

Humility: Advancing the Kingdom in Weakness

The advancement of God's Kingdom through the humble/afflicted circumstances of the church

I. Humility is a reflection of the image of God, as much as justice and mercy are.

A. Humility in Adam, Christ and the Church

1. Before the fall into sin, Adam's Covenant relationship with God required a measure of deep humility. Adam was obligated by God to trust and rely on Him completely for a deep, full understanding of good and evil, Gen 2:8-10, 15-17. Humility is not a trait that is only required of sinful man after the fall; nor is it only related to "teaching sinful men a good, necessary lesson." Rather, humility is an expression of the image of God. In fact, God Himself acts in humility towards his people and creation repeatedly throughout the Scriptures.

Psalm 8; Isaiah 66:1-2; 1 Peter 5:5-7 all reflect on the willingness of the Lord to "condescend" (lower himself; stoop; humble) to bless and meet us as his people

The word humility is strongly related to gentleness and is one of the fruits of the Spirit in the life of the Christian, Gal 5:22, 23. Jesus describes himself, the express image of God, as "gentle and humble in heart," Luke 11:29.

2. The very nature of rebellion and breaking the Covenant is an act of arrogance and pride on the part of man in which he seeks to overthrow the rule of God and become a "god to himself," Gen 3:4, 5. This pride becomes the core element in the human heart that leads to oppression, injustice and indifference in the world, Gen 3:12; 4:8, 23,24; 6:11,12; 11:4, Rom 1.
3. After the fall, the experience of humility in a broken, proud, abusive world takes the look of "affliction," "oppression," and is connected to the poor.

The Hebrew word for humble here is ANAH- humble; afflicted; meek -- Used 32 times in the Psalms and 25 times in the Prophets.

Psalm 9:11,12, 17-18; 10:12-15; 25:8-10, 16-18; 37:10-11; 34:2 cf6,7, 17-22; 76:8-9; Isa 11"1-4, 53:7 cf Psalm 22;

- B. Humility, like all other moral traits in Scripture, has a look to it. It is not less than, but certainly more than an attitude of the heart. Our understanding of the call for the church to walk in humility (Micah 6:8) as we seek God's kingdom, means both a call to turn away from an internal heart and mindset of arrogance and pride, and also a call to walk in humble, even "afflicted" circumstances in order to see the kingdom come. The nature and purpose of the kingdom and the nature of the pride of the human heart require this.

II. The Call to Humility/Humble/Afflicted Circumstances in the Old Testament

The Covenant Message to the People of Israel in Genesis – Deuteronomy: God leads His people into 'humble circumstances' in order to advance His kingdom

A. The Patriarchs - Abraham

1. Abraham's call - Genesis 12: 1-3

- The call is to trust God to make him a great nation
- The focus is to bless all the nations of the earth
- The requirement is to follow God to a "place I will show you"
- The means is to give birth to a child by an elderly, childless couple

2. The litany of humble circumstances - Genesis 12:10 – 25:11

- On arrival, the drought and the oppressive Egyptian Pharaoh
- The division of the land with Lot
- The war with 4 conquering kings
- The lengthy delay of the birth
- The sign of the covenant: circumcision
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the lessons on prayer for justice
- The oppression of Abimelech
- The birth of Isaac
- The sacrifice of Isaac
- The death of Sarah and the burial plot
- The wife for Isaac

3. Isaac/Jacob/Joseph - Gen 25-50

Oppression, injustice, weakness, humble circumstances repeated. The commentary of Psalm 105.

B. The humble circumstances of Israel's birth as a Nation

1. The 400 year slavery and the Exodus
2. Moses the Sheep herder (cf Genesis 46:34) and a shepherd's staff, Ex 4:17
3. The desert experience -- Deuteronomy 8:1-20 all a gift
4. The warfare: The Red Sea deliverance; the Amalekites' defeat Exodus 17:8ff

All of this puts Israel in the position of being the "poor and needy," the "humbled and afflicted" who must look to the Lord for their deliverance.

C. The call to maintain a position of humility in the law

1. The Kings -- Deuteronomy 17:14ff
2. The army -- Deuteronomy 20:1ff
3. The Feasts and the Year of Jubilee "returning to the humble circumstances"

Exodus 3:14-17, cf Leviticus 23:42, 43; Leviticus 25:4-12, 18-22

D. The experience of Israel throughout her history: the paradigm applied

1. Joshua and the Judges -- 360 years of history
 - The lessons of Jericho – Joshua 5:8; 6:8
 - The lessons of Ai - - defeated because of sin; not because of failure of military might

- The “sun stands still” against the Amorites - Joshua 10:12-14: key “the Lord was fighting for Israel”
- Othniel - Judges 3:28, Ehud - Judges 3:28, Shamgar - Judges 3:31, Deborah/Barak - Judges 5:20-27; Gideon - Judges 7:2-8; Samson - Judges 15:14, 16:17

2. The Kings and Prophets

- David and Goliath - I Samuel 17:45-47; David and the Philistines - II Samuel 5:22-25; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chronicles 21:14ff. Cf. the sin of David- 2 Sam 24:1-4, 10ff.
- The anti-paradigm of Solomon - Deuteronomy 17 cf. I Kings 9:6,7 10:14 – 11:12, especially the Temple, cf Acts 7:47-53
- The anti-paradigm of Rehoboam - I Kings 12:1-4, 12-15 cf. Jeremiah22:15-17
- The early prophets - Elijah – Mt. Carmel - I Kings 18:22ff and Elisha - Namaan - II Kings 5
- The later prophets- Isa 52:13 – 52:12; Jer 31:1-9; Hosea 2:14, 15 cf 12:7-9, 13:4-6; Zech 4:1-10; Joel 2:28-31

III. The fulfillment of Righteousness and Humble/Afflicted circumstances in the ministry of Christ

A. In His Birth

- Born of poor parents instead of an established royal family Luke 2:22-24
- Born in an animal manger instead of a king’s palace Luke 2:4-7
- Born under persecution by a ruthless oppressor, leading to a refugee status Luke 2:13-18

B. In His Development

- Raised in a frontier town on the southern edge of Zebulun, overlooking a desert plain (not at the center of power) Matthew 2:19-23 cf. John 1:43-46
 - Raised without formal theological education Luke 2:41ff, 4:20ff
- C. In his ministry Jesus associates with the “humble circumstances” of Israel’s journey
- The wilderness experience Matthew 4
 - Homeless Matthew 8:20
 - Supported by “women” Luke 8:1-3
 - Associating with the “dregs” of society Luke 5:27-32
 - Focusing on the marginalized Luke 7:18-23
 - Refusing to “broadcast” His ministry in order to keep close to the broken Matthew 12:15-21
 - Inviting others into His meek and humble heart Matthew 11:25-30
- D. In His death and resurrection
- Enduring the humiliations of unjust trials and the indignities of abuse from unjust authorities - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Psalm 22
 - Crucified between two thieves, naked and exposed, ridiculed even in His death - Lk 23:32-43
 - At His resurrection, permitting the oppressors to malign His authority - Matthew 28:11-15

IV. The Call to Humility/Humble Circumstances for the New Testament Church

- A. Mary as the humble servant – Luke 1:46,47 (cf Hannah - I Samuel 2)
- B. The Beatitudes - Luke 6:20-36
- C. The Disciples - oppressor and oppressed; common fisherman and poor zealots - Matthew 10:5-10

D. The church in Acts and the Epistles

- Acts 1:4 - wait for the power of the spirit
- Acts 2-4 - political, socio-economic weakness
- Acts 3:6 - “silver and gold I do not have...”
- Acts 8:1ff - the persecuted, weak church becomes the paradigm - I Peter 1:1-7, 2:9-12, 4:12ff; James 1:1,9-11

1. The paradigm applied: Corinth

I Corinthians 1:18-31; II Corinthians 12: 7-10

2. The anti-paradigm: Laodicea

Revelation 3:7-22 Philadelphia vs. Laodicea

V. Major Biblical-Theological themes on God’s commitment to Humility/Humble circumstances

- A. The power is clearly of God and with that comes the freedom to not be driven by anxious fears of to reduce the work of God to humanly managable terms

Deuteronomy 8; Luke 4; Acts 2

- B. Boasting in human strength is removed and therefore the occasion to oppress

Romans 3:27ff; James 4:1-12; I Corinthians 1, cf Jeremiah 9:23,24

- C. Liberty in generosity is increased

Exodus 20:2- leads into 21:1ff; Deuteronomy 10:1ff ; II Corinthians 8:1-4

- D. Compassion and justice are real because they are coming from a vulnerable position vs. Paternalism that comes from a position of perceived superiority and strength.

Deuteronomy 9: 4-6

Romans 3:23,24

- E. The message of salvation by grace, as a gift, is clearly reinforced

Genesis 17:17, 18:12, 21:1-7; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

VI. Implications for ministry

- A. We expect the real work of the kingdom to involve our being led into humble circumstances

Romans 8:17-18; Philippians 2:10, 3:10-11; see esp. 1 Cor 4:8-15

- B. We do not seek to shift the paradigm to building “humanly sustainable Systems of ministry”

Becomes oppressive/ineffective to move with the real needs of people because ministry is questioned /measured by sustainability

The more bureaucratic we become the less responsive to needs because the multiplicity of organizational rules actually replaces the need for dynamic wisdom from the Holy Spirit in applying general biblical principles.

In the end we become protective of the old wineskin - i.e. protect institutions for the institution’s sake

- C. We freely approach DEEP needs of ministry with Humble Acts of kindness and love

Luke 6

- D. We look for God’s Blessings to go beyond what we can “control” - Acts 8; Matthew 14

**"POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS"
(2 COR. 12:9): A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF
STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS**

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*Caspian knelt and kissed the Lion's paw.
"Welcome, Prince," said Aslan. "Do you feel yourself sufficient to take up
the Kingship of Narnia?"
"I—I don't think I do, Sir," said Caspian. "I'm only a kid."
"Good," said Aslan. "If you had felt yourself sufficient, it would have been
a proof that you were not."*

—C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*

INTRODUCTION¹

At the pinnacle of a letter written to a church that was magnetically drawn to all that is outwardly impressive, Paul declares, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).² This paradoxical claim is the literary climax and hermeneutical key to Paul's second canonical letter to the church at Corinth.³ More broadly, though, it also crystallizes a pervasive though deeply counterintuitive theme that runs through all of Scripture. This essay aims, in broad contours, to show this. Specifically, we will show that the biblical pattern of God's redemptive activity is not

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² All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

³ See, e.g., Hans Dieter Betz, "Eine Christus-Aretologie bei Paulus (2 Kor 12,7–10)," *ZTK* 66 (1969): 288–90; Hans-Georg Sundermann, *Der schwache Apostel und die Kraft der Rede: eine rhetorische Analyse von 2 Kor 10–13*, *Europäische Hochschulschriften* 575 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 219; Margaret E. Thrall, *2 Corinthians 8–13: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 871.

one of selecting those most qualified when granting salvation⁴ and employing humans in his redeeming purposes, or even of indifference as to natural human qualification, but of deliberately saving and using those who are transparently most disqualified—as long as this weakness is acknowledged.

This paradoxical prerequisite to God's favor can be seen primarily individually but also corporately and, in what is both climactic and paradigmatic from the perspective of the New Testament, christologically. By a broad sketch of salvation history,⁵ tracing the theme of strength through weakness through the Bible, we will note the way divine favor comes to those who acknowledge, rather than seek to overcome, their weakness. This sketch will be broad and necessarily cursory; what follows is not microscopic exegesis but panoramic biblical theology.⁶

Three initial clarifications must be given before moving on. First, by "paradoxical" I mean unexpected or counterintuitive or upside down or against natural anticipations—what Jonathan Edwards called "self-contrary."⁷ We have in mind precisely what Webster's says in defining a paradox as "a tenet or proposition contrary to received opinion; something seemingly absurd, yet true in fact; a statement or phenomenon apparently at variance with or in opposition to established

⁴ We use the word inclusively here to speak of saving that is both circumstantial (e.g., from disease or physical danger) and spiritual (e.g., from hell or punishment for sin).

⁵ This phrase is used here in the same sense as by Anthony Hoekema, who defines "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*) as "the view that God has revealed himself in history through a series of redemptive acts, at the center of which is the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by means of which he brings salvation to his people" (*The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 301). See also Oscar Cullman, *Salvation in History*, trans. Sidney G. Sowers (London: SCM, 1967), 74–78; Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Salvation-Historical Fallacy? Re-Assessing the History of New Testament Interpretation* (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 3–4.

⁶ "Biblical theology" has a wide range of potential meanings; here I have in mind reflection on the Bible that traces a theological (i.e., having to do with God and his activity in the world) theme through the canon and the overarching story found therein, culminating supremely in Christ. Cf. D. A. Carson, "New Testament Theology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 797–814; Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 3–11.

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, "Ministers to Preach Not Their Own Wisdom but the Word of God," in *The Salvation of Souls: Nine Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Call of Ministry and the Gospel by Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Richard A. Bailey and Gregory A. Wills (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 114.

principles yet demonstrably true.”⁸ Second, “weakness” is used as broadly as possible in this essay, having in view both natural weakness (such as disadvantages resulting from one’s birth or intellectual capacity) as well as moral weakness (sin). It will become clear as we progress that the terms “strength” and “weakness” are being used in an elastic way that goes well beyond what the results of a strict lexical search for “strength” and “weakness” would produce. Third, by “divine favor” we refer to both God’s (objective) pardoning and his (subjective) empowering—both “getting in” and “staying in.”⁹

We proceed, first, by sprinting through the whole canon, noting instances of this paradoxical dimension to God’s dealings with people, dividing Scripture into four general sections: Pentateuch and historical books, poetry and prophets, the four Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament. Second, we articulate the climactic paradox of strength through weakness, involving three specific ways in which Christ forms the ultimate instance and theologically integrative center point of the motif of strength through weakness.

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Pentateuch and Historical Books

The first book of the Bible unambiguously establishes the intercanonical motif of strength through weakness. In Genesis 12, Abram is chosen as the one individual (cf. Isa. 51:2) through whom God will rescue the world—a 75-year-old pagan from Ur who twice lacked the courage to ensure the well-being of his own wife.¹⁰ The reader soon discovers that Abram’s unlikely selection is not an aberration in God’s dealings with humanity but a consistent pattern. Time and again, in an upending of ancient cultural primogeniture patterns, it is the younger sons in Abraham’s line who are consistently favored over the older—a pattern already established in Abel’s more warmly received offering than his older brother Cain’s (Gen. 4:1–5), as well as in the choice of the younger

⁸ Webster’s Twentieth-Century Dictionary of the English Language (New York: Publisher’s Guild, 1940).

⁹ Expressions made famous in NT scholarship by E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977); see, e.g., 17, 424.

¹⁰ See J. Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology: Genesis–Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 48. Some detect the paradoxical notion that strength comes through weakness as early as Gen. 3, as Eve is given her name, with its allusion to *life*, in the immediate wake of the fall and the onset of *death* (v. 20); e.g. Derek Kidner, *Genesis, TOTC* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 72; Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1988), 37.

Seth over the older Cain as the one through whom God’s promises are realized (cf. 4:25).¹¹ Isaac is subsequently chosen over his older brother Ishmael, Jacob over his older brother Esau.¹² Jacob himself was not only inferior in age but would go on to live up to his name (which means “he deceives”), stealing first his brother’s birthright (25:29–34) and then his brother’s blessing (27:1–40). Yet he was the one through whom the promise traveled—though only after God had permanently weakened him (32:21–32).¹³ Of Jacob’s twelve sons, it is the fourth (Judah) and eleventh (Joseph) who ultimately receive unique favor, and the 13 chapters that close Genesis narrate the way young Joseph’s rise to power comes through a series of devastating sufferings and setbacks.¹⁴ As Genesis closes, Ephraim receives Jacob’s blessing rather than his older brother Manasseh (48:13–19).¹⁵

God’s counterintuitive ways appear not only in the favored males but also in the favored females. It is “weak-eyed” Leah, whom Laban deceitfully pawned off, and not beautiful Rachel (Gen. 29:17), who bears Judah, the tribe from which the Messiah will come. It is Leah, furthermore, who is brought into deep fellowship with God, evident in her concluding comment after bearing Judah: “This time I will praise the LORD” (Gen. 29:35).

Exodus opens with the depressing account of the enslaving of God’s people, and here too we find hints of God’s upside down ways. Contrary to what one would expect, the more Israel was oppressed, “the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad” (1:12).¹⁶ And the man chosen to bring Israel out of Egypt was not, it would seem, the barrel-chested Charlton Heston conjured up in modern imagination: in Moses’ ordination service in Exodus 3–4 he offers one excuse after another, each valid in its own right, for why he was unqualified and too weak for the

¹¹ Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, 20–21, 40–41; Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 113. The repeated choice of younger sons is picked up by Paul in Romans 9:6–13; see esp. Frank Thielman, “Unexpected Mercy: Echoes of a Biblical Motif in Romans 9–11,” *SJT* 47 (1994): 176–79.

¹² Mark G. Brett needlessly plays down the consistent selection of younger sons (*Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* [London: Routledge, 2000], 83); better is Judah Goldin, “The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 27–44. Cf. Jub. 28:6.

¹³ See Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 92–94.

¹⁴ See Goldin, “Youngest Son,” 37; Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, 81–82.

¹⁵ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 105–7; cf. 278–79.

¹⁶ Cf. idem, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 85, rightly suggesting that Exod. 1:12 picks up the command to multiply and fill the earth in Gen. 1–2.

task God was setting before him. Yet in the ensuing narrative, it is weak Moses through whom God's strength is channeled in overcoming powerful Pharaoh.

Nestled into the curses of Leviticus 26 is God's threat that if his people disobey, their "strength shall be spent in vain" (v. 20)—hinting at what is made more explicit elsewhere, that it is not human strength but self-divesting trust in God that ultimately produces fruitfulness. In Numbers it is through the ridiculous speech of a donkey that God finally gets Balaam's attention (Num. 22:21–35). And a recurring theme of Deuteronomy is what Moses says to Israel in Deuteronomy 7: "The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:6–7; cf. 8:17–18; 9:4–6; 14:2). Here we find the same theme of God's attraction toward weakness put in *corporate* terms.

In Joshua it is a woman and a prostitute, Rahab, who proves to be the decisive factor in the conquering of Jericho (Josh. 2:1–24; cf. Heb 11:31, 34). In Judges it is Gideon—the least in his father's house, whose clan is the weakest in Manasseh (Judg. 6:15)—who is beating out wheat in the winepress to hide from the Midianites, to whom the Lord appears and whom he hails as a "mighty man of valor" (Judg. 6:12). A quick perusal of the commentators on this puzzling ascription shows how difficult it is to grasp the import of this greeting apart from the biblical-theological theme of strength through weakness. It is precisely Gideon's weakness, openly acknowledged without an attempt at self-resourced mitigation of this weakness, with which God's strength intersects and in which divine power ignites.¹⁷ This is evident later in the narrative when God leads Israel to victory with an army to match their leader's weakness—300 men (pared down from 10,000) with nothing but voice boxes, trumpets, and jars.

Samson is relevant here, too. Even his extraordinary human strength devolved into reckless selfishness when exercised apart from God's Spirit. Samson's great might, writes Christopher Wright, "starts innocently enough under the sign of God's blessing. But as the story proceeds, that strength gets more and more out of control. Samson's human weakness is all too visible under his superhuman strength."¹⁸ Perhaps Samson serves as an embodiment of the inverse of the theme of

¹⁷ Contra Daniel I. Block, who understands the angel's ascription "simply as a flattering address, designed to win the sympathy of the man to what he is about to tell him" (*Judges, Ruth*, NAC 6 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 260).

¹⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 41.

this essay, for it was through *strength* that he became *weak*. Still, perhaps as a foretaste of the one who would provide the deliverance none of the judges could decisively accomplish, it was in the weakness of blindness and death that Samson provided his greatest deliverance.¹⁹

In the book of Ruth we find a poor, husbandless, female foreigner to be the one through whom David and ultimately Christ himself come. Another famous woman of the Bible, Esther, is almost equally implausible on first glance as one through whom God would save his people—a woman, an orphan, and a concubine.

The narrative chronicled in 1 and 2 Samuel taps into the theme of strength through weakness in Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2. When the formerly barren woman becomes pregnant, her song provides an acute picture of God's paradoxical prioritization: "The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn" (1 Sam. 2:4–5).²⁰

We find strength through weakness exemplified in David, too, at various points in the Davidic narrative. The reader is first introduced to the future king—once more, the youngest son—when he is not even summoned as one of Jesse's sons upon Samuel's arrival to anoint Israel's next monarch. Later on it is the weakness of an unarmed, youthful shepherd who brings down Goliath of Gath (1 Sam. 17:1–54). "There was no sword in the hand of David," the text tellingly reminds us (v. 50). David's representative victory in the face of defeat on behalf of his cowering people foreshadows the representative victory-in-defeat later won by David's greater son.²¹ We see strength through weakness exemplified morally in David, too. Comparing his life as a whole with that of Saul clarifies the crucial difference between the two men. The distinction is not that Saul sinned and David did not; one could argue that David was the greater sinner (adultery, murder). The difference is that David acknowledged his failures, egregious though they were (e.g., Ps. 32:5; 51:1–5), while Saul consistently explained his misdemeanors away (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:11–12; 15:15, 20–21).²²

In the narratives of 1 and 2 Kings, too, weakness is strength. It is the weakness of a single despised prophet, a water-drenched altar, and a

¹⁹ Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, 15–16, 136–42.

²⁰ Nicely drawn out by Walter Brueggemann, who suggests Hannah's prayer here may anticipate the later defeat of strong Goliath by weak David (*First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation Commentary [Louisville: John Knox, 1990], 18).

²¹ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 166.

²² Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, 158; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 378–79.

brief prayer that elicits consuming fire from heaven, not the 450 prophets of Baal who pray from morning till noon (1 Kings 18:20–40). Later, when the Syrians advance against Israel, “the people of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Syrians filled the country” (1 Kings 20:27). Syrian boasts of strength, however (v. 28), result in a slaughter of 100,000 Syrian foot soldiers in a single day (v. 29).

The opening narratives of the Bible consistently depict human weakness as an opportunity for, not a hindrance to, accessing strength from God.²³

Poetry and Prophets

That divine strength is channeled through human weakness is evident in the poetry and prophets, too, though didactically and poetically rather than narratively. Despite coming from the mouth of Eliphaz—not a model theologian—we read in Job 5:11 that God “sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.” Job 5:13, a few verses later, is reiterated in 1 Corinthians 3:19: “He catches the wise in their own craftiness.” Evidently human wisdom is not as wise as it appears. In the psalms we read, “Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger” (Ps. 8:2). What is weaker than an infant? Yet these are the very ones who, according to the psalmist, will provide triumph over God’s enemies and subdue Israel’s persecutors. Psalm 126 reads: “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:5–6). Here the emotionally weak wind up displaying the most intense of joys. Perhaps Psalm 138:6 provides the reason for this:

“though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar” (cf. Ps. 113:5–8).

In Proverbs we find similar upside down statements regarding strength through weakness, here expressed in terms of wise daily living. Proverbs 11:24 says, “One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.” This is a kind of *financial* strength through weakness; generosity, not hoarding, is the path to flourishing.²⁴ Proverbs 29 returns to the theme of human pride, as in Psalm 138: “One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor” (Prov. 29:23).

²³ Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narratives Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 3–4.

²⁴ Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 216–17.

The lowliness of pride and the greatness of humility recur in Isaiah.²⁵ “The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day” (Isa. 2:11). The flipside is that the LORD “gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength” (Isa. 40:29). Again, it is the weak who are endued with power, might, strength; Calvin connects this text with 2 Corinthians 12:9, as both passages speak of God manifesting his power in the weak.²⁶ In Isaiah 53, vindication, peace, and healing come not in conquering sin but bearing it, not in overcoming iniquities but in being crushed for them, not in slaughtering God’s enemies but in being led to the slaughter on behalf of God’s people (Isa. 52:14–53:12). And at the end of Isaiah, after reminding his people that heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool, God declares that “this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa. 66:2; cf. 57:15; Ps. 51:17).²⁷

Other prophets contain similar hints of the counterintuitive nature of flourishing in a fallen world. In Jeremiah God says, “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me” (Jer. 9:23–24; cf. 12:13; 24:1–8; 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17).²⁸ In Ezekiel we read: “Thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted” (Ezek. 21:26).²⁹ Hosea teaches us that Israel’s increased strength of numbers proved morally counterproductive: “The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame” (Hos. 4:7). Micah 5:2 identifies the backwoods town of Bethlehem (“too little to be among the clans of Judah”) and not the city of David or Jericho as the source of the coming king.³⁰ Habakkuk closes (3:17–19)

²⁵ See John Barton, “Ethics in the Book of Isaiah,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans, VTSup 70/1 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 73–74.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, Vol. 3, trans. William Pringle (repr; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 237.

²⁷ Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008), 4:162. A pervasive theme of Isaiah is that Israel’s ultimate security is found in trusting Yahweh rather than seeking shelter under the wings of the political superpowers of the day.

²⁸ Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 687; cf. idem, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 132.

²⁹ This text contains interpretive ambiguity; for discussion see Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC 29 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 21, who translates, “Up with the low and down with the high!” (18).

³⁰ See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:649.

with a moving affirmation that, as Bavinck puts it, "one is blessed whose God is YHWH, even in the most dreadful adversities."³¹ Would Habakkuk have been able to say that "GOD, the Lord, is my strength" (Hab. 3:19) *apart* from the impending calamity?³² And viewing the prophets collectively, finally, it is time and again the weakness of a small remnant that will usher in a new day in Israel (Isa. 10:19–22; 37:31–32; Jer. 50:20; Ezek. 11:13–17; Zeph. 2:7–9; Zech. 8:1–13).³³

Gospels³⁴

In the Gospels this paradox is ratcheted up to the next level of clarity and pervasiveness. Concerning the Old Testament prophecies seen in the Gospels as pointing to Christ, C. H. Dodd concluded that "it is easy to see how for a first-century reader it all worked out as an elaboration and enrichment of the same broad plot of suffering and humiliation followed by triumph through the [*sic*] grace of God"—in other words, the same broad plot of weakness being a catalyst for, not an obstacle to, real strength.³⁵

One is immediately struck by the way the genealogy of Matthew 1 includes several women—unusual enough in itself, but all the more so in that it is not an all-star line-up of, say, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah (all of whom were in the line of Christ and therefore legitimate candidates for inclusion) but Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, Bathsheba, and Mary—all of whom were, for various reasons, strikingly implausible

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4:601–2.

³² It is, writes Calvin, "as though the prophet had said, 'God will be a strength to me; though I am weak in myself, I shall yet be strong in him'" (*The Commentaries of John Calvin on the Prophet Habakkuk*, trans. John Owen [repr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 176–77).

³³ See Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, 190–91.

³⁴ For the sake of space this paper will not deal with the literature of Second Temple Judaism, though one does find occasional understanding of strength through weakness; see, e.g., *T. Judah* 25:4; *Judith* 9:11; 2 *Macc.* 6:12–17; 7:36–38; 1 *Enoch* 103:9–15; 2 *Enoch* 66:6; 1QH 9:24–27; *Life of Moses* 1:67–69; *Jewish War* 7:419. There may be identifiable reasons, however, why intertestamental Judaism would not have grasped the fundamental biblical paradox of strength through weakness—see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 53–54.

³⁵ C. H. Dodd, *The Old Testament in the New* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1963), 19; cf. *idem*, "The Old Testament in the New," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 174–75. See also William A. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 94.

participants in the lineage of Christ, and some of whom bring to mind forgettable episodes in Israel's checkered history.³⁶

The Lukan genealogy of Christ does not include women, but the notion of strength through weakness has a clear social parallel in Luke's ubiquitous inclusion of outsiders to the exclusion of insiders, a theme common throughout the third Gospel. In Luke 1 Zechariah is implicitly compared and contrasted with Mary. Both are visited by an angel, told they will have their first child, and have significant reason to doubt such a statement. Yet Zechariah, the quintessential insider (old, male, priest), responds precisely as Mary, the quintessential outsider (young, female, poor), would be expected to respond (Luke 1:18), and Mary responds as Zechariah ought to have (Luke 1:34). It is not surprising, then, that in an intercanonical echo of Hannah's prayer from 1 Samuel 2,³⁷ Mary prays: "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Luke 1:51–53).

This surprising role reversal is developed throughout Luke, as the socially weak—tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles, Samaritans, women, children, "sinners," the poor—are included in the kingdom, and the socially strong—teachers of the law, scribes, Pharisees, the dutifully religious, the rich—are excluded.³⁸ To cite a few examples: the poor, hungry, and despised are blessed, while the rich, satisfied, and socially accepted are under woe (Luke 6:20–26); a disabled woman appears to be in and a synagogue ruler out (Luke 13:10–17); those who are invited end up rejected, while those whom one would never expect to be invited are "compelled" and included (Luke 14:7–24); the younger son—as so often in the Genesis narrative—is welcomed and the older son (appears to be?) alienated (Luke 15:11–32); the poor man winds up in heaven and the rich man tormented in hell (Luke 16:19–31); of the ten lepers cleansed, it's the one outsider (a Samaritan) who returns to render thanks (Luke 17:11–19); the miserable tax collector, not the dutiful Pharisee, goes home justified (Luke 18:9–14).³⁹

³⁶ See Edwin D. Freed, "The Women in Matthew's Genealogy," *JSNT* 29 (1987): 3–19; *idem*, *The Stories of Jesus' Birth: A Critical Introduction* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 31–52.

³⁷ So Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 233.

³⁸ See Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Scribner's, 1966), 97–116; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 137–44. Cf. Lawrence M. Wills, *Not God's People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World* (Plymouth, Eng.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 101–32.

³⁹ The counterintuitive nature of God's ways as expressed in Jesus' parables is repeatedly noted in Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father: Sermons on the*

Similar reversals, though not as sharply socially cast, are seen in Mark. For instance, in two consecutive pericopes, Mark contrasts James and John with blind Bartimaeus. Both James and John on the one hand and Bartimaeus on the other ask Jesus to fulfill a request, and to both Jesus responds, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:36, 51). Yet James and John ask for glory, Bartimaeus for mercy. Mark is showing us that James and John were physically seeing but spiritually blind; Bartimaeus was physically blind but spiritually seeing (note the similar reversal of John 9:39–41⁴⁰). James and John were operating out of a "strength through strength" mindset ("Are you able to drink the cup...?" And they said to him, "We are able!" [δυνάμεθα; Mark 10:38–39]).

Stepping back and viewing the Gospels with a wider lens, one finds scattered throughout all four accounts numerous aphorisms from the mouth of Jesus that pithily crystallize the strength-through-weakness motif illustrated narratively early on in the Old Testament and poetically later on. It is in losing our lives that we find them (Matt. 10:39; cf. Luke 17:33); humbling oneself like a child is true greatness (Matt. 18:1–4; cf. Luke 9:23–24, 48); the last will be first and the first last (Matt. 19:30; 20:16; cf. Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30); those seeking to be great must serve others (Matt. 20:26–28;⁴¹ cf. Mark 9:35; 10:43–45); the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, a tiny seed yet providing the largest, most shady branches (Mark 4:30–32); the humble will be exalted and the self-exalting humbled (Luke 14:11; cf. 16:15; 18:14); it is the grain that falls into the ground and dies that bears much fruit (John 12:24–25).⁴²

To be sure, each of these statements must be appropriately literarily situated. We must beware flattening out the biblical text in an attempt to detect a common theme. None of the texts just quoted, moreover, uses the words "strong" or "weak." Yet each text taps into the notion that strength, fruitfulness, and life are found not in taking such things up but in laying them down; not in scrambling to amass self-generated worth

Parables of Jesus, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), e.g., 26–27, 31–33, 36, 38, 117, 126–29, 133. See also Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 343.

⁴⁰ See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 166, 224–25. Luther comments on this text: "Look, what an upside down judgment that is for Christ to make!" (LW 51:37).

⁴¹ See the discussion of strength through weakness based on this text in Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844), 220–23.

⁴² See Martin Luther, "Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows," in LW 44:294; cf. idem, "Treatise on Good Works," in LW 44:41–42; also Edwyn Hoskins and Noel Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber, 1958), 111–14.

but in putting that impulse to death;⁴³ not in exercising innate strength but in acknowledging weakness; not in self-exaltation but in self-humbling; not in self-resourced triumphalism but in self-denying crucifixion.⁴⁴ It is the smallest, weakest seed that produces the greatest, strongest shade.

This paradox, however, is more than a scattered theme in the Gospels. At times we can see this principle providing an organizing structure in the deliberate coordination of successive pericopes. We take one example.

In Matthew 18–20, in the course of Jesus' describing life in the kingdom, numerous questioners come to him, each asking the same fundamental question: What's the least I can do? What is the minimum required of me?⁴⁵ Peter asks this with respect to forgiveness (Matt. 18:21–35), the Pharisees with respect to marriage (Matt. 19:1–12), and the rich young man with respect to morality (Matt. 19:16–22). How does Jesus respond to this cost-benefit mindset that has infected even his own disciples? He answers by upending the world's understanding of qualification and disqualification for life in the kingdom. This is facilitated by Matthew's linking of four consecutive pericopes in Matthew 19–20. First, children are prohibited from coming to Jesus (Matt. 19:13–15). Second, a rich man asks Jesus about how to attain eternal life (Matt. 19:16–22). Third, Peter and the disciples ask about heavenly rewards for their willingness to do precisely what the rich man refused to do (Matt. 19:23–30). Fourth, Jesus tells a parable about workers hired at staggered times throughout the day yet all paid a day's wage (Matt. 20:1–16).

We tend to read these as disconnected stories strung together by Matthew much like a builder laying bricks—the order in which one lays them matters little so long as they all get in there. But Matthew's strategy

⁴³ Cf. G. C. Berkouwer: "Faith directed only to divine mercy, excludes all worthiness. Paradoxical though it may be, it is in this exclusion of worthiness that the worth of true faith is brought out" (*Faith and Justification*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], 189).

⁴⁴ Here we bear in mind, then, James Barr's salutary reminder that instances of a word do not exhaust the presence of a concept (*The Semantics of Biblical Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], esp. 206–62). Cf. Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 23.

⁴⁵ Cf. C. S. Lewis: "Our temptation is to look eagerly for the minimum that will be accepted. We are in fact very like honest but reluctant taxpayers. We approve of an income tax in principle. We make our returns truthfully. But we dread a rise in the tax. We are very careful to pay no more than is necessary. And we hope—we very ardently hope—that after we have paid it there will still be enough left to live on" ("A Slip of the Tongue," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* [New York: Touchstone, 1996], 140).

is instead more like that of a traffic worker placing a series of road signs along the highway (one says "Boston: 80 miles," another "Boston: 40 miles")—not only is each necessary, but they are placed in a deliberate order and are all pointing to the same reality (Boston). These four stories in Matthew are connected by a single thread that is at the heart of how life in the kingdom works: in the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing you are weak, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking you are strong. In each passage, a central character assumes one has to "qualify" with some kind of strength—strength of age, of obedience, of sacrifice, of labor—to gain some apposite result.

1. The disciples thought children needed to qualify with strength of age in order to gain Jesus' attention.
2. The rich young man thought he needed to qualify with strength of obedience in order to gain eternal life.
3. Peter and company thought they had to qualify with strength of sacrifice in order to gain a reward.
4. The earlier-hired workers thought all employees had to qualify with strength of labor in order to gain a day's wage.

The root mistake in each case is the intuitive assumption that some kind of strength, or self-generated qualification—social, ethical, sacrificial, or economic—provides corresponding approval in the kingdom. Each time Jesus turns this assumption upside down.⁴⁶

What is exemplified in the narratives of the early Old Testament and sporadically affirmed in the poetry and prophets of the later Old Testament is explicitly amplified in the Gospels: awareness of weakness—when self-divestingly acknowledged—channels, rather than inhibits, real strength.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Cf. Adolf Schlatter, *The History of the Christ*, trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 39, 152, 217–29, 328–29; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 117–21.

⁴⁷ On this theme in the Gospels see also Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 19–20. R. T. France and John W. Wenham helpfully note the way Jesus' own messianic self-understanding was formed by the OT motif of strength through weakness, especially as seen in Isa. 53, Dan. 7, and Zech. 9–14; see France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (repr.; Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 79–80, 106, 109, 117; Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972), 60.

Epistles and Revelation

In moving to the rest of the New Testament, this paradox is even further heightened. In Romans 4:4–5 righteousness is the result of explicitly not working but rather trusting him who justifies the *ungodly*. In Romans 8:37 Paul says it is "in all these [hardships]" that "we are more than conquerors." The apostle's suffering, he tells the Ephesians, is their glory (Eph. 3:13). The man chosen to lead the church at Ephesus was, according to clues discernible in Paul's letters to him, young (1 Tim. 4:12), sickly (1 Tim. 5:23), and timid (2 Tim. 1:7). In the litany of weak but faith-filled saints in Hebrews 11—much of which could conceptually qualify for portraying strength through weakness—the words themselves are used in verse 34 in describing those who "were made strong out of weakness." James reminds his readers that God has "chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom" (James 2:5).⁴⁸ In James 4:10, echoing the words of Jesus, James enjoins his readers: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (cf. Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14). And Jonathan Edwards, among others, has drawn attention to the way Christ is presented in Revelation 5 in both the weakest and strongest of images at the same time—as a lamb and a lion.⁴⁹

Viewing the theme of strength through weakness once again *corporately*, a frequent emphasis of the New Testament as a whole is the favor shown to Gentiles, often juxtaposed with Jewish failure. Throughout Acts, for instance, Jewish hard-heartedness toward Paul's preaching is characteristically followed up with Gentile reception of it. Frank Thielman thus rightly notes that Paul's argument in Romans 9:6–13 "shows that God's choice to include Gentiles within a newly constituted Israel is not as inconsistent with scripture as it at first seems—that God has in the past conferred his blessing on the least likely candidate, on the weak rather than on the strong."⁵⁰

While it might be fruitful to pursue other more implicit occurrences of strength through weakness in the New Testament,⁵¹ we hurry on to

⁴⁸ See Douglas J. Moo's particularly apt comments in *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 108.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," in *Sermons and Discourses 1734–1738*, Vol. 19 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 560–94. Cf. Rev. 12:10–11, where the saints' suffering, rooted in Christ's suffering, is the means by which Satan is conquered. G. K. Beale draws attention to other surprising reversals in Revelation in "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," in *Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts*, 270–71.

⁵⁰ Thielman, "Unexpected Mercy," 178.

⁵¹ J. R. Daniel Kirk has recently detected the paradox elsewhere in Romans (*Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* [Grand Rapids:

the place where the motif is most clearly explicated—the Corinthian correspondence. The paradox is conspicuous in 1 Corinthians 1–4, as many have noted.⁵² After chapter four, however, Paul takes up questions apparently posed to him by the Corinthians—marriage, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and so on. The paradox thus becomes largely muted in the rest of the letter. But in the early chapters, Paul drives home the upside down ways of God. Perhaps 1 Corinthians 1:27–28 crystallizes the theme of these chapters best: “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are” (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1–5; 3:18–19; 4:10; Ignatius, *Eph.*, 18.1–2).⁵³

In these four chapters, unlike the soundings taken from Jesus' teaching, we consistently find the explicit language of “strength” and “weakness.” To a church absorbing the surrounding *Zeitgeist* rather than confronting it with the upside down message of the gospel, Paul seeks to expose the Corinthians' subtle capitulation to worldly notions of strength and weakness. Corinth was famous for lusting after wealth, religious power, athletic glory, and impressive speech⁵⁴—in a word, strength. The apostle's strategy is to turn this mindset upside down by showing the Corinthians that true strength and glory are found in the very weakness and suffering so despised in their social context.⁵⁵

Eerdmans, 2008], 210; cf. *ibid.*, 213). Stephen Westerholm notes the “paradox” of Rom. 9:30–10:4 in “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 226–27; cf. Martin Luther, “Letter to Wenceslas Link,” in *LW* 49:22. Carl N. Toney (*Paul's Inclusive Ethic*, WUNT 2/252 [Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2008]) examines the language of “strong” and “weak” in Paul; while he naturally focuses on Rom. 14–15 and 1 Cor. 8–10, note the discussion of divine strength and human weakness on pp. 74–80.

⁵² E.g., Erhardt Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr: Studien zur paulinischen Christologie*, FRLANT 90 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 142–69, 282–328; Anthony T. Hanson, *The Paradox of the Cross in the Thought of St Paul*, JSNTSup 17 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), esp. 25–37; Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), *passim*.

⁵³ See Adolf Schlatter, *The Church in the New Testament Period*, trans. Paul P. Levertoff (London: SPCK, 1961), 155–57; cf. 200; also Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, 71–72. Note the way C. H. Dodd connects 1 Cor. 1:27–28 with the OT promises in *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 112.

⁵⁴ See Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19–102.

⁵⁵ Paul also speaks of strength through weakness at the very end of 1 Corinthians—the old body “is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown

Whereas in 1 Corinthians this counterintuitive dynamic predominates only in the first four chapters, it pervades 2 Corinthians from start to finish. We might say that whereas from chapter 5 onward in 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the *fruit* of the Corinthian mistake, in 2 Corinthians he addresses the *root* of the Corinthian mistake. Second Corinthians deals with the disease itself, the symptoms of which have popped up in various ways in 1 Corinthians 5–16. Tim Savage's monograph hints at this, but focuses on chapters 3–4 of 2 Corinthians.⁵⁶ A more comprehensive study could identify how Paul employs the principle of strength through weakness throughout the epistle⁵⁷: in chapter 1, the strength of comfort comes through the weakness of affliction (2 Cor. 1:3–7); in chapter 2, victory comes through captivity (2:12–17); in chapter 3, sufficiency through insufficiency (3:1–6); in chapter 4, life through death (4:7–15); in chapter 5, eternal dwellings through bodily destruction (5:1–5); in chapter 6, blessing through suffering (6:3–10);⁵⁸ in chapter 7, salvation through grief (7:2–10); in chapter 8, abundance through poverty (8:1–2, 9, 14); in chapter 9, receiving through giving (9:6–8, 11); in chapter 10, commendation through denigration (10:10–18); in chapter 11, boasting through hardship (11:16–30). Each time a certain strength comes *through*, not *despite*, a corresponding weakness.⁵⁹

in weakness; it is raised in power” (15:43; cf. v. 36). Gerald G. O'Collins rightly points out, however, that the thrust of 1 Cor. 15:43 is somewhat different than that of 2 Cor. 12:9–10; in 1 Cor. 15 the weakness leads to a subsequent manifestation of power, while in 2 Cor. 12 the two are simultaneous; it is a power in weakness (“Power Made Perfect in Weakness: 2 Cor. 12:9–10,” *CBQ* 33 [1971]: 531, 536).

⁵⁶ Savage, *Power through Weakness*. See also Sze-kar Wan, *Power in Weakness: Conflict and Rhetoric in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000). Wenhua Shi's recent monograph covers both Corinthian letters, but, again, fixes on only certain key passages: 1 Cor. 1:18–31; 2:1–5; 4:8–13; 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:23–33 (*Paul's Message of the Cross as Body Language*, WUNT 2/254 [Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2008], *passim*); so too John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), focusing on 1 Cor. 4:9–13; 2 Cor. 4:8–9; 6:4–10.

⁵⁷ See Craig F. Evans, “The New Testament in the Making,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome* (ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 246. Cf. also Karl A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 4–5, 16.

⁵⁸ Cf. the strikingly similar language to 2 Cor. 6:3–10 in the early *Epistle to Diognetus* 5:4–16.

⁵⁹ Helpfully noted by Alister E. McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 30.

Yet the clearest example of strength through weakness is in chapter 12, as Paul reflects on his “thorn in the flesh,” “a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7). Despite pleading three times for its removal, the Lord’s answer is: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (12:9). Paul defiantly announces, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (12:9). Why? “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10).⁶⁰ Real strength flooded his life not by circumventing or overcoming weakness but in it. Human weakness and suffering, let it be said clearly, are not ends in themselves⁶¹—hardship exists neither in the first two nor the final two chapters of the Bible, neither in Eden nor the New Eden. Yet such unpleasant experiences are primary channels of God’s strength in between these two stages of glory. “[T]he grace and power of God interlock with human lives at the point of mortal weakness.”⁶²

The above survey of 2 Corinthians omitted chapter 13. This is because the final chapter of this epistle brings us to the foundation for all that has been said in this paper.

CHRIST: THE CLIMACTIC PARADOX

Christ “is not weak in dealing with you,” Paul says in closing 2 Corinthians, “but is powerful among you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13:3–4).⁶³ Everything

⁶⁰ Note Philo’s interpretation of God’s words to Moses, to be passed on to the Hebrews in their suffering in Egypt: “do not lose heart; your weakness is your strength” (*Life of Moses*, 1:69). Paul, however, does not see human weakness funneling into human strength but human weakness as the channel for *divine* strength.

⁶¹ H. H. Drake Williams makes this mistake (*The Wisdom of the Wise: The Presence and Function of Scripture Within 1 Cor. 1:18–3:23*, AGJU 49 [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 153–54).

⁶² Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 179. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford L. Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 2.2.10–11; Adolf Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles*, trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 188; idem, *Paulus, der Bote Jesus: Eine Deutung seiner Briefe an die Korinther* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1934), 669; Petrus J. Gräbe, *The Power of God in Paul’s Letters*, 2nd ed., WUNT 2/123 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2008), 144–49. Hans Windisch’s comment “je mehr Leiden, desto mehr Kraft,” though largely true, is overly formulaic (*Der zweite Korintherbrief* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1924], 392).

⁶³ On the christologically-rooted paradox of this text, see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John R. de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 248; Kenneth Grayston, *Dying, We Live: A New Enquiry into the Death of Christ in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 67; Gräbe, *Power of God*, 154–56.

said in this essay thus far is true as far as it goes, yet remains hollow or unlocked or unconsummated if it is not rooted in Christ. For Christ is the ultimate example of someone who experienced strength through weakness. In three critical ways—one of degree, one of union, and one of vicariousness—Christ embodies and fulfills this biblical-theological theme.

First, Christ experienced both weakness and strength to a superlative degree. On the one hand, it is impossible to fathom the profound weakness to which God the Son was subjected.⁶⁴ He became a man, subject to all the frailty and limitations that this involved with the exception of sin. And Christ’s weakness plummeted to its lowest depths in the gruesome shame of the cross.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the exaltation of Christ to God’s right hand exhibits a “strength” of status and glory as high in degree as his humiliation was low. Richard Bauckham, for instance, has brought out in various writings the shocking way in which the man Jesus was included by early Christians within the divine identity, an identity unswervingly cordoned off by Second Temple Jews as belonging to Yahweh and Yahweh alone.⁶⁶ Not only was Jesus divine, but *as a man* he was highly exalted to a superlative position of “strength” (cf. Acts 3:13; Rom. 1:3–4; 5:15, 17; 1 Cor. 15:21–22; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Noteworthy in all this is that it was *through* his weakness that Christ was ultimately glorified. His shame was ultimately the means, not an obstacle, to his honor. Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. *Therefore* God has highly exalted him . . .” (Phil. 2:8–9; cf. Heb. 2:14⁶⁷). “The supreme paradox of the Christian gospel,” writes Vern Poythress of Christ’s death, “is that victory comes through apparent defeat.”⁶⁸ Let us frame the point in biblical-theological terms. Certainly Jews were aware of the theme of a lowly suffering servant from Isaiah 40–55. What would have shocked them was to overlay this role with that of the triumphant Son of Man of

⁶⁴ Cf. Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 204.

⁶⁵ See Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility,” in *LW* 44:140. On the shame of crucifixion in the ancient world see David W. Chapman, *Ancient Jewish and Christian Perceptions of Crucifixion*, WUNT 2/244 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2008), 252–54; cf. Shi, *Paul’s Message of the Cross*, 20–52.

⁶⁶ Bauckham has argued this christological point from John (*The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 239–52), Paul (*Jesus and the God of Israel*, 197–210), Hebrews (*ibid.*, 233–53), and Revelation (*The Theology of the Book of Revelation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 54–65).

⁶⁷ See Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 116; Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 244.

⁶⁸ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 207. Cf. Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, 38; Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 115.

Daniel 7 and the eternal Davidic king of 2 Samuel 7 (along with a handful of messianic psalms). The weakness of the suffering servant and the strength of the Son of Man and Son of David intersected in a single individual.⁶⁹

Christ's weakness and strength are not only to be coolly appreciated from a distance, however, but also personally embodied, for while Christ is in a class by himself in the *degree* of his weakness and strength, Christians do follow him in *kind*. This brings us to the second way in which Christ climactically sums up the paradox of strength through weakness. Jesus not only bore a cross but instructed his followers to take up their own crosses and follow him, in what Michael Gorman has recently reiterated as "cruciformity" or "cruciform power," since it is rooted in Christ's own experience of power through the weakness of crucifixion.⁷⁰ Graham Tomlin, in a fascinating monograph that examines the cross in the thought of Paul, Luther, and Pascal, writes of the way God chooses "inferior people" just as he chose to work through "the crucified Messiah," leading Tomlin to discuss "the paradigmatic nature of the cross."⁷¹ Jesus experienced strength through weakness; united to him, so do we. Christ is not only the definitive instantiation of this motif but also its paradigmatic pioneer, its ἀρχηγός (Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Believers are united to Christ in both (the weakness of) his death and (the strength of) his resurrection (Rom. 6:4–8; cf. 8:17; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:29; Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:11; 1 Peter 2:21).⁷²

⁶⁹ See Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1983), 95. Cf. Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 216, 327; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus: Origin and General Character of Paul's Preaching of Christ*, trans. David H. Freedman (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), 29–33; Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 54, 244.

⁷⁰ Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 25–34, 121–23; cf. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 268–303. These references should not be taken as an endorsement of Gorman's writings; his explication of *justification* in terms of believers' "cruciformity" is especially troubling. See Paul Barnett's comments in *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 179n39.

⁷¹ Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal*, Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 100, 278 (note the way Tomlin roots the paradigmatic nature of the cross in the OT on p. 101). Cf. Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 287, 292–93; John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th Anniversary edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 283.

⁷² See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 206–14; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 44–52.

We have said, then, that Christ was superlatively weak and superlatively strong, and we have connected that weakness and strength to Christian discipleship. What we have not yet uncovered is the foundation for such discipleship. This brings us to the third point, and moves us from the subjective to the objective. For not only do believers participate in Christ's weakness and strength (with respect to frailty and suffering), but in the great exchange, Christ's strength has become ours and our weakness has become his (with respect to sin and righteousness; Isa. 53:12; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18).⁷³ Not only do we go down in order to go up, as Christ did; he went down so that we, in the most ultimate sense, need not. Christ's vicarious weakness rescues weak people (cf. Rom. 5:6). He became weak, bearing the wrath we deserved, so that our natural weaknesses might not dictate our usefulness in the kingdom, and, even more fundamentally, so that our moral weakness, once confessed, might not dictate our existence in the kingdom.⁷⁴

Earlier we addressed four consecutive pericopes in Matthew 19–20, each affirming from various angles that the key to qualifying in the kingdom is not asserting strength but acknowledging weakness. But we did not provide the foundation for why that could be true. In exploring this third way that Christ sums up the paradox, in which our condemnable moral weakness is exchanged for his freely provided strength of status, we have penetrated to that foundation. The point could be expressed in terms of the four consecutive Matthean accounts.

1. *Regarding the children being kept from Jesus' attention (Matt. 19:13–15):* weak Christians can have God's undivided attention without qualifying with age or other social prerequisites, because on the cross Jesus experienced the weakness of being rejected not only by men but by his own Father.
2. *Regarding the young man asking what he had to do to gain eternal life (Matt. 19:16–22):* weak Christians can have eternal life without qualifying with lawkeeping, because on the cross

⁷³ Cf. Morna D. Hooker's notion of "interchange" in Paul's theology: "Interchange in Christ," *JTS* 22 (1971): 349–61; idem, "Interchange in Christ and Ethics," *JSNT* 25 (1985): 5–10, 14. This third point is not meant to make the forensic (justification) more soteriologically basic than the vital (union with Christ) in general theological terms. On the contrary, union with Christ is most helpfully understood as the broadest soteriological rubric, within which the various dimensions to salvation (justification, sanctification, etc.) are subsumed. The point we are making is that believers existentially can follow Christ in his weakness and strength only to the degree that this is self-consciously founded upon and generated by Christ's vicarious saving work.

⁷⁴ See Schlatter, *New Testament Period*, 43.

Jesus experienced hell despite living the only life deserving heaven, being the only person who could ever truly say, as the rich young ruler claimed, "All these have I kept."

3. *Regarding the disciples' self-concerned highlighting of their sacrifice (Matt. 19:23–30):* weak Christians can have the ultimate reward without qualifying with a minimum level of sacrifice, because on the cross Jesus made the superlative sacrifice despite deserving the ultimate reward.
4. *Regarding the parable of the workers (Matt. 20:1–16):* weak Christians can have a full day's wage without qualifying with comparatively more work than others, because Jesus worked with strength the whole day—"bearing the burden of the day"—and then went to the cross, waiving the wage he rightfully deserved.

In these four points we do not mean to emphasize Christ's death to the neglect of his resurrection.⁷⁵ Rather we are bringing out the way in which Jesus experienced what all our moral weakness deserved so that we can experience the strength of a righteous status before God simply by acknowledging that weakness, fleeing to Christ, and refusing to self-resource qualification before him. Because of Christ's vicarious weakness, divine power is channeled in admitting, not circumventing, our weakness.⁷⁶ Every human example of strength through weakness is ultimately rooted in Christ's strength through weakness. Even Old Testament saints, by casting themselves in faith on God on account of their weakness and consequently experiencing fruitfulness and strength, truly if unknowingly were appropriating the accomplishment wrought in Christ's life, death, and resurrection (cf. WCF 7.5).⁷⁷ In the intercanonical motif of strength through weakness, Christ provides the consummate fulfillment—establishing the ground for, and superlatively recapitulating in himself, every example of faith-fueled strength in weakness.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ According to Calvin, to speak of either Christ's death or resurrection is necessarily to imply its counterpart (*Institutes*, 2.16.13).

⁷⁶ See Calvin's moving and sustained discussion of this theme in his *Institutes*, 3.8.1–11. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:169–70.

⁷⁷ Cf. Poythress's discussion of "mini-redemptions," ultimately derived from Christ's redemption (*In the Beginning Was the Word*, 209–18).

⁷⁸ See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 81–85, 248–57. By "recapitulation" we have in mind "repetition, summing up, representation, and embodiment" in Christ of God's ways with his people in the past (Joel Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel: Use of Israel's History in Matthew 1:1–4:11, WUNT 2/257* [Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2008], 23; cf. 21). Royce G. Gruenler helpfully speaks of the way Jesus "'breathed in' all the Old

CONCLUSION

"Deep in the structure of God's redemptive plan," writes Edmund Clowney, "is the principle that His power is made perfect in weakness."⁷⁹ This paradoxical principle is exhibited in the Bible individually, corporately, and christologically. The foregoing pan-biblical overview has sought to demonstrate in broad strokes the pervasive nature of this upside-down pattern. Time and again the biblical storyline is one not of God being frustrated by human weakness but attracted to it. This encompasses not only natural weakness (birthplace, tribal association, speech deficiency, natural timidity) but also moral weakness (deceit, adultery, murder, prostitution, fear). The point is not that God *lowers* what we perceive to be the standard by which his favor is attained but that, because of Christ, he *inverts* that standard. We must conjoin Luther's theology of the cross⁸⁰ with Moltmann's theology of hope,⁸¹ for it is out of the former that the latter emerges—what Marva Dawn has called "a theology of weakness."⁸²

Stated in biblical-theological terms, we could say that humans were created "strong"—morally strong, uninhibited in communion with God. The plunge into sin in Genesis 3 introduced both natural weakness (aging, disease, laborious toil) and, more deeply, moral weakness (a propensity toward idolatry, self-reliance, and hard-heartedness). Yet the odd way out of that weakness is not self-resourced strength but acknowledged weakness, brought to Christ. Such acknowledgment, due to Christ's vicarious and canonically climactic weakness on the cross, clears the way for God's strength. And in the consummated new earth, we will, once again, be strong (cf. 1 Cor. 15:53)—this time, though, without even the possibility of weakness.

Testament typologies . . . has called them home, and personifies them once for all in himself" ("Old Testament Gospel as Prologue to New Testament Gospel," in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, ed. Howard Griffith and John R. Muether, [Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic, 2000], 96).

⁷⁹ Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, 84. See also Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, Vol. 2 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 139–40.

⁸⁰ See Alistair E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 146–48.

⁸¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 29–46. We are not categorically endorsing Moltmann's "theology of hope."

⁸² Marva J. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 35–71.

God's counterintuitive ways are not, however, to be restricted to the biblical account. Scripture sets a permanent trajectory of the paradoxical nature of God's partiality toward weakness that carries down to the twenty-first century church and beyond. God's favor—forgiveness, firm assurance of his fatherly approval, participation in fruitful ministry—is refused those who consider themselves already qualified. It is given instead to those who know themselves to be disqualified. God's power engages not claimed strength but acknowledged weakness—a truth into which Luther had as profound an insight as any.⁸³ If the church is to magnify God in a strength-celebrating world, it must self-consciously present a crucified Christ by crucified Christians and resist the triumphalistic “strength” that feels so deeply to be the path of kingdom advancement. According to the witness of the entire biblical story, culminating in Christ's cross, it is in the very weakness, humiliation, and shame so eschewed by the Corinthian-like Western church that the gospel will go forth. Such weakness is the only—and the promised—path to real strength.⁸⁴

⁸³ Along with other passages cited in this paper, see, e.g., LW 49:105; 51:24, 35, 207, 244; cf. Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 146–47.

⁸⁴ See David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 258–62; Raymond C. Ortlund, “Power in Preaching: Decide (1 Corinthians 2:1–5),” *Them* 34 (2009): 79–88.

SHORT CONTRIBUTION

A LIBRARIAN'S COMMENTS ON COMMENTARIES: 30 Zephaniah and Haggai

James C. Pakala*

Late in the process of writing this article I decided to begin with a paragraph to illustrate the significance of using multiple commentaries and also not relying on one Bible encyclopedia or dictionary. A few examples from Zephaniah and Haggai will suffice. One tool will say, “It was the invasion of Palestine by the Scythians that awakened Zephaniah to Yahweh's call to be a prophet.”¹ Others dismiss the Scythians or do not even mention them.² Still another gives high credence to the Scythian overflow of Palestine but well argues against reflection of this within Zephaniah.³ A Haggai example is that some suggest the prophet was elderly, therefore had a brief ministry, and as a child saw Solomon's Temple.⁴ Others say that “Haggai was still a child when he returned to Jerusalem with his parents in 537.”⁵

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¹ E. A. Leslie, “Zephaniah, Book of,” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:951.

² Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah*, The Anchor Bible 25A (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 43, says, “Herodotus confuses us with his description of the Scythians,” and cites both “Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and the Scythians in Palestine” by Henri Cazelles within *A Prophet to the Nations*, ed. Perdue & Kovacs (1984), and R. P. Vaggione's “Over All Asia?” in *JBL* 92 (1973): 523–30. There is no mention at all of Scythians in the Zephaniah articles of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

³ Bruce Waltke, “Zephaniah, Book of,” in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (2009; a revision of the 1975 *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*), 5:1223. Waltke says the account of Herodotus is “unsuspicious and well-accredited.”

⁴ Herbert M. Wolf, “Haggai,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 2:594.

⁵ R. K. Harrison, “Haggai, Book of,” in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 3:16.