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REFLECTIONS

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

"He Is Not God of the Dead, but of the Living." How Should we Understand Jesus' Saying?

By Ekkehardt Mueller

Jesus' saying, extending from Mark 12:24 to 12:27, relates to the resurrection of the dead. For our study, only verses 26–27 are relevant:

> "And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong." (Mark 12:26–27)[1]

Matthew and Luke report the same saying (Matt 22:31–22; Luke 20:37–38). While the wording differs slightly and Mark and Luke contain an extra comment at the end of the saying, which Matthew does not mention there,[2] still the situation, the basic content, and the message are the same—especially the phrase, "He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

Approaches

This saying has puzzled some, including Bible students. The basic question is whether Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who according to Scripture are dead and were buried, are still alive or are again alive. Is Jesus talking about an immortal soul when He says that God is not the God of the dead, or of a resurrection of the soul right after death to an intermediate state?[3]

For instance, J. W. Cooper discusses the timing of the resurrection—that is, whether there is an immediate resurrection of the soul after death or a resurrection at the end of time.[4] When looking at Jesus' saying, he comes to the conclusion that an "immediate resurrection cannot absolutely be ruled out."[5] He strongly supports the teaching of an intermediate state of the soul after death. Cooper is a Protestant and subscribes to dualism. In order to defend it, he takes Scripture and tradition as authorities in matters of faith. For him, the extrabiblical literature of the intertestamental and New Testament periods and the historical context of the first century AD seem to become the hermeneutical key to unlocking the meaning of biblical texts.[6] Regarding Scripture he writes, "But a distinction must be maintained between the personal vocabulary and beliefs of the New Testament authors on the one hand and the teachings of the New Testament on the other."[7] When he studies the Gospel of John, he comes to the conclusion that John "twice locates the resurrection at a single future time," but then turns around and claims "John's account of Jesus' words is clear. The only question is whether we are obliged to take them at face value in formulating our doctrines."[8]

J. B. Green, however, finds Cooper's position unconvincing. He suggests that there is a variety of views

in Hellenism, including Jewish Hellenism, and not just one position. Therefore, "it is erroneous to allege that the NT authors lived in a milieu pervaded by body-soul dualism."[9] Furthermore, Jewish literature of the intertestamental period does not

> provide us with faithful commentaries on OT perspectives. . . . We would be mistaken, were we to argue that a direct or simple line can be drawn from OT texts to Second Temple Jewish interpretation. . . . Hebrew understanding of death and afterlife were transformed under Greek and later Roman influence.[10]

Contrary to Cooper, Green makes it very clear that people really die. According to Green, "from the perspective of our humanity and sans divine intervention, there is no part of us, no aspect of our personhood, that survives death. . . . life-after-death requires embodiment—that is, re-embodiment."[11] Furthermore, Green points out that "an ontologically distinct soul, which constitutes the 'real person' and which guarantees survival of personal identity from this life to the next, is not only unnecessary but actually stands in tension with key aspects of the resurrection message of the Scriptures."[12]

These two examples highlight how different approaches and presuppositions influence the outcome of the study of a biblical passage. Here is the approach taken in this paper: as Seventh-day Adventists we reject placing tradition and the creeds of the early church on an equal level with Scripture. Tradition and creeds are informative regarding the development of Christian doctrine, but they must be tested by Scripture. We also reject treating rabbinic sources and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of Old Testament and New Testament times as equal to Scripture and as an interpretative key for the Old and New Testaments. We subscribe to *sola Scriptura* and its related principles that Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. One has to be careful not to approach the Bible with preconceived ideas which one then attempts to prove with Scripture.

II. The Situation (Context)

From Mark 11:27 onward, Jesus is involved in conflict with people who had a problem with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His claim of authority over the temple (Mark 11:1–26). According to Mark 11:27–12:12, Jesus had to defend Himself against the chief priests, scribes, and elders. Next He was tempted by the Pharisees and Herodians regarding paying taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13–17). Then the controversy with the Sadducees ensued about the issue of the resurrection (Mark 12:18–27). Finally, Jesus had to respond to a scribe's question about the foremost commandment (Mark 12:28–38).

The dispute with the Sadducees began with them asking a question about the resurrection, built on the Levirate law that if a woman had no son and became a widow, the brother of her deceased husband should take her as wife (Deut 25:5), and expanded it to a hypothetical case in which one woman had seven husbands consecutively, all of whom were brothers. Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (Acts 23:8). They also did not believe in angels and "are said to have rejected all Jewish observances not explicitly taught in the pentateuchal law."[13] Their question, as to which of her seven husbands would she be wife to in the resurrection, was most likely intended to ridicule the concept of resurrection. Possibly, because of the Sadducees' belief system,[14] Jesus could not answer with prophetic texts of the Old Testament, although a few such texts point to the resurrection (e.g., Isa 26:19; Dan 12:1–2, 13). He had to respond with the Torah, the Pentateuch, and this is what He did.[15]

However, it is very difficult to find a direct text about the resurrection in the Pentateuch. None of us are likely to have thought of the passage Jesus came up with. It is the situation when Moses encountered the burning bush and God spoke to him: "And he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'" (Exod 3:6).

The issue at stake was the resurrection of the dead. While the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, obviously they did not believe in an immortal soul either.[16] But the immortality of the soul was clearly not the issue of the debate. Mark 12:18 talks about the Sadducees "who say that there is no resurrection." The real issue was: is there a resurrection from the dead or is there none? Therefore, when studying the passage we must focus on this issue and should not bring other agendas to the table.

It may be useful to take a look at the larger context of the New Testament, especially the topic of resurrection. Some of this information may have been familiar to the Sadducees in oral form. 1) Jesus guarantees the resurrection (John 6:40; 11:25–26). 2) Jesus compared death to a sleep from which there is an awakening (John 11:11–13). 3) During His earthly ministry He raises people who were dead (Mark 5:22–24, 35–42; Luke 7:11–17; John 11:1–44). 4) Jesus predicts His own death and resurrection (Mark 8:31; 10:31), and He is raised from the dead (Matt 28:6; Luke 24:1–47). 5) More than five hundred witnesses testify that Jesus had been raised (1 Cor 15:3–8). 6) Since Jesus was resurrected, all humans will also be raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20–22). However, there are two different resurrections: the resurrection to life and the resurrection to judgment/condemnation (John 5:28–29). 7) The time of these resurrections is still in the future. The resurrection order is Jesus first, then the believers, and finally the unbelievers (1 Cor 15:23–26). At Christ's second coming, the believers will be raised from the dead (1 Thess 4:13–18). The unbelievers will be raised after the millennium to experience the final judgment (Rev 20:4–6,12–15). Result: Jesus is the expert on resurrection. One should listen to Him.

Analysis of the Text

Jesus' response to the Sadducees in Mark 12:26–27

is a bit cryptic. The first part of verse 26, "And as for the dead being raised," makes it clear that Jesus is referring to the same issue that the Sadducees are addressing, the question about the resurrection of the dead. Jesus discusses this topic and affirms that there is such a resurrection.

The question, "Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying . . ." (Mark 12:26), directs the Sadducees back to Scripture they may have ignored. Even religious people and leaders of faith communities may neglect going back to Scripture, being caught up with their administrative deliberations and philosophical reflections. Jesus rebuked them, insisting on "the fact of the resurrection life by an appeal to Scripture and to God's covenant faithfulness."[17]

The quotation from Exodus 3:6, "'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,'" has a deeper meaning than it seems to have at first glance. Moses is at the burning bush after having been away from Egypt for years. When God introduces Himself to Moses as the God of his father, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, He not only reminds Moses of his Hebrew roots but also of the covenant God had made with the patriarchs. Just a few verses earlier "God heard their [the Israelites] groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exod 2:24).[18] This covenant needed to be fulfilled, and Israel needed to be freed from slavery. The promise of blessings for all nations through Abraham's offspring would be "culminating in the coming of Christ."[19] William Lane explains the importance of Exodus 3:6 in its context:

> F. Dreyfus has shown that the text cited by Jesus has, in a strictly literal sense, a much more profound significance than has been generally appreciated and that it can set forth in all its fulness the biblical doctrine of the resurrection. . . . If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula "the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob" is the symbol. It is in fidelity to his covenant that God will resurrect the dead. In citing Ex. 3:6 Jesus showed how resurrection faith is attached in a profound way to the central concept of biblical revelation, the covenant, and how the salvation promised by God to the patriarchs and their descendants in virtue of the covenant contains implicitly the assurance of the resurrection.[20]

Mark Strauss adds, "He remains their [the patriarchs'] God even after their physical death because of the abiding nature of that covenant."[21] But this situation implies that there will be a resurrection. James A. Brooks expresses the same concept in different words: "The fact that the phrase 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' carried with it the idea of the covenant faithfulness of God emphasizes the central truth of Jesus' words for Mark's original readers and for believers today: God is faithful, and we can rely on his promises."[22]

With Mark 12:27 Jesus drives home His point about the resurrection: "He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living" (Mark 12:27, NKJV). While the two parts of this sentence are parallel, they also form a contrast. For the Sadducees God may have been a God of the dead with regard to former generations who had passed away. No afterlife and no resurrection! This is not true, Jesus says. God is the God of the living, including former generations.[23] That does not mean that these generations are alive right now or that they are in a kind of intermediate state (cf. Acts 2:29). It means that resurrection is assured to them as well as to us. In the words of C. A. Evans:

> God is a God of the living. If this is true and if God identifies himself also as the "God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," logic suggests that someday these patriarchs will again be alive. This will take place through the resurrection. . . . Therefore the patriarchs, though presently dead, must someday live.[24]

In Romans 14:9 Paul makes a statement that seems to conflict with Jesus' words: "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." Obviously, Paul is talking about two different groups of people: those who are actually dead and those who are alive. Jesus is Lord over both groups due to His resurrection. Revelation 14:13 takes a similar direction: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'"

The situation is not different in Mark 12:7, except that the dead are described in a kind of metaphorical way to suit the situation of the dialogue with the Sadducees. Furthermore, in John 11, when Jesus is about to resurrect Lazarus from the dead, He speaks about him being asleep (John 11:11). The disciples misunderstand Jesus and tell Him that Lazarus will recover if he is asleep (John 11:12). John explains, "Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep." Then Jesus tells them plainly, "Lazarus has died" (John 11:13–14). In Mark's Gospel a similar situation arises with Jairus' daughter. The people know she is dead (Mark 5:35). Jesus says she is not dead but asleep. They laugh at Him (Mark 5:39–40). He raises her. "In the New Testament the death of the believer is characteristically spoken of as 'sleep.'"[25]

In addition, Jesus is known for some paradoxical or cryptic sayings. For instance, while He is the Prince of peace and pronounces a blessing on the peacemakers (Matt 5:9), He says that He does not bring peace but a sword (Matt 10:34).[26] He also says, "and let the one who

has no sword sell his cloak and buy one" (Luke 22:36). But when Peter actually takes a sword to defend Him, Jesus rebukes him, saying, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52). Quite frequently, Jesus spoke figuratively and did not intend to be understood literally.[27] This happened also when He used parables. Therefore, people sometimes missed His point while His disciples asked for a clearer explanation (Mark 4:10–13; see also Matt 13:10–23). Jesus may be using a similar approach here when He talks about God as God of the living and not of the dead.

John Nolland looks at the same story through the Lukan parallel and makes a valid suggestion to solve the riddle:

> A statement about the immortality of the soul seems out of place in the present Lukan context where the focus is on the issue of resurrection (cf. Ellis, *NTS* 10 [1963–64] 275). It may be best to make a distinction between being alive "as far as God is concerned" (αὐτῷ) and being alive as far as the People themselves are concerned. The shadowy world of the grave has nothing of life about it, if it is to be seen as a perpetual state; but if it is to be seen rather as a place of availability for a future beyond resurrection, made possible by the power of God, then those waiting in the wings, so to speak, are very much alive from the point of view of the purposes of God. We might paraphrase 'all (no matter whether they have passed beyond death or not) are available to God's future purposes, and so in that sense still living.'"[28]

This is supported in the following statement:

> In a note to Luke 20:38, Friedr[rich]. M. Battier and Theodor Berner say aptly and clearly: 'In the eyes of God they are alive because He has decided to raise them up'. God can speak of things that He has planned and determined for future events as if they had already happened. God can call into existence things that do not yet exist, and he can speak of the nonexistent as if it already existed.[29]

Conclusion

Jesus' saying in Mark is difficult to understand. However, it is clear that Jesus is talking about the resurrection which is still future and that He tries to defend the idea of a resurrection and show that it is a truly biblical concept. This is the issue. Therefore, Jesus adapts to the Sadducees by using a text from the Torah, which at first glance does not look like a resurrection text and nevertheless supports the idea of a resurrection. The covenant God made with the patriarchs requires Him to raise them from the dead, and He will do that because He is the God of the living, the Lord of life, and the source of life. Thus, Jesus challenges the Sadducees who have rejected the resurrection and thereby any life following it. His statement about God not being a God of the dead, especially if compared with similar and yet different statements in Scripture—different in wording, not in meaning—should be understood figuratively, highlighting in an unprecedented way the gift of resurrection that He Himself has obtained through His death on the cross. Therefore, He can say, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). Death is compared to a sleep, and the dead are "living," but from God's perspective only because He has purposed to bring them back to life again. As James R. Edwards has pointed out,

> the ultimate answer to the Sadducees, however, is not the exegesis or even the authority of Jesus (neither of which they accept), but the *life* of Jesus, for the empty tomb will verify his teaching to the Sadducees . . . Jesus does not simply announce the resurrection—he *is* the resurrection (John 11:25).[30]

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[1] All biblical quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise indicated.

[2] Mark 12:27 adds a rebuke to the questioners after the saying. Luke adds, "for all live to Him" (Luke 20:38). In Matthew 22, the rebuke precedes verses 31–32, which is also found in Mark 12.

[3] This would be a kind of shadowy existence. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 231, asserts that the intermediate state means "that persons are held in existence without fleshly bodies until the resurrection" (231). See also ibid., 81–85.

[4] Cooper, 120–121, notes about Jesus' saying, "Although this seems to rule out the possibility that the patriarchs are extinct, it does not specify whether their resurrection has already taken place or is still future. For the immediate resurrectionist could assert that the patriarchs are alive precisely because they have already been raised. However, it could just as well be claimed that they are now alive in the intermediate state and will be raised."

[5] Ibid.,121.

[6] See ibid., 111.

[7] Ibid., 119.

[8] Ibid., 120–121.

[9] Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 51.

[10] Ibid., 158.

[11] Ibid., 179.
[12] Ibid., 144.
[13] S. Taylor, "Sadducees," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 966. The Pentateuch are the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They are also called Torah. For the Sadducees, see also Gary G. Porton, "Sadducees," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 892–895.
[14] William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 427, states, "The Sadducees, who took their doctrinal stance from the Pentateuch, were notorious for their rejection of this belief as a later innovation, and the provision of M. *Sanhedrin* X. 1 was directed against them: 'Whoever says that the resurrection of the dead cannot be deduced from the Torah has no part in the Age to Come.'"
[15] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 721–722, mentions, "Because they [the Sadducees] accord privilege to the Torah, he himself [Jesus] also turns to Moses in order to provide scriptural warrant for resurrection-belief."
[16] See Taylor, 966.
[17] Lane, 428.
[18] This information is repeated and expanded in Exodus 3:6–9.
[19] R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 72.
[20] Lane, 429–430.
[21] Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 535.
[22] James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1991), 196.
[23] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 475, observes, "'God of the dead' is not a term which is appropriate to Yahweh as he is revealed in the books of Moses."
[24] Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 2001), 256–257.
[25] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 481.
[26] The acceptance or non-acceptance of Jesus and the gospel will even split households.
[27] Here are a few examples: Jesus talks about cutting off one's foot and plucking out one's eye (Mark 9:45–47). Jairus' daughter is dead and yet she sleeps (Mark 5:35, 39) and Lazarus sleeps but is dead (John 11:11–13). The cup from which Jesus' disciples drink contains His blood (Mark 14:24). People have specks or logs in their eyes (Matt 7:3) and are blind while seeing (Matt 23:26). The destroyed temple that Jesus will raise in three days is His body (John 2:19–21). Nicodemus has to be born again although he is an adult (John 3:3–5), and the Samaritan woman is introduced to living water, which is not actual water (John 4:10; see also John 7:38). Jesus' "I am" sayings are astonishing. He is the bread of life (John 6:35), the light of the world (John 8:12), the gate of the sheep (John 10:7), the good shepherd (John 10:11), and the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).
[28] John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 967.
[29] Gustav Tobler, *Kein Tod mehr! Wann beginnt das ewige Leben?* (Zürich: Advent-Verlag, 1978), 199 (translated by Ekkehardt Mueller).
[30] James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 369.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

"GLIMPSES OF THE SPIRIT"
A Brief Linguistic Reflection on the Divine Person of the Holy Spirit

By Leandro J. Velardo

In his well-known work *The Coming of the Comforter*, LeRoy E. Froom expresses the following thought when speaking about the personality of the Holy Spirit: "This is not a mere technical, academic, or impractical question. It is of utmost importance and highest practical value. If He is a divine person, and we think of Him as an impersonal influence, we are robbing a divine person of the deference, honor, and love that is His due."[1]

Although there are several lists of biblical texts that deal with different aspects of the personhood of the Holy Spirit, the methodology behind their elaboration is often not clear and, as the selection of some passages shows, the criterion for their compilation at times seems to be extremely subjective. In view of this, we suggest here a more linguistically sensitive methodological approach when producing a list of biblical texts that, in this case, shed light on the Holy Spirit as a divine person. In doing so we aim at a greater and more precise linguistic and theological understanding of the biblical testimony about the Holy Spirit. It is of particular interest to trace passages in the New Testament where the Greek word *pneuma* ("spirit") functions as the agent of actions or situations connected to the semantic domain

"Communication." The reasoning behind this inquiry is simple: this semantic domain groups words, such as verbs of saying and verbs of thinking, that denote cognitive capacity and, therefore, connote personhood. In order to carry out such a methodological proposal, we have used the *Cascadia Syntax Graphs of the New Testament* database, which allows us to carry out complex syntactic searches in the Greek New Testament, and the semantic domains established in the lexicon of Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida.[2] Both resources are fundamental tools in the path towards a more inductive interpretative methodology—that is, a method that constructs its theological reflection from the internal mechanics of the original language.

The following are some of the results obtained:

Writings of Luke

Luke 12:12 ("for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say").

Acts 1:16 ("Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas"); 8:29 ("The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'"); 10:19–20 ("While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them'"); 11:12 ("The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them"); 13:2 ("While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'"); 20:23 ("I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me"); 21:11 ("The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles'"); and 28:25–26 ("The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people and say, 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving'").

Writings of Paul

Romans 8:26 ("We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans"); 1 Timothy 4:1 ("The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons"); Hebrews 3:7 ("So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice,…"); and 10:15, 17 ("The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says. . . . Then he adds: . . .").

The Book of Revelation

Revelation 14:13 ("Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'").[3]

From this brief linguistic reflection, the natural conclusion emerges that it is legitimate to affirm that the Greek New Testament preserves a clear testimony in relation to the divine person of the Holy Spirit.[4] In other words, the inspired authors did not see any theological problem in the fact that the word *pneuma* ("spirit") operates as the subject of verbs that, in light of their respective contexts, reveal the authoritative and sensitive personhood of the Holy Spirit.

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[1] LeRoy E. Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter: Studies on the Coming and Work of the Third Person of the Godhead* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1928), 36.

[2] On the grammatical approach behind *Cascadia Syntax Graphs of the New Testament*, see Carl Pollard and Ivan Sag, *Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*, Studies in Contemporary Liguistics (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Concerning the Greek words that conform the semantic domain "Communication," see Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:387–444.

[3] All biblical quotations are from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated.

[4] Since in some contexts *hypo* + genitive denotes agency, such a construction is another valid linguistic argument in favor of the divine person of the Spirit; e.g., Matt 4:1 ("Jesus was led by the Spirit"); Luke 2:26 ("It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit"); Acts 13:4 ("sent on their way by the Holy Spirit"); 16:6 ("having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia"); 2 Peter 1:21 ("spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"). As is well known, there are other important elements—like grieving, comforting, guiding, teaching, etc.—that also describe the Spirit's personhood.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Lessons from Matthew 13

By Clinton Wahlen

Matthew 13 constitutes Jesus' third major teaching block in this Gospel and lies at the center of the Gospel's five discourses (the others are Matthew 5–7, 10, 18, and 24–25). Jesus shares the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 13:11)[1] to the multitudes who gather by the sea near Capernaum (Matt 13:1–2; cf. 12:46). The chapter can be divided into three sections (vv. 1–23, 24–43, 44–52). While the eight parables in this chapter vary greatly in length, they all revolve around reception/rejection of the kingdom and its growth. Before looking briefly at each, it will be helpful to look at the overall structure of this discourse and explain some basic rules for the interpretation of parables.

Structure of the Discourse on Kingdom Mysteries

Much of the content of this discourse on kingdom mysteries is also found in Mark and Luke (Mark 4:1–34; Luke 8:4–18), but these share only two of Matthew's eight parables (the sower and the soils; the mustard seed). One other parable is shared only by Luke (the leaven). The parable of the wheat and the tares and the last four parables of the discourse are found only in Matthew.

The discourse is structured chiastically, with the first four parables directed to the crowds and the last four to the disciples. It opens and closes with parables about hearing and sharing the message of the kingdom, with the focal point being Jesus' teaching in parables as prophetic fulfillment. This structure can be outlined as follows:[2]

Introduction: Setting (Matt 13:1–2)

CROWD

A_1 Parable—*The Sower and the Seed*: hearing the Word of the kingdom (13:3–9)

B_1 Disciples' question —Jesus' answer: interpretation of *The Sower and the Seed* (13:10–23)

C_1 Parable—*The Wheat and the Tares*: the righteous and the wicked (13:24–30)

D_1 Parables—*Mustard Seed* and *Leaven*: growth (13:31–33)

E_1 Parables as prophetic fulfillment; interpretation of *The Wheat and the Tares* (13:34–43)

DISCIPLES

D_2 Parables—*The Treasure in the Field* and *The Pearl of Great Price*: sacrifice (13:44–46)

C_2 Parable—*The Dragnet*: the righteous and the wicked (13:47–50)

B_2 Jesus' question – disciples' answer: understanding parables (13:51)

A_2 Parable – *The Discipled Scribe*: sharing the treasure of the kingdom (13:52)

Conclusion: Jesus finished and departed (13:53)

How to Interpret Parables

A parable teaches spiritual truths by way of comparison with earthly things and may be prophetic. In order to understand its meaning, several principles are important to keep in mind:

1. The literal meaning of the story should first be thoroughly understood, taking into consideration biblical and historical information that illuminates the situation being described. The reason for this approach is that, usually, Jesus' parables teach biblical principles, using actual phenomena in the natural world and real-life situations.

2. Avoid the temptation to find significance in every detail. Though details sometimes contribute to the overall meaning of the parable, their import will always be understood within the literal story rather than outside of it. The most important details may be scriptural allusions.

3. Compare and contrast the parable with the same or similar parables in Mark and/or Luke, noticing features that may contribute to the literal meaning of the story. The Gospel of John contains parabolic teaching with some similarity to that of the other Gospels and for the interpretation of which the same principles need to be followed, but nothing exactly the same.

4. Once the story itself is clearly understood, look for an interpretation that may be given in the text. Whether clearly stated or only implied, scriptural clues given as to the intended meaning should be analyzed in connection with the parable and any appeal to the listeners that may be present. Many of Jesus' parables include surprising or unexpected twists, often at the end, leading listeners to decide how they themselves will relate to the kingdom.

5. Keep in mind that the parables of Jesus usually concern one of two main themes corresponding to either Christ's first or second advent:

- first advent—the present growth of the kingdom in the time of Jesus and/or the church
- second advent—events connected with the kingdom's glorious consummation

6. Draw out the spiritual meaning of the parable, interpreting it in harmony with its literary context and main theme, considering also its application to your own life.

7. Compare and enhance your understanding of the parable with the insights found in the writings of Ellen G. White, especially in *Christ's Object Lessons*.

Interpretation of Matthew 13

1. Verses 3–9 (The Sower and the Seed)
   - The parable describes places where seed is sown: beside the road (an area hardened by trampling), stony places (thin soil atop limestone), among thorns (no care or water), and "good ground."
   - The sower is the same, the seed is the same, and

even the soil itself is the same; only the condition/location of the soil changes, which, as every gardener knows, affects plant growth.
- The good ground is described only in terms of the results it produces; though these results vary from below average to extraordinary, the quantity is not the main concern of the parable.
- The fact that Jesus calls on those listening to "hear" indicates His desire that they understand the parable and apply it to their lives. However, they must open their eyes and ears in order to "understand with their hearts" (Matt 13:15).

2. Verses 10–17 (Kingdom "Mysteries")
   - Situated between the parable and its interpretation is a very important dialogue between Jesus and His disciples, explaining the reason for teaching in parables: not everyone was willing to listen with an honest heart, and some had already closed their eyes completely, "lest they should understand . . . and turn" and be converted. The Pharisees, for example, after listening to Jesus, said His miracles were of the devil (Matt 10:25; 12:24) and plotted to destroy Him (Matt 12:14). Still more surprising, even Jesus' own family and hometown were not receptive (Matt 12:46–50; 13:53–58).
   - Jesus teaches that an understanding of the truth is a gift that must be "given," and it is given to those who, like the disciples, are willing to receive it (Matt 13:11).
   - The kingdom principle follows from this that, to those who receive, more will be given, and "whoever does not have," that is, whoever refuses to receive Jesus' teachings and put them into practice, even what he or she has will be taken away because God cannot continue to bless that person (Matt 13:12; cf. 7:21).
   - Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 6:9–10 indicates that Israel's condition is similar to that in the time of Isaiah. In both cases, the people's failure to heed God's Word results in severe threats from external enemies, eventuating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and faith is identified as the essential ingredient in view of the impending judgment (cf. Isa 7:9; 28:16; 43:10; 53:1). It also signals that His work marks the beginning of the fulfillment of Isaiah's (and other) kingdom-related prophecies (cf. Matt 4:17 // Mark 1:15).

3. Verses 18–23 (Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower and the Seed)
   - The different responses to "the seed," identified as "the word of the kingdom," is the focus—God's Word as interpreted by Jesus and proclaimed by His followers (cf. Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23).
   - The seed on the beaten-path soil never has a chance to grow. This refers to the heart controlled by selfish desires and hardened by sin (cf. Heb 3:13), resulting in the person being unable to understand the Word. So crucial is understanding that it appears five times in connection with this parable (Matt 13:13–15, 19, 23) and, near the end of the discourse, Jesus asks the disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" to which they answer "Yes" (Matt 13: 51). By understanding Jesus' teaching, His followers are qualified as scribes of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 13: 52) and become sowers themselves.
   - A plant growing in thin soil atop limestone may quickly spring up due to the warmer condition of the ground. This refers to receiving the Word "immediately" with joyful enthusiasm. Such an experience may initially appear to flourish, but it does not last because there is no depth of commitment; it is only superficial, since the stony, selfish human heart underneath has not been changed (cf. Ezek 11:19; 36:26). As a result, "when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word," the person "immediately . . . falls away" (ESV). The religious enthusiasm goes away as quickly as it came. "The effort to serve both self and Christ makes one a stony ground hearer, and he will not endure when the test comes upon him."[3]
   - Just as thorny weeds take up moisture and nourishment from the soil, preventing any chance for a healthy plant to grow (cf. Jer 4:3), so worldly worries (cf. Matt 6:31–34) and wealth (cf. Matt 6:24), "desires for other things" (Mark 4:19), and the "pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14) may so absorb a person's energy and attention that they crowd out any influence the Word might have.
   - By contrast, the "good ground" hearer understands the Word. In Matthew, the word "understand" (Gk. *synīemi*) consistently refers to one's grasping the underlying spiritual meaning of Jesus' sayings (Matt 15:10; 16:12; 17:13). Mark 4:20 adds that such hearers "accept" the word—they receive it "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works" in those who believe (1 Thess 2:13). Producing fruit refers primarily to developing a character reflective of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt 3:8, 10; 7:19–21; 12:33–35; 21:43), though, in view of the discipled scribe described in the parallel parable of the discourse (Matt 13:52), it may secondarily refer to those who are able to labor effectively as "sowers" themselves, helping to produce additional disciples for the kingdom.

4. Verses 24–30 (Wheat and Tares)
   - This parable bears some similarity to the first parable in that these two are the longest of the eight parables and are allegorically interpreted by Jesus.
   - However, the differences are significant: the seed is called "good" and the crop grown as a result

is contrasted with the tares sown among the wheat. This parable focuses not on the process of growth, but the harvest at the end: the tares are bundled to be burned up and the wheat is to be gathered into the barn.

- There is an incredible amount of detail in this parable, with a variety of characters mentioned, all of whom are significant to its interpretation.

5. Verses 31–33 (Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven)
   - Although no interpretation of the twin parables of the mustard seed and leaven is given, as was the case with the first two parables, their meaning is fairly clear in referring to the extensive growth and intensive spread of the kingdom of heaven.
   - The mustard seed, though not the smallest seed, was probably smaller than any of the seeds familiar to Jesus' audience, and the striking contrast of it producing a tree, which could grow up to ten feet or more, highlights, from very small beginnings, the extensive growth of the kingdom.
   - The image of a tree to symbolize a kingdom is a familiar one in the Old Testament—most notably in connection with earthly kingdoms such as Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (Ezek 17:24; 31:2–3; Dan 4:23–26), but also in connection with the kingdom of Israel (Ps 80:8–11; Isa 60:21), God's kingdom, and even the temple as a place for birds to nest (Ezek 17:22–23; Ps 84:3; cf. 104:12, 17).
   - Leaven, though often a symbol of sin, can also refer positively to an ingredient in thanksgiving, peace, and firstfruit offerings (Lev 7:13–14; 23:17), and though it spreads invisibly, it will eventually permeate three measures (about thirty-six quarts) of flour, enough to feed up to 150 people.

6. Verses 34–43 (Parables as Prophetic Fulfillment; interpretation of The Wheat and the Tares)
   - This section transitions from Jesus addressing the crowd by the sea to His teaching the disciples privately in a house.
   - Jesus' teaching in parables fulfills what Matthew understands to be a messianic prophecy of Asaph that culminates in David being chosen by God as His servant shepherd, pointing ultimately to Jesus, who will shepherd God's people Israel with integrity (Ps 78:2, 70–72; Mic 5:2; Matt 2:6).
   - Significantly, the disciples are eager to understand more. They ask Jesus to explain "the parable of the tares of the field"—indicating, perhaps, what for them was the most concerning (or obscure) part of the parable.
   - The tares, identified as "the sons of the wicked one," are sown in the field with the "good seed"—"the sons of the kingdom." This suggests that "the world" refers to the present extent of the kingdom's spread on earth through the church, whose witness (Matt 5:14) is envisioned eventually as extending to "the *whole* world" (Matt 24:14; 26:13) in fulfillment of prophetic hopes (see, e.g., Ps 67:7; 72:8; Isa 45:2; 49:6; cf. 1 Sam 2:10). So the field expands as the church grows. The church is not the kingdom, because it contains tares; but it is the means God uses for its spread.
   - Tares (Gk. *zizania*, "darnel") look like wheat until the heads form (cf. Matt 7:20). Should the servants (Gk. *douloi*) try to uproot them, they would likely also uproot some of the wheat (Matt 13:29). Since these servants are distinguished from the reapers, which are the angels (Matt 13:39, 41), they apparently represent the disciples of Jesus (see Matt 10:24–25; 20:27).

7. Verses 44–46 (The Treasure in the Field and The Pearl of Great Price)
   - Whereas the parable pair spoken to the crowd describes the kingdom's growth, these two brief parables spoken to the disciples accentuate sacrifice in view of the kingdom's value and affirm the importance of a positive response.
   - It is not mentioned when the treasure in the field was buried for safekeeping (cf. 6:19), nor by whom, but if it had been the owner of the field he would not have sold the land without first claiming the treasure. What is emphasized is the joy of the treasure's discovery and its value being so great that it is worth selling all to obtain it. Onlookers, including the owner, no doubt considered it foolish to sacrifice so much for vacant land, but to those who understand the value of the kingdom, any sacrifice is insignificant by comparison.
   - The wealthy traveling merchant likewise recognized the supreme value of the pearl of great price and sold all to obtain it. People often fantasize about—and occasionally one hears authentic accounts—of buying something whose worth the seller does not recognize, later to be valued in the millions of dollars (as the worth of such a pearl in ancient times could be). The call to leave or sacrifice all for the kingdom occurs several times in Matthew (4:20, 22; 9:9; 19:21; cf. 19:27).

8. Verses 47–50 (The Dragnet)
   - Of the second series of four parables, this is the most extensive. Similar to the wheat and the tares, it depicts a time of separation—here the valued, "good" fish from the "bad." The word "bad" in Greek (*sapra*) refers to that which is spoiled or rotten (used of trees and fruit in Matthew 7:17–18 and 12:33), perhaps implying that the rejected fish may originally have had good potential.

- The dragnet (Gk. *sagēnē*, "seine," used only here in the New Testament) was a huge device that could measure up to one thousand feet in length and up to twenty-five feet high, with floats attached to the top and weights strung along the bottom so it would sink rapidly when deployed. It would collect "things of every kind" (Matt 13:47, TLV) that happened to be in its path.
- Also like the wheat and the tares, this parable focuses on the end-time judgment with mostly identical wording (Matt 49–50; cf. vv. 41–42). Just as fishing only ends when the net is full, the work of the kingdom has a definite endpoint (Matt 24:14; 28:19–20), culminating in the separation of the wicked from the righteous and casting the former "into the furnace of fire" (cf. Mal 4:1).

9. Verses 51–53 (The Discipled Scribe)
   - Jesus closes His words to the disciples by asking them whether they have understood—which mirrors the issue dealt with in Jesus' answer to the disciples' question and the opening parable of the sower and the seed (Matt 13:13–15, 19, 23). Understanding the Word of the kingdom is foundational to discipleship, so the disciples' affirmative reply to Jesus' question is reassuring and shows them, in this respect at least, to be paradigmatic examples of what it means to follow Jesus.
   - Here for the first time in Matthew we see Jesus preparing His own "scribes" (experts in the Scriptures) "for the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Matt 23:34). The word "instructed" is a verbal form that literally means "discipled" (*mathēteutheis*), used only twice more in Matthew: to describe Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:57) and in the Great Commission to "make disciples" (Matt 28:19).
   - Use of the words "is like" signals the closing parable of the chapter. They describe the "master of a house" (ESV), which Jesus employs of Himself in an earlier simile (Matt 10:25), in the opening parable (Matt 13:27), and in several later parables (Matt 20:1, 11; 21:33, 43). In short, disciples are to faithfully represent their Teacher in instructing church members.
   - The content of this instruction is characterized as "things new and old." The teachings of the kingdom are the "new" things, emphasized through its being mentioned first, while the Hebrew Scriptures from which Jesus quotes abundantly and expects His disciples to know well are "old" and yet obviously still very vital as heavenly "treasure" (cf. Matt 6:21; 12:35).

Application of Matthew 13

Many valuable lessons may be gleaned from this chapter, including:

1. Understanding the truth (which is deeper than simply "knowing" it theoretically) is a gift of God, but we must first surrender our preconceived ideas; otherwise they will hinder us from being taught by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; 16:13; cf. 6:45; 1 Cor 2:12–14).
2. Everyone must hear the gospel of the kingdom, regardless of its prospects, in harmony with Jesus' example as the preeminent Sower (parable of the sower and the seed).
3. The work of the kingdom is gradual but also will become widespread (like leaven working its way through the dough). It does not, however, point to an earthly millennium of peace but to the spread of the gospel proclamation "in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" with the second coming of Jesus (Matt 24:14, 30).
4. The kingdom begins small but eventually becomes great (parable of the mustard seed). So Christians, as members of this kingdom, humbly fulfill God's purposes now in service and will ultimately be exalted (Matt 23:11–12; 1 Pet 5:6) when it is established in glory.
5. The kingdom is more valuable than anything else (parable of the hidden treasure; parable of the pearl of great price).
6. Only in the judgment will the wicked be weeded out (parable of the wheat and tares; parable of the net).
7. The time of the judgment is left vague: "at the end of the age/world" (Matt 13:39–40, 49).
8. Faithfulness to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and instructing others in them accurately is stressed by Jesus as foundational to "every scribe"—every church teacher, pastor, leader (the discipled scribe).

Clinton Wahlen
Associate Director
Biblical Research Institute

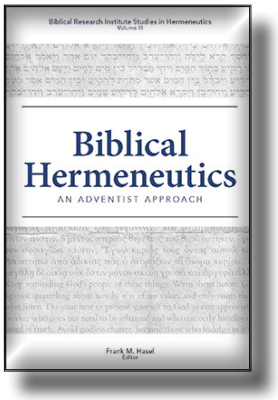
[1] All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.
[2] Adapted from David Wenham, "The Structure of Matthew XIII," *New Testament Studies 25* (1978–1979): 517–518; and David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 332.
[3] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941), 50.

BOOK NOTES

Frank M. Hasel, ed.,

Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach

(Silver Spring, MD: BRI/Review and Herald Academic, 2020), 488 pp., USD 14.95



The Biblical Research Institute (BRI) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has published a new landmark book: *Biblical Hermeneutics. An Adventist Approach*. It is the continuation and actualization of four other books on hermeneutics, previously published by BRI in 1974, 1985, 2005, and 2010.

The book is a response to a request from the floor at the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio to research and study the matter of Adventist hermeneutics and publish the findings in a book.

BRI selected a group of twelve expert scholars and professors, all of whom hold doctoral degrees in their respective fields, and assigned to them the fourteen chapters of the book. The chapters deal with a number of important aspects of biblical interpretation, such as presuppositions in hermeneutics; biblical hermeneutics and the trustworthiness of Scripture; biblical variants and textual transmission of Scripture; the relationship of history, the Bible, and hermeneutics; culture and the Bible; faith and science and the Bible; principles of biblical interpretation; the inner-biblical use of Scripture by Bible writers; principles of biblical apocalyptic interpretation; conditional prophecies and the role of Israel in the Bible; the Genesis account as a test case for biblical hermeneutics; a survey of early Adventist principles of biblical interpretation; the relationship between the prophetic gift and *sola Scriptura*; and recent trends in methods of biblical interpretation. Every chapter is written from a high view of Scripture and presents up-to-date scholarship on various aspects of biblical interpretation.

The book is a significant contribution to a better understanding of Adventist hermeneutics. Anyone interested in the subject will benefit from the insights and the careful research that is presented.

In several chapters I found outstanding discussions of issues that often do not receive adequate attention when it comes to biblical hermeneutics. For instance, in chapter 2, Frank M. Hasel provides a sound approach to what it means to develop biblical principles that are faithful to what Scripture itself affirms. Among other things, he offers some valuable insights into the proper use of human reason when it comes to the process of interpretation. His call to approach the biblical text with intellectual openness, honesty, and carefulness, dealing with it in the context of love, fidelity, and obedience, reminds us that the act of biblical interpretation always involves a spiritual dimension that should not be overlooked.

Other chapters equally convey the faith-affirming approach of the entire book. This is apparent not only when text-critical questions are competently addressed by Clinton Wahlen in the chapter "Variants, Versions, and the Trustworthiness of Scripture," or when the inner-biblical hermeneutic of Bible writers are illustrated in an excellent and well-informed chapter by Richard M. Davidson. Rather than following modern critical interpretations that often claim that New Testament writers read something into the text that actually is not found in the Old Testament (eisegesis), he competently shows that the New Testament writers actually were faithful to the intended meaning of the Old Testament and practiced careful exegesis. The chapter "Culture, Hermeneutics, and Scripture" by Clinton Wahlen and Wagner Kuhn tackles the challenging question of what is culturally relative and what is universal in Scripture, providing some helpful thoughts for further reflection. Another hotly debated area is the historical reliability of the Bible because it is here that biblical criticism often finds its initial entering wedge to doubt the trustworthiness of Scripture. Here Michael G. Hasel does a masterful job in pointing out the significance of the historical nature of Scripture and its reliability and has highlighted its importance for biblical theology. His rigorous scholarship is up-to-date, careful, and provides the reader with some important recent archeological findings. In another chapter he also competently illustrates how different hermeneutical approaches impact our understanding of the creation account in Genesis. To understand different hermeneutical approaches and to see the changes that follow from them in our understanding of many important biblical teachings such as the Sabbath, marriage, the origin of sin, the nature of salvation, and the second coming, to name but a few, shows how hermeneutics affects our theology, message, and mission.

Last, but not least, the final chapter of the book, "Recent Trends in Methods of Biblical Interpretation" by Frank M. Hasel, is in many ways a highlight and culmination of the whole book. He provides a helpful bird's-eye view of the historical and philosophical background that led to a variety of different historical-critical methods that have dominated much of biblical scholarship up to now. He then judiciously analyzes a number of more recent approaches to biblical hermeneutics that have reacted to some of the dominant critical methods. These newer hermeneutical approaches have never received an official response by the church and deserve careful attention. In doing so he competently interacts with current scholarship within the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well as with the larger theological world around us. His informed treatment of a modified use of the historical-critical method (by Stuhlmacher and others), which has found followers even with some Adventist scholars, is an eye-opener. Perhaps the most important part, however, is his balanced analysis and concise overview of some newer hermeneutical approaches. They include canonical criticism, various literary approaches, reader-response criticism, some postmodern approaches to biblical interpretation, and christological hermeneutical approaches. His treatment provides much-needed orientation for a new generation of Adventists who are confronted with these newer methods. It seems that this brief presentation is one of the first serious attempts to interact with these newer hermeneutical approaches from a more official Seventh-day Adventist

perspective. Some of these approaches might look very attractive because they do not critically reconstruct the history behind the biblical text, as in classical historical-criticism, but instead focus on the canonical shape of the biblical text or emphasize the dynamics of some literary features of the canonical text. But the crucial relationship to historical reality and the propositional truth of divine revelation is often compromised in these methods. Furthermore, in several postmodern approaches it is no longer the biblical text as such that is authoritative and has the final word, but it is the reader in front of the text who determines its meaning. This amounts to a massive shift in the interpretation of Scripture where ultimately the reader constructs the meaning of the text. This leaves us with no control over its ever-changing meaning. Even with a Christ-centered hermeneutic—as appealing as it might sound to some ears—where Christ becomes the hermeneutical key to interpret the meaning of Scripture, we ultimately end up with a canon within the canon and finally practice some form of content criticism where the content of Scripture is criticized, even in the name of Jesus. While it is impossible in one chapter to cover every new method that has emerged during the last fifty years or so, the author does an excellent job by focusing on some significant approaches that have become prominent in certain quarters. While fairly pointing out some strengths in various methods, he also raises several legitimate concerns and points out some dangers that are inherent in several of these newer methods.

The whole book makes clear that Seventh-day Adventists endorse an approach in biblical interpretation that is faithful to the self-claims of Scripture, that respects the canonical shape of the biblical text, and that affirms the historical character and truthfulness of the biblical message. As such, the biblical text remains determinative for a genuine Seventh-day Adventist biblical hermeneutic. Neither the modern readers with their constantly shifting perspectives nor Jesus Christ should be superimposed on the biblical text. Instead, the biblical text, which is historically constituted and divinely inspired, remains the determining factor for any authentic Adventist hermeneutic. The various chapters of the book admirably illustrate this approach for different aspects of the hermeneutical task.

There is one aspect, however, where I perhaps see the need for some further clarification. On pages 402–404 the author of this chapter clearly explains the difference between canonical and noncanonical prophetic *messages*. The difference is functional: the first one has ruling authority; the second does not. God gives the Bible its canonical function. While the canonical authors retain the ruling authority by which every other prophet needs to be tested, it would have been helpful if the author had unfolded the divine authority of extrabiblical prophets more clearly, because what the noncanonical prophets say in the name of the Lord also comes from God. If they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, then it is God who speaks and the prophet He sends is vested with His authority. For example, John the evangelist, a canonical prophet, says that John the Baptist, a noncanonical prophet, was "sent from God" (John 1:6) to give testimony about Christ for everybody to believe the Christ of his message (John 1:7), because his message was given to him by God (John 1:35).

This question aside, I highly recommend this book to every pastor and teacher in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In fact, it should be on the desk of anyone seriously interested in the subject of biblical interpretation. It significantly advances our understanding of important hermeneutical questions and gives valuable guidance to those who seek to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible. It can serve well as a textbook on biblical interpretation for our colleges and universities. Having read every word of this book, I am impressed by the serious scholarship, clarity, and fairness with which every writer unfolds and explains the Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutic in various important areas. One can clearly sense the faith-affirming approach of every author, where the canonical text of Scripture is accepted as the final authority for all of our theology. As such it is a most welcome and much-needed resource that every serious Seventh-day Adventist should read.

Reviewed by
Mario Veloso, ThD
Former Associate Secretary of
the General Conference

"It is one thing to treat the Bible as a book of good moral instruction, to be heeded so far as is consistent with the spirit of the times and our position in the world; it is another thing to regard it as it really is - the Word of the Living God, the Word that is our life, the Word that is to mold our actions, our words, and our thoughts. To hold God's Word as anything less than this is to reject it."

Ellen G. White, *Education*, 260.

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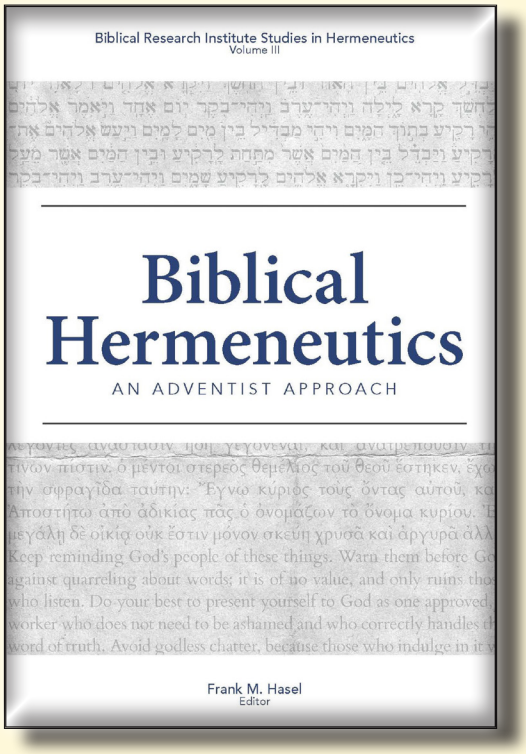

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