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271 W Edmundson Ave • Morgan Hill, CA 95037 • www.sgbcsv.org • (408) 778-5930

Inside This Issue

- **John 6:44**
Lake Sovereign Grace
James A. Billings
front page
- **The Present Challenge to Preaching**
Mark A. Bailon
page 4
- **An Introduction to Islam**
Part 5: The Prophet of Islam at Medina (1)
Dr. Arthur L. Mellon
page 5
- **The God of Creation, Time and Salvation**
Dr. William R. Downing
page 7
- **Exegetical Notes**
Dr. William R. Downing
page 8

PIRS Faculty



William R. Downing, M.Ed., Th.M., Ph.D., D.D.
Director

Paul S. Nelson, Ph.D., Th.M.
Department of Apologetics

James A. Billings, Th.B., M.Div.
Department of Church History

Mark A. Bailon, Th.M.
Department of Theology & Biblical Languages

Arthur L. Mellon, Ph.D.
Department of Middle East Studies

Michael A. Carling, M.Ed., Th.M.
Adjunct Faculty for PIRS Satellite Institute
in Marysville / Yuba City, California

John 6:44 *Lake Sovereign Grace*

By J. A. Billings

John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Introduction

John 6:44 is among the most misunderstood and feared passages in all of the Word of God. Modern Evangelical Christianity, made up of Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians and Arminians has tried to ignore it the best they can. They look upon it as an ugly stain upon the clean, white linen of the offer of salvation. They, like their fathers before them, are a people who have created a mythical land, a land where they worship a man-centered gospel. A land where man is elevated to a position of moral neutrality. A land where man sits in judgment upon the Word of God. A land where man exercises his "Free-Will" in order to choose to either accept or reject God's offer of salvation. It is a land where God has done all He can to save sinners. It is a land where all God can do is patiently wait and hope that man will exercise his "Free-Will" and accept His gracious offer of reconciliation. It is a land where God has been stripped of His sovereignty and where man and his "Free-Will" are sovereign over God. The cardinal doctrine of modern evangelical Christianity, that supersedes all other doctrine, is that nothing in this universe, including God, can overrule man's "Free-Will."

Ponce De León and the Mythical Land of Man's Sovereignty

The people who love this popular gospel have traversed every land and crossed every sea to find this place that elevates man to being equal with God.

This uncharted land is the "Gospel of Man's Sovereignty." They are as mesmerized by this fantasy as much as Ponce de León was when he set out to find the Fountain of Youth. In reality, their gospel and the Fountain of Youth are both mythical places conjured up in the minds of men that have never been found and have never been experienced by any man.

Like the Spanish explorer navigating his ship through the familiar waters of the Caribbean, modern Christianity travels down the well-trodden pathways of their gospel year after year. In this mythical land they have all of their exotic vacation areas well-charted and well-visited.

The City Called "Free-Will"

Their most popular and favorite place is the Capitol of their Faith and the Pinnacle of their Philosophy; the large city called "Free-Will." Ironically the premier philosophy of modern, evangelical Christianity is the same as the world's philosophy. In fact, it dates back to the Garden of Eden. Untold millions flock to this great city every year to indulge in this doctrine first discovered by Adam and Eve when they did eat of the fruit of *The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. In eating the fruit, they sought autonomy from God and sovereignty over God's Will. The ruinous result was that they died in their sins. Modern Christianity has no problem sharing this great city with many of the people who hold to the most radical philosophies man's mind has ever devised. The glaring truth is that they do their best to ignore the fact that all of their humanistic counterparts also hold "Free-Will" to be the cardinal doctrine of their faith. These wanderers move freely and comfortably among the Catholics, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Humanists, the Hippies,

the Anarchists, the Legalists, and the Atheists.

The Land of Legalism

The more serious of these travelers spend their time in the land of "Legalism." Only the elite are allowed in this exclusive place, and membership is reserved for only a select few. The favorite pastime in this land is to sit at the feet of the ancient Scribes and Pharisees of Israel in order to perfect the art of self-righteousness. They have a tried and true method that they have perfected over the years to create a ruling class of elitists. Their rules are simple. They create a standard that is unreasonable, unbiblical and too high for anyone to achieve. Then they announce that they not only live by the standard but that they are the standard. They create the impression that they are the religious elite who have attained the pinnacle of Law-Keeping while the unwashed masses have fallen far below the standard. These people have created for themselves an elite class of "Law-Keepers" and by contrast have produced an inferior class of "Law-Breakers" that can be controlled and despised. The Catholics have been going to the land of Legalism for 1,700 years. They have created the illusion that the Pope, Cardinals, Bishops and Priests are all superior to the unwashed masses who follow them. Over the last one-hundred and fifty years it has become the newly found favorite destination of the ruling class among the Fundamentalists.

The Land of Carnal Christianity

A favorite vacation spot of the rich is the old historical region of "Carnal Christianity" which dates back close to two-thousand years. There are two very nice five-star hotels that overlook this spirit-filled land. They are the Grand Cerinthian and the luxurious Docetic Towers, where the guests can lavish themselves with every earthly desire they can imagine. The people who own the hotels along with their guests have both convinced themselves that the actions of the body never influence the spirit. The hotels advertise that their guests can indulge

themselves in carnal pleasure with little, if any danger of spiritual harm. They spend their days pampering themselves with the best the world has to offer and attending seminars about their fore-fathers, the ancient Gnostics. The seminars focus on the much-loved fantasy that once a man has accepted Christ, it matters little what he does in his body because his spirit is eternally safe and secure in Christ.

The Land of Lawlessness

The less sophisticated wanderers spend much of their days in the affordable land of the old wild-west called "The Land of Lawlessness." These people are not blessed with all of the niceties of the people who spend their time in the land of Carnal Christianity. There are no beautiful hotels or scheduled seminars in this untamed wilderness to cover their true motives. In this land, the agendas and true heart desires of the tourists are laid bare for all to see. The law does not exist in this untamed land. Because of this, the visitors have come to believe that they are free to do whatever they please because there is no one to uphold the law. In this land, made from the machinations of men, they believe they are *not under the law but under grace*. They see the strong admonition from Paul as an Antinomian or lawless grace by purposefully deleting his statement at the beginning of the verse "For sin shall not have dominion over you:..." They conveniently only quote the latter half "...for ye are not under the law, but under grace." The motto of this barren land is posted above the gates at the entrance. The plaque reads:

"All ye who enter through these gates are now no longer under the demands of the old law. Ye are now under the law of love. Whatever ye choose to do ye can be sure that love covers a multitude of sins. While ye enjoy your stay with us remember that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."

The sad reality is that most of the untold millions of people who have entered through those gates have quickly found that while they went there

to be free from the law, they became slaves to the dominating power of sin. The power it has on these wayward travelers has proven to be too strong for them and many of them have attested that they did not possess the Will to leave. Many have testified that their remaining years have been characterized as slavery to sin, not freedom from law. They found that their Will is in bondage to their true nature and their last years always end in destruction. The ones that do make it out of the Land of Lawlessness believe the oft-repeated lie that all they have to do is feel sorry for exercising their "Free-Will" and then rededicate themselves. At the end of their vacation they can return home as a blank slate and start all over again. These wanderers come back year after year and have affectionately nick-named it "The Land of Rededication."

The Town of Perfectionism

The town of "Perfectionism" is a place that everyone talks about. In conversation, one and all say they desire to go there more than any other land. But no one ever has. In fact, no one has ever seen the town of Perfectionism. The place is much like the Fountain of Youth. Everyone wants to go there and partake of its bounties but no one has ever been able to find it, therefore no one has ever experienced it.

Forbidden Lands

There are places the wanderers have been forewarned about. They are unfamiliar lands; lands that are not charted on their maps. The elite tell the commoners that these lands are dark, mysterious and foreboding. They counsel the commoners that the number one rule is to do their best to stay in their familiar places of ease and comfort. But, all too often they find themselves drifting off the well-worn paths. As the blind lead the blind in their constant wanderings, they sometimes stumble upon them.

Lake Sovereign Grace

There is a forbidden region on their charts so large that it cannot be hid. It

is called "Lake Sovereign Grace," found in the region of John 6:44. The lake is so immense that the leaders have thought it necessary to use all of their resources and energies to keep their travelers as far away from the lake as possible. They look upon it the same way the Jews in Judaea and Galilee looked at the land of Samaria. The Samaritans were so hated and despised that the Jews built all their major roads around the great land in order to not defile themselves by coming in contact with it. Like their fathers before them, they too build their high-ways and by-ways around Lake Sovereign Grace.

These lovers of Free-Will have described Lake Sovereign Grace as an ominous, deep, dark, mysterious lake that is as large as the Dead Sea. The elite rulers have strict rules to never talk to their followers about the lake. But, on occasion some of their people have wandered from the pre-approved pathways. The wanderers, who have inadvertently come upon this great lake, always, without exception, express shock and amazement at its very existence. In their desperation they run from one direction to another trying to figure out how to circumnavigate its depths. It is heartbreaking to watch these wanderers tremble at their first glimpse of this pristine, crystal-clear body of water. In their superstitious minds, they fear they will drown in its deep mysteries if they dare to even place one toe on its shoreline.

Oh! If they only knew how many have entered the lake and experienced all of the wonders of the Gospel. If they only knew how many have navigated through her friendly waters and experienced divine love, Christ's righteousness, free-grace and man's responsibility to believe the Gospel. If only these wanderers would realize that God Himself has charted these waters. If they only knew that it is so easy to navigate through them that even a *little child* can sail upon her. In fact God requires that only those who sail upon her waters, with the faith of a *little child*, will be accepted by Him.

**The Discoverers of the Lake:
The First Group**

Like millions before them, Modern Christianity does all it can to make its way around this lake called God's Sovereign Grace and behave as if they had never seen it. The vast majority that have inadvertently wandered upon its shores have scurried away without even bothering to think about it, much less bring it up to someone else. They turn their heads and happily find their way to their favorite mythical land. When they get there, they not only place their heads, but also their hands, feet, hearts, minds and souls in the sand. And if all that is not enough to wipe away the memory of Lake Sovereign Grace they try one last tactic—they bury their conscience deep in the sand.

**The Discoverers of the Lake:
The Second Group**

Some of the common people that have seen the lake in their travels have had the good sense to tell their leaders they found the lake and then to ask its meaning. When this occurs the ruling class jumps into action and they tell the wanderers they were mistaken. The first thing they are told is that the lake does not exist! But sometimes the common ones who witnessed the lake's existence insist that they saw the lake. In that case the elite will admit to them that the lake does indeed exist, then they will tell them that they have stumbled upon something that no one is allowed to speak about. Then the ruling class will warn them, with deep conviction, that the lake is so mysterious that it will only confuse and confound those who try and understand why it exists. The elitists imply that only a select few can understand its mysteries while the commoner will only be confounded. Sadly, most of the common people at that point trust their leaders and never mention the lake again. Multitudes are among this group and untold millions have lived out the rest of their lives traveling from place to pre-approved exotic place without a care or a thought of that once visited lake of God's Free and Sovereign Grace.

**The Discoverers of the Lake:
The Third Group**

There is a strange sub-group among the wanderers who claim they have sought out and have seen Lake Sovereign Grace. This group claims to love the doctrine of God's Free and Sovereign Grace as much as they love their doctrines of Easy-Believeism, Antinomianism, Dispensationalism and their beloved Arminianism. Their doctrines always place the Will of Man as the single most sovereign power in the entire universe, especially sovereign over God's Will. They tell the story of how they came upon Lake Sovereign Grace. They say that one day while in their wanderings, they were talking about someday finding Lake Sovereign Grace. As they looked out over the vast Dispensational, Serengeti-like Plains, with its famous seven rolling hills, all of a sudden, without any warning, a fierce rain came. They say they took cover until the rains stopped. They go on to tell us that as they looked out over the beautiful setting, the clouds parted and the sun's rays hit the drenched landscape and they beheld Lake Sovereign Grace in all its glory. They have asserted that they ran toward the lake and when they came to its shores they dived into it and dipped themselves into its unspoiled waters.

The reality is that in their excitement, they thought they saw the pristine waters of Lake Sovereign Grace, but in reality they only saw a mirage. What they actually saw, as they got closer, was the old mud hole and swamp of a modified Free-Will Arminianism. To this day they are still perpetuating a deceived and perverted vision of a lake they never really saw in the first place.

**The Discoverers of the Lake:
The Fourth Group**

There is an indigenous people that have been seen by some. They are a small group who have lived there for centuries. They are the most isolated people in all of the lands. They live among the caves high above the water line in the vast outcroppings of stone. Their dwellings make it almost impossible for them to have any contact with the outside world. They have never

made any attempts to leave their caves or to talk with any outsiders about the lake's cool, refreshing waters. In fact they believe it is sinful to tell anyone else about the lake because they believe that only God Himself can reveal the lake to men. Some outsiders have tried to reason with them from afar. One Christian remembered yelling at them from across the shore. He said that he reminded these isolated inhabitants that *Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.* Sadly they turned the man away not able to *endure sound doctrine.* They are a people who *heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears* and turn away all who have ever enquired about the lake. This strange tribe somehow believe they will commit the sin of presumption if they dare invite anyone outside their small tribe to drink from the lake's eternal depths.

**The Discoverers of the Lake:
The Fifth Group**

The Good News is that there are a few, out of the common people, who have truly seen the lake in its purity and who refuse to deny its existence. They too, went to their religious leaders, after they discovered the lake, and told them they must understand why the lake is there. The elite ruling class initially gave their undivided attention to those people. In fact, they put all of their combined efforts into convincing those commoners to stop talking about the lake. The insubordinates refused, so the elite told them that it was possible that they saw the lake, but to be sure not to tell the rest of the common people that they saw the lake. The rulers reasoned, saying it would only confuse them. The inferior commoners still did not stop talking about the lake so they were told by the ruling class, under no uncertain terms, that it is folly to attempt to understand why the lake is there and that they are simply misinformed. The rulers then sternly commanded them that it is unlawful to talk about the lake. The rulers went on to say that if the commoners were caught speaking about the lake to their fellow travelers they would be asked to leave the group.

Like all that have gone before them,

desiring to obey God rather than men, this humble group told the ruling elite that they had begun to understand the mysteries of the lake. Then the leaders openly condemned them as heretics and forced them to leave the traveling band of Free-Will enthusiasts. But the leaders did not stop there. Then they told the un-washed masses that follow them to fear and to hate those who talked about the lake. The elitists convinced their willing accomplices that those who talked about the lake are demons that have been sent from the devil himself to cause confusion among the wanderers.

Soon the ones who left them are forgotten. Soon the leaders and the followers alike are again living and wandering side-by-side in their mythical land without a care or worry. They happily tell themselves that there is no part of the biblical landscape that they have not seen. They will convince themselves that Lake Sovereign Grace is a mirage that deceives some but never them. They, like Ponce de León in his quest for eternal life will continue on in their search for this mythical land of "Man's Sovereignty" and "Free-Will" all the while ignoring the fact that they ripped out the very pages of the Word of God that condemns their beliefs. They are *wiser in their own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.*

Conclusion

But what happened to those who have seen the lake and were cast out. We are now *a band of men, whose hearts God has touched.* We are living out the rest of our pilgrimage with those, who, like us, glory in the truth of Lake Sovereign Grace. There are groups of us all over the world. Our lineage dates back over two-thousand years. We covenant together in bands of ten, some fifty, some hundreds and there are a few large congregations that have taken in over a thousand people to rest from their wearisome wanderings. There is no part of the landscape of the Bible we do not love. We love John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And we love John 6:44 equally "No

man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." We see no contradiction or controversy with the two eternal truths dwelling together. We, like Job, *know that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!*

May all who name the name of Christ join our ranks.

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The Present Challenge to Preaching

By M. A. Bailon

There is a movement afoot in a portion of American Evangelical Christianity which seems to be something good. Some of the pastors leading this movement are very well known and virtually all of them have large congregations. These men have either written books or have had articles written about their ministries by the secular press. What they are preaching and teaching is, for the most part, sound and orthodox. But whether some of these men may be called Neo-Calvinists or whether their ministries are geared at reforming the church, I am afraid that all of them are facing a formidable challenge and they don't realize it. The issue is that the world has infiltrated the church.

The World Has Infiltrated the Church

To some observers it is crystal clear that our churches have imbibed upon the philosophy of the world. There are ministries that cater to the appetites of religious but unconverted church goers. True Christianity involves self-sacrifice. But the world prioritizes self-interest over all else. In religion, self-interest translates to man-centered ministries rather than God-centered ones. This can be subtle. But note that today many churches have worship teams. The worship team members are the most musically gifted of the congregation. Hopefully, they are at least ostensibly devout. But the qualifications probably end there. The team helps with worship only because the worship service has

been redefined. To worship God is to be able to sing lyrics to tunes that sooth the mind and stir up the emotions. The worship service allows the person in the pew to eulogize God emotionally. This is not wrong in that emotions are not ungodly. But the worship service is not especially scriptural. Instead, it is rather pragmatic. It allows the pastors to build large congregations. The people feel good about themselves and the service, and afterward they leave to go home. The people need to feel good about themselves and the world, and they do; so they come in droves. Since they have sung to their hearts content, waved their arms in the air, and spoken sweet words to Jesus they are satisfied with their Christianity.

The Church Has a Gap

However, there is a gap within the church between the pastor and the congregation. It is created by the worship team. But the responsibility falls upon the church leadership. The worship service as led by the worship team provides emotional support to the congregation, but it is a substitute for the preaching of the Word which is the true food of the ministry. The mind must be fed propositional truth from the Scriptures. Paul told Timothy to preach the Word. In fact, preaching is mentioned in the epistles to the church in Corinth (in both letters), in Philippi, in Colossae and several in the region of Galatia. Many books have been written on the primacy of preaching for the Christian Church. Many books have been written on the worship of God. These are not only old books, but contemporary ones as well. It is here that the gap is so pernicious. Most, if not all, of the preachers whose ministries are hindered by the gap understand the importance of preaching and the essence of true worship. Many have even written about these in a chapter of one or two of their books of theology. This is not something old-fashioned. We are seeing a resurgence in interest in preaching by today's Christian leaders, the very men who are known by both their writings and their considerable preaching gifts. This is an interesting state of affairs, especially for their churches.

Only God Can Bridge the Gap

The problem for the preacher is that his congregation does not live or die by the preaching. They need the emotional support of the worship as led by the worship team. This means that they are not dependent upon the Word of God. If they come to sing and to see each other, then they are fed. If, on the other hand, they came to hear the preaching, and that alone, then the preaching would have an impact on their lives. Today it doesn't matter that the pastor can preach and teach. It doesn't even matter that the pastor is gifted. Since the service is not organized around the preaching, the ministry of the Word is nullified. The God ordained order of worship is for the truth to enter the mind to be digested and then to filter down to the heart and out into the life, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Today the path is to fill the heart with song and good feelings about an awesome God and have something flow up to the mind. How this should work is anybody's guess. But it doesn't seem likely that the worship team format is going away. A powerful intervention by God is required. Some Christians call this intervention revival. True revival is instigated by God and the lives of the people coming under the influence of the revival are changed by the Holy Spirit.

That revival is the only hope for the churches of Jesus Christ that worship with choruses instead of through the Word of God seems clear. The preaching must surmount the obstacle raised by the current worship format. And it must do so despite the lack of an atmosphere for preaching. The Word of God usually overcomes the prejudice of the sinner who is manifestly opposed to God and His gospel. This is a supernatural work of God, to be sure. But in our churches the preaching has to overcome the prejudice of professing Christians who believe they are already pleasing God. This too requires a supernatural work of God. Until and unless the pastor sees that having a full church is not necessarily the blessing of God, the preaching will not do its true work of converting sinners and edifying saints. If the preacher's eyes are opened, his only hope is to keep on preaching, and to pray that God will

bring revival. He must pray that God will bridge the gap and reach the mind of the people that they might hear the gospel and understand; and not just feel. The pastor must trust in the Lord and preach the truth until it touches people's lives by the power of God alone. Only then will he see his congregation changed and become receptive to a preaching centered ministry. Only then will he see the fruit of his preaching gifts and see the blessing of the power of preaching which he so fervently believes in.

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¹ In Romans 12:2 the apostle Paul writes, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Literally, do not be molded to the schema of this age. μή συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ. But be transformed (undergo a metamorphosis) by the renewing of you mind. ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς. Change your way of thinking away from the world's way and to God's way.

An Introduction to Islam Part 5: The Prophet of Islam at Medina (1)

By Dr. Arthur L. Mellon

The Medina period in Muhammad's life is very important. It is during this ten year period that three major things occur: (1) Muhammad comes into political power, (2) the Super-Tribe or Community is established and (3) many of the Quranic doctrines are formulated.

Muhammad Comes Into Political Power

Muhammad's position in Mecca was becoming very dangerous for him and his followers. With the death of his uncle Abu Talib who was the leader of the Quraysh tribe, Muhammad no longer had protection from his own tribe and others who wanted to kill him. He had been invited by some of his followers who lived in Yathrib [Medina] to come and be the arbitrator between the Arabs, Jews (who were mostly converted Arabs) and a few Christians that lived there. Violent conflicts had erupted between the Arabs and Jewish tribes and both the Arabs and Jews had heard that Muhammad was a prophet.

Because he was a prophet, they thought that he could resolve issues fairly. Two secret meetings between Muhammad and his followers were held at Aqaba, which is located on the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea. Muhammad sent some of his followers north to Yathrib. After they left for Yathrib, Muhammad slipped out of Mecca and hid in a cave for a few days. The leader of the Quraysh offered a reward of a hundred camels if anyone could locate Muhammad or kill him. On 16 July 1AH/622 A.D. Muhammad arrived in Yathrib.¹ Yathrib [Medina] was a rich oasis located about 200 miles or nine days travel north of Mecca. Reza Aslan writes; "...Yathrib is not a city at all. It is a loose federation of villages inhabited by farmers and orchardists, tillers of the earth."² The Jewish tribes owned the riches and best of the palm date orchards and cereal fields. The Arabs owned the lesser properties. The Jewish tribe Qaynuqa owned and controlled the only market place in Medina where the silver and goldsmiths and arms makers applied their skills. "In the honor of the Holy Prophet, the city of Yathrib was renamed 'Madinah-tul-Nabi', the city of the Prophet, Medina."³

The first thing that Muhammad did upon arrival at Yathrib was to build a Mosque which was to become both the secular and religious center of life for the community.⁴ It was while this building was under construction that Muhammad consummated his marriage to Aisha the nine year old daughter of Abu Bakr.

Muhammad as the arbitrator between the Arabs and Jews at Yathrib created a document called *The Constitution of Medina or Leaf*. This document was a non-aggression pack stipulating that all the tribes at Yathrib would support each other in case of attack from outside forces and for the mutual support in manpower, weapons and expenses involved in a conflict with outsiders. The document also gave Muhammad final authority in the arbitration process on all issues at Medina.

As the followers of Muhammad flocked to him, it created a strain on the economy of Yathrib. Most of those who

came were city dwellers and not farmers, and what they received was charity. There was no way of supporting his followers, and he had to do something quickly or he would lose them. Muhammad fell back on the old traditional way of the desert of raiding for plunder. Muhammad started raiding the caravans of his own tribe the Quraysh. He felt justified in raiding them, because they had persecuted him and his followers. Some of these caravans were made up of over 2500 camels laden with trade goods. These successful raids drew other desert tribes into the fold of Islam so they could take part in the raids for spoils. Another reason for joining Islam was not to be a target of such raids.

These raids [razzia] against the caravan trade of the Meccans and the Qurayshites were taking their toll on the economy of Mecca, but Muhammad had also declared Medina [Yathrib] as a *Holy City* against that of the *Kaaba* in Mecca. The Jews believed they could bring Muhammad around to their religion, but after a short time they saw there were too many differences in their beliefs. Muhammad was not the prophet the Jews expected and from that point on they began to resist Muhammad covertly. When Muhammad first arrived at Medina, he had his followers adopt many Jewish traditions. He had them keep the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, etc., and to pray toward Jerusalem. He instituted praying five times a day.

The leaders of Mecca recognized the growing power of Muhammad and the threat to Mecca and its economy. The Meccans launched three major battles against Muhammad. The first battle was the Battle of Badr fought on 17 March 2AH/624 A.D.. The Meccans fielded around 950 men against Muhammad's 300. Muhammad won the day with the loss of only 14 men.⁵ Robert Spencer wrote concerning the results of the Battle of Badr, "The victory at Badr was the turning point for the Muslims. It became the stuff of legend, a cornerstone of the new religion."⁶ K. Ali wrote of this same battle, "The battle of Badr is the most decisive event in the history of Islam. If the

Muslims could not achieve success in this battle, Islam might have been wiped out for ever from the face of the earth."⁷ What the victory did instead was to solidify his position as the supreme authority and head of the new religion. The promise of Paradise that Muhammad gave to his fighters motivated them to fight to the death in battle. Muhammad said, "By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no man will be slain this day, fighting against them in steadfast hope of his reward, advancing not retreating, but God shall straightway enter him into Paradise."⁸

The second battle, the Battle of Uhud fought on 23 March 3AH/625 A.D. was a disaster for Muhammad and his fighters. Losing the battle was attributed to the majority of the archers disobeying Muhammad's instructions and leaving a breach open while the archers went off in search of spoils. Other Muslims withdrew from the battle after hearing a rumor that Muhammad had been killed. If it were not for the Meccans quitting the field all would have been lost. (Read Surah 3:152 in the Quran) The Jews had secretly supported the Meccans against Muhammad.

The third and final battle waged by the Meccans and their Bedouin and Jewish confederates against Muhammad and the Muslims took place at Medina. The battle was called the Battle of the Ditch or Trench. This battle was fought on 31 March 8AH/627 A.D.. The battle was a siege that lasted about two weeks. A Persian convert of Muhammad's named Salman advised Muhammad to construct a trench around Medina. W. Montgomery Watt says, "On the military side the reason for Meccans failure was the superior strategy of Muhammad, and probably also his superior information service and secret agents. His use of the device of the trench was particularly well suited to the circumstances...In this year the grain had been harvested a month before the Meccans arrived."⁹ Muhammad was now the absolute and undisputed ruler of Medina.

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¹1AH symbolizes the first year of the Islamic calendar. The Islamic calendar started when Muhammad emigrated to Yathrib. This emigration is called Hijra or Hegira (in English) or Emigration. Both the Islamic calendar and our standard dating system are used together in written works on Islam.

² Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*, (Random House Trade Paperbacks: New York), 2006, p.51.

³ Prof. Masudul Hasan, *History of Islam*, (Adam Publishers & Distributors: New Delhi, India), 2009, Vol. 1, p.62.

⁴ Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad*, (Pantheon Books: New York), 1971, pp. 149-150.

⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, (Oxford University Press: Karachi, Pakistan), 2001, p.10.

⁶ Robert Spencer, *The Truth about Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion*, (Regnery Publishing, Inc.: Washington, DC), 2006, p.107.

⁷ K. Ali, *A Study of Islamic History*, (Adam Publishers & Distributors: New Delhi, India), 2003, Vol. 1, p.49.

⁸ A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, (Oxford University Press: Karachi, Pakistan), 2009, p.300.

⁹ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, (Oxford University Press: London), 1961, p.169.

The God of Creation, Time and Salvation

By Dr. W. R. Downing

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.¹

Rom. 11:36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.²

Rev. 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.³

The God of the Bible is the God of creation. Every fact is therefore a created fact. There are not, nor can there be any “brute” facts which are neutral.⁴ Every fact witnesses to the eternal power and Divine nature of the triune, self-disclosing God of Scripture.⁵ To say “The universe” is to say “God” and “meaning.”⁶

The God of creation is the God of time and history. Nothing is left to chance, fate or luck. Everything exists, moves and interacts by Divine

Providence.⁷ Time and history are contained within God. These are neither cyclical, as the ancient Greeks supposed, nor meaningless, as modern secular humanists assert. Time and history are linear, with both a beginning and end.⁸ When time has served its purpose in the eternal decree, it will cease to exist.⁹ In fallen, sinful human thought, time moves from the past to the present and into the unfulfilled void of the future; biblically, time moves from the future into the present, and from the present into the past in terms of the eternal purpose or Divine predestination.¹⁰ Upon this Divinely-revealed principle rests every biblical prophecy and promise. To say “God” is to say “purpose,” and to say “purpose” is to say “predestination.”¹¹

Man was created as and remains the image-bearer of God.¹² He must believe in something or someone greater than himself. He possesses an instinct for that which transcends this present life.¹³ Man was created as a presuppositionalist, as he was created and placed into a world already created and defined by God. He is inescapably a creature of faith as the source of truth and knowledge remains external to himself.¹⁴ As a fallen, sinful being, man seeks to re-define and re-interpret himself and everything in his world according to his own sinful presuppositions. He seeks to be his own “god” and determine for himself what is right or wrong (Gen. 3:1-7).¹⁵

The gospel begins, not with sinful man, but with a morally self-consistent [absolutely righteous] God who cannot arbitrarily set aside sin. He must be propitiated. Sin demands either punishment of the sinner or a sinless substitute. God gave his Son for sinners. The cross is a necessity in the Divine, redemptive purpose.

Fallen, sinful man is a rebel against God's Law, an apostate from God's truth and a squatter on God's creation.¹⁶ His greatest needs, strongest desires and deepest longings can and will be satisfied only in a right relationship to God through the Person and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only in this redemptive con-

text that he can experience forgiveness of sin, peace of mind, true meaning and reconciliation with God. This salvific relationship is through faith alone.¹⁷ Saving faith is such that it appropriates the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ which he wrought through his active and passive obedience on behalf of his people.¹⁸ To say “The Lord Jesus Christ” is to say “Lord” and “Savior,” and to say “Lord” and “Savior” is to say “there is hope and deliverance for the worst of sinners.” The Divine purpose and salvation meet in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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¹ If God spoke this universe into existence by his fiat decree, then every fact is a created fact, defined by God through his creative act.

² God is the Source [ἐξ αὐτοῦ], Support [δι αὐτοῦ] and End [εἰς αὐτόν] of all things [τὰ πάντα].

³ “...for thy pleasure they are...”, i.e., they exist [εἶσαν]. The whole universe exists for the mere good pleasure of God—an awful thought to the unregenerate, but a source of the greatest joy to the converted.

⁴ Human science and the empirical method make much use of alleged “neutral facts.” But every fact is a created fact and witnesses to the existence and power of its Creator.

⁵ Rom. 1:18-20. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [habitually suppress] the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [in their minds and hearts]; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse [an apologetic].

⁶ Although science calls creation “the universe,” this very term presupposes a unifying power and principle. Upon their allegation of evolutionary “brute facts,” they should call it a “heap,” or a “multiverse.”

⁷ Divine providence is that process in time wherein God brings to pass his eternal decree. This is clearly seen throughout Scripture: e.g., Neh. 9:6; Isa. 46:9-11; 55:8-11; Dan. 4:35; Rom. 8:28-30; 11:33-36; Eph. 1:3-11; Rev. 4:11.

⁸ The ancient Greeks thought time to be cyclical. The modern version is that “history repeats itself.” Modern secular man holds that history is meaningless. The only meaning which man has is the meaning he stamps upon what he considers reality and history. This is simply a practical atheism and nihilism. Biblically, time and history are linear. History is being brought to its

comprehensive consummation in the glorious culmination of the eternal, redemptive purpose which centers in the Lord Jesus Christ and the re-creation of the universe (Eph. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:4-13).

⁹ Rev. 10:6. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.

¹⁰ See: Isa. 46:9-11; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:11. Although the term “predestination” only occurs a few times in Scripture, the whole fabric of Scripture is held together by Divine predestination. The Old Testament uses seventeen Hebrew terms and the New Testament uses nineteen Greek terms to adequately and properly reveal this truth.

¹¹ God is a Person, i.e., he possesses the attributes of personality. He is necessarily a Person of purpose. We cannot hold to any Divine prophecy or promise without presupposing an inclusive Divine predestination.

¹² Even in his fallen, sinful condition, man is the image-bearer of God, The Divine image in man was not erased—he did not become an animal—it was defaced. Man remains a rational, morally-responsible being. In the salvific purpose, God is redeeming his image in man and his ultimate purpose for creation.

¹³ Eccl.3:11 ...he hath put the world [עַלְמַי, eternity] into their heart...

¹⁴ Man is inescapably a presuppositionalist, i.e., he interprets all facts according to his presuppositions. Thus, the unregenerate and converted see everything from a different perspective. Man is a creature of faith because he must believe in someone or something external to and higher than himself—be it a dictionary, another human authority, a “deity,” the “god” of his own imagination, or the self-disclosing, triune God of Scripture.

¹⁵ Fallen, sinful man seeks Autonomy from God and his Word. But there is no autonomy—any actual independence—from God, not in time, not in history, not in a state of sin, not in a state of grace, not on earth, not in heaven and not in hell.

¹⁶ Man is God’s creature, and this Creator-creature distinction and relationship cannot be changed. The need of man is not to be autonomous from God but to be reconciled to him.

¹⁷ Salvation is by grace [completely unmerited favor] through faith [a God-given trust and reliance]. This is saving grace, never a “cheap grace,” as it cost the Lord God his Son (Jn. 3:15-17).

¹⁸ The active obedience of Christ refers to his perfect life whereby he perfectly kept the demands of God’s Holy Law; the passive obedience of Christ refers to his sufferings in life which culminated in his final

suffering and death whereby he paid the Law’s penalty in full. His glorious resurrection was the Divine guarantee of the acceptance of his finished redemptive work.

Exegetical Notes

By W. R. Downing

“Dialoguing with the Devil”

Gen. 1:1-3 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said [כִּי־אָמַר אֱלֹהִים],¹ Ye shall never ever eat of every tree of the garden [וְעַיִן הַגָּן מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן]? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat [מִפְּרֵי עֵץ־הַגָּן נֹאכְלִים] of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not ever eat of it [מִמִּנְהוּ אֲנִי־אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ], neither shall ye ever touch it [וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בּוֹ], lest ye die [פֶּן־תָּמוּתוּ].

This is a vitally important passage in the history of the human race: first, the serpent speaks about God in the abstract [אֱלֹהִים], not using the title “the LORD God” [יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים], which is used throughout Gen. 2:4-3:23, i.e., from the very beginning of the human race and the Creator-creature relationship. This introduces the first theological exchange about God, as though God could be considered in the abstract and not as the all-encompassing, living Reality in whose context “we live and move and have our being.”

Second, the serpent’s question, introduced with a feigned surprise, purposely twists the prohibition to include all the trees of the garden, seeking to draw out the woman’s relation to the Word of God. Her answer betrays her lack of understanding and opens the way for the serpent’s utter denial of God’s truth in verse 5. She fails to comprehend God’s goodness, i.e., that they may freely eat [וְאָכַל תֹּאכְלוּ] (Gen. 2:16) of the fruit of the trees. Then she unwittingly descends to the serpent’s level, i.e., rather than “thinking God’s thoughts after Him,” she is now seduced into thinking the serpent’s thoughts after him—she calls the LORD God simply “God” [אֱלֹהִים], an almost unconscious mirroring of the serpent’s

reference to God in the abstract.

Third, the woman gives equal force to her own thinking as she did to the very Word of God. With a woman’s natural care and concern, she adds a further prohibition. This is the beginning of all religious tradition, in which the word of man assumes equality with Divine truth, then tends to lessen or obscure the Word of God. Having given so much force to her own idea, she lessens the Divine sentence from the infinitive absolute, “thou shalt surely die” [תָּמוּתָּ בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת, “dying you shall die,” the strongest possible expression]³ to “lest ye die.” This inevitably follows the entrance of human religious tradition.⁴

In this passage we may mark the subtlety of the devil, the ease with which he seduced the woman, the unwitting failure to perceive Divine goodness, the danger of misunderstanding the Word of God, the beginning of all religious tradition and the consequent lessening of the Word of God. Either Adam failed to properly catechize his wife or she failed to listen carefully, and he further failed in providing adequate headship in the critical hour of temptation. The Fall was first hermeneutically twisted (v. 1), then conversationally seductive (v. 2-5) and finally overt in action (v. 6-7). We must seek to know and understand the Word of God as thoroughly and carefully as possible. Every word is vitally important!⁵

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¹ אֵף Is a particle connoting either doubt or surprise. The following neg. לֹא with the imperf. expresses a perpetual prohibition. This should be grammatically noted throughout this passage.

² The woman omitted the word “freely.” She failed to grasp the goodness of the Lord.

³ תָּמוּתָּ בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת, inf. absol., occurring here before the verb, intensifies the abstract idea of the verb, and has the force of “certainly” or “surely.”

⁴ Matt. 15:6 ...Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

⁵ Matt. 4:4, literal translation: It stands written [with undiminishing authority], not upon bread alone shall live the man, but upon every word proceeding through the mouth of God.