WESLEY ONE VOLUME COMMENTARY

EDITED BY
KENNETH J. COLLINS & ROBERT W. WALL

Nashville

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Wesley One Volume Commentary

Copyright © 2020 by Abingdon Press

All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2222 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., Nashville, TN, 37228-1306 or emailed to permissions@umpublishing.org.

LCCN: 2020933861
ISBN: 978-1-5018-2391-6

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Common English Bible. Copyright © 2011 by the Common English Bible. All rights reserved. Used by permission. www.CommonEnglishBible.com.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION of the Bible. Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

For Joel B. Green:
faithful friend, respected colleague,
and biblical scholar extraordinaire

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

Contributors	ix
Introduction to a Wesleyan Theological Orientation	xiii
Introduction to Wesleyan Biblical Interpretation	xxi
Abbreviations and Explanations	xxxi

Commentary on the Books of the Old Testament

Genesis	Bill T. Arnold	1
Exodus	H. Junia Pokrifka	37
Leviticus	Brent A. Strawn	66
Numbers	Matthew Richard Schlimm	90
Deuteronomy	Brian D. Russell	111
Joshua	Joseph Coleson	144
Judges	Lee Roy Martin	166
Ruth	Nina Henrichs-Tarasenkova	183
1-2 Samuel	L. Daniel Hawk	190
1-2 Kings	Drew S. Holland	216
1-2 Chronicles	Stephen P. Riley	237
Ezra	Richard P. Thompson	255
Nehemiah	Richard P. Thompson	263
Esther	Karen Strand Winslow	273
Job	James C. Howell	280
Psalms	Lee Roy Martin	304
Proverbs	James C. Howell	340
Ecclesiastes	Larisa Levicheva-Joseph	358
Song of Songs	Brent A. Strawn	371
Isaiah	Rickie D. Moore	385
Jeremiah	Joel R. Soza	426
Lamentations	Joel R. Soza	450
Ezekiel	Timothy M. Green	457
Daniel	Daniel D. Bunn Jr.	482
Hosea	Brad E. Kelle	499
Joel	Donald Ernest Burke	509
Amos	Donald Ernest Burke	514
Obadiah	Craig A. Vondergeest	523
Jonah	Craig A. Vondergeest	526
Micah	Craig A. Vondergeest	530
Nahum	Laurie J. Braaten	535
Habakkuk	Laurie J. Braaten	538

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Zephaniah | Laurie J. Braaten | 544
Haggai | Kristen Lee Helms | 548
Zechariah | Kristen Lee Helms | 551
Malachi | Kristen Lee Helms | 558

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew | Roger L. Hahn | 562
Mark | David Fenton Smith | 588
Luke | Mary K. Schmitt | 615
John | Richard E. Cornell | 644
Acts | Kevin L. Anderson | 679
Romans | Presian Renee Burroughs | 709
1 Corinthians | Andy Johnson | 736
2 Corinthians | B. J. Oropeza | 757
Galatians | David A. deSilva | 772
Ephesians | Suzanne Nicholson | 783
Philippians | Brian D. Russell | 795
Colossians | Joseph R. Dongell | 808
1 Thessalonians | David R. Bauer | 819
2 Thessalonians | David R. Bauer | 827
1 Timothy | Ken Schenck | 832
2 Timothy | Nijay K. Gupta | 840
Titus | Ken Schenck | 847
Philemon | Mitzi J. Smith | 852
Hebrews | Ruth Anne Reese | 856
James | David R. Nienhuis | 868
1 Peter | Abson Prédestin Joseph | 875
2 Peter | David McCabe | 882
1 John | Robert W. Wall | 890
2 John | Robert W. Wall | 900
3 John | Robert W. Wall | 903
Jude | David McCabe | 905
Revelation | Dean Flemming | 908

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

CONTRIBUTORS

General Editors

Kenneth J. Collins, Ph.D.
Professor of Historical Theology and Wesley Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary
The United Methodist Church

Robert W. Wall, Ph.D.
Paul T. Walls Professor of Scripture and Wesleyan Studies
Seattle Pacific University and Seminary
The Free Methodist Church

Contributors

Kevin L. Anderson, Ph.D.
Professor of Bible and Theology
Asbury University
The Anglican Church in North America
Acts

Bill T. Arnold, Ph.D.
Paul S. Amos Professor of Old Testament Interpretation
Asbury Theological Seminary
The United Methodist Church
Genesis

David R. Bauer, Ph.D.
Beeson Professor of Inductive Biblical Studies
Dean of the School of Biblical Interpretation
Asbury Theological Seminary
The Free Methodist Church
1-2 Thessalonians

Laurie J. Braaten, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies, Emeritus
Judson University
The Church of the Nazarene
Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

Daniel D. Bunn Jr., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Old Testament
Oral Roberts University
The United Methodist Church
Daniel

Donald Ernest Burke, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies
Booth University College
The Salvation Army
Joel, Amos

Presian Renee Burroughs, Th.D.
Assistant Professor of New Testament
United Theological Seminary
The United Methodist Church
Romans

Joseph Coleson, Ph.D.
Professor of Old Testament, Emeritus
Nazarene Theological Seminary
The Wesleyan Church
Joshua

Richard E. Cornell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
Spring Arbor University
The United Methodist Church
John

David A. deSilva, Ph.D.
Trustees' Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Greek
Ashland Theological Seminary
The United Methodist Church
Galatians

Joseph R. Dongell, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies
Director of Greek Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary
The Wesleyan Church
Colossians

Dean Flemming, Ph.D.
Professor of New Testament
MidAmerica Nazarene University
The Church of the Nazarene
Revelation

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

TIMOTHY M. GREEN, PH.D.
Dean of the Millard Reed School of Theology and Christian Mission
Professor of Old Testament Theology and Literature
Trevecca Nazarene University
The Church of the Nazarene
Ezekiel

NIJAY K. GUPTA, PH.D.
Associate Professor of New Testament
Portland Seminary, George Fox University
2 Timothy

ROGER L. HAHN, PH.D.
Professor of New Testament
Willard H. Taylor Chair of Biblical Theology
Nazarene Theological Seminary
The Church of the Nazarene
Matthew

L. DANIEL HAWK, PH.D.
Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew
Ashland Theological Seminary
The United Methodist Church
1-2 Samuel

NINA HENRICHS-TERESENKOVA, PH.D.
Instructor in Theology
University of Portland
The Church of God (Anderson)
Ruth

KRISTEN LEE HELMS, PH.D.
Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies
Roberts Wesleyan College
The United Methodist Church
Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

DREW S. HOLLAND, PH.D.
Associate Pastor
Huntsville First UMC, Huntsville, Alabama
The United Methodist Church
1-2 Kings

JAMES C. HOWELL, PH.D.
Senior Pastor
Myers Park United Methodist Church
The United Methodist Church
Job, Proverbs

ANDY JOHNSON, PH.D.
Professor of New Testament
Nazarene Theological Seminary
The Church of the Nazarene
1 Corinthians

ABSON PRÉDESTIN JOSEPH, PH.D.
Professor of New Testament
Academic Dean of Wesley Seminary
Indiana Wesleyan University
The Wesleyan Church
1 Peter

BRAD E. KELLE, PH.D.
Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew
Point Loma Nazarene University
The Church of the Nazarene
Hosea

LARISA LEVICHEVA-JOSEPH, PH.D.
Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
Indiana Wesleyan University
The Wesleyan Church of Russia
Ecclesiastes

LEE ROY MARTIN, D.TH.
Professor of the Old Testament and Biblical Languages
Pentecostal Theological Seminary
The Church of God (Cleveland)
Judges, Psalms

DAVID MCCABE, PH.D.
Missionary Church Endowed Professor of Biblical Theology
Bethel University
The United Methodist Church
2 Peter, Jude

RICKIE D. MOORE, PH.D.
Professor of Old Testament
Associate Dean of the School of Religion
Lee University
The Church of God (Cleveland)
Isaiah

SUZANNE NICHOLSON, PH.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies
Malone University
The United Methodist Church
Ephesians

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

DAVID R. NIENHUIS, PH.D.
Professor of New Testament Studies
Seattle Pacific University
The Episcopal Church
James

B. J. OROPEZA, PH.D.
Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies
Azusa Pacific University
The Free Methodist Church
2 Corinthians

H. JUNIA POKRIFKA, PH.D.
General Director of Phos Ministries
Exodus

RUTH ANNE REESE, PH.D.
Beeson Chair of New Testament Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary
The Anglican Church in North America
Hebrews

STEPHEN P. RILEY, PH.D.
Associate Professor of Old Testament
Northwest Nazarene University
The Church of the Nazarene
1-2 Chronicles

BRIAN D. RUSSELL, PH.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary (Orlando, Florida)
The United Methodist Church
Deuteronomy, Philippians

KEN SCHENCK, PH.D.
Professor of New Testament
Dean of the School of Theology and Ministry
Indiana Wesleyan University
The Wesleyan Church
1 Timothy, Titus

MATTHEW RICHARD SCHLIMM, PH.D.
Professor of Old Testament
University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
The United Methodist Church
Numbers

MARY K. SCHMITT, PH.D. CANDIDATE
Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies
Trevecca Nazarene University
The Church of the Nazarene
Luke

DAVID FENTON SMITH, PH.D.
Associate Professor of New Testament and Biblical Languages
Indiana Wesleyan University
The Wesleyan Church
Mark

MITZI J. SMITH, PH.D.
J. Davison Philips Professor of New Testament
Columbia Theological Seminary
The African Methodist Episcopal Church
Philemon

JOEL R. SOZA, D.TH.
Professor of Old Testament
Malone University
The Church of the Brethren
Jeremiah, Lamentations

BRENT A. STRAWN, PH.D.
Professor of Old Testament and Professor of Law
Duke University
The United Methodist Church
Leviticus, Song of Songs

RICHARD P. THOMPSON, PH.D.
Professor of New Testament
Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion
Northwest Nazarene University
The Church of the Nazarene
Ezra, Nehemiah

CRAIG A. VONDERGEEST, PH.D.
Professor of Religion
Presbyterian College
The United Methodist Church
Obadiah, Jonah, Micah

KAREN STRAND WINSLOW, PH.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies
Chair of the Department of Biblical and Theological Studies
Azusa Pacific Seminary of Azusa Pacific University
The Free Methodist Church
Esther

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION TO A WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

Kenneth J. Collins

If you have ever hiked into a large forest you realize very quickly that it's easy to get lost. All the trees look alike to you and the distinguishing cues from a shifting landscape may all be gone. It's helpful then to have a compass or, better yet, a couple of guides with you who know where they're going. The difficulty with forests, among other things, is that you can quickly become disoriented in the foot path view when what you really need to see is the helicopter view, the larger landscape of which the forest is a part. The Bible with its many authors and its sixty-six books, the entirety of which took over fifteen hundred years to write as well as to be recognized as sacred scripture, is like a vast and lush forest in a number of ways. For one thing, it's helpful when reading Genesis, for example, a book of beginnings, to have the end in view, the book of Revelation, in which Jesus Christ is both celebrated and glorified at the consummation of things.

Throughout history the Bible has been interpreted in numerous ways, some of which actually contradict one another. How would you know then that the interpretation you hold is correct, appropriate, or even edifying? This is the very question that Augustine (354–430), early Christian theologian and philosopher, addressed in his brief, yet very valuable, work *On Christian Doctrine.* Taking the broadest view possible, this Latin church father in effect posed the question, What's the Bible all about? Put another way, he asked how scripture could be summarized in but a few words. These are queries not always entertained by people who see little beyond the footpath view, the details of a particular landscape. Augustine's reply then is enormously valuable in that it gives readers a clear sense of orientation, the lay of the land so to speak, at the outset, whether they are in the book of 2 Chronicles or in the book of Galatians. Augustine expressed his basic interpretive principle in the following way: "Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all."[1]

This twofold love of God and neighbor, displayed in both the Old Testament and in the New, is the interpretive guide, the key, to sacred scripture. This means, for instance, that if we interpret a particular book of the Bible in a way that undermines the universal love of God and neighbor then we are quite simply wrong in our judgment. Sadly the Bible has been misinterpreted, misused, and even abused in the past by groups throughout history that evidently did not love their neighbors as themselves but instead diminished their worth through interpretations that were frankly racist or that were developed along class, economic, cultural or even ethnic lines. The greatest story ever told in the hands of some became a greatly diminished narrative.

Augustine's counsel is also valuable in that it suggests the Bible is best read in the church, within the community of the faithful, a context that will help to correct troubled and idiosyncratic views that are neither held nor even acknowledged by the community, the theological tradition of which one is a part. This means then, contrary to some popular stereotypes, that no one actually reads the Bible all alone, that is, utterly divorced from the particular theological tradition, along with its interpretive commitments, in which one participates. Instead, the community forms the interpretive context in which all reading takes place whether that community is fully recognized or not. Thus within the parameters of Augustine's guide for reading the Bible there can yet be a diversity of views as reflected, for example, in the distinct theological traditions that have emerged in Christian history. That is, Roman Catholics read the Bible as Roman Catholics and Wesleyans as Wesleyans. Different theological traditions are in a real sense interpretive communities whose judgments are passed along from age to age. Augustine's guidance then does not result in an utter sameness of interpretation but is able to embrace a number of readings, reflected in various traditions, that yet affirm the overriding importance of the love of God and neighbor.

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

John Wesley's Summary of the Bible: Holiness and Grace

Like Augustine, John Wesley thought carefully about the essential teaching of the Bible in his own day and similarly concluded that it's about love, the love of God and neighbor. In fact, a data mining investigation of Wesley's writings, conducted by Dr. Brint Montgomery, reveals that the second most prominent theme in all of his works (beyond God) is none other than love. Moreover, Wesley further delineates just what he means by the term "love," which our twenty-first-century context so easily misunderstands, through the expression "holy love," which surfaced more than a dozen times in his writings.[2] In other words, it is not just any love that is revealed in the Bible in general and in the humble sacrificial death of Christ at Golgotha in particular. It is a love marked by the purity and simplicity of holiness. At Calvary nails could not destroy such a holy love, taunting could not weaken it, hatred could not overcome it.

So then, if holy love aptly expresses the Christian understanding of God as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments, then the beauty and strength of that love, as Wesley understood so well, could only be communicated to a fallen humanity through grace, both free (the work of God alone) and cooperant (divine and human cooperation). Not surprisingly then, Wesley's practical theology, bathed in the language of scripture, can be expressed quite simply in the words *holiness* and *grace*, words that in turn are emblematic of the conjunctions of "holy/love" and of "free/cooperant" grace. In other words, if holy love suitably describes the Christian Godhead, the very being of God, and if the two great commandments of loving God and neighbor epitomize the basic teaching of the Bible, then grace both free and cooperant reveals just how this sacred deposit of holy love is both communicated to and actualized in the lives of hitherto sinful human beings. Simply put, holy love crosses the separation between God and humanity only through grace. And so to Augustine's celebration of the love of God and neighbor, Wesley adds in his own practical theology the necessity of grace, both free and cooperant, apart from which such love could never be realized in practical Christian living.

In many ways the practical theology of John Wesley, richly informed by the Bible, resonates with the universal teaching (catholic) of historic Christianity, or what C. S. Lewis in his own day considered to be "mere Christianity." In other words, Wesley's reading of scripture, reflected in his Old and New Testament Notes, for example, will be in accordance with the consensual tradition of the early church in both Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity, for example. Though much is shared between the Wesleyan tradition and Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism, the substance of which the late Thomas C. Oden referred to as consensual Christianity, there are nevertheless important differences, elements that Wesleyanism affirms but are not shared by all of the same three great traditions just noted.

In this introduction then, for the sake of space, we will not consider all those doctrines of the Wesleyan faith that are shared with the broader Christian community such as the doctrine of creation along with its goodness, the fallenness of humanity, its sin and evil, and the doctrine of last things or eschatology, to name a few. Instead, we will focus on the emphases of the Wesleyan theological tradition, ongoing elements of its interpretive posture, that issue in a distinct vocabulary, conversation and life. In other words, we will explore what it means to "speak Wesleyan," if you will, as a function of the ways that biblical scholars and theologians of the tradition have not only interpreted scripture but have also passed along those various readings from generation to generation, a process that thereby creates a distinct Christian community that is empowered to witness to the broader church. We will therefore offer a number of leading themes that make up this Wesleyan witness.

God Loves and Desires to Redeem All People

Given that the very nature of God is holy love as expressed in the community of relations of Father, Son and Spirit, Wesley maintains that the Most High cannot but will the greatest good for all of humanity that entails nothing less than a

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

desire for their redemption. Again, God "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4), a passage upon which Wesley reflects: "It is strange that any whom he has actually saved, should doubt the universality of his grace."[3] Indeed, in commenting on John 3:16, a passage that is emblematic of the universal love of God for all people ("God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life" CEB), Wesley affirms a basic gospel truth in his notes on this often-cited passage that all people ought to believe "that Christ was given for them."[4] Why then are not all people redeemed despite the will of God to this end? Wesley answers this question forthrightly in his sermon, "Free Grace," in which he replies, "[because] they will not be saved."[5] In other words, "So our Lord expressly [stated]: 'They will not come unto me that they may have life.' "[6] Simply put, God has made ample provision for the salvation of all people through the atoning work of Christ but many refuse to receive what is so graciously offered.

God Gives Prevenient Grace to All People

Coming from the hands of the creator, humanity was both holy and good in this pristine state. With unbelief arising in their hearts, Adam and Eve embraced a corruption of being, a self-curvature or pride, that was subsequently manifested in sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. This negative inheritance of sin and evil, an unholy deposit, was then passed along to the entirety of humanity with the single exception of Jesus Christ. Wesley employs a vocabulary similar to John Calvin's to describe this wretched condition apart from all grace: "Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart evil continually'? Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but a heathen still."[7]

So pervasive were the effects of sin on humanity that if God did not act first to begin the process of redemption, then no human life could be saved. However, no human being was left void of all good, totally corrupted, since God sovereignly and in utter freedom restored the four faculties that together make up the deposit of prevenient grace, a grace that comes before salvation properly speaking. These four faculties, given on the basis of the illuminating work of Jesus Christ (as expressed in John 1:9), are as follows: conscience, a measure of freedom (to receive the further grace of God), knowledge of the moral law, and knowledge of the basic attributes of God.

Prevenient grace, at the hands of God's initiating work, marks the very beginning of redemption in that it renders human beings accountable and responsible and therefore savable. What's more, it is given to all human beings; none are excluded from its embrace. Again, highlighting the favor and goodness of God in response to human sin, prevenient grace is given even before humanity has realized it. Such grace, then, to use Wesley's own words, "waiteth not for the call of man."[8] The larger theological significance of prevenient grace, then, that will distinguish Wesleyan theology and interpretation from that of other traditions, is that although humanity cannot redeem itself, given the seriousness of sin, God will not redeem humanity without themselves, given the illuminating and enabling power of grace.

How Sin Is Defined Is Crucial in Understanding the Liberties of Redemption

Wesleyans and Calvinists can, and sometimes do, talk past each other because it is not recognized at the outset that they are operating out of different definitions of sin. For Calvinists any violation of a known law of God, whether willful or not, is sin properly speaking. Such a definition seems to resonate with an Old Testament understanding as reflected in Levitical sacrifices for unintentional sins. However, if such is the case, then how could Christian believers ever be free from the power or dominion of sin as affirmed, for example, in both Romans 6 and 8 and the First Letter of John? It would seem to be an impossibility simply because freedom from sins that are not intended would entail perfect performance, a clear impossibility. These NT books then would be left hanging in the air in terms of the application of their meaning. Wesley clearly recognized the issues at stake here

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

in an important letter that he drafted in 1772 to Mrs. Bennis that reads in part:

> Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of a known law of God. Therefore every voluntary breach of the law of love is sin; and nothing else, if we speak properly. To strain the matter farther is only to make way for Calvinism. There may be ten thousand wandering thoughts and forgetful intervals without any breach of love, though not without transgressing the Adamic law. But Calvinists would fain confound these together.[9]

Without this definition of sin, which is able to make sense of the liberties proclaimed in Romans and the First Letter of John and elsewhere, readers of this commentary would be ill equipped to comprehend the extent of divine grace highlighted by Wesley in his doctrines of both regeneration and entire sanctification.

Justification Is Freedom from the Guilt of Sin

Wesley defined justification quite simply as the forgiveness of those sins that are past.[10] That last word, *past*, kept Wesleyan theology from affirming the mischievous notion that one could be justified in the ongoing practice of sin such that justification in effect would now be functioning as a license to sin. Elsewhere Wesley affirmed that three things come together in justification: "Upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part, the satisfaction of God's justice, by the offering of his body, and shedding his blood; and upon our part, true and living faith in the merits of Jesus Christ."[11]

Wesley's reading of scripture in terms of the doctrine of justification shares much in common with the magisterial reformers Luther and Calvin. Indeed, in a letter to John Newton, drafted in 1765, Wesley states: "I think on Justification just as I have done any time these seven-and-twenty years, and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him a hair's breadth."[12] What Wesley and the Protestant reformers who preceded him saw so clearly, and what Roman Catholicism struggles to acknowledge even today in the wake of Vatican II, is that justification is distinct from sanctification. In other words, justification entails not being made holy; that's sanctification. That is, justification is "that great work which God does *for us*, in forgiving our sins."[13] Regeneration, or the new birth, is that "great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature."[14]

The confusion of the "for us" and "in us" nature of these works of grace (justification and regeneration) could only undermine the radical Pauline notion that God justifies not those who are in any sense holy but the Almighty justifies sinners, the ungodly, those steeped in their sins. Even in his own day Wesley faced the complaint among those to whom he had proclaimed the gospel that "I am not good enough to be forgiven." His response to such an objection was quick and to the point: "Neither say in thy heart, 'I cannot be accepted yet, because I am not good enough.' Who is good enough—whoever was—to merit acceptance at God's hands? Was ever any child of Adam good enough for this?"[15] Elsewhere in his journals, Wesley comforts sinners who were overcome with their own sense of guilt and unworthiness: "Look for it [justification] *just as you are*, unfit, unworthy, unholy, by simple faith, every day, every hour."[16] So then, justification, the forgiveness of those sins that are past is a sheer gift, a species of free grace that could be received now. Simply put, sinners do not have to clean themselves up first in order to be forgiven. The Apostle Paul knew this; Wesley knew it as well.

Regeneration Is Freedom from the Power of Sin

In his reading of scripture, Wesley clearly recognized that the liberties of the gospel are not exhausted in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. In fact, he taught that if the new birth did not occur at the same time as justification, "you would immediately sin again, that is, unless your heart were cleansed; unless it were created anew."[17] Whereas in the reception of justifying grace one is freed from the guilt of sin, with the embrace of regenerating grace, one is set free from its power or dominion. However, not all Christian traditions have acknowledged such a freedom, due in some measure to different con-

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

ceptions of sin—and of grace as well. For Wesley, regenerated believers are truly holy, not merely reckoned to be so, simply because the Holy Spirit now reigns in their hearts.

Throughout his writings Wesley affirmed that the new birth entailed "power over outward sin of every kind; over every evil word and work; . . . And over inward sin."[18] Indeed, he understood from raw personal experience, especially while he was in Georgia, that "unholy tempers are uneasy tempers,"[19] with the result that the beginning of holiness in the new birth, in a real sense, marks also the rise of happiness both true and lasting. And yet the liberty of the new birth encompasses far more than the negative aspect of freedom *from*; it also includes the positive liberty of freedom *to*, that is, freedom to love both God and neighbor. Once again in harmony with the teaching of Augustine, Wesley maintained that faith is ever instrumental to love; it establishes the reign of love in the heart such that Wesley's ethic of the Christian life can be suitably described as "faith working by love."[20]

Beyond this, such a great change in the life of aspirants of God's grace ushers in the rise of holiness, what can otherwise be termed initial sanctification, a holiness that try as they might sinners cannot bring about by themselves. As such the new birth is not a natural change but a supernatural one. "But regeneration is not 'gaining habits of holiness;' " Wesley writes, "it is quite a different thing. It is not a natural, but a *supernatural* change; and is *just as different from the gradual 'gaining habits,'* as a child's being born into the world is from his growing up into a man."[21]

Wesley's distinction between the beginning of sanctification in the new birth and subsequent growth, that is, "gaining habits of holiness," as mirrored in the distinction between the natural and supernatural elements of growth, may be a window on the further difference between incremental change—the inculcation of virtue over time—and genuine qualitative change, a transformation of being as represented in the new birth, a change that is not just a little more of what already was but reveals itself, through the rich grace of God, as something *new*. Here, in other words, the reception of regenerating grace is manifested in a distinct before and after. This means, of course, that regeneration like justification is a sheer gift and therefore one that can be received by the free grace of God even now. Accordingly, this is where the freedom and the beauty of the good news of the gospel begin to shine once more through the utter graciousness of God who ever seeks to bless and in this case through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. And all of this is clearly seen and explored in Wesley's notes upon 1 John.

Christian Assurance: All Believers Can Know They Are Redeemed

Influenced in many respects by the Enlightenment, and by the spirit of John Locke in particular, several Anglican clergy took issue with Methodism's affirmation of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit to believers that they were the children of God. Church of England clergy, of course, had little difficulty supporting *the fruit* of the Spirit by means of the disciplines of the Church, but to acknowledge the reality of the Holy Spirit directly witnessing to the hearts of believers was deemed to be an excess, a species of enthusiasm or fanaticism. Undeterred by such criticism, John Wesley declared: " 'The life that I now live, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' And *whosoever hath this*, 'the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.' "[22] Carefully exegeting the *locus classicus* of this doctrine, that is, Romans 8:16, Wesley unpacked the Apostle Paul's teaching in the following manner: "By the testimony of the Spirit I mean, an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."[23] Pastorally sensitive in many respects, Wesley admitted there could be exceptions here due to ignorance or bodily disorder,[24] but not only did he maintain that such an assurance is "the common privilege of *real Christians*,"[25] but it is also "*the proper Christian faith*."[26]

It is not an exaggeration to state that Wesley gloried in the doctrine of assurance. Indeed, he taught that it was "one grand part of the testimony which God has given them [the Methodists] to

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

bear to all mankind."[27] Other Christian traditions, such as Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, by way of contrast, have failed to recognize in a full orbed way the implications of Paul's teaching in Romans 8, and instead have claimed that the possibility of people in the pews actually knowing that they are redeemed would be an instance of a lack of humility. The Council of Trent during the sixteenth century, for example, repudiated the direct witness as essential to the Christian faith: "If any man hold (*fiduciam*) trust, confidence, or assurance of pardon, to be essential to faith, let him be accursed."[28]

Likewise Eastern Orthodoxy has not underscored the reality of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit. In fact, this tradition has so "subjected the Holy Spirit to a sacred time and place," as Starkey points out, "to tradition and the sacraments . . . that [it has not] had any creative contribution to make to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."[29] So then, instead of affirming the Pauline doctrine, these two great traditions, both in the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, directed believers for what assurance they might have to the sacramental life of the church. This institutionalization of the Spirit, what Outler calls its "domestication,"[30] goes back "as far as Simon Magus, and always it had tended to link Spirit too closely with the institutional church."[31] It is therefore a very precious truth that all believers may know that they are redeemed. This was a vital part of the ministry of the people called Methodists, and it was well grounded in scripture.

Entire Sanctification: All Believers Can Be Saved to the Uttermost

Wesley was a careful reader of the Bible. His devotional practices that included daily scripture reading infused his ordinary use of language, for example, in letters, treatises, and even journal entries, with a biblical idiom. The key truths of the Bible, then, were never very far from his thought or from his lips. In reading scripture, Wesley took up the task of analysis in terms of grappling with the meaning of particular passages, but he also considered the loftier truth of scripture that could only be appreciated through the work of synthesis, that is, by seeing the larger themes that the Bible displays over many of its books. Entire sanctification or Christian perfection was just such a truth.

A common mistake of those beyond the Wesleyan tradition is to consider the teaching of entire sanctification simply as a Methodist distinctive. It is not. To be sure, this is a doctrine that is deeply rooted in scripture, in particular passages such as Psalm 130:8; Ezekiel 36:25; Romans 8:3-4; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; and several passages from 1 John, in particular, 4:17. Wesley also reflected more broadly in his practical theology and considered the need of sinners, in terms of both the guilt and power of actual sins (plural) on the one hand, and the being of sin or inbred sin (singular) on the other hand. In other words, the need of sinners, so clearly displayed in scripture, was not singular but twofold in terms of acts and being, or put another way, in terms of deeds and condition. It is this second need of a transformation of being or condition that Wesley discerned in the Bible and saw articulated in the works of Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law. His sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart" expressed what he had discovered.

Interestingly enough, Wesley's definition of entire sanctification as "the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions"[32] revealed that this doctrine not only summarized the heart of scripture but also was in harmony with the interpretive principle, the hermeneutical guide established by Augustine as noted earlier. "If thou wilt be perfect," Wesley writes, " 'add to all these charity: add love, and thou hast the 'circumcision of the heart.' 'Love is the fulfilling of the law,' 'the end of the commandment.' . . . It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one."[33] Moreover the freedom from fear, left in the wake of such holy love, displayed in 1 John, emerged in Wesley's typology of Christian discipleship in the form: "A natural man has neither fear nor love; one that is awakened, fear without love; a babe in Christ, love and fear; a father in Christ, love without fear."[34]

Other Christian traditions such as Roman Catholicism affirmed sanctity at its highest levels (indeed Wesley valued several Roman Catholic spiritual classics) but such an affirmation often

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

devolved upon a select few, with monks and virgins taking leading roles. Wesley's affirmation of this biblical doctrine, however, was marked by three differences in comparison with that of Rome. First, Wesley applied the insights of the Reformation in this context: "*Exactly as* we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the *only* condition of sanctification, *exactly as* it is of justification."[35] Second, since entire sanctification is a sheer gift of God's grace it can be received by faith by all believers, all those who are already born of God. And third, those who are entirely sanctified can know that God's grace has saved them to the uttermost. "But how do you know, that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption," Wesley asked. "I can know it *no otherwise* than I know that I am justified."[36] In other words, this knowledge constitutes Christian assurance and it comes through the gracious witness of the Holy Spirit: "None therefore ought to believe that the work is done, till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification, *as clearly as* his justification."[37]

Redemption Is both Personal and Cosmic

When Wesley explored the image of God, the *imago Dei* in which humanity had been created, so evident in scripture, he considered the interconnectedness between homo sapiens and the rest of the animal realm by articulating the political image in the following manner: "As all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off."[38]

Since humanity is at the nexus of a network of relations, its redemption has consequence for other animals as well. In other words, a Wesleyan understanding of salvation goes well beyond anthropological considerations to embrace, as does scripture, consequences for the entire created order. Simply put, a new creation is coming. To be sure, not only will there be a new heaven and a new earth as a result of Christ's saving work but also Wesley speculated that the animal realm in the future, in that coming sparkling new day, may be invited to participate in the knowledge and love of God. He wrote:

> May I be permitted to mention here a conjecture concerning the brute creation? What if it should then please the all-wise, the all-gracious Creator, to raise them higher in the scale of beings? What if it should please him, when he makes us "equal to angels," to make them what we are now? Creatures capable of God? Capable of knowing, and loving, and enjoying the Author of their being?[39]

A Wesleyan interpretation of scripture then underscores the fullness of redemption on a number of different levels or relations as is evident in the following:

- God to humanity,
- humans to other humans,
- persons to themselves,
- humanity to the animal realm, and
- humanity to the cosmos.

How poignant then will be the loss felt by men and women who have rejected the gracious offer of redemption in this life only to learn in judgment in the next that the beasts of the field may yet be welcomed to participate in nothing less than the image and likeness of God, the very image in which humanity had been created. In the end a Wesleyan interpretation of the Bible is both glaringly truthful and unavoidably serious. Such factors, however, must be seen in terms of God's love and holiness, not as an invitation to sentimentality but an invitation for all humanity to be transformed by divine grace, which is ever sufficient, such that the redeemed, filled with joy, will praise the Most High for all eternity for so great a salvation in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.

Endnotes

1. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1958), 30.

2. Wesley notes in his journal, for example: "After preaching, I went to the new church, and found an uncommon blessing, at a time when I

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

least of all expected it; namely, while the Organist was playing a voluntary! We had a happy hour in the evening; many hearts being melted down in one flame of holy love." See W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 20: *Journals and Diaries III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 382–83.

3. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishers, nd.), 540 (1 Tim 2:4).

4. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 219 (John 3:16).

5. Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vols. 1–4: *The Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 3:553 ("Free Grace").

6. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:553–54 ("Free Grace").

7. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:183–84 ("Original Sin").

8. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:207 ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation").

9. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 5:322 ("To Mrs. Bennis, June 16, 1772").

10. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:189 ("Justification by Faith").

11. Rupert E. Davies, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 9: *The Methodist Societies, I: History, Nature and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 51.

12. Ted A. Campbell, ed., *The Works of John Wesley: Letters III (1756–1765)*, vol. 27 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 427. ("To John Newton, May 14, 1765").

13. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:187 ("The New Birth").

14. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:187.

15. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:214 ("The Righteousness of Faith").

16. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 21: *Journals and Diaries IV* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 321. Bracketed material is ours.

17. Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 11:180 ("A Word to a Condemned Malefactor").

18. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:419 ("The Marks of the New Birth").

19. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:195 ("The New Birth").

20. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:425 ("The Marks of the New Birth").

21. Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 3:507 ("The Doctrine of Original Sin").

22. Outler, *Sermons* 3:497–98 ("On Faith").

23. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:287 ("The Witness of the Spirit, II").

24. Telford, *Letters*, 5:358 ("To Dr. Rutherforth, March 28, 1768").

25. Baker, *Letters*, 26:254–55 ("To Charles Wesley, July 31, 1747").

26. Baker, *Letters*, 26:254–55 ("To Charles Wesley, July 31, 1747").

27. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:285 ("The Witness of the Spirit, II"). Bracketed material is ours.

28. Gerald R. Cragg, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 11: *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 68.

29. Lycurgus M. Starkey, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 142. Bracketed material is ours.

30. See Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 131.

31. Albert C. Outler, "A Focus of the Holy Spirit: Spirit and Spirituality in John Wesley," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 163.

32. Telford, *Letters*, 4:187 ("To Charles Wesley, September 17, 1762").

33. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:407 ("The Circumcision of the Heart").

34. Wesley, *NT Notes*, 638 (1 John 4:18).

35. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:163-64 ("The Scripture Way of Salvation").

36. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, eds., *The Works of John Wesley: Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises 2*, vol. 13 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 102 ("Farther Thoughts upon Christian Perfection"). Emphasis is mine.

37. Chilcote and Collins, 174 ("A Plain Account of Christian Perfection").

38. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:442 ("The General Deliverance").

39. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:448 ("The General Deliverance").

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION TO WESLEYAN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Robert W. Wall

People read and study scripture for various reasons and different ends. Most do so as an act of devotion to God with confidence that scripture is a revelatory word that communicates a normative understanding of who God is and how God acts in the world. The theological understanding acquired from Bible study supplies a faithful people with a practical wisdom for ordering their lives according to the ways of a holy and loving God.

Although the Bible remains the primary text in forming a faithful people's knowledge of God, careful readers typically bring other resources with them to help them navigate what Karl Barth called "the strange new world within the Bible." The one-volume Bible commentary—a genre only recently introduced to meet the demands of students who wanted ready access to expert opinion—puts in a single (but very big!) collection what contributors think necessary for a wakeful and pertinent study of each book of the church's two-testament Bible. Naturally other resources are sometimes required to educate readers in greater depth of the fine print of modern biblical studies, especially as our knowledge of the worlds behind, within, and in front of the church's canonical text continually increases. This one-volume commentary, however, is designed and written as a first step for clergy and teachers who seek to prepare informed sermons or classes, and for students and laity who need expert opinions to help them prepare to participate more fully in a group's discussion of a biblical book. Our purpose is to help all its readers learn to read scripture well thereby to know more fully "what is the overwhelming greatness of God's power that is working among us believers" (Eph 1:19).

The primary attributes of any solid single-volume commentary of the whole Bible are clarity and conciseness. The contributors of this commentary (WOVC) provide a paragraph-by-paragraph reading of each biblical book without technical jargon or studied attention to modern criticism's approaches to biblical interpretation. While the WOVC's authors are fully aware that the Bible gathers together a variety of compositions, each of which was shaped by particular social settings and within ancient time zones, they spend little time there speculating what these canonical texts may have meant to their authors and first readers. There is a general recognition that biblical texts were providentially sanctified by God's Spirit "in the fullness of time," were received and then ordered into the church's scripture under the Spirit's inspiring direction in order to illumine and instruct subsequent generations of faithful readers. The holy end of a more accurate interpretation of scripture is the restored knowledge of God's truth so that the perils of intellectual estrangement from life with God may be remedied (cf. Eph 4:17-19).

The WOVC targets a more theological approach and ecclesial location to biblical interpretation. In a marketplace filled with one-volume Bible commentaries in a wide variety that reflects the diversity of Bible readers, the prospective reader of the WOVC may well ask how this volume in particular will help map an informed approach into and then within the sacred text. What follows is an attempt to answer this question in light of two markers: the biblical scholars invited to contribute to WOVC either pastor Wesleyan-Methodist congregations or teach at places related to the Wesleyan tradition. Their contributions to the WOVC target readers who are spiritual leaders, laity, and students at places located within the Methodist-Wesleyan communion of saints. The results are typically self-conscious interpretations of the biblical text informed by dialogue with Wesley's own readings of the same texts or by their agreements with a Wesleyan theological grammar. Their interpretations, then, result from a scholarly yet self-aware practice of drawing upon the core materials of a particular ecclesial tradition as a hermeneutical guide—in this case from Wesley's sermons, his *Journal*, or *Notes* on both testaments of the church's scripture.

Just as often, however, the readings found in the WOVC are the result of a contributor's theological intuitions forged over time by their active participation in worshipping or learning

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

communities drenched in the Wesleyan materials, where the hymns of Charles Wesley are sung by heart, where the worship practices initiated in Wesley's evangelical revivals are continued, where are routinely heard the personal testimonies and proclamations cued by Wesley's core theological themes such as holiness and perfect love, and where the routines of spiritual devotions that include reading sermons and biographies written by and for Wesleyan communicants are maintained. What are forged in these communities of worship are unconscious interpretations of scripture that are biased in ways that ring true to their experiences of the gospel. These readings, unadorned by a critical apparatus, are also found in the WOVC.

Simply put, the purpose of the WOVC is to retrieve a "Wesleyan sense" of scripture for the reader's use in worship, catechesis, mission, and personal devotions. Our intention in doing so is not tribalistic or divisive but rather to make clearer the theological contribution of a Wesleyan theological reading of scripture for one holy catholic and apostolic church. The prospect of doing so is not a renewal of a sectarian interest in a particular tradition but to form a deeper commitment to it in order to participate more fully and confidently in the ecumenical conversations of the global church.

Wesley's Theology of Scripture

Although John Wesley never wrote an essay or preached a sermon on his theology of scripture, he famously called himself *homo unius libri*, "a man of one book." What he meant by this self-reference, of course, is that the Bible was his go-to text for Christian discipleship, the indispensable auxiliary of the Spirit's formative work in congregational worship and mission, for instruction and personal devotions. We should note that the biblical criticisms characteristic of early modern England, in which Wesley was trained, were more interested in the modest tasks of discerning genuine from embellished texts, orthodox from spurious interpretations according to criteria established by the Magisterial Reformation. Accordingly, Wesley believed "the whole of scripture is not merely God's address to the believer; it is inspired by the Holy Spirit who in turn inspires the believer's understanding."[2] The dogmatic locus of this more functional conception of the Bible is secured by the Reformation's principle of *sola scriptura*, which assigns scripture's normative roles as the means of God's saving grace that reforms faithful disciples into the image of the risen One.

A broad outline of Wesley's theology of scripture may be retrieved from the prefaces to his *Explanatory Notes* on the NT (1754) and OT (1765). Central to his approach to scripture is that readers approach this holy text to "observe the word of the living God . . . which remaineth forever." Scripture is not the depository of timeless truth-claims to be asserted in theological discourse, but a "fountain of heavenly wisdom" that is "tasted as good" because it proffers a holy space into which a congregation of the faithful enter trusting they will hear there the words of a living God[3]—a belief that echoes the pastor's sentiment according to Hebrews 4:12. This holy wisdom is hardly arcane, since God's words are "of inexhaustible virtue." The human language of scripture's various authors and editors "sink[s] into nothing before it (since) God speaks not as man, but as God." Scripture is, now quoting Luther who follows Origen's lead, "a grammar of the language of the Holy Ghost."[4] In this sense, then, scripture proceeds from God by the action of the sanctifying Spirit who graciously illumines the community of readers/auditors who receive and understand it as God's instruction and so as a means or sacrament of God's saving grace. As such, scripture's interpretation must aim to give its audience "the direct, literal meaning of every verse, of every sentence, and as far as I am able of every word in the oracles of God."[5] This is not to say that Wesley read scripture literalistically but closely and plainly as a text appointed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit to guide every member of the global church as the *viva vox Dei* for the love of God.[6]

In light of this conception of scripture's nature, the WOVC attempts to implicate what many contemporary Methodist scholars seem to avoid: a Wesleyan theological interpretation of scripture. Our interest is not to adjudicate Wesley's talent as a biblical exegete, which others have already done.[7] Rather we seek a more practical end: to produce a useful resource that will help initiate

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

interested readers into a particular way of interpreting scripture's metanarrative of God's way of salvation for those who seek to live holy lives before a God who is light and love.

The Practice of Reading Scripture

In his influential "An Address to the Clergy" (1756), Wesley speaks of the importance of "acquired endowments."[8] These are those skills, independent of the Spirit's gifting, that enable and mark out a competent clergy. Surely reflecting his "enlightened" age, Wesley claims that knowledge is first among these endowments; he then goes on to catalog different kinds of knowledge and know-how that clergy must learn. Most important is the minister's knowledge "of all the Scriptures"—*all* the scriptures since "one part fixes the sense of another." Wesley claims that "none can be a good Divine who is not a good textuary. None else can be mighty in the Scriptures, able both to instruct and to stop the mouths of gainsayers,"[9] which surely are the two essential tasks of clergy by his definition.

In explaining what kind of biblical knowledge clergy must acquire, Wesley asks this critical question: "ought he not to know the literal meaning of every word, verse, and chapter, without which there can be no firm foundation on which the spiritual can be built?"[10] Two observations based on his sentiment frame this discussion of Wesley's definition of scripture's literal sense. First, his interpretive strategy is text-centered. While this "Address" describes an expansive array of sources that supply what the cleric must know, including scripture's "original tongues," they are all concentrated on "the literal meaning" of scripture's every word. There is no task more important than the sacred text's address of its faithful, careful reader; it stipulates the reader's "firm foundation." Second, a "good textuary" is expected to seek after "the spiritual." That is, to hold every word of scripture allows the reader to gain a sense of the text's theological meaning and practical application.

Wesley has in mind a familiar protocol of biblical interpretation that begins with text-centered exegesis that provides the "firm foundation" for a theological reading of scripture, guided by the analogy of faith, which makes "a suitable application to the consciences of his hearers." This movement from scripture's literal sense (what does the text plainly say) to its theological meaning or *Christian* sense (what does the text disclose about God's way of salvation) orders the flow of Wesley's sermons and helps locate biblical interpretation in and for the church.

To some extent, Wesley's search for the text's literal sense reflects the Reformation's worry that allegorical readings of scripture are sometimes employed to secure rival theological beliefs or are unnecessary in understanding scripture's plain teaching of God's salvation. What he means by literalism, then, is a preference for what the "naked" text plainly reveals about God's way of salvation. Wesley's seamless move from a text's plain sense to its spiritual or practical application for discipleship suggests that the text's literal meaning points readers to God's redemptive plan.

S. E. Fowl helpfully distinguishes between ancient and modern definitions of the literal sense.[11] His study compares Aquinas, who is exemplary of premodern biblical interpretation, with modern criticism's different conception of literal sense. Whereas modern criticism locates a text's literal sense in a single, normative meaning, which is typically linked to the human author's communicative intentions, Aquinas's reflection on the text's reception by the church's sainted teachers—Origen, Ambrose, Irenaeus, Augustine—and his own experience with the text convinced him that each biblical text has a *multivalent* (rather than single) literal sense that interpreters seek to retrieve and apply to their own situation under the aegis of the Spirit.[12] Not only does this square with the nature of a *living* God whose self-communication is not static and timeless but dynamic and occasional, scripture is also part of a living tradition that changes and expands with each communion of saints.

Following this ancient model, then, the literal sense is not fixed by a single, normative meaning, typically defined by the human author's intention and discerned by linguistic and historical analysis. Rather, the literal sense of a biblical text is ever changing and defined by the divine author's intentions, understood in cooperation with the Spirit and discerned by rigorous application of the analogy of faith (see below). Viewed from

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

this angle, scripture's literal sense for any faithful interpreter is "not an end in itself, but a central way in which God draws us into ever deeper friendship."[13]

The contrast Fowl makes has not so much to do with competing methodological interests in discerning the literal meaning of a biblical text: modern teachers of the academy are as interested in the text's "literal sense" as premodern teachers of the church were. The primary difference between them is whether the text's "literal sense" should be considered "true"; that is, Brevard S. Childs points out that modern criticism reconstructs literal sense as a matter of historical fact and typically in terms of the author's intended (i.e., a particular) meaning. The Reformers, followed by Wesley, meant something different: literal sense regards the text's *Christian* meaning. It was the sense ordinary believers made of what they heard or read in the words of scripture, not the sense made of a replacement storyline proffered by scholars.[14] If so, then it is reasonable to assume Fowl's discussion of Aquinas as roughly true of the Reformers: the single sense apprehended by particular readers of scripture at their location, for their day, in response to their spiritual needs and so to cultivate their friendship with God may very well have differed from the single sense apprehended by other readers. This "multifaceted literal sense" is characteristic of scripture's reception during the Reformation and by its heirs during the long eighteenth century.[15]

This current elaboration of scripture's literal sense is offered here to contextualize what Wesley calls "the naked Bible," a rubric that trades on the importance the Reformers placed on the biblical text *as text.* Influenced by Newton's science of critical observation, Wesley demands the interpreter pay close attention to what the text plainly says. This is not anti-intellectualism or critical naivete but a commitment to the meaning of words and phrases rooted in his core belief that those words and phrases are revelatory of God.[16] At the same time, however, he ridiculed "abstract reasoning" that isolated a careful analysis of the text from its implication for real life.

In his canonical but neglected sermon "The Nature of Enthusiasm," Wesley reflects on how one makes inquiries into the will of God. Although a radical response to the more individualistic and inward "enthusiasm" (today it might be called "fanaticism") of his day, as we would expect, Wesley advises one to consult "the oracles of God." One finds God's heart in the text. But his practical concern is not where to locate God's will but, "how shall I know what is the will of God in a particular case?"[17] His answer is quite extraordinary and not often included in the various lists of Wesley's hermeneutical rules. It does not concern a textual strategy but an existential outcome. He contends that if God's will in every case is sanctification—"that we should be inwardly and outwardly holy"—then "experience tells (the interpreter) what advantages he has in his present state, either for being or doing good; and reason is to show what he certainly or probably will have in the state proposed."[18] That is, one knows whether a biblical interpretation is a right one by considering whether its actual performance produces a result that accords with holiness. This discernment is not based on one's critical orthodoxy or even the theological orthodoxy of one's interpretation; it is a measurement of what an interpretation produces in life, whether it contributes to inward or outward holiness and so draws the reader into closer communion with a holy God. Simply put, Wesley's search for the literal or "Christian" sense of a text targets a meaning that makes a *particular* communion of readers wise for sanctification.[19]

There is no clearer expression of Wesley's aim for scripture's faithful reader than found in this added prefatory sentence that gives instructions "To The Reader" of his edited version of Cranmer's *Homilies*: "He that desires to more perfectly understand these great doctrines of Christianity (i.e., salvation, faith and good works) ought diligently to read the Holy Scriptures, especially St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians."[20] While this sentiment is widely shared by Protestants even today, Wesley reads scripture from and for a particular social location at a pivotal moment and in a crucial place in the history of the Christian Bible: in eighteenth-century England when the study of scripture, forged in the fires of the Magisterial Reformation, was reshaped by England's reception of the Enlightenment. Wesley's Bible practices were steeped in both the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* and the epistemology of scientific humanism, which prompted him to practice the earliest tools

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

of modern biblical criticism but in service of the church to the glory of God.

Against those who accuse him of an unsophisticated Biblicism, Wesley employed an impressive range of interpretive strategies available to him in the eighteenth century. He was thoroughly alert to the emerging tools of biblical criticism and employed them all, even if with caution and modestly so. Not only did he have an appetite for biblical languages, he was especially interested in textual criticism, which was the primary critical method of his day. On occasion he offered corrections to the *Textus Receptus*, used in the KJV translation—a dangerous activity in those days, since the transmission of the biblical text was linked by church confession to its revelatory role.[21]

Whether in the teahouses of London or the classrooms of Oxford and Cambridge, England's reception of the Enlightenment concerned human nature and the nature of divine revelation. Central to the hard intellectual battles occasioned by this interplay of the human (especially free will) and divine (especially transcendence) was the rejection of mere religious tradition, insisting that any claim for revealed truth must be held accountable to human reason and experience. Wesley agreed and worked hard to construct firm supports for his theology. He selectively admired the work of John Locke, whose empiricism stipulated that any person could and should apply scientific reasoning to what we learn from experience.[22] Close observation of life is foundational for understanding human nature and divine revelation. Even the conservative apologetics of Grotius (and all those who rode his wake) considered competent human testimony, such as retrieved from the plain portions of scripture (e.g., the Gospels), as necessary evidence in securing a belief in the very miracles and fulfilled prophecy that validated scripture's special revelation.

Wesley's spiritual reawakening at Aldersgate was a defining moment of his intellectual journey. His religious experience challenged Locke's suspicion of the individual's inward senses and led him to extend his empiricism to include the spiritual senses—that is, the sensory experiences of God's grace that forge a more expansive understanding of the real world to include the spiritual world occupied by a transcendent God and marked out by the work and witness of God's Spirit. We learn about God not only by the media of special revelation, such as scripture, but by our inward and manifest experiences of God, which confirm and are confirmed by the church's creed and canon.

Wesley received and studied both canon and creed, along with the traditions and histories that attended each, with gratitude and scrupulous attention.[23] He was no dissenter or latitudinarian. He embraced the Reformation's emphasis on the individual believer's freedom to interpret the Bible, and was well schooled in Renaissance humanism with its keen interest in the Bible's original sources. Wesley came from the Enlightenment projects, and so embraced the critical methods of his day, including a lifelong interest in textual criticism and the importance of reading sacred texts in their linguistic and historical contexts. While he firmly rejected Hume's skepticism, he famously claimed to those who accused him of uncritical "enthusiasm" (or "fanaticism") that "to renounce reason is to renounce religion . . . and that all irrational religion is false religion."[24]

The concerns of the Enlightenment for individual progress also shaped Wesley's interpretive interests, some might say too much so.[25] Consider, for instance, that prior to the Enlightenment, happiness was understood to be the province of the virtuous and aristocratic few. But Locke famously announced that it is the business of every man to be happy in the world, and Wesley baptizes that sort of optimism in the transforming power of divine love that cooperates with our obedience in reforming grace-filled believers according to the likeness of God. Yet this optimism in an individual's potential for life, liberty, and happiness was chastened by the Evangelical Revival of the 1730s and its reminder of a person's inability to flourish in the face of persistent sin without a radical intervention of divine grace. While Bebbington reminds us that this great revival, in which Wesley played a significant role, carried a theological freight keenly influenced by the optimistic tempers of England's Enlightenment,[26] Aldersgate taught him that the way forward toward human flourishing is predicated on an "optimism of grace." Reading scripture without doubt and in firm confidence of God's good company is an essential marker of Wesley's hermeneutics, whether applied to his

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

morning office or in sermon preparation for his congregation.

In fact, Wesley's congregation included many rank-and-file converts, who even though unschooled were deeply interested in scripture's teaching, and most were schooled to detect obscure biblical allusions in current popular literature. Biblical commentaries topped the list of books borrowed from the public libraries and purchase of inexpensive Bible study aids quadrupled the sales of any other kind of publication.[27] Wesley himself contributed to this robust market of ordinary readers by publishing his best-selling *Explanatory Notes* (see above). Wesley's interpretation of scripture was not only responsive to a widespread cultural interest in Bible study, then, but was also engaged with a particular reading audience and what it required of him as their spiritual director. Perhaps for this reason, he rarely mentions the contemporary controversies of the educated elites, not because he thought them impious or unimportant, but for fear that "inflaming the hearts of Christians against each other" might distract his readers from hearing "[the Master's] word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his life into our own."[28]

Most of Wesley's sermons include long strings of different Bible verses cobbled together, one glossing the other to express scripture's sense in scripture's phrase. He writes to John Newton that "the Bible is my standard of language as well as sentiment. I endeavor not only to think but *to speak* as the oracles of God."[29] Wesley sometimes expresses concern for a preacher's orthodoxy when hearing a sermon that did not contain much quoted scripture. This concern is not a rhetorical one but theologically adduced: quoting scripture is a matter of trusting scripture. If the very nature of scripture is holy and its effect produces salvation, then its words read aloud are able to disclose God without need of the preacher's pretentious adornments.

Finally, the authority Wesley granted the spiritually mature reader of scripture should not be minimized in this discussion. Although modernity soon came to value a reader's suspicion of the biblical text and to question its capacity to disclose God's truth about the world, Wesley did not. Quite apart from following the standard rules that guide biblical interpretation, as an heir to the importance the Reformation placed on "inner religion," he emphasizes the formation of a reader's holy dispositions by the means of grace. Grace is a countervailing force to suspicion and rather forms faithful readers more receptive to the Spirit's guidance, thereby more knowing of and responsive to the scripture way of salvation.

A Wesleyan Rule of Faith

For all the care Wesley took to translate the biblical text accurately, and draw upon his library of trusted experts and his personal and pastoral experiences to guide his interpretation, Wesley's *Explanatory Note* on Romans 12:6 suggests that the most important constraint in guiding his theological interpretation of scripture is the church's "analogy of faith." He writes,

> *Having then gifts differing according to the grace which is given us*—Gifts are various: grace is one. *Whether it be prophecy*—This, considered as an extraordinary gift, is that whereby heavenly mysteries are declared to men, or things to come foretold. But it seems here to mean the ordinary gift of expounding scripture. *Let us prophesy according to the analogy of faith*—St. Peter expresses it, "as the oracles of God," according to the general tenor of them,[30] according to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein, touching original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation. There is a wonderful analogy between all these; and a close and intimate connexion between the chief heads of that faith "which was once delivered to the saints." Every article therefore concerning which there is any question should be determined by this rule; every doubtful scripture interpreted according to the grand truths which run through the whole.

Significantly, Wesley does not take the prophetic gift in its "extraordinary" sense—to declare divine revelation or foretell the future—but in its more mundane sense to "expound scripture." Perhaps Wesley rightly senses here Paul's exhortation for humility and solidarity. In any case, prophecy is the only charism Paul links to "the faith" (*hē pistis*): the proper exercise of prophecy—or "expounding scripture" in

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Wesley's reading—is "according to the analogy of faith." Although the phrase has puzzled scholars, Wesley takes it as a reference to the apostolic tradition—that is, "the chief heads of that faith 'which was once delivered to the saints.'"

His use of "the faith" recalls the earlier phrase, "measure of the faith" (v. 3), which stipulates a standard of self-criticism: almost certainly Paul does not mean that every believer is given a different "measure" or amount of faith by God but rather that the quotient of Christian faith is equally measured for all believers by the core beliefs of Paul's gospel set out in the letter. As N. T. Wright nicely puts it, "The 'measure' here is not a kind of measuring-jug containing different amounts of faith, apportioned to different people, but a measuring-rod, the same for all, called 'faith.'"[31] The use of "faith" in verse 6 carries a similar theological freight: the prophet's exposition of scripture, as Wesley understands the gift, should agree with the Christian faith in both content and effect.

Although the word translated "analogy" (ἀναλογία) occurs only here in the NT, its basic meaning is well known from its wider use by schools of philosophy: an "analogy" relates two subjects in right proportion with each other. For Wesley, Paul's phrase "analogy of the faith" (12:6; κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως) stipulates an interpretive principle, or "rule of faith," that every use of scripture must exist in right proportion to the core beliefs of the Christian faith.

Maddox observes, "There were British voices in Wesley's century, like John Locke, who criticized allowing the Apostles' Creed or any authoritative 'analogy of faith' to shape one's interpretation of scripture. They argued that this contradicted the role of scripture as itself the 'rule of faith.'"[32] However, not only did the apostolic Rule of Faith come prior to the formation of the biblical canon and did not originate from it, this ecclesial rule subsequently functioned during the formation of scripture as *norma normans* ("a rule that rules") to confirm the apostolicity of all its parts, which self-evidently does not concern their apostolic authorship but rather the content and consequence of their instruction. In this sense, both creed and canon are *norma normata* ("a rule that is ruled").

A hermeneutical circle is thus forged for every faith communion of the apostolic tradition that ensures a right handling of the word of truth: this same apostolic rule that was first used in Christ's absence by his Spirit to guide the theological formation of his disciples, then supplied the canonization of scripture with its hermeneutics that continues to guide its reception and ongoing interpretation within today's church under the Spirit's direction—in Tertullian's apt phrase, of *gubernaculum interpretationis* or "governor for interpretation."

What, then, are the theological agreements that make up this apostolic grammar? Wesley charts a "grand scheme of doctrine" that narrates God's way of salvation that includes: "original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation." In its various articulations from antiquity forward, the apostolic Rule of Faith retains its narrative shape, its Trinitarian substance, and relates together the core beliefs of Christian discipleship in a way that allows believers to confess and communicate their faith in a coherent way to one another (as a mark of their oneness) and to outsiders (as a mark of their holiness or distinctive "otherness"). Accordingly, knowledge of God is inseparable from knowledge of God's Son and Spirit; and such knowledge is impossible apart from its revelation in the events of or actions within history: inaugurated by God's creation of all things, testified to by the prophets, climaxed in and by the life and work of the risen Jesus and the Pentecost of his Spirit, whose work continues in the transformed life and transforming ministry of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, and will be consummated by the creator's coming triumph at the *parousia* of the Lord Christ. The catholic and apostolic church's confession and transforming experience of this narrative of God's gospel, deeply rooted in and confirmed by its collective memory, supplies the rule's raw material. The results of biblical interpretation must ever conform to this confession and experience.

The communion of Methodists speaks with glad hearts of Wesley's *via salutis*—his "way of salvation." This is his "grand scheme of doctrine" that unifies scripture and both regulates and animates a Wesleyan reading of scripture. No part of this grand scheme departs from the doctrinal *loci* of the church's ecumenical creeds, especially articulated by Anglicanism's Articles of Religion. Yet no part is more strategic to Wesley's soteriology than the doctrine of new birth; no

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

reading of scripture can escape its impress. The believer's regeneration is the lynchpin that holds justification by faith and one's "present, inward salvation" together.

In his sermon "Great Privilege," Wesley explains that while justification occurs when the sinner trusts God to pardon him from the guilt of inherited and past sins, regeneration occurs when that new believer is released from sin's captive power to begin a new life under the direction of the Spirit. New birth involves a supernatural change in human nature. If God's justifying grace puts to rights a sinner's personal relationship with God, God's regenerating grace transforms the senses of her inmost soul. She becomes a child of God, reborn with God's image with new capacities for a participatory partnership with God. As Wesley put it, new birth occasions a "vast and mighty change."[33] All the resources necessary to live a holy life are given by God at our new birth, in the twinkling of God's eye: "as soon as he is born of God there is a total change in all his particulars—he sees the light of the world, he hears the voice of God, he feels the love of God shed abroad in his heart by God's Spirit. And now he may properly be said to live."[34]

When scripture's testimony to God's saving grace is understood Wesley's way, regeneration marks a gateway into the body of Christ where still other operations of divine grace begin the hard work of sanctification. Precisely because regeneration changes the will, the believer need not willfully sin. Precisely because regeneration transforms the senses, it is now possible to resist evil tempers and thoughts. Precisely because regeneration restores the image of a loving, truth-telling God within the believer, the believer is now assured of God's love and confident of participating in God's coming victory. Precisely because regeneration purifies the human spirit, God's Spirit can bear witness in our spirit, which in Wesley's understanding paves the path for a robust cooperation between God's people and God's Spirit as broker of God's sanctifying graces.

Central to Wesley's radical conception of Christian existence is this dynamic cooperation between the divine and human spirits that marks out the believer's new birth as God's child (cf. Rom 8). While new birth is a supernatural event that changes our nature, sanctification envisages an unfolding process during which God sanctifies the faithful believer in proportion to the amount and quality of grace received. The various practices of Christian discipleship—works of piety and mercy—when complemented by the ordinary means of grace ordained by the church occasion a profuse outpouring of God's salvation-creating grace that transforms the believer into a conspicuous saint. Every meaning and performance of scripture at its ecclesial location is analogous of this conception of salvation.

A Concluding Exhortation

In his famous comment about scripture's importance in the preface to his published sermons, Wesley famously writes, "I want to know one thing, the way to heaven: how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book! O give me that book! At any price, give me the Book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me."[35] While Wesley's exuberant note of scripture's endgame is sometimes taken at face value to dismiss him as a biased biblicist, his exhortation to readers of his sermons underscores two important features of the kind of biblical instruction we hope the WOVC will underwrite. Our intention is to encourage an approach to Bible study as God's saving word for God's people. We understand scripture's purchase precisely as Wesley understood it: it discloses a pathway to heaven—that is, a sacred place where God's victory over sin and death is realized. Scripture's referent is the Savior of God's creation, the incarnate Word, through whom we are forgiven and by whom we enjoy the presence of his sanctifying Spirit. While WOVC carries the theological freight of a particular people called Methodists for good and ill, we trust that it will be used by teachers and preachers, students and laypersons from every communion of the global church.

Wesley makes it clear by his own Bible practices that there is no shortcut in the hard work required in forming the competent reader of a text with as many moving parts as scripture. God's inspired instruction is not magically given nor are its redemptive ends magically produced. For our own day, Wesley stands as our mentor and exemplar in this regard: scripture is the Spirit's auxil-

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

iary for growing the church's wisdom; but such is received only by faithful readers who study the sacred text very carefully in expectation of hearing a sanctifying word from the Lord God Almighty.

Endnotes

1. Much of the present essay is an edited compilation of bits from several of my earlier studies of Wesley's conception and practice of scripture including "The Rule of Faith in Theological Hermeneutics" in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*. Ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 88–107; "Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture" (39–55) and "Facilitating Scripture's Future Role among Wesleyans" (107–122), in *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals,* ed. Barry Callen and Richard Thompson, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2004); "Wesley as Biblical Interpreter," in *Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 113–28; "John's John: A Wesleyan Theological Reading of 1 John," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (2011): 105–41; and, especially, "Reading Scripture, the Analogy of Faith, and the Literal Sense," in *The Word Written on Our Hearts: Wesley and Wesleyans in Scripture,* ed. Joel B. Green and David F. Watson (Dallas: Baylor University Press, 2012). A more general account of a theology of scripture and its practice, which depends upon a Wesleyan theological understanding of scripture—its nature and practices—as a Spirit-directed means of grace, is now found in Daniel Castelo and Robert W. Wall, *The Marks of Scripture: Rethinking the Nature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2019).

2. Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—in John Wesley," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 31.

3. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Vol I: Matthew to Acts (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), preface, para. 10.

4. Wesley, *Notes*, preface, para. 12.

5. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*, The Wesley Center Online, preface, para. 15.

6. For a list of five interpretive rules that follow from this conception of scripture, see Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., Vols. 1-4, *Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 1:57-59. What is lacking for his list is a sixth interpretive rule supplied in Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," Outler, *Sermons* 2:54–55. According to Wesley, the target of scripture's interpretation is to know the will of God, "which is our sanctification." Below I seek to apply this general rule to define, in Wesley's implied terms, scripture's "literal sense."

7. See Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995); S. J. Koskie, *Reading the Way to Heaven: A Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutics of Scripture*. JTISup 8 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

8. Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 10:482 ("An Address to the Clergy").

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Stephen E. Fowl, "The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture," in *Reading Scripture with the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 35–50. On this point, Fowl would distinguish Aquinas from the Reformers who were more keen to pursue a single literal sense, even if this sense is believed to be God's (rather than the author's) intended meaning.

12. Cf. Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

13. Fowl, "The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture," 49–50.

14. Brevard S. Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentttlichen Theologie,* ed. W. Zimmerli FS, H. Donner, R. Hanhart, and R. Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977) 80–95. Of course, the reception of scripture in the academy is also multifaceted, but based upon either new interpretive methods or new historical evidence about the author, the author's social world, and a more precise portrait of his first readers/auditors. Modern criticism's conception of a "multifaceted literal sense," then, is very different from what Fowl has in mind for Aquinas and I for Wesley!

15. Although well beyond the scope of this chapter, let me simply observe that a comparison

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

of Jonathan Edwards's explanatory notes on a sample of set texts in his *Blank Bible* and those in Wesley's *Notes*—along with the notes of other contemporary interpreters—will reflect their different readings of these texts and help secure this point, which otherwise is made with common sense.

16. Wall, "Wesley" in *Cambridge Companion,* 123–24. See Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture*, which stipulates that Wesley's use of scripture was regulated by this rule: "use the literal sense unless it contradicts another scripture or implies an Absurdity" (114).

17. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:54 ("The Nature of Enthusiasm").

18. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:55 ("The Nature of Enthusiasm").

19. This conclusion is not very different from Koskie's fluent description of a literal sense in that he also defines Wesley's conception as including its Christian rather than merely its verbal sense. See "Reading the Way to Heaven," 88–119. However, my definition assumes that the nature of God who addresses readers in scripture is living and present (Deut. 5:26; Matt 16:16; 1 Tim 3:15) and whose self-communication via scripture's "literal sense" is therefore more particular to the audience and so dynamic and multivoiced in substance and effect. The better way of testing this thesis is to compare different Wesley sermons based upon the same set text but preached or written for different audiences and at different stages of his life—a set text, for example, such as Eph 2:8-10 or John 3:8, among Wesley's most strategic. My findings from a cursory analysis are more in line with Fowl's idea of a "multivoiced literal sense" for ever changing audiences than a more static meaning based upon an unchanging theological grammar.

20. Found in Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 123. Wesley's nod to Romans and Galatians reflects his formal dependence upon the Reformation's Pauline canon within the canon. I have argued, however, that Wesley's true home is 1 John by which the rest of scripture, including Paul, is glossed. See Wall, "Wesley" in *Cambridge Companion,* 118–22.

21. For Wesley's routine use of a scholar's tools, see Randy Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope: John Wesley on the Bible," *MethRev* 3 (2011): 3–7. In responding to the anachronistic use of Wesley by Protestant fundamentalists, note especially Maddox's helpful "excursus on inerrancy" (913).

22. Especially K. G. Howcroft, "Reason, Interpretation and Postmodernism—Is There a Methodist Way of Reading the Bible?" *EpRev* 25 (1998): 28–42.

23. Outler puts it this way: "We can see in Wesley a distinctive theological method, with Scripture as its preeminent norm but interfaced with tradition, reason and Christian experience as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture." See "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—in John Wesley," in *Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas Langford (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 77.

24. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley, A.M.,* 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 5:164 ("To Dr. Rutherforth, March 28, 1768"). On this point, see Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith," 5–7.

25. E.g., S. B. Dawes, "John Wesley and the Bible," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 54, no. 1 (2003): 1–10.

26. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 50–66.

27. T. R. Preston, "Biblical Criticism, Literature, and the Eighteenth-Century Reader," in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England,* ed. I. Rivers (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 98–102.

28. Wesley, *NT Notes*, preface, para. 9.

28. Telford, *Letters*, 5:8 ("To John Newton, April 1, 1766").

29. The "general tenor" of scripture refers to its simultaneity. In Wesley's reading, every scripture agreed with the literal sense of every other scripture, since the literal sense of any biblical text, properly understood, testifies to God's way of salvation.

30. N. T. Wright, "Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 10:709.

31. Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith," 22.

32. Outler, *Sermons,* 2:279 ("The Witness of the Spirit, I").

33. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:193 ("The New Birth").

34. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:105 ("Preface to Sermons on Several Occasions").

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

ABBREVIATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

BCE	Before the Common Era	Heb.	Hebrew
CE	Common Era	LXX	Septuagint
c.	circa	MT	Masoretic Text
cf.	compare	NT	New Testament
ch(s).	chapter(s)	OT	Old Testament
esp.	especially	v(v).	verse(s)
Gk.	Greek		

References to John Wesley's Writings

Notes References to John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament and the Old Testament* are indicated by the biblical book, chapter, and verse upon which Wesley is commenting. For instance, the commentary on John 3:16 is marked with "(*Notes*, John 3:16)." Since there is neither a critical edition nor even a standard edition of these works for citation purposes (there are various publishing formats both hardbound and electronic) the editors have decided to use a format corresponding to how these works are *generally* cited today. If readers have other editions or formats of these works then they can simply look up the reference by the specific biblical text in question.

WJW References marked WJW are to the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*, general editors Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975—). Page 235 of volume 2, for instance, is "(WJW 2:235)." See below for a list of the published volumes in this series.

Jackson Material that is not in the Bicentennial Edition but is in the Jackson Edition of *The Works of John Wesley* is cited by volume and page number as "(Jackson 2:235)."

Telford Letters that have not yet appeared in the Bicentennial Edition but are in the Telford Edition of *The Letters of John Wesley* are cited by volume and page number as "(Telford 2:235)."

The published volumes of the WJW are as follows.

1 *Sermons I: 1-33*
2 *Sermons II: 34-70*
3 *Sermons III: 71-114*
4 *Sermons IV: 115-151*
7 *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*
9 *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*
10 *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*
11 *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*
12 *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*
13 *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*
18 *Journals and Diaries I (1735-1738)*
19 *Journal and Diaries II (1738-1743)*
20 *Journal and Diaries III (1743-154)*
21 *Journal and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*
22 *Journal and Diaries V (1765-1775)*
23 *Journal and Diaries VI (1776-1786)*
24 *Journal and Diaries VII (1787-1791)*
25 *Letters I (1721-1739)*
26 *Letters II (1740-1755)*
27 *Letters III (1756-1765)*
32 *Medical and Health Writings*

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

WESLEY ONE VOLUME COMMENTARY

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

GENESIS

Bill T. Arnold

Overview

The first book of the Bible is suitably named. The book is devoted to "beginnings," the meaning of the Greek title (*genesis*). The book's Hebrew title is traditionally translated "in the beginning" but more aptly "when God began to create" (1:1). As a book on origins, Genesis gives an account of the beginning of everything except God, who has no beginning and who sustains all creation.

Genesis is one of the most intentionally organized books of the Bible. Two large blocks of material of unequal size are arranged by the recurring term *offspring* or *descendants* in a structuring clause, most often translated "this is the account of" or "these are the descendants of." This clause introduces each section of text as either a new portion of narrative or a new list of descendants intermingled with narrative. Adapted most likely from an ancient practice of using genealogies, the clause was expanded in Genesis to bring order and literary symmetry to the presentation. From genealogies, it was modified to introduce narratives, and in one case it even introduces the creation of "the heavens and the earth" (2:4a introduces the unit that follows, despite the CEB's paragraph break). The clause is used eleven times to divide the materials of Genesis into the following narrative and enumerative texts:

Creation overture (1:1–2:3)

2:4, "this is the account of the heavens and the earth" (2:4–4:26)

5:1, "this is the record of Adam's descendants" (5:1–6:8)

6:9, "these are Noah's descendants" (6:9–9:29)

10:1, "these are the descendants of Noah's sons" (10:1–11:9)

11:10, "these are Shem's descendants" (11:10-26)

11:27, "these are Terah's descendants" (11:27–25:11)

25:12, "these are the descendants of Ishmael" (25:12-18)

25:19, "these are the descendants of Isaac" (25:19–35:29)

36:1, "these are the descendants of Esau" (repeated in 36:9; 36:1–37:1)

37:2, "this is the account of Jacob's descendants" (37:2–50:26)

In short, a clause traditionally used to introduce genealogies has been adapted in Genesis to introduce narratives and to provide an overarching structure for the book as a whole.

This ingenious technique occurs five times in the first large block of material in order to collect into one narrative string an account of primeval history (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10). Five more occurrences arrange the book's material on the ancestral narratives (11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2; plus an extra one in 36:9). The result is a structural, yet unbalanced, symmetry for the book that can be divided into two sections: eleven chapters in the first and thirty-nine in the second.

This macrostructure for Genesis, with its literary symmetry, expresses an important theological message. Linking the ancestral narratives to the primeval history through these genealogical notations, we see how Abraham and the nation of Israel serve as the instrument of salvation for all humanity, indeed for the entire cosmos. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same God of creation who enjoyed intimate fellowship with the first humans in the garden of delight. Thus, a theological dialogue is taking place between and within the two portions of Genesis, posed in a problem-solution sequence. The primeval history of Gen 1–11 establishes the sovereignty of God and the innate goodness of God's creation, including especially the human beings. And yet, the goodness of God's creation appears irretrievably lost—thoroughly ruined by human rebellion. Only God's grace prevents permanent loss. The faith of Noah and a few others in the faithful line of Seth make space for the grace of God. But these are temporary solutions. Ultimately, it is the faith of Israel's ancestors in Gen 12–50 (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and others), demonstrated dramatically through the

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

sometimes-excruciating experiences, that finally addresses the devastating results of human rebellion in the primeval history. The faith of Israel's ancestors is the solution to the world's problems. Genesis thus portrays God as the creating and revealing God, preparing for God's saving roles in the rest of the Bible.

A Wesleyan reading of Genesis shares with ecumenical Christianity a focus on the ruinous consequences of human sin, along with humanity's desperate need for salvation. Beyond this, a Wesleyan reading also emphasizes the essential goodness of God's creation and everything in it, including human beings. The faith and examples of Israel's ancestors assure today's readers that God's grace is active and available for all, to redeem and overcome the consequences of evil. Genesis teaches that all need salvation, and any can be saved. Wesleyans celebrate the sufficiency of God's grace to save to the utmost, just as grace was effective in the lives of Israel's ancestors.

Outline

I. Primeval History (1:1–11:26)

- A. Creation Overture (1:1–2:3)
- B. Human Origins, Part 1: The Garden of Delight (2:4–3:24)
- C. Human Origins, Part 2: Cain, Abel, and the First Human Institutions (4:1-26)
- D. The Scroll of Adam's Descendants (5:1-32)
- E. Divine-Human Marriages and Reasons for the Flood (6:1-8)
- F. The Great Flood (6:9–9:29)
- G. Table of Nations (10:1-32)
- H. Tower of Babel (11:1-9)
- I. Genealogy of Shem (11:10-26)

II. Ancestral Narratives (11:27–50:26)

- A. Call of Abram (11:27–12:9)
- B. Sojourn in Egypt (12:10-20)
- C. Abram and Lot Separate (13:1-18)
- D. The Battle of Siddim Valley and Its Aftermath (14:1-24)
- E. Promises Confirmed by Word and Covenant (15:1-21)
- F. Hagar and Ishmael (16:1-16)
- G. Covenant Details (17:1-27)
- H. Yahweh Visits Hebron, Then Sodom and Gomorrah (18:1–19:38)
- I. Abraham and Abimelech, King of Gerar (20:1-18)
- J. Isaac, Ishmael, and the Covenant at Beer-sheba (21:1-34)
- K. The Testing of Abraham (22:1-24)
- L. The Death of Sarah (23:1-20)
- M. The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (24:1-67)
- N. The Death of Abraham (25:1-18)
- O. Jacob and Esau (25:19-34)
- P. Isaac the Patriarch (26:1-35)
- Q. Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing (27:1-46)
- R. Jacob at Bethel (28:1-22)
- S. Jacob in Paddan-aram (29:1–31:55)
- T. Jacob at the Jabbok (32:1-32)
- U. Jacob and Esau Meet (33:1-20)
- V. Shechem and Dinah (34:1-31)
- W. Jacob's Return to Bethel and to Isaac (35:1-29)
- X. Esau the Father of Edom (36:1-43)
- Y. Joseph and His Brothers (37:1-36)
- Z. Judah and Tamar (38:1-30)
- AA. Joseph in Potiphar's House (39:1-23)
- BB. Master of Dreams, Master of Egypt (40:1–41:57)
- CC. The Sons of Jacob Are Reunited (42:1–45:28)
- DD. Jacob Settles in Goshen (46:1–47:31)
- EE. Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh (48:1-22)

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

FF. The Twelve Tribes of Israel (49:1-33)

GG. Burial of Jacob and Death of Joseph (50:1-26)

Primeval History (1:1–11:26)

The first of the two units of Genesis describes the origins of the cosmos, the earthly home of humans and all living things, and the beginnings of human civilization and societal institutions, including the origins of religion itself. Human rebellion mars an originally perfect creation. Chaos ensues. Simple disobedience of God's instructions escalates rapidly, leading to fratricide and the ruination of all human institutions. The depth and breadth of human depravity results in a catastrophic flood that destroys all humanity except for Noah and his family. God displays holy love by demanding punishment for the increasing and endlessly threatening wickedness of humanity, while also extending grace to the exceptionally righteous Noah from the faithful line of Seth. The image of God stamped into humanity holds the greatest potential for God's created order. But paradoxically, humans also have the potential for the greatest evil. Postdiluvian humanity fares no better. Humans spread across the earth, taking sin and destruction with them. A vain attempt to achieve glory and recognition leads to the building of a great city and tower, reaching to the sky, an example of human excess and pride. God condescends to their lowly tower to destroy it, then spreads humanity across the earth, now divided by diverse languages. The only hope for humanity seems to rest upon the line of descendants from Noah through his son Shem to the tenth generation, Abram, originally from Ur of the Chaldeans. Throughout the primeval history, God's love for humanity is relentless. God refuses to give up on humanity, despite the dark proclivities of human behavior evident at every turn. Through it all, God's grace preserves a faithful remnant.

Creation Overture (1:1–2:3)

This introductory creation account emphasizes God's sovereignty and the goodness of the cosmos. In Wesley's words, "from what we see of heaven and earth, we may infer the eternal power and godhead of the great Creator" (*Notes,* Gen 1:1). In a reflection of God's power and sovereignty, God created the universe without effort, simply speaking it into existence. Yet God's dominion is no simple determinism. The realities of the universe are not irrevocably intertwined in a relentless cause-and-effect chain of reactions in which human liberty and freedom have no part. This creation account introduces and prepares for the next one (2:4-25), which precludes such simple determinism by focusing especially on the humans in the paradise garden (Eden), where they are offered distinct choices.

These two creation accounts (1:1–2:3 and 2:4-25) are not scientific explanations of the universe's origins, and they make no claim to answer the "how" of creation. John Wesley was a pioneering theologian of his day for many reasons, one of which was his interest in the physical sciences. His writings reflect a fascination with the findings of astronomy, which he used to reflect upon the wonder, glory, and wisdom of God in creation. He was clearly up-to-date on the latest developments in the field of natural philosophy (what we call "science"), especially the discoveries of Isaac Newton (1642–1727) and Edmond Halley (1656–1742). We may speculate that Wesley today would be what we today consider a theistic evolutionist. Today's heirs to his efforts of bringing faith and science together should not take these opening chapters of the Bible as a narrow account of the world's material origins, but rather as a careful theological treatise on God's desired function for each component of the cosmos.

Of the literature of the ancient world, only the Old Testament holds the conviction that a single God was alone at creation and responsible for its effects. "When God began to create" (1:1) is one of the most remarkable opening lines ever, especially considering the polytheistic and pantheistic world in which it was written. Israel's beliefs about God as creator and the nature of the universe are set out here in particularly careful terms. Other passages of scripture assume what we learn here or assert additional specifics about creation. But only here, in this seven-day outline of literary formula and symmetry, does the Bible establish a paradigm for God's creative activities.

The opening sentence has three parts: a temporal clause ("When God began to create," 1:1),

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

continuing with a parenthetical statement on the state of creation at the beginning ("the earth was without shape or form," 1:2), and concluding with the main clause ("God said, 'Let there be light,'" 1:3). While this first sentence doesn't itself express the later doctrine of creation "out of nothing" (the early Jewish-Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*), it's compatible with the intent of that doctrine.

The parenthetical statement (1:2) details three circumstances of the cosmos at its beginning: The "earth . . . without shape or form" portrays earth as undeveloped or *pre*-developed, an unproductive emptiness rather than ominously chaotic. The "dark over the deep sea" is likewise not a threatening presence but represents the absence of God's life-giving light that is to come. "God's wind" introduces God's presence on the scene and anticipates God's dramatic decree.

Everything changes at once with simple but effective divine speech (1:3). God's creative action requires no exertion or exhaustion. "Light" appears in order to separate and divide—light from darkness, day from night—and makes possible the alternating sequence of days to follow in the week of creation (1:4). This is "good" because it is precisely what God intended and satisfies God in every respect. In ancient Near Eastern thought, the giving of a name to something newly made is the culminating and final creative act. The naming of "Day" and "Night" (1:5) completes the creative process and perhaps also determines their functions in God's creative order. The formulaic pattern for creating—*evening and morning, day x*—is now set for the rest of the week of creation.

In the understanding of the universe that was common in the ancient world, mountains at the ends of a flat disk-shaped earth support a domed firmament or multilayered sky. The sun, moon, and stars cross this dome in regular patterns, and chambers above the dome hold water that occasionally falls as rain. Water also exists beneath the earth in subterranean seas, the "springs of the deep sea" (7:11). God establishes these cosmic elements effortlessly, again, and names the dome "Sky" (1:8).

A divine decree gathers the waters under the Sky, exposing the dry land (1:9-13). God names them "Seas" and "Earth," and these also are "good," satisfying precisely their God-given functions. The essential components of the universe are given names: Day, Night, Sky, Earth, and Seas. This completes their creation and sets their functions in the cosmic order. The other components of the universe derive from these or are added to them. In the first act of derivative creation, God calls forth a new element of the universe from one of the primary components: vegetation from earth (1:11-12). This, too, is "good," just as God planned it.

God makes two great lights and sets them in "the dome of the sky" as lamps to become signs and seasons throughout the years (1:14-19). Many of Israel's neighbors worshipped the sun and moon as astral deities, with names similar to the Hebrew words for *sun* (the deity Shamash; Heb. *šemeš*, "sun") and *moon* (the deity Yarikh; Heb. *yārēaḥ*, "moon"). Thus, here they are simply the "larger light" and "smaller light" to avoid the Hebrew terms and any appearance of referring to other gods. The sun and moon have been stripped of any possibility of serving as objects of worship or veneration. They are physical or material lamps, rising and setting at the command of the great creator. And this is also "good," just what God wanted.

In another supplementary act of creation, God calls forth swarming creatures for the waters and birds for the sky (1:20-23). The first occasion for divine blessing, "be fertile and multiply," is a call for the water and sky creatures to fill their domains (1:22). The capacity to reproduce distinguishes "living things" from the sun, moon, stars, and so forth. Living creatures continue God's creativity by filling up and inhabiting the formerly empty and uninhabitable, the formless void (1:2). The fifth day also yields "good" things, just as God wanted.

Now God provides "every kind of living thing" to fill up and inhabit their respective domains (1:24-31). The types of animals—fish, fowl, and land animals—have appropriate physical traits for their domains: water, sky, and land. Land creatures are of three types: cattle capable of domestication, creeping things, and wild animals (1:24-25). Humankind is a subset of these living creatures. The creation of the human is such a momentous event in the narration that a different sort of divine language is used (1:26). Previously God has spoken items into existence ("let there

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

be"), ordered a redeployment of an item ("let the waters . . . come together"), or called on the primary components of the cosmos to bring forth secondary creatures of their own accord ("let the earth grow plant life"). In contrast, the plural pronouns *us* and *our* in 1:26 signal the unique centrality of this moment of creation. This is a purposeful and measured act. The blessing, like that for other living creatures (1:22), is a mandate to fill up and inhabit that portion of the cosmos set apart specifically for humanity (1:28).

The language of "God's own image" or "divine image" (1:27; later known as the *imago Dei*) is royal terminology used in the ancient world to portray a king or pharaoh as the divinely appointed representative of the kingdom. For Wesley, the image of God in humanity is intensely relational, the very emblem of holy love. The threefold image of God is, first, a *natural* image, being essentially an immortal and spiritual essence, endowed with understanding, will, and liberty. At the beginning of God's perfect creation, human life was characterized by understanding and reason that was rightly directed toward truth, and free will that was rightly directed toward God's holy love. The image of God is, second, a *political* image, bestowing to humans dominion over the created order just as God has dominion over the cosmos. As God's vice-regents on earth, humans are to be channels of God's blessings to fellow creatures and caretakers of the created order. And the image of God is, third, a *moral* image, created "according to God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24, author's translation; cf. Col 3:10). Unlike other creatures of God's creation, the humans were created with the capacity for God, to relate to God rightly, and to know, love, obey, and enjoy God forever. The result is that love, justice, mercy, truth, and holiness were innate to humans at creation and were evaluated as "supremely good" along with the rest of creation (1:31) (see *Notes*, Gen 1:26).

A final divine evaluation assesses the whole of creation, instead of simply the creatures of day six (1:31). For Wesley, this meant that humanity came from the hands of the creator "pure from every sinful blot" ("The New Birth," WJW 2:188). Central to Wesleyan theology is the idea that evil didn't exist "at all in the original nature of things" and was "no more the necessary result of matter, than it was the necessary result of spirit" ("God's Approbation of His Works," WJW 2:387-399). The unmitigated goodness of God's creation, including especially the goodness of humanity, is at the heart of a thoroughly Wesleyan understanding of grace.

The conclusion of the creation account on the seventh day differs from the other days of the creative week (2:1-3). The phrase "heavens and the earth . . . were completed" is similar to that used for the completion of the wilderness tabernacle in Sinai, which constructed an earthly dwelling place for God (Exod 40:33). Here the cosmos-building project results in a temple for God's sovereign rule. The concept of "rest" is simple cessation of work, not a break from the weariness of work (2:2-3). Divine blessing this time consecrates the seventh day, elevating the concept of Sabbath and endowing it with the best of God's intentions for the cosmos. Indeed, the significance of the Sabbath throughout Israel's history can hardly be overstated. The seven-day pattern of this creation account transforms something as simple as the weekly calendar, with its regular twenty-four-hour periods, into a constant reminder of God's creative sovereignty. Every week of human history becomes a stroll through creation itself, summoning the reader to reject dominion over time and all the uses we humans have for time. The reader is invited to acknowledge the lordship of the creator over time itself and therefore to reject one's autonomy by embracing God's dominion over time and over oneself.

Human Origins, Part 1: The Garden of Delight (2:4–3:24)

A second account of creation (2:4-25) identifies Israel's God, Yahweh, or simply "the LORD," as the creating God of the first account (1:1–2:3). By putting these two chapters side-by-side, the text claims that Israel's loving and redeeming "LORD" is the very same singular and sovereign God who created all that is. This second account emphasizes the intimacy between the LORD Yahweh and creation itself, including especially the humans in the garden of Eden (see below on the name *Eden*).

Here is the first of eleven occurrences of the book's structuring clause: "this is the account of the heavens and the earth" (2:4). This clause organizes Genesis into eleven portions of text. Each

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

introduces either a list of descendants of a lead character, and thus *enumerates*, or a new narrative about the character or about his descendants, and thus *narrates*. This one is unique because it introduces “the heavens and the earth,” linking this creation account with 1:1–2:3.

Whereas 1:26-27 presented the creation of humanity as the culminating and climactic event of a six-day creation period, this narrative makes humanity the centerpiece of a beautiful garden to enjoy life with the Lord God (2:4b-9). The garden is a delicate balance of water and luxuriant plant life, including “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” and, at its center, “the tree of life.” Like a divine potter, the Lord God shaped the human being from the dust (2:7), linking the human to the ground and presenting him as the solution to the lack of someone to till the ground (2:5). The human becomes earth’s keeper (2:15). The Lord God breathed into the lump of clay, creating a living being, and distinguishing the man from other animals by his role, by his centrality in the garden, and in the detail with which his creation is described (contrast with 2:19). The name *Eden* means “delight” and represents a place of paradisiacal perfection (2:8). Fruit from the “tree of life” resulted in an unnaturally long lifespan, perhaps even immortality (2:9; see 3:22). The “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” may refer to cognitive enlightenment for those who consume its fruit. With Wesley, we may also assume it yielded knowledge *about* the garden’s human inhabitants rather than *for* them. It represented “an express revelation of the will of God,” and by means of its presence in the garden, God could experience the goodness of human obedience (*Notes,* Gen 2:9).

The four fresh-water rivers flowing from Eden’s river irrigate the surrounding regions. Earth at its inception lacked water and someone to till it and keep it. These rivers, together with the human in the garden, supply all earth’s needs (2:10-14). The human is God’s representative in the garden to farm it and to take care of it (2:15). The sole stipulation is the first commandment of God to humanity, “don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” which is the only requirement for maintaining peace and tranquility in the garden of delight (2:17).

For the first time, God appraises something as “not good”: the human has no companion or counterpart (2:18-20). The expression “a helper that is perfect for him” does not imply subordination or inferior rank but rather the need for someone suitable to help the man cultivate the earth (2:15), as well as suitable for marriage and procreation (2:24). This explains the origins of animals on the earth and their closeness to the man in many respects, although none was perfectly matched to the man as a companion. The man participated in the creative process by naming each animal as it was created (2:20).

No suitable companion was found among the animals created out of the ground (2:19), so one was created using material from the man himself (2:21-25). Rather than a potter working with clay (2:7, 19), here the Lord God is a builder constructing a living work of art. When the man sees the woman, he uses the word *finally*, signaling his joy at meeting a suitable companion in distinction to the animals (2:23). His name for her, “woman,” a wordplay on “man” (see *ishshah* and *ish* in CEB notes), stresses the intimacy of male-female companionship. He and she belong to each other in a way that signifies what it is to be human, and which distinguishes man and woman together over against the animals. Marriage is defined here as a reuniting of two parts of a single whole (2:24-25). The mysterious power driving the sexes together is explained as the common fleshly bond they have at their origins at the beginning of time. The complete absence of shame is remarkable (2:25). Humans after leaving the garden of delight instinctively understand shame.

The second creation account thus explains the beauty and nature of human existence, including the rich intimacy of human relationships with the earth, with animals, with each other, and especially with God. Genesis 3 explains the brokenness of human existence and the loss of such intimacy in its relationship with God and in all other relationships (3:1-24). Although nowhere called “the fall” in the Old Testament, this text later became the cornerstone for the church’s reflection on the human condition. Wesley, for his part, explained the presence of pain and evil in the world as a result of the liberty of humanity, “a will exerting itself in various affections,” without which the rest of God’s grand creation would have been of no use. “Had he not been a free as well as an intelligent being, his understanding would have been as incapable of holiness, or any kind of vir-

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

tue, as a tree or a block of marble" (Sermon 57: "On the Fall of Man," §1). Having this freedom, humankind chose evil over good, and sin entered the world, bringing with it misery of every kind.

The whole church has never come to a commonly accepted understanding of a doctrine of "original sin." Most agree that Gen 3 explains in some way the general fallen nature of humanity, and that Gen 4–11 illustrates the depth and breadth of sin's penetration and ruination of the cosmos. The strong influence of Augustine among Protestants has led to widespread belief that all humanity is implicated in Adam's sin. As the *New England Primer* put it in 1690: "In Adam's fall / We sinned all."

Wesley's understanding of original sin was consonant with Augustine's, although nuanced considerably. For example, Wesley edited article IX ("Of Original or Birth-Sin") of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the doctrinal standards of the Church of England, to emphasize the transmission of a corrupt nature but not a transmission of guilt to all future generations of people. Prior to Augustine, however, the earliest Christian traditions generally didn't read Gen 3 in the terms that would eventually be formulated as a distinct doctrine of the church. Indeed, Gen 3 doesn't support the traditional doctrine of original sin, either as a genetic transmission of sin *and* guilt or as an attribution of blame to all humanity through the rebellion of the first set of human parents. Objections to this way of understanding original sin are raised by the Bible itself, as well as by evolutionary biology and ethical, philosophical, and theological reflection on the idea that God holds humans responsible for the brokenness and rebellious actions of past generations. Indeed, the Bible shows little interest in the origins of human sinfulness among our ancestors but rather shows an intense interest in the universality of human sinfulness, its character as a disease infecting all humans, and its social effects. Rather than "original sin," we might think of a strong, primal desire or tendency to continue sinning, which is characteristic of all humans. A Wesleyan reading of Gen 3 acknowledges the Bible's basic intuitions about sin, including its corrupting effects and the notion that all humans share in its universal solidarity.

Snake imagery in the ancient world credited serpents with a special knowledge of death, perhaps because of their ability to produce venom or their ability to renew themselves by sloughing off skin (3:1-7). Early Jewish and Christian interpreters identified the serpent as Satan. Wesley also assumes the serpent was Satan, "who was a liar from the beginning," mixing truth and falsehood together (Sermon 57: "On the Fall of Man," §I.1). The serpent's question is no innocent conversation starter. It exaggerates and turns inside out the details of God's command in 2:17, feigning astonishment and making the command appear unreasonable (3:1). The woman's response is at first resolute and correcting (3:2-3). Yet the serpent's challenge has raised the possibility of an alternate view, perhaps reflected in her slight addition, "and don't touch it." In a clear turn in the conversation, the serpent treacherously challenges God's authority and character, using half-truths to distort the whole truth (cf. 3:4 with 2:17). Their eyes will indeed be opened, and they will certainly gain knowledge, but the whole truth has been clouded by misinformation. The misdeed is infectious and communal; the guilt is shared by both (3:6-7). Once their eyes are opened, their innocence is irreversibly lost (cf. 2:25).

Swift and terrible annihilation of the humans seems warranted (3:8-13). They have tossed aside the rule of God, they have openly rebelled, and according to Wesley, their misdeed shows a determination not to seek happiness "in God, but in the world, in the works of his hands." The death spoken of here is therefore a spiritual death, "the loss of the life and image of God," so that the humans "became unholy as well as unhappy" (Sermon 45: "The New Birth," §I.2-3). The sound of the Lord God in the garden signals unexpected grace (3:8-9). The loving call, "Where are you?" graciously beckons them to return, "who would otherwise have eternally fled from God" (Sermon 57: "The Fall of Man," §I.3). The man's initial explanation is truthful but feeble. God immediately asks two penetrating questions intended to explore the contours of the deed (3:10-11). The man responds with recrimination and deflection of blame, the first responses of guilty humans ever since (3:12-13).

Having no need to hear the serpent's excuses, the Lord God announces the verdicts (3:14-19). The punishments are natural and logical corollaries of the roles each guilty party has played, a feature characteristic of Old Testament justice.

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

God's grace is evident even in discipline. The curse explains why serpents crawl on the ground and why enmity exists between snakes and humans (3:14-15). The serpent has fallen from being the shrewdest of all animals to being among the most lowly. That a promise of victory over the serpent occurs in the midst of judgment shows that God remembers mercy. From the beginning of the world, God connected "the grand promise of salvation with the very sentence of condemnation" (Sermon 57: "On the Fall of Man," §I.3). Early Christians interpreted this promise as a prophecy of Christ's victory over Satan, the woman's seed crushing the serpent's head, the so-called *protevangelium*, the "first good news." Wesley agreed but also spoke more generally of this enmity as representing "a continual struggle between the wicked and the good . . . which will continue while there is a godly man on this side heaven, and a wicked man on this side hell" (*Notes*, Gen 3:15). The punishment explains for ancient Israelites the close association between sexual pleasure and the pain of childbirth (3:16). Her punishment impairs her major roles in life as the man's companion (2:20-24). These are *descriptive* results of sin, detailing the nature of life after the transgression and resulting from it. They are not God's *prescriptive* plan, decreeing God's first and best will for the serpent, the woman, and the man. It is too late for that. These are the unfortunate consequences of the garden rebellion. The punishment explains why life and toil are inextricable and death is unavoidable (3:17-19). The man and woman are punished, but the serpent and the ground are "cursed" (3:14, 17). Because of the transgression, the ground will become intractable to man's cultivation, resulting in painful toil.

The account closes with explanations for Eve's name, the common use of clothing for humans, and why the loss of Eden is irreversible (3:20-24). The Lord God lovingly replaces their insufficient loincloths of sewn fig leaves with garments of pelt more suitable for their new lives outside Eden. Similar to certain ancient Near Eastern myths, this text explains why humans must die: they have lost access to the tree of life. Unlike those myths, however, the Lord God banishes the humans from Eden as an act of grace and mercy. God's punishment might have been more severe, but humanity "was only sent to a place of toil, not to a place of torment" (*Notes*, Gen 3:24). By the act of banishment, God ensures their genuine humanity instead of a lesser option, in which they are trapped in a miserable immortality. Human life, therefore, is authentic only in this balance between boundless potential and a realization that life is short.

Human Origins, Part 2: Cain, Abel, and the First Human Institutions (4:1-26)

The birth of a child introduces the narrative of Cain's murder of Abel (4:1-7). Life is different outside Eden. Conception and birth are marked by the changes signaled in God's list of punishments (3:14-19). The occupations of Cain and Abel, farmer and shepherd, may reflect strife between social groups in early human civilization, or more simply the need for a division of labor and cooperation because of the harsh new realities of life outside the garden of delight (4:2). We are not told why God favored Abel's offering above Cain's (4:3-5). The text implies the problem was with Cain himself rather than with his sacrifice (cf. also Heb 11:4; 1 John 3:12). This is the Bible's first use of the word *sin*, and it is described as a persistent impulse toward rebellion like a wild beast "waiting at the door ready to strike" (4:7). The problem in the garden of delight follows the humans outside the garden and threatens their lives because they carry the problem within themselves. Yet this is an invitation to Cain to "do the right thing" that he might "be accepted." Wesley observes, "See how early the gospel was preached, and the benefit of it here offered even to one of the 'chief of sinners'" (*Notes*, Gen 4:7). The appeal, "you must rule over it," works only if Cain has some degree of freedom to master his own impulses, and we would add today, enabled by the prevenient grace of God. If he fails to overcome them, he will suffer the same consequences as his parents or worse.

Next comes a premeditated murder (4:8-16). Transgression of the word of God by the man and woman in the garden of delight continues in a more disturbing way among their children. Cain is driven even farther from tillable soil, beyond "the LORD's presence," farther east of Eden (4:14, 16). Cain's incensed rejoinder, "Am I my brother's

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

LUKE

Mary K. Schmitt

Overview

The attribution of this Gospel to the figure "Luke" is not something mentioned in the text itself. In the tradition, this designation becomes important when the four Gospels are brought together, as a way to distinguish them. The Gospels are always intended to be good news (εὐαγγέλιον) about Jesus Christ. The designation "according to Luke" is secondary because the Gospel writers themselves are not the subject and don't want to draw attention to themselves. Nevertheless, the lack of this designation and the uncertainty around who Luke was has caused difficulty at times. If apostolicity was a primary concern when canonicity was being established, the Gospel of Luke presents some challenges. Luke was not a disciple of Jesus; he appears to say as much by claiming that he has spoken to the eyewitnesses (1:2), which suggests he himself was not an eyewitness. For this reason, the Gospel of Luke faced some opposition from persons who thought the lack of apostolicity was grounds for preventing canonization.

The early church, nevertheless, found this Gospel to be faithfully preserving the good news about Jesus and did canonize it. Not only that, but the early church also deemed it appropriate to accept a second book purportedly attributed to the same author Luke. The similarities among Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) have resulted in the Gospel of Luke being separated in the canon from its sequel Acts. While the final placement of Acts in the NT canon divides the two, thus giving Acts its own discrete role to perform within scripture, most would agree that they were written by the same narrator to the same recipient as a continuous narrative. The designation of "Luke" as the author of both books results in a large portion of the New Testament being attributed to a figure who was not a firsthand witness to Jesus's ministry. This would be a problem if Wesleyans believed that inspiration lay with only the original authors of the text. Wesleyans are committed to the role that the Holy Spirit—an important figure in the Gospel of Luke—plays in inspiration and interpretation of biblical texts. Thus, for the sake of a theological reading that focuses on the Gospel and the person witnessed to in the text (Jesus), this commentary will refer to the author simply as "Luke" while acknowledging that there are historical and canonical challenges that arise from so doing.

In the third Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as a Savior who, in particular, has come to minister to those who sometimes have been overlooked or outcast. Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favor" (4:19), the year of Jubilee. The kingdom of God is coming and bringing a time period of radical, eschatological reversal. This is good news for those on the margins of society. Jesus spends the majority of his time in this Gospel with those who make the religious leaders nervous. He dines not only with Pharisees but also with sinners. There are women who travel with Jesus and his disciples and who care for his needs (8:1-3). A Samaritan becomes the ultimate example of what it means to love one's neighbor (10:25-37). According to Luke, the kingdom of God comprises tax collectors, sinners, women, Gentiles, the poor, and the lost.

A Wesleyan reading of Luke highlights several key themes in Luke. First, salvation is available to all. At the heart of Wesleyan theology is a God who loves and pursues humanity and the world. Luke presents Jesus as repeatedly reaching out in prevenient grace, even before persons come to Jesus. The grace that Jesus brings is not reserved in Luke for a limited few, but is available to all—especially those on the margins of society. Second, a Wesleyan reading highlights that eschatological redemption results in restoration. There is an expectation that encounters with Jesus will transform individuals, communities, and the whole created order. Salvation is manifest in transformed lives. Jesus goes to the home of the tax collector Zacchaeus, and he commits to giving away half his money and paying back fourfold anyone he cheated (19:8). As the story of Zacchaeus makes clear, the transformation will have concrete and often monetary implications.

John Wesley draws attention to the role of money in Luke's Gospel. Luke includes many parables about money and wealth that are not found in other Gospels. Even sayings about giving

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

or money that are found in other Gospels take on a new urgency in light of the attention that Luke gives to fiscal responsibility. Wesley's sermon "The Use of Money," which contains his advice to "gain all you can," "save all you can," and "give all you can" (WJW 2:266–80, sermon 50, "The Use of Money"), is based on Luke 16. In fact, a majority of Wesley's sermons on Luke concern the proper use of money. Money matters because the use of money reveals what you value. Moreover, the use of one's money is a concrete demonstration of whether or not one's heart and life has been transformed.

Both Luke and Wesley invite readers to enter into this radical kingdom where all are welcome, where lives are transformed, and where money is used to further the kingdom of God. Those who belong to the Wesleyan tradition can find in this Gospel an invitation to reevaluate our theologies and our practices. At the heart of Wesleyan tradition has been always a calling to live at the margins of society. Reading this Gospel is a call to return to our core values as Wesleyans and an exhortation to live out those values on a daily basis in our own lives and in the life of Wesleyan communities.

Outline

I. Prologue (1:1-4)

II. Birth and Childhood (1:5–2:52)
   - A. John's Birth Announced (1:5-25)
   - B. Jesus's Birth Announced (1:26-38)
   - C. Mary Visits Elizabeth (1:39-56)
   - D. John's Birth (1:57-80)
   - E. Jesus's Birth (2:1-20)
   - F. Simeon and Anna Give Thanks for Jesus (2:21-39)
   - G. Jesus Growing Up, God's Son (2:40-52)

III. Preparation for Ministry (3:1–4:12)
   - A. Ministry of John (3:1-20)
   - B. Jesus's Baptism (3:21-22)
   - C. Genealogy of Jesus (3:23-38)
   - D. Temptation (4:1-13)

IV. Ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50)
   - A. Jesus Visits the Synagogue at Nazareth (4:14-30)
   - B. Jesus Ministers in Capernaum (4:31-44)
   - C. Jesus Calls Disciples (5:1-11)
   - D. Jesus Challenges Religious Authorities (5:12–6:11)
   - E. The Sermon on the Plain (6:12-49)
   - F. Jesus Heals the Sick and Raises the Dead (7:1-15)
   - G. Jesus Compared to John (7:16-35)
   - H. Women Disciples (7:36–8:3)
   - I. Jesus Speaks in Parables (8:4-21)
   - J. Jesus Performs Wondrous Signs (8:22-56)
   - K. Following Jesus, the Messiah (9:1-27)
   - L. Jesus Prepares to Go to Jerusalem (9:28-50)

V. Journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27)
   - A. Jesus Sets Out for Jerusalem (9:51-62)
   - B. Seventy-Two Sent Out to Minister (10:1-24)
   - C. Parable about the Good Neighbor (10:25-37)
   - D. Jesus Instructs the Disciples (10:38–11:13)
   - E. Confrontation with Those Seeking Signs (11:14-36)
   - F. Warnings about Pharisees (11:37-54)
   - G. Warnings for Disciples (12:1–13:9)
   - H. Transformative Power of the Kingdom of God (13:10-35)
   - I. Table Fellowship in the Kingdom of God (14:1-34)
   - J. Parables about Lost Things Being Found (15:1-32)
   - K. Parables about Wealth (16:1-31)
   - L. Examples of Faith (17:1-19)

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

M. Signs of the Kingdom of God (17:20-37)

N. Parables about Prayer (18:1-14)

O. Inclusion in the Kingdom of God (18:15-30)

P. Jesus Heads to Jerusalem (18:31-42)

Q. Instructions about Living Responsibly (19:1-27)

VI. Passion Narrative (19:28–23:56)

A. Triumphal Entry (19:28-48)

B. Controversies with Authorities (20:1-47)

C. Jesus Teaching in Jerusalem (21:1-37)

D. Passover Meal (22:1-38)

E. In the Garden of Gethsemane (22:39-53)

F. Jesus before Authorities (22:54–23:25)

G. Jesus Is Crucified (23:26-49)

H. Jesus Placed in Tomb (23:50-56)

VII. Resurrection Accounts (24:1-53)

A. Empty Tomb (24:1-12)

B. Road to Emmaus (24:13-35)

C. More Resurrection Appearances (24:36-49)

D. Ascension (24:50-53)

Prologue (1:1-4)

Luke begins his Gospel with a brief introduction, in which it is revealed that Luke is not the first to write a Gospel. He writes that "many people have already" written accounts (1:1). A careful reading of the Gospel of Luke reveals that Luke most likely knew a version of the Gospel of Mark; perhaps he knew other canonical Gospels as well. Acknowledging that he is familiar with other Gospels is particularly interesting given that Luke's Gospel is not an eyewitness account. Luke's name is not one of the names of the twelve apostles. Some interpreters have conjectured that Luke himself joins the story as a Christian around the time of the events described in Acts 16, at which point the narrator switches to "we" language. After researching and talking with "original eyewitnesses," Luke too has decided to write "a carefully ordered account" (1:3).

Even though he was not an eyewitness, the reason he gives for writing a Gospel account is so that the reader might "have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received" (1:4). While this could be understood as an indication Luke thinks the other Gospels to which he refers lack something, it also could be read as an appeal that Luke's Gospel be read as equally valid though not written by one of the apostles. A charitable reading of the text suggests that we should assume Luke does not intend for his account to replace the other Gospels, but to be read alongside them. Luke understands himself as another faithful mediator of the truth of the Gospel. This is entirely consistent with Wesley's account of the inspiration of scripture. For Wesley, God's word provides confidence for salvation, but it is necessarily mediated through human witness to God's works. "The Scripture, therefore, being delivered by men divinely inspired, is a rule sufficient to itself" (Jackson 10:141). The prologue to Luke's Gospel is Wesleyan theology on scripture exquisitely stated.

The Gospel of Luke is addressed to Theophilus. The addressee could be a person, perhaps a Gentile Christian leader or benefactor with this name. The name Theophilus also could be roughly translated "friend of God" or "God-lover." Thus, the address might function as a kind of a general invitation. This Gospel is addressed to anyone who loves God. Wesleyan theology is a theology of holy love. If Luke is addressed to those who love God, this Gospel may prove to be particularly important for Wesleyan theological reflections. The assumption that the addressee already loves God also may explain the great emphasis on loving the neighbor in Luke's Gospel. The proper response to the love of God is to love one's neighbor as well.

Birth and Childhood (1:5–2:52)

John's Birth Announced (1:5-25)

The attention that Luke gives to John's birth underscores that his Gospel is a continuation of the account of God's faithfulness to Israel that is being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Anyone familiar with the biblical narrative immediately will recognize the common trope of the barren couple. Zechariah and Elizabeth—like Abraham and

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Elkanah and Hannah—are unable to conceive and are advanced in years. The announcement of John's birth is in keeping with the Old Testament story of God's provision of children through miraculous conceptions. Yet, Luke chooses to subtly alter the narrative in one way. In Genesis, it is Sarah who does not believe that she will become pregnant. In Luke, Zechariah does not believe. As a result, he is silenced, and Elizabeth becomes the one who proclaims that the pregnancy is "the Lord's doing" (1:25). This is the first of many occurrences in Luke where women are portrayed as exemplars of the faith. Luke is invested in demonstrating the role of both women and men in the kingdom of God.

The events surrounding John's birth parallel the events of Jesus's birth (see Luke 1:26-38). The angel Gabriel appears and gives instructions to Zechariah and Mary, respectively, about the names and roles of the two boys. The boy John will have the Holy Spirit resting on him from birth, and he will have the spirit and power of Elijah. The comparison to Elijah makes clear that John's primary role is to prepare the way for Jesus.

Jesus's Birth Announced (1:26-38)

The announcement of Jesus's birth comes to Mary. She is described as God's "favored one" (1:28), although she continues to refer to herself as a "the Lord's servant" (1:38). Her response to the announcement stands in striking contrast to Zechariah's response (see Luke 1:18). Mary believes she will become pregnant. She does not understand how because she has never been with a man. Nevertheless, she trusts that God can do anything. The announcement to Mary continues to underscore the central role of women in Luke's Gospel. Wesley was concerned to note that the emphasis on Mary in Luke's account does not lead to the conclusion that Mary should be worshipped (*Notes*, on Luke 1:28). Luke is clear that Jesus, and only Jesus, is God in this passage. Still, Luke elevates the role of women by giving attention in these first few chapters to the women who carried, birthed, and cared for Jesus and John.

The naming of Jesus as the Son of God and the involvement of the Holy Spirit in Mary's pregnancy suggest that these verses can be read through a trinitarian lens. The Holy Spirit will come on Mary so she can conceive. Jesus is declared to be God's Son. The advent of Christ is the decision and the active will of all members of the Trinity. Though some have argued that the official doctrine of the Trinity is developed later, Wesleyan theology assumes that tradition will help shape our interpretation of scripture. Thus, a trinitarian reading of Luke is a faithful Wesleyan reading.

Mary Visits Elizabeth (1:39-56)

Upon receiving the news from the angel Gabriel, Mary goes to visit Elizabeth. The scene is particularly important because it is one of only a few dialogues between two women recorded in scripture. When Mary arrives, the baby within Elizabeth leaps for joy. Even before birth John is fulfilling the role of announcing the coming of the Lord. Elizabeth also praises Mary for her belief that the Lord fulfills promises.

The song Mary sings is referred to as the *Magnificat*. The song is reminiscent of Hannah's song (2 Sam 2:1-10), with its themes of reversal and announcement of one who will come to rule this upside down kingdom. Mary's song contains similar themes, many of which foreshadow Jesus's ministry in Luke's Gospel. Jesus has come to shake up the established order. God lifts up the lowly and brings down the proud and arrogant. God fills the hungry, but sends "the rich away empty-handed" (1:53). Luke's Gospel is often described as good news for the poor, but Mary's song also introduces the idea that the message of this Gospel will prove challenging to those who have benefited from certain social and economic systems. Many of Wesley's sermons on Luke address issues of financial responsibility. Wesley insists that fiscal responsibility is an element of faithful discipleship.

John's Birth (1:57-80)

On the eighth day after his birth, in keeping with Jewish tradition, Elizabeth and Zechariah have John circumcised. The crowd who gathers to celebrate with Elizabeth wants to name the boy after his father, but Elizabeth insists "his name will be John" (1:60). Zechariah confirms the name in writing. Immediately, he is able to speak. Zechariah's praise, known as the *Benedictus*, parallels the song of Mary in the previous section (see Luke

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

1:39-56). God has provided a deliverer for Israel, to rescue them from the power of their enemies in keeping with the covenant to Abraham. Zechariah names the child John as "a prophet of the Most High" who "will go before the Lord to prepare his way" (1:76). The prophecy begins with God's faithfulness toward Israel, but concludes with God's compassion for all those who are in darkness, hinting at the inclusion of not only Jews but also Gentiles in this marvelous plan for salvation. In Luke, John's ministry primarily begins with Jews who seek the repentance that he preaches, but his message in which "God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones" (3:8) also foreshadows Jesus's universal salvation of all persons, both Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus's Birth (2:1-20)

Luke locates Jesus's birth within the context of the Roman Empire. The Messiah has come to save the world. The mention of the census also explains why Jesus is born in Bethlehem. Joseph belongs to the lineage of King David who is from Bethlehem, and his betrothed Mary goes along with him. While they are in Bethlehem, Mary gives birth to Jesus. The circumstances of his birth are humble. He lies in a manger because there is no other space for him. The angels announce his birth (*Excelsis*), but to shepherds. This is not Matthew's Gospel in which wise men and kings know of Jesus birth and bring him expensive gifts. No, lowly shepherds are the only ones who come to worship the newly born Savior.

Despite the humble surroundings, Luke makes it clear that this baby is indeed the savior of the world. The angels proclaim that Jesus is "Christ the Lord" (2:11). "*The Lord"* is a title that is used to describe Caesar Augustus, the leader of Rome who tends to present himself as a worldwide savior. In contrast, Luke radically proclaims that this baby lying in a manger is salvation in the flesh. By calling Jesus "Lord," Luke also makes a direct connection between the first and second persons of the Trinity. The shepherds come to find Jesus because the "Lord" has revealed it to them (2:15). The address *kurios* ("Lord") is used most frequently to translate God's holy name in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. By referring to Jesus as the Lord, Luke clarifies his divine status and at the same time insists that this baby, not Caesar Augustus, is the real savior of the world.

Simeon and Anna Give Thanks for Jesus (2:21-39)

On the eighth day after Jesus's birth, the family goes to the temple in Jerusalem for Jesus's circumcision and Mary's purification. By highlighting this, Luke draws attention to the fact that every aspect of Jesus's upbringing is in keeping with the law of Moses. The family offers two birds (not a lamb), another sign that Jesus's family was not wealthy. While at the temple, the family is approached by Simeon and Anna. Luke frequently chooses to include both men and women as witnesses to Jesus. Simeon emphasizes that Jesus will bring salvation for all peoples, both Jews and Gentiles. This announcement is referred to as the *Nunc Dimittis*, and is considered to be the last of Luke's four "Christmas canticles." Anna also praises God for bringing redemption for all. The emphasis on men and women, Jew and Greek, poor and rich, young and old in the passage highlights the inclusive nature of the gospel message as conveyed by Luke. The Wesleyan tradition emphasizes the inclusiveness of the gospel and in its most faithful moments seeks to model inclusiveness as a sign of the kingdom of God present and yet to be revealed among us.

Jesus Growing up, God's Son (2:40-52)

Luke's Gospel contains the only account of Jesus growing up. At twelve years old, his parents take him to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. This brief glimpse into his youth highlights once again that Jesus was raised faithful to the Jewish traditions. While in Jerusalem, he discusses the Law and matters of faith with the leaders of Israel. It is said that he both teaches and learns. In every way he is portrayed as a normal young man who is growing, maturing, and learning. At the same time, Jesus is aware of his position as God's Son. When his parents return to find him in Jerusalem, he asks, "Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" (2:49). From the beginning, Luke describes what the church will later clarify as Jesus's identity. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. He is a boy,

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

growing and learning. Jesus also is God-in-flesh, the source of all wisdom.

Preparation for Ministry (3:1–4:12)

Ministry of John (3:1-20)

While Luke is the only Gospel writer to include details about John's and Jesus's childhoods, in chapter 3 the narrative begins to parallel the accounts found in other Gospels, with a few notable distinctions. Luke continues to locate the events of his Gospel within the framework of worldwide history, stating the names of the high priests and the Roman officials who ruled while John was baptizing. John's message of repentance emphasizes the salvation of the world. Luke includes a longer quotation from Isaiah the prophet, which ends with the line "all humanity will see God's salvation" (3:6; cf. Isa 40:5).

This emphasis on salvation for all is revealed through those who are attracted to John's message in Luke's Gospel. Matthew claims the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to hear John's message. In Luke, John invites tax collectors and soldiers to repentance. Moreover, John's advice is practical in Luke's Gospel. He tells the tax collectors not to collect more than is required and soldiers not to cheat or to harass people (3:13-14). Luke perceives these concrete actions as the fruit that repentance must bear.

John's message in Luke is similar enough to Jesus's message that some wonder if John is the Messiah. John clearly states he is not the Christ. There is one who comes after him. Thus, John fulfills his role as preparer of the Lord's way until the very end. Luke's account of John's ministry is unique in that John is arrested and put in prison before Jesus's ministry begins. This is the only canonical Gospel in which there is no overlap between their ministries. John, whose life up to this point has paralleled Jesus's, is not the expected Messiah. His ministry ends, and Jesus's ministry begins.

Jesus's Baptism (3:21-22)

In Luke, Jesus is one of many people being baptized. It is not clear who performs the baptism. A straightforward reading of the narrative suggests that John already has been arrested. Up until now, the lives of John and Jesus have run parallel courses, but here Jesus seems to step into his own calling. The events typically associated with Jesus's baptism—that is, the dove and a voice from heaven—occur not during the baptism, but while Jesus is praying. Prayer is an important aspect of Jesus's ministry in Luke, and the emphasis on prayer begins in this baptismal scene. Luke highlights the involvement of all three members of the Trinity (see Luke 1:26-38). The Holy Spirit comes in bodily form as a dove. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as distinct, but also embodied. A voice from heaven names Jesus as "the Son," which presumes existence of a Father. Wesleyan theology has long emphasized the relationship of love within the Trinity. Evidence of love that binds together the individual members of the Trinity is found in the voice from heaven describing Jesus as the "my Son, whom I dearly love" (3:22). The love among the divine members is now embodied in the love that Jesus will show to his disciples and ultimately for all the world.

Genealogy of Jesus (3:23-38)

Placing the genealogy after the baptismal scene in which Jesus is declared to be the Son underscores the primacy of the divine Father-Son relationship. Luke claims that people living in Jesus's day assume Joseph is his father. However, the readers of Luke's Gospel know that Jesus is God's Son. The genealogy in Luke also establishes Jesus's relationship to all humanity. In contrast to Matthew who begins Jesus's genealogy with Abraham (Matt 1:2), Luke begins with Jesus's purported, earthly father, Joseph, and works all the way back to Adam, the first human being. Adam is also called the "son of God" (3:38). Jesus is fulfilling God's intentions for all humans by living as the new Adam. All persons are saved through Jesus's life. This reinforces the claim that Jesus in Luke is to be viewed not exclusively as a Jewish messiah, but also as the Savior of the world.

Temptation (4:1-13)

Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness in order to fast for forty days. This experience parallels the history of Israel wandering in the

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

wilderness for forty years. Jesus, however, is faithful to God's mission. He does not succumb to temptations by social, political, or religious powers to avoid suffering. Luke's version of the temptation ends with Jesus in Jerusalem, in contrast to Matthew who places this temptation second. The final temptation to call on the Father and to avoid suffering death is the same temptation that Jesus will face at the end of his life. Jesus resists that temptation now and will do so again at the end of his ministry (see Luke 22:39-46).

The temptation narrative draws attention to other features of Luke's theology that perhaps Wesley shared, but Wesleyans may need to revisit. Both Luke and Wesley seem comfortable with the idea of supernatural beings, for example, Satan and angels. There is a spiritual world in Luke's Gospel that coexists and at moments intersects with the natural realm. Both Jesus and Satan quote scripture in this account. Scripture can be used properly or misused. For Wesley, faithful interpretation of scripture is dynamic and occurs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists those that read it with earnest prayer" (*Notes*, 2 Tim 3:16). Jesus in Luke spends forty days in prayer under the guidance of the Spirit and then faithfully interprets scripture in order to resist temptation.

Ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50)

Jesus Visits the Synagogue at Nazareth (4:14-30)

Luke locates Jesus's visit to the synagogue in Nazareth at the very beginning of his public ministry. Luke implies that Jesus's custom was to go to synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus goes to the synagogue in his hometown, Nazareth, and reads from the scroll of Isaiah (see Isa 61:1-2). The text from Isaiah lays out the basic contours of Jesus's ministry in Luke. Jesus has come for the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. Jesus has come to proclaim good news to those who are marginalized. He has come "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:19). This is another way of saying Jubilee (see Lev 25:8-18), the year in which Israelite debts were to be forgiven and slaves set free. Jesus proclaims that the year of Jubilee has come today: through his ministry the oppressed are being set free.

The initial response to Jesus's message is positive. The people are impressed. However, within the course of only a few verses, they move from praising Jesus to trying to throw him off a cliff. The rapid change in attitude of the crowd foreshadows the events at the end of Jesus's ministry, where the crowd will be praising him on Palm Sunday but yelling for him to be crucified a short time later. In Nazareth, public opinion changes so quickly because Jesus insists his ministry is for Gentiles as well. The people point out that this is his hometown, and Jesus implies that he is being pressed to do miracles for his own people. Instead, Jesus recounts two narratives from the Old Testament: Elijah and the widow (see 1 Kgs 17:8-16) and Elisha healing Naaman's leprosy (see 2 Kgs 5). In both instances, the prophet helped a Gentile, not a Jew. Luke emphasizes that Jesus's ministry is for all people, but special attention is given to those who might be more likely excluded—the poor, the oppressed, and the foreigner. Jesus's ministry is to serve the people at the margins. Those who would follow after Jesus must commit to living into a radical vision of eschatological reversal as well.

Jesus Ministers in Capernaum (4:31-44)

Much of what Luke records as Jesus's ministry in Capernaum also appears in Matthew and Mark. Luke seems to be following Mark at this point in the narrative as far as the order of events. A demon-possessed man approaches Jesus. The demon rightly identifies Jesus as "the holy one from God" (4:34). Jesus silences the demon and casts it out of the man. Afterward, Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law. Miracles are signs of the in-breaking kingdom of God. By his miracles, Jesus is banishing oppression and illness, and revealing a new kingdom characterized by freedom and restoration. As a result of these events, many people come to him bringing their sick and demon-possessed in order to be healed. Jesus heals them. As word about Jesus

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

WESLEY ONE VOLUME COMMENTARY

This all new and unique one-volume commentary on the entire Bible is offered by more than forty scholars from the broad range of Wesleyan denominations, including The United Methodist Church, The Church of the Nazarene, The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The Church of God (Anderson), The Church of God (Cleveland), The Wesleyan Church, The Free Methodist Church, and The Salvation Army.

It is the only concise Wesleyan Bible commentary available and will assist pastors in sermon preparation, small group leaders in lesson preparation, college and seminary students in preparation for ministry, and laypeople in Bible study.

Joel B. Green, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Fuller Seminary, called this commentary, "The Wesley Study Bible +++." The commentary form allows for a much greater exploration of Wesleyan themes and theology than a Study Bible ever could.

EDITED BY

Kenneth J. Collins, Ph.D.
Professor of Historical Theology
and Wesley Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary
The United Methodist Church

Robert W. Wall, Ph.D.
Paul T. Walls Professor of Scripture
and Wesleyan Studies
Seattle Pacific University and
Seminary The Free
Methodist Church

www.abingdonpress.com

Cover Image: Getty Images
Cover Design: Jeff Moore

RELIGION/Biblical Commentary/
General/$89.99 US

ISBN-13: 978-1-5018-2391-6

Copyright © by Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.