

The most important thing in Al's life was his friendship with Christ. If you ever got into a conversation with him about what really mattered, he would point not to honors or degrees or accomplishments, but to the depth of a person's friendship with Christ. Al loved the Lord, and he wanted to do only what was pleasing to him. He also loved people, and he did his best to share with them the one thing that really mattered in life: the love of God. In his work as a scholar and teacher, Al had that remarkable ability of integrating his love for learning with his desire for God and his concern for others. He was loving husband, father, pastor, elder, and friend to so many people. He was also a groundbreaking Old Testament scholar, researcher, and teacher, with a deep love for God's Word and a desire to share that life-giving Word with his colleagues and students. I am sure that Al would be deeply touched by this collection of essays written in his honor. He would be especially moved, I believe, not so much by the high quality of the contributions (as evidenced throughout), but by the deep bonds of friendship that inspired his colleagues and former students to honor him in this way. My friendship with Al goes back to 1971 when we entered Dartmouth College together as freshmen. I remember him then and think of him now as someone who always counted his blessings, and who generously shared his many gifts and talents with others. This volume demonstrates in no uncertain terms what a truly great blessing Al was to the Christian community revolving around Westminster Theological Seminary, and what a wonderful and inspiring gift he was to the international world of biblical scholarship.

—**Dennis J. Billy**, C.Ss.R., John Cardinal Krol Chair, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

I cherish very special memories of my work with Al—an innovative, thorough, and knowledgeable scholar, and above all a dear friend. My work with him in the 1980s on the digitization of the Leningrad Codex was pleasant and instructive in all aspects. Subsequently, he slowly became a leader in this field. He was at the forefront of the computerized study of the Hebrew Bible and its grammatical analysis, and without him this field would be different today. This fine collection of studies is a token of appreciation for his work, and will remain an everlasting memory of his activities and personality.

—**Emanuel Tov**, J. L. Magnes Professor Emeritus of Bible,  
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

“Ah, Mercy!” That word that was ever on Al’s lips also well describes the focus of his work and his life. As he was conscious of having received mercy, so he lived it and, like Micah, loved it. And as he read his Hebrew Bible (and his Greek New Testament, too), he saw God’s *chesed* everywhere in it. The essays in this volume are a fitting tribute to Al, the lover of mercy, because, as Al himself was always concerned to do (even in the midst of parsing an ambiguous verb), they point beyond technical matters to some of the ways in which the Bible directs us both to love and to live God’s mercy. Thanks be to God.

—**Dan McCartney**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Redeemer Seminary, Dallas

Al Groves would surely have opened this volume of scholarly essays eagerly, and on scanning the contents page thought: “Why, I know every one of these contributors personally!”—little thinking that this was the motivation for the entire book. He would have been deeply moved, honored, surprised, grateful, and happy to know he was so much loved.

Al Groves had a special capacity to make people *feel* his care for, and interest in, them—and not only as students or scholars but as whole individuals. At the same time, he could gently question and probe both mind and heart in pastoral concern. Reading these pages with gratitude, he would often, surely, have paused and thought: “Now, we must talk further about this.”

It is wonderfully fitting that some of his closest friends, colleagues, teachers, and students here offer their learning and their love to the memory of such a man. This physical reminder of his largeness of heart, his lovability, his ability joyfully to unite faith and learning, makes one feel again how much he meant to those who knew, loved, and learned from him—and how much he is missed.

—**Sinclair B Ferguson**, The First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina; Professor of Systematic Theology, Redeemer Seminary, Dallas

Teaching in a theological climate is a very lonely and sometimes daunting enterprise. Even with the most absorbed and friendly class, you are all alone there in front. What you say will inevitably be passed on—sometimes garbled and distorted. When you read the exams and one student after another gets it all wrong, there is really only one conclusion available: you, with all your

preparation and good intentions, have deceived a whole class, and they will go on to deceive the waiting world. It is hard to be fearless and open to learning and willing to teach something new and important. It is easy to be safe and lazy. I think teaching the Old Testament is the hardest. It is so far away from today; is Jesus really there? But at Westminster Theological Seminary it was different. Ray Dillard showed us Jesus in the Old Testament, with integrity and with joy.

Ray was pastoral in his preaching and in his recruitment and leadership of his band of brothers in the Old Testament department. The group he brought together and nurtured was truly a team. But that can't happen, can it? Remember how lonesome it is up in front? Someone has said that if it happens, it's possible. It happened. That had to be unique in Old Testament theological education.

But it wasn't unique; it continued. At Ray's much-too-early death, suddenly the unspectacular Al Groves was there, as pastoral of his brood as Ray had been. He had his own kind of cutting-edge scholarship in the arcane world of the Old Testament text. How could the cellar of a crumbling mansion produce the very best Old Testament text ever—and computerized at that? How could that kind of world-class scholarship come with the pastor's heart, for students and especially for his colleagues? It happened again with Al.

We must speak the truth in love. In a seminary, *truth* means the very best painstaking scholarship. *In love* means with kindness and care for all the students, and especially for colleagues in the hard and sometimes hostile world of evangelical Old Testament scholarship. That was Al Groves. It happened again. Isn't the Lord kind?

—Clair Davis, Chaplain and Professor of Church History,  
Redeemer Seminary, Dallas

It is a pleasure to commend this tribute to Al Groves, a pioneer of the interface between computers and the study of the Hebrew Bible, whose death was a huge and untimely loss. The collection here reflects Al Groves' particular interests, and testifies to the vigor and creativity of Old Testament studies in the best traditions of Westminster Theological Seminary, as well as to the immense personal and scholarly influence of the honoree.

—Gordon McConville, Professor of Old Testament Theology,  
University of Gloucestershire

Al's interest in the Hebrew biblical text brought him into contact with the fledgling Center for Computer Analysis of Texts (CCAT) that was attempting to gather computerized texts, especially for the subproject Computer Analysis of Texts for Septuagint Studies. Al worked with the late Jack (John) Abercrombie to correct and adjust the computerized Hebrew text that had been acquired from the University of Michigan (Van Parunak) in cooperation with Claremont Graduate School (Dick Whittaker). In the development of things, further work on this Hebrew material was done in the Netherlands by E. Talstra and his team, with Al contributing on this side of the waters. Al became the person in charge of the Hebrew biblical text developments, at first as an arm of CCAT but soon as an independent project. It was a tremendously valuable development in all ways, and his attention to detail and cooperative spirit were much appreciated by all.

—**Robert A. Kraft**, Berg Professor of Religious Studies,  
University of Pennsylvania

For two traits, yea for three, will I remember Al Groves:  
For prayers redolent with thanksgiving and praise and short on petitions,  
For scholarship alive both to textual ideologies and to Yahweh's mission,  
And for an unnatural gift of parsing lunch bills into fair divisions.  
For these traits, yea for many more, may the God of Israel be praised!

—**Stephen S. Taylor**, Associate Professor of New Testament,  
Biblical Seminary, Hatfield, Pennsylvania

This volume is full of gems, cut from the Scriptures, and skillfully polished by gifted scholars who knew and loved our brother Al Groves. I knew Al for almost thirty years, as classmate and colleague, and these essays are a fitting tribute to the man whose heart was full of love for Christ and for his church. They illustrate all that was true of Al: a concern for academic excellence and theological integrity, allied with a warm heart. The task facing Old Testament scholars is often difficult, but these essays are sparkling with light and color and make us want to dig for ourselves so that we may discover new biblical gems that enable us to be more energetic worshipers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

—**Stafford Carson**, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland  
and minister of First Presbyterian Church, Portadown, Northern Ireland

Eyes to See,  
Ears to Hear



# Eyes to See, Ears to Hear

ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF

J. ALAN GROVES

*Edited by*

Peter Enns, Douglas J. Green,  
& Michael B. Kelly

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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To Libbie, Alasdair, Rebeckah, Éowyn, and Alden:  
Thank you for sharing so much of your husband and father  
with so many.

To Al's students:  
May you have "ears to hear and eyes to see Jesus."



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## Foreword

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MOISÉS SILVA

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I SUSPECT I'M NOT UNUSUAL in that I especially admire those qualities in other people that are conspicuously absent in me. It is perhaps for that reason that, in my estimation, the most striking of Al Groves' many virtues was his welcoming smile and voice whenever someone stepped into his office to disturb him. And because he never appeared to have felt disturbed, the typical visitor, no doubt, felt encouraged—if only at a subconscious level—to interrupt him as frequently as possible.

The truth is that Al had far more on his plate than I, and perhaps any of his other colleagues, ever did. But a single human being who might come to see him was, for him, of far greater importance than the pressing work. It is possible, I suppose, that a sense of obligation was part of what motivated Al to treat others the way he did. And yet one was never aware that duty played a role. He truly valued and appreciated people, and was ever willing to set aside his own interests and plans for their sake.

Al had served in a pastorate before coming to Westminster Seminary—initially as a student, but eventually joining the faculty. Unlike some others who have made a comparable transition, however, he did not set his pastoral heart aside when he became more directly involved in academia. One might think that the highly specialized and technical nature of his scholarly interests (such as using computer technology to produce an electronic text of the Hebrew Bible with every word grammatically

analyzed) would have drawn him into an eremitic existence and greatly limited his contact with students.

Quite the opposite was true. Indeed, most students undoubtedly viewed Al as the pastor-teacher par excellence. And we will never know how many troubled believers, both in seminary and in the local church where he served, were helped by his spiritual advice. On two or three occasions, Al half-jokingly referred to me as his “father-confessor” (I quickly granted him absolution). In reality, and in spite of his younger age, he was far more qualified to play that role.

Beyond that—and in the midst of intense pressures and trials—Al was hardly lacking in *joie de vivre*. I was privileged to be part of a small group who joined him in traveling to professional meetings year after year, and it quickly became apparent to the rest of us that he was exceptionally well qualified to guide us in choosing good places to eat. None of us could match his range of culinary tastes or his capacity to clean every plate until it was spotless. Moreover, his appreciation for life was just as evident in his enjoyment of literature and film. And no one could be around him very long before becoming aware of the great pride and delight he took in his family.

Yet what ultimately distinguished him above all was his deeply personal commitment to Christ. And while the whole tenor of his life gave testimony to his faith, its genuineness and warmth would become immediately evident to anyone who heard him pray. Al would often ask God, for himself and those present, for “eyes to see and ears to hear.” Such a prayer reflects a willingness to recognize the reality of human ignorance, struggle, and doubt in the Christian life, but it also expresses a sense of humble dependence on the One who can grant light, strength, and assurance to all who ask. Al’s life reflected that prayer. May we all learn to pray and live as he did.

# Preface

“Give us eyes to see Jesus,  
ears to hear,  
and hearts to understand.”

Al Groves routinely closed his prayers with those words. In fact, we cannot even read them without hearing his voice pleading them to his heavenly Father. With his body in decline from cancer, he closed his charge to the 2006 graduates of Westminster Theological Seminary with those words—a charge that those hundred or so men and women, and many of us in attendance, will not forget. Al meant that prayer, and that charge. His life was one pointed to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and lived with the intention of directing those with whom he came in contact to their own need for new eyes, ears, and hearts, coming only as a gift from a loving Father.

## THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGIAN

Those words, some may recognize, arise directly from the vision in Isaiah 6:10, where Isaiah’s call is framed around this difficult-to-understand biblical picture of the prophetic ministry as one of “hardening.” Isaiah undertakes his prophetic ministry lest the people see, hear, and understand. The fact that Al would boldly pray that prayer gives us a window into the deep biblical-theological thinking that captured his approach to Scripture. He boldly offered that prayer, aware of the human propensity to be blind, deaf, and dull, but fully confident that Jesus Christ, by the power of his death and resurrection, offers the gift of new eyes, ears, and hearts to the ever-expanding circle of those who follow him, who find life in the kingdom

of God (Acts 28:23–31). Al would think of praying this way only because of his deep convictions about what Jesus Christ had accomplished in the fullness of time.

This foundational interest in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as providing the climax to the grand story of Scripture inspired a generation of Al’s students. The contributors to this volume were deeply influenced by his careful attention to the Hebrew text, his sensitivity to the historical context in which it was written, and his insistence that the OT be understood as ultimately pointing to its climax in Jesus Christ. Al served as coeditor, with Tremper Longman III, of *The Gospel According to the Old Testament* series, a theological commentary series devoted to exploring the biblical-theological dimensions of the OT. His untimely death prevented Al from finishing his intended contribution to that series, *The Gospel According to Isaiah*. His remarkable biblical-theological work on Isaiah, seen, for example, in his article “Atonement in Isaiah 53,”<sup>1</sup> and contained in over a decade of students’ notes, will have to wait to see the further light of day as many of us pick up his ideas and explore and expand them in other venues. Likewise, Al’s publication of longer essays on the Deuteronomistic history and the book of Judges (see the Curriculum Vitae in this volume) are really windows into the depth of his biblical-theological thinking. His students tasted the blessings of his learning and reflection; the wider people of God are the poorer for not having heard more from Al firsthand. But by God’s grace, Al’s “fingerprints” thoroughly cover his students, who take his insights beyond what he was able to do. It is the prayer of the editors of and contributors to this volume that *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear* will play a role in honoring Al, giving thanks to Jesus Christ for the scholarly, pastoral, and spiritual mentor he was to so many.

## THE PIONEER AND COLABORER

Al’s written scholarly output was somewhat limited, because he conceived of his contribution to the academic community as taking place behind the scenes. A consummate team player, Al spent much of his career collaborating with many other scholars to provide electronic data for careful study of the Hebrew Bible. Al took great pleasure in collaborating with others,

1. In Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 61–89.

working together to ensure the highest quality output for others to use in research. Much of this work was done in the recesses of a computer center, away from the public eye. As Kirk Lowery, the current President and Senior Research Fellow of the J. Alan Groves Center for Advanced Biblical Research, has commented, Al likened his work to that of an engineer who designs the wings of the airplane so that they don't fall off at thirty-one thousand feet, and not the welder who assembles the steel or the pilot who actually flies the plane. This is a wonderful metaphor to understand this important component of Al's scholarly contribution and his meticulous attention to detail: the background work and data had better be right, before the plane is built, test-flown, and put into service carrying people!

Much of this collaborative work was done in the field of the application of computer technology to the study of the Hebrew Bible, a field in which Al was among the early scholars to recognize the importance of doing sound technological work in order better to understand the Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew language. In this scholarly arena, because of Al's early visionary work, it is not uncommon to hear him referred to as a "pioneer." For several years he served as cochair of the Society of Biblical Literature's "Computer Assisted Research Group," providing leadership to the scholarly biblical studies community during the critical years when computers moved from behemoths that occupied entire rooms to boxes that sat atop office desks. This growing access and increased mobility changed the world of computing drastically over Al's three-decade career; he was at the forefront of the leaders bringing this change to bear on biblical studies.

For example, one of Al's earliest scholarly ventures involved playing a role in the production of an electronic edition of the text of the Hebrew Bible, a project in which he collaborated with scholars from The Hebrew University (Jerusalem), The University of Pennsylvania, and Claremont graduate schools. The end result was an electronic text of the Hebrew Bible as close as possible to the important Hebrew Bible manuscript, the Leningrad Codex. The text ultimately produced through this collaboration, known as the Michigan-Claremont-Westminster (MCW) electronic BHS, is currently maintained by the J. Alan Groves Center for Advanced Biblical Studies, and to this day is used for translations and printed editions of the Hebrew Bible, for example, the Hebrew-English Tanakh (Jewish Publication Society, 1999) and the Reader's Hebrew Bible (Zondervan, 2008). Additionally, the MCW text serves as the Hebrew text for many of the standard Bible programs

currently available. This important text exists in its current form in large part because of Al's early labors with other scholars, building on their work and, indeed, even going far beyond them.

In addition to playing a significant role in establishing the MCW text, Al was also highly involved collaboratively with the production of a morphology of the Hebrew Bible. This painstaking task involves labeling every component of every word in the Hebrew Bible according to its grammatical part of speech, and even, at times, its grammatical function. For readers who have not studied Hebrew, imagine going through your English Bible and having your eighth-grade grammar teacher ask you to explain every part of speech, word by word! Painstaking indeed! Those who have studied Hebrew and use Hebrew databases in Bible software are very likely benefiting from Al's work, using data that he had a large part in producing and perfecting.

Al's technical expertise continues to benefit the field of biblical studies to the present time. His tireless labor behind the scenes to provide other scholars with tools and data for their work can also be seen in his role as Consultant in Information Systems to the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* project, one of the last projects to which Al was able to contribute. This important project will provide scholars and pastors with a fifth modern edition of the Hebrew Bible. In the introduction to the first released volume, the Editorial Committee comments that the project

benefited from the flexibility and control of a new computerized production method in which all data to be included in the edition are entered into a database, which can then be converted into a variety of electronic and printed forms. This approach would not have been possible without the guidance and assistance of the project's Consultant in Information Systems, Alan Groves of Westminster Theological Seminary . . .<sup>2</sup>

This preface is intended to give some indication of the important role Alan Groves played in the field of biblical studies, admittedly much of it outside the public eye. We have devoted chapter 12 of this festschrift to a fuller treatment of his groundbreaking work, "The Legacy of J. Alan Groves:

2. General *Introduction and Megilloth*, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, Fascicle 18 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004), xxv. Several other scholars from around the world fill out that paragraph—another indication of Al's regular and welcomed role as a collaborator with others.

An Oral History.” Kirk Lowery, the author of that chapter, concludes his article with these words:

Professor Groves’ death prevented him from accomplishing all that he envisioned. Nevertheless, his vision continues to inspire us. The Hebrew syntax database he spoke of is now nearing completion, and plans are already underway for new possibilities, including other ancient Near Eastern languages and texts. The pyramid, the foundations of which he laid, is growing. Tens of thousands of users of all descriptions are making use of the text and data that he created. Unlike ordinary academic publications, Professor Groves’ databases are not static, but are living, growing collections of knowledge and experience in understanding the text and message of the Hebrew Bible. Since Professor Groves’ work forms the foundation of the Hebrew Bible digital pyramid of knowledge, it is difficult to overstate the significance and impact of his legacy for the next century of biblical studies.

It is not difficult to conceive of Al’s contribution to computing and biblical studies. This festschrift in part wants to honor his scholarly contributions, and it is fitting to do so. The contributors to this volume include Al’s former colleagues and students at Westminster Theological Seminary. The colleagues represented are Tremper Longman, Bruce Waltke, Douglas Green, Peter Enns, and Michael Kelly, who (along with the late Raymond Dillard) made up the Old Testament department in the years of Al’s service; the current faculty moderator, William Edgar (with whom Al team-taught a course on a Christian approach to film—another of Al’s passions); and Kirk Lowery, Al’s collaborator and successor as Director (and now President) of the J. Alan Groves Institute for Advanced Biblical Studies.

Because Al’s greatest legacy is found in the students he taught and mentored, we chose to include essays from former students from the three decades in which he taught: Green and Enns from the 1980s, Karen Jobes, Kelly, and Adrian Smith (who completed his Th.M. in Old Testament under Al) from the early 1990s, and three younger scholars who were among his final group of students from the late 1990s and early 2000s: Chris Fantuzzo, Brad Gregory, and Sam Boyd.

As our final act of honoring our mentor and colleague in this volume, we have included Al’s lecture on the occasion of his inauguration as Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. Like other essays,

this is intended to give a sampling of the type of redemptive-historical Old Testament scholarship that came to flower during Al's time on the faculty at the seminary.

But Al's life and legacy go far beyond scholarly contributions. As Moisés Silva brings out in the Foreword, Al had a profound spiritual impact on those around him. The faculty, students, and staff of the seminary enjoyed Al's profound pastoral attention during his all-too-brief time as Vice President for Academic Affairs in 2005–6. So we also offer these essays to honor Al as a brother in Christ, a mentor to his students, a pastor to his colleagues, and one whose life was pointed to the One who gave him life, and who lived his life in the service of others.

Al's prayer has now been answered. He now sees, hears, and knows fully (1 Cor. 13:12). He has now joined the company of disciples. As our Lord says in Luke 10:23–24 (ESV): “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

And for those of us who wait, labor, and serve, grateful and changed by our friendship with Al, we continue to pray this prayer—for eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand.

## Acknowledgments

OUR SINCERE THANKS, first of all, to Marvin Padgett, Karen Magnuson, and John Hughes. Their enthusiasm, flexibility, and attention to detail helped make this volume into a lasting token of thankfulness to God for the life, friendship, and ministry of Al.

Thanks also to our student colleagues, Steve Bohannon and Rob Kashow, for their work preparing the indexes.

Finally, we wish to thank our wives, Sue, Rosemarie, and Shareen, for their steady and compassionate support even as they too shared in the loss of our close friend and brother.

Peter Enns

Douglas J. Green

Michael B. Kelly



## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BDB	<i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
HALOT	Ludwig Köhler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 4 vols., trans. and ed. under supervision of M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994–99)
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew University College Annual</i>
IBHS	Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor, <i>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990)
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOT	<i>Journal of the Society of Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal of the Society of Old Testament Supplement</i>
KJV	King James Version

## ABBREVIATIONS

LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
OG	Old Greek
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
TaNaK	Hebrew Bible
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
THAT	Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> , 2 vols. (München: Chr. Kaiser; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984)
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

# Personal Words

## A Life Well Lived<sup>1</sup>

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

Last Saturday I had the privilege of preaching at a memorial service for Alan Groves, my longtime friend. For fifteen years of our lives, we saw each other almost every working day. He was fifty-four—a scholar and a professor of Hebrew.

The service was memorable. A thousand or more were present, many of them younger men and women; another thousand around the world watched the webcast. His four children and his brothers spoke of him movingly. His colleagues read Scripture in English and Hebrew, and spoke eloquently of his friendship. There were nine tributes and much singing. The service lasted about two hours. I doubt if there were many who wanted it to end sooner.

The stature of our friend grew before our eyes as his full portrait was unveiled and we saw him now whole and complete.

I mention this not so much because the occasion has—obviously—lingered with me, but because three things impressed me.

First, for all his learning (Hebrew scholars are a race apart!), absolutely central to Al's life was the Lord Jesus Christ. You could not be in his presence without realizing that. He simply knew Christ and loved him deeply. The sense of the Lord's presence with him was almost palpable.

1. Rev. Ferguson wrote this tribute in *First Things*, the weekly newsletter of The First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina, where he is senior minister, in the week after he had preached the homily at Al Groves' memorial service.

Second, Al had a habit of pointing things out. One colleague recollected bike riding behind him on the canal paths of Holland. At every point in the road, our friend, in the lead, would point and say, "It's this way, not that!" or "Look at this!" But the supreme expression of this habit was not physical but spiritual. One and another noted how Al always pointed to Jesus—in speech, in action, in all his personal deportment.

Third, what Al was in public he was—even more so—to his wife and children. His children, from early teens to early twenties, could each say that their dad had loved them to Christ. I watched them participate in the worship; it was evident, even in their heart-bursting loss, that they, too, loved their father's Lord. Yes, they have a long furrow now to plough without him. But Al had shown them Christ. This is his lasting memorial.

We both felt we belonged to a great and glorious brotherhood in which we had grown older together—a seminary faculty can be one of the most privileged places in the world to work. But the abiding impression from Saturday was not Al's accomplishments in that world, but that he had been faithful in the ordinary things that Christians share in common. He had trusted and loved Christ; he had pointed others to Christ; he had loved his wife in Christ and led their children to Christ. Therein resides Al's greatest epitaph.

I made my way back to Columbia with a deep sense that everything else we leave behind becomes dust.

*Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show  
Solid joys, and lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know.*

**Jonathan Edwards and Al Groves**

**SAMUEL T. LOGAN JR.**

Al Groves reminds me of Jonathan Edwards. Both men died young, each at the age of fifty-five. Both men died shortly after taking on new academic responsibilities—Jonathan Edwards as President of Princeton College and Al Groves as Vice President of Academic Affairs at Westminster Theological Seminary (one of the institutional heirs of that original Princeton). Both

men left behind communities agonizing over “what might have been” if they had lived.

But those are the externals of the two lives. The most significant similarity between them was the content of their lives and theologies. In a word, that content was, and by God’s grace continues to be, Jesus.

In the most important of his works, the *Treatise on Religious Affections*, Edwards makes the disturbing but thoroughly biblical claim that what characterizes “truly gracious affections” is their Christocentric focus. Ultimately, Edwards argues, the true Christian gives himself to Jesus not in order to get something *from* Jesus (heaven) but in order to give something *to* Jesus (the praise he deserves). Of course, there are unimaginable and eternal blessings in store for the believing Christian, but whenever the heart is more focused on the blessings than on the blesser, we are “seeking first” something other than the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Moisés Silva picks up on this theme in his Foreword to the present volume, especially in the last paragraph of that Foreword: “Yet what ultimately distinguished him [Al] above all was his deeply personal commitment to Christ.” That is why, to take just one of the examples Moisés provides, people came first for Al. And loving the people whom the Lord had placed in Al’s path took precedence over everything else, even those gargantuan piles of work on his desk.

In the midst of a particularly difficult time in my life, Al came to our home and sat talking with Susan and me for hours. The cancer that ultimately killed him had already returned, and his responsibilities at the seminary were huge. But Al came to talk with us and to love us. He did not provide an easy answer (the worst that we feared did eventually happen), but he reminded us, gently but powerfully, of a Savior who loved us even more than he did. And that made all the difference.

But the present volume is intended not just to point back to the life of one Christ-centered man. It is intended to speak about different aspects of God’s Word in ways that embody that central thrust of Al’s life. Over and over again, these essays bring us back to Jesus. When Tremper Longman considers “when bad things happen to good people,” he reminds us in the end that the answer to that conundrum is not to deny it but to affirm that it is resolved when the ultimate wrong is done to the best person and when that best person triumphs in a resurrection that destroys the power of all the “bad things” that have ever existed.

When Doug Green takes us through the Twenty-third Psalm, or Pete Enns mines the riches of Qohelet's theology, or Mike Kelly discusses missional hermeneutics, or Karen Jobes examines apostolic reflections on Isaiah 53, the central figure, over and over again, is Jesus. The genius of all these essays is the way in which they embody what both Edwards and Groves taught and lived—the centrality of the Savior.

Edwards once said, "No light in the understanding is good which does not produce holy affection [for Jesus] in the heart." Jonathan Edwards and Al Groves lived this truth, and by God's grace, the essays in this book will move readers in that same Christocentric direction.

## On Bridges, Bytes, and Beaches

EEP TALSTRA

One of the many things that one could say about Alan Groves is that he was remarkably gifted at observing and enjoying life in all its breadth. Given his broad range of interests, how shall I choose which memories to comment on?

To me, Alan was an excellent example of the importance of having trained engineers in the field of biblical theology. He was a genuine craftsman at building bridges between continents, whether between Europe and the United States or between Christian faith and classical Hebrew morphology. I am convinced that his initial technical training as an engineer helped him to think carefully and precisely, both in the study of OT theology and in doing grammar in bits and bytes. Furthermore, in between all his tasks, Alan was always ready to enjoy the Netherlands' island beaches, as well as beaches in America.

We met for the first time in 1987, in Amsterdam, where Alan contributed a paper to a symposium on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of my research group in Bible and computing.<sup>2</sup> Alan presented the

2. Alan Groves, "On Computers and Hebrew Morphology" in E. Talstra, ed., *Computer Assisted Analysis of Biblical Texts. Proceedings of the Workshop Held at the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the "Werkgroep Informatica" in Amsterdam, November 5–6, 1987, Applicatio 7* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit University Press, 1989), 45–86.

research that he and his team had performed since 1983 for the Westminster Hebrew database. Presentationally, his contribution was modest, but as the audience quickly perceived, it was thorough and effective in approach. As an engineer, he was able to bring our digital dreams down to earth and into the realm of real data. He compared his work to that of a “street sweeper” after a parade, his tasks being to clean databases and to make data and their analysis precise and consistent. As he said in that paper, “all of us in computer-aided study of texts are involved in a modern-day Masoretic enterprise.”

That meeting became the start of a long-term scholarly cooperation that continued until the last years of Alan’s academic work. Alan invited me to visit Philadelphia several times for guest lectures. On three occasions between 1992 and 2002, he and his family spent a semester of sabbatical leave with us in Amsterdam. A tangential effect of these visits continues to this day: my youngest son still speaks Dutch to Libbie on the phone!

These were years of deep friendship between our families and of intense scholarly cooperation. Together, Alan and I studied the Hebrew syntax needed for our common goals: to produce solid databases of the biblical text and to explore the theology of biblical books such as Exodus, Judges, and Kings. Our first common project, in close cooperation with our Swiss German friend Christoph Hardmeier, was the Hebrew database QUEST,<sup>3</sup> its later version called SESB.<sup>4</sup>

Alan made me a member of the Westminster delegation at several Society of Biblical Literature conferences. During the 1991 conference in Kansas City, we took a day off, and Alan drove me into the countryside to visit his grandmother, who lived in a small town in a home for elderly people. After the grand hotels of downtown Kansas City, that was a real and valuable introduction to American daily life.

After this reminiscing, I do not need to make choices: Alan Groves means Hebrew texts and computing, singing hymns together, walking the walls of the ancient city of Jerusalem, and enjoying the beaches of the island of Terschelling. It was a blessing to know this colleague and friend.

3. Eep Talstra, Christoph Hardmeier, and J. Alan Groves, eds., *QUEST: Electronic Concordance Applications for the Hebrew Bible* (Haarlem: Netherlands Bible Society, 1992).

4. Christoph Hardmeier, Eep Talstra, and Alan Groves, *SESB: Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society / Haarlem: Netherlands Bible Society, 2004).

## A Tribute to a Friend

ED WELCH

“Nothing has changed.”

I wasn’t so sure. It seemed to me that everything had changed. With four words—“your cancer is malignant”—Al’s parents would lose their oldest son; his wife would become a widow; his four children, far too young to lose a father, would, indeed, lose their father; and what about me? Not that it’s all about me, but I would lose a dear friend in just a little more than a year. The cancer was inoperable, and there were no viable treatments. But those were his first words to me. He said them about twenty-five minutes after he had been given his diagnosis and prognosis. “Nothing has changed.”

This is what he meant. The hour before he was given his dire and accurate prognosis, Al had been certain that Jesus was the reigning King. His kingdom was initiated with power at his resurrection and ascension; his love was established beyond any doubt when he died for those who held him in contempt; and in his death we have forgiveness of sins, which was the first of an explosion of benefits and promises fulfilled. Nothing can separate us from his love; his reign is guaranteed to prosper. On a more personal note, it also meant that my friend’s loving Father would care for his wife and children with a unique affection. These are a few things that Al crammed into “nothing has changed.”

All this was true pre-diagnosis; it was true post-diagnosis. Yet everything had changed. There were decisions about joining an experimental treatment group; every day would have plenty of tears and many goodbyes; there were gravesites to select; and Al would have to comfort many friends who were already mourning. But he was certain that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8 NIV).

Imagine—and Al was a good imaginer—what life would be like if we could quickly say that nothing has changed when we encounter snags, inconveniences, and downright tragedies. Unshakable. Utterly unshakable. Imagine life without the angry outbursts and swoons of despair or the long gaps of faithlessness before we turn back to Jesus. Well, I can imagine them by simply remembering Al. He was my near-daily reminder that we live in the age of the Spirit, and that what was previously impossible becomes normal.

His words of faith didn't appear out of nowhere. There is always a backstory when we actually see the Spirit on the move. Here is some of it. Al read the psalms every day. In the twenty-five years that I knew him, he probably never missed a day. Of course, he read lots of other passages. I think he was a read-the-Bible-through-in-a-year guy. But his diet of the psalms is what especially inspired me. God has determined that much of the growth that his people experience comes from the gradual accumulation of hearing or reading the truth, believing it, and living it. Dramatic insights are great when they come, but they usually add just a hint of color to the gradual and inexorable process of growing in Jesus.

I read Psalm 105 today. (I don't read a psalm without thinking about Al.) I needed my own version of "nothing has changed." The psalm is like many others. I've never heard anyone say that it was his or her favorite psalm. It just happened to be next in the schedule.

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.  
(Ps. 105:1–4)

The psalmist leads us in a traditional introduction, but already everything has changed. I am taken up out of my many cares, and my heart is focused on things that are even bigger and more important. Then the psalm recounts OT history, which is the history of God. He directs history, and history reveals him and his endless acts of love and faithfulness.

One of the observations that experts have made about the increase in depression is that it has coincided with an era in which there is nothing bigger than us and our own desires. The family is broken or dispersed; there is no security in our jobs; and there is no *cause célèbre*. We are stuck, therefore, with the meager self, and depression is sure to follow. Psalm 105, in contrast, gives us exactly what we need. It brings us into a bigger story and never lets us back down. How pleasant it is to sit on a perch overlooking the universe and see the plans of God. Somehow, we have been joined to Christ in a way that we are involved with a kingdom that is eternal. Then we get off our temporary resting place and look to be part of this larger agenda. Notice how the entire psalm becomes our rationale for simple, daily obedience:

## PERSONAL WORDS

[God did these things] that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws. Praise the LORD. (Ps. 105:45)

So that's how my friend did it. Al did some big things in his life (at least I thought they were big), but his interests were not in résumés. He preferred humble obedience to the King who loved him. The kingdom advances "forcefully" (Matt. 11:12) in ways that can, at first glance, seem mild-mannered.

It has been more than three years since Al's death, and I am still trying to catch up to him. A psalm a day just might do it.

I went to his grave today.

J. Alan Groves

December 17, 1952–February 5, 2007

In Christ death is swallowed up in victory.

# A Letter That Alan Groves Wrote for His Memorial Service: God's Unfailing Love Endures Forever

AS I HAVE WALKED through the valley of the shadow of death, I have walked hand in hand with Jesus, the one who has already walked through that valley and come out the other side—alive, raised from the dead. And as I hold his hand and trust him, I too am raised with him, for this was his purpose in walking that path: to raise those who trusted in him. His rod and staff, his cross of suffering have become my comfort. Now as I have died, I come before the God, the King of the universe, and I come in Christ. He chose to suffer and die on the cross in my place, so that on account of him, I might have forgiveness from sin and victory over death. And now I have received the resurrection and eternal life that has been my only hope, past, present, and forever.

I have led a truly blessed life. At a young age, I realized that Jesus was not just a story in a comic book, but that he was real and I could actually know him. I wish I could describe to you what a powerful moment of understanding that was, and I have thought about it many times over the years, marveling over and over at the truth of this central fact. The Lord placed me into the perfect family where I was raised by loving parents with wonderful siblings. God gave me a wonderful wife who has been my joy as we have raised four wonderful children together. The Lord has given me the opportunity to be intimately involved in the lives of so many wonderful brothers and sisters, in our fellowship at college, as a pastor in Vermont, as

an elder at New Life Church, and as a professor at Westminster Seminary. Through family and ministry, I have had the privilege of loving and being loved by all of you, and I have been struck again and again by the deposit that each of you has left in my life.

Through all my life, Christ has been constant. Even as I have grown and changed, he is still the one whom I loved that first day. And nothing ever changed in how I came to him; every day of my life the story is the same: I come to God in Christ. His love for me has been steadfast, and he has pursued me through every time I have turned away from him and every time I have returned. The constant prayer of my heart for my own life and the lives of those around me has been that we would see Jesus, and that he would be welcome and present among us.

There may be some here who have never trusted Christ for life, who have never known that he is the answer to the sin and death in our lives. I urge you to consider the claims he made to being the Son of God, to consider that he didn't stay dead and sends a message down through the ages that there is life in him and him alone. His death on a cross, humiliating though it seemed, was his glory, by which he has defeated our true enemies—sin and death. By the ultimate sacrifice he made, he humiliated all powers arrayed against him.

If you struggle with faith, let me encourage you that in the hardest moments I have faced, he has been there. And death has been defeated. I am in Christ, as you are in Christ. So let us live out of the grace we have received. Let us live out of Christ. This means looking daily for him, asking him to open your eyes to him, and embracing what you see. Seek him with all your heart. Love him with all your heart. Love those he loves with all your heart, even to the laying down of your life for him. Jesus, the way, the truth, the life. In no other do we have hope. But in him we have hope that endures forever. We grieve, but we grieve with hope. The hope of a resurrection; the hope of life eternal. Together with Jesus.

For most of my Christian life I have wanted to see Jesus face-to-face, to join in with the heavenly chorus in his presence around his royal throne and declare his praise in new ways. Something else has grown through the years: an abiding sense that this is not for me alone. Being with Jesus by myself is not what he wants, nor is it what I want. To be there with you all, those he loves, and those I have come to love—that is true joy. I have often thought of coming to heaven as Jesus standing at

A LETTER THAT ALAN GROVES WROTE FOR HIS MEMORIAL SERVICE

the finish line of a race awaiting those looking for him, trusting in him, pursuing him. But it isn't a race for me to finish first or alone. It has always been a race for us to finish together, arm in arm, having encouraged one another in faith.

He is good. From the beginning, his steadfast love has endured. It endures forever. He is gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. Trust in him with all your heart. For he is faithful.



# I

## Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? A Biblical-Theological Approach

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T R E M P E R   L O N G M A N   I I I

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ALONG WITH THE others in this volume, I dedicate this essay to the memory of my dear friend Alan Groves. In his final M.Div. year and my first year as a teacher at Westminster, Al took two courses from me. He, of course, excelled, and Ray Dillard and I asked him to join our department. The three of us enjoyed a close departmental camaraderie, being joined by Bruce Waltke from 1985 to 1991. In 1993, Ray Dillard, mentor to both Al and me, suddenly died at the age of 49. The trauma of his death and the new responsibility we shared for the curriculum brought Al and me closer together. I left for Westmont in 1998 and Al became the chair of the department, leading it with his good grace and wisdom until just before his death.

I rehearse our history not only to remind the reader of Al's impressive teaching career, but also to demonstrate that I knew Al well. He was a man of virtue and godliness. He feared God and avoided evil (Job 1:1, 8). Al also struggled with health issues over many of the years that I knew him, and he died young. Al's life and death raise one of the most pervasive biblical-theological issues addressed in the Bible: retribution. To put it in a phrase

made popular by Rabbi Kushner's book: "Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?"<sup>1</sup>

## **BLESSINGS ON THE RIGHTEOUS; CURSES ON THE WICKED**

When one thinks about it, it is amazing how much of the OT is dedicated to the proposition that the godly will be blessed and the ungodly will be cursed. I will begin with the book of Proverbs and branch out from there.

### **Proverbs**

The preface to the book of Proverbs begins by stating the purpose of the book: that its readers "know wisdom and discipline" (1:2).<sup>2</sup> The first nine chapters largely comprise a father's speeches to his son with the hope of keeping him on the path of wisdom and off the path of folly. Wisdom, on one level, is a practical skill of living: knowing how to avoid the pitfalls of life and maximize success. Wisdom entails doing the right thing at the right time and saying the right thing at the right time. Of course, wisdom is more profound than knowing how to navigate life. The preface also famously asserts: "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7). One cannot even get to square one with wisdom without a relationship with the God of the universe.

Thus, Proverbs divides people into two camps: the wise and the fool. Germane to our topic is the claim that the former will experience the best of life, while the latter will suffer. Consider the following proverbs chosen rather randomly for illustrative purposes:

There is one who gives freely yet gains more,  
but one who withholds what is due will surely become needy. (11:24)

A healthy tongue is a tree of life,  
but the one with duplicity produces a broken spirit. (15:4)

Note, too, how Woman Wisdom, the personification of Yahweh's wisdom, describes herself and her gifts in Proverbs 8:18–19:

1. Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Anchor, 2004).

2. All quotations of Proverbs in this chapter are taken from Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

Wealth and honor are with me,  
enduring riches and righteousness.  
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
my yield than choice silver.

The presumption of these passages and many more in Proverbs is that if one follows the way of wisdom and godliness, that person will be rewarded with the good things in life. On the contrary, following the way of the ungodly fool leads to life's problems.

## **Deuteronomy**

Proverbs is not alone in advocating a connection between godly behavior and material abundance in life. The structure of Deuteronomy shows that behavior and consequences are woven into the very tapestry of the covenant.

Deuteronomy is Moses' final sermon. As Moses stands on the plains of Moab, he addresses the generation born in the wilderness and exhorts them to obey Yahweh when they enter the Promised Land. They should not be like their fathers, disobedient and judged in the wilderness. Moses, in essence, leads the people to reaffirm the commitment to the covenant that God established with them at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19–24). It is not surprising that as a covenant-renewal text, the book has the following pattern:

- Introduction: 1:1–5
- Historical Review: 1:9–3:27
- Law: 4:1–26:19
- Rewards and Consequences: 27–28
- Witnesses: 30:19–20
- Review and Succession: 31:9–13

Interestingly, since the mid-twentieth century, scholars have recognized that these elements follow the pattern of an ancient Near Eastern vassal treaty.<sup>3</sup> In essence, the covenant is a treaty between an all-powerful King, Yahweh, and his vassal people, Israel.

For our purposes, though, we should draw our attention to the connection between the legal section and the chapters devoted to rewards and

3. See K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 283–94.

consequences. In a word, obedience to the law brings material blessings (abundant crops, large families, success in war; see 28:1–14), while disobedience results in deprivation and defeat (28:15–68). In sum, Deuteronomy, the book that summarizes the Pentateuch, illustrates the nexus between behavior and life consequences. Good things happen to good people; bad things happen to bad people.

## The Deuteronomic History

Deuteronomy not only summarizes the Pentateuch, but also casts its long shadow over much of the rest of the OT. The retribution theology of a book such as Joshua shows this perspective. The two longest battle accounts are those connected to the battles at Jericho (Josh. 5:13–6:27) and Ai (Josh. 7–8). Jericho was the most formidable of the Canaanite city-states, legendary for its massive walls and long history. On the other hand, Ai was not much of a settlement. Indeed, its very name means “ruin” in Hebrew. Interestingly, though, Jericho easily falls to the Israelites, while Ai initially defeats the attacking Israelite army. Why? Again, these two accounts illustrate the theology of retribution. Obedience brings victory; disobedience results in failure. Joshua and Israel followed all of the divine warrior’s instructions (see Josh. 5:13–15 and chap. 6). Ai records the opposite experience. Ai is able to resist Israel because of the disobedience of one man, Achan, who stole plunder from Jericho in defiance of the rules of *herem*, or holy war (see Josh. 7–8). After the sinner is punished, Ai too falls easily. Retribution theology wins out again.

Another prime example of the way the theology of Deuteronomy shapes the presentation of the history of Israel and Judah in Samuel-Kings can be clearly seen by contrasting it with its synoptic counterpart, Chronicles. Samuel-Kings shows no awareness of the end of the exile, ending its historical presentation with a reference to Jehoiachin’s release from prison dated to the year that Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk) ascended the throne in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27–30; ca. 562 BC). Thus, the final form of the book seems to have been completed during the exile. From the contents, it appears that Samuel-Kings is presenting an argument for why Judah is in exile. Each of the kings is judged by whether he kept the law of centralization (Deut. 12), for instance. When read against the background of Deuteronomy 17:14–20, Samuel-Kings also makes it clear that the kings of neither Israel nor Judah lived up to the divine standard

for the king. Israel also did not listen to the true prophets, but rather the false ones (Deut. 13:1–5; 18:15–22). For that reason the curses of the law go into effect (Deut. 28:15–68). None of these concerns can be seen in Chronicles, a historical project that comes to completion sometime in the postexilic period with its different interests.

For the purposes of this essay, the important point is that Samuel-Kings describes Israel and Judah's fate as a result of their not keeping the law.<sup>4</sup> Why are we in exile? "Because we did not keep the law and so the curses of the covenant came into effect." Thus, as in Deuteronomy, one sees that sin leads to suffering.

### The Prophets: The Case of Jeremiah

The prophets were the lawyers of the covenant. When Israel broke the law, God would send in his lawyer to bring a case against it, threatening Israel with the curses of the covenant. Think of Jeremiah: Israel has betrayed the covenant by virtue of its idolatry and many other sins (Jer. 10:1–22; 11:1–17). It would suffer for its transgressions.

Note the specifically legal language found in a prophet such as Jeremiah (e.g., Jer. 2:9; see also Mic. 1:2; 6:1–8). Again, the logic of the prophets is based on the covenant. The people and their leaders have broken the law of the covenant and thus deserve to suffer the curses.

The judgment oracle found in Jeremiah 11:1–8 illustrates the connection between the prophet's message and covenant well. Here God instructs Jeremiah to hear again the "terms of my covenant" (v. 3 NLT), a reference to the laws, specifically of the Mosaic covenant, the one he entered into with his people "when I brought them out of the iron-smelting furnace of Egypt" (v. 4). He told them then to obey him. But they "did not listen or even pay attention" (v. 8). The result, anticipated by a text such as Deuteronomy 27–28, is that the curses of the covenant would come into effect.

The message of Jeremiah 11:1–8 is repeated time and time again in the various judgment oracles of the book. Thus, Jeremiah too, as well as most other prophets, is an example of the doctrine of retribution. God's people have sinned and therefore suffer.

4. See Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 163–64, 181–86.

## Conclusion

Upon reflection, one marvels at just how much of the OT supports the doctrine of retribution. Our examples above are just selections. While Samuel-Kings' central argument is based on the retribution principle, its counterpart Chronicles also teaches that sin has consequences. The major difference appears to be that the former emphasizes delayed retribution in order to explain the exile, while the latter focuses on stories of immediate retribution to discourage the postexilic community's propensity to rebel.<sup>5</sup> We are left with the question: "Does the Bible support the idea of reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked?" Are the modern advocates of the prosperity gospel right after all?

## THE LIMITS OF WISDOM

To answer that question, we turn now to Job and Ecclesiastes, along with Proverbs, the wisdom books of the OT. It appears that one of the canonical functions of these two books is to serve as a corrective to an overly optimistic connection between behavior and quality of life.

### Job

In the light of the biblical teaching above, one might find it difficult to blame Job's three friends for their belief that Job is a sinner. If sin leads to suffering, then isn't suffering a sign that a person is a sinner?

Indeed, before speaking, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar sit for seven days in deep empathy with their friend (Job 2:13). They don't offer their opinion until prodded to do so by Job's lament—or, better, *complaint* (Job 3). Indeed, it is misleading to call Job's words a *lament* because that invites comparison to the psalms of lament. Upon closer reading, we see that Job's impassioned statement is closer to the grumbling tradition found in Numbers (e.g., Num. 20:1–13) than to the psalms. In the latter, the prayer is directed toward God, while the former is addressed to other people about God. God invites the lament, but not the complaint.

5. Raymond B. Dillard, "Reward and Punishment in Chronicles: The Theology of Immediate Retribution," *WTJ* 46 (1984): 161–72; Raymond B. Dillard, "The Reign of King Asa (2 Chr 14–16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," *JETS* 23 (1980): 207–18; Roddy L. Braun, *1 Chronicles*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), xxxvii–xxxix.

Thus, again, one can hardly blame the three friends for their defense of the integrity of God.

In the disputation that follows, their argument, repeated over and over again, is as follows. Job suffers; thus, he has sinned. In order for him to be restored to his former blessed state, he needs to repent. A good example of this type of argument may be found in Zophar's first speech:

If only you would prepare your heart  
and lift up your hands to him in prayer!  
Get rid of your sins,  
and leave all iniquity behind you.  
Then your face will brighten with innocence.  
You will be strong and free of fear. . . .  
But the wicked will be blinded.  
They will have no escape.  
Their only hope is death. (Job 11:13–15, 20)<sup>6</sup>

Job's condition is a result of his sin, and thus to be restored Job must repent.

Right from the beginning of the book, though, the reader knows that Job's suffering is not the result of sin. We know this with a level of certainty that none of the book's characters have because we are given access to God's own mind on the matter in the preface to the book. God decides to allow Job to suffer in spite of his piety, which is affirmed in words spoken to the Accuser that could have come straight from the book of Proverbs: "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless [tam]—a man of complete integrity [yasar]. He fears God [cf. Prov. 1:7] and stays away from evil" (1:8; see also the narrator in 1:1). Not even the Accuser questions this assessment. He rather questions the motivation. Is Job pious out of self-interest? So Job's suffering is the result of a test of the motivation for his godliness, not because of any sin on his part.

Yet one of the ironies of the book is that Job himself shares the presuppositions of the three friends. He too believes that only the wicked should suffer. The difference, however, is that he also knows that he does not deserve to suffer, so he does not see merit in Zophar's (and the others') advice to repent. He believes God is unjust (chap. 9), and so he seeks an audience with God to set him straight (31:35–37).

6. All quotations of Job in this chapter are taken from the NLT.

Job will get his audience with God, but before he does, yet another character steps forward: Elihu. Elihu has waited patiently for men older (and presumably wiser) than he is to solve the problem presented by Job's sin. Elihu represents a more "spiritual" wisdom rather than one based on experience and observation (32:6–10). The irony of Elihu's speech is that though he castigates the failed arguments of the three friends, he basically parrots the same argument based on retribution theology:

He brings the mighty to ruin without asking anyone,  
and he sets up others in their place.  
He knows what they do,  
and in the night he overturns and destroys them.  
He strikes them down because they are wicked,  
doing it openly for all to see. (Job 34:24–26)

Since Elihu's argument is a repetition of the previous argument, no one even bothers to answer him. So much for youthful, "spiritual" wisdom.

Human wisdom has failed. Job's friends, Elihu, and Job himself have not arrived at the right response to Job's predicament. Human perspective gives way to the divine perspective in 38:1–42:6.

Job desired an audience with God. He wanted to set him straight. He gets the audience, but the session does not go as he anticipated in 31:35–37 ("I would tell him exactly what I have done. I would come before him like a prince"). God appears in a whirlwind, a sign that he is none too happy with Job. God does not give Job a chance to speak, but calls him to attention and then presents a barrage of questions. God here is like a professor irritated with a student who thinks he knows more than his teacher. God, in essence, presents Job with a pop exam, which he miserably fails.

The nature of the questions serves the purpose of putting Job in his place. He is unable to answer questions that only God could answer about the origins of creation ("Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much. Who determined its dimensions?" [38:4–5a]). God thus asserts his wisdom and elsewhere his power (for instance, as he describes the awesome Leviathan as his pet [41:1–11]). Job has no recourse but to repent in the presence of God (40:4–5; 42:1–6). As a result, God restores his blessings to him (42:12–17).

What do we learn about suffering in the book of Job? What does it teach about the relationship between behavior and consequences (ret-

ribution)? It is often rightly remarked that the book of Job does not provide an answer to the question of suffering. Indeed, it is right to say that the book's main subject is wisdom and not suffering. Job, after all, does answer the question "Who is wise?" All the human characters' wisdom is shown as inadequate to help Job to understand his situation. Only God is wise.

Even so, the book, while not giving an answer to the question of human suffering, does effectively debunk the view that suffering is inextricably tied to sin. Job is an example of a totally innocent sufferer. As we know from the preface, Job's suffering is not the result of his sin. Thus, the three friends, Job, and Elihu were all wrong to believe so.

### **Retribution in Ecclesiastes**

The book of Ecclesiastes raises serious questions about divine retribution. Before examining that particular issue, however, it is necessary to discuss the book as a whole in order to properly situate our consideration of specific passages.

Most contemporary commentators today follow Michael Fox in distinguishing two voices within the book.<sup>7</sup> In the largest part of the book, Qohelet (the Teacher) speaks in the first person. His voice emerges in 1:12 with a typical ancient Near Eastern autobiographical introduction:<sup>8</sup> "I am Qohelet. I have been king over Israel in Jerusalem."<sup>9</sup> His speech continues through 12:7. The other voice is that of a person (who remains nameless) who talks about Qohelet in the third person: e.g., "Qohelet was a wise man . . ." (12:9). While it is conceivable that the same person lies behind these two voices and changes narrative voice for rhetorical purposes, I find this extremely unlikely and odd, since I cannot determine what the rhetorical purpose would be. The most natural way of reading Ecclesiastes is to differentiate the voices and to understand that the second unnamed wise man (Fox calls him the "frame narrator") is exposing his son (12:12) to the teaching of Qohelet and commenting

7. Michael V. Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," *HUCA* 48 (1977): 83–106, and most recently, *Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2004). See also Tremper Longman III, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998); Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

8. For the ancient Near Eastern background of Qohelet's speech, see Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 120–22.

9. All quotations of Ecclesiastes in this chapter are the author's own translation.

on it in the epilogue. We can identify this second voice in the prologue (1:1–11) and the epilogue (12:8–14).<sup>10</sup> The most important implication of recognizing these two voices is to understand that the “theology of Qohelet” is not the “theology of the book of Ecclesiastes.” The latter is to be associated with the thought of the second wise man. The book of Job is analogous, since it would be an interpretive mistake to understand the theology of the book of Job as that of the three friends, Elihu, or even Job himself. That said, it would also be a mistake to discount the importance of Qohelet’s thought, if for no other reason than the book devotes so much space to the development of his ideas. Furthermore, it appears that the frame narrator does affirm the truth and importance of Qohelet’s views, even while he seems to be criticizing it. I will comment on this below, but for now we need to turn to the book’s teaching on retribution.

As we do so, we see that retribution is a topic that is taken up by Qohelet, not the frame narrator. Qohelet’s main argument is that “life is difficult and then you die.” In a word, life is *meaningless*, a word (*hevel*) that he repeats over forty times in his speech. He does so particularly in the early chapters of his speech when he is exploring different avenues of potential meaning in life: pleasure (2:1–11), wisdom and folly (2:12–17), work (2:18–23; 4:4–6), political power (4:13–16), and wealth (5:9–6:9).

Why are they all meaningless? Qohelet offers three reasons. The first is death (3:16–22; 12:1–7). For example, wisdom is better than folly because it helps one navigate life, but it does not allow the wise man to escape death. Both fools and wise people die, so what is the advantage of the latter over the former (2:12–17)?

The second factor that renders life meaningless is the inability to discern the “proper time.” After all, wisdom functions by doing the right thing or saying the right thing at the right time (Prov. 15:22; 27:14). Just knowing the proverbs is not enough; one needs to know when they are relevant to a situation. For example, the only way to know whether to answer a fool or not is to discern what kind of fool one is speaking with (Prov. 26:4–5). Proverbs in the hands of a fool are useless (Prov. 26:7) or even dangerous (Prov. 26:9). Of course, Qohelet knows that God has created everything for its “proper time,” but unfortunately he has not allowed humans in on the

10. The third-person narrator makes his presence known as the narrator of Qohelet’s teaching in 7:27 with the simple “Qohelet said.”

secret (Eccl. 3:1–14). This frustrates Qohelet and leads him again to conclude that life is meaningless.

For our purposes, Qohelet’s third reason why life is meaningless will draw our close attention. Life is not just short and hard to figure out; it is also unfair. Qohelet raises the question of proper retribution. I will look at four passages in this regard.

In Ecclesiastes 2:18–23, Qohelet explores hard work as an avenue to meaning in life. Based on a number of proverbs (Prov. 6:6–11; 10:26; 12:11, 24, to name just a handful), one would think that hard work would lead to success and happiness since it is the route of wisdom, while laziness would lead to the opposite since it marks the behavior of the fool. Consider, for instance, Proverbs 10:4: “A slack hand makes poverty; a determined hand makes rich.” Qohelet takes a penetrating look at this teaching and concludes that in the light of death, hard work is meaningless. Sure, one might even grow wealthy from working, but then the person dies, and “an individual who did not work for it” (Eccl. 2:21) gets it. Thus “all [one’s] days are filled with pain and frustration” (2:23). Proper retribution does not work out, according to Qohelet.

In 3:16–22, Qohelet again observes that there is no proper reward and punishment in this life:

The place of judgment—injustice was there!

The place of righteousness—injustice was there! (3:16)

In the light of a present in which there is no justice or fairness, Qohelet contemplates the possibility of a later reckoning. What about justice in the afterlife?

I said to myself concerning the human race, “God tests them so that they may see they are like animals.” For the fate of human beings and the fate of animals are the same fate. One dies like the other. There is one breath for all. Human beings have no advantage over the animals, for everything is meaningless. All go to the same place. All come from the dust, and all return to the dust. Who knows whether the breath of humans goes up above and the breath of animals goes down to the depths of the earth? So I observed that there is nothing better than for people to rejoice in their work, for that is their reward. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them? (3:18–22)

Qohelet does not believe that he can be sure that everything will be straight in the afterlife, because he is not sure that there is such a thing as life after death.<sup>11</sup>

In 7:15–18, Qohelet moves beyond mere observation of the unfairness of life to offering advice about how to live in the face of such inequities:

Both I observed in my meaningless life: There is a righteous person perishing in his righteousness, and there is a wicked person living long in his evil. Do not be too righteous and do not be overly wise. Why ruin yourself? Do not be too wicked and do not be a fool. Why die when it is not your time? It is good to hold on to this and also to not release your hand from that. The one who fears God will follow both of them.

These are remarkable words, especially compared with the exhortations of Proverbs to seek wisdom (note the entirety of Proverbs 2). Since retribution does not work, do not exert yourself strenuously in the pursuit of wisdom or righteousness.

Perhaps the most extensive treatment of the lack of retribution by Qohelet is found in chapter 9, where it is also intertwined with Qohelet's other nemesis, death, as well as the inability to recognize the proper time. Ecclesiastes 9:11–12 is just one example from this dark chapter:

Then I turned and observed something else under the sun. That is, the race is not to the swift, the battle not to the mighty, nor is food for the wise, nor wealth to the clever, nor favor to the intelligent, but time and change happen to all of them. Indeed, no one knows his time. Like fish that are ensnared in an evil net and like birds caught in a snare, so people are ensnared in an evil time, when it suddenly falls on them.

In a word, people do not get what they deserve, but rather they are subject to the vicissitudes of chance.

One final example. Ecclesiastes 8:10–14 illustrates that Qohelet really struggled with this teaching. To him, it accentuated the difference between what he *knew* and what he *saw*:

Thus, *I saw* the wicked buried and departed. They used to go out of the holy place, and they were praised in the city where they acted in such a

11. He is actually more pessimistic in 12:1–7 and chapter 9.

way. This too is meaningless. Because the sentence for an evil deed is not quickly carried out, therefore the human heart is filled with evildoing. For sinners do evil a hundred times and their days are lengthened—although *I know* that it will be well for those who fear God because they fear him, and it will not be well for the wicked and their days will not lengthen like a shadow, because they do not fear God. There is *another example* of meaninglessness that is done on the earth: There are righteous people who are treated as if they did wicked deeds, and there are wicked people who are treated as if they did righteous deeds. I say that this too is meaningless.

Here Qohelet begins with an observation of the lack of fairness in life. Wicked people were honored during their life and given a glorious burial. How unfair! But then his mind goes to what he knows (his theology), and he repeats standard ideas of retribution. But he cannot stop here. He then gives an anecdote (another example) based on observation that contradicts his theology. For Qohelet, life conflicts with theology. Theology does not adequately explain life.

### **Do Job and Ecclesiastes Contradict Proverbs?**

Our presentation of the material above may lead to a misconception if not read carefully. Proverbs emphasizes the rewards that come to those who follow the way of wisdom, while Job and Ecclesiastes question the connection between behavior and consequences. Does that mean that Job and Ecclesiastes contradict Proverbs, not to speak of the other strands of the OT that imply that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people?

Close study of these books suggests a negative answer. In the first place, Proverbs does not guarantee reward to the righteous or punishment for the wicked. A proverb is simply not in the business of issuing promises or guarantees.<sup>12</sup> Rather, a proverb states the best route to a desired end, all other things being equal. Most of the time it is true that lazy behavior will lead to poverty and hard work will result in a better living standard, but not always. An indolent person could inherit a fortune, or a hard worker might be wiped out by a natural calamity or a crooked administrator. Proverbs 13:23 acknowledges the latter when it says:

12. Bruce K. Waltke, “Does Proverbs Promise Too Much?” AUSS 34 (1996): 319–36.

A poor person's farm may produce much food,  
but injustice sweeps it all away.

Another indication that Proverbs itself does not believe there is a mechanical and absolutely guaranteed connection between wise behavior and good benefits is in its acknowledgment that the fool can have wealth—even if only temporarily:

Wealth from get-rich-schemes quickly disappears;  
wealth from hard work grows over time. (13:11)

But even when the wealth of fools might last, it does not really help the person:

Riches won't help on the day of judgment. (11:4a)

Thus, a number of better-than proverbs imply that a person may have to decide between wisdom and success in life:

Better to be poor and godly  
than rich and dishonest. (16:8; see also 15:17; 16:16; 17:1; 22:1; 28:6)

In conclusion, Ecclesiastes and Job do not correct Proverbs, but rather they correct an overreading of Proverbs.<sup>13</sup>

The life of Joseph is a wonderful illustration of the complicated relationship between wisdom and consequences. Joseph in many ways is the epitome of the man who walks on the path of wisdom. Proverbs 5–7 teaches that the wise man avoids the promiscuous woman and will be rewarded with success in life for doing so. It is the fool who sleeps with the “strange and foreign woman,” and he will suffer. In Genesis 39 Joseph rejects the advances of his master Potiphar’s wife. Is he rewarded for avoiding the “strange and foreign woman”? No, he is thrown in jail! He suffers for his wisdom.

That at least is the short-term perspective. At the end of his life, however, Joseph can say to his brothers: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of

13. R. C. Van Leeuwen, “Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradiction in Proverbs,” *Hebrew Studies* 33 (1992): 25–36.

many lives” (Gen. 50:20 NIV). And indeed he did. His being thrown into jail meant that he came into contact with the head cupbearer and head baker of Pharaoh. They brought his skills as a dream interpreter to Pharaoh’s attention. In this way Joseph came to a position to which he could help his family, the covenant family, during a horrible famine.

What looks to us like punishment could actually be a blessing. Joseph, like Job, did nothing really to deserve the abuse that he received during his youth. Even if he was an insensitive braggart (Gen. 37:1–11), he did not deserve his brothers’ betrayal. His fidelity to God and Potiphar did not deserve a prison sentence. His aid to the chief cupbearer in prison did not deserve neglect once the latter was released from prison. His life, however, was on a trajectory that brought him to a position of power in Egypt. In the end, retribution worked out for Joseph. He ended his life wealthy and blessed with family.

### **In the End, Retribution Works Out**

Yet not everyone ends life so well. Many people carry their troubles—financial, relational, emotional, health—to the grave. Remember Qohelet’s statement that people “eat in darkness all the days with great resentment, illness, and frustration” (Eccl. 5:17) right after remarking “as they come so they go” (v. 16).

As mentioned above, though, the theology of Qohelet is not the theology of the book of Ecclesiastes. After exposing his son to the “under the sun” theology of Qohelet, he tells him: “The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of humanity. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil” (12:13–14).

The frame narrator does not elaborate on his advice. He does not make explicit when this judgment, at which time good and evil will get their proper deserts, will take place. As we read Ecclesiastes in the light of the NT, though, our attention is drawn to Romans 8:18–27. Here Paul says that “the creation was subjected to frustration” (v. 20 NIV) by God. This word *frustration* (*mataiotes*) is the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew word *meaningless* (*hevel*) in the Greek OT. Paul reflects on the fall, but of course, it is the effects of the fall that Qohelet so painfully experiences in his quest for meaning. But Paul says more than that God subjected creation to frustration. He also looks forward to its redemption, when “the creation itself

will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (v. 21 NIV).

The good news is that Jesus has freed us from the curse of the fall. He has released us from the grip of death, and he did so by dying himself. The sting of death is taken away by his resurrection. Death is no longer the end of the story. We may agree with Qohelet that “life is hard and then you die,” but then there is resurrection, which makes life now meaningful as well. In the end, the message of the NT, foreshadowed by the OT, is that retribution does work out. Only the measure is not how good or how bad we have been, but rather whether we have united ourselves with Jesus Christ our Savior.

## CONCLUSION

Al suffered during his relatively brief life. His health was fragile during much of the time that I knew him. He died young, but confident in God’s goodness. Even in his last days, he was more concerned with how other people were doing than with his own situation. How could he face his end with such dignity and strength?

There was more than one reason. God blessed Al with a wonderful, godly wife and gifted and pious children. He loved them deeply and was so proud of each one. But Al’s profound courage in the face of death was ultimately founded on his understanding that true happiness and blessing were not found in this present world. God grant us all his courage.