

Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies

MISUSING SCRIPTURE

WHAT ARE EVANGELICALS DOING WITH THE BIBLE?

Edited by
Mark Elliott, Kenneth Atkinson, and
Robert Rezetko



Misusing Scripture

Misusing Scripture offers a thorough and critical evaluation of American evangelical scholarship on the Bible. This strand of scholarship exerts enormous influence on the religious beliefs and practices, and even cultural and political perspectives, of millions of evangelical Christians in the United States and worldwide. The book brings together a diverse array of authors with expertise on the Bible, religion, history, and archaeology to critique the nature and growth of “faith-based” biblical scholarship. The chapters focus on inerrancy and textual criticism, archaeology and history, and the Bible in its ancient and contemporary contexts. They explore how evangelicals approach the Bible in their biblical interpretation, how “biblical” archaeology is misused to bolster distinctive views about the Bible, and how disputed interpretations of the Bible impact issues in the public square. This unique and timely volume contributes to a greater understanding and appreciation of how contemporary American evangelicals understand and use the Bible in their private and public lives. It will be of particular interest to scholars of biblical studies, evangelical Christianity, and religion in the United States.

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Dedicated to the Memory of
Hector Avalos
1958–2021

...critical analysis and devotion to truth,
no matter where it leads
(*The End of Biblical Studies*, 11)



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Part 1

Introduction



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1 Introducing *Misusing Scripture*

What are Evangelicals Doing with the Bible?

*Robert Rezetko, Mark Elliott, and
Kenneth Atkinson*

1.1 Background and Rationale of *Misusing Scripture*

Faith-based biblical scholarship: What is it? Is it legitimate? Is it possible? This book's genesis came about through the editors' discussion of such questions. Our conversation was catalyzed by various articles and responses on faith and reason in biblical scholarship on the *SBL Forum* (the Society of Biblical Literature's now defunct online newsletter¹) which spilled over into other venues (mainly 2004–2012). The conversation has yet to settle down, and this book attests to the discussion's unsettled state and aims to continue it, but with a narrower focus on evangelical biblical scholarship.

We begin by explaining what we mean by “faith,” “reason,” and “faith-based.” (Later we describe “evangelical,” “scholarship,” and “faith-based scholarship.”) “Faith” and “reason” each has various senses and the two have a complex relationship. Philosophers and theologians (“Athens and Jerusalem”) have discussed these matters for thousands of years. It is adequate here to define these concepts in this way:² “Reason” is “the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgments by a process of logic” (Google's English dictionary by Oxford Languages). More exactly, “reason” (or rationality) starts from a premise(s), and using intellectual abilities, derives through rules of logical inference, deductively or inductively, a conclusion(s) (Helm 1999, 4; cf. 4–7). In contrast, “faith” is an act of trust in a proposition(s), including religious ones such as “The universe was created by God” (and these and other ideas are *the* faith, the body of propositions believed) (Helm 1999, 7; cf. 7–10). It is correct to say faith is belief without reason or proof, but this is often overstated, because faith can be based on a degree of evidence, or even held despite conflicting evidence, and reason cannot be totally dichotomized from faith. That said, religious faith is often based on something one accepts as divine revelation with its attendant qualities (inspired, authoritative, etc.), that is, faith entails belief in what one perceives to be revealed truths. There are various ideas about the compatibility or incompatibility of faith—especially faith based on alleged divine revelation—and reason as sources of knowledge, but that is beyond the current discussion's scope.³ As for “faith-based,” its usage is broad, and

almost anything could be “faith-based.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines this compound adjective as “(a) based on religious faith; (b) designating or relating to a charitable institution, social program, etc., created or managed by a religious organization” (“faith-based,” C3). Here “faith-based” will not refer to a religious person or institution, but any attitude or argument resting overtly or covertly on assumptions or assertions derived from religious doctrine.

Two publications stirred the fire and continue to embody the controversy under consideration. The first is Michael Fox’s “Bible Scholarship and Faith-Based Study: My View” (2006a),⁴ revised and reprinted as “Scholarship and Faith in Bible Study” (2010). The second is Ronald Hendel’s “Farewell to SBL: Faith and Reason in Biblical Studies” (2010a).

Fox’s claim in his *SBL Forum* article was that faith-based study, while it has its place in churches, synagogues, etc., is irrelevant to the scholarly enterprise: “[F]aith-based study has no role in academic scholarship, whether the object of study is the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or Homer” (2010, 15). Fox clarifies this *does not mean* that persons holding personal faith or religious beliefs cannot do biblical scholarship. Rather, he emphasizes the issue at stake is faith-generated axioms, meaning extraneous axioms or truisms imported into one’s work but are “unexaminable” and “inviolable.” Again, Fox carefully clarifies this *does not mean* non-conservative or non-religious persons do not have presuppositions and premises; no one is viewpoint-neutral, free from beliefs and biases. Rather, scholars must *strive* to recognize and test these, bracket them out, and when necessary reject them. Finally, Fox has in view mainly one group and belief: Evangelicals and their doctrine of biblical inerrancy (i.e., the Bible is “without error”).⁵ Fox’s (2010, 16, 18) concern is that the evangelical commitment to inerrancy “starts with the conclusions it wishes to reach,” is “a predetermined conclusion,” “require[s] conclusions consonant with those premises.” For Fox this approach amounts to questionable, and illegitimate, scholarship.

Jews, Christians, and non-religious persons responded to Fox’s article. Initial responses came on the *SBL Forum*,⁶ and in blog posts some of which have become unavailable. As expected responses were varied, some in support, some in opposition, some in the middle, but mostly all toeing party lines. Critics take aim, questioning the validity, of ideas like religious (confessional, sectarian, etc.) scholars are uncritical; non-religious (non-confessional, non-sectarian, secular, agnostic, atheistic, etc.) scholars are critical; it is possible, or even desirable, to sideline one’s presuppositions; it is possible to be totally objective; a neutral or secular approach, and one absent its own deficiencies, is possible; etc. Others assert that Fox has a provincial understanding of faith or an uncritical positivist and rationalist approach to scholarship. Still others cite professing Jews and Christians (more specifically, evangelicals) who they believe *are* doing *real* biblical scholarship. Very often the critics misunderstand or misconstrue Fox’s view, saying he claims, for example, religionists cannot do scholarship, or secularists are

viewpoint-neutral. (See also Fox's responses to various criticisms; 2006b; 2010, 17–8.) More curious, however, is the near silence on inerrancy in the forum and blog responses (about three dozen located in total, nine in the forum, the rest in blog posts and comments). This includes responses by evangelicals; yet they felt no need to defend their position on inerrancy; in fact, it went unmentioned. Albert Mohler's (2006) response, maybe the most significant by an evangelical, was barely an exception. The title itself, "Can Believers Be Bible Scholars? A Strange Debate," underlines his misunderstanding of Fox's argument. And his response to Fox's comments on inerrancy is simply to rebound with: "Why should the premise of biblical errancy be considered ideologically neutral, but the assertion of biblical inerrancy is considered to be evidence of distorting bias?" Mohler misses the mark. Besides misconstruing what Fox means with his comments on inerrancy and errancy, and even misunderstanding the main issue, Mohler does not justify his premise of inerrancy, but remarkably admits and exalts it: "Christian scholars should always be absolutely transparent and clear about their confessional commitments. As a matter of fact, this should be an absolute requirement of their confessional institutions."

Hendel's article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR) shared similar concerns, though he did not refer to Fox's article. Fox was, however, in the conversation's middle, since Hendel's (2010a, 28) article was occasioned in part by a review by Bruce Waltke (2010), "the dean of evangelical Biblical studies," of Fox's commentary on Proverbs 10–31. Waltke's review was published in the SBL's *Review of Biblical Literature* (RBL). Hendel (2010a, 28) takes issue with various comments by Waltke, which he claims "featur[e] explicit condemnations of the ordinary methods of critical scholarly inquiry, extolling instead the religious authority of orthodox Christian faith." Hendel's focus is the SBL, and he claims the society "has reached out to evangelical and fundamentalist groups, promising them a place within the SBL meeting," and "has changed its position on the relationship between faith and reason in the study of the Bible," the latter evident in the loosening of its mission statement from "to stimulate the *critical investigation* of the classical biblical literatures" to "foster biblical scholarship" (2010a, 28, 74; emphasis added). Hendel laments what he considers the SBL's complicit role in the breakdown between faith and reason in biblical scholarship, and for a time he let his membership in the SBL lapse.

The SBL responded immediately to Hendel on the *SBL Forum* (SBL et al. 2010). It took issue with four of Hendel's claims, but also invited discussion on three questions. This led to 95 responses from every perspective to most facets of Hendel's article and the SBL's response (SBL et al. 2010), and these were not unlike the responses to Fox's article. This was amplified by the nearly 20 blog posts and 200 comments we retrieved. Hendel's critics take issue with (in their view) the wedge driven between faith and reason (and belief vs. fact, religious vs. secular, etc.); his caricature of Pascal's position on faith and reason in his *Pensées*; his misinterpretation of Waltke's comment

on “higher biblical criticism”; his merging of fundamentalists and evangelicals; the error and futility of excluding confessional persons and groups from the SBL; etc. Supporters, in contrast, underlined other questionable book reviews in *RBL*; dubious program units in the SBL meetings (revolving around topics like overtly sectarian groups, denominational theological traditions, practical theology, pastoral theology, homiletics, etc.); obstacles to establishing a “Secular Biblical Criticism” program unit in the SBL annual meeting; lack of “quality control” over presenters and papers evidencing religious ideology or academic laxity; unacademic publishers and books in the exhibit hall; etc. Ziony Zevit (2005, 335–6) had previously highlighted similar problems in the SBL’s annual meeting culture, noting “tolerance on the one hand and political correctness on the other” and “lack of criticism and debate in many ‘soft sessions’” that “promotes a sense that almost anything passes scholarly muster if the rhetoric is right.”⁷

“Inerrancy” is unmentioned in Hendel’s article, but references to “evangelicals” and “fundamentalists” leave little to the imagination. Oddly, however, few picked up on this; by our count, only two former evangelicals among hundreds of responses. Nevertheless, Hendel erased any ambiguity in a response to the responses. Discussing terminology, he linked inerrancy to fundamentalists and evangelicals (SBL et al. 2010, #74). Fox probably also had this issue in mind when he responded with “[a]s soon as one adduces an item of faith as a premise” and “[w]hen one imbeds faith-based ideas as premises of an argument” (SBL et al. 2010, #87). John Collins (2010), a former SBL president (2002), also implies inerrancy is *the* (or at least *a*) make-it-or-break-it issue in his discussion of faith, scholarship, and the SBL. Collins (2010, 65–7, 77–9) frames his treatment with mentions of Hendel’s *BAR* article and also Waltke’s *RBL* review at the end. He seeks to clarify Hendel’s concerns about the SBL, but he also believes Hendel raises a serious concern about evangelical biblical scholarship, and he agrees with Hendel’s diagnosis. Collins does not mention inerrancy, but references to traditional belief/faith, conservatives, evangelicals, faith-based scholars (including twice to B.B. Warfield, 1851–1921, “father” of modern-day inerrancy), and the Bible’s historicity, again leave little to the imagination. (Elsewhere Collins [2018, 1] explicitly links conservative scholarship and inerrancy.) Collins focuses his related remarks on two evangelical publications, Waltke’s *RBL* review (2010, 77–9), and Ian Provan, V. Phillips Long, and Tremper Longman’s *A Biblical History of Israel* (2003; 2nd ed. 2015) (2010, 74–5, 78). He believes these are “constrained by religious presuppositions,” manifest “the intrusion of belief into historical scholarship,” and “their evangelical bias is evident to those who do not share it” (2010, 78).⁸ Moreover:

In practice, [conservative scholars] do not question the reliability of the biblical “testimony” at all. Such a “hermeneutic of belief” cannot be accepted as critical scholarship. Even though they do not appeal

explicitly to considerations of faith and try to present their case as a rational argument, it is clear that this argument is determined by their prior belief in the historical reliability [i.e., inerrancy] of the Bible.

(2010, 75)

These are Collins' judgments, but they will resonate with most mainstream, non-evangelical, biblical scholars, and even many "progressive" evangelical scholars.

Hendel's claims and his *BAR* article also became a talking point in several Round Robin debates (see Bock 2011, 12; Hoffmeier 2015, 261, 267). One is *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications* (Janzen 2015a), a debate between three evangelicals (James Hoffmeier, Mark Janzen [editor], Scott Stripling) and three non-evangelicals (Peter Feinman, Ronald Hendel, Gary Rendsburg) on the factuality of the exodus. The other is an issue of the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Powell 2011a), a debate between four evangelicals (Darrell Bock, Craig Keener, Mark Powell [editor], Robert Webb) and two non-evangelicals (Amy-Jill Levine, Robert Miller) on the quest for the historical Jesus. In both publications, each presents her/his view, followed by responses and rejoinders; therefore, we catch a rare glimpse of evangelicals making a historical argument, non-evangelicals criticizing their approach, and evangelicals responding again. The point to underline here is the evangelical presupposition of inerrancy (conceded, not defended, by the evangelical contributors to the exodus volume⁹) and/or the concomitant of historical reliability (mentioned many times in both volumes), shows itself not to admit of negative historical conclusions. The *premise* is the exodus and gospel traditions *could not be non-historical fictions* (i.e., unreliable, untrue). The issue is not *whether they actually are or are not* reliable or true, but *whether it is even possible they could be* unreliable or untrue. We remember John Collins verdicts: "One cannot work with integrity if the conclusions one has to reach are prescribed in advance" (2010, 70), and, "to give one's source 'the benefit of the doubt' is poor historical method by any measure" (2010, 74).¹⁰

1.2 Objective of *Misusing Scripture*

This book examines various questions related to evangelical biblical scholarship. How does it work? Is it legitimate? Is it possible? Is the evangelical commitment to inerrancy a valid presupposition? All scholars have presuppositions, but how does especially this one impact scholarly inquiry? (Besides inerrancy, belief in divine revelation, inspiration, infallibility, and the absolute and final authority of the Bible, must also be considered.) Are there topics and fields where evangelicals can and cannot make valid contributions to academic research and debate? Are "evangelical" and "academic" an oxymoron? Always? Sometimes? There are even evangelicals

who raise these questions about evangelical scholarship, and their answers are not always congenial to evangelicalism.

Our focus is evangelical biblical *scholarship*, meaning academic study and achievement by trained evangelicals with a high level of learning. Evangelical scholars, however, usually do not exist in a vacuum—unlike scholars in many fields whose academic endeavors do not often spill over into their everyday lives or influence the broader society—because they are often affiliated with theological seminaries and Christian colleges/universities. These influence greatly the formation of younger minds and consequently many facets of ever-changing society. And these scholars and their students are also frequently involved with evangelical churches and para-church organizations. The boundary between the academy and the church, and between scholarly and popular activities, is fluid. Evangelical scholars often preach and teach in their churches, for example. And there is also the evangelical book and periodical publishing network where scholars (and many who are not!) produce semi-academic and popular literature to educate laypersons and ministers on biblical and theological topics. This situation means any volume on “misusing Scripture”¹¹ should also consider evangelical scholarship’s influence outside the academy in the “real” world. This approach is also justified because evangelical subculture is driven by its popular elements, and evangelicals constitute a major part of the U.S. population and Republican political party.

Misusing Scripture therefore explores the conventional evangelical *approach* to biblical scholarship and the *application* of its outcomes to matters beyond the Bible’s literary, theological, and historical aspects and the biblical world, reaching into the evangelical subculture and present-day American culture and politics. This book’s overall claim is evangelical biblical scholarship exploits the Bible and “biblical” archaeology in ways that do injustice to the Bible’s origin, history, nature, and interpretation, and then evangelicals use their (mis)understandings to sustain distinctive beliefs and practices in their private sphere and the public square of the U.S. Later we give illustrations of the Bible’s misuse by evangelicals (Section 1.5) and a summary of what this book’s authors contribute (Section 1.6). This book is not a treatise on (i.e., against) inerrancy, but it is impossible to divorce evangelical scholarship from this presupposition (the minority group of “progressive” scholars is the exception). Thus inerrancy is treated at many points in this introduction (Sections 1.3–1.4), and is addressed in Chapters 2–3. From there the discussion moves to archaeological and historical matters (Chapters 4–5), the Bible’s interpretation in its ancient context (Chapters 6–8), and the Bible’s role on the contemporary scene (Chapters 9–12).

What is *Misusing Scripture*’s objective? While evangelicals may hold personal beliefs about the Bible and use it as they wish in their personal lives, many are alarmed by the pervasive and regrettable influence evangelical biblical scholarship has inside and outside the academy on the interpretation

and use of the Bible. Besides continuing and deepening the conversation described above (Section 1.1), we hope to provoke a wider debate about the nature of evangelical biblical scholarship that advances beyond what has largely been an intra-evangelical dialogue between “traditionalists” and “progressives.” We have mentioned the kinds of questions that interest us. Furthermore, regarding evangelicals and the SBL, we remember John Collins’ question, “Should the Society of Biblical Literature have a regulative function with regard to what passes for biblical scholarship?” (2010, 66; cf. 66–7, 78–9). Evangelicals are welcome to publish with the SBL (*JBL*, *RBL*, etc.)¹² and participate in regional, national, and international meetings, but the question is whether evangelical scholarship should be held to the standard canons of scholarship. To paraphrase Collins, we believe the SBL does have a regulative function, just as it does with any evident bias, regardless of its ideological character.¹³ We therefore suggest, and hope, this book and its topics will become matters of public debate between evangelicals and non-evangelicals in the SBL’s publications and meetings and beyond.¹⁴

Finally, why *evangelical* biblical scholarship? This book’s origin is not personal animosity toward evangelicals, whether they be scholars, ministers, laypersons, or others. Evangelicals stand among our colleagues, friends, and occasionally our families. Nor is this book one of hostility toward people of faith in general, whether evangelical or non-evangelical Christians, or adherents to other religions. Instead, our focus is biblical scholarship by evangelicals within the academy. And we have tried to let the voices be heard of evangelicals and non-evangelicals, “traditionalist” and “progressive” evangelicals, current and former evangelicals, and Christians and non-Christians. We recall that most biblical scholars, including most of this book’s contributors, are or were professing Jews or Christians, or members of some synagogue or church. Instead, it seems reasonable that we should assemble a book on evangelical biblical scholarship in the light of the historical and ideological issues we have described to this point, because of the bias evident in this scholarship to those who do not share it, and because evangelical scholars are a large and influential group in the U.S. and worldwide. Finally, we are not so naive to think this book will be uncontroversial—we are confident it will ruffle feathers! We already experienced this in the diverse responses, positive and negative, acceptances and declines, and withdrawals, when we extended the invitation and during the process of realizing this volume. Some declined to participate out of political correctness, others from fear of institutional retribution. Some argued the focus on evangelicals was itself biased. They asked, what about Roman Catholics and Jews and Zionist-oriented archaeologists? Others declined because the roster of contributors disturbed them. Perhaps also some contributors will disagree with aspects of this introduction or other contributions. So be it. This is part and parcel of scholarly debate.

1.3 Defining “Evangelical” and Related Issues

1.3.1 Introduction

What is an “evangelical”? Who are the evangelicals this book is written about? George Marsden (1991, 6) comments:

During the 1950s and 1960s the simplest, though very loose, definition of an evangelical in the broad sense was “anyone who likes Billy Graham.” Moreover, in the narrow card-carrying sense, most of those who called themselves evangelicals during that period were affiliated with organizations that had some connection with Graham.

A generation later, who an evangelical is may seem a pointless question given the ubiquity and prominence of evangelicals, especially in the U.S. Ironically, however, this compounds the problem so much that identifying or defining “evangelicals” is hardly straightforward. This is because the beliefs and practices of those calling themselves “evangelicals” or labeled “evangelicals” by others have wavered through time and space, in different periods and areas, and they continue fluctuating depending on which country and even national region one focuses. Furthermore, evangelical belief and behavior also hinge on factors like age, gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, and more generally the evangelical subgroup or subculture involved.

This book’s focus is *contemporary American evangelicalism*. First, this is an initial step toward narrowing the topic to keep the discussion focused and manageable. Second, most of the contributors live and work in the U.S. (except Young and Elms). Third, this book’s background and impetus arose in an explicitly American context (Section 1.1). Fourth, there are noteworthy differences between American and non-American evangelical beliefs and practices. For example, evangelicals outside the U.S.—in Europe, and in the “Global South” of Latin America, Africa, and Asia—tend to be socially and politically more left-leaning, and inerrancy has not played a prominent role in their evangelical bibliology (doctrine of Scripture).¹⁵

Almost every volume on American evangelicalism begins by discussing who counts as an evangelical, and consequently one quickly encounters a bewildering array of ideas and terms, including denominational entities like Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, notions such as non-denominational, inter-denominational, and trans-denominational, fundamentalist, moderate, and progressive, the Christian or Religious Right, etc. This is not the place for a deep dive into American evangelicalism’s diversity, but a basic appreciation is helpful for later narrowing it down to its most salient characteristics, including those most related to this book’s aim. Understanding the diversity of evangelicalism is also essential for recognizing different perspectives on the Bible among evangelical scholars. In addition, non-evangelical

and non-American readers may be unfamiliar with what American evangelicalism is all about.

1.3.2 Taxonomies

One straightforward and popular scheme divides evangelicals into traditionalists, centrists, and modernists. This approach was developed by John Green in relation to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, Green et al. 2004):

Traditionalists were characterized by a high level of orthodox belief (such as a high view of the authority of the Bible) and high religious engagement (such as regular worship attendance), and also a desire to preserve such traditional beliefs and practices in a changing world. In contrast, Modernists were characterized by a high level of heterodox belief and a lower level of religious engagement, and also evidence of a desire to adopt modern beliefs and practices in a changing world. Centrists were neither traditionalists nor modernists. Characterized by a mix of orthodox and heterodox beliefs and moderate levels of religious engagement, most Centrists were willing to adapt their traditions in a changing world.

(2004c, 4; cf. 2004b, 2)

Furthermore:

For evangelical Protestants, traditionalists were those who claimed to be fundamentalist, evangelical, Pentecostal, or charismatic, and those without movement identification who agreed in preserving religious traditions. Modernists were those who claimed to be liberal or progressive, ecumenical or mainline and those without a movement identification who agreed in adopting modern religious beliefs and practices ... Centrists were members of each tradition that did not fall into the traditionalist or modernist groups.

(2004c, 55–6; cf. Green et al. 2004, 15–6)

If roughly one-third of Americans are considered evangelicals, they divide about equally between traditionalists and centrists and far fewer are modernists (e.g., 2004c, 3). Examples of popular figures associated with the traditionalist, fundamentalist, or Christian Right¹⁶ group include James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson; with the centrist, moderate, or new or neo-evangelical group,¹⁷ Bill Hybels, Max Lucado, and Rick Warren; with the modernist, progressive, liberal, or evangelical left group, Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and Jim Wallis. Social justice issues are more central to modernists, and somewhat to centrists.¹⁸ Another group, closer to the modernists, is the emerging church (post-evangelical, postmodern, etc.)

movement, represented by Rob Bell and Brian McLaren. Green's approach represents one of numerous proposed taxonomies of evangelicals. Many others also separate evangelicals into three main groups,¹⁹ but others distinguish four,²⁰ five,²¹ or six,²² and even twelve²³ or fourteen.²⁴

This range of taxonomies has provoked several reactions. The first is widespread acknowledgment that "evangelical" and evangelical identity are highly controversial and contested. Timothy Weber's (1991, 12) assessment is often quoted: "Defining evangelicalism has become one of the biggest problems in American religious historiography." However, this definitional elusiveness is hardly due to lack of trying. Mark Smith (2008, 1–2) begins his discussion of "a movement in search of definitions" with "evangelicalism is probably the most over-defined religious movement in the world," and then adds, "this sense of the 'necessity for definition,' understood primarily in doctrinal terms, is sufficiently pervasive to be regarded in itself as a mark of evangelicalism." Another reaction is to abandon attempts at defining "evangelical" and evangelical identity. Donald Dayton (1991, 245, 251) "argu[es] that the category 'evangelical' has lost whatever usefulness it once might have had and suggest[s] that we can very well do without it," and therefore he "call[s] for a moratorium on the use of the term." Similarly, Nathan Hatch (1990, 97) says, "In truth, there is no such thing as Evangelicalism," and Darryl Hart (2004, 16–7) states, "evangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist ... evangelicalism is little more than a construction." Mark Noll (2022, 258) considers that the difficulty with "evangelicalism" lies less with its theological or religious meaning than with its use in relation to intellectual efforts: "Considered by itself, without careful discriminating nuance, the word 'evangelical' is now next to worthless for serious investigation of questions about Christian faith and contemporary scholarship." Yet despite such despair, few have conceded. Most still think evangelicalism, while diverse, is an identifiable broad movement aptly described by a multiplicity of metaphors such as a big, broad, or vast tent (Murphy 1981, 108), an umbrella (Johnston and Dayton 1991, 2), a mosaic (T.L. Smith 1986), a kaleidoscope (T.L. Smith 1986), a rainbow (N. Wright 1996, 12), a patchwork quilt (Balmer 2014, 353–4), a company (Hill 1989, 253), a conglomeration (Stransky 1988, 24), a coalition (Stone 1997), tribes (P. Ward 1997), or a large extended family (Johnston 1991).

Metaphors like these underscore the diversity within American evangelicalism, observable in other ways too, such as the discussion between Donald Dayton and Robert Johnston (1991, 1–2) over whether their *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* volume should be "the variety of American evangelicalism," or "the varieties of American evangelicalism," or "the varieties of American evangelicisms," or whether American evangelicalism is a coherent category at all. So the questions remain: What is an evangelical? Who are the evangelicals this book is written about? Is there a unity within the diversity? Or what justifies *evangelicalism* rather than *evangelicisms*?

1.3.3 Characteristics

Green's approach (and other similar approaches) of classifying American evangelicals as traditionalists, centrists, and modernists, depends mainly on historical and social factors (and sometimes politics too). Historians and sociologists often adopt this perspective, because they are inclined to look from the outside and focus more on the matter of belonging (affiliation, demography, etc.). Others, however, particularly theologians and church leaders, prefer to look from an inside vantage point, and they tend to focus on propositional and/or phenomenological criteria, or evangelical belief and/or practice.²⁵ Evangelical experiences such as conversion or being "born again" also fall under the phenomenology umbrella.

While some scholars prefer to center their definition of "evangelical" more on belief *or* practice, it is more common to endorse a composite view encompassing both.²⁶ David Bebbington is the paramount proponent. He argues for four special qualities of evangelical religion (1989, 1–17; cf. 2019, 31–55):

- Conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed.
- Activism, the expression of the gospel in effort.
- Biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible.
- Crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

These together are known as the "Bebbington Quadrilateral." Though writing originally about British evangelicalism, Bebbington's definition is considered appropriate to the American scene,²⁷ and many will agree with Tidball's (1994, 14) appraisal: "His [Bebbington's] suggestions have met with a ready response from across the spectrum of evangelicals and has quickly established itself as near to a consensus as we might ever expect to reach." Even so, others identify additional or different characteristics of American evangelicalism, usually three,²⁸ four,²⁹ five,³⁰ or six.³¹

We may take away several conclusions about the characteristics of American evangelicalism formulated by a dozen prominent authorities. First, there is substantial continuity between the historians and theologians on the major points. The concept of Christian fellowship is explicit in several statements, spiritual growth in about half, crucicentrism in the balance, activism in most, and conversionism and biblicism in all. (Most do not use Bebbington's terms but the concepts are present.) Two historians (Larsen, Noll) include several points unparalleled elsewhere. Second, nothing in the descriptions distinguishes fundamentalism from other forms of evangelicalism. Third, biblicism is one of only two concepts every authority mentions, but there are also small yet not trivial differences between their descriptions.

Several final general observations are helpful before turning to fundamentalism and biblicism. One is that while specific concepts related to belief and practice, and especially certain doctrinal or theological convictions,

characterize American evangelicalism, the movement is so broad that scholars often speak about it as having a general “ethos” or “spirit” that cuts across the diversity of different denominations and groups (e.g., R. Kyle 2006, 10; K.M. Taylor 2006, 15; Weber 1991, 13–4). Another observation is that while our focus falls mainly on the “scholarly” aspects of American evangelicalism and evangelical biblical scholarship, the fact is that evangelicalism as a movement has always been profoundly shaped by its popular character, as a people’s movement (Noll et al. 1994, 8; cf. R. Kyle 2006, ix–x; Noll 2004, 201–2; 2022, 12–5).

1.3.4 *Fundamentalism*

What is fundamentalism? What is the relationship between fundamentalism and evangelicalism? Returning to our discussion of what is an evangelical:

In its most simple terms, [quoting David Dockery on Twitter] “an evangelical is someone who likes Billy Graham; a liberal is someone who thinks Billy Graham is a fundamentalist; and a fundamentalist is someone who thinks Billy Graham is apostate.” This is a riff on the statements by George Marsden that “A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something,” and that during the 1950s and 1960s, the simplest, although very loose definition of an evangelical in the broad sense was “anyone who likes Billy Graham.”

(J. Taylor 2015)

While entertaining and humorous, such aphorisms are not completely off the mark and highlight an important point: “Fundamentalist” and “evangelical” are not just different names for the same thing. All (Christian) fundamentalists are evangelicals, but not all evangelicals are fundamentalists. This is frequently misunderstood by “outsiders” and in popular imagination and media (where “fundamentalist” typically has a pejorative connotation), for various reasons: The distinction is not always easy to make; “fundamentalist” can designate a historical movement and a certain way of thinking; the significance and usage of the words have changed through time and space; British writers often refer to (especially American) evangelicals as fundamentalists; etc.

Like evangelicalism, fundamentalism is not just one thing and defining it is not clear-cut. This is complicated further by the fact that, unlike evangelicals, fundamentalists can be Christian but also Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, etc. This again is not the context for a deep dive into fundamentalism in general or Christian fundamentalism among American Protestants in particular.³² But several clarifications are necessary.

Christian fundamentalism arose in the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in reaction to theological liberalism and modernism.³³ The name derives from the title of 12 books, *The Fundamentals: A*

Testimony to the Truth (1910–1915), with 90 articles by 66 American and British authors. These aimed to establish the fundamentals of Christian faith, and the first volume begins with “The History of the Higher Criticism,” “The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch,” “Fallacies of the Higher Criticism,” etc. (Torrey et al. 1917), which also indicates the contributions’ apologetic tenor. Marsden’s (1991, 1) classic definition of “fundamentalist” fits with this theme:

A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something. That seems simple and is fairly accurate. Jerry Falwell has even adopted it as a quick definition of fundamentalism that reporters are likely to quote. A more precise statement of the same point is that *an American fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with “secular humanism.”* In either the long or the short definitions, fundamentalists are a subtype of evangelicals and militancy is crucial to their outlook. Fundamentalists are not just religious conservatives, they are conservatives who are willing to take a stand and to fight.
(emphasis added)

Elsewhere Marsden (1988, 947) comments:

The most widespread of these distinctive traits [of fundamentalism] is a conspicuous militancy in defending what is regarded as the traditional Protestant Gospel against its major twentieth-century competitors, especially modernism or liberalism in theology, secularism or “secular humanism” in cultural values, evolutionary naturalism, Marxism, Socialism, Roman Catholicism, and religious cults.

In addition to militancy against theological liberalism and modernism, other characteristics of fundamentalism have been separatism from the world, other religious groups, and “unsound” doctrine; biblical literalism and inerrancy; and stemming from the preceding, dispensational premillennialism, a system of interpretation viewing history as divided into certain periods, typically seven, and usually viewing the future to include a first return of Jesus to earth to rapture away believers, a seven-year period of tribulation, a second return of Jesus with the church, a thousand-year reign of Jesus, and finally eternity. Other common characterizations of the fundamentalist mentality include populist, anti-intellectual, polemical, dogmatic, authoritarian, patriarchal, lacking social concern, etc. In this context, we need not discuss how fundamentalism changed over the past century and remains polythetic, or discuss the nitty-gritty of specific similarities and differences between evangelicals and fundamentalists.³⁴ But, in one matter, fundamentalists and most evangelicals think alike, in their biblicism or bibliology, and principally related to literalism and inerrancy.

1.3.5 *Biblicism*

Bebbington's "biblicism" is glossed as "a particular regard for the Bible" and he examines this in detail (1989, 12–4). All the main ideas are discussed by the authorities cited above: The holy Bible as God's written word is divinely revealed and inspired, completely true and reliable (i.e., inerrant and infallible), supremely authoritative and absolutely sufficient for knowledge of God and as a guide for Christian belief and practice. These traits, or some combination, comprise the bibliology (doctrine of Scripture) of most American evangelicals and all fundamentalists. In this sense, evangelicals and fundamentalists think alike, and therefore evangelicals are also *biblical or scriptural fundamentalists*, or simply fundamentalists when the context relates to their biblicism.³⁵ This explains why several of this book's contributors vacillate between "evangelicals" and "fundamentalists." Most evangelicals, however, balk at the label "fundamentalists" for themselves, but in fact they are fundamentalists in their attitude to the Bible.

The important ideas and vocabulary connected to evangelical biblicism are inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, literalism, and authority.³⁶ Most American evangelicals consider that the Bible's actual words, in the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) (of the 66 book Protestant Bible), in the original manuscripts,³⁷ were inspired by God, that is, "the Holy Spirit of God superintended the human writers in the production of Scripture so that what they wrote was precisely what God wanted written" (Lightner 1986, 12). The idea that divine inspiration pertains to the Bible's very words—as opposed to only some words or just ideas—and to all parts of the Bible—as opposed to part of it—is variously referred to as "verbal inspiration," "plenary inspiration," "verbal plenary inspiration," or "plenary verbal inspiration." "Inerrancy" and "infallibility" are sometimes used interchangeably or are defined differently depending on the author's beliefs and perspectives. For example, according to Stephen Davis (1977, 23), the Bible is inerrant "if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any topic whatsoever" and it is infallible "if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice." In contrast, for Robert Lightner (1986, 12–3), inerrancy "means that the original documents were without error" and infallibility "is to say that [Scripture] is incapable of teaching deception or of failing in its purpose."³⁸ Most American evangelicals consider that Davis' "infallibility" is really "limited inerrancy"—as opposed to "unlimited inerrancy"—because in a view like his, inspiration pertains to matters of faith and practice, particularly soteriological (i.e., redemption, salvation) and ethical issues, but not necessarily to factual matters of history or science or to the Bible's precise words including the most minute and incidental details.³⁹ In any case, the main point is most American evangelical traditionalists and centrists—or fundamentalist and "mainstream" evangelicals—who constitute the majority of American evangelicals, hold to "verbal plenary inspiration" and "unlimited inerrancy," and this applies to

laity, clergy, and scholars alike.⁴⁰ Inerrancy especially is the watershed issue and the cornerstone and hallmark of American evangelical identity, belief, and practice.⁴¹ Moreover, many consider belief in inerrancy as the essential condition for being an evangelical (see Hart 2004, 131–51), and thus many “traditionalists” do not consider “progressives” to be evangelicals.

Inerrancy and literalism are fundamentalism’s defining characteristics. Scholars often emphasize literalism,⁴² but the distinction between evangelicals and fundamentalists on this issue is merely degree of application. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the literal interpretation of a sacred text as “designating or relating to the sense intended by the author of a text, normally discovered by taking the words in their natural or customary meaning, in the context of the text as a whole, without regard to any ulterior spiritual or symbolic meaning” (“literal,” II.5.a). So “literal” usually means basic, plain, natural, normal, conventional, customary, usual, etc., as opposed to non-literal, figurative, symbolic, allegorical, spiritual, etc. This approach is exactly how evangelicals, like fundamentalists, read the Bible.⁴³ The two might separate on something like the Genesis 1 creation story. Whereas fundamentalists read the story “literally,” that is, God created the universe in 6 days of 24 hours each, and accept the story as “scientific” description of beginnings, evangelicals might prefer “non-literal” readings emphasizing the story’s literary and theological aspects, and consequently might be receptive to scientific explanations of origins. But this is a salient example that represents more the exception than the rule. In general, the fundamentalist and evangelical interpretative rule is “literal where possible.” Either way, however, factuality or historicity, *that God somehow created*, is not questioned, but only how to construe correspondence between the Bible and external reality.⁴⁴

If one side is “literal where possible,” the other is “non-literal where preferable.” But who or what decides that a non-literal reading is preferable, or required? The answer is the inerrantist and his/her inerrancy: “[T]he doctrine of inerrancy finesses the problem of literalism” (Ruthven 2007, 44; cf. 40–58). James Barr has documented this.⁴⁵ The evangelical presupposition is: “The passage is inerrant: the only question is, which is the correct path to the necessarily inerrant meaning?” (1977, 51). The evangelical solution is: “Inerrancy is maintained only by constantly altering the mode of interpretation, and in particular by abandoning the literal sense as soon as it would be an embarrassment to the view of inerrancy held” (1977, 46). “In order to avoid imputing error to the Bible, fundamentalists [= “evangelicals” in Barr’s usage; see Hart 2011, 9] twist and turn back and forward between literal and non-literal interpretation” (1977, 40). An example is the treatment of the creation story in Genesis 1 (1977, 40–5). In short, evangelicals fall back on non-literal interpretation when necessary to safeguard the Bible’s inerrancy.⁴⁶

Lastly, evangelicals are devoted and submit to the Bible as the highest and final authority for their Christian belief and practice. “The hallmark of

authentic evangelicalism is not subscription but submission ... to what the Bible teaches” (Stott 2013, xi). For American evangelicals the Bible’s authority is of equal or even greater importance than its verbal plenary inspiration and unlimited inerrancy because these ultimately serve to buttress its authority. Returning to the question, “Who are the evangelicals this book is written about?” the answer is, those holding the views described here on the Bible’s inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, and authority. With this another series of questions arises: How far is it possible for evangelicals to engage in scholarship on a book they consider inspired, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative? Is it possible? To what degree? Is scriptural fundamentalism compatible with scholarship? The preceding remarks on literal and non-literal exegesis are just a first glance at the problems of evangelical biblical scholarship.

1.4 Problems with Evangelical Biblical Scholarship

1.4.1 *What Is Scholarship?*

Our starting point is the common association of scholarship with the creation, or discovery and advancement, of knowledge. We do not deny that scholarship has teaching and service components, but our focus is its research aspect. Even in this narrower sense, however, scholarship has many facets and involves diverse research aims, assumptions, and methods for asking and answering new questions or reconsidering and settling unresolved ones. So, are there common characteristics of scholarship, of scholarly work? Ernest Lynton (1994, 11) asks:

What are these commonalities? Are there general statements which can be made about the nature of the scholarly profession, and about what constitutes quality in scholarly work? Is it possible to generate a working definition by which scholarship can be recognized in whatever form it occurs?

His answer is the following *intellectual process*:

What unifies the activities of a scholar, be he or she engaged in teaching, research, or professional service, is an approach to each task as a novel situation, a voyage of exploration into the partially unknown. Along this voyage, the scholar defines the new problem, sets a goal, chooses the most appropriate approach, monitors the ongoing process, making corrections as necessary, assesses the outcome, draws appropriate inferences and, where possible, verifies and then shares what he or she has learned.
(1994, 12)

Lynton’s description of scholarship as an *intellectual process* can be compared to Lee McIntyre’s (2019) depiction of the *scientific attitude*, because

while neither scholarship broadly nor science narrowly is characterized by a single method, both share a common *approach to knowledge*.

Prominent aspects of scholarly inquiry are its open-mindedness and open-endedness. A scholar does not and cannot know—cannot *really* know—the answer to a question at hand, and though s/he may suspect one answer is superior, s/he is not, or should not be, predisposed to arriving at that answer. This is what Lynton means by “a voyage of exploration into the partially unknown,” where correction and verification (by oneself and one’s peers) also come into play. Ernest Boyer (1990, 17) underscores this same point: “No tenets in the academy are held in higher regard than the commitment to knowledge for its own sake, to freedom of inquiry and *to following*, in a disciplined fashion, *an investigation wherever it may lead*” (emphasis added). This open-minded and open-ended approach is the bedrock of scholarly inquiry, and simultaneously the catalyst for *critical thinking*.

“Critical thinking has always been—and still is—a fundamental part of scholarly knowledge” (Brodin 2007, 13). Like scholarship, critical thinking is diversely explained. We can rely on Mark Mason’s (2008, 5–6; cf. 3–5) summary of what various prominent thinkers think about critical thinking:

Each of the philosophers I’ve considered here emphasizes a particular feature that he or she defends as the most important aspect of critical thinking. Each tends to emphasize one, perhaps two, of the following:

- The skills of critical reasoning (such as the ability to assess reasons properly);
- A disposition, in the sense of:
 - A critical attitude (scepticism, the tendency to ask probing questions) and the commitment to give expression to this attitude, or
 - A moral orientation which motivates critical thinking;
- Substantial knowledge of particular content, whether of:
 - Concepts in critical thinking (such as necessary and sufficient conditions), or of
 - A particular discipline, in which one is then capable of critical thought.

Most debates around critical thinking tend to stress at least the skills and dispositions associated with a sceptical, reasonable, and reflective approach ... It may be that an integrated conception of critical thinking, such as I have discussed elsewhere ... would need to be constituted by all five of these components: the skills of critical reasoning; a critical attitude; a moral orientation; knowledge of the concepts of critical reasoning; and knowledge of a particular discipline. If these are indeed the necessary conditions for integrated critical thinking, then what I

mean by this term is thinking that is of course not entrenched in dogma (although committed to reason), is willing to consider multiple perspectives, is informed, sceptical, and entails sound reasoning.⁴⁷

With the preceding comments in mind, we can now summarize the scholarly mindset's central characteristics:

- (1) Scholarship is *discriminating*. It seeks to arbitrate between interpretations of facts, right and wrong, good and bad. The word "critical" is often used instead of "discriminating," but too often it carries the negative connotation of "criticism" instead of the more neutral "arbitration," even if a strict line between these isn't possible. Furthermore, the word "critical" in the context of scholarship can be regarded as superfluous.
- (2) Scholarship is *skeptical*. It asks challenging questions and does not accede to any interpretation without engaging in cross-examination.
- (3) Scholarship is *polemical*. It engages others' ideas, and it argues for or against a particular interpretation of facts.
- (4) Scholarship is *liberal*. It is free-thinking because it is not resolved a priori to conserve a particular dogma or tradition or status quo. It is also liberal because scholars are prepared, or should be, to consider and acknowledge the correction or refutation of any interpretation of facts, their own included. So, scholarly inquiry is open-minded and open-ended; by definition, it is liberal and not conservative or traditionalist in its modus operandi.

Consequently, we suggest one may talk sensibly about "critical" inquiry, investigation, research, etc., but it is oxymoronic to speak about "critical" or "liberal" scholarship or scholars, except maybe as a matter of emphasis for distinguishing between critical (as by definition it should be) scholarship and biased (as by definition it should not be) scholarship (or in some other way bad scholarship). Nevertheless, such parlance is common in evangelical apologetics, where "critical" or "liberal" scholars are reprimanded for their "critical" or "liberal" stance toward the Bible, in contrast to evangelical or "conservative" scholars who do not approach the Bible in such a "critical" or "liberal" way.

Turning to biblical scholarship, we start with the Westar Institute's summary of "What is a Critical Scholar?" Pardoning its oxymoronic but benign "critical scholar(s)," the principles given are concise and coincide with our preceding characterization of scholarship. We list the first six (of eight) main points, without the explanations:

- "Critical scholars make themselves accountable to the established body of knowledge and theory."
- "Critical scholars adopt the critical methodologies integral to their fields of study."

- “Critical scholars practice their craft by submitting their work to the judgments of peers.”
- “By submitting the work to the judgment of other critical scholars, one is actually offering to have one’s work judged by the standards and criteria common to all scholarship.”
- “It is precisely for this reason that critical scholarship in the biblical field does not permit special pleading on the basis of theological doctrine or other bias.”
- “It is therefore appropriate that Catholic scholars submit their work to the judgment of Protestants; that Christian scholars pass review by Jewish scholars; that biblical scholars measure up to the requirements of historical and philological learning in related fields.”

For this final point, however, we also include the commentary because of its relevance here:

Conservative theologians may be skeptical about certain historical events (and often are). Liberal theologians may make conservative historical judgments (and often do) ... For these reasons, it is difficult to guess the religious convictions or church affiliation of scholars on the basis of their critical judgments. *In fundamentalism, by contrast, theology and fact are collapsed into each other, because religious conviction is the controlling element.*

(emphasis added)

The final observation strikes directly at the heart of evangelical biblical scholarship with its scriptural fundamentalism and a priori commitment to an inspired, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Bible.

Our discussion in Section 1.1 surveyed various scholars’ concerns over this evangelical mindset, and shortly we turn to discussions between evangelicals, but first it is worthwhile to share several additional non-evangelical appraisals of biblical scholarship. Jon Levenson (1993, 3) comments that “critical” biblical scholars are “scholars who are prepared to interpret the text against their own preferences and traditions, in the interest of intellectual honesty.” John Collins (2010, 77) says, “What is essential to historical criticism, and indeed to critical thinking of any kind, is that everything in principle is open for discussion. Any position, no matter how venerable, can be challenged by new arguments and evidence.” Similarly, Hendel (2012, 22) remarks:

A critical scholar is one who is able to make distinctions based on careful study of the evidence and by appeal to reasonable arguments and criteria. One of the key strategies of critical scholarship is methodological doubt. A critical scholar does not accept the conclusions of authorities or tradition but rather submits them to doubt. Only a position

that survives the scrutiny of methodological doubt can be regarded as reliable, and even then it is subject to future testing. In this fashion, critical knowledge builds up reliable knowledge, which remains forever corrigible.

These three scholars' remarks contain nothing unusual; they are completely reasonable in the light of the preceding discussion. Most scholars in all fields worldwide will agree with them.

Biblical scholarship has long struggled with Scripture's "uniqueness." At issue is whether Scripture can be studied in the academy apart from religious influences or agendas. Since the Enlightenment, the appropriateness of prior belief in Scripture as a prerequisite for academic study has been increasingly questioned. The historian Van Harvey (1966) describes this debate as the conflict between traditional Christian belief and the new morality of historical knowledge. Whereas the first celebrates faith as virtue and believes doubt to be a sin, the latter extols skepticism and distrusts prior conclusions. The academic study of religion, in contrast to methods followed by evangelicals, operates upon the premise that those adhering to fixed religious presuppositions, or fearing a "critical" examination of the Bible, cannot fully engage in "critical" biblical scholarship (Atkinson 1995). Richard Rubenstein (1972, 21) writes, concerning this conflict between faith and history: "The objective historian is compelled to place the affirmations of faith in the context of the social and cultural movements out of which they arose. In the light of objective history, no religious position can be privileged." Evangelical scholars, however, would disagree with these propositions when it comes to interpreting Scripture.

Evangelical scholarship on Daniel has elicited robust responses by non-evangelicals. Several take aim at evangelical biblical scholarship generally.⁴⁸ In his discussion of "defining academic and historical scholarship," Stephen Young defends "critical inquiry characterized by methodological naturalism where the data sets used, arguments offered, and hypotheses proposed must be critically assessable by the tools of the academy," because:

If historical, sociological, anthropological, and scientific approaches cannot access the evidence and adjudicate arguments based on it, then the evidence and arguments in question lack academic validity. Arguments and their undergirding assumptions must operate as articulable and falsifiable entities.

(2011, 206–7)

However:

This does not entail that supernatural explanations are categorically wrong within any field of discourse. Nor does it involve a metaphysical or ontological claim about the existence or non-existence of the Christian God or other gods or non-obvious beings. Methodological—not

ontological—naturalism defines academic and historical inquiry for this chapter. Even if one does not consider naturalistic empirical inquiry to have a natural place, while participating in the academy one must play according to the rules.

(2011, 207)⁴⁹

Also writing on Daniel, Lester Grabbe, a former scriptural fundamentalist, makes many relevant points about evangelical scholarship. His main verdict is: “The question is, Can one be a fundamentalist [i.e., have ‘a belief that the biblical text is “inerrant in the autographs”] and still claim the label ‘biblical scholar’?” (1987, 133). No, “fundamentalism is incompatible with scholarship” (1987, 148). A primary reason for this is:

The fundamentalist approach asks scholarship to be inconsistent, to use criteria for the Bible which are different from those used with other literature ... In other words, they want the normal canons of research to be suspended when it comes to the Bible.

(1987, 136–7; cf. 145–50)

Furthermore, recalling our discussion of “liberal” etc. scholarship:

There may be, and frequently are, different ways of weighing a set of data. Two careful and sincere scholars can in certain cases come to radically different conclusions, but the ideal is that all follow the evidence wherever it leads. The evidence may lead to conservative results, and it is no denial of the scholarly method to come to conservative conclusions if one has fully considered all the data and arguments. But those [evangelicals] who talk of “conservative” scholarship versus “liberal” scholarship have already shown their ignorance about what the scholarly process consists of.

(1987, 146; cf. 145–50)

The thrust of the non-evangelical writings just cited is that a commitment to inerrancy seals the Bible from legitimate scholarly inquiry.⁵⁰ This is because the Bible is viewed a priori as an illegitimate object of doubt or skepticism, and its veracity—its coherence with external historical reality and its internal literary and theological consistency—*cannot* be infringed; however, this perspective is incompatible with the scholarly mindset. Some evangelicals might respond by saying non-evangelical or “critical” or “liberal” scholars presuppose the opposite view, and therefore are equally biased against the Bible as evangelicals are for it. However, this would be a specious argument, because inerrancy and errancy are both extreme and incorrect views, but they are also not comparable. Fox (2010, 19n1) makes this point well:

The antithesis of inerrancy would be total errancy, the assumption (held by no one) that *everything* in the Bible is false. The stance of biblical

errancy is an openness to the possibility of claims, stories, and assumptions in the Bible being factually wrong—or right, or non-adjudicable and therefore irrelevant to scholarship.

In other words, non-evangelicals entertain the possibility of errors *and* non-errors in the Bible, but (most) evangelicals *only* an error-free Bible and this posture is antithetical to scholarship. Revisiting Boyer's words, evangelicals are not predisposed to following an investigation wherever it may lead.

We must comment here on historical criticism because it is a conventional approach to written texts by biblical and non-biblical scholars, whether studying the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Bible, the Quran, the Upanishads, the Book of Mormon, or many other historic non-religious and religious writings. "Historical criticism" is sometimes used interchangeably with "historical-critical method," "higher criticism" (as opposed to lower, textual criticism), and within biblical studies, simply "biblical criticism." It is a bundle of methods (not just one) that seeks to recover the (historical) context (times, places, etc.) and (literary) process (sources, redactions, etc.) of composition of a written text in order to better understand its original meaning. This seems straightforward, and it is largely uncontroversial and presupposed within the academy.⁵¹ What then is the problem for most evangelicals? To begin, historical criticism has sometimes produced conclusions contradicting traditional views about the Bible's origins and nature. For example, Moses did not write the Pentateuch, but rather it gradually came to exist as it is now over a considerable period of time by the hands of multiple writers and editors, and furthermore their recorded words and thoughts frequently disagree. But for evangelicals there is a deeper and more sinister issue: They reject the methodological presuppositions of skepticism and naturalism. Rather, the Bible and what the Bible claims about itself should be given benefit of the doubt, and supernatural explanations for the Bible's origins and the events it records are as credible, even more, than natural ones. In other words, the Bible should *not* be treated like other texts; it should *not* be subjected to conventional scholarly procedures. If the Pentateuch indicates Moses wrote it, Moses wrote it. If there are "problems" with this conclusion, they lie with the interpreter's own (problematic) presuppositions or methods and his/her own (mis)understandings. The Bible, not the interpreter, has the final say. Case closed. Yet evangelicals are reticent—to put it mildly!—to transfer their convictions about the Bible to other religious writings like the Quran and Book of Mormon; their attitude toward these is one of thoroughgoing skepticism and naturalism (see Grabbe 1987, 136–7, 146–9; S.L. Young 2011, 217–8). In short, the evangelical's mindset—rather than the "critical" or "liberal" scholar's—stands fundamentally at odds with scholarship and critical thinking.⁵²

1.4.2 *Intra-Evangelical Dialogue on Evangelical Biblical Scholarship*

The preceding critiques of evangelical biblical scholarship by non-evangelicals are amplified by the voices of evangelicals themselves. There are evangelicals whose appraisal of evangelical scholarship essentially agrees with and reinforces the preceding criticisms. We begin with Mark Noll, a historian of American evangelicalism who has written specifically on the nature of evangelical scholarship.⁵³ In *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (2022 [1st ed. 1994]; cf. 2011), he argues: “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind ... Notwithstanding all their other virtues ... American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations” (2022, 3). He is speaking about evangelicals within the whole spectrum of modern learning (history, literature, politics, science, etc.), but in Chapter 5 on “the intellectual disaster of fundamentalism” (2022, 108–45), he offers an indictment of evangelical intellectual efforts with respect to the Bible by elucidating how the fundamentalist preoccupation with inerrancy—still looming large—has obstructed the Bible’s historical reading with full attention to the human circumstances that produced it:

For matters involving Scripture, redemption, and the last days—that is, for the matters that monopolized dispensationalist attention almost entirely—fundamentalists tried to read experience from the divine angle of vision. In each case they tried to understand the contemporary world as the divinely inspired authors of Scripture had understood their experience. In each case fundamentalists denied that historical processes—networks of cause and effect open to public analysis by all and sundry—had anything significant to contribute.

Thus, when fundamentalists defended the Bible, they did so by arguing for the inerrancy of Scripture’s original autographs, an idea that had been around for a long time but that had never assumed such a central role for any Christian movement. This belief had the practical effect of rendering the experience of the biblical writers nearly meaningless. It was the Word of God pure and simple, not the Word of God as mediated through the life experiences and cultural settings of the biblical authors, that was important.

(2022, 132–3)

This commentary highlights the enduring evangelical antipathy to historical criticism which aims precisely to comprehend the Bible’s production in the historical contexts of its ancient authors, editors, hearers, and readers.

Noll’s earlier volume, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (2004 [1st ed. 1986]; cf. 1984), had already reviewed the history of evangelical interaction with mainstream

(i.e., “critical”) biblical scholarship over a century. A predominant theme is the evangelical perspective on the Bible’s nature:

When examining the evangelical study of Scripture, everything hinges upon a recognition that the evangelical community considers the Bible the very Word of God. Further, most evangelicals emphasize that the Bible is the Word of God in a cognitive, propositional, factual sense. Whatever else one may say about the Word of God ... *the Word of God always involves the truth-telling Bible.*

(2004, 6; emphasis added)

In Chapter 7, on “the standpoints of evangelical scholarship” (2004, 142–61), Noll fleshes out further what “the truth-telling Bible” means (2004, 142–54), and then describes how it relates to evangelical scholarship (2004, 154–61). In Chapter 8, on “contemporary uncertainties” (2004, 162–85), Noll goes deeper into the potentials and perils of “believing criticism,” where he also describes the controversies over the work of various evangelical scholars from the U.S. (Robert Gundry, J. Ramsey Michaels, Bernard Ramm) and U.K. (James Dunn, William Abraham). But, concerning American evangelicals, Noll describes some differences that seem at best a matter of degree and at worst a distinction without a difference,⁵⁴ because even progressive evangelicals remain very conservative in their convictions about the Bible’s nature, compared to non-evangelical or “critical” scholars. Noll comments:

Evangelical critics of this type regularly reflect some influence from neo-orthodox theologians or biblical scholars, and they may call certain evangelical formulations of inerrancy into question. They may even contest the whole evangelical concern for the question of error in the Bible. But on other important matters—belief in the truth-telling character of Scripture, its realistic interpretation, its substantial historicity, its ultimate authority—these critics align themselves with the evangelicals who are more conservative on critical matters.

(2004, 160; cf. 155 on the results of “critical” scholarship that are plainly unacceptable even to most progressives)

Most American evangelicals are traditionalists and centrists in about equal numbers and comparatively few are modernists. Based on our own interaction and reading, our intuition is the ratio is more lopsided when focusing on *evangelical biblical scholars*. Most are traditionalists, few are centrists, and fewer still are modernists or progressives.⁵⁵ The current “battle for the Bible” between traditionalists and progressives began almost two decades ago with Peter Enns’ *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (2005; 2nd ed. 2015).⁵⁶ This was

followed by Kenton Sparks' *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (2008). Enns and Sparks take different approaches and cover different issues, but they share a common objective: To synthesize the results of "critical" biblical scholarship and historical criticism with conventional evangelical doctrines of God and Jesus, and *also* the Bible as God's revealed, inspired, and authoritative word. In other words, where they diverge from traditionalists is in their acceptance of many results of mainstream, non-evangelical biblical scholarship, *and* in their insistence on taking a bottom-up, inductive approach that allows the Bible's phenomena to define the Bible's nature.⁵⁷ For Enns and Sparks, inerrancy (as described in Section 1.3.5) does not express what the Bible is and does.⁵⁸ And correspondingly, they question and disregard conventional evangelical views on the authorship of the Pentateuch, Isaiah, and Daniel, and various "Pauline" epistles, the total factuality of a historical Adam, exodus, conquest, and various gospel traditions, and they acknowledge factual errors and ethical flaws in the Bible. Enns' and Sparks' volumes were the major stimuluses of a progressive evangelical approach to the Bible and biblical scholarship that continues to expand as (mostly younger) evangelicals are exposed to "critical" scholarship and grasp the many shortcomings of the conventional evangelical top-down, deductive approach to explaining what the Bible is and does.⁵⁹

Traditionalists responded swiftly and unsympathetically to Enns and Sparks. The first major reply, in addition to dozens of print and web reviews, was Gregory Beale's *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (2008), which attacked Enns.⁶⁰ This was followed by James Hoffmeier and Dennis Magary's *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (2012a), which includes 22 evangelicals, and mainly attacked Sparks.⁶¹ The traditionalists' rejoinders are predictable, reaffirming inerrancy, casting aspersion on Enns' and Sparks' evangelical credentials, and disputing the "assured results" of historical criticism. Few novel ideas or arguments are given and the criticisms of historical-critical scholarship will appear superficial and apologetic to non-evangelicals.

This is largely a debate between evangelicals that has attracted limited outside interest.⁶² For example, traditionalists and progressives have debated non-stop the historicity of Genesis 1–11,⁶³ but among mainstream biblical scholars (and of course historians and scientists), the intra-evangelical dialogue is merely a curiosity because these chapters contain nothing of historical or scientific value. Daniel Treier and Craig Hefner (2017, 136; cf. 135–6) summarize the standoff:

Traditionalist evangelicals—appealing to scripture's historical integrity and theological unity—are accused by progressives of remaining fundamentalist. Progressive evangelicals—limiting biblical inerrancy or otherwise reinterpreting the Bible's historical reference and internal

coherence—are accused by traditionalists of revealing themselves to be liberals.

Does any of this matter? Not much. First, progressives are a minority among evangelical biblical scholars. Second, their views are marginal within evangelicalism where there is no major drift away from belief in inerrancy and no widespread call for abandoning “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (e.g., J.D. Hays 2011). Third, progressives should be credited for arriving closer than traditionalists to the ideals of scholarship and critical thinking. They have demonstrated they can submit some of their conventional evangelical perspectives to doubt, which is a step forward, and then to come out on the other side with mainstream “critical” scholarship on some issues (see, e.g., Sparks 2008, 169–70). However, even progressives *cannot* be fully predisposed to following an investigation wherever it may lead, because they remain fully committed to “belief in the truth-telling character of Scripture, its realistic interpretation, its substantial historicity, its ultimate authority” (Noll 2004, 160). Christopher M. Hays (2013, 2) cites Noll’s statement with approval in his introduction to *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (C.M. Hays and Ansberry 2013), another chief representative of progressive evangelical biblical scholarship. He also agrees with Larsen’s (2007, 1) statement that an evangelical “has a preeminent place for the Bible in her or his Christian life as the divinely inspired, final authority in matters of faith and practice” (C.M. Hays 2013, 17). Enns (2012c, 127–8; 2015, 1) and Sparks (2008, 21) express similar sentiments. Therefore, these may wish to discard inerrancy or fine-tune its definition, but they continue to hold to the Bible’s divine inspiration and authority, and presumably to submit themselves to it as their highest and final authority. Consequently, even for these there are non-negotiables and limits to the boundaries of historical criticism and biblical interpretation.

Above all, evangelicals—traditionalists, centrists, and progressives—affirm the central core, the essential tenets of Christianity, especially Jesus’ pre-existence, incarnation, virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, ascension to heaven, and second coming (e.g., C.M. Hays 2013, 5–6; Sparks 2008, 21, 359; presupposed in Enns’ incarnational analogy). These are regarded as illegitimate objects of doubt or skepticism.⁶⁴ So questioning certain matters *is* out of bounds. Religious conviction and allegiance *are* a controlling element. “Religionists are widely suspected of avoiding research that might conflict with the teachings of their faith or of selecting only findings that support those teachings. Reason and critical analysis will thus take a back seat to unquestioned convictions” (Briggs 2016, 104). Rollston (2016, 7), reviewing C.M. Hays and Ansberry (2013), summarizes:

The actual biblical text, therefore, is placed in bondage to religious dogma. Preferable is to analyze the biblical corpus in an inductive

manner, replete with the same methodological rigor and freedom that is part of all scholarship on all ancient literary and epigraphic texts.

1.4.3 *Review of Critiques of Evangelical Biblical Scholarship*

We have examined various problems with evangelical approaches to the Bible. Our focus has been scriptural fundamentalism as an impediment to normal scholarship. The major problem is submission to the Bible rather than submitting the Bible to open-minded and open-ended research and following the investigation wherever it may lead. Evangelicals confess to standing “*under* [Scripture] allowing it to critique, shape, and judge their thoughts” (Waltke 1984, 110; emphasis added), or standing “*before* the text with reverence and awe” (Block and Schultz 2018; emphasis added), but the crux of scholarship, regardless of the discipline, is standing *over* an object or issue, in this case the Bible, and analyzing and evaluating it to form a judgment, in this case about the Bible’s history, nature, factuality, and meaning. We reiterate that evangelicals take a dramatically different approach to the Bible than to the Quran or Book of Mormon or other religious and non-religious writings.

The preceding “confessions” by several evangelical OT scholars are a segue into the issue of OT vs. NT scholarship. To begin, the evangelical doctrine of “progressive revelation” effectively subordinates the OT to the NT: “This revelation of God in Jesus Christ constitutes the fulfillment and climax of the Old Testament revelation and thus it must be granted priority. Earlier revelation must be interpreted in the light of later revelation” (Waltke 1984, 133), and:

[E]vangelical scholars view biblical writings (1) within the context of the entire canon, and seek to locate texts they are analyzing within the history of divine revelation, which climaxes in the incarnation, life, death, and exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord, and (2) within the context of the process whereby the canon was produced.

(Block and Schultz 2018)

This “progress of revelation” approach together with their understanding of NT reports of Jesus’ and the apostles’ words about OT writings and events, inevitably influence how evangelicals construe conclusions related to OT authorship, historicity, and interpretation. For example, they prioritize what Jesus is reported to have believed or said about the validity of OT figures and events. Furthermore, whereas some have accepted the prevailing scholarly consensus against, for example, the total historicity of a miraculous exodus of Israelites from Egypt (e.g., Enns 2015, 185–6; 2021, 4–7; Sparks 2008, 99–100, 155–7), even these scarcely question the miracle of Jesus’ resurrection, but accept it (and the gospel presentations generally) as historically reliable. Lastly, and paradoxically, evangelicals find OT

dilemmas more numerous and unsettling than in the NT, and the chasm between evangelical and mainstream scholarship has been wider for the OT than the NT. A case in point is acceptance of the source critical approach to the NT gospels but much less so the OT Pentateuch. Barr (1977, 140–5) and Noll (2004, 188–90; cf. 160, 164–5, 183, 186, 201) discuss this situation. Accordingly there is also more treatment of OT issues in this introduction and subsequent chapters.

The preceding shortcomings in evangelical scholarship can be expanded with many more. We will discuss a dozen. Due to space constraints, we had to exclude many illustrations, references, quotations, and additional commentary on the following issues. But other useful discussion is provided by Barr (1977, 120–59; 1980, 65–90), Enns (2009, 2013b), Grabbe (1987), Sparks (2008, 133–70), and S.L. Young (2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2020). Contrary to Hoffmeier and Magary’s (2012b, 22) claim that “Barr’s caricature of evangelical scholars ... was outdated and inaccurate in the 1970s,” the fact is, Barr’s appraisal was accurate then and little has changed since (other than progressive evangelical developments). Scriptural fundamentalism simply has no room for change or progress in understanding.

1.4.3.1 Taking an Apologetic Approach to the Bible

Defending the Christian “faith” runs deep in evangelical blood (as in other religious traditions, e.g., Islam, Mormonism), and this means defending evangelical perspectives on the Bible’s history, nature, and reliability (just as Muslims defend the Quran and Latter-day Saints the Book of Mormon). Not all evangelical scholarship is apologetic—it depends on the discipline’s “safety” and how it might impact an inerrant Bible—but much of it is. Needless to say, an apologetic attitude toward the Bible is incompatible with the skeptical attitude subsumed within scholarship. On the evangelical penchant to protect Scripture, besides the referenced treatments by Barr, Enns, Grabbe, Sparks, and S.L. Young, see Enns 2014 and Noll 2004, 156–8, 183. Many of this book’s contributions discuss this issue.

1.4.3.2 Privileging Biblical Claims about the Bible

The most prominent evangelical tactic for protecting the Bible is by letting the Bible have the final word about itself.⁶⁵ In other words, if words in the Pentateuch (and by Jesus in the gospels!) suggest Moses wrote the Pentateuch, then Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Evangelicals feel no shame admitting this. “[A]n evangelical stance toward the Scriptures is typically positivist, rather than suspicious” (Block and Schultz 2018). “Yes, it is true that conservative evangelical scholars naturally give the text the benefit of the doubt in terms of historical, theological, and compositional integrity. Guilty as charged!” (Averbeck 2012, 156; cf. 179).

The first part of this essay argues for a kind of approach to the scholarly historical-critical study of the Hebrew Bible that takes a “generous” approach to the text. We need to take historical-critical work seriously, but without the negative bias that it has toward the text as it stands.

(Averbeck 2020, 47; cf. 29–30, 47–8)

Such “critiquing biblical criticism with the biblical ‘testimony’” (Sparks 2008, 164–5) permeates evangelical discourse. Stephen Young (2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2020) shows that evangelical privileging of the Bible’s self-claims exemplifies an aberrant academic methodology that collapses the distinction between description and explanation, between describing biblical claims and explaining those claims in ways that do not methodologically commit to reinscribing the claims in the analysis. Repeating John Collins’ (2010, 74) verdict, “to give one’s source ‘the benefit of the doubt’ is poor historical method by any measure.”

1.4.3.3 Embracing Questionable Strategies for Safeguarding the Bible

When the going gets tough for an inerrant Bible, evangelicals resort to an assortment of “tricks” to eliminate “purported” inconsistencies (contradictions) or inaccuracies (mistakes), or protect the Bible’s literary, theological, historical, or scientific integrity.⁶⁶ As described in Section 1.3.5, a prominent tactic is “literal where possible” but “non-literal where preferable.” Barr (1977, 40–55; cf. 1973, 168–81) examines this tactic. Some specific exaggerated or forced strategies for resolving “apparent” errors in the Bible are recourse to hyperbolic interpretation,⁶⁷ approximation or generalization (especially round and large numbers), harmonization (very frequent; see Achtemeier 1999, 46–57; Barr 1977, 55–72, 279–84, 309–10; Sparks 2008, 159–64),⁶⁸ and “divine” accommodation or condescension. The latter’s basic idea is God spoke in a culture-conditioned way to communicate infinite truth to finite humans. Yet non-inerrantists see no reason to buy into the apologetic defense, for example, that Jesus’ reported statement about the mustard seed as “the smallest of all seeds on earth”⁶⁹ is an instance of cultural (or contextual) accommodation rather than simply a mistaken idea (even if part of a figure of speech) believed by Jesus or the Evangelists.⁷⁰

1.4.3.4 Working to Resolve Bible “Difficulties” Relentlessly

There is no shortage of books (Archer 1982, Geisler and Howe 1992, etc.) and webpages (e.g., “Solutions to Bible ‘Errors’”⁷¹) instructing laypersons and others how to deal with “alleged” Bible errors. Among specific practical steps, besides studying the verse’s context in which the difficulty arises to gain a better idea of its meaning, the layperson is told to be fully persuaded an explanation or reconciliation exists, trust in the Bible’s inerrancy,

remember the Bible’s historical accuracy is unsurpassed, etc. (Archer 1982, 15–7). Since the presupposition is the Bible does not contain errors, the task is to figure out the path to arriving at that conclusion. The approach is completely circular, uncritical, and unscholarly.

1.4.3.5 *Deferring Answers to “Insoluble” Bible “Difficulties”*

“[W]hen confronted with the charge of error against Scripture, we have a threefold choice: we can admit error, we can resolve the supposed error, or we can *admit perplexity*” (Dembski 2001, 94; emphasis added). Or,

Inerrancy is the view that *when all the facts become known*, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and *correctly interpreted* is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences.

(Feinberg 2017, 125; emphasis added)

If a “problem” cannot be resolved and the “error” eliminated, then “it is methodologically wise to take a more generous stance toward the reliability of the text and argue that the problem is with the scholar’s misunderstanding of the text ... but not the text itself” (Averbeck 2012, 179). Shifting the burden of proof from God to humanity, from inerrant text to human (mis)understanding, is characteristic of evangelicalism and scriptural fundamentalist traditions generally (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish) (see Ruthven 2007, 43–4). The modus operandi is something akin to suspend judgment and “trust God.” See further Grabbe 1987, 148–9; Sparks 2008, 165–8.

1.4.3.6 *Making Speculative Proposals of the “It Is Possible” Variety*

When solutions for a Bible “difficulty” are lacking or are uncongenial to evangelical sensibilities about an inerrant Bible, it is always possible to latch onto any number of unlikely ideas as “possible” solutions. While it is common for scholars to make speculative proposals—this is a normal part of creative problem solving—there is a difference between speculating about the solution to a problem where there is no other good explanation available, and where there is. The problem is when it comes to maintaining inerrancy, evangelicals often reject more obvious solutions to problems in support of less likely ones that do not conflict with their bibliology (and then uncritically recycle the less favorable solution between themselves). Stephen Young illustrates this with evangelical attempts to historically identify Darius the Mede in Daniel (2011, 229; cf. 227–9, 234–5). The basic idea is to punt—close one’s eyes, kick the ball, and hope for the best.⁷²

1.4.3.7 *Citing “Critical” Scholarship Dubiously*

This plays out in two ways. Evangelical scholars cite mainstream scholars, arguments, or evidence in ways misrepresenting them, or they set

disagreements between these in opposition to one another to suggest their “assured results” and “scholarly consensus” are in a state of chaos. In both cases the objective is to bolster, by default, the likelihood of the traditional or conservative perspective. See Barr 1977, 307–8; Sparks 2008, 146–50, 153–5.⁷³ This approach manifests itself especially when it comes to arguments for the compositional unity and the (entirely or mostly) single authorship of the Pentateuch and Isaiah. For example, about the Pentateuch, Averbeck (2012, 156) claims: “The confused diversity of historical-critical opinion within the ‘scholarly consensus’ is telling. There are so many different revisionist trails and trends to follow, and so little agreement between them, that there is virtually no solid ground here.” Similarly, about Isaiah, Schultz (2004, 154–5) says:

Although none of the [non-evangelical] scholars just mentioned would attribute the entire book to Isaiah of Jerusalem, support for the basic unity of the canonical book has been growing steadily within non-evangelical scholarship. Ironically, while critical scholars are moving in a more conservative direction, there is also a growing trend among evangelicals to expand the concept of Isaianic authorship and to embrace views regarding Isaiah that some critical scholars are discarding.

The problem with these appraisals is that mainstream scholarship on the composition of the Pentateuch (e.g., Baden and Stackert 2021, esp. ch. 1) and Isaiah (e.g., Tiemeyer 2020, esp. chs. 1–2) scarcely supports Averbeck’s “no solid ground” or Schultz’s “conservative direction” in historical-critical scholarship; rather, *there is substantial scholarly agreement against* (as Averbeck and Schultz wish to believe) *the authorial unity of the Pentateuch or Isaiah.*

1.4.3.8 *Showing Preference to the Protestant Bible Canon*

The scriptural canon for evangelicals is the Protestant Bible with its 66 books, 39 OT and 27 NT. This is reasonable since each religious group (Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, etc.) includes different books among its sacred texts. We observed that evangelicals take a dramatically different approach to the Quran and Book of Mormon. This is most clear in their perspective on these books’ basic nature—which they consider uninspired and often unreliable and untrue—and this is also reasonable for evangelicals to believe from their religious perspective. But the issue here is the evangelical attitude toward books which for them are non-canonical when they do their scholarship, in particular, how they use other non-religious and religious writings as background sources for understanding the Bible and the histories and cultures of the ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman worlds in which the Bible was produced. This is the problem: Evangelicals have a distinctive outlook and approach to the Bible which evidences itself in their

marginalization or mishandling of other ancient writings in their literary and historical-cultural research (see Sparks 2008, 150–3).⁷⁴

1.4.3.9 *Favoring the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*

As for the OT, evangelicals deal almost exclusively with the traditional Jewish Bible text, the Masoretic Text (MT). This observation actually applies to most biblical scholars, Jewish and Christian.⁷⁵ However, the MT is not *the* text of the OT but just one of several forms of the text, albeit an important and reliable one, but the assumption of MT priority is untenable (see Müller and Pakkala 2022, 4–9, 13). The preference for the MT has significant consequences for aspects of text-critical and other research undertaken by evangelicals.⁷⁶

1.4.3.10 *Preferring “Soft” Academic Routes and “Safe” Disciplines*

First, where do evangelical biblical scholars complete doctorates (Ph.D.s and Th.D.s)? Second, what subjects do they focus on in their training and then research, teaching, and publishing? Regarding the first question, evangelicals study in many different higher learning institutions: Theological seminaries, Christian and Jewish colleges/universities, and secular colleges/universities either in divinity schools or other faculties/departments. These are usually in the U.S., often in the U.K., and less frequently in mainland Europe or elsewhere.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Sparks (2008, 145–6, 168) correctly observes that evangelicals often follow “soft” academic routes (see also Barr 1977, 128–32; Grabbe 1987, 135; S.L. Young 2015a, 28). An important phrase in Sparks’ description is “where they are not *required* to face the critical issues head-on” (emphasis added), because some do focus on “critical” issues in their dissertations, in addition to exposure in courses, seminars, lectures, exams, etc. Turning to the second question, while some evangelicals do concentrate on “critical” issues in their doctoral studies and afterward, most do not. What do we mean by “critical” and “non-critical” issues?

“Critical” issues revolve around the Bible’s history and nature. Often there is a diachronic (change over time) orientation and “introduction” matters such as authorship (who, when, how?) are involved. One thinks of historical criticism (see Section 1.4.1), form, source, and redaction criticism, or literary criticism that involves the history of composition, the Documentary Hypothesis, problems in the production of the Pentateuch, Isaiah, Daniel, the gospels, etc. The preceding are aspects of “higher” criticism. Textual or “lower” criticism may be included here too, notably when it does not simply presuppose an “authoritative” or “received” manuscript or edition that only requires minor adjustments (e.g., correcting an MT error with a Septuagint [LXX] reading), or when textual criticism and literary criticism

are combined to discern the evolution of biblical writings. Other “critical” issues involve general historical matters, such as the history of Israel and whether for example an exodus actually happened, or biblical theology when the historical-critical dimension is not eliminated.

“Non-critical” issues refer to ones adjacent to the Bible, on the margins or periphery, involving the Bible’s environment, or they have a synchronic orientation because they disregard the Bible’s process of development into its final or canonical form. The latter approach includes new literary criticism, narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, etc., and biblical theology without the historical-critical dimension. The first approach, the “world of the Bible” topics, is often where evangelicals choose to focus. Prominent examples include textual criticism, analysis of manuscripts, creation of editions, especially involving the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Peshitta;⁷⁸ ancient Near Eastern languages such as Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Northwest Semitic languages, etc.; the biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and the linguistics and its different dimensions related to these, and linguistic dating in OT studies; ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman literatures; histories and cultures of the ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman worlds of the Bible’s production; archaeology of Syria-Palestine and the broader environs; geography and historical geography; etc. These are “safe” disciplines, or they can be, because one can compartmentalize them away from the Bible, or use them to understand and illustrate the Bible and events recorded without touching on the Bible’s history and nature so that conflicts never arise between one’s research and view of the Bible or theology. Evangelicals can do excellent work in these fields (e.g., Kitchen on Egyptian, Millard on Akkadian), but when they turn to the Bible’s history and nature, their evaluations exceed their expertise and their reasoning reveals the shortcomings of scriptural fundamentalism and maximal conservatism (see Barr 1977, 130–2; Hendel 2005; and Isbell 2004 on Kitchen and history; S.L. Young 2015b on Millard and literacy).

Evangelicals often lament evangelicals who encountering “critical” biblical scholarship abandon inerrancy or evangelicalism or Christianity. They view the questioning or abandoning of inerrancy as a “slippery slope” toward liberalism and atheism. Moreover, they claim those who follow this path often take it because of ulterior and self-serving motivations, and they “sell their souls” for academic recognition and prestige (Carson 1983, 348–9; Grudem 2000, 16–23; Naselli 2014, esp. 433–53; Payne 1980, 108; Schultz 2004, 170; Witherington 2011, 82–4; etc.). In response, those making such accusations portray themselves as acting from disinterest and standing for the truth but claims of disinterest are a common intellectual practice participants adopt when competing within a field for symbolic and other capital (S.L. Young 2015a, 27–8). In addition, such accusations contradict the self-reported experiences of evangelicals and former evangelicals who abandoned inerrancy because of analytical thinking and conclusions reached about the Bible’s

history, nature, and (un)reliability as they followed their investigation wherever it might lead—and the end was not inerrancy (Bovell 2012, ix–xi [Enns’ foreword], i–ii [introduction]; Enns 2015, 166; Sparks 2008, 11–2, 21; etc.).

There is another disconcerting angle here. Beale attributes the reassessment of the traditional evangelical view of the Bible to two factors, the onset of postmodernism in evangelicalism and evangelicals graduating with doctorates from non-evangelical institutions (2008, 20–1; seconded by others, e.g., Beall 2013, 80; J.D. Hays 2011, 113–4n8). He therefore offers this advice in an interview on inerrancy in response to the question, “What practical advice then would you give to evangelical students pursuing graduate Biblical Studies in secular university departments?”:

If the student is not planning to try and teach at a high powered university in the United Kingdom or America but at an evangelical college or seminary then get your doctorate at a conservative place. There are some good programs out there: for example, at Wheaton, Trinity, Westminster Seminary or Dallas Theological Seminary. If one is thinking about going to a non-evangelical institution, it is my opinion that you need at least three if not four solid years at a masters level, studying exegesis, studying theology at an orthodox institution. You need to have your beliefs really grounded. You need to know who you are, and why you are that way before you enter into an institution ... It is very important to be in a solid, orthodox evangelical church, and to stay close to the Lord in Scripture and prayer. If there are lingering or rising doubts about the Scriptures during research, then contact a scholar-pastor or biblical scholar or a theologian who is known to be orthodox, and get a good bibliography on the issues from both sides and work through it.
(Downes 2009)

The problems with Beale’s advice are obvious:

[T]he doctrine of inerrancy is an improper foundation for both evangelical traditioning and Bibliology because the doctrine both quells an individual’s potential for theological growth and is intellectually dishonest when confronted with the challenges presented by modern biblical scholarship.

And: “The assertion that one’s beliefs about the Bible should be preemptively insulated from the effects of serious academic study of the Bible is simply contrary to any meaningful notion of academ[ic] study” (Raybeck 2016, ii, 125; cf. Cole’s [1998, 8] personal reflections).

1.4.3.11 *Being Constricted by Doctrinal Statements*

Creeds and faith confessions have a long history in the church. Today’s doctrinal (confessional, faith) statements inform adherents about the shared

worldview, beliefs, and practices of a religious community. Within evangelicalism, doctrinal statements are usually connected to churches, theological seminaries, Christian colleges/universities, learned societies, periodicals related to the preceding institutions, and sometimes book publishers. In contrast, secular entities, including non-evangelical biblical societies, lack doctrinal statements that rigidly govern religious beliefs and practices. They may have constitutions and/or bylaws that govern academic practice, but they do not control the intellectual process and scholarly inquiry. Religious entities certainly have every right to require their associates' commitment to particular beliefs and practices, but this has consequences when academic pursuits are involved. The problem is that doctrinal statements establish boundaries and commitments to certain conclusions; they are self-isolating and self-protecting. This is opposite to scholarship, because scholarship must follow an investigation wherever it may lead, even if that conflicts with an assertion in a doctrinal statement. One might argue that professors at evangelical institutions with doctrinal statements affirming inerrancy are free to conclude that the Bible is inaccurate in some way, and in such a situation they should choose to resign or the institution is justified in terminating their employment (see Craig 2017). True, but this hardly fosters an environment of open-minded and open-ended scholarship, and it overlooks the problem of trying to sustain a livelihood without fear of institutional retribution. In short, doctrinal statements suffocate scholarship and academia. The list is long of evangelicals who have been denied tenure, dismissed, resigned, retired early, etc., because their scholarship produced "unacceptable" conclusions on inerrancy, historicity, gender identity/roles, evolution/human origins, etc. Enns (2013c), himself a casualty, asks: "Can Evangelical Colleges and Seminaries Be Truly Academic Institutions?," or "Are 'Evangelical' and 'Academic' Oxymorons?," or "Should such institutions publicly acknowledge that they are centers of theological apologetics and therefore not places of academic training?" (see Sparks 2008, 167–8, 357–74).

1.4.3.12 Orienting their Discourse toward Other Evangelicals

Evangelical scholars are wedged between the church and the academy, and as expected many speak and write for evangelicals at large, laypersons and ministers, non-academics and academics, in churches, theological seminaries, and Christian colleges/universities. In these contexts their voices are readily acknowledged, they provide doctrinal and pastoral guidance, they educate others sharing their bibliography and biblical worldview, they induce trust in the Bible, they feel they can glorify God and serve the church, and sometimes they receive more financial reward (i.e., royalties from popular books). Some encourage evangelicals to make the church's needs their main motivation for publishing (e.g., Grudem 2000, Naselli 2014). This also clarifies why they feel compelled to shield laypersons and students of

the Bible and theology from “critical” issues and perspectives, so they do not experience “disruptive, faith-testing bouts with cognitive dissonance” (Sparks 2008, 167). Related problems already mentioned are an apologetic approach to the Bible, how to deal with Bible “difficulties,” where and what to study, etc., and one can add others like which authors and books evangelicals should (not) read (see Barr 1977, 121–2) and how they should (not) use “critical” Bible commentaries (e.g., M. Ward 2018). No wonder many progressive and former evangelicals lament their training in evangelical churches and institutions which did not prepare them to encounter the “outside” world of “critical” biblical scholarship (Bovell 2007, 154; Enns 2012c, 156–8; 2015, 169; Grabbe 1987, 134; Sparks 2008, 374; etc.).

Furthermore evangelical *academic* discourse is generally carried out in evangelical contexts, with evangelical societies and publishers (see Barr 1977, 120–8; 1980, 89–90, 146–7n8).⁷⁹ In addition to factors discussed already, much evangelical discourse is apologetic of the Bible and a biblical worldview, and this is relevant only to evangelical audiences. Another reason evangelicals orient their academic discourse toward other evangelicals is that when dealing with “critical” matters, evangelicals have a difficult time passing non-evangelical peer review because their conservative presuppositions about the Bible’s history and nature and the historicity of biblical events are so uncritical and unbending, and so apparent to mainstream scholars, that it is easier for evangelicals to stay “in house” with evangelical societies and publishers, where the listeners and readers are inclined to agree (see Grabbe 1987, 149; S.L. Young 2011, 234–5; 2015b, 168). Very many, actually most, evangelical introductions, commentaries, theologies, political and religious histories, etc., simply do not pass muster outside the evangelical ecosphere, and therefore they are habitually published by evangelical presses. And, contrary to their conviction and reassurance by their evangelical constituency, evangelical writings on these matters are not being accepted and making an impact on mainstream scholarship (see Noll 2004, 201–2). Evangelicals routinely attribute this to anti-supernatural bias among “critical” scholars, but for most historical issues this charge is immaterial.⁸⁰

1.5 Other Issues in Evangelical Biblical Scholarship

Two other matters amplify the preceding critique of evangelical biblical scholarship and evangelical misuse of the Bible. We begin with misuse of archaeology to support the Bible’s historical claims and then turn to the Bible’s misuse in the public square.

1.5.1 *The Bible and Archaeology*

Using archaeology to support the Bible’s historicity goes back to the early days of modern biblical criticism.⁸¹ The literature on this subject is vast, and embraces archaeological sites and excavations in multiple countries, and

findings from methods involving ceramic chronology, stratigraphic analysis, and dating techniques. Consequently, a thorough analysis of evangelical (mis)uses of archaeology is beyond this book's scope. Nevertheless, given the preceding discussion and several later contributions, some comments are appropriate.

As with textual scholars, most archaeologists excavating in Israel reject using archaeological data mainly to prove the Bible.⁸² Nonetheless, archaeological discoveries in the late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries were utilized to attack Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) and biblical criticism emanating from Germany. From the twentieth century's beginning, archaeology became a valuable tool in the attack on historical criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis. Archaeological data emboldened traditionalists who adhered to inerrancy. This cherished doctrine appeared wondrously corroborated by celebrated digs that unearthed biblical antiquities. In this early period, Archibald H. Sayce (e.g., 1894, 1904, 1923) and Melvin Grove Kyle (e.g., 1910, 1912, 1917a, 1917b) were two notable opponents utilizing archaeology against historical criticism.

Many Evangelicals looked to archaeologists' findings to prove the Bible's historicity. Archaeology quickly merged with theology to support the Bible's truthfulness (see Dever 1990, 3–36). This is reflected by the short-lived “biblical theology movement.” Although praised and criticized by conservative Christian scholars, this movement continues to shape evangelical scholarship. Some of this movement's main features are its emphasis on the Bible's unity, God's revelation in history through mighty acts, and the distinctiveness of biblical revelation and its superiority to the cultures in which it arose. G. Ernest Wright (1909–1974) was perhaps this movement's chief proponent. Although not an evangelical, Wright's work, because he was an archaeologist and biblical scholar, continues to shape evangelical portrayals of biblical history. In *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (1952), Wright argues that history is God's chief medium of revelation. For Wright, Israel's exodus from Egypt and the Sinai experience are the core of biblical theology. Wright excavated sites in Israel to uncover physical evidence of God's miracles described in the Bible to prove its historicity. In his quest, he was influenced by his teacher William Foxwell Albright (1891–1971)—also not an evangelical, and regarded as perhaps the previous century's most influential archaeologist—whose legacy also continues to shape evangelical biblical and archaeological scholarship.

Throughout the twentieth century, archaeological evidence was interpreted and integrated into the conservative struggle against any analysis challenging traditional Bible interpretations. Under Albright's influence, many American biblical scholars insisted that archaeology had validated early Israelite history and nullified the Documentary Hypothesis. Albright's books (e.g., 1940) espoused a largely positivistic view of the Bible based on his pioneering archaeological excavations. Although all archaeologists continue to benefit from Albright's advances in stratigraphic excavation techniques

combined with his pioneering ceramic typology, he mainly focused on the patriarchal narratives and conquest period and expected to find physical proof of the biblical narratives. Like his student Wright, Albright denigrated the indigenous cultures of ancient Israel (i.e., Canaanites) for their inferior polytheistic religion, and located the pinnacle of religion in Israelite monotheism. Yet Albright, raised by conservative Methodist missionaries in Chile, shared many evangelical convictions.

Albright befriended Kyle, president of the St. Louis-based Xenia Theological Seminary, who edited the journal *Bibliotheca Sacra* with its decidedly evangelical conviction. The two did much to use archaeology to support evangelical scholarship. Kyle introduced Albright to the Fleming H. Revell Company, a publishing house for evangelical Christian readers, which published Albright's first book (1932) on the Bible and archaeology that drew upon his findings from Tell Beit Mirsim. Kyle promoted Albright's archaeological findings to support Christian apologetics, and he also contributed to *The Fundamentals*. In turn, Albright encouraged the scholarship and participation in the SBL of James Kelso, a Presbyterian minister and Kyle/Albright protégé, saying "we need more conservatives to offset a strong liberal slant in the Society."⁸³

The Albrightian School dominated biblical archaeology until the 1970s. By the 1980s, however, the synthesis of biblical studies and archaeology as practiced by Albright and his supporters was considered unreliable. Even Albright had to recognize his excavations did not support his conviction that Hebrew tribes leaving Egypt conquered Canaan, as narrated in Joshua. Nevertheless, he and his students attempted to sustain the basic biblical narrative by finessing certain details and explaining away discrepancies. This allowed them to maintain the conquest's historicity despite contradictory evidence from physical remains (see Moore and Kelle 2011, 1–42). Nevertheless, most rejected the biblical traditions as a reliable historical foundation, leading to the collapse of Albright's school among mainstream biblical scholars and archaeologists (e.g., Dever 1993).

Now, even conservatives have recognized older interpretations have changed with new evidence and methods. However, using archaeological data to validate the Bible, whether legitimate or not, remains the bulwark of faith-oriented scholars. Countless books, articles, and lectures highlight archaeological evidence in support of the historicity of the biblical narrative in Genesis–Joshua. Most of their conclusions are controversial and have few mainstream supporters (e.g., Finkelstein and Mazar 2007).

An egregious example of faith-based scholarship is the *Archaeology Study Bible* (Currid and Chapman 2018), which states all the authors

affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness, and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. They also affirm that God's Word clearly

teaches that the only means of salvation is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2018, vii)

It appears these pious scholars have created an encyclopedia of spiritual archaeology. It should appeal to the faithful in extolling the testimony of archaeology's contributions toward vindicating the Bible and enhancing God's revelation. Are these conservative scholars' methods theological and based on a testimony to the truth of Scripture, and not to the truth of scholarship?

In recent decades, evangelical scholars have attempted to buttress the lack of archaeological data for the biblical conquest and other stories by producing comprehensive works that recount the entire history of Israel from Genesis to the OT's end.⁸⁴ These books largely follow the biblical narrative and offer a selective use of archaeological evidence. Provan, Long, and Longman's *A Biblical History of Israel* (2015), is exemplary of evangelical scholarship in its view the Bible should be trusted unless directly falsified by clear, unambiguous, external evidence. Likewise, Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (2003), highlights archaeological evidence to argue the numerous correspondences between the material culture and archaeology prove the Bible's truthfulness. Another example is Jens Bruun Kofoed's *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text* (2005), which adopts Kitchen's maximalist position to prove the biblical narrative. Such claims have been challenged by mainstream biblical scholars, who argue the methods in these and other similar books reflect distinctive evangelical presuppositions and apologetic motives (e.g., Davies 2008, 156–68; Lemche 2005; cf. Barr 1977, 135–9).

An equally troubling trend is the media's influence upon the public.⁸⁵ Stories on archaeological discoveries are trumpeted in newspaper headlines. For years the public has been inundated with articles proclaiming evidence has been found that authenticates the Bible. Archaeologists have criticized the media for propagating incorrect or incomplete information. Evangelical and reputable news outlets reporting on the discovery of archaeological evidence "such as Noah's ark or the ark of the covenant or 'biblical sites,' such as Sodom and Gomorrah or the Garden of Eden, shows how ill-informed the media is about current scholarship on the Bible and archaeology" (Meyers and Meyers 2012, 3–4). In publicizing biblical archaeology, the media has often imitated faith-based scholars' tendency to distort archaeological results for pious purposes. A serious byproduct of these dubious and poorly written stories is they minimize the results of professional excavations and research that are essential in assisting scholars in understanding the biblical narrative. By hyping and celebrating every archaeological discovery related to the Bible, examined or not, the public, understandably, does not know what to believe. Notwithstanding Meyers and Meyers' piece, media sources continue to exaggerate biblical claims in their reporting. Following is a

small sample of what Meyers and Meyers depicted as the press' tendency to distort archaeological results for pious purposes.

Misleading headlines have appeared in the press that somehow validate the biblical record, such as "Archaeological Discovery: Evidence of Hebrew Exodus From Egypt Found Near Jordan River" (Gryboski 2018). Yet, in the text of the article, "We have not proved that these camps are from the period of the early Israelites, but it is possible," noted David Ben-Shlomo. The exodus is indeed a popular topic. Even meteorological events might explain the event: "How Wind May Have Parted the Sea for Moses" (Mcalpine 2010). In "In Ancient Mass Graves, Archaeologists Find Child Slaves of Biblical Egypt" (Borschel-Dan 2017), despite the author's attempts to link Akhenaton, Aton, Sigmund Freud, and monotheism to the early Israelites, the Amarna Project's archaeological director, Barry Kemp stated in the article he does "not accept the Old Testament narrative as a historical record, and therefore that there is any connection between Amarna and 'Hebrew slaves.'" In an article on whether bitumen and pitch were available at the time of Moses' birth, "Using the Bible to Debunk the Bible Debunkers" (Armstrong 2021), the author stated: "The Bible (God's revelation) also teaches truth, obtained by different—but equally valid and valuable—methods. Confirmed, established science is always harmonious with the Bible." Though published in the *National Catholic Register*, this is an extraordinary article that does not hide its faith-driven analysis of the biblical history. The author noted "biblical inspiration, infallibility and the Bible's status as God's revelation have nothing whatsoever to fear from archaeology, or any scientific field, because truth is truth."

Readers were amazed to encounter an article entitled "Archaeologist Claims Mount Sinai Found in Saudi Arabia" (Froelich 2021). However, no archaeologists were quoted. The major spokesperson was Ryan Mauro of the "Doubting Thomas Research Foundation" who is also busy hunting for Noah's ark. He is not a trained archaeologist. This is an old topic. Even the evangelical archaeological site Associates for Biblical Research (2001) has written extensively against any linking of Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia. Various other headlines clearly indicated King Solomon's mines had been discovered: "Found: Fresh Clues to Mystery of King Solomon's Mines" (Donahue 2017), "Scientists Just Discovered a Major Part of King Solomon's 3,000-Year-Old Mines" (Bonazzo 2017), and "New Clues To King Solomon's Mines Found" (Gannon 2013), plus "Archaeologists Startled to Find Remains of Pregnant Woman Buried in King Solomon's Mines" (David 2017). A closer reading demonstrates the mines were in control of Edomite tribes, and the mines existed during the period of Solomon's purported reign in Jerusalem. The king may have traded with the Edomites but there is no evidence Solomon controlled the mines. These mines contained "the largest smelting operation ... during the 10th century, in the age of David and Solomon" (David 2017). Erez Ben-Yosef, the lead archaeologist, and "his team found no direct links to that ancient biblical kingdom, whose historicity is still hotly debated"

(David 2017). Then in “Archaeology Confirms Book of Genesis on Israel’s Arch-nemesis, the Edomites” (David 2019), Ben-Yosef insisted “whether this can be linked to an Israelite connection is anyone’s guess.” He also surmised scholars “don’t have evidence one way or the other” (David 2019). One should note that even the well-respected *Haaretz*, an important news source about the Bible and archaeology, occasionally publishes misleading and sensationalized headlines, more reminiscent of the conservative press proving the Bible than *Haaretz*’s normal judicious reporting.

As the press picked up stories on the excavations in Jezreel by Norma Franklin and Jennie Ebeling, dubious stories began to appear indicating the directors had discovered the vineyard of Naboth in 1 Kings 21: “Archaeologists Might Have Identified Jezreel Winery Featured In Bible” (Tercatin 2020), “Discovering Naboth’s Vineyard: Another Find of Biblical Proportions” (Metaxas 2017), and “Archaeologist Finds Traces of Biblical Vineyard of Naboth in Jezreel Valley” (Malado 2017). The latter article contained a number of confusing quotes. “In light of the latest findings, Franklin is convinced that the Biblical story of the conflict between Naboth and King Ahab over a vineyard could very well have taken place” (Malado 2017). However, Franklin is also quoted as saying: “As an archaeologist, I cannot say that there was definitely a specific man named Naboth who had a particular vineyard” (Malado 2017). And in “Archaeologist Discovers Proof for Biblical Vineyard of Naboth” (Zaimov 2017a) and “Archaeologist Uncovers Proof that Vineyard Recorded in Old Testament Actually Existed” (Zaimov 2017b), the author indicated Franklin “suggested that the vineyard was established somewhere before 300 BCE, which coincides with the time-frame for when Naboth was producing wine at the site” (Zaimov 2017b). The confusion continued as Franklin said “she disputes some aspects of the biblical narrative, and suggested that Naboth did not actually live in Jezreel” (Zaimov 2017b). As for the story’s accuracy, Franklin was quoted as saying: “Most Biblical scholars agree that the story was written down after the return from Babylon which coincides with Nehemiah telling Israel to turn away their foreign wives” (Zaimov 2017a). It is obvious Franklin never believed they found Naboth’s vineyard or whether Naboth even existed. In a personal email to one of this book’s editors, Ebeling, the excavation’s co-director, confirmed these headlines are cases of misrepresentation.

An article in *Nature Scientific Reports* (Bunch et al. 2021) announcing an asteroid burst destroyed the ancient Bronze Age city of Tall el-Hamman, the reputed Sodom of Genesis, set off a deluge of articles. This event could have inspired the Bible’s tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the wondrous news would surely captivate the public. The story was picked up by more than 175 news outlets (Batycka 2022), which eagerly featured stories on this destruction of Sodom: *Smithsonian Magazine*, “Ancient City’s Destruction by Exploding Space Rock May Have Inspired Biblical Story of Sodom” (Gerшон 2021); *The Times*, “Meteor Destroyed Sodom, Tell El-Hammam Valley Archaeologists Believe” (Binyon 2021); and even *Forbes* informed

the business community, “A Massive Meteor May Have Destroyed the Biblical City of Sodom” (Fernandez 2021). This led *Newsweek* to publish “Is Archaeology Proving the Bible?” by Eric Metaxas, a well-known evangelical. After recounting the details of the published article and the writings of archaeologist Steven Collins and his cohorts, Metaxas (2021) opined:

That a prestigious journal of science would admit these things should at least make skeptics sit up and take notice. Few people—whether religious believers or skeptical scientists—ever dreamt such a thing was possible. Archaeology has been pointing to the accuracy of the Hebrew scriptures for 170 years.

A scholarly firestorm quickly followed. It was pointed out that Collins taught at “an unaccredited Bible college,” these scholars “confused run-of-the-mill smelting and pottery processes with heat from an airburst,” and even the evangelical Answers in Genesis pointed out the group’s chronology does not support evangelical interpretations of biblical dating (Pattengale 2022). Another article reported: “A contingent of scientists took to the internet to call the study a farce, arguing that it was nothing more than a form of ‘pseudoarchaeology’” (Batycka 2022). In the report’s defense, one contributor said: “The report ... merely made the ‘suggestion,’ rather than the ‘claim’ that he and his colleagues had located Sodom” (Batycka 2022). The controversy led Arie Amaya-Akkermans to blame biblical archaeology in a hypercritical comment as “one of the worst examples of ideology and fundamentalism operating as science” (Batycka 2022). Even the evangelical *The Christian Post*, in “Researchers Claim Biblical Sodom was Destroyed by Massive Asteroid, Scholars Disagree” (Blair 2021), added dissenting voices criticizing the report, which included well known archaeologists Steven Ortiz, director of Lipscomb University’s Lanier Center for Archaeology, a faith-based Christian college, and Aren Maier, Bar-Ilan University archaeologist and director of excavations at Tell es-Safi. Moreover, an article in the anthropological magazine *Sapiens* described the report’s condemnation by scholars on Twitter as “shoddy science, poor analyses of biological remains, edited images, overt religious agenda, and misinterpretations of stratigraphic contexts, particularly those exhibiting evidence of burning” (Kersel et al. 2021). The article warned: “Anyone who cares about archaeology, including scientists and scientific media outlets and the public who depends on them, should question the results of excavations that accompany claims like these made by Collins” (Kersel et al. 2021).⁸⁶

1.5.2 *The Bible in the Public Square*

The impact of the Bible and evangelical interpretation of the Bible on U.S. public opinion and domestic and foreign policy is pervasive. There are few and maybe no areas where the Bible has not exerted its influence. This is

nowhere more visible today—writing soon after the Supreme Court’s overruling of *Roe v. Wade* on June 24, 2022—than in the right-wing evangelical and Christian Right’s fight to limit access to abortion, because they believe the Bible, at least by inference, prohibits abortion, and the Bible is the principal catalyst and ultimate authority for their position. But abortion is just one of many contemporary issues preoccupying evangelicals, even if less prominently than abortion. A thorough list of topics and organizations from a conservative, mostly evangelical, perspective is readily accessible on the website of “Find Your Conservative Organization” (FYCO).⁸⁷ The Bible has figured prominently in the formulation of evangelical thought about all the issues there and more (e.g., Grudem 2010).

It is beyond this introduction’s scope to discuss the Bible’s general influence on American culture and politics,⁸⁸ and more specifically how right-wing evangelicalism and the Christian Right, using their biblical understanding, act to influence public opinion and policy.⁸⁹ We would also be remiss if we failed to acknowledge the many positive contributions by evangelicals to society, past and present, for example in education, healthcare, caring for the poor, homeless, hungry, sick, oppressed, orphans, widows, and the old, etc., even if evangelical acts of charity in these areas are not unique to evangelicals, or even (Protestant) Christians, but are also done by adherents to other religious traditions (e.g., Judaism, Islam), and none.

This book, however, deals with evangelical misuse of the Bible, and while evangelicals may act with sincere motives in their private and public spheres, it is nevertheless true—regardless of one’s take on some of their specific cultural, political, and legal postures and objectives—that their Bible-inspired agendas showcase many shortcomings in regard to biblical interpretation and application. There are multiple angles on this issue. One is what the Bible’s books and passages meant in their ancient contexts. Quite often evangelical views on particular ethical issues are actually opposed by the Bible or otherwise are controversial and uncertain (e.g., J.J. Collins 2019, Coogan 2010, R.E. Friedman and Dolansky 2011). Another issue is whether the Bible’s ideas are transferable through time and space from the ancient world to modern culture, and if so, how. Yet another is whether the Bible or any (ancient) religious book for that matter—and if the Bible, why it and not the Quran or Book of Mormon, for example—should exert any influence on contemporary (democratic) society. But narrowing in on the Bible within evangelicalism, there is the alarming problem of inconsistencies and contradictions in how evangelicals—and not just right-wing vs. left-wing—have interpreted and used the Bible in different historical periods and at particular moments in time.

Examples of discrepancies in what evangelicals think the Bible endorses, allows, and prohibits abound. For example, the Bible was cited in opposition *and* support of American slavery in the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries, and even racial segregation until well into the twentieth (on the latter see, e.g., J. Taylor 2016). Randall Balmer (2014, 2021) argues abortion was

not the main rallying cry of evangelicals until the late 1970s–early 1980s, when it replaced evangelical support *for* segregation as the main catalyst for evangelical political, legal, and cultural activism. Or take divorce—about which the Bible speaks volumes, though it is silent on abortion—this was a major issue in the minds of evangelicals in the 1950s–1970s, but that changed with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and clearly the election of Donald Trump in 2016 underlines that within a generation divorce and remarriage have become non-issues to evangelical leaders and voters (Balmer 2006, 1–34). Another illustration is the Christian Right’s conjuring of a gospel Jesus who loves borders, guns, unborn babies, and economic prosperity, but hates homosexuality, taxes, welfare, and universal healthcare (Keddie 2020). This broaches the matter of the intrinsic value and protection of human life, but the biblical life-ethic endorsed by evangelicals seems anything but (biblically) consistent when one considers their views on abortion, capital punishment, gun ownership and personal self-defense, armed conflict and national defense, climate change, universal healthcare, etc., including also their pushback against wearing masks, receiving vaccines, limiting church gatherings, closing school campuses, etc., during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁰ Berlinerblau (2008) rightly concludes that the Bible has been misused and abused to advance just about every side of a position and therefore should be invoked with great caution, if at all, when dealing with contemporary matters.

Chapters 9–12 focus on several public square issues: Avalos on creationism, Keddie on gun culture, Schroeder on purity culture, and Scholz on biblical and modern women. Also, in Chapter 6, Bowen looks at genocide and holy war and touches on biblical and modern morality. As a final illustration of how evangelicals will defer simplistically to the Bible in their efforts to protect their distinctive and misguided views on particular issues, we turn to the debate between Bill Nye “the Science Guy” and Ken Ham an evangelical creationist and apologist, who debated the question “Is Creation a Viable Model of Origins?” at the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, on February 4, 2014.⁹¹ Near the debate’s end the moderator, CNN’s Tom Foreman, asked “What if anything would ever change your mind?”⁹² Transcribed excerpts from their answers follow:

Ham: Well, the answer to that question is, I’m a Christian. And, as a Christian, I can’t prove it to you, but God has definitely shown me very clearly through his word and shown himself in the person of Jesus Christ, the Bible is the word of God. I admit that that’s where I start from ... And so, as far as the word of God is concerned, no, no one’s ever going to convince me that the word of God is not true.

Nye: We would need just one piece of evidence. We would need the fossil that swam from one layer to another. We would need evidence that the universe is not expanding. We would need evidence that the stars appear to be far away, but they’re not. We would need evidence that

rock layers can somehow form in just four thousand years instead of the extraordinary number. We need evidence that somehow that you can reset atomic clocks and keep the neutrons from becoming protons. Bring on any of those things, and you would change me immediately.

For Ham and most evangelicals (two-thirds of white evangelicals according to Gallup and Pew Research Center polls), “the only acceptable model for human life is that given by an inerrant reading of the Bible. Not just sound scientific knowledge, but also morality and social well-being, depend on subordinating human reason, moral intuitions and imagination to the authority of the inerrant Word” (McCalla 2006, 197). And so, with this we come full circle to the nature of scholarship, a topic we have discussed at length, and what we have emphasized is that scriptural fundamentalism and the presupposition of inerrancy are incompatible with scholarly method and critical thinking, and this matters whether discussing creationism, or abortion, or any other public square issue.

1.6 Summary of Contributions to *Misusing Scripture*

Part 2, “Inerrancy and Textual Criticism,” begins with Kenneth Atkinson, “The Error of Biblical Inerrancy—The Bible Does Not Exist!” (Chapter 2). Atkinson acknowledges that evangelicals use the Bible to support their theological beliefs. Likewise, liberal Christians often cite Scripture to rebut evangelical religious convictions. This is especially true regarding controversial issues such as same-sex relationships, women’s rights, and other social justice issues. The problem with this debate is the basis evangelicals use to justify their positions on these topics—the Bible. Atkinson highlights what evangelical scholars with a solid graduate education in biblical studies know about the “Bible,” namely that it does not exist. Rather, contemporary Bible editions and translations are modern reconstructions that evangelical and liberal scholars alike frequently change. The Bible’s original text is lost. This not only poses a significant problem for evangelicals, but calls into question the basis of their arguments on controversial issues and even of their very faith.

Robert Rezetko, “Building a House on Sand: What Do Evangelicals Do When They Do Textual Criticism of the Old Testament?” (Chapter 3), identifies the Westminster Confession of Faith and “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” as foundational documents to contemporary American evangelicalism. Prominent in both is their declaration of the divine revelation, inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the original OT and NT texts. Rezetko explores the views of evangelical scholars on the OT text. He evaluates major evangelical publications on the topic, paying close attention to what they say about the original text and what they aim to accomplish with their text-critical principles and practices. He argues evangelical scholars find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one

hand, informed evangelical OT textual critics have rightfully accepted the scholarly consensus view and abandoned the search for the original text. On the other hand, their presuppositions and beliefs compel them to still try to defend the text's accuracy and reliability, and indirectly its originality and inerrancy. Consequently, evangelical scholarship on the OT text is marked by conflict of interest, mutually inconsistent beliefs, problematic tactics, and ultimately uncritical and marginal views.

Part 3, "Archaeology and History," begins with William G. Dever, "Christian Fundamentalism, Faith, and Archaeology" (Chapter 4). Dever commences with a summary of fundamentalist and evangelical approaches to Scripture. While noting that the faith perspectives and views of both often overlap, he highlights that evangelicals are more theologically diverse than their fundamentalist counterparts. Evangelical interpreters of Scripture, moreover, can be critical scholars, relatively well-informed and sophisticated, at least on some topics. Therefore, there can and should be a dialogue between evangelicals and mainstream biblical scholars and theologians. Dever then highlights the misuse of archaeological evidence by fundamentalists and evangelicals alike, and the false understandings of Scripture both use to interpret archaeological evidence. By rebutting the common fallacy that archaeology should "prove" the truth of the Bible's historical and theological claims, Dever offers a valuable corrective showing what we can learn from the material culture uncovered by archeologists, particularly in the land Christians often call the "Holy Land."

Mark Elliott, "*The New York Times* and the Sensationalizing of Archaeological Stories from the Holy Land, 1920–1930" (Chapter 5), observes that in the 1920s, the *Times* published many stories on archaeology and the Bible that provided fodder for fundamentalist and evangelical scholars to claim archaeology proves the Bible. The stories about archaeological excavations came from scholarly journals, cables, letters released by archaeologists working in the field, and announcements of public lectures given by archaeologists. The *Times* also relied on published reports and information from PR announcements from universities or museums, popular magazines, clergy, and writers and editors who knew little about archaeology but could spin a biblical tale. A number of reports and stories were sober and analytical, but other pieces were unreliable, incorporating sensational leads or headlines not even reflected in the stories themselves. The national organ, whose nameplate still reads "All the News That's Fit to Print," played a major role in popularizing biblical archaeology and provided a valuable outlet for a vigorous defense of the Bible. The *Times* contributed to the public's conception that remarkable evidence had been unearthed that decidedly substantiated the biblical narrative, which created an atmosphere of biblical expectation and sensational archaeological events.

Part 4, "The Bible in its Ancient Context," begins with Joshua Bowen, "'Your Eye Shall Have No Pity': Old Testament Violence and Genocide" (Chapter 6). Bowen observes that the commands of Yahweh to commit

violence and genocide in the OT are not only jarring, but also seemingly incompatible with the idea of a perfectly good and moral god. As a result, evangelical scholars often attempt to explain these seemingly immoral commands, arguing Yahweh was either perfectly justified in ordering such violence against a wicked group of people, or the texts in question contain hyperbolic language and are therefore not as bad as they might at first seem. Bowen offers a counter to these arguments, focusing on similar types of divine commands from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, along with examining the literary context of many of these OT passages. In this way, he demonstrates that evangelical scholars misunderstand and misuse the OT when they attempt to justify divine commands of violence and genocide.

Ian Young and Thomas J. Elms, “Avoiding the Apocalypse in the Book of Daniel” (Chapter 7), show that evangelical scholars have often taken contrary positions on major issues in Daniel scholarship that display a rare degree of scholarly consensus within the general field of biblical studies. These center on the dating of the book’s final forms to the second century BCE. Young and Elms describe some major literary observations about the visions in Daniel 7–12 that lead mainstream scholars to their understanding of the book’s date and authorship, and evangelical responses to them. Their aim is to understand why evangelical scholars feel they must dispute the observations and conclusions of mainstream scholars and what strategies they use to do so. They argue that evangelical scholarship has made decisions on what Daniel is saying (and cannot be saying) by applying anachronistic readings to the book which lead them to misinterpret its meaning, based on an insufficient understanding of ancient literary practices and the function of attributions of authorship.

Bruce Chilton, “A Resurrection Fallacy” (Chapter 8), observes that the “empty tomb” has become a standard metonym for Jesus’ resurrection. That is a relatively recent development, accomplished by the influence on scholars of the fundamentalist and evangelical claim that Jesus was raised “in the same body” in which he died. The earliest known testimony regarding the resurrection, St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, is adamant Jesus’ body was different in resurrection from what it was before, spiritual rather than composed of flesh. Further, the usual methods of exegesis show that the tomb of Jesus, judged by the statements of the texts involved and their developing tendencies, is better described as “emptying” as time went on than as “empty” from the outset. More importantly, reference to the tomb conveyed differing emphases among tradents, and distinctive outlooks on the resurrection. Awareness of the exegetical trajectory of the relevant texts and their varying perspectives leads to the conclusion the “empty tomb” needs to be replaced as the point of departure in discussion. Otherwise, alleged textual analysis is really only an example of apologetics.

Part 5, “The Bible in Its Contemporary Context,” begins with Hector Avalos, “Why Academic Biblical Scholars Must Fight Creationism” (Chapter 9). Avalos argues that biblical scholars are the best equipped

experts to lead the fight on creationism, alongside their colleagues in the natural sciences. This is because the Achilles' heel of creationism is its biblical illiteracy, and not just its scientific illiteracy. Common objections to public debates and other forms of public engagement such as op-ed pieces are readily answered, including claims there is no need to debate creationism, debates will never convince anyone, debates are often poorly done, and activism should not be part of biblical studies. The common belief, especially among evangelical Christians in the U.S., that the origins of our world are scientifically represented in the Bible, has enormous implications. Scholarly activism acknowledges that beliefs have consequences. It is, therefore, a moral duty to share the results of biblical scholarship about the Bible's views of creation and cosmology within the broader society. One can think of it as outreach or a service to public education.

Tony Keddie, "Second-Amendment Exegesis of Luke 22:35–53: How Conservative Evangelical Bible Scholars Protect Christian Gun Culture" (Chapter 10), points out many American conservative evangelicals claim the Second Amendment's right to bear arms is a God-given right and find proof of this in the Bible. One text often singled out is Luke 22:35–53, where Jesus tells his disciples to buy swords and then a disciple uses a sword during his arrest. Right-wing politicians and gun lobbyists cite this text in support of gun rights, but do conservative evangelical Bible scholars agree? Keddie shows they sometimes interpret this text in the same way, but even when they don't, they still assent to a biblical justification for individual rights to self-defense. Through "Second-Amendment exegesis," they advance allegedly "historical" claims about the meanings of Luke and the Second Amendment that impose modern notions of "individual rights to self-defense" onto historical contexts with no such laws and ideals. Except under particular circumstances, a civilian bearing arms was not a heroic expression of liberty, but a legally dubious action, in the Roman Empire and the early American republic. Whether they actively advance Second-Amendment exegesis or acquiesce to it in subtler ways, conservative evangelical Bible scholars' interpretations of Luke 22:35–53 protect right-wing evangelicalism's violent Christian gun culture in the U.S. and abroad.

Joy A. Schroeder, "Virginal Blood of the Marriage Covenant: Deuteronomy 22:13–21 in Evangelical Purity Culture" (Chapter 11), argues certain evangelical authors took out of context a single nine-verse biblical passage, Deuteronomy 22:13–21 about a bride's family preserving their daughter's nuptial bedsheets or garments, imported the concept of "covenant" into that passage, and misrepresented biblical and Jewish wedding customs to create a theology of blood-covenant marriage that requires a virgin's sacrificial blood. These evangelicals claim the holy covenant of marriage is ratified by the virgin's shedding of hymeneal blood, spilled on her husband's genitals, during intercourse on her wedding night, and they compare this to the blood of circumcision, animal offerings, and Christ's crucifixion. Schroeder argues this modern teaching is a concept found nowhere

in Scripture. Its timing corresponded to the rise, beginning in the 1990s, of evangelical purity culture, an ideology and set of practices emphasizing abstinence and sexual purity, especially for female teenagers. The interpretation has created anxiety and distress for twentieth- and twenty-first century Christian women and girls, even causing psychological harm, particularly in those who have had sexual experiences prior to marriage.

Susanne Scholz, “Essentializing ‘Woman’: Three Neoliberal Strategies in the Christian Right’s Interpretations on Women in the Bible” (Chapter 12), takes as its point of departure the Christian Right, a politically conservative variety of evangelicalism that arose prominently in the U.S. in the 1970s, and still enjoys rising popularity in various Christian sectors. It has developed an extensive network of biblical interpretations for the lay and academic public. Evangelical reading of the Bible is even taken for granted as the dominant Christian voice about biblical views in the Western world and beyond. Christian Right authors have increasingly become interested in the study of biblical women, who they depict as pietistic, moralizing, monolithic, and supportive of patriarchy, limiting women to motherhood, marriage, childbirth, and dividing women into good and bad “girls.” Such authors rarely engage feminist or much of any biblical scholarship. Their focus is not just recitation of women’s acts in the Bible, but how modern Christian women should behave and support a right-wing political agenda. Feminist scholars must not ignore this popularity among conservative Bible believers. They must engage how interpreters from the Christian Right present biblical women with the goal of producing alternative visions of gender-based biblical studies.

Notes

- 1 The SBL is the oldest and largest learned society devoted to the Bible’s critical investigation from various academic disciplines. It supports scholarly research and fosters public understanding of the Bible and its influence. It has a membership of over 8,000 scholars. It was founded in 1880 and since 1929 has been a member (of 79) of the American Council of Learned Societies. See <https://www.sbl-site.org/aboutus/mission.aspx>.
- 2 See Bishop 2016; Helm 1999, 3–12; Hick 2006; Markie 2005; Proudfoot and Lacey 2010, 139, 341–2; Swindal 2008; Warnock 2006; Wolterstorff 2005.
- 3 See n.2. Swindal (2008) discusses four models of interaction between “the authority of faith” and “the authority of reason”: conflict, incompatibilist, weak compatibilist, strong compatibilist.
- 4 Preceding Fox’s article, other relevant *SBL Forum* discussions were Ames 2004, Reddish 2004, C.D. Smith 2005, Gaztambide 2005, and Bader 2005 and responses (Gaztambide et al. 2005). Fox’s (2010, 18n*) article grew out of Bader’s.
- 5 Fox avoids “evangelical(s),” but references to Christians, traditional Christians, conservative religionists, and to George Marsden (evangelical scholar of American church history) and Albert Mohler (evangelical theologian and former president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) in the reprint, clarify his target.

- 6 Avioz and Hinson 2006, Berlinerblau 2006a, A. Wells et al. 2006. Some responses besides Avioz's and Hinson's (2006), originally at <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=502>, by Paul Brassey, Kurt Noll, and James Bowley (cf. references in Fox 2006b), disappeared from the SBL website but remain at <https://www.scribd.com/document/214106947/Essays-on-Faithbased-Scholarship-From-the-SBL-Forum>.
- 7 See also J.J. Collins 2010, 66–7 on *RBL* book reviews and SBL meeting papers.
- 8 J.J. Collins (2010, 75–7) is aware all scholarship has presuppositions, but he considers inerrancy an invalid presupposition in any conceivable scenario.
- 9 Hoffmeier 2015, 261, 263; Janzen 2015b, 15; 2015c, 284; Stripling 2015, 257–8. Remarkably, these concede this presupposition only in their *responses*. Others argue evangelicals should disclose their inerrancy presupposition up front when doing scholarship (Barr 1980, 74; Grabbe 1987, 149–50).
- 10 Also related to the preceding discussion are Ames 2010; Atkinson 2012; Avalos 2006, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Avalos and Gagné 2016; Berlinerblau 2006b, 2010; Boer 2010; Brettler et al. 2012; Briggs 2016, 99–116; Dart 2011; Gericke 2012; Hendel 2010b, 2012, 2017; Reinhartz 2015; Silverman 2012; Simkins 2011. Preceding these, see Berlinerblau 2005, Craigie 1980, and Davies 1995, and see also Thompson 2005 and Kofoed 2007.
- 11 This book uses “Bible” and “Scripture” synonymously. Elsewhere one might differentiate these in ancient (e.g., Zahn 2011, 95–102) and modern (e.g., Davies 1995, 11–6) contexts.
- 12 The *Journal of Biblical Literature's* editorial position, however, excludes contributions that are explicitly confessional in nature or purpose, because of JBL's “emphasis on critical biblical scholarship, which proceeds by posing hypotheses and engaging in argumentation” (Reinhartz 2015, 465).
- 13 The SBL, however, has not been entirely successful at separating itself from a religionist agenda (e.g., Avalos 2007, 307–24, esp. 311).
- 14 For example, the SBL's Metacriticism of Biblical Scholarship unit might host sessions, including evangelicals and non-evangelicals, on the characteristics of evangelical (and non-evangelical) scholarship. At least once before (2014), the unit hosted a paper on a related matter, Hendel's “Biblical Inerrancy and Textual Criticism: A Curious History” (2016).
- 15 See Michael Bird's (2013) chapter in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Merrick and Garrett 2013), “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA”; cf. Bird 2020, 722, citing Treier 2007, 40; Holmes 2007, 254–5; McGowan 2007, 126; Noll 2019, 35–6; Salinas 2009, 83–119, esp. 98–107.
- 16 The Christian Right is also called the Religious Right or the evangelical right (vs. the evangelical left). According to Balmer (2006, xxvii; 2021, xviii): “I use the term *Religious Right* to denote a movement of politically conservative evangelicals who, since the late 1970s, have sought to exert their influence in political, cultural, and legal matters.”
- 17 Contemporary neo-evangelicalism is distinct from neo-evangelicalism that emerged from fundamentalism in the 1940s and included figures like Billy Graham, Carl Henry, and Harold Ockenga.
- 18 See the relevant comments in Keddie's contribution.
- 19 E.g., Cerillo 1976; Dayton 1991; Dorrien 1998, 2–3; Nash 1987, 25–7; Quebedeaux 1978, 7; M.L. Stackhouse 1982; K.M. Taylor 2006, 14; Webber 2002, 15–9; D.F. Wells 2008, 4–18.
- 20 E.g., Hunter 1983, 7–9; Naselli and Hansen 2011; Weber 1991.
- 21 E.g., Quebedeaux 1974, 18–45.
- 22 E.g., Fackre 1993, 22–3.
- 23 E.g., Murphy 1981.
- 24 E.g., Webber 2009, 56–7.

- 25 Our delineation of historians/sociologists vs. theologians/church leaders, and historical/social vs. propositional/phenomenological approaches, modifies the language in Atherstone and Jones 2019b, 12, though such ideas appear elsewhere.
- 26 In addition to the following sources, see Atherstone and Jones 2019b, 8–15; Crossley 2016; De Chirico 2002, 24–35; Fisher 2016; Hitchen 2004a, 2004b; Johnston 1991, 260–3; Krapohl and Lippy 1999, 3–16; Monsma 2017; Silliman 2021; Stott 2013, 8–11; Sweeney 2005, 17–26.
- 27 E.g., the National Association of Evangelicals (founded in the U.S. in 1942) uses Bebbington’s quadrilateral in its self-definition (<https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical>).
- 28 E.g., Balmer 2010, 2; Kidd 2019, 4–6, 155–6; Quebedeaux 1974, 4; 1978, 7.
- 29 E.g., Anderson and Stetzer 2016; McGrath 1993, 183; 1996, 22; Stetzer 2015, 2017/2018.
- 30 E.g., Larsen 2007, 1–12 (“Larsen Pentagon”); G.M. Marsden 1984, ix–x; 1991, 4–5; 2019, 22–3 (“Marsden Pentagon”); Noll 2010, 28–9 (“Nollian Quintagram”).
- 31 E.g., McGrath 1995, 55–6; J.G. Stackhouse 2007, 3; 2011, 124; 2022, 20–47.
- 32 See Brasher 2001 (esp. xv–xviii), Brekke 2012, Huff 2008, Kaplan 1992, Marty and Appleby 1991–1995, Phillips and Kitchens 2021, Riesebrodt 1993, Ruthven 2007. On the psychology of fundamentalism, see Altemeyer and Hunsberger 2005, Hood et al. 2005, Saroglou 2021. On the history of U.S. fundamentalism, see Carpenter 1997, G.M. Marsden 1991, 2006, Sandeen 1970; cf. Sutton 2017.
- 33 See n.32 for sources on the historical circumstances, including the battle over historical criticism, the heresy trials of Charles A. Briggs (1892–1893), the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy (1920s–1930s), the split at Princeton Theological Seminary and the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary (1929), etc.
- 34 See Harris 1998, 6; McDermott 2010, 6–7; Stott 2013, 5–7; cf. Marty 1992, 18–23.
- 35 Schimmel 2008, 3–5 describes Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptural fundamentalism. Harris (1998) argues evangelicals mirror a fundamentalist mentality with respect to the Bible.
- 36 We leave aside revelation, preservation, and canonicity.
- 37 On “original” biblical manuscripts see Atkinson’s and Rezetko’s contributions.
- 38 See also “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (Articles XI–XII, Exposition of the Articles). Evangelicals usually relate inerrancy to *written texts* rather than *writers of texts*.
- 39 See also “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (Article XII, A Short Statement).
- 40 As for scholars, agreement with the Chicago Statement is required for membership in the Evangelical Theological Society (https://www.etsjets.org/about/membership_requirements). The Institute for Biblical Research, another American evangelical learned society, is vague on this but most members will agree with it (<https://ibr-bbr.org/about/documents#confession>). Also, excluding Fuller Theological Seminary (<https://www.fuller.edu/about/mission-and-values/what-we-believe-and-teach>), inspiration and inerrancy appear in the doctrinal statements of major U.S. evangelical theological seminaries (e.g., Asbury, Dallas, Gordon-Conwell, Master’s, Trinity, various Baptist seminaries: Gateway, Midwestern, New Orleans, Southeastern, Southern, Southwestern), e.g., Dallas Theological Seminary (<https://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinal-statement>).
- 41 Some compare the evangelical commitment to inerrancy to bibliolatry or polytheism, e.g., Allert 2011, 261; Enns 2012a; Moreland 2011, 289; Sanders 1987, 5; Ziolkowski 2011, 1189.

- 42 E.g., Ammerman 1987, 6; Dollar 1973, xv.
- 43 See “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics” (Article XV) and evangelical treatments of biblical interpretation or hermeneutics.
- 44 Barr (1977, 47–51) and Ruthven (2007, 83–94) discuss the link between inerrancy and historical reliability.
- 45 Barr 1973, 168–81; 1977, 40–55; 1980, 77–9; 1984, 39–40, 112–7, 157, 170–2; cf. Achtemeier 1999, 44, 46–7, 56–8, 64–6; Harris 1998, 14n9, 15; 2006, 818; 2013, 307.
- 46 See the relevant comments in Bowen’s and Elm and Young’s contributions.
- 47 Mason’s “knowledge of the concepts of critical reasoning” and “knowledge of a particular discipline” correspond to Eva Brodin’s (2007, 18–9) absolutists and relativists, respectively, and others take a diplomatic position in-between. See also Brodin’s (2007, 13–5) discussion of the conditions for critical thinking, and the excellent statement by McAtee (1940).
- 48 See also Young and Elms’ contribution.
- 49 Dawes (2009, 2011) defends methodological naturalism in scientific and historical research. For a discussion of methodological naturalism in the context of historical Jesus research, see the conversation between Robert Webb (2011a, 2011b) and Amy-Jill Levine (2011, 103–5), Robert Miller (2011, 93–5), and Mark Powell (2011b, 135). Evangelicals accuse mainstream scholarship of anti-supernatural bias. In addition to positive arguments for methodological naturalism in historical-critical scholarship, the following points are relevant to answering their accusation. First, most non-evangelical biblical scholars come from religious backgrounds, and therefore are unlikely to be motivated by anti-supernatural bias. Many scholars fully committed to historical criticism are quite pious. Second, evangelicals, in contrast, do seem to have strong anti-supernatural bias against non-biblical writings and supernatural events narrated therein (see Grabbe 1987, 146–8). Third, there may be around 200 supernatural events (miracles, prophecies, etc.) recorded in the Bible (e.g., Lockyer 1961), mostly in Exodus–Judges and Gospels–Acts. In most instances—exodus, wandering, conquest, etc.—one reasonably expects some “natural” (artifactual) evidence if such events happened as described (in addition to appealing to divine agency as an explanatory category in describing what happened). Fourth, evangelicals sometimes misunderstand the literary genre of texts they claim involve future prediction (see Young and Elms’ contribution).
- 50 One might compare the evangelical commitment to inerrancy to match fixing in sports, but the currency is belief and the game is the Bible’s historical, literary, and theological coherence, and the match’s result is predetermined: The inerrantist cannot lose—even if s/he violates the normal “rules” of scholarly engagement during the “game.”
- 51 Barton 2007, J.J. Collins 2005, and Law 2012 are helpful introductions to historical criticism. Baden and Stackert 2021 represents the vitality of historical criticism in Pentateuchal studies despite differences between scholars on the Pentateuch’s formation. Notwithstanding claims to the contrary, often by evangelicals, historical criticism is far from “confused” or “bankrupt” or “defunct” (see Enns 2013a).
- 52 All scholars, all people, have “values” and “biases” that influence, consciously and unconsciously, what they think and do, and in this context, what they believe about the Bible and how they approach it in their scholarship. There is no escaping this fact, but we do not have to be held captive to it either. While “we all have biases,” not “all we have is biases” (J.D. Levenson 1990, 53). For trenchant discussion, see Brettler 1995, 9–10; 2017; J.J. Collins 2010, 75–7; Fox 2010, 16; Grabbe 1987, 134–5, 146–50; D. Levenson 1990, 155–9. These highlight the *social* character of scholarship. For illuminating discussion

- of science's (and generally scholarship's) social character, and the allied concept of scholarly consensus, see McIntyre 2019, 81–113, esp. 85–91; Oreskes 2019, 15–68.
- 53 Darryl Hart (1999; 2004, 131–51; 2011) is another historian of American evangelicalism who underscores the commitment to inerrancy as a major problem for evangelical scholarship. Worthen 2014 is an excellent study of evangelical anti-intellectualism and its crisis of authority with inerrancy at its heart.
 - 54 Noll (2004, 246n25) remarks: “This diversity is one of the characteristics of evangelicals that James Barr has not perceived clearly, a point nicely made by Gabriel Fackre in a review of Barr’s *Beyond Fundamentalism*,” but Noll’s distinction is irrelevant as far as evangelical bibliography is concerned.
 - 55 Some prefer “inerrantists” (= traditionalists) and “non-inerrantists” (= progressives) which can be less accurate. Progressives in the following discussion include Enns (2015), C.M. Hays and Ansberry (2013), Sparks (2008), etc. Among traditionalists, all scriptural fundamentalists, there are two streams, and those like Farnell (2013, 2015b) criticize those like Hoffmeier and Magary (2012a).
 - 56 According to Jason Sexton (2009), Enns’ volume coincided with the beginning of the inerrancy debate’s third wave, the first wave climaxing in 1893 and the second in 1976.
 - 57 Evangelicals follow two paths to describe the Bible’s nature (including inerrancy), sometimes using both in tandem. One approach, usually by theologians, places more weight on the Bible’s divine origin and prefers deductive (logical) arguments; it argues from God’s character (e.g., God cannot err) and biblical statements (e.g., 2 Timothy 3:16) to an appraisal of the Bible’s nature. The other approach, usually by biblical scholars, places more weight on the Bible’s human origin and prefers inductive (empirical) arguments; it argues more from the Bible’s phenomena to the Bible’s nature. See Trembath 1987, 8–71.
 - 58 Enns self-identified as a “progressive inerrantist” or “genre inerrantist” (2015, ix–xi), which in his mind allows for the OT’s progressive development, but he now dislikes and avoids the word.
 - 59 Other relevant contributions include Allert 2007, Bacote et al. 2004 (includes traditionalists), Bovell 2007, 2009, 2011 (includes traditionalists), 2012, 2015, Enns 2012b, 2014, J.B. Green 2007, C.M. Hays and Ansberry 2013, Longman and Walton 2018, McGowan 2007, C. Smith 2011, Sparks 2012, Stark 2011, Walton 2009, 2011, 2015, Walton and Sandy 2013, Walton and Walton 2017, 2019. Mainstream “critical” positions are also accepted in some evangelical introductions and commentaries (e.g., several Word Biblical Commentary volumes).
 - 60 Chapters 1–4 in Beale 2008 were originally published as journal articles, and along the way Beale and Enns exchanged rejoinders and surrejoinders. See Enns 2015 (1st ed. 2005), Beale 2006a, Enns 2006, Beale 2006b, Beale 2007a, Enns 2007, Beale 2007b, Beale 2008, Enns 2009; cf. Beale 2011.
 - 61 Other major responses by traditionalists include Carson 2016, C.J. Collins 2018, Craig 2021, Farnell 2015a, Geisler and Farnell 2014, Geisler and Roach 2011, Poythress 2012a, 2012b, 2019.
 - 62 Several dissertations helpfully examine the debate, including Brown 2014, Hentschel 2015, Raybeck 2016, White 2019, Yeo 2010 (2007 dissertation); cf. Sexton 2009.
 - 63 E.g., Enns 2012b, Walton 2009, 2011, 2015; vs. C.J. Collins 2018, Craig 2021, Poythress 2019; cf. conversations between traditionalists and progressives in Barrett and Caneday 2013, Charles 2013, Halton 2015, Moreland and Reynolds 1999, Stump 2017. Debates on other topics include Naselli and Hansen 2011 (spectrum of evangelicalism), Merrick and Garrett 2013 (inerrancy), Berding

- and Lunde 2008 (OT in NT), Janzen 2015a (exodus), Gundry 2003 (Canaanite genocide), Beilby and Eddy 2009 (historical Jesus), etc.
- 64 See also Harris' (1998, 323–4) brief remarks on inerrancy and the “major anxiety ... of losing proof for the resurrection.”
- 65 The notion of *the Bible* commenting on *the Bible itself* is largely anachronistic until the completion of the OT and NT books, texts, and canons, and their collection in the codex.
- 66 Allowance for some of these is built into “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (Article XIII).
- 67 See Bowen's contribution. Even traditionalists like Farnell (2017) criticize other evangelicals about “the alarming rise of the evangelical hyperbolic hermeneutic.”
- 68 The problem of harmonization is particularly acute for parallel texts in the Pentateuch, Samuel–Kings//Chronicles, and the gospels. On the gospels see Chilton's contribution. Both literary and text-critical phenomena may be involved. However, evangelicals often underestimate the problem's gravity, at least for the OT, since they usually work only with the Masoretic Text.
- 69 “Again he said, ‘What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade’” (Mark 4:30–32; cf. Matthew 13:31–32; Luke 13:18–19; New International Version).
- 70 Here too the more “liberal” understanding of this approach by progressives (e.g., Sparks 2004; 2008, 229–59; 2012, 50–5) is criticized by traditionalists (e.g., Hoffmeier and Magary 2012a, *passim*).
- 71 <https://defendinginerrancy.com/bible-difficulties>.
- 72 See also the relevant comments in Elliott's, Rezetko's, and Young and Elms' contributions.
- 73 Schultz (2012, 257–9) attempts to respond to Sparks (2008, 146–50, 153–5) on this matter. See the relevant comments in Rezetko's and Young and Elms' contributions, and I. Young 2010, 4–6.
- 74 See Bowen's and Young and Elms' contributions.
- 75 Use of the Septuagint instead of the MT as the traditional OT text in Orthodox churches is the exception (see Mihăilă 2018).
- 76 See Atkinson's, Rezetko's, and the relevant comments in Young and Elms' contributions.
- 77 The patterns Noll discovered in his 1984 survey of evangelical biblical scholars (2004, 122–9, 205–6) persist.
- 78 Bart Ehrman (2016, 2020), speaking as a former evangelical, discusses why textual criticism is “safe” for evangelicals and why so many are NT textual critics.
- 79 See also the relevant comments in Rezetko's and Scholz's contributions.
- 80 See n.49.
- 81 See also Dever's and Elliott's contributions.
- 82 See Dever 2017, Finkelstein and Silberman 2001, and also Kletter 2006 on Israeli archaeology, and for shorter discussions, M. Friedman 2021, Hasson 2017, Herzog 1999, and Marblestone 2000.
- 83 Quoted from Albright's correspondence to Kelso, dated October 8, 1941, cited in Long 1997, 25.
- 84 E.g., Arnold and Hess 2014, Kaiser and Wegner 2016, Kitchen 2003, Kofoid 2005, Merrill 2008, Provan et al. 2015.
- 85 See also Elliott's contribution.
- 86 Bible theme parks and museums, including the Creation Evidence Museum, Creation Museum, Ark Encounter, and Museum of the Bible, and also Answers in Genesis, Creation Ministries International, Creation Research Society, Discovery Institute, Institute for Creation Research, Reasons to Believe, etc., should also be

- mentioned here. Such evangelical organizations, as with the misuse of archaeology, seek to bolster the Bible's reliability, and merit careful scrutiny and extensive criticism for their misuse of the Bible, problematic "scholarship," and apologetic and propagandistic intentions. See Bielo 2018, Moss and Baden 2017, Oberlin 2020, Roberts and Eyl 2018, Thomas 2020, and Trollinger and Trollinger 2016.
- 87 <https://www.fycousa.com>.
- 88 See Berlinerblau 2008, Chancey et al. 2014, Clanton and Clark 2021, Flannery and Werline 2016, Goff et al. 2017, Gutjahr 2017, Hanson 2015, Hatch and Noll 1982, Kittredge et al. 2008.
- 89 For mostly critical treatments of right-wing evangelicalism and the Christian Right on a variety of topics see Alumkal 2017, Balmer 2006, 2021, Du Mez 2020, Gardner 2011, Hendricks 2022, Jones 2016, 2020, Keddie 2020, L. Marsden 2008, Meyers 2006, Noll 2008, Posner 2020, Press 2005, Seger 2006, Stewart 2012, 2020, Wallis 2005, 2016.
- 90 On the evangelical infatuation with Donald Trump and embrace of conspiracy theories (QAnon and others) and anti-science views, see the critical comments by evangelicals Balmer (2020, Balmer and Strozier 2021), Fea (2021), and Noll (2022, ix–xv), in addition to widespread press coverage. Evangelicalism as a movement has always been profoundly shaped by its popular character, as a people's movement (Noll et al. 1994, 8; cf. R. Kyle 2006, ix–x; Noll 2004, 201–2; 2022, 12–5); consequently, evangelicalism is characterized by "quixotic eccentricities promoting crack-pot arguments," "pump[ing] the lurid details of end-times prophecy," and "lunatic approaches" (Noll 2004, 201–2), and evangelicals, "bereft of self-criticism, intellectual subtlety, or an awareness of complexity—are blown about by every wind of apocalyptic speculation and enslaved to the cruder spirits of populist science" (Noll 2022, 14).
- 91 <https://youtu.be/z6kgvhG3AkI>.
- 92 2:04–2:07.20 in the YouTube video.

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Part 2

Inerrancy and Textual Criticism



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2 The Error of Biblical Inerrancy

The Bible Does Not Exist!

Kenneth Atkinson

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.
(Matthew 24:35; King James Version)

2.1 Evangelicals and Scripture

The debate over the appropriateness of using the Bible to guide public behavior has intensified in recent decades with the growth of evangelical Christianity. “Evangelical” is derived from the New Testament (NT) Greek word commonly transliterated as “gospel,” which means “good news.” For evangelicals, this good news is the life, teachings, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its power to save humanity from sin. In looking at evangelical views of Scripture, it is important to explain our terms. The historian David Bebbington lists four characteristics that define evangelicalism from its beginnings to the present. His list, often referred to as the “Bebbington Quadrilateral,” is useful since it is broad enough to include most of those who identify as evangelicals (Bebbington 1989, 5–17; 2019, 26–40):

- **Biblicism:** All essential spiritual truth is found in the Bible.
- **Crucicentrism:** A focus on the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.
- **Conversionism:** The belief that human beings need to be converted.
- **Activism:** The belief that the gospel needs to be expressed in effort.

Of all the items in Bebbington’s list, none is more important than the first. It is the foundation of his remaining three items. If, as he notes, spiritual truth is found in the Bible, then this must mean the Bible is superior to all other books since it alone contains God’s revelation. Since the 1920s, many evangelicals have insisted on the Bible’s inerrant nature and the need for a literal interpretation of its contents. “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” which over 200 evangelical leaders signed at a meeting sponsored by The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), defended this viewpoint by asserting that “being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching.” This declaration also makes an

important claim many evangelicals share: “[I]nspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy” (see Geisler and Nix 1986, 181–5).

Although Christianity had assumed the Bible was inspired by God and errorless, it was at Princeton Seminary that an intellectual argument and a commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy as an antidote to the product of critical biblical scholarship was defined. A number of Protestants made the doctrine of inerrancy a litmus test for every believing Protestant (Moorhead 2012, 234–46). While biblical inerrancy is not the sole defining feature of evangelicalism, most of those who would identify as evangelicals accept some view of this doctrine. Those evangelicals who do not espouse inerrancy, however, still place the Bible’s text at the core of their faith to guide present behavior. Yet, all forms of Christianity—whether evangelical or liberal Christians who use the Bible to define their beliefs and determine contemporary norms—share the same often unacknowledged conundrum. The problem is that what Christians and non-Christians call the Bible is a recent creation that constantly changes based on the discovery of new manuscripts. Therefore, it cannot contain the eternal unaltered word of God. Biblical scholarship not only supports this statement, but it complicates the evangelical use of the Bible as a basis for contemporary beliefs and behavior.

2.2 The Problem of Biblical Scholarship

Recently, progressive-minded evangelical scholars such as Peter Enns have tried to accept the basic tenants of biblical scholarship, and the problematic nature of the biblical text, while maintaining the traditional evangelical faith in the Bible’s superiority as a sacred book. He and others recognize the Bible contains errors yet appeal to critical scholarship to defend the basic tenants of evangelicalism, namely the use of the Bible as the normative text to guide human behavior. Incorporating insights from ancient Near Eastern history, Enns acknowledges the Bible contains myths that are unhistorical while arguing that “Christ is both God and human, so is the Bible” (2005, 17–8, 67, 111, 167–8). Accepting the Bible bears witness to God’s revelation, Enns and other like-minded evangelicals maintain the Bible’s authority as a guide for contemporary ethics and behavior. Although many evangelicals reject the views of Enns and others who maintain more liberal stances, all evangelicals espouse some belief in the superiority of the Bible over all other books. Herein lies the problem for all evangelicals: We cannot use the Bible as our source for contemporary values if we do not know what it says or if its truth claims are based on myths that justify unethical behaviors. This is especially true of the NT, which, like the Old Testament (OT), is a problematic book.

Evangelicals regard the NT, and its interpretation of the OT, as the foundation of their faith. However, the NT, like the OT, contains historical

errors and ethically problematic doctrines. Jesus and the NT writers believed in the literal truth of the OT stories and regarded their violent figures as heroes of faith. A glance at the catalog of men and women singled out for praise in Hebrews 11 raises significant theological problems for those who believe biblical ethics should guide us today. Among these esteemed OT figures are the prostitute Rahab, and the violent warrior Joshua, who, at God's command, slaughtered innocent men, women, and children to take their land. Scripture is full of such divinely sanctioned violence, including the mass murder of humanity and nature by a cosmic flood (Genesis 6:5–9), divine commands that the Israelites commit mass murder and genocide (Deuteronomy 7:1–2; Joshua 6:21; 10:40–41; 1 Samuel 27:8–9), God's murder of children (Exodus 12:29–30; Joshua 7:20–25; 2 Kings 2:23–24), and God's killing of people for simple curiosity (Genesis 19:12–26; 1 Samuel 6:19). The secular biblical scholar Hector Avalos (2015, esp. 90–128) argues that if the historical Jesus faithfully followed the OT, then he endorsed genocide (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:1–5; 1 Samuel 15:1–3) and environmental destruction (e.g., Deuteronomy 28:15–56). If one wishes to accept the OT's disturbing accounts of God-inspired genocide as myth, then the entire theological basis of the NT collapses since Jesus and the NT authors accepted the stories about the exodus and conquest as factual (e.g., Hebrews 11).

New Testament doctrine is based on the teachings and actions of mythical characters that Jesus and the biblical writers believed existed and who committed acts we would classify today as crimes against humanity. Because evangelicals believe God's will is known through the OT and NT, any doubt cast upon the historicity or accuracy of Scripture calls into question the Bible's veracity as the basis for evangelical faith. This is especially true of those passages in which God commits and sanctions acts of mass murder.

Evangelicals are not alone in attempting to wrestle with the Bible's problematic contents. Liberal scholars often ignore such theologically questionable passages in their efforts to maintain the Bible's superiority over other works of literature. One prominent example is the effort of the biblical scholar Howard Kee and the Jewish publisher and philanthropist Irvin Borowsky to promote interreligious dialogue. In their book they ironically entitled *Removing the Anti-Judaism from the New Testament*, they make the following recommendation to deal with the NT's violent and hateful passages:

The solution to erasing this hatred is for bible [sic] societies and religious publishers to produce two editions, one for the public similar to the Contemporary English Version which reduces significantly this anti-Judaic potential, and the other edition for scholars taken from the Greek text.

(2000, 18)

Avalos (2007, 24–5) comments that this proposal “is nothing short of paternalistic deception” because it recognizes that parts of the Bible endorse

and promote hateful and violent speech toward Jews. It is also troubling to find two authors urging scholars to conceal the NT's hateful content to promote interreligious dialogue. They are not alone in their efforts to save the Bible from itself.

The biblical scholar Luke T. Johnson (1989, 419), in an article published by the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL)—the world's premier and largest organization of biblical scholars—comments: “The scurrilous language used about Jews in the earliest Christian writings is a hurdle neither Jew nor Christian can easily surmount.” Johnson (1989, 441) compares many of the NT's numerous anti-Jewish passages with Hellenistic literary conventions to argue the NT's “slander against fellow Jews is remarkably mild.” Although the efforts of Kee, Borowsky, and Johnson to end the use of the Bible to support anti-Judaism, sexism, and other forms of hatred should be applauded, they all assume the Bible is morally superior to all other books despite its hateful content. What they and others who seek to maintain the Bible's relevance overlook is that there is no such thing as the Bible!

The statement the Bible does not exist will sound strange, perhaps bizarre, to many since nearly every home has at least one copy. Yet, all evangelical scholars with a credible degree in biblical studies know this statement's truth. To understand the inappropriateness of all attempts—whether by evangelicals or liberals—to defend the continued use of the Bible as the basis for modern life, we must take a brief look at the arcane discipline known as textual criticism.

2.3 Textual Criticism and the Non-Existent Biblical Text

Biblical textual criticism is the discipline that seeks to reconstruct the biblical text to the best of our ability based on the extant manuscripts. Unfortunately, evangelical and secular textual critics recognize it is impossible to reconstruct the Bible's original text. This is because all biblical manuscripts contain errors, passages that make no sense, and grammatical constructions whose meanings are sometimes impossible to determine. Consequently, textual critics look at all the extant manuscripts and try to discern the best readings they believe are closest to the original. For instance, the traditional Jewish text, or Masoretic Text (MT), “is *not* the Bible but only one of several text forms and/or representatives, albeit a very good one” (Tov 2015, 6). This reconstructed biblical text then becomes the basis for contemporary Bible translations. This means that what many evangelicals believe is a translation of God's inerrant word is a rendering and reconstruction created by scholars. Many evangelicals are aware of this because they are among those who create these artificial biblical texts!

Evangelicals occupy important roles in the esoteric discipline of textual criticism. Many evangelical academics who specialize in textual criticism work at evangelical seminaries where they teach biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek so their students can read the Bible in its original

languages. Professors at evangelical institutions produce translations and commentaries on the books of the Bible and deliver papers at the SBL's conferences in North America and abroad. Bart Ehrman, a graduate of an evangelical religious school but now an agnostic and an expert on the NT text, comments that textual criticism is so important to evangelicals that their seminaries sponsor multi-million-dollar projects to examine textual variants in the Greek manuscripts (2009, 189; e.g., *The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts*).¹ They do this to uncover what they believe is God's original word that has become corrupted through transmission. They have no choice but to use textual criticism to uncover the Bible since its original text is lost.

All evangelical scholars who engage in textual criticism recognize we do not have the original copy of any book of the Bible. Scholars refer to the lost original manuscripts of each biblical book as the "autograph." Because ancient books were written either on parchment made from reeds or vellum produced from animal skins, they wore out. Consequently, no autograph of any book has survived. We only possess copies of the OT and NT books made by scribes, who produced their editions from earlier copies. To complicate matters, no two biblical manuscripts are alike. This may sound odd, but it should not be surprising since our extant copies of most biblical books date centuries after their dates of composition. All are made from countless copies made from earlier copies, all of which contain errors. Although evangelical apologetic literature may claim "no viable variant affects any cardinal truth of the New Testament" (Gurry 2019, 207), the problem with such statements is we do not have the NT's original text to compare with the numerous manuscript variants. Consequently, such statements that variants do not affect the Bible's message—whether the OT or NT—are based on faith. They presuppose scholars can reconstruct the original text from countless variants and exclude those that represent later changes.

There are so many errors and discrepancies in the extant biblical manuscripts that, as Ehrman (2009, 59) has stated, it is impossible to maintain a belief in the Bible's inerrancy. Unfortunately, evangelical scholars and clergy with reputable degrees in biblical or religious studies seldom communicate to those in their pews this truth, or that the Bible's text constantly changes (Ehrman 2009, 1–60). This problem is not new. Rather, the ancient pagan inventors of textual criticism acknowledged they had lost the original texts of their most cherished books.

The scholars at the great library of Alexandria, Egypt, recognized the original texts of their beloved classics were lost. For them, Homer played the role the Bible has played in Western tradition. It formed part of the educated canon by the time the great philosophers Socrates and Plato formed their academies, creating the basis for the modern university. Greeks and Romans alike read the Homeric writings to learn about the gods. Ancient readers expected authors to cite Homer's books and imitate

his style. Unfortunately, scholars in the Greek and Roman periods faced a major problem since all the extant copies of Homer's books were different (Moran 2020).

The famed librarian Aristarchus of Samothrace (ca. 220–143 BCE) became obsessed with restoring the Homeric tales to their pristine condition. He compared all manuscripts of Homer's writings in the Greek and removed words and passages he believed were scribal mistakes or additions. As a good academic, Aristarchus wanted to inform his readers of changes he made to the texts. He did this by devising a set of symbols to indicate words missing from some manuscripts that he restored as well as passages that appeared in different places in the ancient copies of Homer's works. These editorial markings, known as Aristarchian symbols, were intended to help future scholars produce more accurate versions of Homer's writings since Aristarchus recognized his edition was provisional and not identical with Homer's original text. His method of reconstructing the Homeric writings became the basis for all subsequent reconstructions of ancient texts, including the Bible (Honigman 2003, 119–43).

2.4 The Problem with Origen

The famed biblical scholar Origen (ca. 184–253 BCE) used Aristarchus' method when he produced a monumental edition of the Bible known as the Hexapla (Kreuzer 2019, 35–7). In his day, most readers of Scripture did not know Hebrew or Aramaic, the OT languages. Rather, they spoke Greek and read the Bible in a Greek translation known as the Septuagint (a name derived from the Latin *septuaginta*, meaning “seventy”; LXX). Septuagint is the short form of the name *interpretatio septuaginta vivorum* (“the translation by the seventy men”) that refers to a legend, found in the apocryphal *Letter of Aristeas* and other texts, that 72, or according to some versions 70, men translated the Hebrew OT into Greek.² This tale was so well known that Christian authors from the mid-second century BCE to the present often refer to the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT simply as “the Septuagint” (Fernández 2000, 3–84).

The completion of the LXX was an unprecedented event, for it was the first time in history a major religious text had been translated into another language and considered equal to the original version for the faithful. In other words, Jews, and later Christians, who spoke Greek believed they did not have to learn Hebrew and Aramaic to access God's word. Rather, they could read the LXX in their native language. The same is true today as most evangelicals, few of whom can consult the Bible in the original languages, read and preach from their English Bible translations, which they believe accurately convey God's word. Even in the first century BCE, “it was realized that the Greek translation did not reflect the Hebrew Bible current in Palestine” (Tov 2021, 49). More important, the LXX shows we have not only lost the OT's original text, but the NT's as well.

The relationship between the LXX and the Hebrew OT is seldom communicated to the public. When evangelical scholars refer to the original OT text, they usually mean the MT. It contains the textual tradition of the Jewish scribe Aaron Ben Asher that is represented in its complete form in the Leningrad Codex (ca. 1008 CE), named after the former city of Leningrad where it was once housed. The current printed edition of this OT manuscript, known as *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, was completed in the German city of Stuttgart, hence its name (Elliger and Rudolph 1967–1977). It is the official text used by nearly all Bible translators—whether evangelical or liberal—to render the OT from Hebrew into modern languages. A glance at the preface of any major English Bible translation will reveal it was translated from this printed edition of the OT.

The MT is named after a group of Jewish scribes and scholars known as the Masoretes. Although the Leningrad Codex is our oldest complete copy of the OT, the MT is not the original text. Rather, the Masoretes, who lived along the Sea of Galilee in Israel, produced what they thought was the best text of the OT around 780–930 CE. They too were troubled by the different OT versions in their day and worked tirelessly to produce a single authoritative text. They did not always choose the best manuscripts, as evidenced by the numerous errors in the Hebrew texts of books such as 1–2 Samuel and Hosea. The Masoretes also added markings above, beneath, and within the consonantal text to indicate vowels to preserve the traditional pronunciation. They did this because Semitic languages, such as Hebrew and Aramaic, in antiquity did not include vowels. In the process, they added many errors to their text that changed its meaning.

Although the precursor of the MT became dominant around 100 CE, it is merely one form of the biblical text. Any reliable OT English translation contains notes stating the translators have used the LXX to help them render specific verses from the Hebrew into English. Most Bible readers—whether evangelical or secular—will be surprised to learn our three earliest complete LXX manuscripts, which date to the fourth and fifth centuries CE, predate our oldest complete copies of the Hebrew OT by nearly 500 years (Kreuzer 2019, 21–3)! Because the Hebrew OT text includes many errors, and passages of uncertain meaning, biblical scholars often use the LXX to help interpret and translate the OT. This means that Bible translators do not simply render the MT into English, but selectively incorporate readings from the LXX. However, uncovering the OT's original text is not as simple as comparing the LXX with the Hebrew text. This is because all our OT versions, whether the MT or the LXX, are different.

The biblical scholar Origen (ca. 185–254 CE) undertook a herculean effort to produce a reliable edition of the LXX to help him uncover the original Hebrew OT. Yet, Origen had a problem. All the LXX manuscripts differed from one another. They did not always agree with the Hebrew OT from which they were translated. Origen set out to produce the most accurate edition of the LXX that was closer to the original Hebrew OT. His

massive work became known as the Hexapla (Greek for six-fold) because it contained six parallel columns:

- (1) The Hebrew text of the OT.
- (2) A transliteration of the Hebrew text into Greek to show the traditional pronunciation. (Greek, unlike Hebrew, contains vowels.)
- (3) The revision of the LXX by Aquila.
- (4) The revision of the LXX by Symmachus.
- (5) The edition of the LXX commonly used by the Christian church.
- (6) The revision of the LXX by Theodotion.

Although column five contained the standard LXX text used in Origen's day, he recognized it contained errors and differed from the Hebrew OT. Earlier, the scholars Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion had revised the LXX to correct its numerous mistakes and make it closer to the Hebrew OT. Yet, each of these revisers produced a Greek text that contained differences from the Hebrew OT as well as inserted new mistakes. Origen printed the texts of these three editors since he believed their versions in many instances were better than the LXX used by the church in his day. He also used the Aristarchian symbols in column five to show passages in the Hebrew OT that were missing in the LXX, which he translated into Greek and restored. In addition, Origen marked those passages in the LXX lacking in the Hebrew OT, some of which he believed belonged in the original OT.

Origen's Hexapla is lost. It is doubtful it was ever copied in its entirety since it was likely over 6,000 pages. Most of our LXX manuscripts were produced by Christian scribes. They tended to copy column five of the Hexapla, which they assumed represented the original edition of the LXX. Unfortunately, Origen made an error. He assumed the Hebrew text of his day represented the original OT. Consequently, Origen produced what scholars call a "mixed text." He unwittingly inserted passages into his LXX that were in his Hebrew manuscripts that were not part of the original OT. Some readings he added came from the Greek, others from Hebrew, and others from changes to the text made by the LXX's revisers.

In many instances, the differences between the LXX and the MT are so vast it is difficult to determine whether they originated with Origen having used a different Hebrew text or to inner-Greek exegesis. This is particularly true of 1 Kings 2, which in the LXX has 14 more verses after verse 35, traditionally denoted 35_{a-o}, and after verse 46 there are 11 additional verses (46_{a-l}). After 1 Kings 12:24, the LXX has 23 more verses (24_{a-z}), and there are 8 more verses following 1 Kings 16:28 (28_{a-h}). Differences in the MT and LXX of Judges, moreover, are so vast it is difficult to restore the original Greek since the text of this book has been strongly influenced by Origen's Hexaplaric recensions to such an extent that no groups of manuscripts are free of Origen's influence (Fernández 2011, 7–8; Tov 1999b). Despite Origen's herculean effort to uncover the original biblical text, he faced the

same insurmountable difficulty we face today: In antiquity different Hebrew and Greek texts were regarded by Jewish and Christian communities as authoritative (Tov 1999a, 271–455).

2.5 Which, If Any Version, Is the Original?

The evangelical text critic Peter Gentry (2009, esp. 30–3) acknowledges that in some individual instances the MT is corrupt and other witnesses, such as the LXX, retain the more original text. On a larger scale, an example is Leviticus, one of the first five books (Pentateuch) of Scripture traditionally attributed to Moses. Of all books, those that comprise the Pentateuch form the heart of the Bible, for they contain the covenant and God’s law. The LXX preserves a Leviticus text that is older and more accurate than the extant Hebrew version of the MT used as the basis for all contemporary English translations. Yet, later editors revised the LXX to such an extent that the original LXX edition is lost (Himbaza 2020, 107–19). However, portions of Leviticus found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)—a collection of writings from the third century BCE to the first century CE that includes the copies of the oldest portions of the OT—contain an older edition of LXX Leviticus that appears to be based on an earlier now-lost Hebrew text that is closer to the original edition. Yet, we only have part of this book in the DSS, meaning the earliest form for most of Leviticus’ text is lost. However, the editor of the forthcoming revision of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, known as the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, concludes the textual situation of this book is so complicated we cannot use the DSS copies of Leviticus to revise later editions of this book in Hebrew or Greek since they contain so many differences (Himbaza 2016, 294–308). We can only reconstruct multiple ancient versions of Leviticus or any other OT book. This statement has profound consequences for evangelicals since it suggests it is impossible for scholars to uncover the OT’s original text. The same is true of the NT.

What further complicates matters for evangelicals wishing to claim we have the original edition of the NT is its authors mainly quoted the OT from the LXX, not the Hebrew text. This is because the NT’s writers appear to have been native Greek speakers and read the OT in the LXX. Consequently, they preferred to cite the LXX rather than the Hebrew text, since they regarded both as equally authoritative. Furthermore, the NT’s writers sometimes quoted changes which one of the LXX’s revisers made to the LXX. For example, the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:54 does not quote from the Hebrew of Isaiah 25:8 (“He will swallow up death forever”) or the traditional LXX text (“Death swallowed them up, having prevailed”), but Theodotian’s revision of the LXX (“Death has been swallowed up in victory”). Paul also quoted from Theodotian’s text in 1 Corinthians 15:45 in his citation of Genesis 2:7, which differs from the traditional LXX and the Hebrew OT (McLay 2003, 106–7). If one wants to use the Bible as the basis of faith, then any claims it is inspired must also extend to later

revisers who changed its text since the NT's authors consider their revisions God's word!

The famed Christian Bishop Augustine recognized the problem the NT's citations of the OT pose for the Christian faith. He argued the Hebrew and Greek OT versions are equally inspired by God (*City of God*, 18:43). As a good scholar, Augustine knew the NT's authors cited changes the revisers had made to the LXX. Consequently, he argued in instances where passages found in one OT edition are not in the other due to activities of later scribes and revisers, then all are to be regarded as equally inspired! Evangelicals who today claim the NT is God's word must follow Augustine and extend their view of inspiration to include the LXX and its revisers such as Aquilla, Symmachus, Theodotian, and other scribes who altered the LXX and the Hebrew OT texts cited as God's word by the NT's authors. However, there is one additional problem, namely what constitutes the biblical text.

It is impossible to uncover the original edition of any NT book since scribes altered each immediately after its composition. Paul's letter known as 2 Corinthians provides one of the best examples. Scholars recognize this book is a combination of several letters. One section (6:14–7:1) was added to the book and was clearly not written by Paul (Duff 1993, 160–80). Likewise, many sections were added to the Gospel of John, such as the story of the adulterous woman (7:53–8:11). This popular tale of Jesus protecting a vulnerable female is not in the earliest NT manuscripts. It appears centuries later and in many manuscripts is placed after Luke 21 or 23 (Comfort 2015, 58–9; Nestle et al. 2012, 321–33). Some of the most important Christian doctrines such as the Trinity (1 John 5:7–8) are also not in the oldest or best manuscripts. They were added to the NT to support later Christian beliefs (Comfort 2015, 396–7). This raises the question of what constitutes the original NT text since scribes regarded each book as a living document which they altered to support their theological beliefs. Unfortunately, the oldest manuscripts complicate our quest to know what was in the NT's original text because they contain the greatest number of variants and alterations.

It took centuries before Christians stopped altering the NT's text to create a standard version for church use (Ehrman 1993, 28, 44n112). Many of these changes, particularly in Acts, reflect the anti-Judaic prejudices of the Christian communities that produced them. In one famous manuscript of this book, known as the Codex Bezae, some 40% of the variants added to it are anti-Jewish (Metzger and Ehrman 2005, 272–99). The list of alternative manuscript readings in the footnotes to the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, the reconstructed Greek text used as the basis for all modern English Bible translations, contains more words than the actual biblical text (Ehrman 2005, 88–90). The most recent scholarly attempt to determine how many variant readings are in the NT, omitting spelling differences, numbered them at 500,000 words; the number of words in the entire Greek NT is approximately 138,162 (Gurry 2016, 97–121; Mounce 2019, 18).

The introduction to the *Novum Testamentum Graece* makes clear it is a reconstructed text based on select manuscripts, readings from the LXX, and ancient NT translations in languages such as Latin, Syriac, and Coptic (Nestle et al. 2012, 46–81). The scholars who produced this critical edition aimed to reproduce a Greek NT text that likely represents the form from which our surviving witnesses descend: The ancestor of our extant manuscripts but not the lost original. The dates of our extant manuscripts do not allow us to reconstruct the textual history of all the NT books during the first few centuries after Jesus' death since most copies were produced much later (Nestle et al. 2012, 792–819).

The Hebrew OT and Greek NT texts that all scholars use are not God's word. Rather, as all evangelical biblical scholars know, it is the word of biblical scholars. A glance at the title pages of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and the *Novum Testamentum Graece* list the names of the scholars who created these editions along with a copyright notice indicating their reconstruction of the Hebrew and Greek texts is an original work. According to the U.S. government: "Copyright is a form of protection grounded in the U.S. Constitution and granted by law for original works of authorship fixed in a tangible medium of expression."³ The German Bible Society (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft) holds the copyright to these Bible editions. They own it and are entitled to profit from it! Consequently, scholars must obtain permission from the copyright holder, the German Bible Society, to print extensive portions of the Hebrew and Greek texts of any OT and NT book they have published. If scholars fail to do so, they can be sued for unauthorized use of a work that bears a copyright. God's name appears nowhere on the cover pages or the copyright notices of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, indicating we do not need divine permission, but consent of the copyright holders, to reprint these Bibles.

The SBL recently dealt with the issue of copyright for the NT by producing its own edition, the *Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Holmes 2010), which was edited in its entirety by the Christian biblical scholar Michael Holmes, who teaches at the evangelical Bethel University. The SBL allows for public distribution of their critical Greek NT text and permits scholars to make liberal use of it.⁴ In the preface to the volume, the editor explains his method of textual criticism while making it evident he produced this text independently of the standard editions to avoid any copyright infringements. Like the texts of the German Bible Society, this edition too bears a copyright since the SBL regards itself and Michael Holmes, and not God, as its author.

Evangelicals who wish to maintain the Bible is God's word must acknowledge that our English translations and critical Hebrew and Greek texts pose an insurmountable problem for their faith. All translations are based on scholarly reconstructions of the biblical text, and they all are periodically revised based on new scholarship and the discovery of additional manuscripts. This means the Bible has never been a fixed text.

It is a constantly changing book that reflects the opinions of the scholars in charge of selecting which manuscript readings to accept. What is more problematic is the basic method of textual criticism for the NT. Scholars agree the NT in the early centuries was primarily copied in major intellectual centers such as Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch. Copies produced in these cities circulated in the surrounding areas. As they were copied, distinct errors, additions, and changes unique to these regions were preserved. Yet, biblical scholars often pick and choose variants from manuscripts without any regard to their geographical origins, meaning their choice of which manuscript to accept may reflect a reading unique to a particular region. In other words, manuscripts in each of these centers often reflect local understandings of the text, distinctive textual traditions, and theological alterations. Yet, by picking and choosing variants from different texts, scholars end up producing a Greek NT that reflects no ancient manuscript, but which mixes features unique to various copying centers. The same is true of the Hebrew OT as well as the LXX. Not only do our ancient manuscripts of these texts reflect mixed texts, but their original versions are beyond recovery.

Evangelical scholarship has accepted the results of secular biblical scholarship and recognizes we do not have the autograph of any biblical book. Consequently, evangelical scholars are largely at the forefront of textual criticism. They help decide which manuscript readings should provide the basis for English translations. This should not be surprising, for the main feature of all forms of evangelical Christianity is they have become more liberal over time. Evangelicals and all other conservative branches of Christianity, although they maintain the Bible is God's inspired word, reject many of its central teachings like many liberal Christians and non-Christians. No Christian today accepts the biblical injunctions that allow Christians to own slaves even though most evangelicals believe these passages are divinely inspired (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:21; Ephesians 6:5–8; Colossians 3:22–24; 1 Timothy 6:1–2; Titus 2:9–10; 1 Peter 2:18). Evangelical and liberal Christians alike typically state that such passages reflect the ancient and foreign cultures of the Bible and are no longer relevant. Yet, other teachings rooted in ancient prejudices, for many evangelicals, are held to be a valid part of God's word. Passages such as Romans 1:18–32, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10 make it clear those engaging in homosexual relationships (male or female) will not inherit God's kingdom. However, no NT passage permitting slavery or denouncing same-sex relationships decrees its edicts are God's word until more enlightened times appear when Christians will be free to ignore such biblical commands that conflict with their modern values. When one considers the incredible number of contradictions, variant views, and errors in the NT's Greek text, it is impossible to use it as the basis for Christian belief without cherry-picking its contents (Ehrman 2009, 19–179). This is exactly what all Christians—whether evangelical or liberal—do.

Michael Grisanti, associate professor of OT at The Master's Seminary, teaches at an institution that requires a belief the Bible is verbally inspired in every word, absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed.⁵ This statement is not unique as most evangelicals maintain this same belief. Yet, evangelical scholars acknowledge that no autograph of any biblical book exists. In an article on OT inspiration and inerrancy, Grisanti accepts the legitimacy of all the objections raised in the present study against the existence of an original text (i.e., the autograph). To get around this problem, he proposes in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*—a publication dedicated to “the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ”⁶—a potential solution. Grisanti (2001, 98) proposes the following change to the traditional evangelical statements regarding biblical inerrancy: “At every point of the inscripturation process, a given biblical book is autograph-like, fully inspired, and inerrant.” Because evangelical and other biblical scholars constantly emend, change, and alter the texts of their critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek OT and NT, Grisanti's doctrine of inspiration would also include contemporary scholars engaged in this enterprise as part of the divine process.

Having attended many meetings devoted to the “original” biblical texts and having spoken alongside scholars who produce the critical texts used as the basis for all contemporary Bible translations, none has ever in my presence claimed to be inspired. Although I regard many evangelical scholars as friends and colleagues, I consider none of them inspired (myself included!). If inspiration includes the scholars who produce the critical biblical texts, then inspiration must be extended to include the scholars whose names appear on the official editions of the German Bible Society's Hebrew and Greek Bibles.

Evangelical textual criticism has come to acknowledge the problems textual criticism poses for faith. Whereas before the 1960s the goal of NT textual criticism was to uncover the original text, it has since moved away from this goal. Rather, biblical scholars collect all variants and view them as windows into the text's history. They preserve fragmentary witnesses to the many changes and interpretations Jews and Christians have made to Scripture as they struggled with their faith and shaped their doctrines. The text critic Eldon Epp (2021) has argued we should think of multiple originals. The concept of an original text is a later development that arose because of the printing press. He accepts the original text is lost and we must accept textual diversity and confusion.

The evangelical biblical scholar Abidan Shah, in *Changing the Goalpost of New Testament Textual Criticism* (2020), recognizes the problem of a view like Epp's for evangelical faith. Shah argues that because the Christian faith is based on a first-century CE text, without an authoritative NT edition, there cannot be a distinct Christian faith and practice. Consequently, he argues we can and should pursue the original text as

our text-critical goal. He asserts this is necessary since the absence of the original text will result in an unsettled biblical theology. Although Shah urges textual critics to return to their traditional goal of retrieving the original text, this is impossible as generations of textual critics have recognized. Any reconstructed original text, whether by evangelical, liberal, or secular scholars, is merely a reconstructed text made by humans. It will never be infallible, but constantly changes. However, a special issue of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, containing academic papers delivered at the Text and Canon Institute of Phoenix Seminary's 2020 inaugural conference, argues otherwise. Timothy Mitchell (2020, 98) concludes this special issue by rejecting Ehrman's belief that the Bible's original text is lost:

Contrary to Ehrman's conclusions quoted at the beginning, though we may not always be able to discern between authorial text and scribal additions, we can be mostly certain that what we have today contains the inspired *text* of the autographs.

Mitchell's statement that we can "be mostly certain" we have the "inspired" text of Scripture leaves much room for doubt and appears to state we can be reasonably certain at least portions of Scripture are not the inspired text.

How evangelicals and other Christians actually deal with and explain away the insurmountable problems posed by the Bible's missing autographs is beyond the limitations of the present study. However, because all Bibles represent scholars' reconstructions, they cannot be used as the basis for faith or to determine norms without extending the process of inspiration to the biblical scholars who produced them. Evangelical scholars should be honest and tell their students, parishioners, and the public that the Bible's original text is lost. Our Bible is a fallible book full of errors, myths, and disturbing teachings. One of its most significant errors is the claim the Gospel of Matthew 24:35 attributes to Jesus, namely God's word will not pass away. But, it *is* gone! All that is left are scholars' reconstructed words as the government recognizes in the copyright notices found in all Bible translations, indicating they are indeed the reconstructed words of biblical scholars.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.csntm.org>.
- 2 References in this chapter to the Hebrew OT also include the Aramaic portions of Daniel and Ezra.
- 3 <https://copyright.gov/what-is-copyright>.
- 4 <https://sblgnt.com>.
- 5 <https://tms.edu/about/doctrinal-statement>.
- 6 <https://www.etsjets.org/about>.

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3 Building a House on Sand

What Do Evangelicals Do When They Do Textual Criticism of the Old Testament?

Robert Rezetko

3.1 Introduction

More than half of Americans (Barna 2021) and most American evangelicals¹ believe the Bible was divinely revealed and inspired, and accordingly its words are inerrant (without error) in the original manuscripts (or autographs), and also in manuscript copies, editions, and translations that accurately represent the originals. “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (1978) is a respected declaration of this view:

Article VI:

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article X:

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

In the connected “exposition” on transmission:

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster

Confession,² a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

The Chicago Statement's assertions to highlight are, first, the surviving manuscripts preserve the original biblical words with great accuracy and, second, any small errors that slipped into the original text can be identified using textual criticism. Furthermore, these words reverberate in the doctrinal statements of evangelical institutions such as Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary, and of the two major American societies of evangelical scholars, the Evangelical Theological Society³ and the Institute for Biblical Research,⁴ and they are routinely voiced by others. The list is endless, but I think of individuals like Norman Geisler (e.g., 2011, esp. chs. 13–15, 25, 27) and Josh McDowell (e.g., 1999, esp. chs. 4, 11), who claim the words of the Bible in the hands of evangelicals today are essentially equivalent to the words the original authors of the biblical compositions wrote (also referred to as “authorial wording,” “original authorial wording,” etc.)

This chapter, however, is not about inerrancy, but what evangelicals who advocate inerrancy believe about the transmission and preservation of the biblical text, and especially the degree the surviving manuscripts faithfully represent the words originally written by the Old Testament's (OT) authors. Moreover, and with all due respect to cultivated laypersons and ministers, apologists and theologians (e.g., Geisler, McDowell), and even biblical scholars generally, I must limit my conversation partners to prominent evangelicals, and non-evangelicals, who are experienced OT textual critics and/or have published important contributions on the OT text. These scholars' voices should be weighed heaviest since they are “authorities” in the highly specialized field of OT textual criticism. Some of the questions I will ponder are: *What is the verdict of the “science” of textual criticism about the original OT text? What do evangelicals aim to do when they talk about or engage in OT textual criticism?* Answers to these questions certainly have implications for the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy, but the narrower issue that interests us is the cogency of evangelicals' orientation toward *the original text* when they do OT textual criticism.

3.2 First Glance: Bruce Waltke and Eugene Ulrich

We start with two contributions published in sequence in one volume, one by respected evangelical Bruce Waltke, “How We Got the Hebrew Bible: The Text and Canon of the Old Testament” (2001),⁵ and one by well-regarded, non-evangelical Eugene Ulrich, “The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures Found at Qumran” (2001a).⁶

Waltke's approach to OT textual criticism evolved over the years. In earlier contributions, Waltke (1978, 47; 1979, 211) comments, “To restore

the original text of ancient documents, such as the OT Scriptures, is the task of textual criticism,” and though he does not say so explicitly, it seems clear the original text he aims for is that of an original author or composition (cf. 1989, 93). A decade later, presumably after more careful thought about the data and debate (1989, 108), and having considered five possible aims of OT textual criticism—restore the original composition, final text, earliest attested text, accepted texts, or final texts—he says:

The text critic’s aim will vary according to the nature of the book. If a book had but one author, then the critic will aim to restore his original composition; if it be an edited text then he will seek to recover the final, canonical text. If he turns up more than one final text, he will turn his data over to the literary and canonical critic to determine whether the text is in process of developing into a final canonical text or whether it existed in more than one canonical form.

(1989, 107–8)

And finally, another half-decade later, the “original” text which is textual criticism’s aim has advanced beyond an original author’s text or composition to become the much later and more developed text-type or recension that lies behind the Masoretic Text (MT), the proto-MT; “original text” now means “original edition” (1994, 174–6; 1997, 48–9, 58–9; 2001, 27–8, 42–3).⁷ Waltke’s thinking seems to have developed for two reasons, first, his reassessment of the textual facts and their explanation by other textual critics (he cites especially Emanuel Tov),⁸ and second, his agreement with the scholarly consensus that biblical writings, like other ancient Near Eastern literary writings, were composed over centuries by supplementing earlier sources with later material, “and thus it is too simplistic to say that OT textual criticism aims to recover the original text of the OT” (1997, 48; 2001, 27; cf. 1994, 175).

On the one hand, there is deep disagreement between Waltke’s perspective on the issue of the original text just described and the outlook presented earlier, for example in the Chicago Statement. Whereas the statement asserts, “the autographic [i.e., original] text of Scripture ... can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy,” Waltke concludes, “it is too simplistic to say that OT textual criticism aims to recover the original text of the OT.” However, on the other hand, while Waltke’s perspective has advanced, it has not come totally into agreement with the scholarly consensus, because he continues to strive to prove the “infallib[ility]” and “reliability” of the biblical text.⁹ He comments:

In the light of the OT text’s complex history and the welter of conflicting readings in its textual witnesses, can the Church still believe in an infallible OT? Can it still confess with the Westminster divines: “by His singular care and providence” the text has been “kept pure in all ages”

(Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.8). We argue that in fact this history of the text and its witness and other reasons give the Church good reason to continue to confess *ex animo* both the reliability of the OT text and its purity.

(1997, 61–2; 2001, 47)

Waltke tries to support his belief in “infallibility” and “reliability” with ten arguments (1997, 62–3; 2001, 47–50; cf. five of the same arguments in 1994, 157–9). I cannot deal here with his (oversimplified) arguments, but he is unlikely to persuade non-evangelical OT textual critics. This is because Waltke takes the unusual step among contemporary textual critics of prioritizing the MT as *the* OT text, and remarkably he even provides a theological justification for this choice: “If the Church confesses that the Holy Spirit superintended the selection of books that comprise the canon of the OT, why should it not confess that the Holy Spirit also superintended the selection of the MT recension?” (1997, 62; 2001, 48).

Waltke’s selection of the proto-MT as *the* OT text could (and probably should) be construed as an attempt to salvage the idea of an inerrant original text, that is, original *edition*, despite contrary evidence and scholarly consensus. However, for textual critics like Ulrich (and Tov, etc.), the “infallibility” and “reliability” of the biblical text are irrelevant (and therefore unmentioned), because for them nothing is at stake theologically, like for Waltke and other evangelicals. Furthermore, the preponderance of textual data leads Ulrich (and Tov, etc.) to arrive at different conclusions than Waltke.

First, Waltke comments, “If a book had but one author, then the critic will aim to restore his original composition,” but the notion that *any* biblical book had just one author is very unlikely, because, as Ulrich (2001a, 57–8) states:

Although in the traditional, pious, and popular imagination the books of Scripture were composed by single holy men from earliest times (Moses and Isaiah, for example), critical study of the text of Scripture demonstrates that the books are the result of a long literary development, whereby traditional material was faithfully retold and handed on from generation to generation, but also creatively expanded and reshaped to fit the new circumstances and new needs that the successive communities experienced through the vicissitudes of history. So the process of the composition of the Scriptures was organic, developmental, and contained successive layers of tradition.

Second, regarding the OT text’s history, there is no *a priori* basis for preferring the MT over any other biblical text, or vice versa (Ulrich 2001a, 52, 65–6; cf. Tov 2012, 11–2, 26–7, 272–3, 365, etc.; Tov and Ulrich 2020, Section 1.1.1.7). Third, Ulrich (2001a, 66) comments:

The Masoretic Text, like the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint, is not a univocal term or entity but a collection of disparate texts, from different periods, of differing nature, of differing textual value, etc. There is no reason to think of the Masoretic collection as a *unit* (a codex, a 'Bible'), or as a *unity*. The collection is like the Septuagint, a collection of varied forms of the various books.

(See also Tov 2012, e.g., 2–17, 24–74.) Fourth, for many individual readings, book passages, and whole compositions, most likely the MT is the latest and most developed in comparison with other Hebrew texts and versions (Ulrich 2001a, 59–64; cf. Tov 2012, 283–326, etc.). Waltke, paradoxically, acknowledges the MT's secondariness (i.e., unoriginality) in (parts of) Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Proverbs (1997, 53–4, 59; 2001, 35–6, 44), but he dismisses this as a problem for literary criticism (1997, 48, 51; 2001, 27, 31), even while acknowledging “the line between literary criticism and textual criticism has become attenuated” (1997, 54; 2001, 35). In contrast to Waltke, Ulrich (2001a, 65) asks:

Because the text of each book was produced organically, in multiple layers, determining “the original text” is a difficult, complex task; and theologically it may not even be the correct goal. How do we decide which of the many layers that could claim to be the “original reading” to select? Often the richer religious meanings in a text are those that entered the text at a relatively late or developed stage. Do we choose the earlier, less rich reading or the later, more profound one? In contrast, if a profound religious insight in an early stage of the text is toned down later by a standard formula or even a vapid platitude, which do we select? And must we not be consistent in choosing the early or the later edition or reading?

Fifth, and lastly, I stress that contemporary OT textual critics have completely rejected the text-critical recoverability of the original text as conceived in the Chicago Statement and by most evangelicals. This is true for Ulrich (see above; cf. discussions in 1999, 12–6; Tov 2012, 161–9, 263–5), and even for Waltke (see above) who grasps the insurmountable problems of such a notion and instead chooses to substitute “original edition” for “original text.”

3.3 Looking Closer: Other Evangelical Old Testament Textual Critics

Waltke's assessments are a natural starting point for discussing evangelical OT textual criticism because other major works during the past 30 years often refer to his publications. Here we will look at four such works. Three of these are widely regarded by evangelicals as dependable introductory

handbooks to the field and are used in courses at evangelical educational institutions, at least from what I can see in reviews and syllabi. (Price's volume is the exception.) Until now, we have seen that Waltke's conclusion about the (ir)recoverability of the original OT text contradicts conventional evangelical thinking such as in the Chicago Statement, and therefore the question arises of how other evangelical OT textual critics view the matter of the original OT text.

3.3.1 Paul Wegner

Paul Wegner may be the most prolific and vocal contemporary exponent of evangelical OT textual criticism. He has published two monographs and many articles related to the topic (1999, 2006, 2008a, b, 2012, 2013a, b, 2015). His most significant work, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods, and Results* (2006),¹⁰ begins with these words:

Students often ask, "Is the Bible we have today accurate?" or "How accurate is the biblical text?" A response is almost impossible without discussing questions of textual criticism. This book is written to provide both the basics of textual criticism and the background needed to answer questions regarding the accuracy of the Bible.

(2006, 19)

Here we see Wegner's main concern, like Waltke's, is the OT text's "accuracy" or "reliability," and this concern permeates his book, and his other publications, appearing even in several titles (2008a, 2012; cf. 2013b). But what precisely is the biblical text that concerns Wegner? A close look reveals an inconsistency between what he seems to *know* to be true about the OT text, and what he seems to *want* to be true in keeping with his evangelical belief and of what he wants to reassure his evangelical readers. The tension between these perspectives is especially evident in Wegner's equivocation about OT textual criticism's aim, which vacillates between the search for (a) an undefined text, "the most accurate or reliable" or "the most reliable" or "the most plausible" text, form, reading, or wording (e.g., title of Chapter 8 in 2006), or (b) an original text, "the original" or "the most reliable original" or "the most plausible original" text, form, reading, or wording (e.g., title of Chapter 5 in 2006), or (c) a final text, "the authoritative" or "the authoritative, final" or "the final, authoritative" or "the earliest final, authoritative" or "the final form of the authoritative" text, form, or reading "which then was maintained by the scribes and was later recorded in the canon" (e.g., 2006, 37). Ultimately, like Waltke, Wegner settles on the last, the final form of the authoritative text, as his text-critical objective, and, again like Waltke, that text is the MT. However, unlike Waltke, who offers a theological explanation for his

choice of the MT (i.e., the Holy Spirit superintended its selection), Wegner depends on the view of Tov (and several others) concerning the proto-MT's centrality in the circle of scribes closely connected to the Jerusalem temple in the Second Temple period (538 BCE–70 CE), among a plurality of other texts (2006, 37, 63–74, 299–300; 2013a, 466–72). For now, I want to underline that Wegner, like Tov, Ulrich, Waltke, and other contemporary OT textual critics, also rejects the text-critical recoverability of the original text in the way it is conceived in the Chicago Statement and by most evangelicals.

3.3.2 *Randall Price*

Randall Price, often identified as an evangelical Indiana Jones, has published on topics such as Bible prophecy, Israel and Jerusalem in prophecy, the “last days,” the temple, the ark of the covenant, archaeology and the truth of the Bible, etc. Written in the genre of his *In Search of Temple Treasures* (1994), *Searching for the Ark of the Covenant* (2005), and *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1996), Price's book on the Bible's history and text leaves little to the imagination: *Searching for the Original Bible* (2007). The book's introduction, “Why Believe the Bible?,” states: “This book is written in the confident conviction that, in the critical editions of our present Hebrew and Greek texts, we have substantially all of the words given by God, and that the work of textual critics today is bringing us ever closer to the Original Bible” (2007, 14). He adds:

What should the response of spiritual leaders be to the present confusion concerning the origin of the Bible and the integrity of its text? They should inform people of the actual state of the text, and how conservative textual critics are laboring to align it to the original, a task that is not only possible, but has admirably succeeded in its goal.

(2007, 16)

Compared to other works discussed here, Price's book should be considered an interlude or, better, a digression from the progress of (evangelical) OT text-critical scholarship. At several points he discusses the Chicago Statement (2007, 34–5, 245), and it is clear that for him the task of textual criticism is to identify the autograph, “the original edition of a particular work, written or dictated by the author” (2007, 33), because “we have all of the variants that make up the Original Bible somewhere in our vast number of manuscripts” (2007, 247). The problems in Price's book are numerous, but several especially significant ones, also separating him from the other evangelical OT scholars treated here, are his explicit rejection of literary developments and editions of OT writings (2007, 35–6, 93–103), and his blatant favoritism for the MT, as the starting point of textual criticism, and as closest to the original text: “If we are searching for the original text of the

Hebrew Bible, it is necessary to trace the Masoretic Text back to its source” (2007, 97; cf. 59, 103–5, 226, 231).

3.3.3 *Ellis Brotzman and Eric Tully*

The changes from Waltke’s earlier to later views, and the differences between Price’s and Wegner’s books, are paralleled by the first and second editions of Ellis Brotzman’s book: *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (1st ed. 1994; 2nd ed. with Eric Tully, 2016). In other words, whereas Waltke’s views progressed over the years, and Wegner’s grasp of issues is more sophisticated than Price’s, Brotzman’s revised book comes closer to the conclusions of mainstream OT textual criticism. This is evident throughout the volume, and is particularly clear in the introduction’s heavily revised “Textual Criticism and Inspiration” (Brotzman and Tully 2016, 6; cf. Brotzman 1994, 22–4), and in the new appendix B, “What Text(s) Are We Attempting to Reconstruct?” (Brotzman and Tully 2016, 219–26; not in Brotzman 1994). First of all, Brotzman and Tully retain, inadvertently perhaps, several loose references to “the original [Hebrew] text/reading/wording [of the OT],” but usually their language is circumspect and they refer to “the better,” “the more original,” “the best,” and/or “the most original” text/reading/wording. The revised discussion of textual criticism and inspiration, besides being half the length of the first edition, takes pains to distinguish the inspiration of the autographs from their subsequent transmission, and only the transmission phase is the domain of textual criticism. In other words, the original biblical text is not the goal of OT textual criticism. If there could be any doubt about this, Chapter 7 and the appendix are clear: “The goal of Old Testament textual criticism is to recover the final, authoritative text or texts of biblical compositions” (2016, 219; cf. 226), and they mean the resulting texts that were “the product of lengthy development” or “the final redaction of earlier sources and revisions” or the end result of “scribal or editorial composition” (2016, 221, 224). This text-critical goal has nothing to do with any actual inspired words of an author, such as Moses or Isaiah. We see therefore that Brotzman and Tully’s book stands far from the Chicago Statement and similar opinions (e.g., Geisler, McDowell, Price), and corresponds more closely to the perspectives of Tov, Ulrich, Waltke, and Wegner, mentioned above, as well as Ferdinand Deist (1978, esp. 11–4, 249–57), and Ernst Würthwein and Alexander Fischer (2014, esp. 157–69), whom they also cite. Before moving on, I cannot overlook one major setback in Brotzman and Tully’s thinking. They say: “If a book had but one author, then the critic will aim to restore his original composition” (2016, 224; citing Waltke, above), and:

Some books of the OT, probably most of them, were created in a straightforward manner. The author worked on the book and completed it. It was then recognized as authoritative by the community,

and copying began. In this case, the original composition and the final form of the text are essentially the same thing, and this text is the goal of text-critical reconstruction.

(2016, 225)

Nevertheless, few OT scholars accept “most” or maybe even “some” OT books had just one author and were produced in a straightforward manner.

3.3.4 *Amy Anderson and Wendy Widder*

Amy Anderson and Wendy Widder’s *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (2018), like Wegner’s and Price’s books, treats both OT and New Testament (NT) textual criticism. It too has several references to “the original text,” but Anderson and Widder (2018, 7n8, 40–2, 93n138) want to clarify that the original OT text is a problematic idea that should be avoided. Rather:

The goal of OT textual criticism as represented in this volume is to reconstruct the text’s “final literary product” [citing Tov 2012, 165]. This final form developed during a complex and irretrievable compositional history. At whatever point it reached its final authoritative status, the text then stood at the beginning of an equally long transmission history. For some books or sections of the OT, there were apparently several valid “final forms” of the text. Such is the case with the book of Jeremiah.

(2018, 41–2; cf. 93)

In various discussions, Anderson and Widder agree with other OT textual critics such as Tov, Waltke, and Wegner, and also Michael Fox (2006, esp. 4–10). In addition, like other evangelical works, they wish to reassure their evangelical readers about the OT text’s reliability (2018, 12–3, 182–4), and linked to this, like Wegner, they subscribe to the perspective on the proto-MT’s centrality (2018, 57, 82, citing Tov and Gentry). For now, we see again that these OT textual critics also dispense with the common evangelical belief about the goal of recovering the original OT text.

3.3.5 *Summary*

I have summarized the views of evangelical OT textual critics (Anderson and Widder, Brotzman and Tully, Price, Waltke, Wegner) on the (ir)recoverability of the original OT text and OT textual criticism’s aim. These scholars, excluding Price, and contrary to the widespread belief of most evangelicals, have abandoned the search for Scripture’s autographic text, and have settled instead on trying to establish the final authoritative text(s) of OT writings. Therefore, these evangelical OT scholars have gradually come to agree with some explanations of the manuscript evidence provided by mainstream

OT textual critics (such as Deist, Fox, Tov, Ulrich, and Würthwein and Fischer). There is substantial agreement between experts on the main points of a model of the OT text's emergence.¹¹ Most notably, the quest for the original OT text is almost universally considered to be naive in the extreme. Accordingly, after reviewing the opinions of many scholars, Hans Debel (2011, 83, 84–5) eloquently voices the scholarly consensus about the quest for the original OT text: “Textual critics are bereft of all hope to be able to reconstruct an ‘original text,’” and, “As a consequence, the traditional conception of textual criticism as reconstructing the ‘original’ text of the Hebrew Bible appears as an ill-fated undertaking—a vain quest for a holy grail which one can never hope to find.” Similarly, “the Qumran discoveries have led to a situation where this most basic of basic notions—that there is indeed a discoverable original text from which all subsequent iterations stem—is no longer held with much conviction in biblical studies” (Nati 2022, 1; cf. 1–42).

So far, so good. However, there is a catch. We have seen that our evangelical OT textual critics—though they have abandoned the search for the original OT text—are still determined to defend the OT text's accuracy and reliability. They say this explicitly, many times. And they go to great lengths to reassure their evangelical readers. We turn now to tactics evangelical OT scholars use to “protect” the OT text.¹²

3.4 Digging Deeper: Evangelical Tactics to Protect the Old Testament Text

3.4.1 *Citation of Authorities*

One tactic evangelical OT scholars use to protect the OT text, and reassure their evangelical readers of its accuracy and reliability, is referencing other authorities, mainly other evangelicals. The names of particular evangelical scholars appear frequently, including Gleason Archer, Peter Gentry, R. Laird Harris, Walter Kaiser, Roger Nicole, Douglas Stuart, and Waltke. For example, Anderson and Widder (2018, 12–3), Brotzman and Tully (2016, 3–4), Price (2007, 102), and Wegner (2006, 24–5), *all* cite Waltke's uplifting statement:

INSPIRATION, AUTHORITY, AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM.

Students whose churches taught the biblical doctrines of Scripture's inspiration and authority find it troubling to discover no perfect [manuscripts] of the Bible exist. The following five points should dissuade any discouragement, however.

1. *The Need for Proper Perspective.* First, one needs to keep the data in perspective. A quick count of the textual variants in BHS¹³ shows that on average for every ten words there is a textual note—and many of these can be discounted. In sum, 90 percent of the text contain no variants.

Textual criticism, however, focuses on the relatively few problem readings, not on the many uncontested readings, so a sense of proportion may be lost as the 10 percent variant garners much scholarly attention. (1994, 157; 1997, 62; 2001, 48)

In turn, Waltke cites encouraging statements by Harris and Stuart, evangelicals, and Shemaryahu Talmon (Waltke 1994, 157–9; 1997, 48–9; 2001, 62–3). Indeed, Anderson and Widder (2018, 13), Brotzman and Tully (2016, 3), Price (2007, 200), and Wegner (2006, 25, 298) also cite positive statements by one, two, or three of these same scholars, that is, Harris, Stuart, and Talmon, among others mentioned above. The citations of Talmon are particularly illustrative because they demonstrate how far evangelicals go to boost their position. They cite two statements by Talmon, one of which I will discuss here: “It should, however, be stressed that these errors and textual divergences between the versions materially affect the intrinsic message only in relatively few instances” (Talmon 1970, 162; cited in Anderson and Widder 2018, 13n2; Brotzman and Tully 2016, 3 [also Brotzman 1994, 19]; Wegner 2006, 25).¹⁴ To anybody who knows Talmon’s work, including his chapter with this quotation, it will be obvious that these evangelicals have ignored Talmon’s actual (and less congenial) views on the OT text, as *they* (not Talmon) envision it, and have simply lifted this passage off the page as a proof-text in support of *their* own view on the OT text’s accuracy and reliability. But, Talmon’s text resists this use of it, when read in its broader (pp. 161–4) and narrower contexts, for what he really says is (portion cited above in italics):

It should, however, be stressed that these errors and textual divergences between the versions materially affect the intrinsic message only in relatively few instances. Nevertheless this may occur. Some examples of variants significant from a theological or ideo-historical angle may in fact be found. In most instances the differences are of a linguistic or a grammatical nature, which resulted either from the unpremeditated impact of the linguistic peculiarities of successive generations of copyists, or from their intentional attempts to adjust the wording of scripture to changing concepts of linguistic and stylistic norms.

The above remarks do not, however, absolve us from accounting for the fact that the further back the textual tradition of the Old Testament is followed, i.e. the older the biblical manuscripts perused, and the more ancient the records which come to the knowledge of scholars, the wider is the over-all range of textual divergence between them.

(1970, 162; cf. 161–4)

In other words, the single sentence extracted and cited by evangelicals is exploited to support a position without regard for its immediate context or its author’s actual views. James Barr’s (1977, 308; cf. 304–10) words come

to mind: “The scholar just quoted [e.g., Talmon] would, of course, totally repudiate the whole conservative position advocated in this book [e.g., Wegner 2006]” (cf. Schimmel 2008, 244–5n38). Another kind of proof-texting occurs with the citation of a scholar like Frederic Kenyon, in particular his final comment in *The Story of the Bible* (1936, 144):

[I]t is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God.

Price (2007, 261) and Wegner (2006, 25, 301; twice!) cite this text to reassure their evangelical readers.¹⁵ However, Kenyon wrote these words before the discovery of the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS; 1947–1956), which have revolutionized our understanding of the OT text’s history, and therefore his perspective is incomplete, and inaccurate. Price, Wegner, and other evangelicals would do better to look to other experienced, contemporary, and mainstream OT textual critics (e.g., Tov, Ulrich) in their search for proof-texts on the OT text’s accuracy and reliability; however, they will discover little or nothing that suits their apologetic purpose.

3.4.2 *Single Authorship of Old Testament Books*

Evangelicals like to imagine that each OT book was written by one author at a particular time and place, such that Moses wrote Genesis–Deuteronomy (except the final chapter), Isaiah wrote the book with his name, Solomon wrote Qohelet (Ecclesiastes), etc. Some of our evangelical OT textual critics also hold this view, at least partially, as we saw in Waltke’s comment, “If a book had but one author, then the critic will aim to restore his original composition” (1989, 107; cf. Brotzman and Tully 2016, 224), and in Brotzman and Tully’s complementary remark, “Some books of the OT, probably most of them, were created in a straightforward manner. The author worked on the book and completed it” (2016, 225; cf. 219–26). Wegner also seems to accept this part of Waltke’s statement (2006, 36–7; cf. 29–37), and Price goes full throttle against the editing or rewriting of OT books; he believes each book was written by one author (2007, 93–7; cf. 87–108).

However, aside from evangelicals—and other likeminded conservative or traditionalist Christians and Jews—few OT scholars, and fewer OT textual critics, agree. Instead, it is apparent to most of us, it is the outcome of our text-critical and other methods, and it is the consensus of centuries of “critical” biblical scholarship, that OT books evidence the hands of many authors, editors, and scribes, with few if any exceptions. (Usually just Song of Songs and Qohelet and some individual Psalms are even mentioned in this regard.)

[E]ach book is the product of a complicated and often unrecoverable history of composition and redaction. The “original text” that lies somewhere behind the archetype is usually not the product of a single author, but a collective production, sometimes constructed over centuries, perhaps comparable to the construction of a medieval cathedral or the composite walls of an old city.

(Hendel 2008, 332)

“Most of the biblical books were not written by one person nor at one particular time, but rather over many generations” (Tov 2012, 166).

[E]ach book is the product not of a single author, such as Plato or Shakespeare, but of multiple, anonymous bards, sages, religious leaders, compilers, or tradents. Unlike much classical and modern literature, produced by a single, named individual at a single point in time, the biblical books are constituted by earlier traditions being repeated, augmented, and reshaped by later authors, editors, or tradents, over the course of many centuries. Thus the text of each of the books is organic and developmental, a composition-by-multiple-stages, sometimes described as a rolling corpus.

(Ulrich 2015, 2)

In brief, diverse phenomena—historical, cultural, social, literary, textual, linguistic, conceptual¹⁶—support the scholarly consensus, and especially relevant in the present context is that the surviving manuscripts provide empirical evidence that corroborate the long production history of OT writings¹⁷—none of the biblical books were completed at one go. Consequently, assertions about the single authorship of OT books is just a tactic to protect the OT text. But to see more clearly why this is true, we must look again at how these evangelical OT textual critics view the MT.

3.4.3 Privileged Status of Masoretic Text

We saw previously that several of our evangelical OT textual critics effectively substitute the proto-MT (the consonantal base of the medieval MT) for the idea of the original OT text, Waltke because the Holy Spirit superintended its selection, and Anderson and Widder, and Wegner because it was maintained by the circle of scribes closely connected to the Jerusalem temple in the Second Temple period. Price also strongly favors the MT. Brotzman and Tully are more cautious in their approach to the MT and other textual witnesses, in theory and practice (2016, 41–3, 47–8, 59, 74, 188). At one point, they cite Tov (1988, 7): “The [DSS biblical] texts have thus taught us no longer to posit MT at the center of our textual thinking.” However, for the most part, our evangelical OT textual critics privilege the MT, due to its (using their words) antiquity, centrality, authority, stability, uniformity, accuracy, reliability, etc.

Most OT textual critics acknowledge the proto-MT is a very old and important text and arguably *often* the “best” and most “original” of the surviving texts, when it comes down to many individual variants, sets of variants, passages, and books. Nonetheless, there are significant problems with privileging the MT over other texts. First, as mentioned, there is no a priori basis for taking this approach, and the many (proto-)MT manuscripts are not a unity. Furthermore, privileging the MT in the post-Qumran age is not a sustainable position. Ulrich articulates this well in his chapter “Post-Qumran Thinking: A Paradigm Shift” (2015, 15–27):

Just as the invention of the telescope and accurate observation of astronomical data allowed the Copernican solar system to eclipse the previously unquestioned Ptolemaic-medieval view of the earth as the center of creation, so too the discovery of the scriptural scrolls and accurate observation of the data they provide have, in the academic sphere, eclipsed the MT as the text-critical center of the Hebrew Bible.
(2015, 16; cf. 20–1)¹⁸

Another issue to emphasize again is that the MT is a composite collection whose textual profile varies from book to book. Tov (2017) says:

The MT in Sum: The upshot of this analysis is that MT is a mixed bag containing units that reflect a conservative tradition and those that do not,¹⁹ units that seem to be later than the LXX (Joshua, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), and units that are earlier than the *Vorlage* of the LXX (1 Kings, Esther, and Daniel). Each book of scripture was produced at a different time by a different scribe, reflecting his personal character. Overall, compared with the other known texts, MT is generally the best text available. By “generally” we mean that this is not the case in all words or all verses, nor in all books.

(cf. Lange 2020a, Section 1.2.1.3.4; b, Section 1.2.2.6; Tov and Ulrich 2020, Section 1.1.1.3.4; Ulrich 2013, 92)

My own detailed work on the literary, textual, and linguistic formation of Judges, Samuel, and Jeremiah persuades me the scholarly consensus on these books is correct: The MT is *not* the “best” and most “original” of the surviving texts (Rezetko 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016).

Another issue linked to the privileging of the MT is the view that the proto-MT was exceptional because it was maintained by the circle of scribes closely connected to the Jerusalem temple in the Second Temple period. Here too our evangelical OT textual critics overplay their hand. To begin, OT textual critics debate whether there was a single official text in the Jerusalem temple and whether the proto-MT can be identified as that text. For example, Tov (2012, 29–31, 36; cf. 174–80) says yes, but Ulrich (2015,

21–4) says no. Therefore, the evangelical OT textual critics who agree with Tov, such as Wegner,²⁰ and Anderson and Widder, should at least deliberate and respond to the detailed counterarguments by Ulrich and especially by Armin Lange (2009, 2016, summarized in 2020b, Section 1.2.2.4.2; cf. 2020a, Section 1.2.1.3.4).

However, there is a further problem, because even if the connection between the proto-MT and the temple were demonstrated, it is a separate question as to how far into the past that connection would extend. Wegner seems to wish for the connection to have always existed, throughout Israelite history, on both sides of the Babylonian exile (2006, 299–300, 306; 2013a, 466, 475, 479). But there is no textual evidence one way or another prior to 250 BCE, and consequently those who support the connection, including the non-evangelical scholars cited by Wegner, speak about a connection only in the last centuries BCE, which is far from the First Temple and early Second Temple periods. Lange, for example, comments, “It seems unlikely that the proto-Masoretic text served as a standard or even dominant text for most of the Second Temple period” (2020b, Section 1.2.2.4.1.1), and he himself locates the connection in the second half of the first century BCE (2020b, Section 1.2.2.4.2).

Lastly, it seems our evangelical OT textual critics defend the single authorship of OT books and privilege the (proto-)MT as a roundabout way—I might say as a text-critical sleight of hand—to sustain their search for an original OT text, all the while voicing how problematic that idea is given the surviving textual evidence. In other words, if any given biblical book had just one author, and the (proto-)MT is the oldest and most dependable text of that book—reaching back perhaps into the early Second Temple period or even into the First Temple period—then one can just as well say the (proto-)MT is effectively equivalent to the original text written by that biblical author. This is more or less explicit in Brotzman and Tully’s (2016, 225) comment, “the original composition and the final form of the text are essentially the same thing.” We will see how this plays out in the specific case of Jeremiah. For now, it suffices to say that in terms of the single authorship of OT books and the privileging of the (proto-)MT, evangelicals do not have much of a leg to stand on.

3.4.4 Limited Scope of Textual Variation

Another tactic evangelical OT scholars use to protect the text is emphasizing the infrequency and insignificance of textual variants. The basic statistical claim made by evangelicals is that for 90% of the OT text there are no variants, and only a small number of variants in the other 10% is significant and warrants scrutiny, so overall 95% of the text is certain. Waltke was the first to make this claim, on the basis of a “[a] quick count of the textual variants in BHS” (1994, 158; 1997, 62; 2001, 48), and many others have quoted Waltke’s numbers, including all our other evangelical OT textual

critics (Anderson and Widder 2018, 12–3; Brotzman and Tully 2016, 3–4 [cf. Brotzman 1994, 23]; Price 2007, 102, 244; Wegner 1999, 177–8; 2006, 24–5, 298; 2013a, 480; b, 133; 2015, 24), and many others too (e.g., Geisler 2011, 190–1, 329–31, 375; Geisler goes even further, stating for the entire Bible, both Testaments, that 99% of its words are identical to the original manuscripts and are therefore inerrant). As for the significance of the variants, it is stressed they mainly have to do with matters of language (e.g., spelling, word order); they do not deal with substantive matters, they do not affect the intrinsic message, they do not affect doctrine or theology. In addition to Talmon’s words above, our evangelical OT textual critics accentuate their point using (evangelical) Stuart’s (1980, 98) words:

Rather, it is fair to say that the verses, chapters, and books of the Bible would read largely the same, and would leave the same impressions with the reader, even if one adopted virtually every possible *alternative* reading to those now serving as the basis for current English translations.

(cf. Brotzman 1994, 10 [Waltke’s foreword; not in Brotzman and Tully 2016]; Waltke 1994, 157; 1997, 62; 2001, 48; Wegner 2006, 298; similar statements in Price 2007, 102; Wegner 2013a, 278)

In addition to Waltke’s percentages (based on his “quick count”), several other data points are cited as proofs of the limited scope of textual variation and the MT’s reliability. These include a general count of variants in Genesis by Wegner (2013a, 480; b, 133), and the close similarity of several biblical DSS to their respective books in the MT, particularly the Murabba‘at Exodus scroll (MurExod) (see Price 2007, 102) and the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a).

First, we cannot comment explicitly on Waltke’s and Wegner’s statistics since they do not share their method or data. Second, an overall rate of variation of 5–10% and the significance of the variants are matters of subjective opinion. There are more than 430,000 words in the Hebrew (and Aramaic) OT, and in my mind tens of thousands of variants are not easily regarded as inconsequential. Furthermore, though very many may not be “significant” in the ways described above, very many of them *do* impact meaning. As an example—and there are many!—in the story of David’s transfer of the ark to Jerusalem, did Yahweh kill Uzzah (2 Samuel 6:7//1 Chronicles 13:10) “because of (his) error” (MT Samuel, various LXX manuscripts of Samuel/Kingdoms, etc.) or “because he reached out his hand upon/against the ark” (MT Chronicles, 4QSam,^a etc.) or for an unspecified reason (various LXX manuscripts of Samuel/Kingdoms)? How one resolves this text-critical problem significantly impacts the meaning and theology of the entire story (see Rezetko 2007, 128–41).²¹ Third, anyone who really works through multiple OT passages or books, gathering and analyzing variants between the MT, DSS, SP, LXX, etc., will quickly discover

the abundance and complexity of the OT textual situations. Variations between OT parallel/synoptic passages and how the OT's words are cited in Qumran sectarian works, rabbinic writings, the NT, and patristic writings add more fuel to the fire. Fourth, Waltke's and Wegner's statistics are misleading in other ways too. In particular, they fail to indicate that variation rates fluctuate from book to book and from manuscript to manuscript. Some books are more stable, others more fluid, some non-MT texts are more like the MT, others less so. Ian Young (2005, 2018) gives hard data, examining variation rates for nearly all the individual biblical DSS in relation to the MT. In some cases there is a variant between the DSS and MT about every 4 words, or a variation rate of 25%. His conclusion is sobering:

Given the abundant evidence of textual variety from Qumran, the LXX, and the SP, both on the level of different literary editions of whole books, and in individual details as presented in this study, we may agree with Clines that the text of the Hebrew Bible is in a state of "radical uncertainty." On this evidence it seems unlikely that the Hebrew Bible comes from a world where precise copying of texts was the norm. Instead whereas some core elements remained the same, the outward form of the biblical texts was in constant flux.

(2005, 106–7)²²

Fifth, even if our evangelical OT textual critics were right about the infrequency and insignificance of textual variants—I am confident they are not, since the low variation rates they assert are problematic at best, erroneous at worst, and misleading either way—it would still land on their plate to deal with Tov's (2012, 166n24) verdict, which rings true to most OT textual critics: "The textual diversity visible in the Qumran evidence from the 3rd century BCE onwards is probably not representative of the textual situation in earlier periods, when the text must have been much more fluid."

3.4.5 Book of Isaiah: Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls, especially 1QIsaiah^a

1QIsaiah^a is one of the biblical DSS evangelicals are fond of citing as evidence for the limited scope of textual variation and the MT's reliability (Brotzman and Tully 2016, 41–3; Price 2007, 65–6, 200, 208; Wegner 2006, 145; cf. Geisler 2011, 329–31; McDowell 1999, 69–70, 78–9, 81, 90; etc.). This manuscript is cited so invariably and widely in evangelical writings, academic and popular, one might consider it their Cinderella proof. Their main observation is there are relatively few differences between the texts of Isaiah over a thousand-year period from 1QIsa^a (125 BCE) to Codex L (1009 CE; see n.13).²³ Millar Burrows (1955, 304), often quoted by evangelicals, said it this way:

Considering ... what a long time intervened between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the oldest of the medieval manuscripts, one might have expected a much larger number of variant readings and a much wider degree of divergence. It is a matter for wonder that through something like a thousand years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article on the scroll, “Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition.”

Burrows’ evaluation may be true as a generalization, but our evangelical OT textual critics are mistakenly optimistic when they press it and 1QIsa^a into service for their apologetic agenda. There are at least four complications with their approach to Isaiah.²⁴

First, there are many differences between 1QIsa^a and the MT. Overall there are more than 2,600 variants between 1QIsa^a and the other witnesses to the book (MT, LXX, other Qumran scrolls of Isaiah,²⁵ etc.). Anybody who examines the data will see 1QIsa^a and the MT are hardly “almost identical” (as claimed in Price 2007, 200). Second, another more fragmentary Qumran scroll of Isaiah, 1QIsa^b, is actually closer to the MT than 1QIsa^a. Textual critics describe 1QIsa^b as proto-MT, MT-like, belonging to the MT family, etc., but 1QIsa^a is instead considered non-aligned, unaligned, or independent.²⁶ Specifically, according to Ian Young’s (2005, 94; 2018, 8) preliminary figures, there is one (non-orthographic/spelling) difference between 1QIsa^b and the MT every 23.9 words, but one between 1QIsa^a and the MT every 9.7 words which is more than twice as often as in 1QIsa^b. Third, when evangelicals cite 1QIsa^a compared to the MT as the example *par excellence* of the OT’s reliable transmission for over a millennium, they overlook that no individual biblical DSS, 1QIsa^a, 1QIsa^b, or any other scroll, is representative of all the Qumran scrolls or of the diverse relationships between the individual scrolls and their MT counterparts. In other words, they commit the logical fallacy of inferring something is true for the whole because it is true for some part of the whole. The truth is, while some biblical DSS are like the MT, others are not. Fourth, turning to the evaluation of individual textual variants, sometimes the MT is superior, sometimes 1QIsa^a, sometimes another Qumran Isaiah scroll, or sometimes the LXX. Readings in Isaiah’s non-MT texts are judged more often than not to be secondary to readings in the MT, but this is not always the case, so each difference between the textual witnesses must be evaluated one by one on an egalitarian basis. In addition, the editors of the official publication of 1QIsa^a, Ulrich and Peter Flint (2010, 90), argue:

With regard to most individual linguistic features, 1QIsa^a does exhibit a later profile; however, with regard to the development of the text, the case is the reverse. These seven major secondary additions indicate that MT displays a later stage of textual development than that of 1QIsa^a,

even if the linguistic features of MT did not undergo as much updating as those of 1QIsa^a.

(cf. Ulrich 2001b; 2015, 109–29)²⁷

In other words, they argue MT Isaiah is both early and late in different ways when compared to 1QIsa^a. In summary, evangelicals stand on shaky ground when they claim 1QIsa^a as proof of the MT's accuracy and reliability. The complex textual situation cannot be boiled down to a single simplistic generalization.

3.4.6 *Book of Jeremiah: Masoretic Text, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Septuagint*

We discussed the view of Tov, Ulrich, and Waltke that MT Jeremiah is secondary or revisionist, and later than LXX Jeremiah, in its textual and literary characteristics. The following facts on Jeremiah are the basic ones to keep in mind (e.g., Tov 2012, 287; cf. 20–1, 137, 168, 189).²⁸ The differences between the texts are recognizable in two main areas: Length and order. As for length, the LXX is shorter than the MT by about one-sixth (others by one-seventh or one-eighth). The LXX lacks words, phrases, and entire sections that are found in the MT. Also, the shorter LXX is reflected in two biblical DSS, 4QJer^{b,d}, whereas the longer MT is reflected in four others, 2QJer, 4QJer^{a,c,e}. As for the order, the LXX deviates from the MT in several sections and chapters. In particular, the LXX reflects a different sequence in chapters 10 and 23 and of the “oracles against the nations” and of their placement in the book (MT 46:1–51:64 = LXX 25:14–31:44). Scholars embrace different views about these facts. The two main hypotheses entail expansion or abbreviation, and there are several mediating positions involving aspects of each. The majority, the “scholarly consensus” (Tov 2012, 288n11), holds that the LXX and MT represent two literary editions of Jeremiah. The LXX was translated from a Hebrew text close to 4QJer^{b,d}, and the translation did not abridge its Hebrew source. The LXX reflects a first, short, literary edition (edition 1). The MT is a second, long, literary edition (edition 2), whose supplements date to the postexilic period. A minority thinks the opposite, the LXX is an abbreviation of the longer form known from the MT. “This position has not found many followers” (Tov 2021, 133). The main proponents of this position in the post-Qumran period have been Georg Fischer, Arie van der Kooij, and Jack Lundbom, and this is also the view often favored by evangelicals.

Turning to our evangelical OT textual critics,²⁹ Anderson and Widder (apparently), Brotzman and Tully, and Waltke favor the MT expansion hypothesis; the LXX and MT represent a shorter first edition and a longer second edition, respectively (Anderson and Widder 2018, 40–2; Brotzman and Tully 2016, 22, 27, 31, 72, 133, 222–6; Waltke 1978, 70; 1979, 222;

1989, 104–6; 1994, 163, 166, 173, 177; 1997, 49, 59; 2001, 28, 35–6, 38, 43–4). For Brotzman and Tully: “The Greek shape of Jeremiah was not an adjustment by the Greek translator. We know this because several Hebrew scrolls at Qumran—namely, 4QJer^b and 4QJer^d—have the same text form as the Greek version” (2016, 72; cf. 133, 222–6). Also, they say: “Some of the [secondary] pluses in the MT are inconsequential, but some do affect the meaning of the text,” for example in Jeremiah 11:6–8 where “the LXX states only that YHWH gave the people a covenant (v. 6), and they did not do it (v. 8). The MT has a plus, describing how YHWH persistently warned the people along the way (v. 7 and all but the last two words of v. 8)” (2016, 222). In contrast, Wegner, referencing Gentry and referring to his own research, favors the LXX abbreviation hypothesis (2006, 33–4, 103–4, 179–81, 184–5, 299–300; 2013a, 468–9).³⁰ Price, our other evangelical OT textual critic, holds another view:

If Jeremiah dictated both versions at different times to his scribe Baruch, then each would be an original and inspired autograph. On this basis, a scribe would have had to respect both versions, and thus each text could have developed on its own through the process of transmission.

(2007, 101; cf. 40–1, 69–70, 98–101; Jeremiah 36:2–32)

This kind of view in one form or another has been advocated for a long time by evangelicals, e.g., Archer (1964, 349–50). Lastly, some evangelicals look to hedge their bets on this issue. For example, Wegner and others, such as Richard Hess (2016, 540–1), favor the LXX abbreviation hypothesis, but they also entertain the possibility that both the short and long editions go back to the prophet himself (Hess 2016, 541; Wegner 2006, 185).

The minority LXX abbreviation hypothesis has been more prevalent among evangelicals and other conservatives or traditionalists than the preceding references suggest. But we have seen that other evangelicals have started to accept the majority MT expansion hypothesis, probably because they are more willing to consider the range of data and accept the most plausible and therefore consensus explanation. In other words, they are more open-minded toward other possibilities even if those are less congenial to conventional evangelical thinking about the OT text’s nature. This is especially evident with a textual and literary situation like we find in Jeremiah. I have quite a few conference papers, journal articles, book chapters, and doctoral dissertations written by evangelicals over the past three decades that look at the variant editions of Jeremiah and/or more general matters such as textual fluidity and pluriformity, textual and literary updating, multiple literary editions, etc., and their ramifications for the MT’s accuracy and reliability, and for evangelical notions of the OT text’s inspiration and inerrancy, “inspired redactors,” “inspired textual updating,” etc. I am preparing a discussion of this for another publication (Rezetko, in

preparation). For now, the important point is there is an emergent group of (mostly young) evangelical OT scholars which is less committed to accepting marginal and improbable hypotheses in order to (a) protect the OT text's accuracy and reliability, in this case MT Jeremiah, and more generally (b) protect the notion of the (proto-)MT as essentially the equivalent of the original OT text. A recent example can be found in the work on Jeremiah 52 by James Frohlich and Henk de Waard (De Waard 2019, 2020, Frohlich 2018, 2022, Frohlich and De Waard 2021), in which they show that LXX Jeremiah reflects an earlier Hebrew version of the book, and while LXX and MT Jeremiah underwent secondary developments, those were more comprehensive in the MT.

3.4.7 Summary

Evangelical OT textual critics, despite their seeming abandonment of the search for the original OT text, remain biased toward the MT, and aim to protect it, and not only it but also by association the OT text's accuracy and reliability more generally. To accomplish this objective they have adopted various problematic tactics, including misrepresentative citation of authorities, implausible attribution of OT books to single authors, unjustifiable privileging of the MT over other textual witnesses, misleading assertion of the limited scope of textual variation, misappropriation of 1QIsa^a as evidence for the accuracy and reliability of the (proto-)MT, and dismissal of LXX Jeremiah and 4QJer^{b, d} as counterevidence against these same aspects of the (proto-)MT.

3.5 Conclusion

The subtitle of this chapter, and one of the main questions I have sought to answer, is what do evangelicals do when they do OT textual criticism? I have developed my answer to this question in two parts. On the one hand, our evangelical OT textual critics, excluding Price, have set aside the quest for the original OT text. Instead, they have concluded the most viable aim is to work toward establishing the final authoritative text(s) of OT writings. On the other hand, these same textual critics remain intent on defending the OT text's accuracy and reliability. To accomplish this, they have adopted various questionable tactics which do not hold up under scrutiny. In addition, reading between the lines, and as a former insider (see n.1), my intuition is the underlying objective of their partiality toward the medieval MT and the proto-MT amounts to a circuitous or backdoor way to preserve the conventional evangelical belief in the OT text's originality and inerrancy.³¹

Admittedly, I have not addressed every relevant topic or potential evangelical response to the issues and arguments in this chapter.³² Nevertheless, for those of us very involved with OT textual criticism, evangelicals

embrace peripheral academic views (even if those views are common in popular imagination), and the evangelical approach has been and continues to look pre-Qumran and even pre-modern (see again Ulrich 2015, 15–27).³³ Evangelicals generally still deal mainly with “any slips that may have crept into the text,” that is, with unintentional corruptions (errors), especially single instances. In contrast, they pay far less attention to other forms of scribal intervention, meaning deliberate and purposeful alterations (changes, additions, deletions, especially in the MT), and they talk even less about the large-scale textual and literary issues that are addressed in a publication like *Textual History of the Bible* (Lange et al. 2016–).

The ongoing current situation in evangelical OT textual criticism was pointed out already three decades ago by several evangelicals. According to Al Wolters (1999, 36–7):

One of the striking features of the scholarship surrounding the Old Testament text in the late twentieth century is the failure of biblical scholars to discuss the deeper theological issues that are raised by the new discoveries and theories. There are occasional exceptions, of course [references to Brotzman and Waltke] ... Oddly enough, there seems to have been very little work done in this direction by evangelicals, whose theological identity is so closely bound up with the notion of inspired autographs. ... Although the rise of modern historical criticism has altered the terms of the debate ... the basic theological issues at stake have not changed. I would submit that it is to these issues, alongside the more precise tracing of the evolution of the biblical text, that the discipline of Old Testament textual criticism will have to give greater attention in the twenty-first century.

And in his “Where Should Twenty-First-Century Evangelical Biblical Scholarship Be Heading?,” Craig Blomberg (2001, 170) observed:

Lest I be accused of commenting only on OT topics with NT analogues, let me add that it seems to me that major issues surrounding the formation of the OT canon and the practice of OT textual criticism still cry out for additional evangelical treatment. At the beginning of the 1990s, Randall Buth argued that new uncertainties over portions of the OT autographs raised by the Dead Sea Scrolls remained the single biggest obstacle to evangelical theories of inspiration and inerrancy, and I have not seen much to address these concerns in the decade since then.

Based on my own background (see n.1) and what I have heard and read by evangelicals, some of which I have discussed in this chapter, I don’t think much has changed in the past 20 or 30 years. Another indication of the ongoing situation is the relative paucity of posts, topics, and resources related to OT textual criticism that have appeared on the website Evangelical Textual

Criticism during its 17 year history since its inception in 2005.³⁴ Other signs of the still current situation are remarks by evangelicals such as Carlos Bovell, Kenton Sparks, and Peter Enns, who lament that issues like those treated in this chapter were absent from their formal evangelical education (Bovell 2007, 154), or that evangelicals often are exposed to and major in only the “safe” disciplines of biblical scholarship (Sparks 2008, 145–6, 168), or that “[t]he evangelical paradigm that was my default seemed to require a fair amount of information control once I began to understand better what that information was, and it needed careful tending in order to remain viable” (Enns 2015, 169). The consequence of all this is that evangelical belief in the OT text’s originality and inerrancy rests on a text-critical house built on sand (Matthew 7:24–27), and that house is sinking, little by little, and when it collapses entirely, so also should old-fashioned evangelical views about the textual nature of the Bible.

Notes

- 1 I believed this, evangelicals among my colleagues, friends, and family believe(d) it, I was taught it during my studies at Moody Bible Institute (<https://www.moodybible.org/beliefs>; <https://www.moodybible.org/beliefs/positional-statements/bible>) and Dallas Theological Seminary (<https://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinal-statement>), and I taught it myself during three decades of involvement with evangelical churches in the U.S. and abroad.
- 2 The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Section 8: “The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical.”
- 3 <https://www.etsjets.org/about>.
- 4 <https://ibr-bbr.org/about/documents#confession>.
- 5 This is a reprint of Waltke 1997. See also 1978, 1979 (reprint of 1978), 1989, 1994 (cf. Waltke and O’Connor 1990, 15–30), and on the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), 1965, 1970, 1992.
- 6 This is a revision of Ulrich 1994 and 1999, 17–33. See also, e.g., 1978, 1999, 2010, 2015.
- 7 “Proto-MT” is the consonantal base of the medieval MT, that is, without the vocalization, para-textual elements, accentuation, and the apparatus of the Masorah of the “full” MT.
- 8 Tov’s *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (1st ed. 1992), slated to appear in its fourth edition in 2022, is indispensable. See also, e.g., Tov, 1999, 2008, 2015, 2019.
- 9 Waltke uses the word “inerrancy” in other publications (e.g., 1984). However, it seems he may have abandoned *the Bible’s* inerrancy as such, instead using the word for its “Source,” that is, God, e.g., “The theologian should consider the Bible’s Source as inerrant and its teaching as infallible” (2007, 49), and, “I accept the inerrancy of Scripture as to its Source and its infallibility as to its authority” (2007, 77). See also 2015, 237, but cf. 248.
- 10 Waltke contributed one of the back cover blurbs (and Walter Kaiser the other).
- 11 See Rezetko and Young 2014, 71–7 (cf. 60–1) for a detailed description of scholarship.

- 12 See also S.L. Young 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2020. Adapting one of Young's points, my argument is evangelicals modulate their text-critical scholarship to prefer interpretive options that keep the Bible inerrant.
- 13 The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* is the standard edition of the MT as preserved in Codex Leningrad (St. Petersburg) B19A (indicated as L) which is the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible (1009 CE).
- 14 The other statement is: "The scope of variation within all these textual traditions is relatively restricted. Major divergences which intrinsically affect the sense are extremely rare. A collation of variants extant, based on the synoptic study of the material available, either by a comparison of parallel passages within one Version, or of the major Versions with each other, results in the conclusion that the ancient authors, compilers, tradents and scribes enjoyed what may be termed a controlled freedom of textual variation" (Talmon 1975, 326; cited in Brotzman 1994, 10 [Waltke's foreword]; Price 2007, 102; Waltke 1994, 158; 1997, 48–9; 2001, 62; Wegner 2006, 298n1).
- 15 They cite the second edition of Kenyon's book, with supplementary material by F.F. Bruce, published after Kenyon's death (1952) in 1964.
- 16 Such matters are treated in "critical" OT introductions and commentaries. For a detailed illustration of how these various phenomena coalesce to show that a biblical composition had a long and complex production history, see my contribution on the Joseph story in Genesis 37–50 (Rezetko 2023).
- 17 On this see Ausloos et al. 2012, Dávid et al. 2012, Müller and Pakkala 2017, 2022, Müller et al. 2014, Pakkala 2013, Person and Rezetko 2016, Tigay 1985, Weissenberg et al. 2011.
- 18 Among our evangelical OT textual critics, Brotzman and Tully come closest to this post-Qumran mindset.
- 19 E.g., the MT Pentateuch, with exceptions such as Exodus 35–40, is a "conservative" tradition, whereas MT Samuel and MT Jeremiah are "revisionist."
- 20 Wegner cites others in agreement, including Gentry (2009), Lawrence Schiffman (1994, 171–3), Al Wolters (1999), and Adam van der Woude (1992; cf. 1995). Arie van der Kooij (2012, 2014) and Ian Young (2002) also hold this view. Brotzman and Tully (2016, 31n39) briefly mention this view, citing Tov and Young.
- 21 A statement like this one, "Those variation units that affect the meaning of a biblical text are found in the footnotes of any good English Bible" (Anderson and Widder 2018, 12–3), stands far from the truth.
- 22 See also, on Judges, Rezetko 2013; on Samuel, Clines 2001, 2011; Rezetko and Young 2014, 129–210, 413–591; I. Young 2014; on Isaiah, I. Young 2013; on Job, Clines 2023; on Song of Songs, I. Young 2001; and on Daniel, I. Young 2016. See also Young et al. 2008, 1: 348–58.
- 23 The number of differences between 1QIsa^a and Codex L is stated in a variety of ways, sometimes as percentages for the entire book of Isaiah and sometimes as absolute numbers for individual chapters such as Isaiah 53. In many instances, these statements are bizarrely inaccurate. For the entire book, Geisler (2012, 44–5) claims "[o]nly 13 small changes," Kaiser (2007, 74) "only three minor spelling changes," and Price (2007, 200) "only three words are spelled differently." Kaiser says, "when we studied the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah"—really?!—and Price cites Kutscher 1974 and Qimron 1979 which offer nothing to support his statement but are rhetorical flourishes. Who knows how Geisler, Kaiser, and Price came up with their figures of 13 and 3 small changes. Those numbers might be accurate for one verse of the book, e.g., 1:1, but hardly for the 1,291 verses in the entire MT book, most of which is preserved in 1QIsa^a.
- 24 For recent surveys of the status quaestionis, see Brooke 2020, Fuller 2020, Parry 2020, Ulrich 2000, Van der Kooij 2020. For the manuscript and its textual

- variants, see Parry and Qimron 1999; Ulrich 2010, 330–464; Ulrich and Flint 2010.
- 25 It is usually stated there are twenty-two (mostly fragmentary) Qumran Isaiah manuscripts.
 - 26 I cannot enter into the issue of textual typology, meaning here biblical DSS that are proto-MT, pre-SP, like the presumed Hebrew source of the LXX, or non-aligned, and other related terminology and categories. It must suffice to mention that less than half the biblical DSS are proto-MT or MT-like. See the discussion in Lange 2020a, Section 1.2.2.3. Several attempts at reanalysis by evangelicals, especially Ferguson (2018, 2020; cf. 2022) and Gentry (2009, 2020), are addressed elsewhere (Rezetko, in preparation).
 - 27 Ulrich and Flint’s view is contested in Fuller 2020, Section 6.2.1.1 1; Longacre 2013; Williamson 2012.
 - 28 For recent surveys of the status quaestionis, see Lange 2018, 2020c, Rofé 2021, Stipp 2021, Tov 2021, Weis 2020. For the manuscripts and their textual variants, see Baillet 1962; Rabin, Talmon, and Tov 1997; Tov 1997; Ulrich 2010, 558–83.
 - 29 Geisler (2011) and McDowell (1999), who cite MT Isaiah and 1QIsa^a as evidence of the MT’s accuracy and reliability, understandably do not mention LXX vs. MT Jeremiah or the related biblical DSS, because the evidence does not support their claims about the OT text’s nature.
 - 30 However, as with his count of Genesis variants (2013a, 480; 2013b, 133), Wegner offers no evidence to support his claim about minuses in LXX Jeremiah. And Gentry’s conference paper (“The Septuagint and the Text of the Old Testament”) he cites is unpublished, but see Gentry 2009, 33, 35–6, 40, 43–4.
 - 31 Indeed, Hendel (2016) shows that these two postures—partiality toward the (proto-)MT and its originality and inerrancy—have a shared origin in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, which provides a historical antecedent to the current situation and thus some confirmation of my intuition.
 - 32 For example, some may claim my selection of evangelical authors and publications is skewed. However, the authors discussed have strong evangelical credentials and their publications are widely used by evangelicals. As an aside, I was surprised to learn that most of the evangelical publications I have discussed were published by evangelical publishers (Baker, Bethany House, Broadman and Holman, Crossway, Eerdmans, Harvest House, InterVarsity, Lexham, Moody, Thomas Nelson, Word, Zondervan), or in evangelical journals (*Bulletin for Biblical Research*, *Credo Magazine*, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, *Westminster Theological Journal*), or were doctoral dissertations written at evangelical institutions (Dallas Theological Seminary, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Theological University of Apeldoorn). One can make of this what s/he will. The several exceptions are De Waard 2020, Frohlich 2022, and Frohlich and De Waard 2021; cf. Waltke 1965, 1970, 1992, Waltke and O’Connor 1990, which are not immediately relevant. Another observation is that apart from Waltke on the SP (1965, 1970, 1992), Gentry on the LXX, e.g., on Job and Ecclesiastes (1995, 2019), and Tully on the Peshitta of Hosea (2015), our evangelical OT textual critics have published little else that involves significant research on the primary sources, and especially not the biblical DSS. Again, one can make of this what s/he will. I have cursorily discussed some issues, e.g., variations between OT parallel/synoptic passages and how OT words are cited in Qumran sectarian works, rabbinic writings, the NT, and patristic writings. And I have left aside completely other issues I take up elsewhere (Rezetko, in preparation), e.g., generalization of the evangelical assessment of the NT text-critical situation to the entire Bible, OT and NT alike; general (including evangelical) misapprehension of the chiefly oral

context of the OT's origin and production in which the meaning of a "word" (as in "inspired and inerrant words") was different than in our own modern highly literate understanding; and quite a few issues that relate more proximately to the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy.

- 33 See also Tov's (2012, 17–9) discussion of "a modern approach to textual criticism." Tov (2012, 18) thinks Wegner (2006) "pay[s] much attention to the new [Qumran] discoveries," but while he may pay attention, he does very little to assimilate them into his theory and method. Tully, in his revision of Brotzman's book (Brotzman and Tully 2016), published subsequently to Tov's book (2012; previous editions: 1992, 2001), does a better job than Wegner.
- 34 <https://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com>.

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Part 3

Archaeology and History



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4 Christian Fundamentalism, Faith, and Archaeology

William G. Dever

4.1 Introduction: Fundamentalists and Evangelicals

In discussing evangelicalism, it is important to distinguish evangelicals from fundamentalists. The term “evangelical” comes from the Greek *euangelion*, “good news.” In Christian parlance, this good news is the gospel, the news of God’s salvation in Christ. That message is to be shared with the whole world, thus the missionary zeal of evangelicals, true to their name. Fundamentalists, in contrast, see the “good news” as only *their* “good news,” and obvious to right thinkers. There can be no doubts. In effect, “my mind is made up on all the essentials; do not confuse me with facts.” There are, of course, some differences of opinion among fundamentalists. Nevertheless, all these share one indisputable position, a bellwether: The doctrine of biblical inerrancy. The Bible cannot be wrong in any sense.¹

Fundamentalists and most evangelicals are committed to inerrancy, and therefore both are scriptural fundamentalists. There are other areas where fundamentalists and evangelicals overlap, and some areas where they do not. What makes some evangelicals different than fundamentalists is they are more open to different (often non-literal) interpretations of Scripture. Evangelicals also differ from one another more than fundamentalists; some are more open-minded than others regarding their interpretations of Scripture and other issues. While all fundamentalists are evangelicals, not all evangelicals are fundamentalists. While all fundamentalists are inerrantists, most evangelicals are inerrantists. Some evangelicals, mostly left-wing or progressive, such as the theologian Jim Wallis or the biblical scholar Kenton Sparks, do not identify as inerrantists. Yet, what does unite fundamentalists and evangelicals is their emphasis on the Bible as the final authority for faith and practice and as an inspired document that communicates God’s will today.

Although some evangelicals may espouse beliefs that sound like fundamentalists, what characterizes the former is many are more open-minded. It is possible for evangelical interpreters of Scripture to be critical scholars, relatively well-informed and sophisticated, at least on some topics.

Therefore, there can and should be a dialogue between evangelicals and mainstream biblical scholars and theologians. Fundamentalists, in contrast, reject modern critical biblical scholarship, which many evangelicals, to some degree, accept. It is important to keep this distinction in mind in characterizing fundamentalism. Our definition is not a caricature. It is extreme, because the movement itself is extreme, and it is recognized as such by mainstream scholarship, even by some conservatives. But the zeal of moderate evangelicals is tempered by reason, and by the recognition that what constitutes the “good news” is open to various interpretations and is always subjective.

4.2 Inerrancy

If the doctrine of inerrancy is the litmus test for fundamentalists and most evangelicals, we need to explore it in more detail. Christianity, like Judaism before it, has always claimed to be a “historical” religion, in contrast with supposedly more speculative and philosophical religions like Buddhism and other non-Western religions. Christianity depends upon the notion that God has revealed himself in concrete historical events. In these events, he has spoken his divine will and commandments through human spokespersons. These interpreters have recorded his words in a body of literature that comes to be regarded by the believing community as Scripture, “holy writings,” God’s very word.

Beyond a doubt, New Testament (NT) writers believed in divine revelation and were confident they were conveying God’s word. The apostle Paul, who never met Jesus, assured his readers God had revealed himself to him in a vision. He was thus “inspired”; God’s spirit dwelt within him. Paul became God’s spokesperson, and his subsequent writings were on a par with Scripture. Soon they became canonical Scripture. The words were not of Paul, but of the risen Christ, as though dictated to him through the Holy Spirit. Other NT authors were not as explicit as Paul, but they would undoubtedly have felt no less inspired.

God’s written, embodied word is the essential of Christian faith and practice. It is complete, final, inalterable. That proposition is dogma, and it is unquestionable, with pride of place from the very beginning. The early church fathers adopted this dogma. In combating Gnosticism—the doctrine of “secret truths” known instinctively only to a privileged few—Irenaeus (ca. 130/140–200 CE) advocated the notion of *Scripturae perfectae*, “the perfect and saving nature of the Scriptures.”

This was an elaboration of biblicism—the authority of a fixed text, presumed divinely inspired. In Irenaeus’ view, if God were true, then his Holy Spirit, speaking through human language, was infallible. And salvation depended on that. As he put it: “[T]he fruit of the Spirit’s work is the salvation of the flesh” (Haykin 2012, 146). Succeeding generations of Christian apologists maintained Irenaeus’ “high view” of Scripture. What became the

doctrine of inerrancy was simply assumed as the *fundamental* doctrine of Christian faith. There the matter rested until modern times and the development of higher criticism, beginning in Europe.

4.3 European Criticism and Faith

That story is complex and has been told elsewhere (Barr 2000, Collins 2005, Friedman 1987, etc.). The crux of the problem is that such a secular approach to Scripture, the embodiment of the Enlightenment notion of reason transcending myth, threatened the very foundations of Christian faith: Scripture's inerrancy. If various human agents were responsible for these writings, as critics alleged, then they were not divinely inspired. For instance, if the Pentateuch had been written by various writers, not Moses (in the fifteenth century BCE) as Christian (and Jewish) tradition said, then it could not be God's word. Higher criticism (the "Documentary Hypothesis" as it came to be called) in effect dethroned God by replacing him with so-called "schools." There was:

- The "J" school: This was named after a group of Yahwists (Israel's God, "Jahweh" in German). This source dated perhaps to the tenth century BCE, maybe a southern source.
- The "E" school: This was named after a group of Elohistes (the other name of God in the Hebrew Bible). This school was dated a bit later, perhaps a northern source.
- The "D" school: This was named after a group of restorationists, responsible for the book of Deuteronomy ("second law"). It may have dated to the seventh century BCE.
- The "P" school: This was named after a priestly group, composed late in the monarchy and the exile.

These and other heretical views of Scripture's composition spread in Europe and soon became known as "higher (i.e., literary) criticism," in contrast to "lower criticism," the attempt to establish a critical text as close to the original as possible. The latter had always been accepted by conservative commentators, because having the Bible's *true* text was obviously a requirement for espousing inerrancy. But this higher criticism was a new and serious challenge.

There were soon strong reactions from conservative Christian scholars. James Orr in *The Problem of the Old Testament* (1906, 396, 395) declared:

It must be accounted a wonderful providence of God that, at a time when so much is being said and done to discredit the Old Testament, so marvellous a series of discoveries, bearing directly on matters contained in its pages, should have been made ... a new claimant to be heard has put in its voice in the science of archaeology, which bids fair, before long, to control both criticism and history.

Melvin Grove Kyle, an American Presbyterian clergyman, and later co-editor of *The Fundamentals* (1912, 39), wrote: “A flood of light is, indeed, pouring across the page ... but the source of that light is neither criticism nor exegesis nor comment, but archaeology.” One volume by Kyle was entitled *The Deciding Voice of the Monuments in Biblical Criticism* (1912). Earlier, Ira Price had published *The Monuments and the Old Testament* (1899). One may compare Archibald Sayce, *Higher Criticism and the Monuments* (1894), and *Monumental Facts and Higher Critical Fancies* (1904).

Another later enthusiast, J.W. Newton, declared (cited in Prescott 1933, 65):

Not a ruined city has been opened up that has given any comfort to unbelieving critics or evolutionists. Every find of archaeologists in Bible lands has gone to confirm Scripture and confound its enemies ... Not since Christ ascended back to heaven have there been so many scientific proofs that God’s word is truth.

If renewed examination of internal evidence could not confirm the truth of the biblical text, *external* evidence would in the guise of dramatic new archaeological discoveries. And by 1900, such discoveries were beginning to come to light.

By the late nineteenth century, as European higher critical theories began to appear on American shores, the crisis struck home. A heated controversy at the interdenominational Union Theological Seminary in New York left the faculty bitterly divided. Other seminaries, mostly conservative, became battlegrounds. Some faculty were dismissed because they were allegedly “modernists”—converts to revolutionary European skeptical views of Scripture.

As the lines were soon drawn, the quarrel became known as the “Fundamentalist-Modernist” controversy, the battle lines obvious. In 1910–1915, a series of volumes entitled *The Fundamentals* was published, consolidating conservative evangelical views (see Bray 1996, 540; Thompson 2012). One of the fundamentals was the doctrine of inerrancy. However, the label “fundamentalist” was coined in 1920 for those who were ready to do battle for the “fundamentals” in the theological struggle against modernism (Marsden 1991, 57).

Fundamentalism was a largely Protestant phenomenon. By 1920, nearly every major Protestant denomination in America struggled over the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. The battle against modernism, especially evolution, readily accelerated the fundamentalist movement. The conflicts between Protestant sects and the culture at large mushroomed in the first years of the decade (Marsden 2006).

The Roman Catholic Church was less susceptible to doctrinal disputes, since it was monolithic, subject to the unquestioned authority of the Pope and bishops. Yet, the Church recognized the obvious problems highlighted by textual criticism, and the “progress made in the human sciences”

even though these “methods, despite their positive elements, have shown themselves to be wedded to positions hostile to the Christian faith” (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1993a). The Church has insisted it has never been fundamentalist or literalist in its interpretations. It could point to a whole list of noteworthy interpreters from Origen, Jerome, and Augustine. In that vein, the Church published *Divino Afflante Spiritu* by Pope Pius XII (1943), confirmed by the declaration *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* (1964) and “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (1993) of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Despite acknowledging the useful effect of modern critical methods, in the end, modern interpretations missed the mark for they are not

an instrument for understanding the central object of all interpretation: the person of Jesus Christ and the saving events accomplished in human history. An authentic interpretation of Scripture, then, involves in the first place a welcoming of the meaning that is given in the events and, in a supreme way, in the person of Jesus Christ.

(Pontifical Biblical Commission 1993b)

But after *Divino Afflante Spiritu* there were implicit divisions between orthodox (old order Catholics) and more liberal Catholics.

Judaism was also less vulnerable to divisions. Orthodox Judaism had already undergone its own division with the development of Reform Judaism in the late nineteenth century in Europe. This was precisely a response to the new liberal views of Christian and other scholarship in Europe at the time. Reform Judaism was, however, more about practice than theological conformity. For Orthodox Jews, all this maelstrom was irrelevant; the Mishnah and the Talmud remained even more authoritative than the Hebrew Bible. They were the real fundamentalists, wedded to texts.

By 1925, fundamentalism reached its zenith, then quickly declined. The celebrated Scopes trial in 1925, where the teaching of evolution rather than the Genesis creation story was at issue, had “far more impact on the popular interpretation of fundamentalism than all the arguments of preachers and theologians” (Marsden 2006, 185). After the trial the movement was ridiculed, and many moderate Protestants quickly dropped support of the movement that had acquired a degraded and obscurantist image (Marsden 2006, 184–9). The movement did not disappear. It may have lost its influence on a national level among its Protestant followers; however, it percolated locally, doing what it did best, evangelizing and building up local churches (Marsden 1991, 61).

The movement then arose to test faith in America after WWII. But in the 1960s and 1970s the issue of inerrancy surfaced again. That may be because of attempts to revive the old discipline of “biblical theology” in Protestant Neo-Orthodox circles beginning in the 1950s. Since 1787, when Johann Philipp Gabler gave his inaugural address at the University of

Altdorf, attempts have been made to separate a “biblical” theology from dogmatic theology. This was in effect to move authority from the Church’s realm (dogma) back to the original source, the Bible. This is the essence of fundamentalism, the source of authority.

4.4 Matters of History and Faith

Biblical theology has been dying and reviving itself for centuries, as trends in theology generally wax and wane. The most recent attempts at reviving it began about 1950, largely as an effort of mainstream Protestantism, i.e., Neo-Orthodoxy. It is not gratuitous, therefore, to suppose that conservative focus on the Bible as authoritative would evoke a *more* conservative response among evangelical scholars. That took the form of revived classical fundamentalism. Again, the crux was “faith and history,” a quest for authority.

Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture (Hoffmeier and Magary 2012a), takes up the challenge. The 22 contributors are evangelicals, and most are scriptural fundamentalists.² Thomas McCall’s (2012) chapter is the most outspoken defense of what he calls significantly “foundationalism.” He advances two arguments, “justified or warranted Christian belief,” and “coherence.” But what would justify anyone’s beliefs, what kind of evidence would be required or available? And the fact that all aspects of a theory hang together is no guarantee the theory is correct, or even useful. McCall’s fallback position is what he calls “modest foundationalism.” He also speaks of “naturalism,” as though inerrancy were self-evident, that is, rational, focusing on epistemology, which is an issue. The chapter by Graham Cole is entitled “The Peril of a ‘Historyless’ Systematic Theology” (2012). Cole wants to couple inerrancy with historical proofs. Mark Thompson’s (2012) chapter is entitled “The Divine Investment in Truth: Toward a Theological Account of Biblical Inerrancy,” or back to theology. As he puts it, “locating the doctrine of Scripture within the Christian doctrine of God,” which he says is “robust and exegetically defensible” (2012, 73–4). Thompson’s account of the revival of the doctrine of inerrancy is useful. He cites Article XI of “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy”:

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all matters it addresses. *We deny* that it is possible for Scripture to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy must be distinguished, but not separated.

(2012, 79)

Thompson (2012, 81) also cites another Article, one widely accepted: “Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their

original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm.” Those are very big “ifs.” Is one to believe we actually have or will ever have the original text? A copy of the Pentateuch signed by Moses? Another chapter by James Hoffmeier is entitled “‘These Things Happened’: Why a Historical Exodus Is Essential for Theology” (2012). Because it is needed does not mean a thing exists.

It seems clear from these and other ultra-conservative statements the doctrine of inerrancy is a theological assertion, one with little historical foundation. The doctrine is in need of constant reaffirmation, often called “Christian apologetics.” But this is not an apology, a sign of hesitancy, at all. It is militant, on the attack.

As an example of fundamentalism’s often vengeful tendency, one should note the volume we have been quoting says explicitly it was inspired by the heresy of one of their own: Kenton Sparks (see, e.g., Hoffmeier and Magary 2012b, Woodbridge 2012, and throughout the volume). Yet his *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (2008) is modest, still rather far right of center compared to mainstream scholarship. On its own, it would hardly be worth mention in assessing mainstream scholarship.

The sense that Christian doctrine needs a robust defense goes back almost to the beginning. The apostle Paul’s defensiveness is on full display. The later church fathers took their typical apologetic strategy from Plato’s philosophical treatise *apologia pro sua mea*. We will look at the development of this tactic from Irenaeus into the medieval era.

The movement known as the Enlightenment in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries sought to promote reason over myth and dogma in the pursuit of knowledge, that is, evidence. But there was little or no external, rational evidence to support claims about the Bible’s truths until the beginnings of modern archaeological exploration in Egypt and the Middle East in the mid-nineteenth century. The long-lost world of the Bible was dramatically coming to light (Pritchard 1969).

4.5 An Archaeology of Faith

In London in 1865, the Palestine Exploration Society was formed. Its opening statement described it as “A Society for the Accurate and Systematic Investigation of the Archaeology, the Topography, the Geology, and Physical Geography, the Manners and Customs of the Holy Land for Biblical Illustration.” In 1870, the American Palestine Exploration Society was launched. Its opening statement ended not with “illustration,” but the “illustration and defense of the Bible.” Then in the first volume of the Society’s proceedings, the goal was to

recall Americans to their duty in a field where their own countrymen were pioneers, and where American scholarship and enterprise have

won such distinguished merit. If of late years we have suffered France, Germany, and especially England to lead us, their success should stimulate us to an honorable rivalry for a precedence that was once fairly American.

(1871, 7)

The difference in the two societies is noteworthy. Now the Bible needed to be *defended*; and archaeology would provide the major weapon. And the American view is not coincidental. This was classical American fundamentalism, sometimes called “foundationalism,” “essentialism,” “coher-entism,” “fideism,” or “Christian apologetics.” It was extreme, and very defensive.

There were, of course, more moderate reactions to higher criticism, and some attempts at clarification came from archaeologists who were soon becoming involved. The leading American biblical archaeologist of the early mid-twentieth century—the father of the movement—William Foxwell Albright, wrote (1932, 137–8):

Archaeological research in Palestine and neighboring lands during the past century has completely transformed our knowledge of the historical and literary background of the Bible. It no longer appears as an absolutely isolated monument of the past, as a phenomenon without relation to its environment. The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition of the value of the Bible as a source of history.

This was a conservative, not a fundamentalist manifesto. But in time, it too would turn out to be too far to the right (Albright 1969).

Since archaeology was seized upon by fundamentalists at its very beginning in the late nineteenth century, we need to look at its development. The issues that emerged early in the controversy over American-style “biblical archaeology” were those implicit in the fundamentalist movement itself. That is, they were about *faith*, not history, much less archaeology. Let’s look critically at these fundamentalist issues in order to compare the archaeological perspectives.

On history, the fundamentalist assumption was that history consists simply of the cumulative events of the human past. A narrative of events constitutes a record based on well preserved evidence, mainly in texts which can be understood when read at face value, the truth of things, of the world of nature and human nature.

Fundamentalists have almost always viewed archaeology in the Middle East as somehow “biblical,” all about the Bible, both Jewish and Christian. This view was already articulated by Albright (1966, 13), the real founder

of the movement (although no fundamentalist) in one of his few definitions of the discipline: “I shall use the term ‘biblical archaeology’ here to refer to all Bible Lands—from India to Spain, and from southern Russia to South Arabia—and to the whole history of those lands from about 10,000 BC, or even earlier, to the present time.” The truth of the matter is even in Israel—surely the “heartland” of the Bible—the vast accumulation of archaeological data, probably 80–90%, has little if anything to do directly with the Bible. That is fundamentalism’s basic and crippling misunderstanding about modern archaeology in the Middle East.

Fundamentalists have another basic misunderstanding about archaeology, that its essential role is to undergird the biblical worldview (ancient and as modernly interpreted) by “proving” the Bible true. That would verify its historicity as a reliable record of the past, and thus the ground of faith. That assumes, of course, that Judaism and Christianity are superior as “historical” religions (i.e., legitimate), in contrast to the other “mythological” religions.

Fundamentalists misunderstand archaeology’s role further by embracing it enthusiastically when it is convenient, but assuming it is non-essential for history writing. The fact is, in recent years the postmodern “literary turn” in biblical studies amounts to an increasing skepticism about gleaning *any* reliable historical information from the biblical narratives. The trend is “cultural memory”; one does not ask about what happened (there are no “facts of history”), but only about how the stories, the metanarratives, function culturally (see Dever 2001, 23–52; 2017, 19–58). That leaves archaeology as indeed our *only* source for writing any new and more satisfactory histories of ancient Israel. The archaeological data thus became “primary” evidence, although this view of history writing is still somewhat novel. I have recently published an extensive synthesis entitled *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Dever 2017, esp. 25–34; see also 2020a). The essential issue is historiography. What is “history”? Who wrote it? How? Why? What can we learn from the effort?

Fundamentalists do not see the obvious: Archaeology as a discipline is history, or it is nothing. What else could it be? Archaeologists are simply scholars who attempt to portray the past not so much on the basis of textual remains as on the basis of material culture remains, of *things*. The rationale is that, like texts, artifacts faithfully reflect the thoughts, beliefs, behavior, and culture of those who made and used them. Thus, artifacts constitute essential, *primary* data for historical writing.

Fundamentalists argue (or simply assume) an accurate and reliable “history of events” is possible, real events in a real time and place, enacted by real people with real motives. In short, history is intelligible because it is logical, i.e., orderly and purposeful. This is, of course, the classical positivism of the seventeenth–nineteenth century Enlightenment, of the Western cultural tradition. But its roots lie in the biblical worldview, so such positivism is congenial to fundamentalists because they adapt (or pretend to adapt) that worldview. But as a putative historiography, it is naive.

4.6 Writing Reliable History

We do not have to buy into all the extreme views of postmodernists, for whom there are no “facts of history,” to understand that no attempt at history writing can be entirely subjective. That is because we, the writers, are the subjects doing the writing, and we inevitably bring to the task our own modern interests, our personal biases. Thus, all histories are provisional, only part of the story. In short, our perceptions of any reality beyond our senses are just that, not a direct apprehension of truth.

Since the ancient Greek philosophers first began to grapple seriously with the dilemma, with epistemology, we have known many of the “events of history” will elude us, despite our best efforts. The past cannot be reconstructed, only portrayed as best we can. The method and the result are best described in terms of “phenomenology,” a sort of functionalist or pragmatic rather than an imperious rationalist approach. Such an approach, which is typical of good archaeological historians, can be outlined as follows:

- (1) It relies on observing society directly, in action rather than theory.
- (2) It does not necessarily “reconstruct,” but uses typical case studies.
- (3) It seeks to understand society “from within,” what folks say about themselves, whether through words or symbolic actions.
- (4) It emphasizes individual creativity, rather than trying to develop large-scale “typologies.”
- (5) Its objective is Geertz’s (1973) “thick description,” not necessarily explanation.
- (6) It makes use of “organic models,” assuming social systems operate in some ways like biological systems (notions of interacting “subsystems,” seeking and maintaining equilibrium).
- (7) Its methods are basically inductive, that is, working from the particular to the general, rather than deductive, or seeking “law-like generalizations.”
- (8) It does not eschew ideology, but it assumes the exact content of belief systems is irretrievable, although their observation is possible through inference.

It is easy to see how far such modest optimism is removed from typical fundamentalist positivism. It is not a contrast between “minimalism” (or nihilism) and “maximalism,” but rather one between the possible and an unrealistic ideal (the Greek *hubris*). In writing a recent archaeology-based phenomenology of ancient Israel, taking material culture remains as the “primary witness” to the past, I have developed a functionalist methodology that utilizes a model drawn from jurisprudence.

We historians confront a supposed event in the past, as in some text or object, as though to “try it in court,” in order to reach a verdict to establish

the truth of the matter. And the principles we can best employ are those used in the practice of law:

- (1) The accused is presumed (not judged) innocent unless proven guilty.
- (2) The preponderance of the evidence (anything over 50%) is decisive.
- (3) The verdict rendered is considered proven beyond reasonable doubt (not absolute).

The use of this historiographical model means archaeology cannot and should not attempt to supply the “proof” fundamentalists may want. Such certainty is not available, and to suppose it is creates an illusion. What archaeology *can* do is to supply a real-life historical and cultural context within which the Bible and its stories can become more credible, not “proven.” And although some meanings, religious and otherwise, can be inferred from certain modern portrayals of past events, there are other possible meanings. And none of our “meanings” may align perfectly with those of the original authors and editors of the biblical writings. We can read what they wrote, but we cannot read their minds. We cannot simply appropriate their beliefs; we must create our own. Even if we assert the Bible is all about “revelation,” we must nevertheless discover what that revelation means for ourselves in our time. Texts and things are indeed facts; but all facts require interpretation, and even honest and competent interpretations often differ. That is what it means to be mortal, to live in contingency—to cope with multiple meanings, to acknowledge the ultimate mystery of life and human consciousness. So now we come to hermeneutics, the systematic analysis of methods of interpretation.

4.7 Artifacts Should Be “Read” Like Texts

Traditional “biblical” and current southern Levantine archaeologists have typically been pragmatic, rather than theoretically inclined. Thus, there is scarcely any literature in our discipline on hermeneutics, in contrast to biblical and theological literature. A prolegomenon, however, might include the following principles, assuming artifacts require interpretation just as texts do. And these are parallel, since texts, too, are artifacts.

- (1) Artifacts, like texts, represent (“re-present,” make real) the thoughts, intentions, beliefs, values, and behavior of those individuals who make them, use them, and curate them. Artifacts are symbols; they are signs pointing to a reality beyond themselves. They are metaphors for establishing meaning, the meaning of things.
- (2) Artifacts cannot be understood in isolation. It is social context—culture—that gives them meaning.
- (3) An individual is part of what we call an “assemblage,” a collection of other artifacts with which it forms an organic whole, a socio-cultural entity.

- (4) Artifacts are not self-evident as “facts.” They allow us to make inferences about the culture that they represent. These inferences must then be tested, using some deliberate, systematic empirical models.
- (5) When properly interpreted, artifacts may lead to probabilistic conclusions, not objective facts (of which there are none).

The similarity of textual and artifactual hermeneutics has led some archaeologists to propose artifacts should be “read” like texts. That is, if one knows the vocabulary and grammar of *things*, that can lead to representations of reality, historical and cultural reality. But we cannot know absolutely that the representation is always accurate. Like texts, artifacts reflect and refract reality.

One way of illustrating our limitations is to liken archaeological conclusions to piecing together the picture-puzzles with which some of us grew up. Many of the pieces may be missing. We have a border or two, perhaps a corner, a number of scattered pieces somewhere in the center. With perseverance and a bit of luck, we can nevertheless come up with a portrait that is reasonably satisfying and presumably accurate in broad detail. But it is still a portrait, not the thing itself. Yet it is all we have; and it is better than nothing. There is no such thing as complete “objectivity”; but some objectivity is better than none. In light of their historiography (however inchoate), fundamentalists and evangelicals tend to see the Bible simply as *revealed* history—a realistic comprehensive account of ancient Israel and Judaism as well as of early Christianity as they *really were*. That is because they take biblical texts as the primary data, in this case augmented by the notion that these texts constitute God’s literal word.

A further and inevitable assumption is the meaning of these texts as divine “revelation” is accessible to any sincere reader and when that meaning is clear, i.e., “true,” then it becomes the ground of true faith, of beliefs that are in accord with a demonstrable view of reality that is logical (in a closed system however). The essential aim is telling of story—a narrative—which is typical of all pre-modern history writing. The story may be based on some older, authentic sources, either oral or written, so story-tellers are not simply fabricating their account, writing fiction. Nevertheless, the authors feel free to embellish details, and evert to invent some elements, all in the interest of explaining the *meaning* of the supposed events.

In the light of this, the Hebrew Bible has been characterized as “historicized fiction,” “fictionalized history,” “revisionist history,” “propaganda,” or simply “myth.” The point, however, is the Hebrew Bible is *didactic* literature throughout. The aim of the writers and redactors is to drive home the ethical and moral meaning of events in the past. Simply put, in the Hebrew Bible history is theology. This is what good historians always attempt, not only to describe past events, but in so far as possible to explain them. And the fundamentalist explanation is always the same: These events are the *magnalia dei*, God’s mighty acts breaking into human history to

accomplish his will for his people. Faith, then, is the acknowledgement of this miracle, submission to the divine will it reveals.

Needless to say, no modern secular historian or archaeologist, interested in established facts, can operate this way. It is the radical disconnect between biblical historiography (such as it is) and modern, scientific, objective, and academic study of the past that defeats a rapprochement between theology and history writing such as fundamentalism often envisions.

4.8 Faith Is Not Knowledge

In the light of this analysis, the evangelical concept of faith needs to be addressed only briefly. Faith is essentially *knowledge*; the opposite of faith is not doubt, but ignorance. Such a view is arrogant, but it masquerades as tolerance; if you only knew, like us, you *would* believe. It is the Bible, which contains all we humans need to know, that is the source of the Truth. And it is the truth about *history* that is the essence. Even a liberal Christian theologian like G. Ernest Wright (my mentor) could declare: “In biblical faith everything depends on whether the central events happened” (1952, 126–7). It is not clear whether Wright meant the faith of those who lived in biblical times, or the faith of modern would-be believers. I suspect he meant both—our belief must be congenial with the original biblical beliefs (although perhaps not identical).

The problem with viewing the Hebrew Bible primarily as a history of ancient Israel is it is nothing of the sort. In fact, there is no Hebrew word for “history” in the Hebrew Bible. There are, of course, words for “story,” declarations of happenings (as in prophetic literature). And there are genealogies (A begot B, B begot C, etc.), although they are little more than lists of names. None of this rises to the level of modern history writing. The characteristic biblical style of discourse about the past is to introduce a particular topic by saying “these are the matters pertaining to ...” The term translated as “matters” is *divrey* (from the noun *davar*, “word, thing”).

Given the presuppositions of fundamentalists discussed above, it is not surprising their typical understanding of faith—in the “biblical” and only sense—is seen as a rational response to the “facts of history” in the biblical narratives read literally. That is why the promise of archaeological “proofs” is welcome, even if providing them is a task for archaeologists.

This rationalization of Christian faith goes all the way back to the scholastic movement of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries in late medieval Europe. It began with the rediscovery of Aristotle in early universities like the University of Paris (1170–present). Hugh of Saint-Victor (1096–1141) had already declared in his *Didascalicon*: “Learn everything. Later you will see that nothing is superfluous.” Under Albertus Magnus (1200–1280) and his illustrious pupil Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the Scholastic school seemed triumphant—the distillation of 800 years of Classical-Christian wisdom regarding truth.

The aim of Scholasticism was to allow medieval philosophy to demonstrate the joining of faith with reason, so the revealed truths of Christian dogma could be explicated and defended with the aid of rational analysis. Yet within about a century, Scholasticism collapsed, partly because of the work of another great champion of reason, the British philosopher William of Ockham (1285–1349). Gradually epistemologies developed, especially classical humanism. Henceforth faith would need a new rationale.

What fundamentalists and other positivists and essentialists failed to grasp is that faith is *faith*; it is not knowledge, much less certainty. It is belief that some theological inference about “the meaning of events” is *true*. But it goes beyond that to *act as if* these things were true. Faith is belief plus action.

Faith may have some impulse in reason (“this makes sense” to me), but eventually it is supra-rational, beyond the powers of reason alone. It is intelligent in the sense of not being mindless, but it is more “emotional quotient” than “intellectual quotient.” Faith is passion. Thus, faith is essentially risk—an embrace not of what is proven, or even probable, but of what is possible, yet unknown. Ultimate faith is what the existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard called a “leap into the abyss.” It is an educated guess as to reality, a willingness to bet one’s life there *is* some truth. Faith is not revealed; it is discovered and embraced. Archaeology cannot help the individual to have the courage to attempt that voyage into the unknown; it may even seem to jeopardize the inquiry.

A final word about faith. It is indispensable. Without faith, no human effort at anything is possible. Whatever uncertainties faith implies, it is a *sine qua non* of the human condition. Even postmodernists and other nihilists, who ridicule faith as “blind,” must believe in their own pronouncements. A complete lack of faith in something would lead to insanity, the overwhelming feeling our perceptions are false, so all is chaos, the dissolution of the mind and soul.

4.9 Faith Doctrines and Archaeology

Thus far we have focused on the differences between evangelical and archaeological approaches to the essential issues. But what are the issues? And how has fundamentalism fared on the debates? Let’s look first at the Hebrew Bible or First Testament (not the “Old Testament,” a Christian caricature). There would be a general scholarly agreement on the following “fundamental” doctrines, on which there can be no compromise for scriptural fundamentalists:

- (1) *The primeval era*: The fall from grace in the garden of Eden; the restoration after Noah’s ark and the floods; the call of Abraham and the promise of the land of Canaan for his descendants, the Chosen People.

- (2) *Moses and monotheism*: The exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt; wandering in the wilderness; the giving of the law, the ark, and the covenant at Sinai; exclusive Yahwism as the norm from the outset.
- (3) *The conquest and settlement of Canaan*: A brief, pan-military conquest of all of Canaan under Joshua; Yahweh's triumphant holy war; the establishment of a 12-tribe "Israel."
- (4) *Divine Kinship*: A dynastic monarchy under divine aegis.
- (5) *Prophecy*: Yahweh's continuing protection and beneficence, or Destiny; Israel a "light to the nations."
- (6) *The Tanach*: Torah, Prophets, and Writings as divinely inspired revelation.

For the NT, the following are essential doctrines (although beyond our purview here):

- (1) Jesus' virgin birth, i.e., the incarnation; God's son Jesus as the Messiah of promise.
- (2) Jesus' miraculous public ministry as proof of his divinity.
- (3) Salvation from original sin through Jesus' blood sacrifice; God's plan for redemption, accepted by faith as grace.
- (4) Jesus' bodily resurrection into heaven, which promises salvation and eternal life to believers.
- (5) The Holy Spirit's indwelling; the church and the sacraments as the Body of Christ.
- (6) Christian triumphalism: "Unto all the world."

The questions for fundamentalists are: (a) How have these doctrines stood the test of time, and are thus legitimate as an authority for faith?; and (b) How has archaeology as an external witness helped or hindered the investigation? Here we assess only the Hebrew Bible and pertinent faith-claims (see further Dever 2017).

On point 1, archaeology can obviously say nothing whatsoever, despite persistent claims Noah's ark has finally been found. Eden is nowhere on any map. There was no universal flood. The notion of "election" is a dogma not subject to archaeological verification (and defies common sense). Abraham and the patriarchs may have been itinerant Amorites, but that is all we can say. Fundamentalists can live with this, since archaeology can neither affirm nor deny the historicity of the patriarchal narratives, and they can proceed with their own interpretation.

On point 2, there is no empirical evidence for an exodus of Semitic slaves from Egypt of biblical proportions (although we know of the presence of Asiatics in the Delta from the early twentieth century BCE onward). Nor is there any evidence for the larger-than-life Moses. Mt. Sinai has never been located, despite repeated claims. And nearly all scholars now acknowledge polytheism was prevalent throughout Israel's history until the exile and

beyond, not only in family cults but even in the Jerusalem temple and its clergy.

On point 3, there was no statistically significant military conquest of Canaan in the thirteenth–twelfth centuries BCE. The evidence is overwhelmingly in support of various “indigenous origins” models, emphasizing “long-term” social and cultural evolution from “Canaanite” to “Israelite” ethnicity. No mainstream biblicist or archaeologist any longer espouses the conquest model.

One of the major flashpoints for scriptural fundamentalists is the biblical narrative about the Hebrew exodus from Egypt and the subsequent pan-military conquest of Canaan. Is the account verifiable, i.e., is it true historically, and therefore becomes the ground of faith? Is it credible? One might attempt to answer that question in several ways, depending on (a) the nature of the available data, in this case, textual and extra biblical/archaeological; (b) the method of the inquiry; and (c) the interpretation and the predisposition of the interpreter.

With regard to the data, fundamentalists and evangelicals tend to ignore it, reject (even ridicule) it, or confront it somewhat reluctantly, then distort or more typically rationalize so as to explain it away. If, however, the essential doctrine of inerrancy is taken seriously—as it is by fundamentalists and most evangelicals—one must ask whether there *can be* any discussion of the matter. If the Bible as read literally is God’s word—a full, complete, and final revelation of Truth, accessible to the believer through the Holy Spirit—“proofs,” archaeological or other, would seem to be irrelevant. Yet most fundamentalists and evangelicals appear to be ambivalent, otherwise why would they embrace such proof when archaeology offers it (of course in their mistaken apprehension)? Is it possible that, despite their confident assertions, they have a lingering suspicion their faith is weak? Whatever the case, fundamentalists and evangelicals, despite some differences, all come out at the same place: There was a real conquest of all Canaan under Joshua. The only difference is some evangelicals like Hoffmeier (2012) and Monson (2012) have abandoned the early fifteenth century date.

On point 4, an inchoate early state or kingdom in Judah beginning in the tenth century BCE is well documented. But whether David or Solomon (or their successors) were God’s anointed is beyond archaeology’s purview. In any case, conservatives will have to live with a much more modest “state.”

On point 5, we now know a lot archaeologically about the life and times of the prophets, but beyond a “real-life” context, we can say nothing of their inspiration (although some of their predictions did come true).

Finally, on point 6, archaeology cannot comment on any claims of “divine revelation and inspiration,” except to say a literal reading of much of the Hebrew Bible as “history” is not precluded for sophisticated, modern critical readers.

Although not our principal concern here, when it comes to NT archaeology’s contribution to the narrative, it is even more minimal. What could any

conceivable archaeological discoveries, any new external information, say about the virgin birth? Miracles like raising the dead? The doctrine of blood atonement? Or bodily resurrection, paradise? The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence? These are all theological dogmas that stand or fall on their own. Archaeology cannot "confirm" them, nor does it attempt to do so.

This impasse leads us to a final consideration with regard to the "faith and history" issue aired here. To appreciate the value of the witness of archaeology to history and religious (or other) faith, we must fairly and realistically assess its potential and achievements, as some "biblical" archaeologists have done (Dever 2017; cf. 2020a, a simplified revision of the preceding, emphasizing how to retain some biblical moral principles).

4.10 Archaeological Data and Its Interpretation

When its full potential is reached as a cultural-historical discipline, modern interdisciplinary archaeology can and does contribute a good deal to historical and even to theological inquiries.

- (1) It can provide unique external data with which to complement, supplement, balance, and often correct the biblical narratives.
- (2) Archaeology can comment on putative historical events by answering fundamental questions. What likely happened? Where? When? How? Who were the principal actors (even if they remain anonymous)? What were the immediate and long-term consequences? How did a tradition develop?
- (3) Because archaeology has a unique long-term perspective, it can provide what Annales historians call *la longue durée*, a view often extending over centuries and even millennia.
- (4) Above all, archaeology reconstructs a "real-life" economic, social, and political context ("with text") for the biblical text. Thus, it illustrates what actually may have happened in history and what it can realistically come to mean for us today.
- (5) Finally, archaeology can utilize all the above potential to facilitate faith, to make it tenable and intelligent, even if not "proven." Doubts may remain, but they need not prevail.

What is it, however, archaeology, even at its best, cannot do?

- (1) Archaeology makes inferences about what may have happened in the past, but it usually cannot verify these things actually transpired (although it can occasionally prove they did not).
- (2) Archaeology can answer many of the questions posed above. But it cannot resolve the final mystery: Why? That is, it can supply proximate causes for events, but not the ultimate "uncaused cause" of philosophy and theology.
- (3) Archaeology can suggest what the original meaning of events may have been to contemporary observers, as well as alternate meanings, but it

cannot determine which (if any) is the “true” meaning. That remains a personal judgment call.

- (4) Finally, archaeology cannot create, or even decisively shape, faith. It cannot legitimize faith-based assertions, or validate any source of authority for beliefs.

We began by stating Christian fundamentalists do not really understand modern archaeology, and therefore they do not appropriate its results realistically or usefully. That charge has been amply documented, with numerous case studies on the most pertinent issues, especially the perennial “faith and history” issue.

Fundamentalists discredit archaeology by perpetuating fraudulent “discoveries”: The garden of Eden, Noah’s ark, Abraham’s migration to Canaan, Mt. Sinai and the ark of the covenant, the crossing of the Red Sea, proof of the Israelite conquest, the real location of Solomon’s temple and his fabled treasure, Jesus’ empty tomb—all these have been *found* and prove the Bible *true*.

Some fundamentalists abuse archaeology by pretending to be archaeologists, with little or no training. The “Foundation for Biblical Research,” founded by the well-known fundamentalist Bryant Wood, has dug at Khirbet Nisya (which they think is biblical Ai) and at Shiloh in the West Bank (Israel would never have given permits). Steven Collins has dug at Tell el-Hammam in Jordan (which he connects with Genesis 14) and now co-sponsors a Ph.D. program in archaeology at the Veritas International University, which he claims has a “world renowned faculty” (none of whom have “real” credentials).

In summing up, we must observe this misunderstanding is a pity. Fundamentalists ignore so much of the vast new information on ancient Israel’s history and religion that archaeology, and archaeology alone, now provides. They remain closed-minded, the hallmark of all types of fundamentalism. What do they have to fear? Nothing except the loss of their innocence.

4.11 The Contributions of Archaeology

Throughout this analysis, our discussion may have seemed negative, even derogatory. Let’s explain what is meant by now summarizing the positive effects of the “archaeological revolution” Albright promised, a revolution that has come, even if not in the way he anticipated.

- (1) We now have a far more comprehensive and accurate portrait of a “real-life,” truly historical Israel. It goes far beyond the ideal, elitist, other-worldly, sometimes imaginary “Israel” in the Hebrew Bible.
- (2) We can now reconstruct in considerable detail the lives of ordinary folk, especially marginalized individuals like women, people in whom

the biblical writers are scarcely interested given their transcendent focus. A passage in Daniel 12:2 refers to “all those who sleep in the dust.” These people too, make history. Archaeology gives a voice to all these anonymous folk.

- (3) “Ancient Israel” no longer appears as an isolated phenomenon, unique and therefore incredible in the ancient world. We have a wealth on her nearest neighbors, not only distant Egypt and Mesopotamia, long well known. Today we can draw fully fleshed-out ethnic portraits of Canaanites, Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and others in the Levant. That means Israel was not after all unique. But the portrait does allow us to underline in detail how *different* she was in comparison with her nearest neighbors. That is progress.
- (4) An actual, identifiable historical “Israel” did arise in the late thirteenth–twelfth centuries BCE in the vacuum in the eastern Mediterranean world left by the collapse of great empires. And, given the incredible odds against such a feat, the success may indeed seem miraculous.
- (5) The continuing struggle with the surviving Canaanite culture in the period of the Judges can now be documented in extraordinary detail. The book of Joshua is largely a foundation myth; but the immediately following (!) book of Judges has the ring of truth for an archaeologist on every page.
- (6) Despite the insistence of biblical and archaeological revisionists, we can now show beyond reasonable doubt there was an early if inchoate early state or kingdom in Judah in the tenth century BCE, with its capital in Jerusalem. David and Solomon are not fictional characters; and we know a lot about their actual achievements, whether they were God’s anointed or not. In particular, the biblical account of David’s war against the Philistines accords closely with the facts on the ground. He did indeed win those wars, and the Philistines were held in check along the southern coastal plain for another 400 years.
- (7) We now have ample evidence polytheism was prevalent throughout the settlement period and the monarchy, not only in faith and family religion, but even in the official cult. Yet that recognition makes the final achievement of monotheism in the exile and beyond seem even more remarkable. We can appreciate its evolution.
- (8) The Assyrian destructions of Israel in the eighth century BCE, and of Judah in the Babylonian campaigns in the early sixth century BCE, anticipated by the prophets, can now be documented in horrifying detail, thanks to archaeology. And the prophets’ promise of some sort of restoration was fulfilled. Whether inspired or not, the Hebrew prophets were astonishingly prescient.

If fundamentalists are really interested in history, they should adopt and celebrate the positive contributions of archaeology to the recovery of

so much of the reality of ancient Israel that had been lost or forgotten. We cannot unlearn what modern archaeology has taught us, nor can we close our minds to new and verifiable information about ancient Israel. Fundamentalists do indeed love the Bible. But if they insist on continuing to read it literally and naively, they will find themselves lost in nostalgia for a “biblical world” that never existed. And they may end up being among the few people still reading the Bible. Today’s pervasive skeptics will then have won.

Fundamentalism’s best ally in attempting to defeat their adversaries, the truly radical revisionists, would be to side with mainstream archaeologists. They alone possess the new data that can refute nihilism. For any rapprochement to take place, however, a productive dialogue would be required. That would necessitate, at minimum (a) genuine openness to new data, most of which would come by definition from archaeology; (b) willingness to change one’s mind when new data indicate the need; and (c) profound understanding of and respect for the other protagonist. Is such a dialogue possible? Only time will tell.

4.12 Conclusion

This discussion has focused on one theme of this book, the reaction of fundamentalists and evangelicals to external data, especially the archaeological data. In our assessment, fundamentalism in *practice* means “closed-minded.” It is therefore inadmissible as scholarship, the essence of which is an honest, open-minded inquiry. In all fairness it must be pointed out these right-of-center “sacred fundamentalists” have a close counterpart among radical leftists who may be characterized as “secular fundamentalists.” Those in both camps are extremists, whose presuppositions cannot be challenged. Thus, the European biblical revisionists either ignore the archaeological data (Philip Davies), or they distort it and even pretend to archaeological expertise (Niels Peter Lemche, Thomas Thompson, Keith Whitelam). This, too, is intellectually dishonest and reprehensible in my view. And it precludes *any* dialogue. A “neo-fundamentalist” approach, however, would be promising (see Dever 2001, 23–52; 2017, 19–58).

Some bumper stickers read: “God said it. I believe it. That settles it.” Perhaps so. But a better resolution would be to adopt an allegorical interpretation, which does not require a literal reading of the biblical narratives, yet preserves some of the writers’ original intent to inculcate ethical and moral values. The term allegory (Greek *allegorein*, “to interpret”) is an interpretive method that assumes people and events may be seen as standing for abstract realities. Thus, a literal reading may suggest larger, parallel meanings, equally valid. In my defense, one should note that allegorical readings of the biblical text have a long history in rabbinical hermeneutics, in the writings of the early and medieval church fathers, and

even among the biblical writers themselves. As James Kugel (1997, xv) puts it:

[I]t was this *interpreted* Bible—not just the stories, prophecies, and laws themselves, but these texts as they had, by now, been interpreted and explained for centuries—that came to stand at the very center of Judaism and Christianity. This is what people in both religions meant by “the Bible.”

The archaeology-driven revisionist history advocated here, combining our sources, is truly mainstream. It can help us to regain Kugel’s “center.” Whether fundamentalists and evangelicals can live with that, it is the only way forward.

Notes

- 1 For detailed discussion of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” see the introduction and Atkinson’s and Rezetko’s contributions.
- 2 This volume is a convenient source for the extended literature. Three of my former students are among the evangelical contributors (Thomas Davis, Michael Hasel, Steven Ortiz), but their contributions are not marred by theological bias. I myself, like so many in our branch of archaeology, come from a strictly fundamentalist background, and I was in my youth a Christian pastor (see Dever 2020b, 9–32).

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5 *The New York Times* and the Sensationalizing of Archaeological Stories from the Holy Land, 1920–1930

Mark Elliott¹

5.1 *The New York Times* and Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible

World War I cemented the reputation of *The New York Times* (NYT) as the U.S.'s most prominent newspaper. After the war, the *Times*' "international reputation exceeded anything known up to that time" (Berger 1951, 240). The *Times* won the Pulitzer for coverage of WWI in 1918. In 1924, *Time Magazine* wrote: "If there is a national newspaper in the U.S., it is the *Times*" (1 September 1924). As the *Times* grew in stature, conservative Bible believers were organizing their theological war against modernist interpretations of the Bible, evolution, and societal changes. The movement accelerated in the early 1920s. The term "fundamentalist" was coined in 1920 for a movement requiring its believers to battle against those who would deny doctrines of supernatural, evangelical Christianity (Marsden 2006).

During the decade of the 1920s, the *Times* provided a platform for prominent fundamentalists, such as Robert Dick Wilson of the Princeton Theological Seminary, Rev. George W. McPherson, a pastor of the Old Tent Evangelical Church of New York City, Bishop Horace M. Du Bose, a Methodist clergyman, and J. Gresham Machen, professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, who wrote and championed the tenants of fundamentalism in the *Times* (21 June 1925). The *Times* also published a piece from the former Democratic presidential candidate and anti-evolutionist, William Jennings Bryan, who wrote "God and Evolution" in 1922 (26 February).

The *Times* was willing to publish excavation results in a serious manner along with a sensational article hyping the biblical narrative. The focus of the *Times*' stories was the Old Testament (OT). "Seventy-eight per cent of all stories on archaeology in Palestine involved Old Testament sites" (Davidson 1996, 106). The primary reporter for the *Times* in Palestine was Joseph Levy, who began reporting from Palestine in 1928. Thus, a number of published stories during the decade were based on other news sources, or archaeological reports and cables rewritten by its New York reporters.

The *Times* published stories on archaeology and the Bible containing fanciful theories and false information. Articles were printed concerning the discoveries of the ark of the covenant (19 May 1927), Solomon's mummified wife in Egypt (20 January 1929), Moses' childhood ark (19 June 1927), and Genesis having been "gradually confirmed by scientific thought" (Wilson 1926). Bible scholars and archaeologists often lent a hand in sensationalizing discoveries promoting the belief archaeology proved the Bible.

It is important to acknowledge Lawrence Davidson's (1996) exceptional article on the *NYT's* reporting concerning excavations in Palestine during the decade of the 1920s. He pointed to the paper's constant romanticizing of the archaeological findings and how it served the interests of "modern day colonialism." Not only did the *Times* report on excavations confirming the "truth of the Bible," but when the *Times's* writers even mentioned Palestinian Arabs the depictions were invariably negative. The *Times* printed articles on the Bible and the function of archaeology without a caveat to the veracity of the reports. In reporting on excavations in the Near East, the *Times* might have spiced up lifeless interviews or dull pedantic field reports, for it continually used misleading headlines. One short provocative story surfaced with the headline "Professor Clears Eve of Adam's Downfall" (19 January 1920). However, closer examination revealed Stephen Langdon, professor of Assyriology at Oxford, was referring to the Mesopotamian flood story. Langdon's comment on Babylonian tablets from Nippur regarding Eve and a deluge story was "there is no mention of Eve." However, according to the article, one Babylonian story included Noah who "ate the forbidden fruit after he landed from the ark."

On October 25, 1922, a front-page headline declared "Tablet of 2100 BC Makes Adam Victim of Jealous Gods." In the body of the story, Dr. Edward Chiera, professor of Assyriology at the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago, deciphered an early Babylonian creation story, but he never mentioned Adam as part of the Babylonian myth. The professor pointed to the similarities of the Babylonian and biblical creation stories and their parallels with each other. Chiera's opinion was the Hebrews appropriated Sumerian and Babylonian creation stories. A few days later, McPherson "scoffed" at Chiera's theories (29 October 1922). The *Times* later described McPherson as a "crusading fundamentalist" who called Harry Emerson Fosdick, the well-known liberal and professor at Union Theological Seminary, a "baboon" booster for supporting evolution (28 September 1956). The reverend strenuously objected to Chiera's interpretation of these Babylonian myths. He was quoted extensively in the article as arguing for the authentic Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and for the Genesis account being written long before the Babylonian myth. For McPherson, the "history of the fall of Genesis" dated "thousands of years before the Babylonian record." The Genesis story "was passed on age to age from the beginning." The Babylonian flood story was "debased and mythical" and lacked the higher ideals of the Bible. McPherson was confident "Genesis stands unshaken" (29 October

1922). In a letter to the editor, an unnamed author likened McPherson's analysis to Greek and Latin being derived from English (12 November 1922).

5.2 Beth Shan and the Biblical Philistines

The *Times* followed the excavation at Beth Shan eagerly. Dr. Clarence S. Fisher, director at Beth Shan (1921–1923), was often ready with a tantalizing interpretation of the dig. Before the excavation began, the *Times* reported Fisher would be looking for the iron chariots used to prevent the children of Israel from conquering Beth Shan (12 May 1921). Then two years later, an intriguing article appeared entitled “Dr. Fisher Unearths Data on the Exodus.” Fisher had just returned to New York City after spending two and a half years in Palestine and Egypt and “brought back with him several cases filled with photographs, documents, plans and rare antiquities found in the ancient rock tombs of Egyptian nobles.” Fisher stated he had uncovered a stele of Ramesses II and claimed his finds at Beth Shan had “proved that his son Merneptah was undoubtedly the Pharaoh of the Exodus.” Though the discovery of the famous stele was important, Fisher actually uncovered no data on the exodus, and he did not explain how the stele proved the son of Ramesses II, Merneptah, was the pharaoh of the exodus. Instead, most of the article informed readers of Fisher's views concerning the excavation of the temple of Merneptah in Egypt, the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, the Cairo museum and antiquities, and Zionist-Palestinian issues (3 December 1923).

In later stories on Beth Shan, *Times*' editors exaggerated the possibilities the Bible had been confirmed. On November 16, 1925, on the front page the *Times* announced, “Find Philistine Fort Burned by David for Death of King Saul ... Bible History Confirmed, Monument of Rameses II Tells of Hebrews' Sojourn and of Early Religions.” The following year the “Ruins of Temple Bear out Bible” was published on August 9, 1926, and in “Canaanite Citadel Is Bared at Beisan” (10 December 1928), buried on p. 29, evidence surfaced of a model chariot as mentioned in Joshua. In the 1925 story, a number of details about the excavation were discussed. A fort had been excavated, and Alan Rowe, director of the excavation (1925–1928), identified it as the very fort where Saul's body had been hanged. Readers were also led to believe the discovery of the Ramesses II stele at Beth Shan verified the exodus. The article stated the Ramesses II monument “tells of his capture of certain Semites and of his use of them to build cities for him, confirming the account in Exodus.” Yet, nowhere in the article did Rowe say this or anything else about an exodus. Actually, Rowe would write just the opposite about the inscription on the stele a few years later in *The Museum Journal* (1929, 95):

It has frequently been stated elsewhere that the stela here described refers to the building of the city of “Raamses” of *Exodus*, i, 11, but this

is not so. The text contains no mention whatever of any such building operations, nor of the Israelites, although it certainly does contain a reference to the famous Delta town of Raamses (Per-Ramessu).

The Beth Shan articles described the destruction of a number of temples built by the Canaanites and used by Egyptians and Philistines. Rowe highlighted the excavated burned Philistine temple dedicated to the goddess Ashtaroth, which was none other than the “House of Ashtaroth” mentioned in 1 Samuel 31:10. This temple was rebuilt over an earlier temple (16 November 1925). And the next year a second temple was discovered as a temple to Baal (9 August 1926). Important facts were brought to light confirming certain biblical statements regarding the town of Beth Shan under the rule of the Philistines, according to Rowe. The Philistines and other Aegean mercenaries ruled Beth Shan at the time of King Saul’s death about 1020 BCE. As for David burning down Beth Shan, according to Rowe, David “seems” to have driven out the Philistines and “was probably” responsible for the partial destruction of the temple, and “must surely” have established another sanctuary. And as for the chariot model mentioned in the 1928 article (10 December), Rowe claimed his excavations not only substantiated certain Egyptian inscriptions but also “passages from the book of Joshua.” What was the archaeological evidence for Joshua? A “pottery model (a drawn image on pottery) of a two-horse chariot” was simply linked by Rowe with Joshua 17:16, which stated “Canaanites who live in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel.” There was no discussion on its discovery or meaning in any context. Years later, Amihai Mazar reexcavated Iron Age Beth Shan and said there were hardly any Philistine finds there:

The finds from this period contain no traces of Philistine presence in the town. The biblical account of the death of Saul at best related to an historical event in which the Philistine forces carried out a military campaign from Philistia to the Gilboa and the Beth-Shean Valley, but never occupied this region for any length of time.

(1997, 73)

Perhaps some Philistines lived in Beth Shan, but their numbers must have been quite insignificant. As for the Beth Shan temple destruction in the tenth century during the period of David, Mazar refrained from speculating who destroyed this temple in his 1997 article; however, in an earlier piece he suggested it *might* have been destroyed by King David, “who perhaps destroyed other cities in northern Philistia, in the Valley of Jezreel and in the Land of Geshur” (1993, 229).

In the last major article in the decade on the excavation, the headline contained nothing on the Bible. “Ancient History in Beisan Mound” was

published on December 29, 1929. As part of the excavation of Beth Shan, Rowe recounted the biblical story of Saul's death. Rowe now, without any hesitation, stated the young "poet-warrior" David "sallied forth" and destroyed the citadel of the Philistines, because it could thoroughly be seen in the debris. A Mrs. Dunn, a docent from the Museum of Pennsylvania, provided more details from the excavation. She maintained the new temple must have been David's work. And the King must have established a sanctuary or tabernacle at Beth Shan. Despite these possibilities, the Bible never directly credits David for the destruction of Beth Shan or the temple. It is unclear how the Israelites captured the site.

5.3 City of David in Jerusalem

R.A.S. Macalister, professor of Celtic archaeology (1909–1943) at University College Dublin, a veteran archaeologist who had excavated Gezer, was followed closely by the *Times* in his excavation at the City of David in Jerusalem. One short story announced, "Hunt for Jewish Tablets." Though there was no evidence of tablets, the excavation *hoped* to uncover correspondence tablets between "Israelites of Egypt and the neighboring cities" (2 March 1923). Another short piece declared "Find King David's Citadel," but actually Macalister indicated the "Millo" could have been a tower or a dam. It was clear he really did not know what the structure was (23 November 1923). Another dubious story asserted Macalister excavated a trench dating to "2000 BC, or possibly 3000 BC." The steps of the trench dated "before the time of Abraham" and amazingly Macalister insisted "the results of the digging ... removes the last shred of doubt that we have penetrated into the city of Melchizedek [the priest who blessed Abram in Genesis 14:18]" (22 April 1924).

A story on the discovery of Absalom's tomb, David's son, "Tombs of Bible Heroes Are Unearthed: Archaeologists in Palestine Find Burial Places of Jehoshaphat and Absalom," would not fail to impress the public (16 November 1924). Readers were informed of the exciting news the tombs of Absalom, Jehoshaphat, and Zechariah had been excavated. The article described Absalom's biblical deeds, a few details on the architecture of the tombs, and the opposition by the Jewish orthodox community to the dig. But nowhere in the article was Nachum Slousch, the lead archaeologist, quoted as stating these tombs were actually those of Absalom, Jehoshaphat, and Zechariah because the tombs had nothing to do with the revered biblical characters. Though the article quoted Macalister, there was no mention he had concluded the tombs dated to the Hasmonean period (1900, 59). Slousch (1925) had also dated the tombs to the Hellenistic period. The tombs were built for Jerusalem's richest, most influential families long after the period of these biblical heroes.

5.4 Serabit el Khadem and Moses

One of the most sensational stories of the decade appeared on the front page on October 20, 1925. The headline announced “Tribute by Moses to Rescuer Found.” A Dr. Grimme of the University of Münster stated he had deciphered the following inscription from photographs taken by W.M.F. Petrie at Serabit el Khadem, a turquoise mine in the Sinai Desert, which the *Times* identified as Mt. Sinai!: “I, Manasse, mountain chief and head priest of the temple that Pharaoh Hiachepsut for having drawn me out of the Nile and helped me to attain high dignities.” The *Times* further reported Grimme’s extraordinary discovery answered “the question as to which hill on the Sinai Peninsula was Mount Sinai of the Bible.” Five days later, buried in the back of the newspaper on p. 29, was Petrie’s one line response disagreeing with the professor’s decipherment. The article was only two paragraphs and provided no details of Petrie’s analysis (25 October 1925). No doubt many people read the front-page story, but few saw Petrie’s reply. Though scholars contested Grimme’s contentions, his decipherments became famous in the press as the “Moses inscriptions” (Lake, Blake, and Butin 1928).

5.5 Babylonian Tablets and Mosaic Authorship

The *Times* turned to several fundamentalists for insightful analyses regarding archaeological evidence and the Bible. Princeton’s R.D. Wilson argued recent archaeological discoveries of Babylonian tablets demonstrated the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. According to Wilson, these tablets proved the Hebrew language dated to the time of Moses and was utilized by him in writing the Pentateuch. Another point of evidence resonating with Wilson for Mosaic authorship was the laws of Moses demand a single originator, as the idea of God which Moses had as the source of his thoughts and laws (25 March 1924). In 1926, “The Spade Confirms the Bible” (22 August) was written by Philip Whitwell (P.W.) Wilson, a former member of the British Parliament and a writer for the *Times* for two decades. Wilson had been adroitly analyzing the *Times*’ articles on archaeology and the Bible. He mentioned a number of archaeologists and their purported evidence such as Woolley, a Colonel Hagen attached to Allenby, Albright, Grimme, Bade, Fisher, Breasted, Macalister, and others. Among the biblical topics appealing to Wilson were the creation story in the book of Genesis that he believed had been substantiated by science; the flood story that was confirmed by a host of other cultures in Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Easter Island, and Hawaii; the Mosque of Machpelah that fit precisely with the cave purchased by Abraham; the actual wall of the city of Melchizedek discovered in Jerusalem; and broken tablets identified as the Ten Commandments. The author did exhibit some restraint by noting the mystery of Jonah’s whale, as yet, had no solution.

5.6 Shechem and Jacob

In the same year, Du Bose, a supporter of the fundamentalist movement, wrote a series of articles regarding the excavation at Shechem. Du Bose, an American sponsor for the expedition, hoped the dig would uncover Joseph's mummy, or a tablet written by Jacob, or the teraphim stolen by Rachel from her father, Laban (4 April 1926). Du Bose also hoped to discover "evidence of the historical authenticity of the patriarch Abraham and conclusive proof of other truths of Old Testament history." The excavation at Shechem could corroborate the authenticity of Moses, Abraham, and Jacob. The archaeologists led by professor Ernst Sellin of the University of Berlin still believed proof of all this existed in the "civilization heaps" at the site. Du Bose was especially keen in overturning German Bible critics whose theories on OT history and religion prevailed in theological schools in the Old and New Worlds. He envisioned archaeology as the tool to supersede the hypothesis of biblical criticism. For Du Bose and the excavators, the site was the "most important spot on the earth for Old Testament history and tradition." Five months later, the *Times* published Du Bose's "Bible Tales Verified by Ruins of Shechem: Excavations Bring Evidence of Jacob's Residence in Oldest City Uncovered in Palestine" (22 August 1926). Du Bose said validation of Bible stories relating the history of Abraham and Jacob to the Canaanite city had occurred. "The main problem of the Old Testament criticism" was solved, and the "historical position of Moses and the Pentateuch" had been "settled with it." Du Bose described some of the archaeological evidence discovered were the foundation of a palace, a drainage system, pottery, a bronze sword, and gold jewelry. He lauded Canaanite engineering skills. The excavation dealt biblical critics a severe blow. According to Du Bose, the demise of OT criticism rested with a discovery of an ancient well he associated with Jacob, the identification of Belata-Sichem as Shechem, and the existence of destruction debris. Du Bose surmised that evidence of Shechem's destruction should date to the period of the patriarchs corresponding with the biblical account of the "sacking of the city by the sons of Jacob." He insisted the excavation at Shechem had somehow supported the historicity of a number of OT tales, when actually little of his audacious assertions concerning Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and the Pentateuch were validated by this excavation.

5.7 Megiddo, Site of Armageddon

The first excavation of Megiddo, known in the New Testament as Armageddon (Revelation 16:16), was led by Gottlieb Schumacher, an American-born architect from Haifa. Schumacher led the excavation during 1903–1905, which was supported by the German Oriental Society. The name Armageddon would attract the interest of Bible readers, for it was considered the site where the final battle at the end of days would be fought.

Schumacher published one of two early volumes on Megiddo in 1908, and the second volume was published by Carl Watzinger in 1929. In 1925, James H. Breasted, director of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, resumed the excavation of Megiddo with support and funds from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The excavations continued until 1939 under the direction of Clarence S. Fisher, P.L.O. Guy, and Gordon Loud. A series of small excavations took place in 1960, 1961, 1966, 1967, and 1971 under the direction of Yigal Yadin. In 1994, Tel Aviv University began a new excavation, still ongoing, and headed by Israel Finkelstein.²

It appears the *Times* never reported on the excavation at Megiddo for the first two decades of the twentieth century. An article was published to explain Theodore Roosevelt's phrase "standing at Armageddon" (Roosevelt actually said "we stand at Armageddon") delivered at the Progressive Party convention in 1912 (11 August). It was a significant one-page article reciting only biblical stories but never indicated an excavation had taken place at Megiddo, the site of "this terrific final struggle."

Though the initial surveying of the site did not begin until 1925 (Cline 2020, 24), readers encountered articles on Megiddo/Armageddon throughout the early 1920s. They read about Rockefeller's generous sponsorship of the excavation, the building of the Jerusalem Museum, and even his visit to Megiddo (2 July 1921; Levy, 15 January 1928; 28 January 1929). Articles on General Edmund Allenby always seemed to highlight his battle at Megiddo during WWI, "Allenby of Megiddo" (18 March 1925), often describing his tactics as imitating the famous Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III's attack on Megiddo in ca. 1479 (25 March 1923). In 1925, the *Times* noted that Fisher was traveling to the site to begin the excavation financed by Rockefeller (24 July 1925 [a]). Megiddo was referred to as the "archaeological investigation that was within 400 miles of the Garden of Eden." On the same day, an editorial stated the excavation was not simply a "scholarly curiosity" but "all humanity had a concern" of what will come. The brief piece ended by disparaging William Jennings Bryan for not listening to archaeologists, geologists, and scientists (24 July 1925 [b]).

A more informative article was written by John H. Finely, "Exploring Armageddon's Great Secrets" (1925). Finely had an established academic career including a presidency at College of the City of New York and as a *Times* editor beginning in 1921 and had actually visited Palestine during Allenby's WWI campaign. Under Finely's editorial guidance, as Jerold Auerbach (2019, 16) pointed out, "criticism of Zionism was a staple of *Times* coverage." This editorial viewpoint merged perfectly with the owner of the *Times*, Adolph S. Ochs, who openly identified himself as anti-Zionist. This was reflected in the pages of the paper and the editorials from Ochs' purchase of the paper in 1896 and throughout the 1920s and beyond. Ochs' aversion to Zionism and his discomfort in identifying the paper as Jewish were passed on to his son-in-law Arthur H. Sulzberger (Auerbach 2019, 1–55). Finely's article contained some flowery verbiage in recounting biblical

stories, but he traced the history of Megiddo without the conservative impulse to prove every biblical tale. He appeared to extensively quote from George Adam Smith's *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894) and a Breasted letter on the excavation and archaeological data of the site. Finley's article was a capable example of how to present the archaeological news from Palestine devoid of the sensationalized headlines and stories regularly surfacing elsewhere in the *Times*.

In 1926, Breasted reported in "Armageddon Mound Yields Relic of Past" that workmen found an Egyptian hieroglyphic fragment while collecting material for an expedition house (8 April). The fragment was part of a victory stele and revealed an inscription with the name "King Shashanq" (Sheshonq). This short article provided very little information on the importance of the find. Just a short remark appeared that if all the fragments were found, they might verify Shashanq's (Shishak in 1 Kings 14:25) capture of Jerusalem in the tenth century as narrated in the OT. Readers were informed the Shashanq victory relief at Karnak in Egypt specifically mentioned an attack against Israel and the capture of Megiddo. The Megiddo team and other archaeologists in Palestine recognized the magnitude of the fragment, which correlated with an event in the Bible. However, the article provided only the briefest details, and it is difficult to determine what the readers would have understood concerning the significance of this historic discovery (Cline 2020, 30–3).

It appears the *Times* did not view the excavation of Megiddo with the same enthusiasm of other archaeological projects. Even the major stories containing relevant information about Megiddo were hard to find amid the thousands of other stories. In 1928, Levy wrote "Tells of Research in the Near East: Professor Breasted Explains Archaeological Work Under Rockefeller Fund about the Arrival." He described that Breasted was in Palestine concerning the building of the museum in Jerusalem sponsored by Rockefeller's gift of \$2 million. The article discussed in detail the work of the Oriental Institute in Egypt unearthing the royal dwelling of Ramesses III, Nile terraces, and copying Egyptian texts inscribed on coffins. The Institute's excavations in Asia Minor on Hittite sites were also mentioned. As for Megiddo, the article contained no relevant information on the excavation. Levy wrote "reports have been issued that great discoveries have been made there, just what has been found has never been published hitherto" (29 April 1928). The article ended with a short paragraph on the discovery of an Egyptian cylinder seal at the site.

In the same year (1928), a series of articles reported on the important uncovering of stables. In "Armageddon Bared by Exploring Party" (9 August), Breasted was quoted describing the discovery of the stables of King Solomon reflecting the biblical verse of the chariot cities of 1 Kings 10:26. A short description of the discovered stables was included in the Breasted statement. Biblical depictions of Solomon were referenced throughout as a successful merchant, horse dealer, who secured Egyptian thoroughbreds

through the marriage of his daughter. Much of Breasted's comments came from a "dispatch" from P.L.O. Guy, director at the Megiddo excavation. Breasted referenced the biblical story of King Solomon engaged in massive building projects, rebuilding Jerusalem, the capital, and Hatzor, Megiddo, and Gezer (1 Kings 9:15). The article was indeed an important announcement, but it was buried on p. 22, next to the radio schedule and resort ads. A short editorial followed noting Breasted's find of Solomon's stables. The *Times*' editors implied the stables now testified to Solomon as author of 3,000 proverbs and songs and as a great breeder of horses (11 August 1928). During the decade, the *Times*' editorial page was a compilation of a number of editorials and other news items, many only four to five paragraphs or fewer and letters to the editor. And on this day, the editorial was just one of nine editorials and could have been easily overlooked.

On August 26, 1928, P.W. Wilson excitedly recounted biblical legends in "Digging up the 'Glory' of King Solomon. Excavations at Megiddo Recall the Splendor of the Monarch Who Was Also a Poet and a Philosopher." The length of this story was a page and a half. The discovery of the stables was a vehicle to launch into a recitation of Bible stories on great King Solomon. The archaeological excavation was basically ignored. Wilson, employing his scintillating rhetoric, recalled Solomon's palaces, temples, gold plating, and ivory throne. None was so wise as Solomon. Wilson even evoked the tale of the Queen of Sheba's goat hoof as a foot. He confidently noted Solomon's involvement in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs "that is conceded by critical scholarship." In the end, Wilson's pronouncements were more suitable for a Sunday school lesson than a serious piece of reporting. As for the stables, it appears Guy erroneously dated the strata and the building, thus the stables had nothing to do with Solomon. There has been some discussion that the stables were actually storehouses or barracks for soldiers (Cline 2020, 89). Most archaeologists date the stables later than Solomon, perhaps a century later to Kings Omri and Ahab, or even as late as the reign of Jeroboam II, ca. 786–746 BCE (Franklin 2017).

For the rest of the decade, news on the archaeological excavation at Megiddo was indeed scarce. The decade closed with two articles on the purchase of Armageddon: "Armageddon Battlefield Bought for \$3,500 From an American Widow for Exploration" was published on the front page (1 December 1930), and "Ancient Armageddon Plain Comes into American Hands" (14 December 1930) a few days later. Only the December 1 story mentioned the seller as the "widow of Laurence Oliphant" (Rosamond Dale Owen Oliphant Templeton). Neither story had any pertinent information on the excavation, except a short note on the discovery of Solomon's stables (1 December) and a brief observation that the excavation began in 1903 and still continued (14 December). Rather than comment on the archaeological results, Breasted stated the acquisition "paralleled the purchase of Manhattan Island by Peter Minuit 314 years ago from the redskins for \$24" (1 December). The *Times* provided minimal details on the campaigns of

Allenby, Tuthmose III, and Napoleon, as well as Rockefeller's substantial gifts and simply glossed over the excavation.

5.8 Leonard Woolley and Abraham of Ur of the Chaldees

One of the decade's most notable stories was the legendary excavation of Ur in southern Iraq on the banks of the Euphrates River (modern Tell al-Muqayyar). This extraordinary excavation was led by the famous British archaeologist Leonard Woolley (1880–1960), who had worked in North Africa and the Middle East. The *Times* followed Woolley's famous excavation during 1922–1934. The expedition was sponsored jointly by the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania. Woolley and his colleagues unearthed thousands of ancient graves, texts, and tens of thousands of artifacts, including jewelry, weapons, and other items made of gold, silver, copper, and lapis lazuli. "He took over 2,000 photographs and wrote nearly 20,000 pages of notes, not including letters and reports." He uncovered tombs belonging to Sumerian royalty, "temples, administrative buildings, and private houses" (British Museum and Penn Museum).

From the beginning of the *Times*' earliest articles, Ur was referred to as "Ur of the Chaldees, the ancestral home of the Patriarch Abraham" (18 September 1922), "home of Abraham in Babylonia" (21 February 1923), "Ur, which is known in the Bible as 'Ur of the Chaldees,' and is the traditional home of Abraham" (22 February 1923), "and Ur is the city of Abraham, according to the Bible" (11 March 1923). These early articles often quoted Dr. George B. Gordon, director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia and co-sponsor of the excavations at Ur, who had a habit of inserting Bible references in reporting on the progress of the excavation. Gordon wrote press releases for years on Ur, always touting the biblical angle. In addition, Woolley was never shy about accentuating the site's biblical traditions, especially those linked to Ur, the birthplace of the patriarch Abraham. His excavation of Ur was also followed closely by the press in Great Britain (Millerman 2015, 145). He was excellent at communicating his discoveries to an outside world by writing about them in newspapers, academic journals, and books. Beginning in 1924, Woolley regularly appeared on the BBC (Thornton 2018, 43). In his popular books, Woolley identified Ur with Abraham. He used such phrases as "a private house at Ur in the time of Abraham," "the private houses of Abraham's date" (1930, 59–60), "home of Abraham" (1954, 12), "restoration of a house at the time of Abraham" (1954, 86), "houses from the time of Abraham" (1954, 125), and "life in the city of Abraham" (1954, 131).

It should be noted articles were published in the *Times* on Ur, some appearing on the front pages, never mentioning the Bible, such as "Ur Archaeologists Hail Greatest Find, 4200 Year-Slab" (15 April 1925), "Ur King's Retainers Found in His Grave" (12 January 1928), and "Find Oldest Tomb Known of Ur King" (12 March 1928). Yet, the excavation at Ur

was still identified with “Abraham,” and often referred to as “Ur of the Chaldees” or “home of Abraham.”

On May 18, 1923, Woolley wrote “Tells Discoveries at Ur of the Chaldea.” The subheading declared “Links It To Bible Story.” Yet the entire article, nearly a column and a half, had nothing to do with the Bible except one obscure point. Woolley described Nebuchadnezzar’s remodeling of the temple at Ur allowing the people to view the altar and statue of the god. And in one sentence, Woolley mentioned it would be tempting to connect these renovations to the OT story of Nebuchadnezzar setting up a statue and the people worshipping it at the sound of a trumpet. Woolley was presumably referring to the story in Daniel 3. The article was inconspicuously printed on p. 28 in a section of the *Times* entitled “Amusements” next to a column of “Lost and Found” and a much larger advertisement of “Hotels and Restaurants.”

In the coming years, more stories on Ur referenced Genesis tales, whether warranted or not. *Times*’ readers were amazed to read headlines indicating Woolley’s excavation had uncovered information on the famous Tower of Babel: “Great Brick Temple Unearthed at Ur, Was Built Like Babel to Reach the Gods” (13 May 1924), “Ruins at Ur Reveal How Babel Looked” (9 June 1924), and “Finds Records at Ur of Tower of Babel” (28 April 1925). On closer examination the headlines were misleading, the stories often making inconsequential remarks on the tower. The lone comment on the tower in “Great Brick” was every important city in Mesopotamia had its ziggurat “counterpart of the Tower of Babel” (13 May 1924). And in another article, the Ziggurat of Ur gave us only an idea of the Tower of Babel’s appearance. More interesting was Woolley’s quote “when Abraham lived at Ur he looked up daily at the Ziggurat” (9 June 1924). The most deceptive piece was “Finds Records at Ur of Tower of Babel.” Gordon was quoted as stating a carved monument was found describing the Tower of Babel. This led to his imaginative interpretation that “every new discovery in Bible lands, lends support to the Bible story.” Support is given even to the “Book of Genesis.” The ziggurat demonstrated the “building of the Tower of Babel.” The story might not have resonated with the editors, for it was buried on p. 19 published right above “Today’s Radio Program” and near several columns of auto sales. Gordon must have been referring to an article concerning Ur’s ziggurat printed a few weeks earlier on April 15, 1925. This story was published on the front page, “Ur Archaeologists Hail Greatest Find, 4200 Year-Slab.” Based on an article from the *London Times*, Woolley was quoted extensively about a stele (Gordon’s slab) describing among other things the building of the ziggurat at Ur. But unlike Gordon, nowhere in the article did Woolley mention the Tower of Babel or any other biblical allusions.

In 1925, an article described the collapse of Ur during the time of Abraham, “Thinks War Drove Abraham From Ur” (8 February), and the Lord’s command to Abraham in Genesis to depart the city. This was based

on a report by Woolley and a letter by Gordon. It is difficult to determine who was being quoted. The archaeological evidence of the collapse of the city was mixed with snippets from Genesis. For example, the Lord commanded Abraham to depart “thy country” during the chaos. There was a possibility Abraham was “compelled to leave Ur when the city was sacked by the Elamite invaders.” Despite the biblical illusions, most of the story described how Ur was rebuilt over thousands of years. In 1926, a surprising headline stated, “Dig Up ‘Noah’s Ark’ of 3000 BC at Ur” (4 January). But the article disappointed those who eagerly sought information on the ark. Woolley said the expedition uncovered an alabaster relief of a boat fashioned from reeds. Various animals were visible such as carved statues of rams, a boar, and a goose. According to Woolley we “christened it ‘Noah’s Ark.’”

In 1929, the *Times* published a series of major stories announcing Woolley had discovered remarkable evidence of “the Biblical flood.” Excavating the graves at Ur, Woolley noted a thick layer of silt separating the graves. This silt level was nearly 12 feet thick and interpreted by Woolley as the actual remains of Noah’s flood. The headlines announced, “Geologist Confirms Bible Story; Prof. Woolley Returns From Ur in Mesopotamia With Proof of Deluge Before 4000 BC.” (16 March), “Discoveries at Ur Show New Abraham” (17 March), “The Noachian Flood” (18 March), and “Woolley Explains Bible Flood Study” (19 March). In one article Woolley stated, “We are not out to prove anything or disprove anything ... If we were, we would be bad archaeologists.” Then he further described the level at Ur as the flood of the Sumerian legend and “the Book of Genesis,” both based on the same historical event (16 March). In an editorial, the *Times* speculated that preflood utensils were “presumably made by the Nephilim.” The story alluded to the “pillars of Enoch” and Noachian survivors, who “confounded speech of Babel and the scattering of mankind” (18 March). In the March 17 article, Woolley affirmed the evidence at Ur was linked with the biblical deluge, then focused on the many parallels of the Ur excavation to biblical traditions. In his imaginative and colorful style, Woolley said Abraham was not an “ignorant, wandering, nomadic Bedouin.” He lived in a great urban setting and was actually “a trader and a prosperous one.” Abraham probably left Ur “because business was bad.” Parallels and customs from Ur helped in understanding Sarah’s banishment of Hagar, the book of Daniel, women who wove in the temple of Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:7), judges and sacrifices, Jacob’s dream “of ladders to heaven,” and Abraham’s sacrifice of his son. Leaving aside whether Abraham ever existed, or any period of Ur’s history can ever be linked with Genesis, Woolley always seemed to turn various details of his excavation in favor of the Bible. A day later on March 19, at a reception at Oxford University, the *Times* reported Woolley told a group he was a scientist primarily interested in the history of the human race rather than Bible history. He was not interested in proving or disproving the Bible; he was interested not only in the “Biblical version of the history of Ur of the Chaldees but the Sumerian and Babylonian versions

concerning it.” He then informed his Oxford guests he was “satisfied” the evidence of the flood was noticed while “the Bible was being assailed by evolutionists in the courts of Tennessee,” presumably referring to the famous Scopes trial.

For the rest of the decade the *Times* published a number of stories on Ur. It appears few of them had any pertinent information on Ur and Woolley’s biblical claims. Woolley’s flood was only one of the numerous floods of the Euphrates. Flood levels were noted throughout the area “not all of the same date, indicating the possibility there had been a number of localized floods rather than one huge inundation” (Crawford 2015, 24). Woolley’s flood may have been one of the many floods that inspired the Sumerian flood legend and entered the Genesis story, but, then again, most likely it may have had nothing to do with it.

5.9 William F. Albright, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Tell Beit Mirsim

William F. Albright’s role in propagating archaeology proves the Bible in the *Times* was minimal. The *Times* covered many of Albright’s excavations, Tell el-Ful, Bad ed-Dhra, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Bethel, and the general tenor of his remarks was serious and analytical. When the *Times* reported on an expedition searching for Sodom and Gomorrah and the “manner of their destruction,” there were no quotations from Albright about his survey regarding the hunt for Lot’s wife or confirming the biblical record (28 March 1924). Two months later, in “Sodom in the Dead Sea, Explorers Decide,” the *Times* used Albright’s April 1924 *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (BASOR) article extensively, which stated Sodom and Gomorrah were probably submerged under the Dead Sea and there was perhaps a link between Bad ed-Dhra, a possible sanctuary or cultic site, and the biblical cities (25 May 1924).

In the *Times*’ reporting on Tell Beit Mirsim, wild interpretations surfaced. On p. 1, the headline stated, “Ruins Yield Proof of Biblical Records,” and the subheading informed the reader “Head of Expedition Brings Back Evidence Confirming Writings in the Book of Joshua” (19 July 1926). The spokesperson was the ultraconservative Melvin Grove Kyle, who more than any other writer or archaeologist during the first decades of the twentieth century energetically employed archaeology in defending the veracity of Scripture. Kyle (1912, 1917) was hopelessly compromised by his fundamentalist views, which he merged with his archaeology. Though Albright was co-sponsor of the dig, Kyle never mentioned his colleague’s name. Kyle asserted the dig at Kiriath Sepher, also known as Tell Beit Mirsim, corroborated Israelite history from the conquest to the exile. The exile was described, most likely by the *Times* reporter and not Kyle, as the “Exodus in 600 BC when the inhabitants were driven out by the Assyrian King.” Kyle implied the expedition’s discovery of the city’s surviving walls

and water system, plus destruction debris caused by Othniel, confirmed the book of Joshua.

In 1930, the *Times* reported a limestone-carved statue of a crouching lion was discovered in a heap of rubble at Tell Beit Mirsim. The *Times* subheadline declared “American Expedition Finds Lion Statue 3,000 Years Old on the Site of Abraham’s Home.” Albright is quoted as calling the find the “most outstanding object of archaeological and historical interest ever discovered in Palestine proper” (27 August). Albright believed the lion might have been “one of a pair which flanked a throne or more probably supported the seat of an ancient Canaanite idol.” Father Louis-Hugues Vincent endorsed Albright’s description as “one of the most outstanding finds he had seen.” Neither scholar had anything to say about Abraham or his home.

The *BASOR* publications on Tell Beit Mirsim written by Albright (1930a) revolutionized the study of pottery chronology for biblical archaeologists and scholars. Tell Beit Mirsim stood out as one of Albright’s great achievements. His comparative ceramic classification became the standard for the relative chronology for biblical Palestine until revised decades later. However, when Dever wrote a 1992 article for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (“Beit Mirsim, Tell”), he was shocked to learn “that nearly every major stratum has to be completely redone,” the result of Albright’s “*basic flaws* in stratigraphy and in critical judgment” (1993, 31; cf. Blakely and Hardin 2002).

In 1928, two dubious stories were published focusing on Kiriath Sepher/Tell Beit Mirsim (Wilson, 3 June; Levy, 24 June). The article of June 3 written by P.W. Wilson was sprinkled with tales of Moses, spies, Joshua’s attack on Kiriath Sepher and “the cave of Machpelah, in which the untouched tombs of Abraham and of the patriarchs are still guarded.” Much of the rest of the article was spent recalling biblical stories about Caleb, Achsah, Othniel, Saul, and the Philistines. Nowhere is Albright quoted. The tone in Levy’s June 24 article was much different. Albright was mentioned, along with Kyle, as supervising the dig. Levy wrote about the excavation and his article contained a number of details representing the excavation in a thoughtful manner. Though the article contained a recitation of the “romantic tales” of Joshua and some of the judges, the vast majority of the piece commented on houses, dating of strata, pottery style, jars, seals, figurines, inscriptions, walls, and fortifications. In a discordant note, Levy asserted evidence of “a bas-relief, a deity, erect, with a snake coiled around its legs” obviously indicated that every “discovery bearing on Canaanite religion makes the vast superiority of Israelite religion clearer.” Though Levy’s story was informative, he never cautioned the reader this excavation did not prove Joshua actually attacked the city or the details in the Bible were validated. In fact, his ending sentence did the opposite: “It may be added that all of the discoveries so far made fit into the picture as presented by the Bible, which becomes more vivid and intelligible than ever.”

A significant advance in the *Times*' reporting on archaeology and the Bible was "Ancient Palestine Yields Many Relics" (16 September 1928). The author was listed as director of the American School of Archaeology, certainly Albright. It was one of the best articles on the subject of archaeology in Palestine written during the decade. Albright wrote the "Bible is a textbook of religion, and not of history." He reviewed the American contribution to the archaeological work in the Holy Land and also described the British, French, and German schools of archaeology along with Hebrew University excavations. He briefly described the archaeological activity at Beth Shan, Megiddo, Beit Mirsim, Tell En-Nesbeh, Beth Shemesh, Jerash, Jerusalem, Tell Jemmeh, Jaffa, and Shechem. Interestingly, there was even a plea to the "Jews of the world" to pay attention to the antiquities of Palestine. Outside of "where Abraham pitched his encampment," the biblical presentation of events was limited, and, in most cases, the archaeological data were objectively presented. Albright introduced a realistic account of the archaeological work in Palestine free of exaggerated claims and fantasies that too often appeared in the newspaper's stories.

Albright unlike Kyle was measured and careful in his analysis of archaeological data pertaining to the Bible. However, despite his insightful article written in 1928 (16 September), the *Times* published a story in 1929 linking Albright with the discovery of questionable evidence verifying biblical stories and characters. In "Bible Sites Found by Archaeologist: Prof. Albright Identifies Ruins of Jonah's Home Town and Place Where Joshua Routed Foes," the subheading also proclaimed "Support For Genesis" and "The Topography of Fourteenth Chapter Upheld by the Discovery of Ham and Other Landmarks" (5 May 1929). Few details were offered on how Albright located these sites. In the article, Albright proclaimed the discovery of Gath-Hepher and identified Meiron as "a site of the battle in which Joshua defeated the coalition of the kings of Galilee." The article stated:

The most remarkable finds in Transjordanian number important early Canaanite sites of the pre-Patriarchal Age. The fourteenth chapter of Genesis describes the invasion of the Palestine confederacy by Mesopotamian Kings during the time of Abraham ... Radical scholars denied its historicity, thus questioning the general reliability of Genesis, but the new discoveries go far to confirm it.

The article did not quote Albright. It described a "Special Cable" the *Times* received based on an Albright exploration. Though some of these claims were impossible, the article certainly reflected Albright's (1930b) philosophy that much of the evidence from archaeology could establish the Bible's accuracy, especially the background of the patriarchal narratives. Undoubtedly, readers would be left with the impression archaeologists had discovered data verifying Genesis events and possibly people such as Lot and Abraham mentioned in the article.

5.10 Joshua and the Walls of Jericho

The importance of Jericho was obvious to those with even a passing interest in the Bible because of its prominent place in the story of Joshua's conquest of Canaan. In 1868, Charles Warren had investigated Jericho by sinking several shafts into the mound and uncovered nothing of interest. The Austrian-German expedition under Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger (1907–1909) was the first scientific excavation of the site. The *Times* had little interest in the site's early excavation (16 November 1913). However, it did report on Moses Gaster's discovery of "The Samaritan Book of Joshua," which contained a different version of the fall of Jericho (12 July 1908). As the decade of the 1920s closed, a special cable to the *Times* was tucked away on p. 22 next to several funeral announcements and a recap of the "week's news of the radio." The headline announced, "British to Dig at Jericho: Expedition Hopes to Settle Date of Israelites' Exodus" (23 March 1929). The short article was a foreshadowing of the spectacular claims made in the newspaper and essential to the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The cable stated the excavation's leader was John Garstang, the noted British archaeologist and director of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine and director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. He would lead the excavations of Jericho during 1930–1936. The coverage was extensive and persistent concerning excavations throughout the 1930s, and readers were well-informed of developments and discoveries at the ancient site. Articles appeared proclaiming "Find Palace Joshua Razed" (9 April 1931), "Joshua's Wars Verified by the Spade" (9 August 1931), "Pharaoh's Daughter Who Rescued Moses Believed Identified by Tomb at Jericho" (26 January 1932), "Evidence Joshua Burned Jericho in 1400 BC Found in Scarabs Dug From Ancient Tombs" (27 March 1932), and one authored by Garstang, "Scientists at Jericho Find Confirmation of the Bible" (5 June 1932). The same Jericho phenomena appeared in the British press (Sparks 2020).

Garstang's interpretations of the data at Jericho led to the claim the city was certainly destroyed by Joshua. The announcement was controversial and was quoted by biblical scholars and popular writers as proof of the Bible's validity for years, only to be overturned by Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated Jericho during 1952–1958. Kenyon demonstrated Jericho was basically uninhabited at the time of the purported dates of the invasion of Joshua. As for the wall Garstang had identified as having fallen as the result of an earthquake at the time of Joshua's invasion, Kenton dated it to ca. 2400 BCE, long before the time of Joshua (Nigro 2020). Garstang regretted "his error bitterly, and his colleagues were aware of this" (Cobbing 2009, 75). Unfortunately, the mistake came to define Garstang as an archaeologist; however, he had a distinguished career in archaeology "not only in Palestine but also in Egypt and Anatolia, as an active field archaeologist and also as an administrator and a university lecturer at Liverpool" (Cobbing 2009, 65).

Jericho is an active excavation directed by Lorenzo Nigro.³ Recently, in a lecture on the archaeological history of Jericho, Nigro (2022) briefly asserted Jericho was occupied during the Late Bronze Age, and a wall was reconstructed in the fourteenth–thirteenth centuries, “especially the 14th.” Nigro indicated the Late Bronze Age wall “does not mean anything” in reference to the Bible or Joshua. Though Nigro found a wall, nevertheless, someone must bring some evidence of Joshua to him, “then we can discuss if he has something to do with Tel es-Sultan.”

P.W. Wilson ended the decade with a rambling piece entitled “Archaeology Sheds Light on the Bible” (16 February 1930). The article was typical of Wilson’s other consecrated works on the Bible’s historicity. Wilson narrated the biblical stories with accompanying tidbits of archaeological evidence demonstrating the “proof” of the Bible without actually mentioning any archaeologist or the context of the data he used in his article. Wilson’s article was wide-ranging and mentioned the tombs, architecture, ziggurats, graves of Mesopotamian Ur, Hittites’ royal library of 20,000 tablets, and the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amen. He pointed to the tablet that dated Noah’s flood, an altar to Ashtoreth, and a high hill reminding one of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac. He recalled the fortress of “Betshan ... which discouraged all the Israelitsh spies except Joshua and Caleb.” Also noted were the Melchizedek city of Jerusalem, a throne on Mt. Sinai, destructions of the cities of Hazor and Jericho by Joshua, the stables at Megiddo, and Assyrian conquests. There was no real discussion of this evidence; items were simply tossed about as decorations of the Bible’s proof.

5.11 Conclusion

The *Times* was an important news source about excavations in Palestine. The newspaper provided a valuable outlet for a vigorous defense of the Bible by fundamentalists and other conservative Christians. Numerous Bible scholars and archaeologists were portrayed or quoted as endorsing deceptive theories and wondrous antiquities allegedly supporting biblical history. Of course, the science of archaeology was in its infancy during the decade of the 1920s. Much of the archaeological information and data available was incoherent to many biblical scholars, much less to the *NYT* reporters. The *Times* was dependent upon archaeologists’ reports and interpretations, and its editors and writers were untrained to decipher many of the results. The paper’s focus on erroneous and incomplete data added to the public’s perceptions archaeology was verifying the Scriptures. Some of the articles were sensational and purely imaginary. When credible scholars and archaeologists wrote or were quoted in the *Times*, they imparted an aura of respectability to these reports. Thus, when the *Times* published questionable details on varying aspects of an excavation, many mainstream biblical scholars and archaeologists unintentionally lent a hand in the *Times*’ practice of trumpeting discoveries and sanctioning

the belief archaeology had “proved” much of the Bible. How the paper evolved from utilizing archaeological data in buttressing an archaeology of faith to a reliable reporter of ongoing excavations in Palestine and Israel has rarely been considered by biblical scholars. However, in the decade of the 1920s, some of what the *Times* published, in many ways, was not really “fit to print.”

Notes

- 1 The author wishes to thank Roz Schliske and Pat Landy for indispensable advice and editing over many years.
- 2 <https://megiddoexpedition.wordpress.com>.
- 3 <http://www.lasapienzatojericho.it>.

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Part 4

The Bible in Its Ancient Context



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6 “Your Eye Shall Have No Pity”

Old Testament Violence and Modern Evangelical Morality

Joshua Bowen

6.1 Introduction

Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah to *offer him up there as a whole burnt offering* upon one of the mountains which I will tell you.

(Genesis 22:2)¹

The violence that appears throughout the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (OT) has presented no small problem for those who wish to build their ethical systems upon, or derive their values from, this “sacred” text. While philosophical issues like the “problem of evil” are challenging for theism in general, their difficulties increase drastically when a specific god, Yahweh, *commands* actions we would consider to be immoral.² The issues surrounding OT morality become patently obvious when sincere evangelicals attempt to convince others of their God’s goodness and love.

It appears common for evangelicals to receive a certain amount of indoctrination about God’s commands of violence in the OT. This often is the result of their training—both from the text and pulpit—wherein (a) the victims who suffered violence at the hands of Yahweh were completely deserving of his wrath and judgment, and/or (b) the stories are hyperbolic, and the people did not suffer as greatly as we might think (see Avalos 2019, 131–2). These conscious or unconscious apologetic approaches to the OT’s violent commands are not only incredibly effective, but also emotionally satisfying. One can rest assured God had *a morally justified reason* for bringing the violent judgment that he did. In fact, evangelicals are often not only intellectually satisfied by these apologetic arguments, they can even be *emboldened* and *excited* about God’s violent behavior in the OT, as violence will one day be perpetrated in their favor.

This contribution will address the problem of divine commands of violence and genocide in several OT passages, critique how evangelicals misuse the text in an attempt to account for such violent commands, and

finally consider what implications this has on modern evangelical views of violence and morality.

A brief word of clarification is necessary concerning the nature of the evidence. While we will be examining passages from books like Joshua and 1 Samuel from a literary and potentially historical point of view, it is clear the writers of these books (part of the Deuteronomistic History [Deuteronomy–Kings]) were not contemporaries of these events, but were writing centuries later, in the middle of the first millennium BCE, and their knowledge of events purported to have transpired in the mid- to late-second millennium BCE would have been virtually non-existent. This problem is amplified by the archaeological evidence from sites in and around Palestine from the mid- to late-second millennium BCE. As discussed elsewhere, almost all sites said to have been destroyed in the conquest under Moses and Joshua either show *no signs of destruction* in the period required by the biblical texts, or were *not even occupied* during this period (Bowen 2022, 69–133; Dever 2017a, 119–247 [esp. 184–9], 629–33; 2020, 44–68). For example, Dever (2017b, 153) comments:

Of the thirty-one sites the Bible says were taken by the Israelites, actual destructions have been found at only two or three, and these are not necessarily Israelite. Sites like Dhiban, Heshbon, Jericho, and Ai were not even occupied in the late thirteenth century BCE, when we now know that any “exodus-conquest” must be dated. The book of Joshua now looks largely fictitious.

In other words, although books like Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua recount a massive invasion and destruction of sites like Arad, Heshbon, Dibon, Jericho, and Ai, the archaeology of these sites contradicts the Bible’s reports. In short, our sources must be interrogated with these literary, historical, and archaeological problems in mind, although we will sometimes make arguments assuming the Bible’s accuracy but only *for the sake of argument*.

6.2 “The Ban”

The Hebrew word *hērem*, or “the ban,” and exactly what it means and how it is used, are crucial for understanding the OT’s divine violence. Deuteronomy 3:3–6 says:

And Yahweh our God also delivered into our hand Og king of Bashan, and all his people, and we struck him down *until there was not a single survivor remaining*. And we captured all his cities at that time—there was not a city that we did not take from them—sixty cities, all the region of Argov, the kingdom of Og of Bashan. All these cities were impregnable—high walls, gates, and bars—besides very many rural

cities. *And we completely destroyed them*, just as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, completely destroying every city—*men, the women, and the small children*.

The language in this passage is quite jarring. The form translated “you must absolutely destroy them” in verse 6 is built upon the root of the Hebrew word *hērem*, translated “the ban.”³ This word occurs in several problematic, violent contexts. But what is *hērem*, and what does it mean for someone to be under the “ban,” or to be dedicated to “total destruction” in the OT? As a verb, the root *h̄rm* normally carries the idea of “separating/setting something apart” or “dedicating” something for someone’s use or purposes; thus, once dedicated, it is no longer available for use by others. In the OT, this type of dedication is directed almost exclusively to Yahweh.

A similar meaning for this root appears in other Semitic languages. For example, the Akkadian verb *h̄arāmu* is paralleled in lexical lists with the Sumerian word */kus/*, “to cut, separate” (Gelb et al. 1956, 89–90). Perhaps the Akkadian word for prostitute (*h̄arīmtu*) is related to the same root, with the idea of being “set apart,” or “dedicated” to the activity (Gelb et al. 1956, 101–2). Thus, there seems to be a similar range of meaning for the root in Akkadian and Hebrew: “Something that is set apart or dedicated.”

In the OT, there are primarily two contexts in which these forms of the root *h̄rm* appear: When something/someone is dedicated to Yahweh for *cultic use* (less frequent), and when something/someone is dedicated to Yahweh for *destruction* in contexts of war (more common). The distinction is important to understand here (Rösel 2011, 8). While the cultic occurrences are important to the discussion in general, given our purpose, we will restrict ourselves to investigating the destruction contexts.

There are several passages demonstrating this particular use of the root *h̄rm*. I will briefly mention two. The first passage appears in Deuteronomy 2, where Moses recounts the Israelites’ defeat of Sihon, king of Heshbon in Transjordan. In verses 33–34 we read:

And Yahweh our God handed him over to us, and we struck him and his sons and all his people. And we captured all his cities at that time, and we *completely destroyed* (*h̄rm*) every city—the *men, women, and the small children*—*we did not leave a single survivor*.

Here, the text explains what is meant for the city to be “dedicated to the ban”: They are to leave no survivors, including the men, women, and children. Similarly, in 1 Samuel 15:2–3, we see Yahweh commanding Saul to take military action against the Amalekites:

Thus says Yahweh of hosts, “I have taken account of all that Amalek did to Israel when he ambushed him in the road when he went up from Egypt. Now go, strike Amalek, and *completely destroy* (*h̄rm*) all that

he has, and do not have pity on him, *but put to death everyone from man to woman, from child to infant, from bull to lamb, from camel to donkey.*"

As with Deuteronomy 2:33–34, the “ban” or “dedication” results in the dedicated objects/people being utterly destroyed.

The rationale for killing or exterminating all living things that are placed under the “ban” has to do with their status as “dedicated to Yahweh” (Rösel 2011, 8). If something is set aside for a deity, no one else is able to partake of or utilize what has been dedicated. In the case of people, when they are placed under the “ban,” it results in anyone else being “banned” from interacting with (or showing mercy to) them; thus, they are to be killed (Van Wijk-Bos 2019, 46). This type of dedication can have serious consequences for those who do not adhere to it properly, as seen in the story of Achan in Joshua 7. Despite the divine command to completely dedicate the city of Jericho along with its inhabitants to Yahweh, Achan takes several items from the city, hiding them under his tent. This brings severe judgment upon him, his family, and even upon the nation, because of this act of defilement.

6.3 Significant Passages of Violence and Genocide

It is helpful to consider several passages in more detail—particularly in Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Samuel—that are central to the problem of the OT’s violent divine commands. We will pay close attention to the ban’s nature and implementation, why it is being enforced, and the extent to which it was expected to be carried out.

6.3.1 *Deuteronomy 7: A Call for Destruction*

Deuteronomy 7:1–2, commands the complete annihilation of the major people groups in Canaan:

When Yahweh your God brings you to the land which you are about to enter to possess, and he drives out many nations from before you—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you—and Yahweh your God hands them over to you and you strike them down, *you must absolutely destroy them; do not make a covenant with them, and do not show them any mercy.*

We have already seen sections of Deuteronomy 2–3 describing the “ban” inflicted upon Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan in Transjordan. The rationale for imposing the ban inside of Canaan is made clear here in chapter 7. After Moses admonishes the people to keep the law and fear

Yahweh, he strictly warns them *not to worship other gods*, for those who forsake Yahweh will themselves be destroyed (7:10).

Specifically, the Israelites are warned the continued presence of foreign elements in their land will cause them to rebel and worship other gods. These foreign elements, therefore, are to be eradicated. Notice verses 3–4:

And you shall not marry them; you shall not give your daughter to their son, nor shall you take their daughter for your son. *Because they will turn your son away from me, and they will serve other gods, and the fierce anger of Yahweh will burn against you, and he will destroy you quickly.*

And in verse 16, “And you will destroy all the peoples that Yahweh your god is about to deliver to you; *your eye shall not look compassionately on them, and you shall not serve their gods, because that will be a snare for you.*”

Toward the end of Joshua (23:12–13)—after Yahweh has defeated and driven out Israel’s enemies from Canaan—a similar command is reiterated to the people:

Now take great heed to yourselves to love Yahweh your God. Because, if you in fact go back and cling to the remnant of these nations, these that remain with you, and you intermarry with them and you go into them and they into you, you must surely know that Yahweh your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you, and they will be to you as a trap and a snare, and as scourges against your sides and as thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land that Yahweh your God has given to you.

Notice the emphasis on maintaining separation from foreign influence, as it would cause the Israelites to fall into idol worship, leading them to suffer the consequences of Yahweh’s wrath. It is this same principle operating in Deuteronomy 7: If these elements remain, they will become a snare to the Israelites, cause them to worship other gods, and ultimately incur Yahweh’s wrath. This is why they must be eradicated.

6.3.2 Deuteronomy 20: Rules of Engagement

In Deuteronomy 20, we have a more detailed set of rules of engagement by which Israel is to operate. There are two targets of Israel’s military aggression: Those cities inside and outside Canaan. Each carries its own distinct regulations for proper military engagement.

When you draw near to a city to do battle against it, you are to proclaim to it an offer of peace. And it will be that, if it [the city] answers you

peacefully, and it opens up to you, then it will be that all the people that are found inside will be available to you as forced labor, and they will serve you. But if it will not make peace with you and makes war with you, then you shall besiege it. And Yahweh your God will deliver it into your hand, and you shall strike down all its males with the edge of the sword. But the women and the young children, and the beasts and all that is in the city—all its spoil—you will take as plunder for yourselves, and you will consume the spoil of your enemies, whom Yahweh your God has given to you. Thus you will do to all the cities that are very far away from you, which are not from among the cities of these nations [in Canaan].

(20:10–15a)

Here the text speaks of those cities outside Canaan (Lundbom 2013, 586). The Israelite army was to approach each of these distant cities and offer it the chance to make what amounts to a full surrender: An offer of “peace” (Hebrew *shālôm*) (Nelson 2002, 251). Should they surrender, they would become a vassal state, subject to forced or corvée labor (Hebrew *mas*). Lundbom (2013, 586) describes this type of forced labor:

This would be task-work in agriculture and construction projects, such as David required of the Ammonites (2 Sam[uel] 12:31) and Solomon required of Canaanites who had not been expelled from the land (1 K[in]gs 9:15–21; cf. Judg[es] 1:27–35). The Gibeonites became hewers of wood and drawers of water (Josh[ua] 9:21–27).

However, if they refused vassalage, the Israelites were to kill all of the men and take the women, small children, animals, and anything else of value as plunder. In short, for cities outside Canaan, the offer was *vassalage* or *destruction*.

But what about cities *inside* Canaan?

However, from the cities of these peoples whom Yahweh your God is about to give to you as an inheritance, you must not leave anything alive that breathes. You must certainly completely destroy them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as Yahweh your God has commanded you, so that they will not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, leading you so sin against Yahweh your God.

(20:16–18)

There was to be no offer of peace or even an opportunity to be subject to forced labor. More problematic, there was not even the chance for women and children to be spared as plunder. *Everyone was to be destroyed*. Following the logic of the earlier passage in Deuteronomy 7—and in keeping

with what we will see coming throughout Joshua—the rationale is clear: To leave a remnant of people in the midst of the land where Israel would dwell would leave open the possibility of Israel being tempted to fall into idolatry and be destroyed by Yahweh.

6.3.3 *Commands of Violence in Joshua*

Other well-known divine commands for violence and genocide can be seen in Joshua.

Moses my servant is dead. Now get up, cross over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am about to give to them, to the children of Israel. Every place where the sole of your foot will tread, to you have I given it, just as I said to Moses.

(1:2–3)

Standing before the city of Jericho, ready to watch it fall, Joshua cried, “Now the city *will be dedicated to destruction*—it and all that is in it—to Yahweh! Only Rahab will live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent” (6:17).

Throughout Joshua, the Israelites go from site to site, completely destroying various cities by divine command. We get several summary statements concerning the defeat Israel inflicts upon a city or group: “So Joshua struck down all the land: the mountain and the Negev, and the Shephelah and the slopes, and all their kings. He did not leave anyone who escaped, but he completely destroyed all who breathed, *just as Yahweh, the God of Israel, had commanded*” (10:40). And again: “And all the cities of these kings, and all their kings, Joshua captured and struck them down with the edge of the sword. He completely destroyed them, *just as Moses the servant of Yahweh had commanded*” (11:12). There is no question the text indicates Yahweh’s command was to enforce the ban upon these Canaanite groups, just as we saw in Deuteronomy.

While it is clear Yahweh commanded the Canaanites be placed under the ban, the Israelites failed to carry out these orders in full. Following the conquest narrative in Joshua 1–12, 13:1 opens with Joshua as an old man to whom Yahweh appears: “And Yahweh said to him, ‘You are old and advanced in years, *but a great deal of land remains to be possessed.*’” The command was given to Joshua and the nation of Israel to possess the land early in the story, yet here much of the land is yet to be possessed. Is this considered to be a good thing in the narrative? No, it is seen as a failure on the part of the nation of Israel, a theme that continues into Judges (Collins 2019, 149). This indication of failure clearly shows the prior commands *were not intended to be taken as hyperbole*; they are instructions to literally eradicate those cities. If it were hyperbolic language, then the fact “a great deal of the land” had not yet been subjected to this treatment would pose no issue.

6.3.4 1 Samuel 15: The Amalekites

Samuel, by Yahweh's command, instructed Saul to place the Amalekites under the ban. The extent to which Saul was to "completely destroy" (*hrm*) them reaches "*from man to woman, from child to infant, from bull to lamb, from camel to donkey*" (15:3b). This language of complete, wholesale destruction echoes what we have already seen in Deuteronomy and Joshua.

Interestingly, the writer is at pains to point out that while Saul attacks the Amalekites as instructed, he also warns a group known as the Kenites to flee the area.⁴ If this command of destruction was intended to be hyperbolic, why note a specific group of people was spared? Hyperbole assumes some will be shown mercy; pointing out a specific group was permitted to flee rather than be slaughtered is redundant. This event is only noteworthy *because* it goes against the all-encompassing nature of the instruction. The writer is showing that this command to "completely destroy" means exactly that, the complete destruction of everyone and everything "from man to woman, from child to infant, from bull to lamb, from camel to donkey" (15:3b). Given the close proximity and association of the Kenites with the Amalekites, this act of mercy was the great exception to the all-encompassing nature of the ban.

In the end, Saul carries out his task, but with more exceptions than Yahweh allows. His fault lies not in taking a hyperbolic command literally, but rather in taking a literal command as something less. By *not putting to death* the king and some of the choice animals, Saul failed to follow Yahweh's command. In fact, because Saul did not slay everyone—including the king—Samuel was forced to take out his own weapon and kill the Amalekite ruler. In this narrative, therefore, the ban required the complete annihilation of all those who had been dedicated to destruction. Sparing even one individual and a few animals was deemed a failure to carry out its proper execution.

6.4 Defenses of Divine Violence and Genocide

Evangelicals will customarily present two types of arguments to explain Yahweh's violent commands and defend the biblical texts: (a) God was justified in his actions, and (b) these passages are hyperbolic. We will examine each of these positions, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, and noting the ramifications that can come from adhering to these interpretations when approaching the text. Using the internal logic of the OT narratives and comparisons with similar ancient Near Eastern examples of violent divine commands, these defenses are ultimately shown to be unsatisfactory and built on the bias evangelicals have toward their sacred text.

6.4.1 God Was Justified

The initial response I most frequently see from those seeking to defend the violent actions of Yahweh in the OT is the argument God was *completely*

justified in bringing judgment upon a very wicked group. Indeed, there are usually these types of rationalizations in the texts themselves attempting to explain God’s commands, although they rarely meet our modern standards of moral justification for the violence inflicted upon the victims. By way of example, let’s use the case of the Canaanites in the conquest of Joshua. What is the rationale the OT gives for the eradication or dispossessing of the indigenous population of Canaan? Most evangelicals (e.g., Block 2015, 46; Copan and Flannagan 2014, 66–8) argue Yahweh was justified in commanding such violence by citing the wickedness and rebellion of the Canaanites, based on passages like Genesis 15:16:

And he said to Abram, “Know for sure that your descendants will be resident aliens in a land that is not their own, and they will serve them and they will oppress them for four hundred years. And also that nation, whom they serve, will I myself judge, and afterwards they will go out with great possessions. And you yourself will go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. And in the fourth generation they will return here since *the wickedness of the Amorites is not complete yet.*”

If one observes the context, s/he will see Abram has been promised innumerable descendants. However, before inheriting the land granted to Abram, they would have to live with and serve another nation for a lengthy period of time. But why not give Abram the land then and there to possess? The text depicts Yahweh as a patient and fair arbiter of justice, explaining the inhabitants of the land *had not yet become wicked enough to deserve his wrath* (Goldingay 2020, 252). The Amorites—a name often simply designating the people living in Canaan—would not receive retribution prematurely (Hamilton 1990, 436). Abram and his descendants would eventually receive Canaan, but Yahweh would be gracious toward its current inhabitants, giving them every opportunity (even at the expense of his chosen people!) to come to their senses and repent.

This conquest’s justification extends to passages like Deuteronomy 9:4–5:

Do not say in your heart—when Yahweh your God drives them out away from you—“Yahweh brought me in to possess this land *because of my righteousness,*” but *it is because of the wickedness of these nations* that Yahweh is about to drive them out away from you. It is not because of your righteousness and the uprightness of your heart that you are about to come to possess their land; *because of the wickedness of these nations* Yahweh your God is about to drive them out away from you, and so that he might fulfill the word that Yahweh swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The text is clear: The Israelites are not getting this land from its current inhabitants because they were somehow deserving of it, having been so

righteous and pure of heart. Instead, it was *the wickedness of the inhabitants* that was about to result in Yahweh driving them out and destroying them (Lundbom 2013, 363).

Daniel Block, whose views are representative of other evangelicals, lists a variety of reasons why Yahweh commanded violence against the Canaanites. For example, he notes other nations practiced the ban, and Yahweh's implementation of the ban was not done on a whim, but was part of an overall divine strategy (2015, 44–6). As we would expect, he then explains the ban was put in place *because of sin*:

[T]he policy of *hērem* functions as a divinely ordained means of dealing with sin. The mandate to eliminate the Canaanites was driven by neither genocidal nor military considerations but by the eradication of evil and the prevention of evil from spreading to the new population. (2015, 46)

He even points out the ban was only put in place for those particular nations at that specific time but Yahweh played no favorites: If Israel engaged in these wicked acts, they would also be subjected to the same violent response.

What are the central problems with adopting this justification of divine violence? First, there is little to no historical and archaeological support for such claims of widespread and relatively gross immoral behavior. For example, the claims of widespread child sacrifice that are used to condemn the inhabitants of the land (e.g., Deuteronomy 18:9–12) cannot be substantiated by evidence outside biblical texts (Bowen 2021, 131–8). To condemn the Canaanites and justify the actions of Yahweh, *one must just assume the OT to be historically reliable*. In other words, we would have to conclude, as evangelicals do, the people of Canaan deserved to be eradicated or driven out simply because the OT says so (Dallaire 2015). To demonstrate the problems with such a position, I would like to look at some justifications given in the inscriptions of other ancient Near Eastern rulers—specifically some of the Assyrian kings—in order to show we would not consider the arguments in these texts to be reasonable and convincing. If, for example, the Assyrian kings said they carried out divinely commanded violence against foreign nations because of the rebelliousness of these foreign people groups, would we really accept this as a justification for such violence, as evangelicals do for the Bible?

It is important to see how the Assyrian rulers viewed their role when it came to military conquest. Central to this discussion is the distinction between the Assyrian state (Assyria proper) and the countries lying outside that primary land of Assyria. Postgate (1992) labeled the former the “Land of Assur” and the latter the “Yoke of Assur.” According to Assyrian ideology, the main part of Assyria—the “Land of Assur”—was to be expanded under the leadership of the king, who was appointed and commanded by the national god Assur (1992, 251). Any military conquest, therefore, was

said to be done on behalf of and by the command of the god (Liverani 2017, 12). This divine mandate resulted in the subjugation of countries and people groups in the periphery, including those nations to the west of Assyria; this subjugation resulted in divine commands for the vassals themselves. Postgate notes the Assyrian rulers would generally not interfere directly in the inner workings of these nations’ governmental structures; nevertheless, they would regularly enforce a type of vassal treaty on them, in which the vassal rulers would swear oaths to the Assyrian king before the gods. *To break such an oath was no small matter*. Postgate (1992, 255) writes:

Such agreements were reinforced by oaths and solemnized by religious sanctions, especially being witnessed by Assur [the Assyrian god] and the local gods. *To have broken such an agreement then constituted gross sin against Assur, and was seen as justification for punitive action on the part of the Assyrian ruler.*

(emphasis added)

In short, when the Assyrian state was strong enough, the king would follow the divine mandate to militarily expand into foreign regions—including to the west—in order to subjugate the states in those areas, forcing them to swear oaths of loyalty and vassalage to Assyria. Should they break those oaths, it was considered *a sin against the Assyrian god*, and *justified the use of violence* to right the wrong. Notice the reason for regarding them as “sinful” or worthy of violent retribution is not simply they are “foreigners” or “the other.” Rather, *they had sinned* by breaking the oath and rebelling (Crouch 2009, 51).

In addition to the evil act of breaking a loyalty oath, Assyrian texts speak of foreigners plotting outright attack against the state of Assyria (Liverani 2017, 118). This is illustrated in a well-known literary text concerning an Assyrian king of the thirteenth century BCE, Tukulti-Ninurta I, in which the Assyrian king fights against the Kassite king Kashtiliash IV, who had rebelled against the oath he had sworn before the gods. “The gods became angry at the king of the Kassite’s betrayal of the emblem of Shamash, *against the transgressor of the oath, Kashtiliash*” (*Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, i [= B obv.], lines 32’–33’; trans. Foster 2005, 300; emphasis added). Later, in a fragmentary section, we see:

falsehood, crime, repression, wrong-doing, ... the weighty ... *the divine oath and went back on what he swore* ... the gods were watching his furtive deed, ... though he was their follower ... *the king of the Kassites made light of what he swore, he committed a crime, an act of malice.*

(*Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, i [= A obv.], lines 24’–29’;
trans. Foster 2005, 302; emphasis added)

Tukulti-Ninurta I then specifically contrasts himself with Kashtiliash IV, praying to the god Shamash, “O Shamash, ... lord, *I respected your oath, I feared your greatness. He who does not ... transgressed before you ... , but I observed your ordinance*” (*Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, ii [= A obv.], lines 13³–14³; trans. Foster 2005, 303; emphasis added). In fact, the text actually portrays the rebellious king *admitting his own sins*:

So Kashtiliash deliberated with himself, “*I did not listen to what the Assyrian [Tukulti-Ninurta I] said, I made light of the messenger. I did not conciliate him, I did not accept his favorable intention before. Now I understand how grievous the crimes of my land are become, how numerous its sins.*”

(*Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, iii [= A obv.], lines 25³–27³;
trans. Foster 2005, 307; emphasis added)

And even more directly: “*Many are my wrongdoings before Shamash, great are my misdeeds, who is the god that will spare my people from catastrophe? The Assyrian is ever heedful of all the gods*” (*Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, iii [= A obv.], lines 37³–39³; trans. Foster 2005, 308; emphasis added).

Liverani (2017, 117–8) cites another text speaking to the same idea. A *Psalm to Assur for Tukulti-Ninurta I* presents the foreign nations around Assyria as being not only in rebellion, but also ungrateful to Assur, despite all he had done for them.

The lands of one accord have surrounded your city Assur with a noose of evil, all of them have come to hate the shepherd whom you named, who administers your peoples, all regions of the earth, *for which you had produced benevolent assistance, held you in contempt, and though you extended your protection to them, they rebuffed you* and ... your land. The king for whom you held goodwill made sure to disobey you, and even those whom you treated well unsheathed their weapons against you.

(*A Psalm to Assur for Tukulti-Ninurta I*, lines 16²–21³; trans. Foster 2005, 319–20; emphasis added)

Later, during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (mid- to late eighth century BCE), a royal inscription concerning military engagement with the people of the land of Ulluba states they “planned sinful deeds in their hearts” and “planned evil” (Liverani 2017, 124, quoting *Tiglath-pileser III* 37, lines 16–21 in Tadmor and Yamada 2011, 91). This evil intent provided a *clear justification*—even a responsibility—for the Assyrian king to march his army against these wicked forces and right the wrongs they had irreverently performed.

Of course, no historian today would take this information in the Assyrian texts at face value. To read the internal monologue of the repentant Kassite king Kashtiliash IV and conclude Tukulti-Ninurta I was therefore perfectly

in the right for waging war against him would be foolish. These texts were written from a very specific vantage point with particular goals and purposes in mind, including providing a justification for the military conquests of the Assyrian state. We cannot simply utilize these texts to reconstruct historical reality, concluding the Kassites or the people of Ulluba were *actually* wicked and sinful people, deserving of such divine judgment. In the same vein, we cannot simply read Deuteronomy 7 and conclude the Canaanites must have been evil simply because the text says so. Unfortunately, this is exactly how evangelicals often approach the OT.

6.4.2 *It's All Hyperbolic*

I have learned to keep hammers away from my three-year-old, for when he has a hammer in his hand, everything becomes a nail. In my experience, this is also the case with the concept of “hyperbole” in the hands of many evangelicals: When they get a hold of it, every questionable violent act or command in the Bible is explained as hyperbole. While there is clearly hyperbolic language in the OT, as in the rest of ancient Near Eastern writings, placing every description of violence and genocide into that category, or expecting hyperbole to do away with the problems such passages create, is simplistic and naive. In this section, we look at several passages that hinge—from a literary standpoint—on the absolute nature of the command to destroy all living things. The goal, therefore, is not to argue hyperbole does not exist in various OT passages, but rather to illustrate there are many narratives that rise and fall on the story’s non-hyperbolic nature.

One oft-cited publication by evangelicals on divine violence is Paul Copan’s *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (2011). Relying on the work of other evangelicals like Lawson Younger (1990), Copan (2011, 170–3) sometimes attempts to downplay the absolute nature of Yahweh’s commands of violence and genocide by arguing a type of ancient Near Eastern war rhetoric was likely employed—to greater or lesser degrees—in passages like Joshua’s conquest narrative. For example, Copan writes:

Some might accuse Joshua of being misleading or of getting it wrong. Not at all. He was speaking the language everyone in his day would have understood. Rather than trying to deceive, Joshua was just saying *he had fairly well trounced the enemy.*

(2011, 171; emphasis added)

The basic idea behind this apologetic defense is to argue, when the text says they “utterly destroyed” the Canaanites, it didn’t *actually* mean that; rather, this was just the way ancient Near Eastern writers of this genre of text spoke about conquest.

There are obvious similarities between many genres found in the OT and other ancient Near Eastern writings, including different accounts of violence and conquest (Dozeman 2015, 67). What we see in this section

of Joshua is the author utilizing a method of writing similar to what was used by the Assyrians. But what is the significance of this observation in this particular context? Evangelicals will frequently argue these calls for violence and genocide were just “the way they wrote” in the ancient Near East; since it was hyperbolic language, *it lessens the severity of what was perpetrated against the victims of divine violence*. For instance, Copan (2011, 171) argues: “Just as we might say that a sports team ‘blew their opponents away’ or ‘slaughtered’ or ‘annihilated’ them, the author (editor) likewise followed the rhetoric of his day.”

Assuming the biblical authors were at times utilizing ancient Near Eastern war rhetoric, and this use of hyperbolic language somehow creates a justification for the OT’s violent and genocidal descriptions, *this should also be true when other ancient Near Eastern texts do the same thing*. Let’s take a look at some texts evangelicals themselves cite to show similarities in war rhetoric and violent hyperbolic language. Would these same evangelicals argue these rulers *were also justified in their violent acts?*

Copan lists several examples of ancient Near Eastern war rhetoric, including inscriptions of Tuthmose III, Mursili II, Ramesses II, Merneptah, Meshu, and Sennacherib (2011, 172). Each is cited as evidence that this type of language was common stock across the ancient Near East, and claims of “total destruction” did not necessarily reflect reality. Even if true, this does not alleviate the problem of divine commands of violence and genocide.

The example of Sennacherib given by Copan—drawn from the work of Younger (1990)—comes from what is known as the Chicago/Taylor Prism.⁵ The inscription opens:

Sennacherib, great king, strong king, king of the world, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the world), capable shepherd, favorite of the great gods, *guardian of truth who loves justice, renders assistance, goes to the aid of the weak, (and) strives after good deeds, perfect man, virile warrior, foremost of all rulers, the bridle that controls the insubmissive, (and) the one who strikes enemies with lightning.*

(*Sennacherib* 22, lines i 1–9; trans. Grayson and Novotny 2012, 172; emphasis added)

The king is described not only as powerful and in control, but also as a shepherd, who ensures truth and justice abound and oppression is held back from the weak. He is good and just, and has been divinely appointed by the gods. In other words, he is the *good guy* in the story.

Even as Sennacherib embarks on campaigns—in fact, *especially* when he embarks on campaigns—he is bringing order to chaos, establishing justice by the gods’ will. After attacking and subduing troublesome Babylonia to the south, the text goes on to explain:

I put to the sword the population of the city Hirimmu, a dangerous enemy, and *I did not spare a single one*. I hung their corpses on poles and placed (them) around the city. I reorganized that district (and) imposed for eternity one ox, ten sheep, ten homers of wine, (and) twenty homers of dates as his first-fruits offerings to the gods of Assyria, my lords.

(*Sennacherib* 22, lines i 57b–64; trans. Grayson and Novotny 2012, 173; emphasis added)

There is little doubt this language of complete annihilation (“I did not spare a single one”) cannot be understood to reflect reality on the ground: The Assyrian king did not actually kill every individual in the city. *But does this make Sennacherib’s campaign more ethically palatable?*

I doubt any evangelical would come to the defense of Sennacherib and the violence he portrayed and executed upon his enemies. Even if someone were to point out, in these inscriptions, the king is described as being perfect, just, and called to defend the poor and weak, this would have little effect on changing their perspective. When the Assyrian enemies are identified as rebellious and guilty, evangelicals *would consider these descriptions in their context*. It is unsurprising the Neo-Assyrian king presents the enemy as deserving of (even requiring) judgment and violence. These things would be seen as clear cases of *propaganda*, requiring additional evidence to substantiate the claims of the “wickedness” or “guilt” of those subjected to violence.

Why do evangelicals often not subject the Bible to the same standard? If the Egyptian, Hittite, Assyrian, and Babylonian texts are understood to be *doing* something (e.g., justifying the violent actions taken against foreign enemies), why is this often not also considered when reading the OT’s stories? When the Canaanites, Amorites, and Amalekites are described as irredeemably wicked, rejecting Yahweh’s mercy, and bringing down his violent judgment upon themselves, why is it reasonable to simply trust the text? If the answer involves the OT’s inspiration and inerrancy, then this is a theological issue that must be defended utilizing other methods. We cannot start with this conclusion and special plead our way into such justifications.

Furthermore, while there is little doubt rhetoric and hyperbole are employed in these OT conquest accounts, it is not always that simple. There are certain stories in which the narrative itself hangs on the idea that “everyone” or “everything” fell under judgment and these were dedicated to Yahweh and/or executed. Reading these narratives as hyperbole—not everyone or everything is meant—leads to the stories being inconsistent and incoherent. In what follows, I will briefly examine three case studies in this regard. In each case, the emphasis and literary structure appear to depend heavily on the “complete destruction” nature of the divine commands and cannot simply be chalked up to hyperbolic language.

6.4.2.1 *Rahab and Achan*

Two characters appear in the story of Jericho's conquest that demonstrate the all-encompassing aspect of the city's dedication to Yahweh for destruction. The first is Rahab (Joshua 2; 6:17–23), the prostitute who hid the two Israelite spies that came to search out the city. As a character, Rahab is set up as the lone exception to the total destruction that befell the city. She and her family are *the only ones who are spared annihilation*, specifically because she faithfully aligned herself with the Israelites (2:14–21). The narrative contrasts faithful Rahab with an Israelite soldier, Achan (6:25–7:1):

But Rahab the prostitute, and the house of her father, and all that she had Joshua left alive, and she has lived in the midst of Israel until this day, because she hid the messengers that Joshua sent out to spy out Jericho. And Joshua swore at that time, "Cursed be the man before Yahweh who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with his firstborn he will found it, and with his youngest he will set up its gates!" And Yahweh was with Joshua, and his fame was throughout all the land. But the children of Israel were unfaithful in the ban, and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took from the devoted objects, so that the anger of Yahweh burned against the children of Israel.

This comparison between Rahab and Achan hinges upon the ban's totality. If we assume these commands were simply intended to utilize hyperbolic language, then the audience was supposed to understand the command to "utterly destroy" just meant "kill a lot of them," and warning to "not take anything from the devoted objects" meant "just leave most of it." What would this do to the story? Well, Rahab would not be the outlier she is. The reader would know Rahab and her family would not have been the *only ones spared*, as the text is just saying a lot of people were killed. Similarly, if the Israelites were not commanded to refrain from *all* the dedicated objects, then what was Achan's sin? The storyline hinges on *everyone* being killed *except* Rahab, and *everything* being left in Jericho *except* what Achan took.

6.4.2.2 *The Treaty with the Gibeonites*

Following the defeat of the cities of Jericho and Ai, word spreads among the Canaanites of the Israelite's military power. In Joshua 9:3–6, the Gibeonites, having learned of the Israelite's most recent battles, respond quite differently than the other Canaanite city-states. Instead of preparing for war, they decide to approach Joshua and the Israelites, pretending to be foreigners from a distant land. But why would they engage in such a ruse? Recalling the rules of engagement in Deuteronomy 20, those cities lying

outside Canaan can be made vassals to Israel, which is the type of treaty being sought by the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:11). Joshua questions the veracity of their story but ultimately determines they are indeed from a distant country. He therefore concludes a vassal treaty with them, only to realize later the Gibeonites are actually from Canaan and should be under the ban. However, as Joshua had sworn an oath to them, it could not be rescinded and must therefore be honored. Thus, the Gibeonites tricked the Israelites and were spared the ban’s effects (Rösel 2011, 142).

If the language of the ban in this passage was simply hyperbole, then this entire story becomes incoherent. The narrative’s assumption is *everyone* in Canaan is subject to the ban, bound for utter destruction. Most rulers rally their troops to fight, but the Gibeonites express a type of faithfulness to Yahweh—they acknowledge his superiority and seek a way to escape his wrath. However, if this language of total destruction were nothing more than hyperbole, then there would be no expectation *everyone* was to be killed, and thus, the story of the Gibeonites trying to weasel their way out would make little sense. The reason they needed to form such a ruse is specifically because they were part of the inhabitants of Canaan and were going to be destroyed (Hess 1996, 194)!

6.4.2.3 *The Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15*

In this passage, Yahweh commands Saul to go and kill the Amalekites, including women, children, infants, and cattle. If Yahweh’s words were hyperbolic, then we might determine when Yahweh said to Saul, “Kill everyone,” he would have understood this was just ancient Near Eastern war rhetoric. Saul would have heard, “Saul, kill a lot of them, but obviously don’t kill *everyone*. I’m just being hyperbolic.” Upon returning from the battle, when confronted by Samuel, Saul could have easily said, “Yahweh was just being hyperbolic. We both know he didn’t mean ‘Kill *everyone*.’”

As we saw in the two previous case studies, this appeal to hyperbole completely undermines the story’s entire premise. The narrative’s internal consistency requires Saul to kill *everyone*; the fact that he spared *even one* was cause to consider the mission a failure and an act of disobedience toward Yahweh. Additionally, defending the hyperbolic nature of the command to Saul by appealing to later appearances of the Amalekites in 1–2 Samuel does not address the problem, as this is an editorial issue, not a literary one (Auld 2011, 169–70).

In summary, the two primary defenses of violence in the OT so commonly appearing in evangelical apologetic discourse—Yahweh being justified because of the sinfulness of the victims and the violence simply being attributed to war rhetoric or hyperbole—do not stand up under closer inspection. Assuming the OT to represent historical reality, particularly when it comes to the sinful behavior of the victims of violence (e.g., Canaanites, Amorites, Amalekites), requires a great deal of special pleading in light of similar

texts and justifications in the wider ancient Near East. Furthermore, simply appealing to hyperbole does not rid the evangelical apologist of moral or ethical problems; it may lessen the extent of divinely commanded violence, but it certainly does not do away with it. In addition, there are clearly many passages in which the narrative coherence depends heavily on the absence of such hyperbole.

6.5 Conclusion

“Violence never solves anything.” Well, for the OT writers, that wasn’t exactly true. And the divine commands of violence and genocide have caused not a few problems for Christians throughout the ages, and the challenge of defending Yahweh against these charges has been taken up today by evangelicals. In order to deal with the violent actions commanded by Yahweh, two primary apologetics have been developed: God was completely justified due to the victims’ extreme wickedness, and/or the language of violence was often simply hyperbolic. We examined these arguments in defense of divine violence, showing them to be ultimately unsatisfying.

But why discuss the topic of violence in the OT and the frequent misuse of these texts by evangelicals to defend the character of Yahweh? Unfortunately, given the all-pervasive influence of the Bible on Western civilization—both the Old and New Testaments—the modern implications for this ancient compilation of texts cannot be overstated. Although many evangelicals will be quick to contrast the “law” and the “Old Covenant” with “grace” and the “New Covenant,” it seems unacceptable for evangelicals to simply write off the OT as irrelevant for their Christian morality. This results in the constant battle to reconcile Yahweh’s seemingly immoral commands with the moral perfection he is thought to possess. What practical, modern implications does this have for today?

In Block’s (2015, 50) postscript to his article on divine violence, he makes an expected but disturbing statement: “Having wrestled with the theme of divine violence in Deuteronomy, it strikes me that such a study should always be preceded by a study of divine grace in the book, not to evade or deny the painful reality, but to provide context for it.” Whatever his intent, this seems to betray a fundamental starting point from which Block operates: We should view God’s violence *through the lens of his grace*. Similar logic appears to have led him to argue that violent passages in Ezekiel should be read from the same vantage point (1997, 469; emphasis added):

Far from Yahweh acting as an oppressive and powerful male who takes advantage of a weak and vulnerable female, Ezek[iel] 16 presents Yahweh as *a gracious savior* who lavishes his favors on this helpless infant/young woman. *But she who tramples underfoot his grace may expect to experience his wrath.*

We would obviously never accept such rationalizations in other contexts. No counselor would advise a battered wife to consider first the gracious behavior of her husband before assigning blame to him or condemning his behavior. We would be appalled to learn a partner had violently abused their spouse because of unfaithful behavior, attempting to justify the abuser’s actions by recounting the money and gifts they had lavished upon their wayward spouse. This type of mentality seems analogous to giving the ultimate and unceasing “benefit of the doubt” to Yahweh, whose violent and abusive behavior is vigorously excused and defended time and again. This type of apologetic can be seen quite clearly when evangelical scholars cite the person of Rahab in this context. For example, Dallaire (2015, 69) writes: “The Rahab narrative shows us that God will have mercy on all who turn to him in faith and *that not all who lived in Canaan were subject to the hērem*” (emphasis added). Block (2015, 48) goes even further: “[I]f Israel’s policy of *hērem* involves a comprehensive call for the extermination of the Canaanites, it also *graciously opens the door for exceptions*” (emphasis added).

A common method for training evangelicals to justify Yahweh’s actions is establishing a system of what I would call “fair retribution,” particularly by preaching and teaching from the OT’s stories and laws. Evangelicals have been raised to believe Yahweh’s violent responses in the OT were perfectly appropriate—and even absolutely necessary—given the evil being perpetrated. *But were these violent responses actually appropriate?* If one lived in a house where it was considered appropriate to punch someone in the nose if they interrupted in a conversation, one would come to believe that, if someone interrupted someone else, *they deserved to be punched in the nose*. But why would they deserve it? Because one had been raised to believe it was a just (and even necessary) response. This type of circular reasoning has led to the belief that, for example, the Canaanites were worthy of extermination and expulsion from their land because of the sin of idolatry. In fact, it was often the threat of idolatrous influence that brought Yahweh’s stern warning to exterminate these indigenous peoples. However, when the challenge is brought to the evangelical to explain how Yahweh could call for genocide, their response is to say, “They deserved it!” Why did they deserve it? Because they were worshipping other gods. Why should that deserve such a violent response? *Because that’s what Yahweh prescribed*. In other words, it becomes a circular and self-reinforcing pattern: Yahweh prescribed this punishment, so they deserved what they got, because that’s what one gets when s/he acts this way ... because that’s what Yahweh prescribed as punishment.

It is this mindset that can lead to the justification of behavior considered atrocious in any other context. Consider the story of Samson in Judges 16. The mighty man, filled with Yahweh’s spirit, had been defeated through his own pride and waywardness. However, blinded by his enemies and on full and humiliating display, he prayed for Yahweh to give him strength one last time in order to take out vengeance on the Philistines. The story of Samson

is often framed in the light of his moral successes and failures, noting that, in the end, he was able to serve Yahweh one final time. In fact, in Hebrews 11:32–34, Samson is lauded as one of the great heroes of the faith. But what did Samson actually do? In Judges 16:29–30 we read:

And Samson touched the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and he leaned on them, one with his right hand and one with his left. And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” Then he pushed out with all his might, and the house fell upon the princes and all the people who were in it, and the dead that he killed in his death were more than all those he had killed in his life.

Having been placed before this large group of Philistines in the temple, he asked to be leaned up against the building’s main supports. In what we would only refer to as an act of terror today, Yahweh gave him the strength to push down the pillars and become what some have labeled an ancient “suicide bomber” (King 2020). However, because this story comes from the OT, and the “hero” is one anointed by Yahweh, *this act is lauded, not condemned.*

What are the implications for such a story in the modern world? If one wishes to derive moral lessons from the OT, and Samson is held up in this particular act as one of great faith, what could this mean for the modern interpreter? King (2020, 240) asks the question in this way: “Can a figure whose final act is so reminiscent of that of a modern-day suicide bomber any longer be seen as inspiring for women and men of faith today?” Samson’s suicide appears to be another example of an act that, seen in any context outside an inspired and inerrant ancient text, as believed by evangelicals, would be considered egregious and condemnable.

It is also incredibly problematic to see evangelical scholars justifying Yahweh’s violence by noting he is essentially an “equal-opportunity monster”; he will punish anyone who is unfaithful to him, *even if they are part of his chosen group.* Block’s conclusion is particularly troubling: “Israel’s policy of *hērem* plays no favorites. Although seven specific nations are targeted, Deuteronomy is emphatic that, if Israelites will act like Canaanites, abandon YHWH, and serve other gods, they too will be subject to the same law—men, women, and children” (2015, 48). It is this precise sentiment that creates a type of “remnant” mentality in evangelical circles. Evangelicals already distinguish themselves from unbelievers, but this divine “equality in violence” concept allows for a more precise distinction to be made between believer and *true* believer, creating a remnant of the *really* faithful. If someone falls away, either through a sinful lifestyle or simply by adhering to a different theological belief, they have aligned themselves against God. This principle of equal retribution attributed to Yahweh can (and often is) easily turned against other believers and the behavior is justified, as God “plays no favorites.”

Finally, there is the danger of viewing the future through the evangelical lens of the believer’s ultimate divine vindication, which will come about through divine violence. In recent years on social media there has been a strong trend in certain evangelical circles toward notions of violence and its association with versions of a type of apocalyptic theology. That is not to say they are frequently and overtly advocating for violent actions in the present (although that is sometimes the case). Rather, attention is often directed toward the “end of days,” when God will right all the wrongs that have been and are being committed against his faithful subjects. “Remain in your unbelief! When God comes back, you’ll be sorry!” This type of persecution complex draws on notions of the believer’s struggle and ultimate deliverance by the divine warrior. The meek believer can rest assured, although they are destined to be persecuted by the wicked of this world, their divine hero will balance the scales in the end. John Collins (2019, 163) writes: “From this perspective, the violence of apocalyptic eschatology serves as a kind of release valve whereby the oppressed can vent their frustration and anger without actually translating their feelings into violent action.”

This attitude of “delayed violence” has several problematic effects. First, it is predicated on a reading of violent passages in the OT that justifies what we would consider to be atrocities in any other context. To call for any people group’s genocide would result in strong condemnation, *unless* it is in the context of Yahweh’s divine justice. Because God knows all, if he deems a group worthy of extermination, who are we to question his judgment? The problem, of course, is we must assume the text to be actually inspired by the deity that gave the command, an assumption not without a multiplicity of problems.

As a result, this “delayed violence” concept gives believers the idea divine violence solves a great number of things. Although the faithful are admonished to allow vengeance to be God’s, it is not uncommon to see people—convinced of the correctness of their religious convictions—to take matters into their own hands (Collins 2019, 165). Finally, it leaves us at an ultimate impasse. If the believer has become convinced (a) their position is absolutely correct, based on the inspiration of their holy text and the inspired interpretation afforded him by the indwelling Holy Spirit, (b) the unbeliever has been blinded to the truth and will persecute the faithful for their beliefs, and (c) God will return in his glory to bring a destructive end to the wicked unbeliever, then little can be done to negotiate with the believer, leaving only violence as the solution (Collins 2019, 165).

So what of violence in the OT? What should we make of passages calling for death and destruction at the command of Yahweh? Whatever faith position one espouses (including none at all), we must recognize that violent divine commands cannot be interpreted and applied today devoid of our own modern sensibilities. The attempts of many evangelicals to justify much of the divine violence in the OT represents a misuse of the text and can set or

reinforce dangerous ideologies. As stated by Collins (2019, 170; emphasis added):

If we are going to use the Bible as a guide to behavior in the modern world, then we must use it judiciously ... To derive guidance from the Bible on this subject, as on any other, it is necessary to see individual passages in perspective and to establish priorities, *whether we do this on inner-biblical grounds or derive our criteria from elsewhere.*

Even if there are rhetorical or hyperbolic aspects to the narrative, this does not rid us of the ethical problems involved with divine commands of violence if we insist, as many evangelicals do, on taking that narrative as a guide for morality in today's society. In fact, even if these passages are not interpreted theologically as commanding the modern reader to commit violent acts, the Bible's overarching message is violence will ultimately solve the world's problems. Even though it is the deity that will take up arms against the world of sinners, it can be difficult for the faithful to disconnect themselves from the work of their Lord, leading to attitudes of hate and the possibility of violence, even if only in their own hearts.

Notes

- 1 Translations of biblical texts, including emphasis, are the author's. Dever (2020, 13) summarizes well the problem with this passage: "[W]hat kind of God would do such a thing? And what kind of father would willingly comply?"
- 2 For overviews of the "problem of evil" and its application to the Bible's God see, e.g., Bergmann et al. 2011, McBrayer and Howard-Snyder 2013, Søvik 2011.
- 3 As a noun and verb, the root *hrrm* appears 80 times in the OT, mostly in the Deuteronomistic History. References there are: Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6 (twice); 7:2 (twice), 26 (twice); 13:16, 18; 20:17 (twice); Joshua 2:10; 6:17, 18 (4 times), 21; 7:1 (twice), 11, 12 (twice), 13 (twice), 15; 8:26; 10:1, 28, 35, 37, 39, 40; 11:11, 12, 20, 21; 22:20; Judges 1:17; 21:11; 1 Samuel 15:3, 8, 9 (twice), 15, 18, 20, 21; 1 Kings 9:21; 20:42; 2 Kings 19:11.
- 4 The Kenites were likely associated with the Amalekites to some degree (Tsumura 2007, 394).
- 5 The Chicago/Taylor Prism is also called *Sennacherib 22*; trans. Grayson and Novotny 2012, 172–86.

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7 Avoiding the Apocalypse in the Book of Daniel

Ian Young and Thomas J. Elms¹

7.1 Introduction

There are a variety of views on the book of Daniel held by scholars who identify as “evangelical.” Some acknowledge the validity of what we will call the mainstream scholarly approach (e.g., British evangelicals Goldingay 1989/2019; Lucas 2002; American evangelicals Sparks 2008, 116–9, 149–50, 223–5, 335–9; Warhurst et al. 2013, 104–13). However, the evangelical view discussed in this chapter is one that sets itself in opposition to this mainstream approach. The contrast is well stated by Steinmann (2008, 6), an upholder of this evangelical view: “While critical theories concerning the unity and composition of Daniel dominate modern scholarship on the book, conservative and evangelical scholars have continued to defend the traditional date of the book.”² While there are differences in detail between scholars working in the evangelical and mainstream paradigms, they are clearly defined from each other, so it is usually not difficult to discern which “side” a particular scholar is on.

Core elements in this evangelical approach include belief in the inerrant historicity of the events in the book, especially and including the authorship of the whole book by Daniel in the sixth century BCE.³ The issues these evangelicals raise are therefore bundled together around opposition to the dating of the final forms of the book to the second century BCE by mainstream scholars. All other features of this type of evangelical exegesis of Daniel can be argued to flow from the core belief that complete historicity and divine inspiration of Scripture are coterminous. One major area of interest in evangelical scholarship on Daniel, therefore, is addressing the various cases where Daniel presents events that are difficult to reconcile with other known historical data. Among those most often mentioned are the dating of an exile led by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar “in the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah” (Daniel 1:1–2); the presentation of Belshazzar in Daniel 5 as king, and son of Nebuchadnezzar, with no mention of his actual father Nabonidus; and the figure of Darius the Mede who, in Daniel 6, reigns between Belshazzar the Babylonian and Cyrus the Persian.

Due to space limitations, and because there has been discussion of the question of evangelical scholarship on the historicity of these stories in Daniel 1–6 (e.g., Grabbe 1987, 138–45; Rowley 1935, 9–60; S.L. Young 2011, 225–9; cf. Grabbe 1988a, 1988b), this chapter will focus on the dating of the visions in chapters 2 and 7–12.⁴ It is the references to the second century BCE in these visions and their interpretation which is at the core of the scholarly consensus about the dating of the current forms of the book, and is therefore a focus of evangelical response to the mainstream approach. In Section 7.2, we present two of the major points of the scholarly argument for the second century date of the visions and discuss the evangelical response to each. Each of these points will be organized in three parts. We first try to explain clearly the basic literary observation that leads to the mainstream scholarly case, and second, review attempts by evangelicals to respond to this case, with a view to understanding the key issues of why evangelicals feel they must dispute it and what strategies they use to do so.⁵ Then we present further evidence to suggest the problems evangelicals are trying to avoid are due to lack of understanding of Daniel in its ancient literary context. Then, in Section 7.3, we discuss the role Porphyry, the ancient enemy of Christianity, plays in evangelical discourse. Finally, in Section 7.4, we discuss that for evangelicals, the understanding that the book was written by Daniel himself is an integral component of why they feel compelled to reject the mainstream approach to the book, and we describe the way ancient authorship is understood in recent mainstream scholarship.

7.2 Mainstream Scholarship and Evangelical Response on the Date of Daniel 7–12

7.2.1 *Preliminary Comment: Focus on Antiochus IV*

Scholars generally think there is material in Daniel composed much earlier than the second century BCE. This is particularly true for the narratives (chapters 1–6, although these are considered to have been brought together and edited in their present form long after their sixth century setting, in the Persian and early Hellenistic eras) and possibly earlier versions of visionary material, especially chapter 7.⁶ However, the key scholarly argument about the composition of Daniel is that the four apocalyptic sections, chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10–12 all received their decisive formative moment ca. 165 BCE during the crisis under the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but before his death. Antiochus attempted to suppress Jewish practices like keeping the Sabbath, circumcising children, and reading the Torah/Law. The temple was profaned, and new rituals were introduced like offering pigs. The Hasmonean family fought against Antiochus, led by Judas Maccabaeus, and liberated the temple after approximately three years of it being occupied.⁷

It has been accepted by scholarly commentators since the first attested commentary ca. 200 CE (Hippolytus of Rome on Daniel) that Daniel 7–12

has a strong focus on the time of Antiochus IV, and his banning of Judaism and desecration of the temple, 167–164 BCE. For example, almost all scholarly commentators, whether evangelical or not, agree that Daniel 8 is about the desecration of the temple under Antiochus, and that most of Daniel 11 gives a detailed account of Antiochus' reign.⁸ The main issue is how to interpret this focus on Antiochus IV, and how the literary form of Daniel communicates its meaning.

7.2.2 *Argument 1: Daniel 10–12 Connects the End with Antiochus IV's Time*

7.2.2.1 *The Basic Literary Observation on Daniel 10–12*

Chapter 11 gives a very detailed description of events in the Hellenistic period, from the end of the Persian period in the late fourth century BCE. Daniel 11:1–20 describes from the Persian period down to Antiochus IV, although rather than giving names, by using the language of “the king of the north” (the Seleucids in Syria) and “the king of the south” (the Ptolemies in Egypt). Detail increases in 11:21–39 where Antiochus IV takes on the role of the “king of the north” with copious information about his reign. It is generally accepted by scholars of all types that we are talking about Antiochus IV, since the detail is so great (e.g., evangelicals Archer 1974, 400; Baldwin 1978, 41, 183–4, 191–9; Davis 2013, 152–5; House 2018, 174–80; Miller 1994, 298–304; Sprinkle 2020, 293, 307–17; Steinmann 2008, 525–32; Tanner 2020, 664–83; Wallace 1979, 185–6; E.J. Young 1949, 241–6). The issue is how to interpret what happens next. For mainstream scholars, since there is no indication of a change of subject in verse 36 which begins “and the king shall act as he pleases,”⁹ with a *weqatal* verbal form in Hebrew, which would be extremely unusual if used in standard Hebrew grammar as a head word in a new clause,¹⁰ there is no reason why we would think any change of subject has occurred.

In terms of content, however, there is a clear change from describing the known details of Antiochus' reign to apocalyptic symbols around verse 40. There is the massive battle of the nations in the holy land “at the time of the end” (11:40; cf. e.g., Zechariah 14; Vision of Gabriel). “At that time” (12:1) also happen end-time events like the resurrection of the dead (12:1–3). However, the transition from known history to apocalyptic symbols is not indicated by any change of subject. Following on from the sequential *weqatal* verb in verse 36, 11:40 says: “At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack him. But the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. He shall advance against countries and pass through like a flood.” The “king” of verse 36 and the “him” and the “king of the north” in verse 40 are by a straightforward reading the same person as before, i.e., Antiochus.

Therefore Daniel 10–12 has a clear timeline where Antiochus’ activities in the earlier part of the 160s BCE are immediately followed by the great final battle in the holy land which ends with Antiochus coming “to his end, with no one to help him” (11:45), and “at that time” (12:1) the angel Michael shall appear, there will be a final period of suffering, followed by the resurrection of the dead (12:2–3).¹¹ According to mainstream scholarship, the point where the text shifts from detailed description of known historical events to apocalyptic symbols indicating God’s victory over the crisis reflects the present of the author, i.e., in the middle of the crisis under Antiochus, ca. 165 BCE.

7.2.2.2 *Evangelical Response on Daniel 10–12*

Evangelicals try to avoid this simple reading of the narrative in Daniel 11–12.¹² Why they do this seems plain, since the sequence of events described did not happen ca. 165 BCE. Eventually the Jewish military resistance under Judas Maccabaeus regained control of Jerusalem and gradually over time the Hasmonean family established itself as independent from the Seleucid empire. But, for example, Antiochus did not perish in the great battle in the holy land, and the dead were not raised. A core observation, therefore, is evangelicals seem to have decided these apocalyptic symbols of God’s victory have to be interpreted literally, or literalistically, and therefore they cannot accept what seems a very straightforward reading of the text.¹³ This might be related to the commonly recognized evangelical commitment to the idea that historicity of all historical details (future as well as past?) is a mark of inspired and inerrant Scripture.¹⁴

Because they have a literalistic reading of the symbols in these texts, evangelicals are unable to come to any conclusion about Daniel, as understood by mainstream scholars, than that it is failed prophecy. If, for example, the resurrection of the dead did not happen straight after the time of Antiochus IV in the mid-second century BCE, then Daniel is a false prophet, who is identified in Deuteronomy 18:22 as someone who has predicted something but it does not happen (Archer 1974, 400; Miller 1994, 37; Steinmann 2008, 18, 137, 147, 153).¹⁵ Rather than agree with this conclusion, they are forced to try to find a way of avoiding what the text seems to be saying, since how could a false prophet’s work be canonized in the Bible? Mainstream scholarship, in fact, does not accept these as the only two choices.

To avoid the supposed problem of false prophecy, evangelicals suggest there is a change of subject about verse 36, and especially by verse 40.¹⁶ They claim when the text starts to talk about “the time of the end” in verses 35 and 40,¹⁷ it is indicating a change of subject (e.g., Davis 2013, 156; Sprinkle 2020, 322; Steinmann 2008, 538–9; Tanner 2020, 690, 705), because the text cannot have literalistically connected “the time of the end” (meaning the final eschatological events) with Antiochus. Yet

Daniel seems to indeed connect “the time of the end” with Antiochus’ time in 8:17, 19.¹⁸ The change of subject is further said to be supported by the fact that only in verse 36 is the subject called simply “the king” (Steinmann 2008, 539; Tanner 2020, 690).¹⁹ While this is a good literary observation, it is not difficult to read this naturally as meaning “the (aforementioned) king” (cf. 11:27a, “The (aforementioned) two kings, their hearts inclined to wickedness, at one table they will speak lies,” the only other time previously the chapter refers to Antiochus as a “king”). With arguments such as these, evangelicals suggest we change to talk about an evil eschatological king (“the Antichrist”) and are talking about a later period, at the end of time, hence the lead-in to the resurrection of the dead (e.g., Archer 1974, 396; Miller 1994, 304–5; Sprinkle 2020, 322–3; Steinmann 2008, 538; Tanner 2020, 691, 710; Wallace 1979, 189–90; E.J. Young 1949, 241).²⁰ This reading then allows evangelicals to mine Daniel 7 and 11 in particular for information about the eschatological Last Days and especially about the activities to be expected of the coming Antichrist (e.g., Miller 1994, 202–3, 306–13; Sprinkle 2020, 178–9, 191–2, 324–8, 422–5; Steinmann 2008, 373–6, 540–6; Tanner 2020, 411–4, 454–9, 697–704, 710–22; Whitcomb 1985, 96–7, 102–5, 152–61; E.J. Young 1949, 148–50, 246–53). An observation is that this seems far from an obvious reading of the text but appears to be rather a special theory to avoid the problem that eschatological events such as the resurrection of the dead appear to be placed straight after Antiochus’ time. Evangelicals themselves sometimes betray an uneasiness about this forced argument. Consider, for example, “the figure of the historic Antiochus suddenly blends into the figure of an Antichrist who is yet to come in the end time” (Archer 1974, 398); “[t]he more natural answer [to the identity of the king in verse 36] seems to be Antiochus Epiphanes” (Davis 2013, 156); “Admittedly, there is an unforeseen time gap in the presentation of the kings of the North, because the text jumps from Antiochus IV to the end times” (Sprinkle 2020, 38); “there is no obvious break between vv. 21–35 and vv. 36–46” (Sprinkle 2020, 321); “at verse 36 the mind of the writer is already being lifted away from the time of Antiochus” (Wallace 1979, 189–90); “[t]he prophecy [in 11:21–12:3] is confessedly difficult, and the present writer believes that it cannot in its entirety be applied to Antiochus” (E.J. Young 1949, 241).

7.2.2.3 *Further Considerations in Favor of the Mainstream View on Daniel 10–12*

It seems there are three options for interpretation of the sequence of events in Daniel 11–12:

- (1) The writer was writing after the time of the crisis, after the victory of Judas Maccabaeus, and was not predicting anything. This was the opinion of the anti-Christian philosopher Porphyry; no modern scholar

accepts this, to our knowledge. A major problem with this interpretation is: Why not give a similarly plain account of all Judas' career if it was known; why stop detailed description in ca. 165 BCE and move to the use of symbols?

- (2) Evangelicals argue Daniel wrote these sections in the sixth century and all history in these sections is future prediction. The problem with this interpretation is if this is all future prediction, why does the detailed and accurate description end at a certain point, and the text move to symbolic description of the victory of God, or suddenly jump very far into the future to talk about an Antichrist who has not yet come (without providing any description of a resolution of the crisis in Antiochus' time)? This is the same problem as the previous interpretation. There is no motivation for suddenly stopping giving detailed historical information at a particular point, or suddenly drastically changing the subject.

While possibly the case for some scholars, the claim that often accompanies the statement of the position that all of Daniel 11 is future prediction, that mainstream scholars are simply unable to believe God inspires future prediction,²¹ is a straw man. Ernest Lucas (2002, 308), a scholar who is sympathetic to the mainstream view and identifies as an evangelical, puts it very well: “[F]or many supporters of a second-century date the possibility of predictive prophecy (‘Could God do it?’) is not the issue. Rather, there are two other, to them more relevant, issues. One is primarily theological (‘Would God do it?’) and the other primarily literary-critical (‘Did God do it?’).”

- (3) The third view is the mainstream scholarly view. The question is not (as evangelicals claim): Can God inspire prophecy; but: Where does future prediction begin in Daniel, and what is the function of the literary form of Daniel?

One of the challenges of understanding the literary form of apocalypses in the Western canon is that the best compositions with which to compare them are outside that canon. For example, the Animal Apocalypse in 1 Enoch 85–90 (contemporary to these visions in Daniel) does the same thing as Daniel: It contains a survey of history accurate in detail until a certain point in the crisis under Antiochus. It then moves to apocalyptic symbols describing the final victory of God (e.g., 1 Enoch 90:18, 20). Later apocalypses have comparable surveys of history they use for their own purposes. When read in the context of other apocalypses, what happens in Daniel is not so strange. But these other apocalypses are seldom if ever mentioned in evangelical writings on Daniel, beyond occasional general references to Daniel's genre being “apocalyptic.”²² This evidences a blind spot created by the category of canon (worthy of

exploration elsewhere). We also presume one motivation for the lack of mention of these other apocalypses is because doing so might be seen as an admission that close comparisons to Daniel can be found in works from the mid-second century BCE.²³

Mainstream scholars suggest Daniel 10–12 uses an accepted literary form of the “survey of history,” found not only in the aforementioned Animal Apocalypse (a text also focused on an End in Antiochus’ time), but also, for example, the perhaps slightly earlier Apocalypse of Weeks, or the later 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch.²⁴ This literary form has two sections: (a) A survey of history down to the author’s own day. The purpose of this is a theological interpretation of past history. The most extensive (and contemporary) example of this is the Animal Apocalypse, which spends a great deal of time giving a particular (“Enochic”) spin on Israel’s history. Note that this interpretation of history can include events earlier than the time of the literary figure of the visionary. Thus, in the Animal Apocalypse, Enoch sees Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Seth in his vision (1 Enoch 85:1–10). What was important was not that it be presented as future prophecy, but that it present an interpretation of the meaning of history. (b) Future-looking prediction using apocalyptic imagery, which gives a final, God’s-perspective view to the whole of history. This is in line with and builds on the earlier survey of history: It provides an interpretation of the meaning of history, this time a lens through which to view the future.²⁵ Understood in this way, the author of Daniel (or the Animal Apocalypse, etc.) is writing at the point where we shift from the survey of history to the symbolic presentation of God’s victory over the current crisis, which for Daniel 7–12 and the Animal Apocalypse looks to be in the middle of the crisis under Antiochus IV, ca. 165 BCE. This interpretation, based on the use of a known literary form, seems the only one that can explain the shift from detailed description of known historical events to apocalyptic symbols in Daniel 10–12.

As noted, evangelical readers of Daniel have a problem with the statement that God’s kingdom will be set up in the era of rule by the Greek successor kingdoms (Daniel 2), or specifically straight after Antiochus’ time (Daniel 7, 10–12). However, this sort of statement is standard in apocalypses. The Animal Apocalypse pictures God’s decisive intervention and the final judgment happening in the time of the battle against Antiochus IV in the 160s BCE, as do Daniel 7–12. The Apocalypse of Weeks traces history down to the seventh week, where the “chosen will be chosen” and receive “seven-fold wisdom and knowledge” (1 Enoch 93:10; Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012, 140), which is just before the advent of the eschatological final weeks 8–10. A later apocalypse, the New Testament book of Revelation, is quite clear right from the beginning that it describes “what must soon take place” (1:1), “for the time is near” (1:3), and at the end Christ says, “surely I am coming soon” (22:20). Revelation’s contemporaries 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch also talk about the imminent destruction of the Roman Empire by the Messiah (e.g., 4 Ezra 11–12; 2 Baruch 36–40). Are writers of apocalypses

either crazy enough or optimistic enough to keep on making failed predictions? This seems, to worried evangelicals, the only way to interpret what mainstream scholars think is going on in Daniel or Revelation (they don't care about the rest, since they are not in the Protestant canon). On the contrary, we would argue there is something else happening in this literature.

The evidence suggests apocalyptic visions are not to be read, and were not read by their ancient audiences, literalistically. Regularly, in the same apocalypse, things said in one vision will even be logically contradictory to things said in another vision.²⁶ Apocalypses (as an extreme example of what was normal in ancient Near Eastern literature) paint pictures conveying certain truths, but are not exclusive of other visions which convey other truths. Thus, ancient readers considered that Daniel was a true prophet, rather than considering it was some sort of failure that every detail did not literally happen. Daniel was very soon in the authoritative collection of Scripture books in the Jerusalem temple (I. Young 2002, 388–90). Ancient readers understood Daniel's visions had made true predictions about the defeat of Antiochus and the triumph of God's cause using apocalyptic symbols, rather than ticking off whether every detail of the visions literally happened.

We have seen evangelicals invoke Deuteronomy 18:22 (cf. n.15) as proof that, unless Daniel's prophecies were literalistically fulfilled, Daniel is a false prophet. However, the fact that Deuteronomy 18's description, of a true prophet as being evidenced by fulfillment of prophecies, does not imply a *literalistic* fulfillment of prophecies is evident even in a Deuteronomistic text such as Kings, for all its interest in prophecy and fulfillment. Note how, while in 1 Kings 21:19 Elijah prophesies "Thus says the LORD: 'In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth [meaning Jezreel], dogs will also lick up your blood,'" this is explicitly noted as fulfilled "according to the word of the LORD that he had spoken," even though "they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria; the dogs licked up his blood," not matching the apparent thrust of the prophecy that Ahab's punishment would happen in the very place where Naboth was killed. On other occasions it is accepted a prophecy may come to nothing since God's sovereign will might change in response to human actions. Thus in 2 Kings 20:1, Isaiah tells King Hezekiah plainly: "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover,'" yet after Hezekiah's prayer, this prophecy is superseded in 2 Kings 20:5–6a by "Thus says the LORD, the God of your ancestor David: 'I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life.'" According to the interpretation of Deuteronomy 18 as requiring literalistic fulfillment by the evangelicals mentioned above, Elijah and Isaiah must join Daniel as "false prophets."²⁷ Evangelicals must be aware of the various cases such as these of imprecise fulfillment of prophecy, but it seems a different standard of literal fulfillment is set when it comes to Daniel's apocalyptic symbols.

7.2.3 Argument 2: Daniel 8 and Daniel 7 Are Closely Related

7.2.3.1 The Basic Literary Observation on Daniel 7–8

The vision in Daniel 8 is very clear and has been understood as referring to Antiochus IV Epiphanes by virtually all scholarly commentators since antiquity (already, e.g., Josephus, *Antiquities* 10:276; Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 4.26; Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel* [on 8:8–10]; evangelicals: Archer 1974, 397–8; Baldwin 1978, 159; Davis 2013, 110–2; House 2018, 144; Miller 1994, 225; Sprinkle 2020, 209; Steinmann 2008, 389–90, 401; Tanner 2020, 477; Wallace 1979, 139; E.J. Young 1949, 276, 278). It clearly identifies the ram in the vision as the (Medeo-)Persian empire(s), and the goat as the succeeding Hellenistic kingdoms. The first horn on the ram is Alexander the Great, who is succeeded by the four Hellenistic successor kingdoms, including most relevantly for the Jews, the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt. The activities of the “little horn,” which arises from one of these Hellenistic kingdoms and who, for example, takes away the temple offerings (8:9–12, 23–25), are acknowledged to identify the little horn as Antiochus IV. This is not much of a problem even for a literalistic reading of this chapter, since it focuses on the restoration of the temple and does not have much to say about other eschatological events,²⁸ and therefore evangelicals do not take issue with it.

Daniel 8 is explicitly said to be very closely related to Daniel 7 (8:1: “a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after the one that had appeared to me at first”). This includes the presence of the distinctive term “little horn” (8:9), which arises on the fourth kingdom of the vision in Daniel 7 and is also there described in terms reminiscent of Antiochus IV (7:8, 24–25). Unlike Daniel 8, though, chapter 7 makes clear mention that the activities of Antiochus are followed by the final judgment, just as Daniel 10–12 does. Since the little horn in chapter 8 is clearly Antiochus, the most obvious reading is that he is the little horn in chapter 7 too and the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 (and Daniel 2) is Greece. Antiochus is the final king before the end as in Daniel 10–12, and the vision of the end in Daniel 7 is to be understood non-literalistically, in the same way as Daniel 10–12. Scholars therefore identify the four kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7 as Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. The fact that the focus is on the Greek period in Daniel 7 fits perfectly with the acknowledged main focus of the visions in Daniel 8 and 10–12.

Before looking at the evangelical response to this mainstream view, we note the mainstream view is anticipated by a strong stream of Eastern Christian exegesis. For example, early Syriac Bible (Peshitta) manuscripts identify all the main characters in Daniel 7 the same as modern scholars, providing headings that guide readers through the four kingdoms: Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece, and identifying the little horn as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Thus, 7:7, introducing the fourth kingdom, has a heading “The kingdom of the Greeks,” and 7:8 introduces the section about the activities of the “little horn” with a heading “Antiochus Epiphanus,” a heading also

found in the relevant section of the interpretation of the vision in 7:21. This exegesis is reflected in some major commentators in the Eastern tradition. For example, on Daniel 2, Ephrem the Syrian identifies the four kingdoms in this way. His comment on the final kingdom set up by God is instructive: “This kingdom is to a people not near, for although it was delineated/imprinted symbolically in the house of the Maccabees who subdued the kingdom of the Greeks; in truth it is fulfilled in the Lord” (Botha 2006, 123). In other words, while the text had a literal fulfillment in the second century BCE, this did not exhaust the meaning of the symbols used, which prefigure a greater fulfillment (Van Peursen 2011, 206–7).²⁹ Evangelicals are mistaken, therefore, when they claim theirs is the only traditional and viable Christian interpretation.³⁰

7.2.3.2 *Evangelical Response on Daniel 7–8*

The idea that the final kingdom in the sequences of kingdoms in Daniel 7–8 is the same is the most obvious reading of the text. Strong evidence for this is that the “little horn” arises from the final (Greek) kingdom in both cases, and acts in a way easily relatable to the activities of Antiochus IV. Evangelicals argue this is not the case, however. Since the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 and the activities of the little horn are terminated when

the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and totally destroyed; the kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them
(7:26–27),

their literalistic reading of apocalyptic symbolism gives them no option but that even though the final kingdom from whom the “little horn” arises in Daniel 8 is explicitly “Greece” (8:21),³¹ the final kingdom in chapter 7 cannot be, and hence the two mentions of a “little horn” must refer to different subjects. Evangelicals commonly claim the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 (and Daniel 2) is Rome.³² The little horn in Daniel 7 is taken as another reference to the future Antichrist who will arise just before the literal End.³³ Another motivation for the attempt to make the fourth kingdom Rome arises from the argument that God’s kingdom set up “in the days of those kings” (2:44) must refer to the spiritual Messianic kingdom of Jesus set up either by his earthly ministry (e.g., E.J. Young 1949, 78–9, following ancient commentators like Hippolytus and Jerome),³⁴ or the actual Messianic kingdom set up by Christ’s second coming (e.g., Miller 1994, 97–9, following other ancient commentators; cf. Van Peursen 2011, 200). If so, it is clear it would be historically incorrect, and therefore not true prophecy, to view the last kingdom as Greece, rather than the Roman Empire in whose ascendancy

Jesus was born, or whose descendant kingdoms will be destroyed in the future (Sprinkle 2020, 194–5; Steinmann 2008, 147–8; E.J. Young 1949, 288). Finally, the sequence of kingdoms, with Babylon followed by Media before Persia, could be understood as implying Daniel’s author made a mistake, since Babylon was conquered by Cyrus the Persian and the Medes did not really succeed Babylon in this sense.³⁵ Once again we see the need for literalistic fulfillment of Daniel’s words and absolute historicity as the driving foci of evangelical reading of Daniel.

Evangelical arguments are on two fronts: Directly disputing the identity of the “little horn” in chapters 7–8 and arguing more generally that the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7, from which the “little horn” arises, is not the same as the final kingdom of Daniel 8, from which the “little horn” arises.³⁶ A selection of some arguments made is given below. While there are some stronger arguments made (and these turn up regularly in the evangelicals surveyed), the weakness of so many arguments raised by evangelicals in support of their position gives the impression there is a strategy to, in effect, just throw *any* idea out to see if it will stick as an explanation of the text different to what it means in mainstream scholarship. Perhaps this betrays a focus more on the insider group than on seriously engaging with outsiders.³⁷ As long as arguments (of whatever strength) can be made for their view on Daniel, evangelicals will feel their view is not without intellectual support.

Direct attacks on the identity of the two little horns takes the form of pointing out differences in the way the horns are presented in each chapter, which generally invoke an extremely wooden understanding of how images are used and correspond to each other (e.g., Sprinkle 2020, 195; Steinmann 2008, 151–6; E.J. Young 1949, 276–8).³⁸ In a similar vein are attempts to argue that since the imagery of the final kingdom in chapters 7–8 is different (a horrifying beast in 7 with ten horns, a goat in 8 with only one or four horns) they “are *not the same beasts* nor are they intended to represent the same kingdom” (E.J. Young 1949, 287; cf. Sprinkle 2020, 195). One could just as easily follow the same argument to refute the evangelical equation of the final Greek kingdom of chapter 8 with the third kingdom of chapter 7 since a goat is not a four-winged and four-headed leopard (nor in regard to Media-Persia is a ram a bear!).

Many other examples of weak arguments offered by evangelicals to identify the fourth kingdom as Rome seem very far-fetched. For example, note the argument that the ten horns of the fourth beast in Daniel 7 are related to the ten toes of the fourth part of the statue, and hence the fourth kingdom, in 2:41–42.³⁹ The toes are on two legs of iron (2:33), and two refers to the division of the Roman Empire by Diocletian in the late third century CE, but cannot be reconciled with the history of the successor kingdoms to Alexander (Archer 1974, 397; Whitcomb 1985, 49).⁴⁰ Quite apart from the impressively long bow of relating the number two to Diocletian, it must be wondered how else a human statue could be pictured except with two legs (Montgomery 1927, 187; Miller 1994, 95–6 agrees with this criticism, and

Steinmann 2008, 137–8 points out the vision and its interpretation put no stress on “two” legs or “ten” toes⁴¹). Equally strained is the argument that the description of the fourth beast in 7:7 as “different from all the beasts that preceded it”⁴² cannot apply to the Greek kingdoms, but only to Rome (E.J. Young 1949, 288; cf. Steinmann 2008, 155). Any appreciation of the history of the region would surely refute such a bizarre claim.

In contrast to the array of weak arguments made by evangelicals that the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 is Rome, not Greece, there are a couple of stronger arguments, and these typically recur in the literature, and hence are worth spending more time on. One of these two arguments is, since the third beast has four heads (7:6),⁴³ this must refer to the four successor kingdoms to Alexander, mentioned as four horns in 8:8⁴⁴ (Archer 1974, 397 [he adds the four wings too]; Miller 1994, 200; Sprinkle 2020, 176–7; Steinmann 2008, 150–1 adds the splitting of Alexander’s kingdom in 11:4 “toward the four winds of heaven”;⁴⁵ Tanner 2020, 79, 198n122, 408, 410; see already, e.g., Jerome on the four heads).⁴⁶ This is a reasonable literary argument, although the connection is not so obvious as it might first appear beyond the recurrence of the number four. Thus, while Daniel 8 and 11 mention Alexander before the breaking up into four successor kingdoms, in 7:6 the beast itself seems to have four heads, and therefore on this reading would strangely seem to mention the successor kingdoms without acknowledging Alexander’s role in establishing the dominance of the Greek kingdoms (Rowley 1935, 155). Furthermore, it seems the symbolism of the number “four” is so multivalent (occurring scores of times in the Hebrew Bible in various contexts), it is hardly a link as striking as the occurrence of the “little horn” in both chapters (and only occurring in those two chapters). Thus, of many options, “four” regularly signifies universal dominion (four corners of the earth, four winds). Four wings could symbolize the speed of movement of the Persian forces (see Isaiah 41:3). Four heads could be the four Persian kings mentioned in the Bible.⁴⁷ The tradition of four Persian kings before the arising of the four successor kingdoms of the Greeks seems implied by 11:2.⁴⁸ The mere mention of the number four is therefore hardly an exclusive link to the Greek kingdoms, and not of sufficient strength to overcome the use of the highly distinctive term “little horn,” applied to an individual who acts in a similar (Antiochus-like) way, as a link between the final kingdom and its final king in chapters 7–8.

The second argument made by evangelicals that seems to have some strength is where they point to features of the text treating the kingdoms of the Medes and the Persians as one unit, which they say undermines the scholarly (and traditional Eastern Christian) view that the four kingdoms are Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece (e.g., Archer 1974, 398–9; Davis 2013, 95; Miller 1994, 95; Sprinkle 2020, 38–9; Steinmann 2008, 149–50; Tanner 2020, 79, 198, 408, 487; E.J. Young 1949, 285). Thus, in 5:28 the Babylonian kingdom is “given to the Medes and Persians”; in Daniel 6, the law under Darius the Mede is said to be of the Medes and Persians

(6:12, 15); and in 8:20, the ram stands for “the kings of Media and Persia.” We agree these references show Daniel’s authors indeed thought Media and Persia were closely related kingdoms, represented as one ram with two horns in Daniel 8. There is nevertheless a consciousness of historical sequence, since the second and longer horn comes up later. In this vision in Daniel 8, furthermore, horns on one animal are likewise used for closely related kingdoms in verse 8,⁴⁹ where the four horns on the goat stand not only for the four successor kings to Alexander the Great, but also their kingdoms, as is clear since the little horn, Antiochus, comes in verse 9 “out of one of them.”⁵⁰ This picture from Daniel 8, of the Medes and Persians as succeeding but closely related kingdoms, can also be fitted with the references in chapters 5–6. These connect the Medes and Persians together, since they are related peoples in Daniel, but have the Persians achieving superiority later than the Medes in the implied shared history, since Darius the Mede takes over from the Babylonian Belshazzar, and in turn is succeeded by Cyrus the Persian (6:28).⁵¹ It is, furthermore, an excellent observation that Daniel 8 presents the sequence of kingdoms differently than the two four-kingdoms chapters Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, focusing only on using two animals to portray the rising of the Greek kingdom over the Medes and then the Persians, together one animal with two horns (Steinmann 2008, 150). Nevertheless, this is beside the point when it comes to the sequence of the four kingdoms. This was always a schematic view of history, which already had a long history in the region, and the acceptance of it in Daniel implies little about whether Daniel’s authors thought of it as “historical,” despite the evangelical anxiety that statements in the Bible correspond to history.⁵² Indeed, the fact Daniel 8 is portrayed as closely linked with Daniel 7 (8:1), and yet does not use the four kingdom schema (neither does Daniel 10–12), would seem to indicate a flexible understanding of the relationship between historicity and literary presentation by Daniel’s authors. Rather, since the four kingdoms was an accepted schematic view of history, widely known through the nations of the ancient Near East, the literary purpose of adopting it (in some chapters of Daniel only) was to provide a Jewish version of it.

7.2.3.3 *Further Considerations in Favor of the Mainstream View on Daniel 7–8*

The idea of four kingdoms is prominent in Daniel 2 and 7. It is usually thought both chapters are talking about the same kingdoms. As with the description of the statue with four metals in Daniel 2 (Collins 2016, 115–6), it seems very likely in the description of four kingdoms that Daniel is adapting a well-known presentation of history for its own purposes. This theory does not suggest Daniel was making a historical blunder, but rather adapting a literary tradition. This answers evangelical arguments that Daniel could not have been so ignorant of history as to, for example, have the Medes in the succession of kingdoms from Babylon to Persia (e.g., Miller 1994, 94–5;

Steinmann 2008, 148–9). Daniel just seems much less convinced of the centrality of historicity than evangelicals, and, as mentioned, Daniel 8 and 10–12 have a different presentation. A variety of sources attest the sequence of empires, and it is adapted for a variety of purposes. For example, the Roman writer Aemilius Sura says: “The Assyrians were the first of all races to hold power, then the Medes, after them the Persians, and then the Macedonians. Then ... the supreme command passed to the Roman people” (see Collins 2016, 116). Thus, we have history presented as a succession of four empires, and then the fifth that takes over from them. Daniel uses a similar scheme but makes the final kingdom the kingdom of God. It seems likely this schema of history stems from Iranian sources, since its more common form ignores Babylon, and focuses on the fact the Medes overthrew the Assyrian empire and were then taken over by the Persians, which would have been how it happened from an Iranian point of view. Our earliest source for the first part of the sequence, Assyria-Media-Persia is found in the Greek historian Herodotus (*Histories* 1:95, 130), ca. 450 BCE, who says immediately before mentioning it he is relying on Persian authorities. Daniel was, therefore, making reference to a well-known schematic presentation of history, which is found in a Jewish version in Sibylline Oracles 4:49–101 (Collins 2016, 116). However, Daniel (and quite possibly he was not the first)⁵³ made an adjustment to fit the history of the Jewish people and his storyline better, which is that Assyria is replaced by Babylon. The presentation of history in this way was always schematic, but this move creates further problems for relating the theory to what we understand to be the actual history, including that Babylon was conquered by Cyrus the Persian and the Medes did not really succeed Babylon in this sense, nor rule Babylon.⁵⁴ However, to repeat: The primary purpose of this way of presenting history was not focused on the historicity of the sequence (contrary to evangelical priorities), but on its literary and theological impact.

7.3 On Porphyry

There is an often-repeated claim by evangelicals that mainstream scholars are guilty by association because their interpretation of Daniel follows the anti-Christian writer Porphyry’s views (e.g., Baldwin 1978, 64; Ferch 1983, 129; Miller 1994, 24; Sprinkle 2020, 17; Steinmann 2008, 145: “Porphyry’s view [the fourth kingdom is Greece, not Rome] has become the standard approach for contemporary scholars who employ higher critical methodology”). While modern conservatives may echo the views of Jerome in some of his responses to Porphyry, mainstream scholars’ views diverge quite sharply at a number of points from those of Porphyry (despite the attempt of some mainstream scholars to co-opt him as a sort of patron saint for their view). For example, Porphyry thought the four kingdoms were Babylon, Media-Persia (with Darius the Mede as a historical figure), Alexander, and fourth, the Greek successor kingdoms. By having a combined

Medeo-Persian kingdom as the second (with a historical Darius the Mede) and the Greeks already as third, evangelicals are more closely aligned with Porphyry than mainstream scholars who have the four kingdoms as Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece (Casey 1976, 19; 1979, 60; Rowley 1935, 144).⁵⁵ The attempt to paint mainstream scholars as allied with an anti-Christian point of view is of course in any case extremely disrespectful to the Eastern Christian interpretation discussed above. The one major point in which Porphyry (alone) anticipates mainstream scholars is his understanding that sections of the surveys of history in Daniel discuss events earlier than the author's time. However, Porphyry did not understand there are future events discussed in Daniel, nor did he understand how so-called pseudonymous authorship was used in the world in which Daniel was written, thinking (once again in agreement with evangelicals) that it was for the purpose of deception.

7.4 Rejection of Pseudonymous Authorship

Daniel 7–12 are written in the first person by a figure who identifies himself as Daniel. Evangelicals argue the attribution of authorship to this figure demands a sixth century BCE date of composition; the book must have been written by the figure Daniel, while he was in Babylon.⁵⁶ If the text was composed in the second century BCE then it must be a forgery.⁵⁷ To suggest the book is being deceptive to its readers is unacceptable to these scholars and so they must reject such a position (e.g., Davis 2013, 19–20; Miller 1994, 36–7; Sprinkle 2020, 13–4; Wallace 1979, 19; Whitcomb 1985, 10; E.J. Young 1949, 25). This is a classic example of the position inerrant historicity can force a reader of the text into. Every element of the plain reading of the text must be defended, otherwise the integrity of the entire text is under threat. In many ways this position responds to the approaches of enlightenment scholars (see already Porphyry) who labelled the text as fraudulent on the basis it presents a false attribution of its dating and authorship.⁵⁸

Mainstream scholarship has moved on from this position and now understands authorship of ancient texts in a more nuanced way.⁵⁹ To suggest a pseudonymous text in the ancient world is a forgery is anachronistic as it suggests the composers' conception of authorship was the same as it is in the modern day (Najman 2003, 1). Although it may seem like a small step from acknowledging that Daniel 7–12 presents the words as those of Daniel, to Steinmann's formulation that "The visions all claim to be from the pen of Daniel" (Steinmann 2008, 1), according to recent scholarship it actually represents a large leap. In fact, it was the practice of authors of Hebrew and Aramaic texts to write anonymously or pseudonymously. Attributed authorship, instead of indicating the source of composition, indicates participation in a particular tradition and its interpretation of that tradition in its own context (Najman and Peirano 2019, 336–7). This means attribution of authorship functions as an interpretive device.⁶⁰ The claim of

authority in the text is not through deceptive attribution, but rather through its identification with an authoritative tradition.⁶¹

Other examples of such attribution contemporary to Daniel are the apocalyptic texts of Enoch. No scholar, whether mainstream or evangelical, suggests Enoch was the composer of these texts. This accepted pseudonymity, as well as a number of other shared features, makes the Enochic compositions ideal for comparative study when considering pseudonymity. As we have already mentioned, however, they do not concern evangelicals as they are outside the Protestant canon and therefore do not have the same need for justification. By considering these texts,⁶² it is revealed pseudonymity is a consistently applied device in apocalyptic texts composed in the Second Temple period.

Texts are composed in discussion with other texts, and often in response to a tradition. The attribution of authorship in these texts indicates in which discussion they are participating. In the case of Daniel this tradition is developed in the court tales (Daniel 1–6, but also Susanna and Bel and the Dragon) which themselves likely existed independently or in clusters as part of a wider culture of an established Daniel figure before being brought together. As a single text they present Daniel in a particular way and their editing targets the collector/s' context which is the context of the apocalypses of Daniel 7–12. This tradition is what the apocalypses are responding to and building on in the context of the Antiochian persecution.

A significant feature of pseudonymous texts such as Daniel is that the author is a figure of great renown and legend who may be expected to receive such revelation from God.⁶³ The similarities between the experiences of second century Jews in Judea and the events occurring in the court tales make Daniel the ideal figure to receive these apocalypses.⁶⁴ Daniel 1–6 provides third person narrative tales that develop the portrayal of his character with the aim of explaining he is at a level which makes him an ideal candidate for such revelations. We suggest in the case of the completed text of Daniel that the authorial attribution is a device which functions as an interpretive lens created by the characterization of Daniel and the development of the literary themes in Daniel 1–6. This lens is then applied to our reading of the apocalyptic visions of Daniel 7–12 and is indicated by the first-person identification formula. In this view the authorial attribution is a sophisticated literary technique necessary for the interpretation of the text as a whole, an interpretative key missed by evangelical readers.⁶⁵

The various mainstream views explained above, and our own input, are surely a more reasonable explanation for the attribution of the text than the accusation of forgery evangelicals may use to dispute the dating of the text. We find this view of authorship to be a more genuine attempt to understand the text as it was conceived by its composer/s and received by those who originally read the text. After all, they were likely to be aware of its second century composition, yet it was still treated as a text of value in the communities and eventually in the Hebrew Bible. This approach

engages with the historical nature of the text rather than seeking to align the presentation of the text with an anachronistic idea of how the text should be presenting itself. Ironically, the attempt to force literal historicity onto the text leads it further away from what it is aiming to achieve.

When we view the pseudonymous nature of the text in this way, we see it is a perfectly legitimate device consistent with contemporary compositions. This approach to the text, aligned with the mainstream approaches, actually serves to legitimize⁶⁶ the text in a way the inerrant historicity approach simply cannot. It serves to liberate it from the requirement of sixth century composition and therefore the need to justify the arguments presented in the previous sections of this chapter which are contrary to the most natural reading of the text in its ancient context. Mainstream scholarship has a significant amount to offer evangelicals in the area of authorship.

7.5 Final Comments

Evangelicals are quite brutal as to the choices for understanding Daniel: The only way to respect the book is to agree with their reading of it. The mainstream view is demonized with extreme language: Such scholars (apparently!) consider Daniel to be “entirely spurious” (Archer 1974, 380); and if the mainstream view is correct there is no other option except Daniel is “a fraud” (E.J. Young 1949, 25); “fraudulent,” “fallacious” (Miller 1994, 36, 37); “the failed expectation of a long-dead Jewish author” (Steinmann 2008, 379); and “the critical view makes Daniel’s prophecy of ‘truth’ (11:2) into a lie” (Sprinkle 2020, 321). Daniel is “under heavy attack by critical scholars who dispute its trustworthiness and contradict the very teachings in it that the church has traditionally believed” (Tanner 2020, 1). It is clear that for evangelicals this is a high stakes exercise where they feel their faith community has much to lose should their fears be confirmed.⁶⁷ However, we have argued this anxiety leads them to an inaccurate way of interpreting the literature, contrary to how it would have been understood by its original readers. The existence of evangelicals writing about Daniel who are sympathetic to the mainstream view⁶⁸ demonstrates it is not as straightforward a situation as some would claim.

We have argued evangelical scholarship has made decisions on what Daniel is saying by applying anachronistic readings to the book. We are told Daniel “purports to be” “a work of true predictive prophecy” (E.J. Young 1949, 5), whereas mainstream scholars suggest this was not at all the intention of the authors of surveys of history, and Daniel’s “true prophecy” cannot be reduced to literalistic fulfillment. We are told Daniel “claims to be a revelation from God to the Daniel who lived in Babylon during the exile” (E.J. Young 1949, 5), whereas mainstream scholars understand authorship to be more concerned with genre attribution and identification with a tradition. We consider that the evangelical approach to the book leads to a misunderstanding of its meaning and ignores its historical context, ironically

out of a desire to protect its historicity. Ultimately, it seems that the most respectful way of reading Daniel, or indeed any ancient text, is to be open to what it is saying, even if it does not behave like evangelicals or modern people expect or want it to.

Notes

- 1 Young is a non-evangelical Christian, and Elms an Australian evangelical in line with those evangelicals like Goldingay and Lucas who follow the mainstream approach to the book of Daniel.
- 2 Elsewhere and regularly, Steinmann just talks of the “evangelical” view (e.g., 2008, 144). Perhaps in acknowledgement of the growing number of self-identified evangelicals who are sympathetic to mainstream scholarship on Daniel, Tanner’s recent commentary sometimes uses “conservative evangelical” to designate his group, e.g., “Conservative evangelicals, however, insist on the unified authorship of the book by the historical person Daniel who lived in the sixth century BC” (2020, 24).
- 3 See Sprinkle’s (2020, 7) clear statement: “What is essential for the traditional-conservative position is that the book records actual history and true, predictive prophecy.”
- 4 We will throughout be discussing the form of Daniel found in the Masoretic Text (MT) edition. The existence of the highly variant Old Greek edition is barely acknowledged, and if so, is marginalized by evangelicals. Everything beyond the Protestant canon is “apocryphal” (Archer 1974, 394) and “pseudoprophetic” (Miller 1994, 37).
- 5 There is so much written on Daniel, and such a bewildering array of evangelical interpretations on some points, we cannot aim to be comprehensive (no matter how fascinating some of the weirder evangelical arguments are), but will aim to give arguments by a selection of well-known evangelical authors that give the flavor of evangelical responses to the literary features of Daniel discussed. We do not see much development in more recent evangelical scholarship from the views which Rowley (1935) debated (at greater length than here and with extraordinary bibliographic depth). Rowley’s book can still be read with profit nowadays, even though mainstream scholarship has learned a great deal more about Second Temple period Jewish thought since Rowley’s time, leaving some of Rowley’s own mainstream views to be out of step with current scholarship.
- 6 Standard references include Collins 1993, Goldingay 2019, Lacocque 2018, Newsom and Breed 2014. Although the argument given here is presented in our own way, and individual scholars would disagree with details, it is based on widespread scholarly consensus. It should be acknowledged that, in our judgment, previous generations of mainstream scholars sometimes struggled to give a satisfactory explanation of features of Daniel that evangelicals likewise struggle with, such as the function of surveys of history, or of pseudonymous authorship.
- 7 First and Second Maccabees and Josephus contain much detail about these events. For scholarly discussion see, e.g., Portier-Young 2011, 49–216.
- 8 There are occasional attempts by evangelicals to cut the Gordian knot and claim these sections are not referring to Antiochus IV, but they seem to us, as to most scholars, to be very weak, even if they occasionally make valid points against certain views now rejected by mainstream scholars (e.g., Ferch 1983).
- 9 11:36 in full: “and the king shall act as he pleases, and will exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak

horrendous things, and he will prosper until the period of wrath is completed when what has been decreed has been done.” Bible translations in this chapter are our own, generally aiming for a quite literal translation of the Hebrew/Aramaic MT.

- 10 E.g., Waltke and O’Connor 1990, 525: “*wəqatalti* ... represents a situation relative (that is subordinate) to the leading verb (or equivalent).”
- 11 11:45: “And he will pitch the tents of his palace between the seas and the beautiful holy mountain, and he shall come to his end and there will be no one to help him.” 12:1a: “And at that time will arise Michael, the great prince who stands over the sons of your people.” 12:2–3: “And many of those who sleep in dust of the earth will awaken, some to eternal life, and others to disgrace, to everlasting contempt. And those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky and those who make many righteous like the stars forever and ever.”
- 12 For comments on evangelical scholarship on this passage see also S.L. Young 2011, 221–5.
- 13 E.g., Miller 1994, 75n75: “[T]he kingdom of God did not come in any sense during the Greek Empire”; Miller 1994, 305: “The context indicates that the ruler now in view will live in the last days, immediately prior to the coming of the Lord ... the clearest indication that this ‘king’ will live in the latter days is that the resurrection of the saints will take place immediately after God delivers his people from this evil individual’s power,” quoted with approval by Tanner 2020, 690–1; Sprinkle 2020, 40: “[T]he kingdom of God did not arrive at the downfall of Antiochus IV”; Steinmann 2008, 156: since Daniel 11 finishes with the resurrection of the dead, “[t]o be consistent with this terminus, the latter part of Daniel 11 must be referring to the Antichrist, and not to Antiochus, since Antiochus died in 164 BC, whereas the Antichrist remains until the Parousia of Christ”; Steinmann 2008, 538: “11:40–45 do not fit what is known about Antiochus from other historical sources”; Tanner 2020, 398: “Antiochus’ defeat did not result in a realization of the promised kingdom of God.” Note they assume that ancient people had a similar literalistic way of reading, thus the mainstream view necessarily means the “vision becomes an *ex eventu* prophecy by a Maccabean-era author who expected the kingdom of God to be established in his day” (Steinmann 2008, 379); “[h]e predicted Antiochus would carry out extensive military conquests and meet his end in the land of Israel. He plainly botched it” (Davis 2013, 157); “the prophecy fails, showing that the author has gone from history in the guise of prophecy to genuine prediction, which, as it turns out, he is not very good at” (Sprinkle 2020, 321); “the author *thought* that Antiochus’ life might end this way, even though it did not” (Tanner 2020, 686).
- 14 And yet, at other times, when it helps or at least does not threaten their understanding of the book, evangelicals seem quite capable of understanding Daniel as using symbolic language. Thus, Tanner (2020, 491) explains 8:10’s statement, “And it [the little horn, Antiochus] grew great, up to the host of the heavens and it cast down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars and trampled them,” that “[Antiochus’] actions are then depicted symbolically in v. 10 ... his aggression against the land of Judah was as though he made an assault upon ‘the host of heaven.’ ... Obviously Antiochus did not literally ascend to heaven. Yet in becoming greater militarily, his attempt to subjugate the land of Judah was likened in Daniel’s vision to an assault on heaven itself.”
- 15 Deuteronomy 18:22: “If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.”
- 16 For a catalogue of other suggestions for verses that mark a break in Daniel 11 where the text leaps far forward in history, see Rowley 1935, 130–2.

- 17 11:35: “And some of the wise will stumble so as to refine them and to purify and to be whitened until the time of the end for there is still (an interval before) the appointed time (*ki-’ôḏlammô’ēd*).”
- 18 Steinmann (2008, 409, 413) has a good note on 8:17 explaining that “the end” (*qēš*) can mean different things in different contexts. However, this observation is made with the intention of separating the “end” connected to Antiochus’ time in Daniel 8 from the literal eschatological “time of the end” that he finds in Daniel 11–12. This is therefore an admission the expression could mean the same thing in both places.
- 19 Miller (1994, 305) asserts vaguely that “vv. 36–39 seem to introduce the king for the first time,” with the attached n.84 not providing evidence for this claim beyond agreeing with others as early as Jerome (on 11:24) that a sudden leap forward in this chapter should not be surprising, pointing to verses 2–3. So too Gurney (1977, 40) says: “The period of history between verses 39 and 40 is irrelevant and therefore not described (cf. the gap in time between Xerxes and Alexander, 11:2, 3)”; cf. Davis 2013, 156n16; Steinmann 2008, 539. However, these verses at the beginning of Daniel 11 demonstrate the opposite, since there is a clear indication of a change of subject at verse 3, “then a mighty king shall arise,” something which is missing in verses 36 and 40.
- 20 Here, as elsewhere, the recent commentary by House goes its own way, perhaps a sign of the growing openness of evangelicals to accepting at least parts of the mainstream view. He agrees the focus of the text here stays on Antiochus IV until the end of chapter 11, noting: “This reading fits the book’s narrative flow” (2018, 178).
- 21 The “Maccabean date hypothesis (which of course was an attempt to explain away the supernatural element of prediction and fulfillment)” (Archer 1974, 399); “One suspects that the anti-supernaturalist bias in mainstream biblical studies furnishes much of the ‘push’ for this view” (Davis 2013, 20); “This [traditional-conservative view] is in contrast to the anti-supernatural bias of most who affirm the critical view” (Sprinkle 2020, 7; cf. 40); “The assumption that the visions of Daniel are *ex eventu* (‘after the event’) prophecies involves the same antisupernaturalistic bias since critics reject out of hand the possibility of predictive prophecy” (Steinmann 2008, 12; cf. 145, 156); “If the Roman Empire is in view in Dan[iel] 2 and Dan[iel] 7, then critical scholars are forced to conclude that the book of Daniel has predictive prophecy, the very thing they are unwilling to admit” (Tanner 2020, 79; cf. 197, 686–7); “theological liberals who deny the supernatural have maintained that predictive prophecy is a moral impossibility for God. Thus, the book must be a second century BC product of ‘pious deception’” (Whitcomb 1985, 10); “The identification of this [fourth] kingdom as Rome can hardly be questioned except by those whose presuppositions do not permit them to believe in the possibility of predictive prophecy” (Whitcomb 1985, 96). For discussion of this evangelical strategy, see S.L. Young 2011, 215–9.
- 22 For such general surveys see, e.g., Baldwin 1978, 46–59; House 2018, 18–23.
- 23 The lack of much mention of these other apocalypses applies even to Steinmann’s commentary, despite the fact he wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on historical apocalypses, albeit taking the position that Daniel is (much) earlier than the mid-second century BCE Apocalypse of Weeks and the Animal Apocalypse (1990, 48–9).
- 24 The use of a survey of history cast in the form of a future prediction is already found in older Akkadian texts (see Neujahr 2012).
- 25 “Israel’s traditions ... provided a key for unlocking the meaning of the present crisis and the pattern of things to come” (Portier-Young 2011, 347; on the Animal Apocalypse).

- 26 Thus, for example, older generations of scholars found the tensions in 4 Ezra, such as between the idea this world “will not be able to bring the things that have been promised to the righteous in their appointed times” (4 Ezra 4:27) and that there will be a joyous Messianic kingdom before the end (e.g. 4 Ezra 12:34) incompatible with single authorship of the book (Stone 1990, 11–3). For an example from the Protestant canon, in Revelation 3:12 the faithful are promised to become a pillar in the temple of God, but in Revelation 21:22 there is stated to be no temple.
- 27 Outside Kings, there are of course various other examples, such as Ezekiel 26:1–21 and 29:17–21. In the former passage, Ezekiel predicts Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Tyre, while in the second passage, dated 16 years later, Ezekiel admits Nebuchadnezzar’s siege failed. God now promises the Babylonians an Egyptian conquest as a consolation. As another example, a key plot element in Jonah involves an unfulfilled prophecy.
- 28 Although, as mentioned previously, it does say the vision is for “the time of the end” (8:17, 19), a phrase which we saw in Daniel 11 was claimed by evangelicals to indicate a leap forward from the time of Antiochus IV to the last days.
- 29 In the ancient Western tradition, it seems that, e.g., Jerome (in his convoluted way; see, e.g., on 11:44–45) basically agrees with this reading on two levels. We would argue, in fact, that these ancient Christians are doing nothing more than what was already done by earlier writers, which is acknowledging that the text’s literal meaning does not exclude the message’s reapplication to other situations. For example, the reapplication of Daniel’s fourth kingdom to Rome was done consciously in at least some cases. Particularly interesting is 4 Ezra 12:11–12, in Ezra’s Eagle Vision, where the interpreting angel tells Ezra: “The eagle that you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom that appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel. But it was not explained to him as I now explain to you.” In other words, the author of 4 Ezra is conscious the meaning of Daniel’s vision as explained to him is not the same as the new meaning now being revealed, where the eagle stands for Rome. Similarly, rather than deciding that Jesus’ (and Revelation’s) reapplication of Daniel to the Roman period (see Matthew 24:15) excludes all other interpretations and applications of the book (thus creating tension with what seems to be the book’s message for its first audience), Jesus’ interpretation could more easily be taken as warrant for Christian reapplication of Daniel, without ignoring its earliest reference. Strangely, sometimes evangelicals do take this very route. Thus, they accept Antiochus IV is the subject in Daniel 8 but they can also see him as foreshadowing the Antichrist at the end of time. See, e.g., Archer 1974, 398; Sprinkle 2020, 226; Steinmann 2008, 390, 547; Tanner 2020, 34, 477, 665, 684–5; Wallace 1979, 144–5; already Jerome on 8:14. If evangelicals can have something that has a literal fulfillment in the second century BCE and yet prefigures something else, why can’t they do this for other parts of Daniel? Baldwin (1978, 57, 201) is one who seems more generally open to multiple references.
- 30 Lack of acknowledgement of the Eastern Christian tradition can be found in the silence of many evangelical writers about it, as well as positive assertions such as: “Only in modern times did the opinion that Greece was the fourth empire become widespread” (Miller 1994, 96); “‘the Roman view’ was ... the only view among Christians until the rise of modern biblical criticism” (Steinmann 2008, 144); “The evangelical position has been the historic Christian interpretation throughout the centuries, including the early church (e.g., Jerome). The critical position stems from a bias against the Bible” (Tanner 2020, 197).
- 31 8:21: “The he-goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn which is between its eyes is the first king.”

- 32 7:23: “Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast there will be a fourth kingdom upon the earth that will be different from all other kingdoms and it will devour all the earth, and it will trample it down and crush it to pieces.’” The extraordinary number of ways conservative or evangelical readers have understood “the fourth kingdom is Rome” is catalogued by Rowley 1935, 73–85. We can only refer to Rowley’s (1935, 85–91) discussion of the limitations of each of these views.
- 33 House again goes his own way in seeming to agree with the mainstream view that the little horn in both chapters is Antiochus (House 2018, 144).
- 34 Opposed by ancient Eastern Christian exegetes who pointed out in Daniel 7 the Son of Man comes *after* the destruction of the fourth beast (i.e., the Greek kingdom). Walton (1986, 26, 35) points out 2:44 need only indicate God’s kingdom comes in the general period of the earthly kings.
- 35 E.g., Walton 1986, 25: “[I]t is patently not an evangelical option because it suggests that in lining up these four kingdoms the assumed second-century author of Daniel simply made a mistake.” Note that Gurney, even when breaking ranks by agreeing with the identification of the kingdoms by the mainstream view, is anxious to emphasize: “Daniel’s first three kingdoms are accurate, true-to-history descriptions of Babylon, Media and Persia” (1977, 41).
- 36 On evangelical scholarship on the four kingdoms see also S.L. Young 2011, 225–7.
- 37 For a similar suggestion in relation to evangelical scholarship on Daniel, see S.L. Young 2011, 221, 235, and in relation to another field (literacy), see 2015b, 168; cf. 2015a, 28.
- 38 For example, contrasting statements that do not need to be in opposition, such as in Daniel 7 the horn oppresses God’s people but in Daniel 8 prevents the daily offering in the temple; in Daniel 7 the horn loses its dominion and it is given to the saints but in Daniel 8 the horn comes to an end without any description of what happens next. For comments on such arguments, see Rowley 1935, 125–6.
- 39 Note that scholars regularly consider the toes, not mentioned in the Old Greek, to be a later addition to MT Daniel, once again showing the evangelical commitment to the MT.
- 40 Rowley (1935, 94), however, suggests the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms could have been in mind.
- 41 Steinmann also rightly asks why features like the two arms do not convey some similar significance.
- 42 7:7: “After this I was looking in visions of the night and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and fearful and exceedingly strong. It had great teeth of iron; it devoured and crushed and the remains it stamped with its feet. It was different to all the beasts that preceded it and it had ten horns.”
- 43 7:6: “After this I looked and there was another (beast), like a leopard. It had four wings of a bird upon its sides and the beast had four heads and authority was given to it.”
- 44 8:8: “Then the he-goat magnified itself greatly, and when he was strong the great horn was broken and there came up into prominence four horns in place of it toward the four winds of the heavens.”
- 45 11:4a: “And when he has arisen, his (Alexander’s) kingdom will be broken and will be divided toward the four winds of the heavens.”
- 46 E.J. Young (1949, 146) disagrees with these interpretations, and even though an evangelical and committed to the idea that the third kingdom is the Macedonian/Greek, considers that the wings denote speed, and the four heads denote the four corners of the earth. Miller 1994, 199–200 is an example of a common position among evangelicals of agreeing with this interpretation of the wings while still holding that the four heads stand for Alexander’s successors.

- 47 Or the first four powerful Persian kings, suggested by Gurney (1977, 39). For a discussion of these options see Rowley 1935, 155–60, who ultimately considers as inconclusive arguments made on either side for the identification of the second and third beasts based only on their description in Daniel 7.
- 48 11:2: “And now, I will tell you the truth: Behold, still three kings are going to arise for Persia and the fourth will gain greater riches than all. When he is strong, because of his riches, he will stir up all against the kingdom of Greece.” The objection of Miller (1994, 200n29) and Steinmann (2008, 151) that the heads are contemporaneous, not sequential, is undermined by the fact they nevertheless think the beast represents the prior career of Alexander the Great, and therefore not just one historical moment (Miller 1994, 199; Steinmann 2008, 345), and general observations such as that the four sequential beast-kingdoms are described as if coming up from the sea at the same time (7:3).
- 49 8:8: “Then the he-goat magnified itself greatly, and when he was strong the great horn was broken and there came up into prominence four horns in place of it toward the four winds of the heavens.”
- 50 8:9: “And out of one of them came forth a single horn, a little one, and it grew greatly to the south and to the east and to the glorious land.”
- 51 Rowley (1935, 148) notes the consciousness that the Medes and Persians are separate in that the Babylonian kingdom is commonly translated to be “divided and given to the Medes and Persians” (5:28); however, see Wolters 1991, 167–70 for the translation of the first verb as “assessed,” which if correct would undermine this point.
- 52 Note how for E.J. Young (1949, 280, 281) the four kingdom schema must be historical or it is “erroneous,” and: “It is impossible to hold that the fourth kingdom is Greece ... without positing historical error in the book of Daniel”; and, revealingly: “The necessity of making such an assumption is one of the strongest objections against this view.” In other words, any understanding of the text suggesting an error in the Bible is a priori excluded, a good example of commitment to inerrancy dictating the conclusions of scholarship (see S.L. Young 2015a).
- 53 E.g., the suggestion of a non-Jewish oracle underlying Daniel 2 (Collins 2016, 119).
- 54 But note prophetic texts which describe the Medes as potential destroyers of Babylon: Isaiah 13:17; Jeremiah 51:11, 28. Gurney (1977) and Walton (1986) elegantly “save” the historicity of the mainstream sequence of four kingdoms for their evangelical audience by suggesting the sequence of Daniel 2 and 7 represents the order of each kingdom’s rise to be the number one regional power, the Medes overtaking Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar’s time, before being eclipsed by Persia. However, we do not see their theory has made much impact on later evangelical scholarship, which prefers to have Rome as the fourth kingdom. Tanner (2020, 195–6n116, 398n354) at least engages with their work.
- 55 This makes even more unlikely the attempt by Taylor (2007, 252) to marginalize the Eastern Christian tradition by claiming it had been influenced by Porphyry in those areas where they disagree with Western/evangelical exegesis. The relationship between Porphyry and known Eastern Christian interpretations of Daniel is at present unclear. See Casey 1976; 1979, 51–70; and critiques in Collins 1993, 114–6; Ferch 1982. In any case, Van Peursen (2011, 195–9) makes strong arguments against the idea that the Eastern Christian tradition originated from Porphyry.
- 56 E.g., Tanner 2020, 38: “Yet the book clearly portrays the sixth-century BC Daniel as its author. The phrase ‘I, Daniel’ occurs in several places.”
- 57 E.g., Ferch 1983, 129: “an unknown author or authors who posed as a sixth-century statesman-prophet named Daniel and who pretended to offer genuinely

- inspired predictions”; Tanner 2020, 75: “a second-century BC work by an author attempting to disguise the book as written in the sixth century BC.” It should be noted that in this feature, modern evangelicals agree with the Eastern interpretation in that they agree the prophecy comes from a historical Daniel in the sixth century BCE (Casey 1976, 25).
- 58 See the discussion in Newsom and Breed 2014, 7.
- 59 This is a much larger discussion than is possible to have here. We attempt to capture the main thrust of the discussion, particularly the parts most relevant to the current chapter.
- 60 See the important discussion in Najman and Peirano 2019, 331–55.
- 61 The term “pseudonymity” is therefore unfortunate by its literal translation “false name,” which implies deception.
- 62 And others such as Jubilees.
- 63 See Najman 2003, 12–6 for an explanation of her development of Foucault’s concept of “discourse tied to a founder.”
- 64 Contra Davis 2013, 19 and Wallace 1979, 20. Davis holds a particular disdain for this position, going as far as to suggest that any editor who used a pseudonymous Daniel for this would have to have been “abysmally stupid.”
- 65 This is a view taken from Elms’ current Ph.D. dissertation project.
- 66 From the perspective that a faith community may consider a text to be an illegitimate part of their canon if the nature of the pseudonymous authorship cannot be explained or denied.
- 67 E.g., Tanner 2020, 37: “The whole issue is not merely an academic discussion, as there is a lot riding on the verdict. If the book purports to be written by Daniel in the sixth century BC, but in reality is *vaticinium ex eventu* (prophecy after the fact), then this calls into question the integrity of the Bible and its trustworthiness.”
- 68 E.g., Goldingay 1989/2019; Lucas 2002.

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8 A Resurrection Fallacy

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8.1 Introduction

A group of biblical scholars has been applying demonstrably faulty logic to Jesus' resurrection. The attempt to militate for one particular view of what it means to be raised from the dead *as the only possible perspective* has distorted exegesis. Ironically, recourse to the fallacy encourages the claim all discourse involving resurrection is fallacious.

Fallacies thrive with the desire to give the appearance of proving what is already felt to be the case. For example, distrust of government increases the appetite for assertions that follow the general pattern:

Politicians are liars,
and x is a politician;
therefore, x lies. X is a liar.

Different sorts of fallacies have been discussed since the time of Aristotle, with the common agreement they misfire because their language is deceptive and their alleged logic is misapplied (Tamarkin 2017, 1–5). In the present case, to say a class of people are liars does not prove any actual person “x” is telling a lie in a particular case, especially since “x” is a person, and might engage in many activities besides those of a politician. In addition, although politicians are said to be “liars,” their politics involves language not directly comparable to straightforward lies.

While the false syllogism might reassure a pre-existing dislike for “x,” it is a fallacy. “X” might well lie, but that would remain to be seen by examining cases. Fallacies are insidious because they seem to be logical while they are not, promoting adherence to views that are not derived from logic. Once they are uncovered as false, they also, and equally falsely, can be used to point in precisely the opposite sense of their claims. They speak of a world of facts but attempt to foreclose assessment utilizing means of pseudo-logical shortcuts. As in all false shortcuts, they do not arrive at the goal of the journey and can lead people to suspect the journey as a whole is not feasible.

Evangelical William Lane Craig (1985) proposed such a shortcut, in order to reconcile the earliest written reference to Jesus' resurrection, by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, with his own strong preference for the story of "the empty tomb." That designation is itself a shortcut, one that long predates Craig's contribution. For that reason, we will review canonical narratives involving the tomb, and then analyze them in terms of the claim they maintain Jesus' tomb was verifiably empty on Easter morning. That will uncover the fallacy that is then to be addressed.

8.2 Canonical Narratives Involving the Tomb of Jesus

Emphasizing the tomb's physical emptiness is more a feature of modern discussion than ancient sources. As the scene develops in the trajectory through the gospels, the beginning point is not an "empty tomb." More importantly, interest is by no means restricted to the issue of not finding a corpse. Other emphases intrude, in most cases seizing preeminence. Indeed, it is striking the two gospels where people enter the tomb and discover Jesus is not there, insist the site was *not* empty, but contained grave clothes (Luke 24:12; John 20:6–8).

In Mark, who represents the beginning of the trajectory, three women—Mary Magdalene and Mary of James and Salome—have a vision at the *opening* of the tomb. What they see turns them around, directing them to instruct Jesus' disciples and Peter, so they might "see" Jesus in Galilee (16:1–8). The three women are the first to know Jesus has been raised from the dead, although they do not see him. As named, they are the same three that appear in Mark's account of Jesus' death, with usage of the term "Sabbath" a linguistic echo of the timing of the burial, and they are listed in the same order as in 15:40. In the text's present state, Mark underlines Mary Magdalene's importance. The threefold use of her "perceiving" (at the death, 15:40; at the interment, 15:47; and at the visit to the tomb, 16:4) may be compared to Paul's creedal assertion in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 that Christ died, was buried, and rose again.

The women's action as described in 16:5 is not articulated so as to emphasize, or even establish, the tomb is empty. The stone has been removed, and the women "went" (reading *elthousai* with Codex Vaticanus) toward (*eis*) the site when they are interrupted by a young man. Later manuscripts read they "went into" the site (*eiselthousai* with *eis*). That wording probably implies entry into the tomb or cave, which makes Mark comparable to Luke 24:1–3, where a different set of women explicitly enter the tomb and do not find Jesus' body. Such harmonizations of Mark with later gospels are common in the manuscript tradition; their purpose is to make the gospels agree. Efforts of this kind are rightly taken by textual critics—as a matter of course—to indicate a later "correction" of texts toward a canonical standard. No matter what manuscript is consulted, there is no statement in Mark, as there is in Luke, of the women's proceeding into the

cave past the entrance and to the ledge where a corpse would be placed in a burial cave.

Instead, the focus is on the young man, and his statement, identifying Jesus as *Nazarenos* in 16:6. The term *Nazarenos* is consistent in Mark from 1:24, where the unclean spirit's address of Jesus as a *Nazarenos*—and “the holy one of God”—rather than as “Nazorean” (*Nazoraios*, which predominates in other gospels). Mark preserves an alternative Greek correspondent of *nazir* in Hebrew (see the variable treatment “Nazirite” in the Septuagint of Numbers 6:1–21; Judges 16:17). In 16:6, the emphasis is not on an allusion to Nazareth, but on the identification of Jesus as “the holy one of God” as compared to the world of uncleanness, whether in the form of unclean spirits or of death itself. Raised from the dead, he transcends impurity.

The gospel's abrupt ending in 16:8 climaxes the primitive but effective art of Mark, signaling how disruptive the young man's announcement was. (Again, later manuscript traditions produced longer endings of Mark, to bring it into accord with later gospels.) Whether or not the tomb is described as empty, it produces astonishment in every version, but for differing reasons. However, by itself, the empty tomb provides no proof of the resurrection in any version of the account.

In Matthew, the same pattern of a mandate for vision elsewhere, in Galilee rather than Jerusalem, is also emphasized, but now by new means: An earthquake and the active intervention of an angel transform the scene (28:1–8). Matthew has Mary Magdalene go to the tomb with “the other Mary” (28:1). It is unclear whether this is supposed to be the same person as Mark's “Mary of James” (16:1) and Matthew loses track of Salome—unless following a harmonizing tradition of interpretation she is taken as “the mother of the sons of Zebedee” in 27:56—although Mark names her as one of the women at the tomb. These are indications this key story was reshaped prior to the writing of the gospels, and that reshaping came at the cost of destabilizing the memory of particular women.

Matthew's language of Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” is consistent between the interment scene (27:61) and their visit to the tomb after the Sabbath. Although the verb “perceive” is absent in the earlier case (as compared to Mark 15:47), Matthew preserves the usage in 28:1. That is a residue of preparation for a visionary narrative comparable to Mark's, which has largely been overtaken by the apocalyptic intervention of an earthquake and an angel.

Matthew makes the young man at the tomb described in Mark into the explicitly heavenly angel of the Lord involved in a physically verifiable earthquake (28:2 and 27:51–53). The scene is no longer purely visionary, as in Mark, but details a supernatural intervention into the physical world with tangible consequences. Matthew's explanation that the guards (another unique element among the synoptics) became “as dead” (28:4) permits the women to become the center of attention. In contrast, the later Gospel of Peter 9:28–10:57 makes the guards (now Roman soldiers) into

principal witnesses before the women arrive on the scene. Yet even so the women are utterly passive in Matthew, and lack the specific purpose they have in Mark, which is to anoint Jesus in the tomb. Nonetheless, the women do not keep silent, as in Mark 16:8, where “they said nothing to anyone.” Matthew reports great joy overcomes their fear, and they depart to report their experience to Jesus’ disciples.

Matthew overshadows the connection between Mary’s ritual anointing and Jesus’ resurrection with its unique earthquake, the second reference to the earthquake in the gospel. The first is anachronistically embedded within the crucifixion (27:51–53):

And look: the curtain of the temple was split from top to bottom in two, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the memorials were opened, and many bodies of the holy ones who slept were raised; they came out from the memorials after his raising and entered into the holy city and were manifested to many.

Matthew is ambivalent about his own chronology, so the earthquake is allusive in the first reference. Presumably, it coincides with the moment of Jesus’ resurrection, because Matthew’s conception is this moment alone marks an apocalyptic breakthrough showing how believers will be raised. The new element represents a seismic shift to a physical and apocalyptic concept rather than visionary belief in Jesus’ resurrection.

The earthquake, together with the angel’s rolling of the stone and interpretation of the events (28:2–7), obviates any reference to the women wishing to anoint Jesus. The focus is on the angel as the Lord’s, and his function implicitly includes opening the memorials of the holy ones at the same time. The Matthean earthquake literally changes the geography of Jerusalem, rendering the physical status of many tombs in the area indeterminate.

What Matthew’s approach achieves, at the cost of reducing the role of the women and making any categorical statement about the condition of Jesus’ place of burial impossible, is a distinctive emphasis on the apocalyptic transformation of the righteous dead, with Jesus’ resurrection as the vanguard of that change. Matthew’s procedure is to bring the initially visionary narrative of Mary Magdalene into line with the apocalyptic reasoning he prefers. This result is achieved by deploying an angel, explicitly angelic interpretation, an earthquake, resisters subject to punishment (the guards), as well as favored witnesses (the women), elements also featuring in the uniquely Matthean expansion of the “Little Apocalypse” (Matthew 25). In effect, Jesus is raised here, and only here, in a manner fully commensurate with the Matthean parable of how the Son of Man comes in glory (25:31–46). Apocalypse emerges as the substance of vision.

With Matthew’s apocalyptic conception, disruption is more vital than continuity. That is exemplified by the imagery of the angel sitting on what is left of the tomb and explaining the significance of events to the women

(28:2–7). The tomb is neither inspected, nor found empty; what had once been a burial cave is no longer. In Matthew the explicit absence of Jesus’ body features in the *false* story concocted by the high priests and elders (28:11–15), that Jesus’ students had stolen his corpse. For Matthew, the body’s absence does not prove the resurrection; only Jesus’ apocalyptic presence, together with the saints that rose with him (27:52–53), can do that, and even then there is room for doubt (28:17). The resurrection’s physicality proceeds from its status as the definitive and first stage of the age that is coming, not because it extends the terms and conditions of the present age. The Matthean angel explains Jesus “is not here, *because* he has been raised” (28:6). The resurrection determines physical reality, rather than being its product.

While Matthew insists on the physical disruption of Jerusalem’s cemeteries, Luke specifies the *integrity* of the site of Jesus’ burial. The change of emphasis, hand in hand with evident differences over facts on the ground, signals a new way of reasoning through the resurrection. Among the synoptic gospels, Luke alone has the women search for, and fail to find, Jesus’ body (24:1–11, v. 3), a result then confirmed by Peter (24:12), who does see linen wrappings. Luke at first does not name Mary and her companions, although Mary Magdalene is belatedly mentioned in 24:10 with Joanna and Mary of James and other unnamed women. This approach may be taken to finesse the variation of names within traditions prior to Luke.

The women search the tomb and find it empty. The Lukan treatment of the scene produces a certifiably empty tomb, because the women go in and inspect it (24:3). Notably Luke also has the angelic “males” (*andres*, 24:4) say, “He is not here, but has been raised” (24:6), signaling a logical progression that becomes a hallmark of Luke–Acts. Instead of the resurrection requiring the apocalyptic displacement of Jesus’ body as well as the saints’ bodies (Matthew’s conception), Luke makes the tomb’s emptiness a requirement of the resurrection. This would suggest Luke’s additional notice, that the women did not find the body, intends to specify the announcement does more than insist on the identity of the person raised, whose grave can be seen in one state (Mark 16:6) or another (Matthew 28:6). Luke also maintains the body could not be found (24:3), and then was announced as raised by two men unlike Matthew’s angel (24:4–6), such that it was moveable within space, without local constraint. Richard Miller (2015, 173–7) has shown Luke’s treatment, in particular, offers a correlation between the case of Jesus and the translation of Romulus in classical sources.

The purpose of the women, an indeterminate number, since unnamed companions are referred to in 24:10, coincides with Mark’s presentation, although the notice is much reduced as well as delayed, and their real function becomes one of pragmatic witness: The stone has been rolled off, and they enter the tomb, certifying Jesus’ corpse is not there (24:3). Although this passage is referred to generically as the narrative of “the empty tomb,” it is first in Luke (and then in John) that the tomb’s emptiness of Jesus’ body,

rather than its place as the location of a supernatural event (Mark's vision or Matthew's earthquake), becomes the governing concern.

Likewise, Luke will have the risen Jesus insist on his own physical reality. Only in this gospel does Jesus explicitly say (24:39): "See my hands and my feet, that I am myself. Feel me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bone just as you perceive I have." Jesus even eats some fish to make his point (24:41–43). In this manner, the resurrection is substantial and significantly material, in some ways more physical than in any of the other gospels, even as Jesus' body defies strictures of location. Since the women's experience after 24:4 appears as nothing other than an angelic vision (as 24:23 confirms), rather than a physical encounter, this makes for an *aporia* within Luke's own presentation, since the empty tomb would seem to anticipate the women will meet with Jesus' risen body. The narrative concerning Mary Magdalene and her companions stands in contrast to Luke's physical perspective. The women in Luke do not take part in Jesus' interment, not even implicitly. They only watch and wait through the Sabbath with the ointment they have bought (23:55–56); they see the body (23:55) in the very place they will not find it (24:3) later.

Mary and her companions do not succeed in convincing the other disciples their vision is authentic; the men reject their testimony as "nonsense" (*Ieros*, 24:9–12, v. 11), idle tales from women. Apart from tangible, physical substance, Luke dismisses the women's vision and their testimony with a single word. They provide the correct meaning of the events because it is given to them by the angels, but not the confirmation of what had happened.

For Luke's gospel, only Jesus raised from the dead in flesh and bone (24:39) can explain his resurrected presence among his disciples. The book of Acts (1:3) sets aside a period of 40 days during which the risen Jesus teaches his followers in and around Jerusalem, not Galilee. The ambivalent "body" (Luke 24:3), tangible and yet uncontainable, is the resurrection's sole evidence.

The Gospel of John extends all previous narratives of the tomb. The manner of extension conveys a perspective on the resurrection that coordinates the scenes in the gospel's final two chapters and provides insight into the character of the traditions prior to John. Where Mark reasons through the resurrection along the lines of vision, Matthew along the lines of apocalypse, and Luke along the lines of revelation history, John is absorbed by the issue of belief in Jesus (20:30–31) as raised from the dead.

Mary Magdalene does not enter Jesus' tomb in John but reacts only to the stone's removal (20:1–2); the extent of her contact with the tomb, as Mark 16:4–5 also describes, does not include actual entry. John makes emphatic a trait in Mark that might be overlooked: Mary Magdalene never goes into the tomb. However, in John she comes to precisely the wrong conclusion based on what she sees. She supposes Jesus' body has been removed: "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" (20:2). Since Mary is described as on her own, usage of

the first-person plural here seems an artifact of an earlier tradition, where several women visited the tomb. Mary Magdalene's use of the impersonal "they" to refer to the corpse's removal covers the cases of virtually anyone taking the body away. Later traditions of the *Toledoth Jesu*, where a gardener is responsible, might even find their echo in her general statement (Meerson and Schäfer 2014, 1: 101–3).

In any case, seeing the tomb does not amount to believing in the resurrection. Two male students, Peter and his companion, run to the tomb and observe the remaining grave clothes (20:3–8). Just as Mary's non-entry of the tomb (20:1–2) echoes Mark (16:4–5), so Peter's entry and sight of the grave clothes (*othonia*, 20:6) echoes Luke (24:12).

But John uniquely has the "other" disciple, "whom Jesus loved," join in the sight with Peter; only he believes based on what he sees (20:8). He stands for believers who know Jesus as raised from the dead and therefore have the advantage over even Peter, who is not yet described as coming to faith.

At this point Peter's limitation, as well as Mary's (and the incomprehension of students yet to be encountered), is explained: No one had understood the Scripture Jesus had to be raised from the dead (20:9). John follows the synoptic pattern in insisting on a Christological reading of Scripture without specifying a passage. Earlier, John's Jesus had used the example of the bronze serpent Moses raised in the wilderness (3:14–15; cf. 12:32–33; Numbers 21:4–9), and he had spoken of the temple as his body (2:18–22). For John, Scripture was replete with types (foreshadowings) because prophets saw Jesus' "glory" (12:41) before the eternal word became flesh (1:14).

The resurrection is the pivot for John's gospel that enables disciples to move from their natural limitation of understanding to a faithful appreciation of Jesus as the Anointed, the Son of God (20:30–31). Anticipated from the gospel's outset, the nature of his "glory" only emerges fully at its close. Once that is known, however, even Jesus' death is a moment of his glorification (13:31; 17:1–5). Belief is the means of access to the knowledge of Jesus' glory, a leitmotif of the diverse traditions in John that reaches its climax—but for the denouement that caps the whole in chapter 21—in 20:27–31.

8.3 "The Empty Tomb"

The four gospels introduce their resurrection narratives with reference to a group of Jesus' disciples visiting his tomb. The group is variously identified, although Mary Magdalene is a constant factor, but the tomb is only described as vacant of Jesus in the latest of the gospels, Luke (24:3) and John (20:5–8). The accounts vary strongly as concerns what was found, and by whom. In any case, the earliest gospel speaks of women coming to the tomb without a statement about their entry or discovery (Mark 16:5), and Matthew innovatively speaks of an earthquake (28:2) which makes any statement in regard to the physical condition of the tomb uncertain. In any case, the period of the gospels is a generation after Paul.

Despite the fact any reference to the tomb first appears in the gospels, which are all later than Paul's writings, and the fact the tomb only became "empty" with the depictions of Luke and John, "the empty tomb" has become a metonym for the resurrection of Jesus itself in a vigorous strand of scholarship (Chilton 2019, 169–77). Several factors have favored that identification, to the point where asserting Jesus was raised *must* mean the tomb was empty, because that was its "inspiration" (Schaberg 2002, 282–91). Those factors include a tendency to harmonize gospel texts, a preference for the gospels over Paul in assessing Jesus, and the familiarity of accounts concerning the tomb from liturgies of Easter Day.

Such factors lie in the background of readers generally. But partisanship of the primacy of "the empty tomb" is by no means limited to those who treat the gospels as an undifferentiated whole, bypass Paul, and limit their attention to the readings of the first Sunday of Easter. Taken together, they probably would not have produced the fixation on the tomb's emptiness in a great deal of current discussion. The impetus to use "the empty tomb" as a logical proof of the resurrection derives from two axioms of fundamentalism, which arose at the dawn of the twentieth century in the U.S. and has increasingly influenced discussion of the Bible, and of the resurrection in particular, over the past several decades.

First, the insistence all Scriptures are inerrantly true is basic to *The Fundamentals*, a set of principles that came to prominence in 1910 (Ruthven 2004, 10–1). On this basis, Paul is not ignored, but is read in such a way that he agrees with the gospels. This informing principle is not at all the same as a literal reading of Scripture, with which fundamentalism is frequently confused; it is more accurately described as dedicated to a concordant understanding of the Bible. This often results in using one passage to interpret another, whether or not they can be shown to be critically related to one another.

Second, fundamentalists inherited from some strands of Reformation theology the insistence that Jesus' resurrection must be in "the same body" in which he died in order to be considered true (Strickland 2010). Although their "fundamentals" were formulated at the beginning of the twentieth century, emphasis on this axiom has grown since that time (Geisler 1987). The empty tomb, taken as an amalgam of all the gospels and projected into Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 15, delivers a reading of Scripture that honors both principles in a stroke. Approached in this way, "the empty tomb" has to have been believed for any statement about the resurrection to have been made. That putative logic is then deployed to make the tomb in all the narratives equally "empty," despite crucial variations from passage to passage.

This is how the argument of evangelical William Lane Craig developed. A dozen years earlier, Raymond Brown (1973, 83–4), representing a consensus of critical opinion, had contested the correlation of Paul with the gospels in this regard. Craig (1985, 40) argued "saying that Jesus died—was

buried—was raised—appeared, one automatically implies the empty grave has been left behind.” This reading of 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, which makes no direct mention of a tomb or Mary Magdalene and her companions, does not allow for Paul’s explicit statements in the same chapter that the body that is raised, although emphatically a body, is “spiritual” rather than existing in the flesh or even in the soul (1 Corinthians 15:35–49).

The exegesis of Paul’s meaning is a challenge, but he leaves no ambiguity in his claim “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). Paul’s vigorous assertion is evidently his own point of view. He is also well aware of other teachers within his movement by whom Jesus “was seen” (1 Corinthians 15:3–8), such that they influenced how his resurrection was conceived.

Variation regarding issues such as the degree of physicality involved is notable within the gospel resurrection accounts, but the most pressing concern, from the perspective of those who developed the traditions reflected in the gospels, centered on how Jesus’ resurrection shaped those who encountered him as alive. Imperatives are consistently the result, but they vary (Chilton 2019, 187–96). The result of an encounter with the risen Jesus might be an impetus to encourage others toward a visionary realization (Mark 16:7; Matthew 28:10; Luke 24:9; John 20:17–18), to engage in forgiving others on a programmatic basis (John 20:22–23; 21:1–19), to curate Jesus’ teaching (Matthew 28:19–20), to extend his message beyond the traditional lands and peoples of Judaism (Acts 2:14–36; Galatians 1:15–16), to anticipate Jesus’ judgment as Son of Man (Acts 1:10–11), and/or to realize his presence in the acts of ritual and interpretation (Luke 24:30–32). The attempt to reduce Jesus’ resurrection to a single, physical description has resulted, among other distortions, in ignoring these ethical imperatives, arising from the variously described encounters with him, all of which gave rise to Christianity itself.

That is one of the fallacy’s characteristic features. Having reduced all the options of understanding Jesus’ resurrection to one, the alleged source of them all, the mere assertion of this physicalized conception is held to constitute the belief he was raised from the dead. In fact, however, the accounts themselves present encounters with Jesus that impel correlative ethical activities. Ignoring them results, ironically, in an ahistorical view of Christianity.

The fallacy and its consequences have thrived outside a fundamentalist environment, or even the penumbra of such an environment. N.T. Wright (2003, 321) has embraced it with logical daring to explain the absence of “the empty tomb” from any mention in Paul’s writings, especially 1 Corinthians 15:3–8:

The fact that the empty tomb itself, so prominent in the gospel accounts, does not appear to be specifically mentioned in this passage, is not significant; the mention here of “buried, then raised” no more needs to be

amplified in that way than one would need to amplify the statement “I walked down the street” with the qualification “on my feet.”

But if the text’s exegetical thread is followed in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, rather than the reductive logic of the interpreter, the bare statement of Jesus’ burial is connected immediately to the claim he was raised on the third day. Paul says these events happened “according to the Scriptures.” If that phrase applies to both the burial (not only the death) and the resurrection, then Paul might be the earliest source available for a connection between the Passion and the song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, where it is said the servant will be buried with a rich man (53:9). Taken in that way, Paul’s bare assertion might also be taken to allude to the reference to Joseph of Arimathea in the gospels, although it is obvious no specific tradition apart from the fact of burial is stated. Paul’s reference to other apostles in 1 Corinthians 15:8 might reflect an awareness of traditions concerning Mary Magdalene and Barnabas, for example, but if so he does not feature them in his argument. In any case, the reference to “the empty tomb itself,” in an aggregate reference to texts presenting differing conceptions, is another trait of the fallacy.

Wright (2003, 272), like Craig, also appeals to Paul’s background as a Pharisee, pitting the apostle “with his fellow Jews against the massed ranks of pagans; with his fellow Pharisees against other Jews.” Unfortunately, this approach minimizes many different ways in which resurrection was conceived in ancient Judaism. These have been identified as (Chilton 2019, 57–64):

- Resurrection of “spirits” (1 Enoch 22:3–14; Jubilees 23:31).
- Resurrection “like the stars” (Daniel 12:3; Josephus, *Jewish War* 6:47).
- Angelic resurrection (1QSb [The Rule of the Blessing] 4:24–25; Philo, *On the Life of Moses* 2 § 288).
- Resurrection of flesh (2 Maccabees 7:10–11; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:163; 3:374).
- Resurrection of soul (Wisdom 3:1; 4 Maccabees 13:13–15).

Among these options, Jesus in the gospels aligns himself only with the angelic conception (Mark 12:25; Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:34–36), a factor likely featuring in Paul’s conviction that resurrection is in a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42–50). That statement, Paul’s own account of his call as an apostle in Galatians (1:15–17) and the later accounts in Acts (9:1–22; 22:3–21; 26:8–20) emphasize an encounter with flesh implausible (and see 2 Corinthians 5:16). Within the narrative of the tomb, the young man of Mark 16:5, the angel of Matthew 28:2–3, the two males of Luke 24:3, and the two angels of John 20:12 all find their resonance within the textual emphasis associated with Paul’s encounter with the risen Jesus by means of vision. These comport with the visionary emphasis that is a consistent

feature of the narrative, overshadowing any alleged agreement regarding the tomb's content. Luke even generalizes what the women saw at the tomb was "a vision of angels" (24:22–23), an understanding that accords with Paul's summary of his assertion he had "seen Jesus our Lord" (1 Corinthians 9:1). To that extent, some familiarity with tradition associated with Mary Magdalene might be imputed to Paul.

An angelic conception comports with the imperative to press others toward a visionary realization Jesus was raised from the dead (Mark 16:7). Similarly, to forgive others on God's behalf on the basis of an endowment with Spirit (John 20:22–23) presupposes Jesus himself has entered the realm of Spirit. Making disciples of others, as in Matthew 28:19–20, assumes Jesus' presence, experienced collectively, without choosing among angelic or spiritual conceptions. Traditions associated with the Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36) make Jesus' position in heaven the source of the Spirit's impulse to extend the range of activity exponentially. As Son of Man (Acts 1:10–11), a conception derived from Daniel and related to astral imagery, he is conceived of as judge with a palpable and constant presence. Yet when associated with ritual and interpretation (Luke 24:30–32), Jesus can disappear, once recognized, as easily as he appeared unrecognized (Luke 24:15, 16, 31).

Among these conceptions, emphasis on the risen Jesus' physicality without question appears, especially in the desire to eat and his willingness to be touched (Luke 24:36–43), although it is far from dominant. Physical insistence emerges in the stream of tradition, which conceives Jesus as the Son of Man who is to return in judgment, complete with a physical substance that comports with the physical beings he is to judge (Acts 1:10–11). Wright carefully distances himself from identification with fundamentalism's "same body" argument, since he stresses the difference of the body that is raised from the body that was buried (2003, 190–202, 271–6; cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2: 163; 3:374). Augustine makes a similar, yet even more global claim in regard to what he calls "spiritual flesh" (*City of God* 22.21). Any prospect of distance from the fallacy, however, is removed when Wright (2003, 614, 638) states, "the empty tomb was an absolute and unquestioned datum," a generalization which simply does not comport with the evidence to hand. Even in the most physical of conceptions, if the body raised is not the same as the body buried, then it is difficult to see how the tomb's emptiness is a "datum" at all.

8.4 Doubling Down

In an astute analysis, Marianne Sawicki (1994, 257–75) pointed out the chain of custody of Jesus' body was interrupted shortly after his death, so absolutes are not in play in regard to what happened at the tomb. This remains the case, even in the construction of Matthew's gospel (27:62–66; 28:4, 11–15), where guards are uniquely provided for the tomb. However, they are incapacitated during their watch, although

they are more alert (and become Roman) in the elaborate account of the Gospel of Peter 9:35–10:40. In this case, what they witness does not establish the connection between the person buried and the angelic figures that enter and exit the tomb. For that reason, even apart from Wright’s observation that a resurrected body of flesh might nonetheless be conceived as not the same body that died, the assertion of “the empty tomb” as “an absolute and unquestioned datum” throughout the texts as a whole is not warranted. It is far from his assertion of “what some would call a ‘proof,’ in some sense, of the resurrection” (Wright and Crossan 2006, 22). Nonetheless, fallacies sometimes show the capacity, as they are repeated, to appear all the more certain.

Wright’s and Craig’s approach was taken up by Christopher Bryan (2011, 38, 171), who conferred deductive force upon it by invoking Sherlock Holmes’ principle: “[W]hen you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth.” Without citing Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*, where Holmes invokes this principle, Wright reverts to the same argument (Wright and Crossan 2006, 22).

By explicitly citing the principle of the fictional detective, Bryan has highlighted the linguistic confusion involved in the fallacy. Within its terms of reference, “impossible,” “improbable,” and “truth” are correlated, much as “liars,” “politician,” and the verb “lie” are correlated in our introductory example of a fallacy. As observed then, one of the principle flaws of proving *x* lies by means of the false syllogism is that although, as a person, *x* is perhaps a politician, *x*’s identity is not controlled by that category. Now, in the case of Jesus’ resurrection, the texts referring to him as raised from the dead do not uniformly, or even by consensus, present him as physically resuscitated. Resuscitation no more controls the category of being raised from the dead than being a politician controls any human being’s identity.

In addition, much as the meaning is not aligned as one moves through “liar” applied to a politician, and the verb “lie” predicated of a person, so the correlation between that which is “not impossible” and “the truth” only applies under strict conditions. In the fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes brings his rule of detection to bear because he inhabits a finite universe of possibilities and probabilities, all of which can be known. That universe will obviously be upset by any factor that is unknown, and even more seriously, if the universe proves not to be finite. Resurrection, of course, is not conceived within the New Testament (NT) as an occurrence among finite options; its point is the transcendence of what was thought to be a limited set of possibilities. That emphasis is one stable factor among the narratives of Jesus’ resurrection, together with their conveyance of an imperative that arises from the encounter with Jesus. For this reason, applying the fictive Holmes’ aphorism to “the empty tomb” introduces a digression from the purpose of the narratives.

The problems of essentializing the resurrection to the point of identification with the account of “the empty tomb” are not only exegetical and logical. Once the datum to be explained is simply absence, rather than absence as the prelude to Jesus’ presence, various revisionist explanations have flourished. Examples include having Jesus’ corpse removed from the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea before the women’s visit (Lowder 2001, 264), or simply having the women muddled about which tomb to visit (Aus 2008, 321; Lake 1907, 250–3). When the empty tomb is taken on its own in order to mount an apologetic argument for the resurrection, a restrictive focus on that element alone can easily be turned to argue against it. That is all the more likely to occur, if it is maintained (contrary to the evidence) that all the accounts are predicated on the tradition of the tomb and its emptiness of Jesus’ corpse.

Claims that Jesus had survived the crucifixion, and walked out of the tomb, were deployed to justify elaborate legends of his visits to Kashmir, Glastonbury, and Japan (sometimes to spawn progeny). Such stories thrived during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Gilchrist 2015, Joseph 2012, Lidz 2013). Yet, they have been surpassed by baroque schemes, designed to deny Jesus’ corpse had ever been put in the tomb which Mary Magdalene and her companions visited. The dead body was either dumped and left to dogs (Crossan 1994, 123–58; Loisy 1907–1908, 700–12) or moved about from tomb to tomb (Tabor and Jacobovici 2012). Each of these scenarios has been subjected to analysis and found wanting, although considering them helps to sharpen appreciation of both the texts involved and the archaeology of the period. That consideration, however, also reveals the common foible of such schemes. They short-circuit analysis, bypassing an exegesis of what texts say in a rush to make claims of history. Their textual truncation includes considering only the “empty tomb,” without regard to the substance of the claim of Jesus’ disciples, that they encountered him after his death.

The apologetic argument that “the empty tomb” lies at the core of the resurrection has therefore spawned an inadvertent progeny of theories crafted to deny Jesus was raised from the dead at all. Since the gospels themselves portray the removal of Jesus’ body as a rational conclusion (John 20:2) to draw from his uninterpreted absence, or a deliberate plot (Matthew 28:11–15), that is scarcely surprising.

Just as Jesus’ survival of crucifixion, however improbable, cannot be dismissed formally as a possibility, theft and confusion over the gravesite are also not impossible. Indeed, the challenge of an argument grounded in the alleged emptiness of the tomb is that it must exclude other arguments and account for the range of experiences of the resurrection as indicated by diverse texts. That helps explain the increasing tendency of partisans of one view or another to assert their explanation of the physical emptiness of the tomb is the fact or datum that provides the best point of departure. That is, they conflate their own hypothesis for why the tomb was “empty” with the alleged unanimity of the gospels in respect to that emptiness.

8.5 The Problem Identified

The situation was accurately described by Alan Segal, when he characterized “the empty tomb” in contemporary scholarship as a “modern, rationalized apologetic synthesis,” which occluded properly exegetical discussion since it represented only “a small group of scholars made up entirely of the faithful trying to impose their faith in the form of an academic argument” (2006, 135–6). Segal (2004, 393–4) himself conflates “spiritual visions” with Jesus’ “transformed, angelic state.” In his own way, Segal engages in the reductionism for which he criticizes Wright. He short-circuits the physicality of some narratives of the tomb, while Wright short-circuits the pervasive understanding Jesus “was seen” (*ôphthê*) after his death. Segal has been criticized for claiming the earliest rabbis were not concerned with identifying the afterlife with the “fleshy body” (2004, 607–8; cf. Levenson 2006, 232). Yet rabbinic literature attributes to the second-century teacher Joshua ben Hananiah the view God will generate people from an indestructible bone in the spinal column (Genesis Rabbah 28:3).

Segal’s criticism of Wright, then, shows him deploying some of the same reductionist tendencies he identifies. At least, however, the reference to the visionary element in the resurrection appears explicitly in Paul’s work, providing the first written material (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:5–8). That was also the point of departure of Gerd Lüdemann (in Copan and Tacelli 2000, 45), who accorded visions explanatory power:

When we talk about visions, we must include something we experience every night when we dream. That’s our subconscious way of dealing with reality. A vision of that sort was at the heart of the Christian religion; and that vision, reinforced by enthusiasm, was contagious and led to many more visions, until we have an “appearance” to more than five hundred people.

With this process, which seems rational to him, Lüdemann contrasts a physical conception, because “if you say that Jesus rose from the dead biologically, you would have to presuppose that a decaying corpse—which is already cold and without blood in its brain—could be made alive again.” That view strikes him as “nonsense.”

Lüdemann’s position today appears unusual, but prior to the fashion of “the empty tomb” fallacy within academic discourse, its basic contours were a matter of wide agreement, as is apparent from the introduction of C.F.D. Moule (1968, 5) to a work he edited: “[T]he Evangelists, who wrote later, are objectifying, localizing, and limiting what was really in the nature of vision, with all the elusiveness and ubiquity of vision.” At the time of the writing and now, that remains a cautious observation. In exegetical terms, the evidence of Paul predates that of the gospels.

This moment of apparent commonality, prior to the argument that “the empty tomb” was the necessary condition of the resurrection of Jesus, nonetheless, contained within itself deep disagreement. “Vision” might be validated as insight, or dismissed as hallucination. Colleen Shantz’s (2012) work in particular represents the attempt in a disciplinary fashion to avoid the pitfall of either privileging religious experience, as if it were so primal as to escape criticism, or a matter of such cultural projection as to amount to no more than hallucination. Continued research might help provide parameters for the analysis of visionary claims without presuming they can be either authenticated or dismissed out of hand. Although exegetes have anecdotally compared the resurrection to post-mortem appearances of others who have died (Allison 2005, 269–99), analysis of the nature of such experiences remains preliminary. At the moment, despite a great deal of disciplined interest in “vision,” no categorical finding can be recommended for applying it to the resurrection as an adequate explanation. To that extent, Segal’s argument needs to be assessed cautiously in so far as he asserts he has developed a global replacement of physical conceptions of the resurrection.

The particular challenge in evaluating the resurrection involves assessing the disciples’ claims to have encountered Jesus and their understanding of how Jesus was alive after his death. The range of actions of which Jesus is named as the impetus, as well as the array of witnesses, speaks against attempts to reduce all the accounts to a single simple cause. The problem persists, no matter the direction of the reduction. Attempting to explain all the texts on the basis of an alleged guilt complex on Peter’s part (Lüdemann 1995, 129–30) works as poorly as trying to project “the empty tomb” onto every stage of every tradition. The fallacy is not the deployment of the argument to appropriate texts but the attempt to derive the whole array of accounts from a singular cause.

A major reason for the drive to find the single causative trigger of the resurrection is, although ancient sciences could frame views of transcendence, modern science is widely held to exclude any such possibility. The use of electricity, it is commonly said, is incompatible with belief in anything like the resurrection (Bultmann 1984, 4).

Although scientific models of physical existence have often been far less exclusive of the transcendent than is often supposed, the idea of science as a self-contained, indisputable system profoundly influenced theology during the twentieth century. The result, however, was not—except in a few cases—denial of the resurrection. Instead, the resurrection came to be portrayed as the occasion for a response of faith in its purest form, apart from and if necessary despite scientific or historical proof (Ebeling 1961, 62). Departure from the empirical world came to be portrayed as a mark of greater, indeed primordial, faith. The bifurcation between faith and reason over the issue of Jesus’ resurrection became predominant in discussion after WWII; partisanship of “the empty tomb” increased in response to the dichotomy, offering a litmus test for faith in the midst of skepticism.

The assertion of faith regardless of science, however, does not appear to be what the NT texts wish to promote. Rather, neither the visions recounted nor the later accounts concerning the tomb (which gradually became empty in their descriptions) are in themselves portrayed as the crucial disclosure. Instead, the risen Jesus inscribed fresh patterns of action in the bodies of his followers, and he did so because they perceived him as corporeal consciousness. The inscription of his imperatives on their bodies was possible because they could recognize Jesus, accept new directions from him as a human agent, and discover these activities within their own capacities. Their conceptions sometimes put them at odds with one another and contributed starkly different portrayals of the resurrection, some of which are identified by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8. Differences among them coexist, not only on Paul’s list, but also within the NT’s pages. As the conceptions differed, so did the imperatives, and yet those imperatives were embraced by the differing groups as coming from the same risen Lord, who made new conscious choices and “was seen” with a recognizable body.

The resurrection in this sense, as the apprehension of embodied consciousness that impels his followers to new action in Jesus’ name, emerges as the common trait among the various imperatives articulated in the sources identified. Owing to that commonality, the principals at the time could accept their differences in regard to how Jesus appeared, what he said, and the ways their practices should be implemented in response to that appearance. Their direct experience of Jesus as risen from the dead is not historical, and the sources in their various ways keep the moment of resurrection hidden for that very reason. Nevertheless, his followers’ responses to their experiences were and remain powerfully historical.

8.6 Conclusion

The catalytic impact of the risen Jesus upon his followers’ actions resulted in the variety of conceptions that have been traced, but in each case the identity of the embodied catalyst as Jesus features as the central factor. Because the resurrection is an effect of history in its influences but not in the moment of its happening, no insistence on its status as a publicly verifiable event is likely ever to be convincing. Still, the embodied consciousness that the sources in aggregate refer to remains a viable element within the consideration of how human beings relate to transcendent meaning.

“Resurrection in the same body” might, of course, be developed in relation to embodied consciousness, but that would require a significant change from the seventeenth century terms of reference that were taken up in fundamentalism. Humphry Hody (1694, 1) coordinated the concept with Aristotle’s natural philosophy, so that “the same Body which died, consisting of the same Particles, shall rise again of its Grave in the Day of Judgment.” If that sort of Aristotelianism, derived by Hody from Maimonides and combined with a Stoic conception of the soul, could be sustained, “the empty

tomb” as currently understood might also have another day. However, the “Particles” of Hody’s time were unlike the quanta of today’s physics or the cell structures of today’s biology.

Absent a viable philosophical argument for “resurrection in the same body” and related conceptions, the attempt to make “the empty tomb” bear the weight of the case and sustain a reversion to a seventeenth century view is based on a fallacy. Hody appreciated that narratives of the tomb did not make his case, and he did not refer to them. Recent discussion has backed itself into the fallacy in an attempt to make ancient texts do a job Hody rightly saw in philosophical terms. If one were to learn from this episode of scholarship, another remark from Arthur Conan Doyle’s detective (cited by Tamarkin 2017, 3), directed to Dr. Watson in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, may come to mind: “When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth.”

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Part 5

The Bible in Its Contemporary Context



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9 Why Academic Biblical Scholars Must Fight Creationism

Hector Avalos

EDITORS' PREFACE

We received news of Professor Hector Avalos' passing on April 12, 2021, with great sadness. Hector was supportive and enthusiastic about reprinting his *The Bible and Interpretation* article contained in the current chapter (first published in July 2015), and we hoped he would be able to add additional discussion to his chapter while he was well enough to do so, not least some personal anecdotes about his background as a former evangelical and how his own views had changed on the issue under discussion. Unfortunately, time ran out before he was able to do this, but we can refer the interested reader to a brief description of his personal background Hector had previously published elsewhere (Avalos 2007, 26–7). We are pleased to include Hector's original article, with minimal editing, as an excellent argument for why academic biblical scholars must engage creationists' egregious misuse of Scripture for their creationism agenda.

9.1 Introduction

Months before the famous debate on February 4, 2014, between evangelical creationist Ken Ham and science educator Bill Nye, I agreed to a debate with another creationist that took place on February 16, 2014, in a high school in Indianola, Iowa. The debate was with Juan Valdes, a minister from Miami who has since completed a Doctor of Ministry degree in Christian apologetics through Southern Evangelical Seminary. I have taken a special interest in the subject of creationism because of my formal training in anthropology, the home of the study of human evolution, and the Hebrew Bible. By many accounts, including other creationists', Valdes performed poorly, especially as he admitted he could not argue for his interpretation of Genesis on the basis of Biblical Hebrew or other Near Eastern languages (LSI Blog 2015).

The time since that debate has allowed me to reflect on the whole question of whether biblical scholars should debate creationists, and whether debates are effective means to educate laypersons. My response remains today as it was then. Academic biblical scholars are the best persons to

debate creationists. The reason is simple. The Achilles' heel of creationism is its biblical illiteracy, and not just its scientific illiteracy.

It is true scientists have done an excellent job in pointing out the scientific flaws in creationism. However, the problem is scientists usually do not have enough knowledge of biblical scholarship to address or defeat some of the arguments creationists use to harmonize the Bible with science. Scientists are not trained to recognize how creationists are distorting biblical texts. Thus, Jerry Coyne's *Faith vs. Fact: Why Science and Religion are Incompatible* (2015) does an excellent job of explaining scientific theory and methods. Yet, one will not find any discussion in the volume of how most creationists are misreading Genesis 1–3.

Creationists in the pews tend to shrug off arguments about DNA, radioactive dating, and other technical subjects because they are not familiar with them. But one need not even go into these scientific intricacies if the Bible does not even say what creationists claim. For example, most Bible readers today do not realize the Bible speaks of a heaven made of a solid material or a dome in Genesis 1. English translations often obscure that fact. Therefore, it will take a biblical scholar to explain that the Hebrew version of Genesis has a sky made of a metallic or solid material (Avalos 2014a). It is much more obvious to the average creationist that the sky is not made of a solid material. On the other hand, the decay of isotopes over thousands or millions of years is not so easily demonstrated for the average layperson.

I have not seen a debate where a scientist can explain that the creation of light in Genesis 1 is not a reference to the Big Bang. Indeed, even Robert Jastrow, a famous astronomer, adopts this erroneous analogy in his famous book, *God and the Astronomers* (1978, 14):

The details differ, but the essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same: the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy.

Jastrow is completely unaware a good case can be made, on the basis of Hebrew grammar, that water preceded light in Genesis 1:1–3 (cf. 2 Peter 3:5). The text does not tell us where the water came from because the story begins with a chaotic dark mass of water already there. Indeed, Genesis 1 does not say the water was created at all. That is an understanding reflected in, among other translations, the Common English Bible, the New Revised Standard Version (as a footnote), and the New Jewish Publication Society version (Orlinsky 1983). That sequence would not be compatible with the Big Bang, wherein water is a comparatively late development. On the other hand, the primal nature of water in Genesis is a concept shared with other creation stories in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece (e.g., Thales).¹

Creationism is principally an authority-based belief system. Its authority rests on the Bible. Creationists look upon their own ministers/theologians

as the best interpreters of Genesis. To undermine creationism, therefore, it is important to expose how poorly these creationists understand the Bible and its ancient Near Eastern context. There are a few biblical scholars who have taken up such a task in their publications, and one I can mention is progressive evangelical Peter Enns, author of *The Evolution of Adam: What The Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (2012). Enns has frequently written articles for BioLogos, an organization consisting of Christians, some of whom are biblical scholars who embrace evolution, and engage in discussions with creationist Christians.²

Some creationists I know were certainly disappointed Valdes did not know the Bible as well as his followers thought he did. Valdes could not tell his creationist audience why his translation of Genesis 1 was better on the basis of Hebrew grammar and syntax. Several creationists were appalled one of their own did not know his Bible better than a biblical scholar who supports evolution. That is why the fight against creationism must be led by academic biblical scholars. But even if we can agree academic biblical scholars are better at debating creationists, the question remains as to whether there should be public debates at all. Therefore, let me address some of the most common objections to public debates.

9.2 There Is No Need to Debate Creationism

Creationism is simply not worth the time, according to many scholars or advocates of evolution (Chatpilot 2014). It is like arguing against flat-earthers, who mostly have died out by the progress of science. In fact, we actually legitimize creationism, which also will die if left alone. I have found this position to be particularly common among scholars in foreign countries where creationism is moribund. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth in America. Anyone who keeps track of polls knows belief in creationism does not go away by being left alone. According to a Gallup report: “More than four in 10 Americans continue to believe that God created humans in their present form 10,000 years ago, a view that has changed little over the past three decades” (Newport 2014; cf. Brennan 2019).

Despite the defeat of creationism in our courts, creationism still thrives in our schools. That is because teachers, especially in high schools, do not want all the problems (e.g., complaints from creationist parents) that come with teaching evolution. The reticence of many educators to explain evolution may be a great factor in retaining this level of scientific illiteracy in the general populace.

Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer of the Department of Political Science at Pennsylvania State University conducted a study of the teaching of evolution in high schools, and the results were not very encouraging. They state:

We estimate that 28% of all biology teachers consistently implement the major recommendations and conclusions of the National Research

Council ... At the opposite extreme are 13% of the teachers surveyed who explicitly advocate creationism or intelligent design by spending at least 1 hour of class time presenting it in a positive light (an additional 5% of teachers report that they endorse creationism in passing or when answering student questions).

(2011; cf. 2010)

One reason creationism continues to thrive in America is precisely because those most skilled at explaining its flaws have remained silent. Biblical scholars need to be more vocal in their local communities, and in the larger media, in explaining that the Genesis creation stories are being misunderstood by creationists.

9.3 Debates Will Never Convince Anyone

Both empirical evidence and history show this to be wrong or questionable. One cannot easily explain the astounding victory of gay rights in the U.S. without admitting debates played a factor. The main debates in the nationwide legalization of gay rights were held in the Supreme Court of the U.S., where lawyers eventually made a successful case in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) that the Fourteenth Amendment granted homosexuals the right to marry. Lawyers just needed to convince five of nine justices to enact a new national policy.

Debate has been an integral part of how all science progresses. This was the case with the Ptolemaic versus Copernican models of our solar system or the germ theory of disease. A similar observation obtains in the history of biblical scholarship. Even those espousing more relativistic views of science admit that debate and paradigm shifts are intertwined within the field. As Thomas Kuhn observed in his classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970, 48): “The transition from Newtonian to quantum mechanics evoked many debates about both the nature and the standards of physics, some of which still continue.”

While debates in science and humanities usually begin in written form in the elite circles of scholars and philosophers, their contents and/or results eventually need to be transmitted to the masses in a form they can understand. It is important to remember the target audience in debates is never the people convinced on either side. Die-hard creationists probably will never be convinced, and one does not need to convince those who already believe in evolution. However, there is a substantial crowd in the middle, and it is that middle of the spectrum that is the target audience. Indeed, it is at such debates that pro-evolution biblical scholars will encounter the largest pool of creationists that will ever listen to them. A creationist audience may hear arguments they never would hear in churches. Some of these creationists may also be in the middle despite their professed stance. More importantly, in the age of YouTube, one is no longer limited to educating

the live audience in the debate, which was in the hundreds in my case. Although not nearly as well-known as the Ham-Nye debate, the corresponding YouTube video of the Iowa debate had nearly 5,000 views when this article was written.³

Empirically, one does find ambiguity about how effective public debates have been. Some researchers say political debates do not really change many minds based on polls taken after presidential debates (Saad 2008). But it is also important to realize one does not need to convince everyone in a debate. One just needs to convince enough people to make a difference (as in Supreme Court cases).

Over the years, I have had several debates with apologists such as William Lane Craig and Rubel Shelley. I often have students write optional responses that are not graded to elicit honest appraisals. I would say about 20–30% of those who were in the middle reported a change of side or more doubts about their past position. I have seen debates have effect years after people witness them. People that have attended a debate have written me years later to say the debate may not have convinced them at the time, but it raised enough questions that compelled them to investigate further and change their minds later. In that sense, public debating is part of the larger enterprise we call “education.” Imparting correct information is a principal objective of a debate. If one objects that imparting information will not help change anyone’s mind, then this undermines a principal reason for education. Why educate people at all if imparting information has no benefit?

9.4 Debates Are Often Poorly Done

This is true. Debates often develop a bad reputation not so much because the notion of debating is itself flawed, but because the debaters are not always the best. Debating, like many other endeavors, is a craft. Some do it well, and some do not. It is no different from teaching. Some do it well, and some do not. Bad debates are simply an argument for preparing better debaters, and not for giving up on debating itself. My high school had a class on debating, and it was expected one would be using that skill throughout life.

Good debates can take months of preparation and should be pursued like any other substantial scholarly project. For the Valdes debate, I had to read everything I could find written by him. I had to listen to hours of his podcasts and annotate them patiently to ensure I understood his position, and to catalogue the number of factual errors about science and the Bible he routinely made. Updating my basic knowledge of anthropology, paleontology, and a few other related subjects took another large segment of time. Over 500 PowerPoint slides were prepared, even if not all were used (but were there in case needed) for the debate. There were some 119 rehearsals encompassing about a dozen prepared alternate presentations, depending on what he said in the segments allotted to him. We are talking about 200–250 hours of work.

9.5 Activism Should Not Be Part of Biblical Studies

I have advocated a more activist stance for biblical scholarship because beliefs have consequences. I have addressed this argument more thoroughly in other venues, such as *The End of Biblical Studies* (Avalos 2007). I argue therein that academic biblical studies is largely irrelevant for the public.

The remedy for irrelevance is something suggested by Noam Chomsky, who argued cogently during the Vietnam War that “it is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak truth and to expose lies” (1987, 60).⁴ Similarly, Eric Lott (2006) has made a case for renewing past roles of public intellectuals in addressing social injustices. However, public universities are funded by taxpayers and often encourage the view that scholars must be sympathetic or neutral toward religion. Religions must be understood but not criticized. Any research indicating religion is injurious or particular religious beliefs are deleterious can bring a response that universities, as publicly funded institutions, cannot seek to undermine the faith of constituents. Yet, the notion of academic responsibility has not been consistent from field to field. Professors in the sciences routinely are expected to help solve problems in society, whether these be finding a new medication for cancer or learning how to suppress odor produced by swine containment facilities.

It is true there have been efforts to engage in what is called “activist” scholarship or “praxis” in the humanities. This sometimes means advocates of some sort of liberation theology see their obligations, as scholars, of putting their beliefs into practice. In South Africa, there have been some vocal theoreticians of this approach when apartheid ruled. For example, Gregory Baum (1990, 4–5) says “religious studies, and the human sciences in general, should not only aim at understanding reality, but also at transforming it.”

In truth, neutrality does not and cannot exist in the academic study of religion. Even a pluralistic approach is not neutral for those who do not think anything but their religion should be taught. Science certainly is not neutral toward religious beliefs. Despite the complaints of creationists, college science departments have very little problem teaching evolution as fact. Evolution certainly undermines Christian literalistic understandings of Genesis, but those understandings are either held not to be suitable understandings of Christianity, or they have so little power they can be ignored. Nor do universities have a problem teaching a heliocentric model of the solar system even if a few constituents still think it undermines their religious belief. Heliocentrism is held to be so obvious that a religious understanding may be excluded as legitimate. The firm results of empirico-rationalist science are held to take precedence over offending religious beliefs. The same should apply to creationism. It should be refuted out of existence in our society, just as academics have sought to do with the idea of the demonic origin of illnesses or the claim that astrology works.

9.6 Conclusion

The belief that the origins and future of our world are scientifically represented in the Bible has enormous implications for how we deal with everything from climate change to the practical medical applications of evolutionary biology. Biblical scholars are the best equipped experts to lead the fight on creationism, alongside their colleagues in the natural sciences. Scholarly activism acknowledges that beliefs have consequences. It is, therefore, a moral duty to share the results of biblical scholarship about the Bible's view of creation and cosmology within the broader society. One can think of it as outreach or a service to public education.

This stance should be no more controversial than the activism we encounter in sciences. If a scientist discovers a new vaccine that could heal millions of people, then that would certainly cause that researcher to be an activist on behalf of vaccinating those who are eligible for that vaccine. If scientific literacy matters, then certainly biblical scholars should be willing to explain to the public why using the Bible as a scientific authority is not the best way to enact legal or social policies involving science.

Scholarly activism means writing op-ed pieces and providing relevant information about varied biblical interpretations in local school board meetings where creationism threatens to become part of the science curriculum. It means engaging with politicians who have the power to enact legislation that involves conflicts between religious and scientific views (Chancey 2007). And, if they are willing and able, academic biblical scholars should debate creationists in public forums.

Notes

- 1 See Avalos 2014b.
- 2 <https://biologos.org/about-us>.
- 3 For unknown reasons, after Avalos' passing, the video of the debate was removed from YouTube. However, it can be viewed at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140217055817/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPD9bUE7NAU>, or retrieved using the Wayback Machine (<https://web.archive.org>) with the original YouTube URL (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPD9bUE7NAU>).
- 4 For other factors in the decline of public intellectuals, see Posner 2003.

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10 Second-Amendment Exegesis of Luke 22:35–53

How Conservative Evangelical Bible Scholars Protect Christian Gun Culture

Tony Keddie

10.1 Introduction

According to right-wing evangelical influencers, particularly in the U.S. in recent years, “Jesus, Guns, and Trump” is like a new holy trinity, three aspects of a single power: The power to disregard human lives deemed “other.” Take, for example, that in January 2020, Donald Trump Jr., son and advisor to the then-president, posted a photo on social media of himself smiling while holding an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle. He wasn’t wielding any old lethal weapon, however; the pricey firearm he held is known as a “Crusader rifle” because its magazine well is shaped like a Crusader helmet and it is adorned with a Jerusalem cross. Trump Jr.’s particular version also featured a cartoon of Hillary Clinton behind bars (Bailey 2020). Other versions of this rifle are inscribed with Psalm 144:1: “Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle” (Gabriele and Perry 2020). Right-wing Christian leaders can, in the current political climate, publicly promote themselves brandishing guns as symbols of Christian white supremacy, though they don’t always make their biblical justifications and historical references to Christian massacres of ethnic and religious others so blunt. U.S. Congressional Representatives Lauren Boebert and Thomas Massie, for example, put a merrier face on this religious and racial violence. For Christmas 2021, they created social media posts that appeared at first glance as traditional family Christmas card photos, with cheery white families standing in front of Christmas trees, except everyone in these photos was holding an assault rifle, even the kids (DeVega 2021).

More than political theater and a source of enormous revenue for the firearms industry,¹ Christian gun culture repeatedly leads to the loss of human lives. Mass shootings are one of the most alarming symptoms of this culture.² The white male assailants of several recent mass shootings were motivated by a seemingly harmonious mixture of racism, conservative Christianity, and gun culture; these Christian shooters targeted Black congregants in a church Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina (Jones 2020, 137–44), Muslims in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand (Keddie 2019a), Mexicans in El Paso, Texas (Allen 2019), and Jews in a

synagogue in Poway, California (Keddie 2019b). Their particular ideologies and actions were radical, but their racism and affection for firearms are part and parcel of a Christian gun culture that, though global in reach, has a distinctive history in the U.S., where the National Rifle Association (NRA) and conservative politicians have teamed up over decades to popularize the notion that the right to bear arms isn't only a constitutional right, but a "God-given right" (Dawson 2019).

Right-wing evangelical influencers' answer to mass shootings and astronomical rates of homicide is to double down, claiming guns protect people from guns. After shootings, they consistently proclaim "thoughts and prayers" are needed, not gun control. Many argue the solution to gun violence is, in fact, more guns. As the former NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre says: "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun" (Overby 2012). Pastors like Rodney Howard-Browne have urged their congregants to be armed at church (Denker 2019, 61). Similarly, Jerry Falwell Jr., the disgraced former president of Liberty University, the world's largest evangelical university, encouraged his students to carry guns for self-defense (Shapiro 2016). In a controversial recent case, a teenager was even acquitted for killing two men and injuring a third with an assault rifle he took to a Black Lives Matter protest on the grounds he felt threatened and was defending himself; notably, his legal defense was bankrolled by a right-wing Christian crowdfunding site and he quickly became an icon of white Christian rights to "self-defense" by any means necessary (Jones 2021).

While most conservative Christian gun enthusiasts emphasize "self-defense" and extend this to families and property, some far-right groups view guns as a tool in protecting a Christian nation or even bringing about God's Kingdom on earth. For example, the Rod of Iron Ministries, a Pennsylvania offshoot of a sect known as the Moonies (officially the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, or the Unification Church), takes Christ ruling with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:26; cf. Psalm 2:9) as a model for their own prerogative to defend his Kingdom with AR-15s. This increasingly influential gun church has ties to conservative leaders ranging from the Trump family to elected officials in Pennsylvania (Lecaque 2022).

A slightly less radical attempt at a "biblical" platform for guns comes from Phil Robertson, head of the "Duck Dynasty" commercial empire focused on guns, hunting, and "redneck culture." A *New York Times* best-selling author with endorsements from celebrity evangelicals like Franklin Graham and Tony Perkins, he published a book in the run-up to the 2020 U.S. presidential election called *Jesus Politics: How to Win Back the Soul of America* (2020). In it, he concurs with the Rod of Iron church that firearms are a right because they may be necessary to deter fascists and protect freedoms. But Robertson further emphasizes gun control legislation is futile because the problem isn't guns, but human anger—the demons that possess human hearts. True Christian gun-owners, he asserts, are ruled by the Kingdom's law of love. They would not use guns illegally, but only to

“defend our freedoms” and for “protecting this country from a future of creeping godless tyranny” (2020, 52–3), which he associates with liberals.

I have begun by citing some highlights of the current Christian gun culture because, when the average U.S. evangelical asks “What Would Jesus Do?” about guns, they are far more likely to seek answers from right-wing evangelical influencers on Fox News and social media than in books by evangelical Bible scholars. This doesn’t mean the latter should therefore be immune to critical scrutiny, but, on the contrary, their remarks about self-defense in the Bible should be understood against the institutional and cultural backdrop of right-wing Christian gun culture, and against the soaring toll of human lives lost to gun violence. In what follows, we will zero in on some of the ways conservative evangelical Bible scholars, especially in the U.S., have interpreted Jesus’ words about swords in Luke 22:35–53 (esp. vv. 36–38, 49–51), one of the central passages that more widely influential evangelical leaders also cite as biblical support for armed self-defense.³

10.2 The Politics of Evangelicalism

“Evangelical” is a perplexing category. Its meanings and referents are highly contested and ever-changing. So, from the outset, some further discussion of what I mean by “evangelicals” is warranted.

The title “evangelical” has traditionally been defined by insiders in doctrinal terms. For instance, the National Association of Evangelicals follows the evangelical historian David Bebbington (1989, 2–3) in identifying an evangelical according to the four “distinctives” or “Bebbington quadrilateral”: They are born-again (conversionism), mission-oriented (activism), beholden to the ultimate authority of the Bible (biblicism), and committed to the centrality of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross (crucicentrism). But beyond any such prescriptive theological commitments, the label is often associated with the political culture of the U.S. Christian Right. This conflation can be misleading: On the one hand, the political cultures of evangelicals in other parts of the world can differ in more-or-less significant ways from the U.S. Right; on the other, there have been some progressive attempts at reclaiming the title “evangelical” in the U.S. (Lee 2016, Wallis 2019). At the same time, some Black Christians who share core doctrinal commitments with white evangelicals have tended to distance themselves from the title “evangelical” and its historical associations with white supremacy (Jones 2016).

Scholars have dealt with these challenges in different ways. Many evangelical scholars seek to purify evangelicalism of its historical and ongoing entanglement with politics. Evangelical historian Thomas Kidd (2019), for instance, urges his fellow committed evangelicals to recognize the widespread use of “evangelical” by different nations and ethnic groups throughout the world, and therefore “fight to redeem the term from the current political associations” it has accrued in the U.S. (Miller 2020).

Kidd views politics as an external problem that acts as a parasite on true evangelicalism without noting the ways the four evangelical “distinctives” are themselves preconditions of the political culture of white evangelicalism in the U.S.: Commitments to conversionism and mission assume Christian supremacy and belittle other religious (and often ethnic/racial) cultures; biblicism makes the Bible a “good book” even when it sanctions rape, slavery, war, and genocide; and crucicentrism construes humans as in need of redemption and capable of being redeemed. Kidd views the history of evangelicalism and politics through a theological lens underwritten by these evangelical distinctives: In his telling, a pure Christian body (evangelicalism) has polluted itself through sinful engagements with pagan culture (politics) and must seek redemption.

We should understand evangelical historian Beth Allison Barr’s popular book, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* (2021), in a similar way. It seeks to identify and dismantle evangelicals’ longstanding abuse of the Bible as support for patriarchy:

Rather than patriarchy being God-ordained, history suggests that patriarchy has a human origin: civilization itself. From *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in ancient Sumeria to other texts like the *Ramayana* in ancient India, evidence from early civilizations reveals the development of gender hierarchies that privileged men (especially men of certain classes) and subordinated women. Patriarchy is a power structure created and maintained, literally, by human labor.

(2021, 35)

At the same time, however, Barr fails to account for the ways the Bible itself is a patriarchal book. In her review of the book, Jill Hicks-Keeton (2021) has rightly exposed Barr’s biblicist bias: “Barr casts Christianity uncritically as transhistorical, as something that can exist unsullied and unchanging outside of human culture.” Anything immoral in the Bible, in Barr’s prescriptive attempt at redeeming evangelicalism from patriarchy, “bled through into the church’s stories” from the Jewish and Greco-Roman world (Barr 2021, 35; emphasis added). Kidd and Barr thus advocate for what they see as true evangelicalism, or orthodoxy, by casting politics as an external pollution (as blood contamination, following Barr’s metaphor) for which redemption must be sought out. Evangelicalism must be, in a sense, born again.

More critical scholarly treatments have recognized politics has not just temporarily polluted evangelicalism, but the history of evangelicalism and political conservatism in the U.S. are deeply intertwined. One would not exist in the form it does today without the other. Anthea Butler minces no words in her book *White Evangelical Racism* when describing evangelicalism as “a political movement” (2021, 12) that advances white supremacy: “Evangelicalism is synonymous with whiteness. It is not

only a cultural whiteness but also a political whiteness” (2021, 11). She acknowledges a “small but growing number of white evangelicals belong to churches and movements that robustly reject racism and right-wing politics” (2021, 2–3). Even still, she notes, the overwhelming majority of white evangelicals in the U.S. support right-wing causes, candidates, and laws.

As Kristin Kobes Du Mez explains in *Jesus and John Wayne* (2020, 3–4):

More than any other religious demographic in America, white evangelical Protestants support preemptive war, condone the use of torture, and favor the death penalty. They are more likely than members of other faith groups to own a gun, to believe citizens should be allowed to carry guns in most places, and to feel safer with a firearm around. White evangelicals are more opposed to immigration reform and have more negative views of immigrants than any other religious demographic ... More than half of white evangelical Protestants think a majority non-white US population would be a negative development.

Historians have applied the term “Christian nationalism” to the religious-political ideology of evangelicals. Du Mez (2020, 4) offers a simple and helpful definition of Christian nationalism as “the belief that America is God’s chosen nation and must be defended as such.” Though it is true, as Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry (2020) have documented, that not all white evangelicals are Christian nationalists and vice versa, the overwhelming majority of white evangelicals in the U.S. are inclined toward Christian nationalism (famously, 81% of white evangelicals voted for Trump in 2016 and between 76 and 81% in 2020; Newport 2020).

Despite certain political differences among global evangelical communities, the Christian nationalism of white evangelicals is by no means restricted to the U.S. It is widely distributed across the globe through evangelical consumer culture (Du Mez 2020, 7–10; Vaca 2019), missionary and political networks (Sharlet 2008), and evangelical organizations and corporations (Grewal 2017, 93–7). Indeed, it is disseminated (and reshaped in turn) through what Helen Jin Kim (2022) has described in transnational terms as the “American evangelical empire.” Variations on the “U.S. brand” of Christian nationalism have been on prominent display in recent years in the New Zealand shooting (Keddie 2019a), Canada’s “freedom convoy” protests (Mitchell 2022), evangelical support for Bolsonaro’s authoritarianism in Brazil (de Almeida 2020), and even arguably in Putin’s propaganda justifying Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (Kelaidis 2022).

In what follows, I treat American conservative evangelicals, including Bible scholars, as political actors whose words reflect and advance a wider political culture of conservatism centered in the U.S. but with wide-ranging global influence. I do not reject evangelicals’ own theological definitions according to the “four distinctives,” but instead reframe them—and

especially the biblicist component—as political commitments that undergird ideologies of Christian nationalism.

10.3 American Evangelicals and the Second Amendment

A central component of the U.S. brand of Christian nationalism advanced by so many white evangelicals is support for the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms (Whitehead et al. 2018). Statistically, American white evangelicals are more likely than other religious demographics to oppose gun control and to own guns (41% own guns, compared to 30% of Americans on average; Shellnutt 2017). There have also been important campaigns for gun control led by centrist and left-leaning evangelicals like Jim Wallis, the founder of *Sojourners*, who has called on churches to boycott the NRA (Wallis 2017), and Shane Claiborne, an activist who has collected guns to melt down in public performances of Isaiah’s prophetic call to “beat their swords into plowshares” (Isaiah 2:4; Claiborne and Martin 2019). But conservative evangelicals, even if they support some regulations or discourage Christians from arming themselves (e.g., Piper 2015), still tend overwhelmingly to endorse (and vote in favor of) an interpretation of the Second Amendment as a guarantee to individual rights to own and carry guns for self-defense.

The words of the Second Amendment, a late eighteenth-century text, invite many questions from contemporary interpreters: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Note the words “individual” and “self-defense” do not appear in the amendment, which is focused on “militia” and the “security” of the “State.” In her book *Stand Your Ground* (2017), Caroline Light has shown lethal self-defense was not viewed as an individual’s universally protected right at the time the Constitution was written. She discusses, for instance, the records of the 1806 trial of Thomas O. Selfridge on the charges of manslaughter that reveal early American judges turned to English common law and early liberal political theories to understand when self-defense was warranted. On the whole, they believed it was an individual’s duty to retreat in the face of an attacker. The only exception was the castle doctrine, which emerged in England in the 1600s (2017, 18–38). In keeping with the saying “a man’s house is his castle,” this doctrine permitted a property-owning man to use lethal force to repel someone who has invaded a space considered his private property. This selective exemption protected white male hegemony; its protections did not extend to those without property or those with restricted legal rights—namely women, enslaved Africans, African Americans, and Native Americans (Dunbar-Ortiz 2018, Light 2017). As these groups gained legal enfranchisement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the duty to retreat was abandoned and the castle doctrine was gradually expanded for white men.

Castle doctrine-style notions of self-defense have increasingly been codified as law in the twenty-first century, as right-wing politics stoked ethnonationalist sentiments in the wake of 9/11 and the election of a liberal Black president. In the same year Barack Obama was elected (2008), a conservative interpretation of the Second Amendment gained legal credence in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, when the Supreme Court decided in a 5–4 vote that “the Second Amendment protects an individual right to possess a firearm unconnected with service in a militia, and to use that arm for traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defense within the home.”⁴ This ruling, set forth by the court’s conservative justices in tandem with substantial dissents from the liberal justices, reframed the Second Amendment in terms of individuals (instead of militia) and declared self-defense (instead of state security) as the justification for individuals owning and using lethal weapons. Though the conservative justices deemed this “individual right” to be the original intent of the Constitution’s framers, they ignored that the “castle doctrine” was the exception, not the rule, and it was the right of only white property-owning men, not all individuals. Subsequent trials have built upon *Heller* and similar legal precedents (e.g., “stand your ground” laws) to the point that a racist agitator who brought an assault rifle to a Black Lives Matter demonstration and murdered people could be acquitted for being within his rights to self-defense since he claimed he felt threatened (*State of Wisconsin v. Rittenhouse*, 2021).

Evangelicalism has played a significant role in shaping support for gun rights and this interpretation of the Second Amendment as guaranteeing individual rights to lethal self-defense. The history of evangelicalism and gun-rights advocacy is too complex to trace here, so a few general points will have to suffice (see further Dawson 2019, Dunbar-Ortiz 2018, Light 2017, Melzer 2012). First, U.S. evangelicals are prone to understanding the Constitution as a sacred covenant with God and asserting it can be read in a literal and objective way, without admitting how later concepts and different social locations shape interpretation. Second, the racist orientations of gun-rights advocacy and white evangelicalism have proven to be mutually supporting. On the one hand, evangelical commitments to conversionism and mission support rigid boundaries between those orthodox evangelicals understood as “us” and a heathen or heretical “them,” who are often portrayed as a threat and differentiated as “others” in racializing and nationalistic terms. On the other hand, the Second Amendment has from its origins functioned as support for “protecting” white Americans from racial others, whether from, for example, the Native Americans whose land they stole, the Africans whom they enslaved, or the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities that their carceral legal system has treated as subhuman and criminal. Third, the NRA and white evangelical leaders and institutions have been colluding since at least the mid-1970s and this is most apparent in the NRA’s efforts at casting the Constitution in biblical terms and the Second Amendment as a “God-given right.” Fourth, the rise

in mass shootings since the turn of the millennium has become a talking point in the culture wars: Evangelical leaders have blamed the rise in gun violence on the “removal” of God and the Bible from schools and homes and the moral decay wrought by secular culture (e.g., *Tajanlangit* 2022). They have also combined gun rights with the “religious freedoms” they defend (that is, freedoms for the right types of Christians) and framed both as “individual rights” that are infringed upon by liberal-backed forms of “Big Government” regulation.

According to conservative evangelicals, the Second Amendment protects a God-given individual right to lethal self-defense. Except it does much more. It also protects the multi-billion-dollar firearms industry, white supremacy, and the political dominance of conservative Christianity.

10.4 Second-Amendment Exegesis of Luke 22:35–53

Just as conservative evangelicalism influences interpretations of the Second Amendment, interpretations of the Second Amendment influence how conservative evangelicals interpret the Bible. I refer to this as “Second-Amendment exegesis”—the recursive process through which conservative evangelicals interpret this eighteenth-century American text and ancient Mediterranean texts together in light of modern right-wing ideals of individual self-defense, all the while proclaiming their interpretations of each text as literal and historical.

Numerous verses from the Bible get invoked in support of lethal violence and gun rights (see C.B. Hays and Crouch 2021; Keddie 2020a, 216–23, 229–37).⁵ One of the most commonly cited texts in the evangelical biblical arsenal is Luke 22:36–38, where Jesus says:

And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, “And he was counted among the lawless”; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled. They said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” He replied, “It is enough.”

(New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])

This exchange only occurs in Luke but is an expansion of Jesus’ betrayal and arrest scene, which Luke adapted from his source, Mark (14:43–52), and which appears in varied forms in all four canonical gospels (cf. Matthew 26:47–56; John 18:1–11). In Luke’s version of the arrest, when Jesus confronts Judas about his betrayal, those with him ask: “‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him” (Luke 22:49–51; NRSV). These verses raise many interpretive questions that are difficult to answer: Why two swords? What does Jesus mean by “It is enough”? Why doesn’t Jesus answer when the

disciples asked if they should strike with the sword? What does “No more of this” mean? And so on.

Nevertheless, a number of conservative evangelical leaders insist the text’s meaning is clear as day: Jesus supports their particular self-defense interpretation of the Second Amendment. According to Larry Pratt, executive director of the firearms lobby Gun Owners of America, Jesus is here in perfect agreement with America’s Founders, who “considered that self-defense and the ownership and carrying of guns is a God-given right” (Withrow 2018). Falwell Jr. agrees and exclaims “It just boggles my mind that anybody would be against what Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 22:36” (Piper 2015).

Like Pratt, Ralph Drollinger (2018) similarly views these verses as proof of individual rights to self-defense: “[I]n Luke 22:36–38 Jesus did authorize the use of the sword (actually two swords!). And contextually, it was for the purposes of self-defense and protection against robbers.”⁶ Drollinger led regular “White House Bible Study” sessions for officials in the Trump administration and forcefully seeks to evangelize all branches of government in the U.S. and abroad through his organization Capitol Ministries (Keddie 2020a, 125–30; Stewart 2019, 34–53). In another updated Bible study, Drollinger (2022b; cf. 2022a) points to Luke 22:36–38 in support of “just war,” and specifically Russia’s invasion of Ukraine:

Not a pacifist Himself, this instruction indicates that Jesus was aware of the existence and remedy for sinful aggression in the world. But mind you, Jesus was not suggesting a self-styled vigilantism in or by this passage; the sword was to be used for self-defense and protection from thieves.

Note that Drollinger (2018) does not view this as in any way inconsistent with Jesus’ commands to “love your neighbor” and “love your enemies”:

It stands to reason that if one loves his enemies like he does his friends and family, then he will protect them from the onslaught of a murderer or an invading country. And, should one’s actual enemies attack you or your friends, is it loving to allow them to hurt others? Tough love applies to both friend and foe.

This Christian nationalist message is hauntingly echoed in the Bible-speckled manifesto of the Christian shooter who rationalized killing Jews in a California synagogue as a way of loving his neighbor (Keddie 2019b). Like Drollinger’s “tough love,” he claimed to love them by protecting them from killing people of European descent (also echoing heinous antisemitic sentiments prevalent in white nationalist circles). Thus Drollinger’s ideas find an audience in elected lawmakers, but they also resonate with wider currents among conservative evangelicals like those which motivated this hate-filled young man.

Drollinger has not developed his ideas in a vacuum but has instead adapted many of them from books by Wayne Grudem, a biblical studies professor at Phoenix Seminary, former president of the Evangelical Theology Society, and widely recognized as a leading proponent of the patriarchal concept of “gender complementarianism” or “biblical manhood and womanhood” (Du Mez 2020, 144, 167–9, 239–40, 261, 264). Grudem is one of the only “Bible scholars” Drollinger cites approvingly in his Bible studies (Drollinger 2018, n.4), and he acknowledges in a note on one of his studies “It is important for me to state often that I am following the outline of this book, with permission, in these complex studies.” The book he refers to is Grudem’s textbook published by the evangelical press Zondervan, *Politics According to the Bible* (2010).

Grudem’s book is an enormous manifesto in defense of a biblical basis for conservative evangelical politics (see Keddie 2020b). The book reflects Tea Party style libertarian sentiments (aka “Teavangelicalism”) that were on the rise among white evangelicals at this time in reaction to the Obama presidency and economic recession (i.e., affection for “Small Government” when it comes to federal spending on the social safety net, though not national defense), and is far more conversant with right-wing political literature than any current of biblical scholarship. With its arguments against affirmative action and Native American land rights, and in favor of gender complementarianism, its patriarchal and white supremacist perspective is in plain sight. Grudem devoted a part of his chapter on “The Protection of Life” to “The Defense and Ownership of Guns” and Luke 22:35–53 is his main proof-text.

Grudem (2010, 203) asserts “Jesus wanted his disciples to have an effective weapon to use in self-defense.” Interpreters have often misunderstood Jesus’ words “It is enough,” Grudem maintains:

[H]e means two swords are enough, and this is an expression of approval of what they have just said and done. There is no hint of rebuke. But that means Jesus is encouraging his disciples to carry a sword for self-defense, and even to “buy one” (v. 36) if they do not have one.

In concert with his positive “biblical” interpretations of police and military force elsewhere in the textbook, Grudem further explains that the police in the Roman Empire were capable of enforcing the “peace” in general, but there weren’t enough of them to enforce it everywhere at once. So the “sword would provide protection against violent crime *whenever* a policeman or soldier was not in sight” (2010, 203; emphasis added). Similarly, people today have a right to use lethal weapons as protection against “attackers,” “intruders,” and “tyranny” (2010, 204, 211, 212), and this is particularly important in a “high-crime area” (2010, 204). Jesus’ neighbor-love command can be observed by using the least amount of

lethal force necessary to repel an intruder. (To Grudem’s [2010, 211] credit, he admits machine guns should be reserved for military use.)

David Matson is another conservative proponent of this lethal self-defense interpretation. A professor of biblical studies at Hope International University, a private Christian university aligned with the Restoration (Stone-Campbell) Movement (in the wheelhouse of evangelicalism; Baker 2002), Matson has published two articles in the flagship journal of biblical scholarship, *Journal of Biblical Literature*. In these complementary articles, he argues against “the picture of Jesus as a principled pacifist” in scholarship (2018, 263). In the earlier article (2015), he maintains the translation of Jesus’ words *eate heōs toutou* in Luke 22:51 as “No more of this!” is incorrect. On grammatical grounds, he rightly notes a more literal translation would be “permit until this.” But then he converts this into the idiomatic translation “allow the arrest to continue,” inverting the usual translation such that now Jesus actually approves of the disciples’ action in acquiring swords. As he elaborates in his more recent article, Jesus does not consider the disciples transgressors but affirms them for being “prepared to take defensive measures to ensure Jesus’ safe arrival at the Mount of Olives” (2018, 475). Matson gives the whole episode a crucicentric interpretation, which he elaborates in his later article; in his view, “the swords function literally to get Jesus safely to the Mount of Olives ... setting in motion the particulars of the divine plan” (2018, 478)—a plan that brings atonement through the cross. He emphasizes his interpretation has important implications for Christian ethics: “[I]t is still necessary for the disciples to put away their swords, but now the command is indirect, decidedly not a rebuke, and subservient to the larger eschatological purposes of God” (2015, 169).

Though Matson never mentions guns or uses the term “self-defense,” he puts contemporary Christian ethics in view, takes aim at any view of Jesus as a pacifist in the sense of a total and principled position of nonviolence, and portrays the disciples being prepared for lethal defense as appropriate when in concert with the divine plan. While his arguments could be channeled into a progressive Christian argument concerned with denouncing violence in the Bible, as Shelley Matthews (2021, 66–101) has done, these articles ultimately protect conservative Christian gun culture. This is precisely how they have been understood by Timothy Hsiao, a philosophy professor at the all-online University of Arkansas Grantham, firearms instructor, and ardent gun rights advocate. Citing Matson alongside Grudem, Hsiao (2021, esp. 351n1) argued in *Evangelical Quarterly* (an international journal published by Brill) that Luke 22:36 is Jesus’ endorsement of carrying lethal weapons for self-defense.

The conservative inclination of Matson’s arguments come to light in his extensive critique of the Revised Standard Version (RSV). He denounces the RSV translation committee (the Standard Bible Committee) for translating “No more of this!” in Luke 22:51, a choice he traces in the committee’s archival documents to 1942. He attributes this novel translation choice,

which influenced most later translations and commentaries, to the committee's liberal political response to WWII. The committee's work, he explains, "represented a high point for liberal pacifism and its confidence in the abolition of war" (2015, 174). He singles out one member of the committee, Henry Cadbury, a Quaker and pacifist who was also an expert on Luke, for influencing the translation choice, though this connection remains speculative. Matson has thus illuminated political leanings that may have indirectly shaped the RSV translation choice here, but he has failed to consider the prehistory of this translation. For example, the Thucydides scholar and New Testament (NT) lexicographer Samuel Thomas Bloomfield, an Anglican priest, explained in his 1844 commentary on the Greek text of this verse: "The sense, then ... is: 'let the matter alone [after its having proceeded] thus far! Enough of this'" (1844, 1: 315n51). This important study very likely exerted influence on the RSV committee's translation choice, though not necessarily to the exclusion of mid-twentieth century political biases. Matson is thus wrong to attribute this "watershed" in the translation of Luke 22:51 simply to some insidious pacifist bias of this committee of liberal mainline Protestants. Though presented as an objective grammatical and exegetical argument, Matson's flawed rejection of a translation choice condemned as "liberal" in favor of an even more speculative idiomatic translation that serves a Christocentric reading betrays his own conservatism.

Like Matson, other evangelical Bible scholars have interpreted Luke 22:35–53 in more tempered and complex ways than Grudem while nonetheless affirming or at least permitting that this text may serve as a biblical basis for conservative notions of self-defense. For instance, Darrell Bock, professor of NT at Dallas Theological Seminary and also a former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, leaves readers with few clear answers in his chapter on "Gun Control" in *How Would Jesus Vote?* The book appeared in May 2016, and thus must have been written prior to Trump becoming the presumptive Republican nominee for the 2016 presidential election. Even though Bock publicly criticized Trump (Gjeltén 2016), he did so from a conservative position; indeed, his book's real question is *For Which Republican Issues Would Jesus Vote?* He offers some proposals in support of some very minimal regulations on guns (improved background checks and licensing), but tends toward the view, drawing on right-wing political studies, that there are already so many guns (including automatic and semiautomatic guns) in circulation that restrictive laws would "do little or nothing to curtail their use" (2016, 109, 114). He concludes the Bible contains a mixture of views that include self-defense and government force along with non-retaliation, restraint, and respect for life. Luke 22:36 is positioned in his list of texts in support of "Self-Defense and 'Just War,'" though he suggests in his terse remarks on the verse that the main issue here is Jesus showing "he was willing to carry out his calling to die on the cross" (2016, 107).

Bock is more resolute in his other studies of Luke. In his earlier *Luke: NIV Application Commentary* (1996), for example, he observes a contrast between Jesus and his enemies in that Jesus stopped his disciples from fighting back and healed the injured slave. He comments further on Jesus’ “absence of violence” and how he “renounces the use of force.” He concludes: “Defense comes through the injustice of his suffering, not through the sword. A day is coming when Jesus will do battle (see Rev[elation] 19), but we do not need to take up the sword for Jesus now”; and the church should exert strength in facing persecution rather than through guns and bulwarks like David Koresh’s Branch Davidians cult (1996, 572–3; cf. 1994, 1745–7, 1771–4). It would seem Bock in his 1996 commentary geared toward pastors was more inclined to emphasize Jesus’ nonviolence (at least in the present age) than in his book published in 2016 for mass consumption.

A nonviolent interpretation of Jesus, though typically associated with liberal Christians and scholars, also emerges quite often in evangelical scholarship. Take, for example, the blog articles by Moyer Hubbard (2013, 2014), professor and chair of NT language and literature at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University, making a biblical case for gun control. Hubbard sees Luke 22:35–53 (in the context of Jesus’ other teachings on non-retaliation) as strong support for gun control because—in stark opposition to Matson—“It is enough!” and “No more of this” indicate Jesus’ opposition to the use of lethal violence. Hubbard acknowledges people have a right to self-defense (allowing this because it appears in Exodus 21:12–14) and to protecting their family, but argues “maturing disciples of Jesus, following the example of their crucified Lord, will prefer to die, rather than to kill, even in self-defense” (2013). This is an impassioned evangelical biblical argument in favor of gun control, but note it still concedes a legal right to lethal self-defense because this appears in the Bible; it simply calls Christians to a different standard (see Austin 2020).⁷

The common thread, then, in this all-too-brief survey of different ways evangelical scholars have interpreted Luke 22:35–53 is self-defense. Grudem’s gun-rights interpretation couldn’t be further removed from Hubbard’s gun control interpretation, but both see self-defense as a biblically sanctioned, and thus God-given right in validation of the wider Christian gun culture of conservative evangelicals.

10.5 Restoring Luke 22:35–53 to Its Roman Imperial Context

From a critical historiographical perspective, there is one glaring problem with Second-Amendment exegesis: The Bible was written ages before the Second Amendment. As we’ve seen, conservative evangelical interpretations of the Second Amendment already fail to account adequately for understandings of self-defense at the time the Constitution was written, overlooking less canonical sources from that time and privileging the propertied

white man as the default position of interpretation (i.e., who an “individual” is). Their interpretations of the “original meanings” of Luke 22:35–53 in light of their interpretations of the Second Amendment similarly segregate the Bible from its world by discounting non-biblical sources and dodging critical questions of power and privilege. As a result, they impose modern conservative notions of individual rights to lethal self-defense onto a text from a world with entirely different laws and ideals.

If we restore Luke 22:35–53 to a complex ancient context reconstructed from varied sources, we discover, as in the early American republic (cf. the Selfridge trial discussion), that lethal self-defense was only legal for civilians under certain circumstances.⁸ Though we can expect some variations over space and time, a form of the *Lex Julia de Vi Publica* would have been enforced in NT times. Though preserved in the sixth-century CE Justinian Code, the *Lex Julia* is based on laws drafted by jurists in the second and third centuries and built on antecedents stretching back to the first century BCE. The jurist Marcian is clear that a civilian is permitted to possess weapons only “for hunting or for a journey by land or sea” (thus, for protection from bandits in particular situations). He stresses that a civilian also may not appear “in public with a missile weapon” or enter “into a conspiracy to raise a mob or a sedition” (*Digest* 48.6.1–3; see Nicolay 2007, 207–8). Numerous sources corroborate the impression that weapons were typical accessories for those traveling, especially with goods for trade. Weapons were permitted in these particular contexts because they were deemed necessary to ensure individuals’ safety due to the enduring presence of bandits and pirates outside of those cities and other spaces that were repressively policed by the Roman military and local guards (but, notably, *not* “when-ever” and wherever the police needed some vigilante assistance, as Grudem implied, echoing the logic of “stand your ground” laws; see further Blumell 2007; Fuhrmann 2012, 51). In sum, we have every reason to expect a civilian carrying an unconcealed weapon in a civic setting like Jerusalem would be perceived and prosecuted as an outlaw.

Luke and its sequel Acts of the Apostles were written in the late first or early second century CE by an author conversant in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature, and deeply invested in the Hebrew Bible in Greek. As commentators from varied perspectives have pointed out, Luke 22:37 is clear Jesus asks the disciples to acquire swords in order to “be counted among the lawless” in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12. Together with Jesus’ words “It is enough,” the author indicates the group was liable to arrest as outlaws in fulfillment of Isaiah but stresses they weren’t actually outlaws: Two swords were sufficient for them to be counted as outlaws (that is, for having swords in public, following the *Lex Julia*) without giving any impression they were an armed mob. This last part is crucial because the gospels are all, in some sense, sustained retrospective narratives about the Judean–Roman conflict from vantage points after the First Judean Revolt resulted in the temple destruction in 70 CE (Walsh 2019).

The author of Luke–Acts, in particular, goes to great lengths to differentiate Jesus and his followers from the Jewish rebel groups held accountable for the First Revolt. At the scene of his arrest, just after saying “No more of this” and healing the injured slave, Jesus asks those arresting him: “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit (*lēstēs*)?” This is a rhetorical question. The author wanted his audience to be sure the answer is no. Elsewhere, this author insists Jesus’ followers are not like the bandits crucified beside Jesus, one of whom is disturbingly scripted as proclaiming both he and the other man crucified with Jesus deserve their brutal execution (Luke 23:41; see Matthews 2019). Luke–Acts also distinguishes Jesus’ followers from the allegedly seditious mobs led by Theudas, “the Egyptian,” and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:36–37; 21:38). At the same time that all Jews around the empire were paying special taxes as punishment for what was construed in imperial propaganda as their participation in a barbaric revolt (Keddie 2018), this author left no doubt, even though Jesus was crucified, that he was by no means like those violent rebels involved in the violent turmoil in Judea leading up to the First Revolt. Josephus recounted the activities of these rebels (whom he calls “bandits,” *lēstai*) with dramatic flair as part of an apologetic strategy aimed at showing that groups of rebels, tyrannical client-kings, and incompetent governors should be blamed for the revolt rather than all Jews, contrary to Roman post-war propaganda (Grünwald 2004, 91–109). Josephus’ works were likely familiar to the author of Luke–Acts and his intended audience (Mason 2003, 277), which may help to explain why this author was eager to shield Jesus’ movement from any association with Judean outlaws.

When situated in the post-war historical context of the composition of Luke–Acts, then, it becomes clear Jesus’ command to acquire swords couldn’t have anything to do with a God-given right to self-defense. On the contrary, this author relied on the fact that civilians’ use of weapons for self-defense was illegal under Roman rule to show that Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures and explain the pretense for his arrest while leaving the turn-of-the-second-century audience with no doubt that Jesus and his followers had nothing to do with any of the widely maligned Jewish rebel movements. Jesus restricts his disciples’ violence in this episode: He tells them two swords are sufficient, calls for an end to their resistance against the arresting authorities, and heals the high priest’s slave, who was a victim of their violence. Luke’s Jesus never holds or uses lethal weapons, nor does he say they should be used for self-defense or any other reason.

I hasten to add, nonetheless, Luke’s Jesus is hardly the nonviolent pacifist that conservative and liberal interpreters have perceived. If so, he wouldn’t have urged the disciples to acquire the swords that led to violence against an enslaved person in the first place and he would have rejected the crucified bandits’ claim they’re getting what they deserved. Ultimately, by denigrating Jewish rebels as a foil for Jesus’ followers, the author of Luke–Acts reproduced and advanced imperial propaganda. To do so at a time

when Jews across the empire were being degraded and punished as rebels on the basis of their ethnicity and religion was, in itself, an act of violence.

10.6 Conclusion: Self-Defense as Protectionism

Conservative evangelicals' reduction of the Bible to a clear, unequivocal, and authoritative "good book" is never more dangerous than when it undergirds lethal violence. Evangelicalism is a political movement, especially in the U.S., but also in its imperial expanse around the world. The majority of American evangelicals are political conservatives who interpret the Second Amendment as guaranteeing the God-given right of individuals to possess and use guns for self-defense and protection, even if they support some measure of gun control.

Conservative evangelical influencers like Drollinger and Falwell Jr. repeatedly appeal to the Bible, and especially Luke 22:35–53, as a divine charter for lethal self-defense. Some evangelical Bible scholars like Grudem do the same and thus lend credence to wider evangelical gun rights advocacy. Yet those evangelical Bible scholars who downplay Jesus' support for violence in Luke 22:35–53, like Bock, and those who formulate biblical cases for gun control from this episode, like Hubbard, still affirm lethal self-defense is biblical. And if lethal self-defense is biblical, then the Second Amendment does indeed protect a God-given right. This circular reasoning channels the authority of two revered canonical texts to bestow legitimacy on Second-Amendment exegesis, thereby sanctifying contemporary conservative ideas about an individual's right to lethal self-defense by means of two texts from earlier historical contexts devoid of such ideals.

As Stephen Young (2015, 2020) has demonstrated, conservative evangelical Bible scholars repeatedly engage in protectionism. Largely middle-class white cisgender men, they interpret biblical texts in ways that protect their own insider perspectives from interrogation and in doing so protect their positions of privilege as the gatekeepers of religious knowledge. Like Matson, they decry the biases of liberal scholarship, but shield their own biases from scrutiny by presenting their interpretations as objective history and unimpeachable truth. With evangelical scholarship on lethal self-defense, we can see how protectionist exegesis converges with a wider protectionist worldview. By affirming a biblical basis for the modern concept of self-defense, evangelical scholars protect their evangelical empire's toxic Christian gun culture, whose repercussions include Christian nationalist terrorism. Self-defense in these discussions is always also self-fashioning, a project in defining the boundaries of white evangelical identity in contradistinction to others. Who is the self that needs protection? From whom do they need protection? In the case of recent tragedies, at least, the self is a white conservative Christian man who believes he needs protection from Black Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Mexicans—from religious and

ethnic others. Right-wing evangelical biblical scholarship protects this way of thinking.

The ethical concern here, to be clear, isn't that evangelical Bible scholars abuse the Bible by finding violence in it. They would be right to do so. The Bible is filled with violence (Collins 2004), and Jesus and the NT are not immune (Avalos 2015, Matthews and Gibson 2005). Conservative evangelical Bible scholars reproduce this violence, however, either directly by calling for its replication in the present, or indirectly by failing to hold other evangelicals accountable for doing so. Any responsible interpretation of the Bible within our contemporary gun culture must recognize and critically evaluate the good, the bad, and the morally ambiguous in the text *and* its contemporary interpretations, holding purveyors of hermeneutics of hate accountable for interpretations that cause harm (Carey 2020; Keddie 2020a, esp. 5–10; Reinhartz 2021). I have proposed some elements of a reading of Luke 22:35–53 that attempts to do this in a historiographical mode, but other approaches are just as capable or more of fulfilling this ethical objective. Matthews (2021), for instance, has maintained that a (Christian) feminist interpretation of the Bible in relation to gun violence must be willing to identify, critique, and reject forms of patriarchy and oppression in the Bible. In her book on reading biblical rape texts within rape culture, Rhiannon Graybill (2021) has further advocated dwelling with moral ambiguities and recognizing these ancient texts are “fuzzy, messy, and icky.” Wilda Gafney’s “womanist midrash” approach similarly calls for wrestling with biblical texts in ways that appreciate they have been received as Scripture without affirming parts of these texts that dehumanize individuals or communities (2017, 14).

Whatever approach one takes, a critical and responsible engagement with the Bible must be primed to do what conservative evangelical scholars rarely will—to challenge outright the violence of the texts and their interpretations throughout history, including within our own living communities.

Notes

- 1 “In fact, in 2021 the firearm and ammunition industry was responsible for as much as \$70.52 billion in total economic activity in the country” (<https://www.nssf.org/government-relations/impact>).
- 2 See, e.g., <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america>.
- 3 This essay reframes and expands Chapter 8 of my book, *Republican Jesus: How the Right Has Rewritten the Gospels*, on the biblical justifications Republican influencers use to support right-wing positions on guns and immigration (Keddie 2020a, 216–37).
- 4 <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/07-290.ZS.html>.
- 5 The use of the Bible in support of police and military force is closely connected to its use in support of lethal self-defense, but also raises questions of the relationship of “church and state” that fall outside the purview of this essay. I treat them in a forthcoming study focused on the modern reception history of Romans 13:1–7, though see now Griffith 2020.

- 6 Drollinger's online Bible studies are often updated with new prefaces. The versions cited in this essay were accessed on March 18, 2022.
- 7 Richard Hays' influential argument in favor of a biblical ethic of nonviolence in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (1996) is too complex to address here in all its intricacies. I note simply that his biblical case against individual armed self-defense relies on two equally toxic biblicist claims: First, the Christian law of love *supersedes* the Jewish law of retaliation; second, while the Bible does not sanction individual violence, it does sanction individuals' participation in state violence (à la Romans 13:1–7).
- 8 See also the different scholarly perspectives regarding whether the historical Jesus and his disciples were armed in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37, issues 1 (2014) and 3 (2015). Note, however, that my remarks here are focused on Luke in its earliest settings, not the historical Jesus.

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11 Virginal Blood of the Marriage Covenant

Deuteronomy 22:13–21 in Evangelical Purity Culture

Joy A. Schroeder

11.1 Introduction

Fifteen years ago, while I was teaching a seminary course on women in church history, the class was discussing nuns and Christian medieval views of virginity. One student, a Lutheran woman raised in a Pentecostal-evangelical tradition, chimed in with a biblical interpretation I had never heard before. Citing Deuteronomy 22:13–21, about a bride’s family preserving their daughter’s nuptial bedsheets or garments, the student asserted the holy covenant of marriage is ratified by the virgin’s shedding of hymeneal blood during intercourse on her wedding night. “Marriage is a covenant. Covenants require the shedding of blood,” she stated.

I was astounded at her words. As a church historian and a biblical scholar, I was familiar with all sorts of beliefs about virginity, hymens, and women’s purity. I had studied early Christian literature about male attackers’ inability to violate the virgin martyrs. I knew the traditions surrounding the Virgin Mary’s physical virginity, legends asserting her vaginal opening was not subjected to the usual effects of childbirth, and her hymen remained miraculously intact during and after Jesus’ birth (Schroeder 2007, 57–72). However, the concept of a marriage covenant ratified by a woman’s virginal blood, spilled on her husband’s genitals, was new to me.

As I looked into the topic, I found this theme appeared in numerous dating and marriage advice books published by evangelical authors beginning in the 1990s and proliferating in the 2000s. The timing of this interpretation of Deuteronomy 22 corresponded to the rise of evangelical purity culture, an ideology and set of practices emphasizing abstinence and sexual purity, especially for female teenagers.

The preservation and display of coital bedsheets to demonstrate bridal virginity is a practice found in a number of cultures through the centuries (Kelly 2000, 128). However, the notion that hymeneal blood is required to *ratify a marriage covenant* is a concept found nowhere in Scripture. This idea is absent from the Christian tradition until approximately 30 years ago, when it began to gain currency in evangelical subcultures that emphasize abstinence and sexual purity, particularly female purity.

In this essay, I argue that certain evangelical authors took a single nine-verse biblical passage out of context, imported the concept of *covenant* into that passage, and misrepresented biblical and Jewish wedding customs to create a theology of marriage that requires a virgin's sacrificial blood, which is compared to the blood of circumcision, animal offerings, and Christ's crucifixion. As we will see, this modern teaching lacks biblical foundations. Furthermore, it has created anxiety and distress for twentieth- and twenty-first century Christian women and girls, even causing psychological harm, particularly in those who have had sexual experiences prior to marriage.

11.2 The Hymen and Postcoital Bleeding

Before turning to Deuteronomy 22:13–21 and its modern interpretations, it is appropriate to discuss anatomical matters related to postcoital bleeding. In popular Western conceptions, the hymen is a distinct part of women's anatomy, a membrane that functions as a seal or guard covering most of the vaginal opening and bleeds when ruptured or broken. Yet women's physiologies vary considerably. The shape, size, and elasticity of each individual's vaginal opening differ and also change over time. The membrane typically called a "hymen" may or may not be present.

Some medical authorities—both ancient and modern—have questioned whether it is possible to speak of a hymen as a distinct, identifiable body part (Ferguson 2011, 98–106). In her summary of medical texts' descriptions and definitions of the hymen, historian Kathleen Kelly (2000, 10) suggests:

Given the pronounced variations in size and shape from woman to woman, perhaps it would be more accurate to identify the hymen as a *site* than as an anatomical *part*. To make an analogy: we all have insteps, but to identify precisely where the "top" of the instep is would be very difficult.

Furthermore, a woman's first occasion of penile-vaginal intercourse does not always result in bleeding (Blank 2007, 111–5). Factors include the woman's physiology and history (for instance, tampon usage), as well as the gentleness of the sexual partner. Ancient people were aware a virgin's first coitus might not produce bleeding. As Michael Rosenberg (2018, 2), an expert in rabbinic literature, argues, the sages quoted in the Babylonian Talmud expressed a general preference for nonaggressive sexual intercourse that does not result in postcoital bleeding.

Some evangelical Christian authors, especially those writing prior to the 1990s, explicitly encouraged virgin brides to manually stretch their vaginal openings over the course of several weeks prior to the wedding night so the first intercourse would be as painless and bloodless as possible (Wheat and Wheat 2010, ch. 4). In *The Act of Marriage*, a bestselling marital advice book first published by Zondervan in 1976, Tim LaHaye, author of the

famous Left Behind series, and his spouse Beverly LaHaye, recommended: “Before marriage every young woman should be examined by a doctor; at his [sic] discretion and with her consent, the hymen can be broken to avoid unnecessary delay in intercourse after the wedding” (1998, 86). These authors strongly advocated for women to remain virgins until marriage, but they did not regard hymeneal “intactness” and postcoital bleeding as having covenantal significance or religious value. With the advent of evangelical purity culture in the 1990s, many other Christian authors offered a very different—and arguably *novel*—view of the events of the wedding night.

11.3 Bloodstained Garments

In Deuteronomy 22:13–21, a bride’s parents are directed to protect their daughter’s reputation—and life—by saving the bedclothes or garments following their daughter’s first marital coitus. The passage refers to a groom who later slandered an innocent wife by asserting she had not been a virgin at the time of their wedding. The law directs her parents to show the nuptial cloths to the elders as proof the husband was lying.

Suppose a man marries a woman, but after going in to her, he dislikes her and makes up charges against her, slandering her by saying, “I married this woman; but when I lay with her, I did not find evidence of her virginity (*betulim*).” The father of the young woman and her mother shall then submit the evidence of the young woman’s virginity (*betulim*) to the elders of the city at the gate. The father of the young woman shall say to the elders: “I gave my daughters in marriage to this man but he dislikes her; now he has made up charges against her, saying, ‘I did not find evidence of your daughter’s virginity (*betulim*).’ But here is the evidence of my daughter’s virginity (*betulim*).” Then they shall spread out the cloth (*simlah*) before the elders of the town.

(22:13–17)¹

Then the slanderous husband pays a fine of 100 shekels to his wife’s father, and he is not permitted to divorce her. If the parents cannot produce the evidence of their daughter’s virginity, she is to be stoned to death at the door of her father’s house (22:18–21). The passage concludes with the pronouncement: “So you shall purge the evil from your midst” (22:21b).

This patriarchal text represents a worldview that prized bridal virginity and emphasized the mortal danger that ensued if a woman’s parents did not take steps to ensure their daughter’s good reputation. Biblical scholars do not know the extent to which this passage reflects the lived experience of Israelite and Judean women. Cynthia Edenburg (2009) argues the Deuteronomist, writing after the fall of Judah, selected this case law from an earlier legal collection and placed it in a section dealing with other sexual regulations. The passage about nuptial garments is followed in 22:22

by prohibitions against adultery, execution of the guilty parties, and the pronouncement: “So you shall purge the evil from Israel” (22:22b). The next section adjudicates cases of consensual and nonconsensual relations with betrothed virgins (22:23–27) and rape of non-betrothed virgins (22:28–29). In the case where a betrothed virgin was assumed to have consented because the rape occurred in the town rather than the open country where her cries for help could not be heard, both parties are executed (22:23–24). The Deuteronomist again pronounces: “So you shall purge the evil from your midst” (22:24b). This passage about the nuptial garments occurs in a section about regulating sexual behavior, especially women’s “sexual exclusivity vis-à-vis an actual or future husband” (Edenburg 2009, 44), all within a framework in which the author is endeavoring to “purge evil” from the community.

In the passage about the nuptial cloths (Deuteronomy 22:13–21), the NRSV and the New Jewish Publication Society Bibles translate *betulim* (virginity) as “evidence of virginity.” Here *betulim* seems to refer both to the state or condition of a woman’s virginity as well as to the garments, presumably bloodstained, that serve as legal evidence of the bride’s virginity. Rosenberg (2018, 36) writes:

The question, then, is the meaning of this word *betulim*, which is clearly related to the word *betulah* [virgin or young woman]—a word with a slippery meaning in its own right—but which is in masculine plural form. Bible dictionaries translate the word to mean *virginity* but note that it often [as in 22:13–21] carries the concrete sense of *tokens of virginity*, that is, proof that the woman in question is a virgin.

Various New Testament and Hebrew Scripture passages emphasize the honor of virginity prior to marriage and the shamefulness of premarital and non-marital sexual relations (Leviticus 21:13; 2 Corinthians 11:2), but only Deuteronomy 22:13–21 mentions the use of nuptial cloths used as evidence of virginity. Modern evangelical proponents of purity culture and the biblical author(s) of Deuteronomy 22 share a concern for controlling sexual behavior, especially of young women. However, as we will see, certain modern authors imported an interpretation unsupported by the biblical text, the idea of marriage as blood covenant that entails the shedding of virginal blood for ratification. This concept, which seems to have emerged initially in Pentecostal circles by the early 1990s, entered into wider evangelical discourse at precisely the time evangelicalism promoted a renewed emphasis on sexual purity during the course of the 1990s and early 2000s.²

11.4 Virginity in Evangelical Purity Culture

Beginning in the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of evangelical Christian teenagers became active in sexual purity movements such as True Love

Waits (TLW) and the Silver Ring Thing.³ True Love Waits is an abstinence movement that sponsors rallies, concerts, youth programming, and other events held at national and local venues. True Love Waits is also a product line. At Christian bookstores and online, one can purchase TLW jewelry (especially rings), themed Bibles, devotional books, artwork, and novelty mugs. Though silver rings predominate among the jewelry offerings, other options, marketed especially for teenage boys, include a silver guitar-pick shaped pendant with the letters TLW. Bible studies published in the TLW line encourage girls to embrace concepts of “biblical womanhood” that include “working at home” and the requirement for wives “to be submissive to their own husbands” (Girardier 2016, 85).

Founded in 1993 at the Tulip Grove Baptist Church in Hermitage, Tennessee, and promoted in 1994 by the Southern Baptist National Convention in Orlando, Florida, the TLW movement urged youth to sign the following pledge to God and one’s future spouse:

Believing that True Love Waits, I make a commitment to God, my family, my friends, my future spouse and my future children to live a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until I enter a biblical marriage relationship.

(Moslener 2015, 109)

Sara Moslener, an expert in American religion, described a 1994 rally sponsored by Youth for Christ, an evangelical organization, held at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. There, more than 20,000 adolescents heard speeches, danced to Christian pop music, and “staked 211,163 pastel-colored cards into the lawn like tiny crosses” (2015, 109). The cards were TLW abstinence pledges signed by attendees and other teens who sent their pledge cards to the nation’s capital to be part of the public display.

The Silver Ring Thing (SRT), a movement launched by youth ministers Denny and Amy Pattyn in 1993, encouraged young people—especially girls—to wear a silver ring on the left-hand ring finger, as a sign of their commitment to abstinence (Klein 2018). The movement’s co-founder Denny Pattyn (1952–2021) was educated at Fuller Theological Seminary and ordained with the Evangelical Church Alliance. When the program was first founded, Amy Pattyn traveled to Mexico to obtain a batch of silver rings for use in their SRT abstinence program at a congregation in Yuma, Arizona. The Pattyns expanded their ministry nationally, eventually receiving over \$1.4 million in federal funding to promote abstinence education (Moslener 2015, 111–2).

Popular among abstinence movements such as SRT, silver “purity rings” or “chastity rings” are inscribed with the words “True Love Waits” or other messages encouraging abstinence. Some are adorned with crosses, hearts, unopened rose buds, and other symbols. As the ring is ritually placed on the

young person's ring finger at large SRT youth gatherings or smaller private events, the rings' wearers recite a sort of marriage vow:

In making this covenant before God Almighty, I agree to wear a silver ring as a sign of my pledge to abstain from sexual behavior that is inconsistent with Biblical standards. On my wedding day, I will present my silver ring to my spouse, representing my faithful commitment to the marriage covenant.

(Moslener 2015, 143)

Some families and congregations hold wedding-like events, with girls dressed in white gowns and boys wearing tuxedos. Participants pledge abstinence, dedicating their purity to God and future spouses. At formal father-daughter purity balls, a phenomenon beginning in 1998, fathers present their daughters with purity rings. Sometimes the fathers and daughters exchange rings. The father's ring, decorated with heart and shield, symbolizes the father's responsibility to protect his daughter's purity. When his daughter is married, the father turns over the ring to his new son-in-law, transferring his daughter and her chastity into her husband's protection and oversight (Robb 2007).

Contributing to the abstinence movement's popularity, Joshua Harris, then a 21-year-old evangelical author, published *I Kissed Dating Goodbye: A New Attitude Toward Romance and Relationships* (1997). The bestselling book, with more than 800,000 copies sold, recommended abstaining from dating and from kissing prior to marriage. Harris, who renounced the teachings in his book and apologized to his readers (n.d., "A Statement"; 2018), was highly influential in the purity movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Harris' book was one of a wide array of abstinence-themed evangelical advice books for teens.

Also proliferating in the 1990s and first two decades of the 2000s was an assortment of abstinence Bibles geared toward adolescents, especially teen girls. Biblical scholar Caroline Blyth characterizes these teen Bibles as filled with "relentless editorial notes, devotionals, and advice columns." According to Blyth (2021, 3): "These Bibles prescribe strict regulations around female sexuality and purity, casting shame and stigma on any girl who fails to conform."

Though the purity movement promotes abstinence for males as well as females, the greater burden falls upon girls and young women, in terms of actively preserving chastity against their partners' attempts to sully their purity, and also in terms of the stigma attaching to sexually active females. Purity Bibles and other devotional literature directed at teen girls instruct them to guard their virginity so their future husbands will find them pure, desirable, and palatable. As one author starkly put it, a woman who keeps herself pure lets herself be treated like priceless porcelain rather than like a disposable Styrofoam cup, representative of a promiscuous girl or woman

who is used by men who then throw her away like trash (Gresh 2004, 76). Blyth (2021, 18) reports:

Sexual purity and abstinence teachings frequently use a range of object lessons that drive home a message that girls who have sex before marriage are spoiled, dirty, diseased, and lacking in moral and spiritual value. They are likened to chewed gum, sucked candy, licked and dirt-encrusted Oreo cookies, used handkerchiefs, [used] cars, and sticky tape covered in dust balls.

Recounting her interviews with adults who came of age in evangelical communities that used the language of used Kleenex and chewed gum to describe women who were not virgins, Linda Kay Klein described the emotional distress of a rape victim following her assault:

I thought, “Oh my gosh. I’m that chewed up piece of gum. Nobody re-chews a piece of gum. You throw it away.” And that’s how easy it is to feel like you no longer have worth, you no longer have value.

(2018, 237–8)

Klein (2018, 12) reported about another woman who had been pregnant when she walked down the aisle at her wedding. Her groom later became a youth pastor. Years later, the woman wept incessantly when she led youth abstinence retreats, despondent because she herself had not been a virgin when she married.

This valorization of female virginity, and concomitant stigmatization of women’s premarital sexual contact, is heightened when the hymen is regarded as the sacred site of a non-repeatable marriage covenant ratification—or, tragically, when this part of the female anatomy is the site where marital intercourse falls short of its divinely intended covenantal ideal due to the woman’s prior sexual activity. Some purity Bibles and advice books do assert God forgives people who have succumbed to sexual temptation, and they state that people who are raped or molested are “still virgins.” In the *True Love Waits Bible*, a page before the case law about forced marriage of female war captives (Deuteronomy 21:10–14) and two pages before the case law about the rape of virgins (22:23–29), there is a glossy multi-colored insert proclaiming: “If you’ve been raped, molested or abused you’re still a virgin as far as God is concerned. Your virginity is something you give away, not something you have taken from you” (DeVries et al. 1996, 168A).⁴ Yet, when Christian leaders glorify premarital “physical virginity” and teach that the (usually) unrepeatable act of shedding hymeneal blood ratifies the marriage covenant, they send conflicting and contradictory messages to people who have been sexually active or victimized.

11.5 Why the Bride Wore White

The cover of the 2004 edition of *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity*, first released by Moody Publishers in 1999 and reprinted several times, features a soft-focus photo of a joyous young blonde woman dressed in a wedding gown, holding white flowers (Gresh 2004). Other editions similarly portray rapturous young European-descent brides, dressed in white, holding flowers or pearls. The book's author, Dannah Gresh, is a frequent guest on evangelical television programs like *The 700 Club* and *Focus on the Family*. Gresh, who is white, graduated from Cedarville University, a Baptist school in Ohio. She has written books and created programs for tweens (aged 9–12), teenagers, and their parents, promoting abstinence for unmarried people.⁵

In *And the Bride Wore White*, which sold more than 250,000 copies, Gresh presents herself as a mother figure, a wise female mentor who offers young women advice drawn from her interpretation of Scripture and her own youthful experiences. Gresh initiates girls and young women into seven “secrets” about dating, marriage, and sexuality. The secrets are primarily motivations, mindsets, and strategies for abstaining from sexual relations prior to marriage. Gresh announces these secrets in chapter titles. For instance, in “Secret #2, Purity Dreams of its Future: Envisioning a Godly Husband,” Gresh (2004, 61–9) encourages her female reader to journal about and offer prayers that God will support and guide the boy or man who will eventually become the reader's husband.

Three-quarters of the way into the book, after discussions of remaining pure in mind and body during courtship and dating, Gresh turns to the topic of intercourse and the wedding night. In a chapter entitled “The Truth about Sex: It's Out of This World,” and subtitled “Understanding the Heavenly Purpose of Sex,” Gresh introduces the theme of marriage as a covenant ratified by a hymeneal blood sacrifice. She begins by urging her young readers to pray and become receptive to her words:

Stop right now. Quietly invite the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the truth of what my hands have typed. The truth that I am about to reveal to you is powerful, but not often spoken of ... even in our churches.

(2004, 130)

Gresh then reviews “blood sacrifices” found in the Bible, identifying four, which she also characterizes as “blood covenants.” The first three are animal sacrifice, circumcision, and Christ's death on the cross. Animal sacrifice and circumcision, she says, no longer apply after the coming of Christ. Gresh (2004, 130–1) explains:

Within the Scriptures there are only four blood sacrifices. Before Christ came, God was honored and people showed repentance by the blood

sacrifice of animals. And when God made His covenant with Abraham, He requested pain and blood through circumcision as an act of good faith on Abraham's part. By cutting away his foreskin, he demonstrated that his heart had gone through a change. (Ouch!) Those are the first two blood covenants.

The third and most magnificent is the atoning blood of Jesus, which is God's covenant to us that if we confess our sins, He is willing to erase them. (Thank you, Jesus!) The blood covenant of Jesus replaces the need to sacrifice animals and the need to practice male circumcision. Circumcision is still widely practiced, but mostly as a matter of cleanliness and health.

Here Gresh, who regards circumcision as superseded by the New Covenant, fails to acknowledge that many people today, particularly Jews and Muslims, still practice circumcision for religious reasons and not only for health and hygiene.

Next, Gresh turns to the fourth blood sacrifice, the virgin's shedding of blood. This blood sacrifice, unlike circumcision and animal offerings prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures, is not superseded or rendered unnecessary for followers of Jesus:

But wait, before you think, "Whew, I am glad I don't live in Bible times and have to practice animal sacrifice!" there is one left that God still asks us to practice! It was in existence in the Old Testament under the Law, but in the New Testament it has new meaning and is the only blood covenant sacrifice God still asks that we practice today. My friend, it is your sexuality.

(2004, 131)

Gresh (2004, 131) offers her interpretation of the biblical customs described in Deuteronomy 22, paraphrasing the details:

In Bible times, a bride and groom were presented with white linens for their wedding night. They were expected to sleep on them, and the bride was expected to bleed on them as proof of her virginity. You see, God created you and me with a protective membrane, the hymen, which *in most cases* is broken the first time that we have intercourse. When it breaks, a woman's blood spills over her husband. Your sexual union is a blood covenant between you, your husband, and God.

Notably, in Gresh's interpretation, two forms of blood-ratified covenants—those involving men and animals—were superseded by Christ's death on the cross. However, the "sacrifice" that aligns with evangelical purity culture and social control of women and girls is not. God no longer requires the

injury and blood of circumcised men or sacrificed animals, but women's blood is still required.

11.6 Blood of the Covenant

Gresh's teaching about marriage as a blood covenant is not an isolated instance. Below is a sampling from other marriage and dating guidebooks using blood covenant language to advocate for abstinence and virginity prior to marriage, to argue against remarriage after divorce, and to characterize gay marriage as sinful.⁶ Though this interpretation of Deuteronomy 22 may well have circulated among evangelicals, particularly in the Pentecostal tradition, prior to the 1990s, the earliest example I have found was published in 1993: Edwin Louis Cole's *The Glory of Sex: How to Live Right in a World Living Wrong!* It is unlikely the teaching originated with Cole, but he popularized it with his bestselling books.

Cole (1922–2002), a Euro-American evangelist, was raised in the Pentecostal tradition and became an Assemblies of God minister. In 1977, he founded the Christian Men's Network (CMN), a global organization promoting Christian masculinity, male headship within the household, celibacy for male and female alike before marriage, and sexual fidelity within marriage. Reflecting on his ministry, Cole asserted:

I have been called to speak with a prophetic voice to the men of this generation and commissioned with a ministry majoring in men to declare a standard for manhood, and that standard is that "Manhood and Christlikeness are synonymous."

(CMN Worldwide 2012)

In *The Glory of Sex*, published by Honor Books, a Christian press based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Cole offered a description of the blood covenant that requires both marriage partners to be virgins. (Though male virginity is generally encouraged by the evangelical purity movement, Cole is one of the few authors to make it a requirement for ratification of the blood covenant.) Cole (1993, 40) wrote:

When a man and a woman get married as virgins and have their first intimate sexual experience, her hymen is broken. This causes the shedding of blood which flows over the man's part during their intercourse. To God, this is the physical evidence that the couple has entered into a covenant relationship through the shedding of blood.

Two years later, another influential Euro-American leader, Pentecostal evangelist and television preacher Joyce Meyer (1995, ch. 14) wrote:

Marriage is called a covenant, and in a way we can even say it is a blood covenant. If a woman is a virgin when she marries, which was God's original plan, she has an unbroken hymen that will break and bleed the first time she has intercourse with her husband. In other words, the couple enter into and seal their covenant with blood.

Observing that blood "is a powerful entity, and it is because life is in the blood," Meyer (1995, ch. 14) drew parallels between postcoital bleeding, the blood of circumcision, and the language of blood found in the Holy Communion service.

The same theme recurs in numerous publications. In *She Gets It! The 11 Lies That Hold Women Hostage*, printed by Destiny Image Publishers, an independent Christian publishing house, Drenda Keesee explicitly linked the blood shed during first intercourse with the blood of Christ. A Euro-American graduate of Oral Roberts University, pastor of Faith Life Church in Albany, Ohio, and daytime television host, Keesee (2011, 98) wrote:

Sexual intimacy parallels the blood covenant established by Christ in the New Covenant where He gives Himself for us. A woman typically sheds blood as her hymen is penetrated for the first time in intercourse. This mirrors the blood covenant God made with man, as His Son shed His blood in a covenant relationship with us.

In the same year, Paul and Billie Kaye Tsika, Euro-American spouses who hold associates degrees from Fruitland Bible Institute, published *Get Married, Stay Married* (2011). Like Keesee, previously quoted, Tsika and Tsika published their advice book with Destiny Image Publishers. On the organization's website, Destiny Image describes itself as "a community of believers with a passion for equipping and encouraging you to live the prophetic, supernatural life you were created for!"⁷ Invoking the language of blood covenant, Tsika and Tsika (2011, 58) stress the unrepeatability of the marriage covenant:

Without the shedding of blood, there is no blood covenant. We fulfill this step in marriage when the husband and wife consummate the marriage and the virgin woman, through the breaking of the hymen, sheds blood. Jewish parents of the groom received a special cloth upon which the bride's blood was spilled as proof that the marriage covenant had been sealed. This also signifies how we were meant to enter such a covenant only once.

Note the authors assert, contrary to Deuteronomy 22:13–21, the *groom's* parents, rather than the bride's parents, retained the bloodstained cloths.

Harold Gentry, who is African American, is Bishop of New Covenant Churches International, a neo-charismatic network, and pastor of the

non-denominational Majestic Christian Center in Pearland, Texas. Gentry holds a Ph.D. from Cornerstone University and Theological Seminary of Jerusalem. His 2021 book, *Intimacy: Redemption from Perversion*, was printed by WestBow Press, a self-publishing division of Zondervan and Thomas Nelson (HarperCollins). Like other authors quoted above, Gentry (2021, 73) explains that first intercourse establishes a blood covenant intended solely for married people:

The covenant of marriage is not only a vow of husband and wife to one another, but the greater sense of covenant is the blood covenant ... The purpose of the Husband, not boyfriend, to be the one to break his wife's, not girlfriend[s], hymen is to establish a blood covenant between the two. And, of course, only a virgin has an unbroken hymen. God made the body and placed the hymen in the woman's vaginal opening for this reason.

Beverley Allen, an African American evangelist and author who studied at Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack, New York, develops similar themes in *Covenant Dating: The Biblical Path to Marriage*, published by WestBow Press in 2010. She says:

When man and woman became one flesh the next necessary element would be blood, for every covenant involving God and His union with His created man and woman required a covenant in blood. The blood of the covenant was to come from the two becoming one flesh. God created the woman with a "hymen," a tissue membrane covering the vagina with an opening just small enough to allow her to have a menstrual flow. But in the sexual act of intercourse with her covenant partner, the male penis cuts through the membrane and produces the blood which flows over the male penis and unites them in the holy covenant, joining them as husband and wife.

(2010, 15)

In Allen's theology of marriage, the husband is the priest who performs the sacrificial act of piercing his bride's hymen: "The mediator of the covenant is the man who, when joined to his wife, offers them up to God in their oneness, and the covenant is made by the blood shed during the piercing of becoming one flesh" (2010, 15–6). Allen (2010, 17) draws upon Deuteronomy 22:13–21 to develop this notion of the husband's priesthood.

These examples serve today for each man who enters into a covenant with his wife as he becomes the priest of his household. He and his bride enter into a blood covenant on their wedding night in the consummation through intercourse. In Deuteronomy 22:13–21, we read the testimony of what is to be the evidence of the blood covenant between a man and

his wife. The proof of the covenant (bloodstained linen) was held by the bride's parents.

Some authors and ministers used the theology of the marital blood covenant, which entails penile-vaginal intercourse, to condemn same-sex relationships. For instance, in the early 2000s, Bishop Eddie Long, senior minister of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, a 25,000-member, predominantly African American megachurch with Pentecostal leanings in Atlanta, supported adopting a U.S. constitutional amendment defining marriage as pertaining to one man and one woman. Michael Long (2012, 34), a scholar of American religion, quotes and summarizes "God Is after Himself," a 2004 videotaped sermon by Bishop Long:

God wants human sexual relations in a postcrucifixion world to enact and reflect the blood covenant sealed by the sacrifice of Jesus—the blood-filled act that binds individuals together and in unity with God. In "God Is after Himself," Long expounded on this by saying that the will of God in relation to human sexual expression is revealed in the breaking of the female hymen during the act of sexual intercourse. "That's the reason there is shedding of blood in intercourse—because it is an acknowledgement to God that this is right in my covenant," Long stated. More specifically, when a "virgin man has intercourse with a virgin woman" in marriage, "there is blood that is shed on his penis," and this shedding of blood "represents covenant and the grace of God ... " In short, gay sex is "anti-Christ" exactly because it cannot (or so Long preached) reflect the blood sacrifice of Jesus.

At times the anti-gay rhetoric is graphic. Specifically addressing why same-sex couples are unable to enter into a sacred marital blood covenant, Afro-Caribbean religious author Hayden Patrick explained that God fashioned humans so "only a male and female could naturally perform the shedding of blood to consummate their union." After explaining that "the breaking of the hymen (the veil) and the blood flow symbolizes the starting of covenant relationship between a man and a woman," Patrick (2019, ch. 3) proclaims male-male and female-female sexual relations are self-evidently contrary to the created order: "Sorry to sound so crude, there is no hymen in the butthole! Breaking the hymen with anything other than a penis is unnatural."

11.7 Misinterpreting Scripture, Misrepresenting Jewish Tradition

In evangelical Christianity—and perhaps in *most* Christian traditions—the concept of a blood covenant is potent. Many evangelical evangelists, authors, preachers, and bloggers regularly cite an influential work by Congregational

minister, world traveler, and amateur anthropologist Henry Clay Trumball (1830–1903), who authored *The Blood Covenant: A Primitive Rite and Its Bearings on Scripture* (1885).⁸ Trumball’s 350-page tome considers the customs of Asian, African, Viking, Middle Eastern, South Pacific, and indigenous North and South American cultures. He argued that most “primitive peoples” and “the Orientals” who reside in “the unchanging East” have virtually identical forms of

the rite of blood-covenanting: a form of mutual covenanting, by which two persons enter into the closest, the most enduring, and the most sacred of compacts, as friends or brothers, or as more than brothers, through the inter-commingling of their blood, by means of its mutual tasting, or of its inter-transfusion.

(1885, 4–5)

A footnote in Trumball’s book may have been the source for the ideas described in this essay—a seed that grew and developed a century later into a full blown Pentecostal-evangelical theology of marriage as a blood covenant. In a discussion of Moses’ wife Zipporah circumcising her son (Exodus 4:24–26) in order to bring the child and herself “into blood-covenant relations with the descendants of Abraham,” Trumball made a passing reference to “the marriage-rite, as the Orientals view it” (1885, 223). A footnote adds: “See Deut[eronomy] 22:13–21. To this day, in the East, an exhibit of bloodstains, as the indubitable proof of a consummated covenant of marriage, is common” (1885, 223n1). It was also Trumball (1885, 267) who helped popularize the knowledge of the Hebrew terminology that the verb for establishing or entering into a covenant was *kar-ath*, or “cut.”

The evangelical authors quoted in this essay are correct that the concept of a covenant (*berit*) entailing the shedding of blood is found in various places in Hebrew Scripture, particularly passages about circumcision and animal sacrifice. In Genesis 17:10, God directed Abram: “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.” After delivering God’s law to the Israelites, who promised obedience, Moses took basins of the blood from sacrificed oxen and dashed half of the blood against the altar and half of it upon the people, while proclaiming: “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with these words” (Exodus 24:8). In the New Testament, the concept of “the new covenant [*diathēkē*] in my blood” occurs in the account of Jesus instituting the ritual of the Lord’s Supper prior to his crucifixion (1 Corinthians 11:25). In Christian tradition, Jesus’ crucifixion and shedding of blood is frequently regarded as a covenantal act, establishing a redemptive relationship between God and sinful humans. In these passages, God makes a covenant—a solemn pact—with selected humans, whether with Abraham, the

Israelite people, or the followers of Jesus. These covenants include a ritual involving real or symbolic blood.

Yet, nowhere in Deuteronomy is marriage referred to as a covenant. Two passages in Scripture do use the term “covenant” for the marriage agreement. Malachi 2:14 refers to a man unfaithful to “the wife of your youth” who is “your companion and your wife by covenant.” Proverbs 2:17 says an adulterous woman “forsakes the partner of her youth and forgets her sacred covenant.” However, neither the Malachi verse nor the Proverbs passage mention ratification with blood. Furthermore, not all biblical covenants are rituals entailing bloodshed. In the Priestly version of God’s covenant with Noah, the covenantal sign is a rainbow (Genesis 9:8–17).⁹ Jonathan made an apparently bloodless covenant with David (1 Samuel 20:16). God’s promise to David (2 Samuel 7:10–17) is often termed the “Davidic covenant” in the interpretive tradition.

Many mainline Christian traditions do speak about marriage as a covenant. Two examples, representative of Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity, illustrate this theme. *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in 1965, uses the Latin word *foedus* (“covenant”) to characterize marriage as a covenantal bond between the spouses and God (Buck 2012, 451–7). In the *Book of Common Worship* published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the wedding service uses the term “covenant of marriage” to highlight the solemnity of marriage and the reciprocal care each partner pledges to the other (2018, 690–700). In these and other such mainline Christian writings, the concept of “covenant” lacks the notion that a woman’s blood must be shed in order to ratify the pact.

In the Jewish tradition, which evangelical authors frequently try to invoke as evidence for interpreting Deuteronomy 22 in terms of blood covenant, this idea is scarce. Tractate Sanhedrin 22b contains a passing reference to forming a marriage covenant with a virgin by transforming her body through intercourse:

Said R. Samuel bar Onia in the name of Rab, “A woman is unformed, and she makes a covenant only with him who turns her into a utensil [i.e., vessel], as it is said, ‘For your maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name’ (Is[aiah] 54:5).”

(The Talmud of Babylonia, 141)

The Talmudic quotation of Rab, while resonating with themes found in twentieth- and twenty-first-century evangelical Christian sources, lacks mention of Deuteronomy 22. The ancient sages who discussed marriage and bridal virginity generally did not use language of “covenant” and were not strong proponents of following Deuteronomy 22’s procedures for confirming virginity. Rosenberg, who has studied rabbinic interpretations of this passage, argues the sages of the Babylonian Talmud regarded the nuptial

cloth test as unreliable, since bloody evidence could be manufactured and, most importantly, because there were a variety of reasons a virginal woman might not bleed on her wedding night, such as differences in anatomy, physiological changes caused by vigorous exercise such as climbing stairs, or accidental penetration by some object. Additionally, as Rosenberg asserts, the sages expressed a general preference for skillful, gentle marital intimacy that did not necessarily result in postcoital bleeding. The sages were also aware of a custom in Palestine whereby the groom would manually break or stretch the membrane with his fingers before engaging in penile-vaginal relations. They regarded that practice as unnecessarily rough. Furthermore, if proof of *betulim* (physical virginity) was required, it was better to enlist respected older women to inspect the young woman's body rather than to examine garments following coitus (Rosenberg 2018, 90–147).

Celebration of postcoital wedding night bleeding was not absent from Jewish tradition. One medieval Jewish custom loosely connected to Deuteronomy 22:13–21 was the *birkat betulim*, the blessing spoken over the cloths on which the marriage had been consummated. The prayer's text is found in the *Halakhot Gedolot*, which dates from the ninth century CE:

When he brings out the sheet [stained with the blood of virginity], we require him to recite a blessing. If wine and spices are available, he recites over them, “who creates the fruit of the vine” and “who creates fragrant trees.” Then he recites the benediction, “who placed the walnut in the Garden of Eden, the lily of the valley, so that no stranger shall have dominion over the sealed spring; thus the loving doe preserved her purity and did not break the law. Blessed are You, Lord, who chooses the descendants of Abraham.”

(Translated in Langer 1995, 53)

Ruth Langer (1995, 56–65), an expert on Jewish liturgies, notes the blessing includes the language of fertility, bridal purity, the goodness of creation, images from the Song of Songs, and emphasis on the groom alone maintaining control over his wife's sexuality. This prayer, however, does not make reference to shedding blood as ratification of a covenant. All told, there is slim support for developing a blood-covenant theology of marriage from biblical texts or Jewish tradition.

11.8 Guarding the Daughters

Of greater concern than the lack of biblical warrant for this theology is the emotional damage inflicted on girls and women who are members of communities where this teaching is prevalent. Women raised in evangelical purity cultures have narrated stories of conflicts with mothers who cited Deuteronomy 22 and blood covenant theology when forbidding their daughters to wear tampons (Reimer 2016, 83–4). When religious leaders

emphasize a marriage covenant is most authentic when ratified by hymeneal blood, people who did not have this experience reported feeling their marriages had substantially fallen short of God's intent. Some advice books for teenage girls highlighting covenantal bleeding on the wedding night were written by women ashamed they themselves had been sexually active prior to their marriages. They offered their own experiences as cautionary tales so other women would not make the mistakes the authors had (Auld 2010, Gresh 2004).

A particularly distressing account, narrated by a Pentecostal pastor, describes the experience of a Mexican woman who had been sexually active prior to her conversion to evangelical Christianity. She later feared she would be unable to enter into a covenant marriage unless God miraculously restored her hymen—something she prayed for fervently. A few days after her wedding, she experienced postcoital bleeding, which could have several explanations, such as menstruation, spotting as a result of ovulation, or, disturbingly, injury from forceful intercourse. The woman attributed the bleeding to miraculous intervention: “She cried when she realized that God had answered her prayer and that God thought it important enough to restore her hymen so that she and her husband might have a symbol of covenant for their union” (Mattera 2009, 50).

11.9 Conclusion

Proponents of blood-covenant marriage theology selected a single passage of Scripture (Deuteronomy 22:13–21), misinterpreted it (or over-interpreted it), and used it in service of a purity culture agenda. Yet there are similarities between the biblical authors' and modern evangelical authors' agendas. In both cases, there is an emphasis on purity and on parental control (especially the *father's* control) of daughters' sexuality prior to marriage (Matas 2013). One could argue, ironically, young women *do*, in fact, need to be protected—that is, protected from harmful patriarchal interpretations of this biblical passage. Finally, when viewed from a traditional Christian theological perspective, it is puzzling to assign a sacred—even redemptive—quality to women's shedding of blood, given Christian views about Jesus' redemptive bleeding on the cross as having a once-for-all nature.

Notes

- 1 Biblical translations follow the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
- 2 In her study of Christian purity culture, Linda Kay Klein includes a number of different Christian traditions under the broad category “evangelical,” including charismatic, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal. She includes denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Southern Baptist Convention, and Dutch Reformed, as well as non-denominational groups like the Christian and Missionary Alliance and non-denominational churches that “brand themselves independently” (2018, 19).

- 3 For True Love Waits, see <https://www.lifeway.com/en/product-family/true-love-waits>. The Silver Ring Thing has since become Unaltered Ministries (<https://www.unaltered.org/transition>).
- 4 In the *True Love Waits Bible* insert, the quotation is attributed to Jacob Aranza, an evangelical pastor who authored books about sexual purity and about backwards satanic messages embedded in rock and roll music. The reverse side of the glossy insert encourages women impregnated through rape not to abort their babies (DeVries et al. 1996, 168B).
- 5 See <https://dannahgresh.com>.
- 6 This essay quotes only a portion of recent writings expressing the theme of the marriage covenant ratified by the virgin's hymeneal blood. Numerous Christian authors have written on the same theme, e.g., Auld 2010, 62; Booker 2008; De Koning 2014, 6–9; Hughes 2020, ch. 10; Jeffery 2010, 15; Pearson-Darrough, 2007, ch. 1; Stearn 2014; Taurel 2008, 45.
- 7 <https://www.destinyimage.com/meet-destiny-image>.
- 8 See, e.g., Garr (2012, 128n35), who cites Trumball (1885, 223) as evidence a virgin's blood ratifies the marriage covenant.
- 9 Admittedly, there is the threat of bloodletting against murderers (Genesis 9:4–6).

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12 Essentializing “Woman”

Three Neoliberal Strategies in the Christian Right’s Interpretations on Women in the Bible

*Susanne Scholz*¹

12.1 Introduction

The adaptation of biblical interpretation to hegemonic normativities enjoys rising popularity in various Bible-reading sectors. The Christian Right, which as an umbrella term includes several varieties of evangelicalism, features prominently as it has made itself heard in the larger U.S. public since the 1970s (Balmer 2010). As Randall Balmer (2010, 78) explains: “In the mid-1970s, evangelicals emerged from their subculture with a vengeance, seeking to make their presence felt in the media, in culture, and in politics.” They “made their mark on television, radio, and the music industry; spawned megachurches throughout the nation; and helped to elect Republican politicians to office, from school boards to the presidency” (2010, 78). They also developed an extensive network of biblical interpretations for the lay and academic public. By now, an evangelical reading of the Bible is even taken for granted as the dominant Christian voice about biblical views in the Western world and beyond (e.g., P. Jenkins 2006, 2011).

As Christian Right interpreters have intensified their systematic exploration of the Bible, they have increasingly become interested in the study of biblical women. At the same time, feminist exegetes had begun to challenge androcentric and heteronormative assumptions about biblical texts in the 1970s. Conservative Christian biblical scholars began feeling these hermeneutical challenges on their normative readings and, true to form, turned their attention to gender issues. Although books on women in the Bible already enjoyed a certain popularity in the mid-twentieth century (Scholz 2017, 13–42), the renewed Christian Right’s dedication to the topic has led to a virtual explosion of countless evangelical books on women in the Bible.²

12.2 A Conceptual Framework: Three Neoliberal Strategies

Feminist Bible scholars have critically commented on books about women in the Bible for decades. Already in 1983, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza addressed the hermeneutical-exegetical problems of these kinds of books

in her pioneering publication, *In Memory of Her*, although, at the time, conservative Christian publications on women in the Bible were not yet as abundantly produced as they are today. It is worth taking note of Schüssler Fiorenza's three observations on this genre of books. First, she explains that such collections "of so-called data and facts on 'Women in the Bible' ... take the androcentric dynamics and reality constructions of patriarchal texts at face value" (1983, xxiii–iv, 30). Second, she notes these books advance an apologetic hermeneutic legitimizing "societal and ecclesiastical patriarchy and ... women's 'divinely ordained place'" (1983, 7). Third, she clarifies they aim to identify doctrinal truth in their readings of the Bible, and so turn the Bible into "an absolute oracle revealing timeless truth and definite answers to the questions and problems of all times" (1983, 5).

In short, conservative Christian readers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have a considerable tradition of clinging to an apologetic hermeneutic in defense of the Bible as the direct and unencumbered word of God. This hermeneutic enables interpreters to essentialize, naturalize, and universalize female characters, and to read biblical texts at face value in line with the literalist-historicizing approaches. Most importantly, however, the feminist evaluation of books on women in the Bible makes painfully clear that not every biblical interpretation with a focus on women, gender, or sexuality advances feminist and queer-aligned analyses.

This central point is sometimes not even understood in feminist exegetical publications, as feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, Esther Fuchs, charges. In fact, she regards the essentializing, naturalizing, and universalizing hermeneutical assumptions, prevalent in scholarly treatments on biblical women, as rooted in neoliberalist thought (e.g., Steger and Roy 2010). Fuchs shows that recognized feminist Hebrew Bible scholars, among them Ilana Pardes, Susan Ackerman, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, exhibit three particular neoliberal strategies. First, these scholars focus on the "experience" of women within "widely used historical categories" that are "recognizable to social and political historians" (2016, 55). Fuchs charges that this focus does not challenge the academic framework within which the historical reconstructions of women appear, as they "highlight women's strength and power, autonomy and social status, distinct significance and cultural contribution" with the goal of delineating biblical "herstory" (2016, 55–6).

Second, another neoliberal strategy, found in feminist Bible scholarship, presents "woman" as "a natural, commonsense, 'real,' collective, individual presence that claims ontological autonomy" (2016, 56). It presupposes gender as "a stable unchanging essence, or reality," enabling neoliberal feminist interpreters to conform to disciplinary boundaries. When feminist scholars rely on this neoliberal strategy, they describe "ancient women's 'strong' voices," Israelite women's "alleged independence," and their "social power," which, according to Fuchs (2016, 56), are "neoliberal desires and dreams" projected onto biblical texts.

Third, yet another neoliberal strategy informs a considerable number of feminist Bible publications. Assuming the principles of “Western and European liberalism and humanism in Reason” (2016, 56), this strategy enables interpreters to “separate power from knowledge” (2016, 56). It defines “woman” as “a gendered concept based on class advantage and Christian notions about the separation of body and mind” (2016, 56). Based on the neoliberal strategy, interpretations are “held up as a model of a universal ‘human’ intellectual pursuit of truth” (2016, 56), while their deep complicities with the political infrastructures from which they emerge are concealed. These kinds of interpretations appear to be “innocent, unmotivated or unshaped by political interests,” and they seem to advance “human progress” because they include a formerly excluded part of human knowledge—women (2016, 56). This neoliberal strategy also assumes “that biblical women can be studied ‘outside’ considerations of male power and hegemony” (2016, 56). Accordingly, the study of biblical women is seen as a mere matter of inclusion that remedies previous omissions. When feminist Bible interpreters take this neoliberal strategy for granted, they accept patriarchy and ignore searching “for its historical roots and interrogating its origins” (2016, 57). Such scholarship claims to be descriptive, even objective, merely outlining “sexual difference rather than power” (2016, 57). Yet, to Fuchs, this kind of scholarship upholds the socio-political, cultural, and religious status quo by re-legitimizing “the fathers of the field” (2016, 57).

Fuchs (2016, 57) criticizes sharply the effect of these neoliberal assumptions in feminist Bible exegesis when she contends:

Rarely do these works refer to feminist genealogies of knowledge, to their own indebtedness to feminist mothers, or even to their methodological or theoretical departure from feminist antecedents. Instead, there is much citing and genuflection to “discarded” fathers of the field, who were unfairly questioned by radical (poststructural) feminists.

Further, Fuchs’ critique of neoliberal strategies in feminist Hebrew Bible scholarship can also help readers understand the Christian Right’s approaches to women in the Bible. Evangelical scholarship upholds these particular strategies, failing “to investigate the discursive formations, the intersection of power and language in the construction of woman” (2016, 67). Since they do not “question the very notion and definition ‘women,’” they do not “trace the discursive emergence of this category in the text” (2016, 67). Importantly, they do not “delineate the hierarchical power relations in the most basic representations of this subject, on the level of language” (2016, 67). Ultimately, what Fuchs and other feminist theorists define as a feminist hermeneutical posture in studying gender is conveniently ignored in the Christian Right’s approaches to the Bible.

In other words, similar to neoliberal feminist scholarship, the Christian Right’s interpretations of women in the Bible disregard the very notion of

the text as a site in which the concept of women is constructed. Instead, these interpretations affirm "humanist notions of essentialist truths, attainable knowledge, rationalism, individualism, competitiveness, and economic success" (2016, 66). Fuchs quotes feminist theorist bell hooks, who articulates why it is so important to take seriously the notion of "woman" as a construct. As hooks explains:

Many feminist radicals now know that neither a feminism that focuses on women as an autonomous being worthy of personal freedom nor one that focuses on the attainment of equality of opportunity with men can rid society of sexism and male domination.

(2016, 66; cf. hooks 2000, 26)

Consequently, it is insufficient for feminist readers to retrieve ancient Israelite women's lives or to legitimize women's equal inclusion in biblical retellings because such approaches do not contribute to the transformation of society toward gender justice. Instead, they accept the socio-political, cultural, economic, and religious parameters of the kyriarchal system (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007).

The following analysis takes Fuchs' conceptual framework seriously. It illuminates the silenced and hidden neoliberal strategies in the Christian Right's works on women in the Bible. Section 12.3 investigates the Christian Right's readings on women in the Bible as a rhetorical discourse that depicts biblical women's "experience" in support of androcentric and heteronormative hegemonies. Section 12.4 demonstrates how the Christian Right's interpretations essentialize, naturalize, and universalize gender binaries, which in turn stabilizes them. Section 12.5 explores the separation of power from knowledge in the Christian Right's retellings. Finally, a conclusion affirms the need to investigate women, gender, and sexuality as intersectional constructs so that feminist biblical scholarship aligns itself with the overall direction of feminist critical studies today (Chakravarti 2016, Evans et al. 2014, Harcourt 2016).

12.3 Biblical Women's "Experiences" in Alliance with Androcentrism and Heteronormativity

When evangelical readers focus on the experiences of biblical women, they emphasize the familial roles of biblical women as wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters. Evangelical readers also explain that some biblical women stand out in military, political, or even business leadership roles. In their readerly opinion, the Bible provides spiritual-historical information that depicts women as performing roles in support of androcentric and heteronormative norms.

The Christian Right's approaches to women in the Bible illustrate this first neoliberal strategy. For instance, the bestselling popular writer, Elizabeth

George, presents a book on *The Remarkable Women of the Bible* (2003) that includes more than fourteen “remarkable” women of the Christian biblical canon. Among them are Eve as a “remarkable creation,” Sarah of “remarkable faith,” Rebekah who has a “remarkable journey,” Miriam as a “remarkable leader,” Deborah who has “remarkable wisdom,” Ruth and Naomi who have “remarkable devotion,” Hannah who makes a “remarkable sacrifice,” and Esther who has “remarkable courage.” Classifying these biblical women as “remarkable” yet ordinary, George promises that readers, too, will be able to experience “God’s life-changing power” by learning from these biblical women. George explains that these female figures loved God “passionately,” teaching today’s women to do the same. As biblical women “reveled” in their “lovely womanhood and femaleness” (2003, 12) and in their roles as mothers, wives, or sisters, contemporary readers can learn from them. An utterly simplistic retribution theology undergirds George’s retellings shaped by a literalist-historicizing, individualized, and sentimentalized hermeneutics that describes biblical women’s experiences in alliance with androcentric and heteronormative hegemonies.

Another volume, written by Sue Poorman and Lawrence Richards, covers female biblical characters from A to Z (2003; cf. Spangler and Syswerda 2015).³ The table of contents indicates a fuss-free organization with the majority of the book devoted to “women of the Bible A–Z.” The book also includes appendices on the “Historical Panorama of Women,” “Women of the Old Testament,” “Women of the New Testament,” “Paul’s Teaching on Women,” and, the “Proverbs 31 Woman.” The authors explain that they want their readers to “go back in time to experience the life and times” of biblical women (2003, vii). Accordingly, historical-literalist retellings that begin with Abigail and end with Zipporah dominate the summarizing and simplifying descriptions of the female characters. Sometimes Poorman and Richards also move into a semi-feminist mode when they emphasize that “the Genesis account is descriptive rather than prescriptive” and the narratives do not advocate “patriarchal” conventions as “God’s will for humankind” (2003, 281). They explain that not all biblical laws and customs reflect “a totally accurate picture of women’s place” in ancient Israel (2003, 283). Wanting to show affinities between past and present women, the authors state, as many other authors do in similar books: “Both the wonderful gifts God gave human beings and the Fall’s twisting of those gifts is revealed as powerfully in biblical women of this period as in the women of our own time” (2003, 283). Poorman and Richards find in the biblical record “equal rights of husband and wives” (2003, 285), and they stress that in some Hebrew Bible texts, such as Proverbs 31, women are not depicted as “inferior to men by nature” (2003, 326). The book thus underscores women’s “faithfulness to God” as a solution to any circumstances in which biblical and contemporary women find themselves, whether it is Hagar’s situation as a “slave,” Rahab’s life as a “harlot,” or Samson’s mother, Manoah’s wife, in Judges 13 (2003, 81, 180, 208–12). Pietistic, sentimentalizing, and

individualistic readings reinforce women’s roles as loving mothers, obedient wives, and faithful believers in God.

The approach that features each biblical woman by name in a separate chapter has proven to be very popular in this genre of books. Numerous best-selling evangelical authors have pursued it with a vengeance. They have made careers of composing biblical retellings heavy on spiritual-moralizing advice and present biblical women in gender-stereotypical roles, interspersed with this or that exceptional heroine or “wicked” woman. One highly successful author is Ann Spangler who calls herself “an award-winning writer” with a background in “Christian publishing.”⁴ She has enjoyed a prolific publishing career, writing on the Bible within a Christian spiritual framework. Her first book, *Dreams: True Stories of Remarkable Encounters with God* (1997), retells the stories of male dreamers, such as Abraham, Jacob, Daniel, Solomon, and Joseph, without making gender a prominent issue. This emphasis changed in 1999 when she and her co-author, Jean Syswerda, published their first book on *Women of the Bible: A One-Year Devotional Study of Women in Scripture* (2015; cf. 2001), which has been republished in 2002, 2007, and 2015, a testament to the book’s popularity in evangelical circles. Spangler and Syswerda also produced several follow-up titles containing a reduced number of women characters, such as *Women of the Bible: Eve to Pricilla* (2010) and *Mothers of the Bible: A Devotional* (2006). Noticeably, in these works motherhood and marriage feature prominently. For instance, Spangler and Syswerda present Eve as the first women, listing her as “The Mother of All Who Have Life” (2015, 17) and the “first woman to conceive a child, the first to harbor a fertilized egg in her womb” (2015, 20).

For the next 15 years, Spangler wrote women-centered books, some of which were co-authored, and some of which are translated into numerous languages.⁵ In 2002, she co-authored with Robert Wolgemuth, the chair of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association, a volume on *Men of the Bible: A One-Year Devotional Study of Men in Scripture*, followed by *Fathers in the Bible* in 2006 (2008 in Spanish). Both publications indicate the remarkable rise of father-oriented devotional books, such as Wolgemuth’s *The Father’s Plan: A Bible Study for Dads* (2010) and Ed Strauss’ *Bible Prayers for Fathers: A Devotional* (2016).⁶

These kinds of books are marketed as faith-deepening spiritual literature about women (and men) in “Scripture.” Presenting biblical women with concerns similar to contemporary women, the authors offer their retellings as bridges across the “thousands of years” of chronological separation (Spangler and Syswerda 2015, 9). The books also promise “a deeper love for God’s Word and its truth in your life” (2015, 10), while they never engage feminist or much of any other biblical scholarship. The sentimental-fictional retellings of biblical narratives include countless clichéd theological doctrines, such as the Holy Spirit’s indwelling when reading the Bible. These are pietistical, moralizing, and simplistic spiritual-theological publications

that do not care about scholarly credentials and do not look for academic approval. Many authors collaborate closely with their publication houses, sometimes having previously been employed by them. The collaboration often leads to various iterations and republications of the same titles—once it is clear they sell. In fact, there seems to be an almost insatiable appetite for these kinds of biblical retellings in the Christian Right market.

In light of Spangler's disregard for feminist scholarship, it is perhaps unsurprising that Spangler has also written several books on prayer. She even comments on a Bible translation published by the Nations Bible Mission Society (2004, 2009, Spangler with Neff 2011).⁷ Since audience pleasure and not intellectual rigor define Spangler's writing, she easily accepts exclusive language conventions for God ("Lord," he), and she is only marginally concerned with biblical or contemporary women. Yet her books reach international audiences (2011). In 2015, she published yet another book, this time on the *Wicked Women of the Bible*.⁸ It contains many of the same female characters already appearing in her previously co-written books, but in this book the list of biblical women is relatively short. It is organized by the adjective "wicked" in its "literal and ironic sense" (2015, 11), such as "Wicked Lies: The Story of Eve," "Wicked Old: The Story of Sarah," "A Wicked Disguise: The Story of Tamar," or "Wicked Smart: The Story of Abigail." As usual, Spangler does not engage biblical scholarship, focusing her retellings instead on the question why "God put" these "wicked" women into the Bible and allowed "these unpleasant stories to be commemorated" (2015, 11). Spangler creates total fiction⁹ on the selected women whom she characterizes as disobedient, doubting, or faithless wives, mothers, sisters, or daughters, as well as women with questionable professions, such as the so-called "Medium of Endor," whom Spangler classifies as "A Wicked Sorceress," or as women who are inherently evil, such as Jezebel whom Spangler labels as "Wickedness Personified."

In this and many other books the experiences of women are reduced to being mothers, wives, sisters, women after menopause, or women with love-life issues, and sometimes they are leaders, usually queens, who follow or do not follow God (Grady 2012, Higgs 2015, James 2008, Macias 2009).¹⁰ Women's roles are essentialized, as if they characterized all women regardless of place and time and illustrated every woman's strength, power, and social status throughout the ages.

12.4 Attributing "Woman" with Ontological Autonomy

The second neoliberal strategy attributes ontological autonomy to the category of "women." Accordingly, "woman" is not a construct shaped by time and place but has an essential, stable, and unchanging identity. As Fuchs explains, this neoliberal strategy posits that the category of woman is not subject to "discursive formations" (2016, 56). Consequently, biblical women appear within the naturalized, essentialized, and universalized

heteronormative gender binary. In short, gender categories are not historically, politically, culturally, and religiously located. They are presented as if they had been there since the world’s creation.

Many Christian Right books on women in the Bible follow this neo-liberal strategy which reinforces enthusiastically the gender binary. Even further, these works seemingly fortify the gender binary even when they tackle sexuality issues (Gane et al. 2012, Moore and Walker 2016). One of the authors who strengthens the gender binary in this fashion is Herbert Lockyer (1886–1984). He began his career as a minister in Scotland and England for more than two decades before coming to the U.S., and he published many popularizing books on the Bible. Part of a British holiness movement, called the Keswick Higher Life Movement, he was invited by the Moody Bible Institute for a lecture in 1936 which led him to expanding his ministry in the U.S. He spent his final years in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and his son, Herbert Lockyer Jr., a Presbyterian minister, edited many of the books his father wrote.¹¹ The elder Lockyer published more than 50 books that have been republished even after his death due to the son’s editorial commitment to his father’s work (Lockyer 1997).¹²

In 1958, Lockyer published his first book on a gendered topic, entitled *All the Men of the Bible: A Portrait Gallery and Reference Library of More Than 3000 Biblical Characters* (1988).¹³ The volume contains short entries on countless biblical men, setting the tone for his imaginative and diligent biblical retellings. In 1967, Lockyer produced the companion volume, *All the Women of the Bible: The Life and Times of All the Women of the Bible* (1967), and with the help of his son both volumes were published posthumously in one volume in 1996, with another printing in 2006 (cf. Hurley 1981). The back cover promotes the book in vivid language:

Bringing together two books in one convenient volume, *All The Men/ All the Women of the Bible* is a portrait gallery and reference library of over 3,400 named biblical characters. Taken from the time-honoured “All” series by Dr. Herbert Lockyer, this book mines the wealth of Scripture to give you characters you can learn from, teaching you can apply, and promises you can stand on.

All The Men This monumental book puts comprehensive information on the men of the Bible at your fingertips, including a list of major characters. Besides named individuals, it also classifies the thousands upon thousands of unnamed men. It includes a guide to the often complex pronunciation of biblical names. And it explores the attributes of Jesus, God’s model for biblical manhood.

All The Women From Abi to Zipporah, discover how the lives and character of different biblical women, named and unnamed, mirror the situations of women today. More than 400 profiles offer fascinating insights into the Bible’s multi-dimensional women. Wives, mothers,

single women, prophetesses, queens, leaders, villainesses, and heroines—all are portrayed in rich, thought-provoking detail.

(2006)

The construct of woman and man remains firmly locked in the heteronormative gender binary. Accordingly, essentialized femaleness and maleness characterize Lockyer's interpretations. In addition, his literalist-historicizing hermeneutics presents gender as a commonsense notion as real in biblical times as today. Predictably, women are wives, mothers, and queens, even villains and heroes, while Jesus is the model of biblical manhood. To make the nuclear family complete, Lockyer authored a book on *All The Children in the Bible* in 1970.¹⁴

Importantly, then, Christian Right books on women in the Bible take the binary of female and male for granted. Gender is divinely ordained in Genesis 1, and so these books accept the construct of woman or man as fact. Seemingly when a popularizing author writes a book on biblical women, a book on biblical men is not far off. Many evangelical authors advance the binary viewpoint because, to them, it is natural, self-evident, and biblical. That youth audiences need to learn about it, too, is equally clear. Thus, a book like Laurie Polich's *Creative Bible Lessons from the Old Testament: 12 Character Studies on Surprisingly Modern Men & Women* (2005) ensures that teenagers, too, learn never to question the ontological autonomy of the gender binary in their churches.¹⁵

The essentializing framework within which the construct of woman is upheld also prevents the possibility for difference among women. Very few books, published by the Christian Right's various publishing houses, explore intersectional issues of class, race, ethnicity, or geopolitics in the retellings of biblical women's stories. Almost all authors privatize, sentimentalize, and spiritualize concerns that women of color may face, similar to general biblical women's books. For instance, the anthology, *God's Word of Life for Women of Color*, targets an audience of African-American Christian women. The book includes "enriching devotions from the African-American Devotional Bible" with "uplifting and encouraging" biblical texts from the King James Version, as well as "devotionals ... written by well-known African-American men and women, in cooperation with the 19-million-member Congress of National Black Churches" (Snapdragon and Zondervan 2002; cf. *Aspire* 2007). It is curious that the publisher, Zondervan, produced the volume on the corporate level, not seeking an individual author for the book. Did Zondervan test the waters to see if there is a market among African-American Christian women for Bible-oriented books focusing on biblical women without addressing racism, poverty, or other forms of structural oppression?

The 2013-volume by Michelle Clark Jenkins suggests perhaps Christian Right publishers are indeed in the process of explicitly addressing evangelical women of color. Jenkins follows the tried-and-proven format of

individual women portrayals. The volume, written in the first-person singular voice of various biblical women, begins with a chapter on “I am Eve,” followed by chapters on “I am Sarah,” “I am Hagar,” “I am Rebekah,” “I am Rachel,” and “I am Tamar.” The relatively short retellings are devoid of any references to sexism and racism. The enslaved and raped woman, Hagar, appears as a “handmaid” (2013, 24) who experiences God’s faithfulness by rescuing her and her son, Ishmael, in the desert. She is a slave “in a foreign nation” but becomes “a free woman, with a promise from God” (2013, 25). Another biblical woman, Pharaoh’s daughter in Exodus 2, is praised for overcoming “racial prejudice and injustice” (2013, 55). She rescues baby Moses, a Hebrew infant, and adopts him as a son. The lesson Jenkins derives from this story is this: “God can use each of us to carry out His plan whether we belong to Him or not” (2013, 56). Women are there to be the “helpmates” of “the men in our lives,” similar to Zipporah who helps her husband Moses “when Moses had failed to circumcise their son” (2013, 59).¹⁶ In conclusion, Christian Right books on women in the Bible construct the notion of woman with ontological autonomy, and so differences among women are not addressed and intersectional qualifications are absent.

12.5 The Separation of Power from Knowledge

The third neoliberal strategy, as defined by Fuchs, aims to contribute to the advancement of human knowledge by separating knowledge (biblical interpretation) from power (hermeneutical interests). In fact, this strategy enables interpreters to hide deep complicities with the structures of domination in the world. When biblical interpreters employ this strategy, they present their readings as innocent, unmotivated, and unshaped by theo-political interests. It is difficult to identify this third strategy in the Christian Right’s interpretations because, claiming to be concerned with matters of spiritual growth and doctrinal truth, they present themselves as merely elaborating on spiritual truth about the Bible as it shines through biblical women’s stories. Interpretations appear as neutral mediators of biblical knowledge. In other words, this third neoliberal strategy emerges in a complicated fashion in the Christian Right’s readings because the authors, recognizing their theo-political partisanship, presume to communicate universally valid and politically innocent knowledge about God’s word.

A sophisticated example for this third strategy can be found in *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (2002). The two Christian egalitarian scholars acknowledge the particular social location within which their commentary stands. Kroeger and Evans explain that their commentary serves as a “complement rather than as an alternative” (2002, xiii) to other Bible commentaries that are mostly written from the “curtailed perspective” of “white, Western, classically educated, middle-class males” (2002, xiii). Kroeger and Evans seek to “redress this imbalance” (2002, xiii), and so their commentary “is not

written simply ‘for’ women as opposed to men, it is rather written ‘from’ women.” They acknowledge to write “unashamedly” from “a particular perspective,” featuring “women’s questions,” but the commentary as such aims to serve “the whole church—both women and men” (2002, xiii).

The commentary’s editors claim to provide politically innocent knowledge (interpretation) despite the acknowledgement of their hermeneutical interests (power). They assert that their commentary aims for a universal reach embracing all of humanity. Accordingly, “this commentary doesn’t just look at passages about women, it looks at *all* of Scripture from a woman’s perspective” (2002, xiii; emphasis added). In other words, Kroeger and Evans insist on universal validity. In their view, they do not “read into” the Bible, as might be suspected in light of their particular “women’s” perspective, but they present what comes “from the text.” The commentary is thus grounded in the deep-seated conviction the interpretations are theo-politically innocent; they are based in exegesis and not in eisegesis.

Ultimately, then, the editors present the commentary (knowledge) as independent from their hermeneutical interests (power). Kroeger and Evans emphasize that “Scripture is inspired by God and given for the benefit of all humanity” (2002, xiv). At the same time, they acknowledge writing from a “hermeneutic of faith” grounded in “a conviction that the Scriptures are meant for healing rather than hurt, for affirmation of all persons, especially those who are oppressed” (2002, xiv). In short, *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* advances a complex partisan conviction asserting political and hermeneutical innocence. The interpretations assume to merely rehearse the Bible’s teachings. In this sense, it is indeed the case that *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* is written with a “feminist hermeneutic, albeit from a more conservative position than some other materials” (2002, xv). As it subscribes to “the full inspiration of the Bible and the full equality of women” (2002, xv), the volume acknowledges its hermeneutical interests but it claims only to describe divine truth found in the Bible. Importantly, then, the commentary separates the interpretations about biblical women from the politics of gender. Alleging to present the Bible as it is, not as one wishes it to be,¹⁷ it advances the third neoliberal strategy. It separates knowledge from power.

Another less comprehensive volume also illustrating the third neoliberal strategy is *Dynamic Women of the Bible* (2014). Written by Ruth Tucker, this book contains a complicated mixture of acknowledging hermeneutical reading interests on the one hand and asserting descriptive neutrality on the other. In an extensive way Tucker refers to her hermeneutical subjectivity when she elaborates on the formation of her “own worldview.” She writes:

My imagination, like all imaginations, arises out of my own worldview, one formed in the northern Wisconsin farming community in which I was raised, never far away from the country church on the corner of County H and Lewis Road. My worldview has been stretched by such

diverse cultures as those in East Texas; Newark, New Jersey; Crown Point, Indiana; Kijabe, Kenya; Moscow; and Singapore, places where I set up temporary residence. For twenty-eight years, I made my home in an integrated neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and after that in a nearby river-rat neighborhood on a floodplain in Comstock Park, where I am writing today. Add to that a slew of Asian, African, and Latino students, and you might think I am a model of diversity. Far from it. Open these pages, and a white middle-class woman is writing every line.

(2014, xvi–xvii)

This description of a life lived in geographically diverse neighborhoods is impressive, but Tucker does not explain how the various towns, places, and people she encountered have contributed to stretching her reading practice. How have her days spent in New Jersey, Kenya, or Singapore made any substantive difference to her reading of the Bible? She suggests that living in different places did not matter at all in the development of her “worldview.”

She believes her “worldview” is inescapably white, middle-class, and female. This position essentializes her identity which, in turn, allows Tucker to present literalist retellings bereft of any encounters with diversely located people. Stuck in essentialist and individualized identity markers, she even exclaims: “[T]here is no way I can enter into her [Mississippian neighbor’s] worldview or that of any other black women transplanted from Mississippi, and surely not Kenyan or Korean women” (2014, xvi–xvii). Is it simply that this “college and seminary professor for some three decades” loves “lively discussions in class and the wide-ranging points of view” so she can interpret biblical women without “making these women over into my own image?” (2014, xvi).¹⁸ The statement about her upbringing is disturbing because her biblical interpretations are so utterly untouched by her acknowledged experiences. Tucker prides herself to have lived in diverse neighborhoods but not to have been tainted by them. She observes “other” people with a hermeneutics of separation that she also applies to biblical women. Remaining detached and unmoved by them, she also believes they have somehow enriched her life. It is unclear how her 28 years of living in many different places have stretched her hermeneutics beyond “the country church on the corner of County H and Lewis Road.”

Like *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, then, Tucker makes personal statements about her background with a nod of recognition to her own “subjectivity.” She seems to believe the purity of her subjectivity lends credence to her ability to present an objective interpretation of the biblical women’s stories. In her opinion, she describes the biblical women for who they are, separated from contemporary readers by historical distance and authorial intent. Tucker also advises that contemporary expectations and rationality do not matter in the interpretation of these texts. Much in the Bible does “not make sense to a rational questioning mind,” she explains,

which she finds “okay” because it “is not the purpose of Scripture” (2014, xiv). To this white, middle-class, female interpreter, what matters is to appreciate “the down-to-earth reality” (2014, xiii) and “the symbolic dimension of these women” (2014, xiv), who are “elusive women of millennia past” (2014, xviii), and their stories are an enrichment “to our lives” (2014, xviii).

Tucker’s need to separate knowledge (interpretation) from power (hermeneutical interests) is obvious in her description of biblical women whom she discusses mostly in pairs.¹⁹ So, for instance, in a chapter on “Eve and Noah’s Wife: Mothers of Us All,” Tucker compares Eve and Ms. Noah when she claims (2014, 2):

Eve grabs our imaginations. She’s inquisitive and feisty as the woman who stands forever as the mother of us all. Noah’s wife has an entirely different role to play, but in a very significant sense, she too is the mother of us all. In fact, she is the only woman in the Bible besides Eve who could be considered as such.

Her literary retelling of the two women’s stories avoids making references to contemporary women, giving the impression of offering a fair and unambiguous portrayal of their situations. Only a section, entitled “Questions to Think About,” invites readers to make direct connections between the biblical characters and themselves, such as: “What issues and problems relevant to women today may have also confronted Eve?” and “Are you able to contemplate Noah’s wife and daughters-in-law and their terrible loss of extended family members and friends in the great deluge?” (2014, 12)

The third neoliberal strategy, enabling interpreters to separate knowledge from power, is more difficult to delineate in the Christian Right’s treatment of women in the Bible. As it turns out, it is hard for those authors not to acknowledge their hermeneutical interests (power) as they construct their biblical interpretations (knowledge). Being evangelical and feeling the need to affirm divine inspiration or inerrancy of the Bible, they refer to their hermeneutical interests. However, they do not substantively connect these interests to their readings. They assert reading biblical texts objectively (“exegesis”) and merely describing biblical content. In this sense, then, Christian Right interpreters present their readings as innocent, unmotivated, and unshaped by their interpretive interests (power) despite their repeated acknowledgements of reading the Bible from “somewhere.” In sum, in many Christian Right books on women in the Bible the third strategy appears in a more muddled fashion than in neoliberal feminist scholarship on the Bible. The Christian Right’s hermeneutical interests are identity markers too strong to succumb entirely to “Western and European liberalism and humanism in Reason” (Fuchs 2016, 56).

12.6 Asserting Women, Gender, and Sexuality as Intersectional Constructs in Feminist Biblical Studies: Concluding Comments

The three neoliberal strategies Fuchs identifies in academic feminist biblical scholarship also appear in evangelical books on women in the Bible. These biblical interpretations articulate women’s experiences as monolithic, unified, rooted in women’s biological functions and roles, and normative throughout the ages. They also attribute ontological autonomy to the category of woman, as if the concept were independent of time and space. Since the same also applies to the category of man, the Christian Right interpretation stabilizes the heteronormative gender binary in the Bible and beyond. Evangelical readers pursue the third neoliberal strategy in complex fashion. While they acknowledge their hermeneutical interests (power) in some way, they present their biblical interpretations (knowledge) as mere descriptions of God’s word. Still, this combination approach promotes a rehearsal of biblical content as politically detached, independent, and innocent. The three strategies have thus proven helpful in understanding basic features, characteristics, and assumptions in Christian Right interpretations of women in the Bible. The three strategies help deconstruct as a hermeneutical fallacy the Christian Right’s assertion of offering a “common sense, natural, and straightforward reading of the Bible” (Fuchs 2016, 66).

Feminist scholars have long explained that such positivist and essentializing approaches to biblical texts do not lead to societal transformation of gender practices because these approaches assume androcentric and heteronormative arrangements as universal and even eternal. Feminist Bible scholars must therefore analyze Christian Right interpretations and include them in discussions about historical-hermeneutical developments, feminist theories, and theo-political assumptions. In short, Christian Right interpretations are an important part of contemporary approaches to the Bible, despite or perhaps because of their right-wing agenda. Feminist Bible scholars ought to examine these and other biblical interpretations “in a self-critical reexamination of liberal terms like individual rights, or equality, democracy, humanity” (Fuchs 2016, 67).

Additionally, several observations deserve to be mentioned. It is startling to realize that Christian Right books on women in the Bible exhibit similar hermeneutical assumptions as “neoliberal” feminist biblical scholarship. Even the organization of the books, whether written by Christian Right or academic authors, is often similar, featuring one or two biblical women as central in each chapter or the entire manuscript.²⁰ Another striking similarity is the absence of feminist theoretical discourse, whether in Christian Right or academic publications. Essentializing notions about women or the idea of the ontological autonomy of “woman” dominate. Perhaps the lack of theoretical sophistication in neoliberal biblical exegesis encourages Christian Right authors to appropriate the focus on individual biblical women and the

disengagement with theoretical challenges about essentialism or a literalist-positivist hermeneutics.

The situation is indeed grim. Only an explicit hermeneutical stance that integrates intersectional feminist, gender, and queer theories seems to offer a way out of the essentializing, naturalizing, and universalizing gender discourse in Christian Right and academic works. It is simply insufficient to rehearse, retell, or reimagine biblical women's lives in a literalist-positivist and essentializing fashion. The point of studying the Bible is not to naively repeat what the Bible presumably "says," whether the interpretation is articulated as history, literature, or a sermon. Christian Right books on biblical woman demonstrate that such a hermeneutical goal is too narrow, inadequate, and dangerous in the neoliberal era. As Schüssler Fiorenza (2007, 55) puts it so well, the study of the Bible needs to be developed as "a rhetorical practice" so it is understood as "a form of action and power" affecting "real people and situations."

The entire direction of the feminist study of the Bible must thus shift. Feminist exegesis needs to be conceptualized as a constructive-contextual democratic practice that takes place in this world. It ought to be recognized as "a social-political and cultural-political practice" that takes "seriously its public responsibility, because the bible [sic] shaped and still shapes not only the church but also the cultural-political self-understanding of the American imagination" (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007, 55). How interpreters present biblical women and gender matters. If interpreters limit biblical women's lives to motherhood, marriage, and childbirth, their readings will reinforce the gender binary, or divide biblical women into good and bad "girls." Such limitations contribute to a rhetorical practice of politically reactionary proportion. It is worrisome that so many books on biblical women have been published in the last few decades, advancing an androcentric and heteronormative rhetoric about gender entirely divorced from feminist and genderqueer debates. These publications illustrate the urgency that biblical scholars, whether they are feminist, womanist, queer, or progressive in any other way, interrogate the scholarly and non-scholarly production of knowledge in biblical studies with the goal of producing alternative visions for gender-just societies.

Notes

- 1 This essay is a modified version of Chapter 7 of my book, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible* (Scholz 2017, 149–69).
- 2 See the online catalogs of Christian Right presses such as Baker, InterVarsity, Kregel, Thomas Nelson, Wipf & Stock, Zondervan, etc.
- 3 The idea to include in one book "all" the women of the Bible is also found in scholarly feminist work, e.g., Meyers et al. 2001.
- 4 <http://www.annspangler.com/about>. Another popularizing and best-selling writer on women in the Bible is Liz Curtis Higgs. For a list of her books and related activities, see <http://www.lizcurtishiggs.com>. She describes herself as an

- “author of more than thirty books, with 4.6 million copies in print,” who is dedicated to “platform ministry.” Higgs received some academic recognition, according to her webpage, which states: “Her alma mater, Bellarmine University, presented her with a Distinguished Alumni Award in 2005. And she received an Honorary Doctorate from Georgetown College in 2010.”
- 5 Several of her books are translated into Spanish, French, German, and Chinese, indicating an ecclesial global reach (Spangler 2016, Spangler and Syswerda 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2012).
 - 6 For the many derivatives on this topic see, e.g., Wolgemuth 2016. The explicit focus on biblical men is not new, e.g., Baxter 1992 (repr. of 1960), Bounds 1964 (repr. of 1921), Lockyer 1988. Many similar titles exist as any search illustrates on any major online book-selling site, leading to a long list of countless publications targeting Christian Right congregations and lay leaders.
 - 7 Predictably, this Bible translation was produced by the theologically conservative Nations Bible Mission Society (<http://godsword.org>) with many board members affiliated with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). As she has done throughout her entire publishing career, Spangler publishes with theologically conservative publishers. In this case it is Revell, a division of the Baker Publishing Group.
 - 8 See also an online interview with Spangler on this book conducted by Jonathan Petersen (2015), the manager of marketing for Bible Gateway, an evangelical website. The topic seems to be popular in Christian Right circles, as other authors also write on it, e.g., Higgs 2013. Interestingly, feminist Bible scholars also write on it, e.g., Yee 2003.
 - 9 Some authors acknowledge that their interpretations are fictions, e.g., Herbison 2015.
 - 10 For general-advice books including biblical women see, e.g., D. Evans 1996. The six qualities are “brokenness, belief, surrender, obedience, devotion and service.” See also D. Evans 1999. The six virtues are affiliated with particular biblical women: “humility (Esther), patience (Anna), trust (Hagar), vision (Deborah), love (the repentant woman), and vocation (Priscilla).”
 - 11 <https://www.whitakerhouse.com/book-authors/herbert-lockyer>.
 - 12 The son also publishes his own books with similar titles but with a different publisher, e.g., Lockyer Jr. 2004.
 - 13 In 1949, Lockyer (1995) had already published a book on the Holy Spirit.
 - 14 Interestingly, Lockyer rarely diverted from his early idea to use the adjective “all” in the many titles of his books, e.g., 1961, 1966, 1968, 1973, 1975.
 - 15 For additional titles for adults see, e.g., J. George 2010, Köstenberger 2014, Tischler 2002, *Once-A-Day Men and Women of the Bible Devotional (NIV)* (2012).
 - 16 Interestingly, the biographical approach also appears in the scholarly feminist literature, e.g., Brenner 2005.
 - 17 See, e.g., the commentary on Genesis that states in its second sentence: “Genesis 1–11 described how the cosmos came into being, how marriage arose, how it happened that men dominate women and that the ground unwillingly gives its produce, how culture and the many languages began.” This sentence explains neither the logic of declaring the mentioned items as self-evident nor the contested historical-literary nature of Genesis 1–11 in biblical scholarship. For a sympathetic discussion of this and other egalitarian works see, e.g., Winslow 2014, 269–89.
 - 18 The back page offers the following biographical information: “Ruth A. Tucker (PhD, Northern Illinois University) has for more than three decades taught at colleges and seminaries, including Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Calvin Theological Seminary.”

- 19 Several chapters include more than two female characters, such as Chapter 6 on “Jochebed, Miriam, and Zipporah: Moses’s Mother, Sister, and Wife,” or Chapter 10 on “Delilah, Samson’s Mother, and Other Nameless Women: Guile Innocence.” Chapter 14 features only one woman but she has four specified roles: “Bathsheba: Seducer, Widow, Wife, and Mother.” Similarly, Chapter 19 contains only “Mary: Mother and Disciple of Jesus.”
- 20 This organizational preference appears in many academic works, often with some modifications, e.g., Bal 1987, Bellis 1994, Caspi and Havrelock 1996, Darr 1991, Dutcher-Walls 2004, Frymer-Kensky 2002, Jeansonne 1990, McCabe 2009, Rapp 2002, Schneider 2004, 2008, Weems 1988.

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