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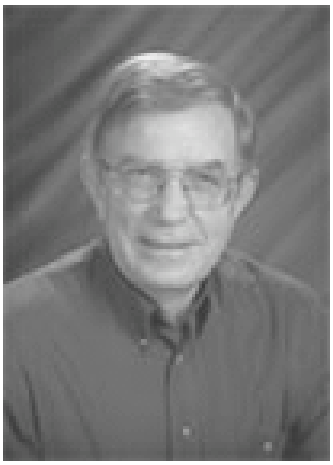
In Memoriam



Dr. Mike White
1938–2007

Dr. Mike White, son of John and Frances White, was born November 26, 1938, in Danville, Illinois. He died August 31, 2007, while visiting his son Paul in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Mike received his undergraduate degree from Harding College where he met Gwen Combest, whom he married in 1960. After graduating from Harding, Mike entered the University of Illinois where he received his Ph.D. in Chemistry. Mike came to the University of Texas in 1966, where he held the Robert A. Welch Chair in the Department of Chemistry.

Mike published over 650 scholarly articles and graduated more than 50 doctoral students, many of whom are now teaching in universities around the world. In 2004 Mike began a joint research appointment with Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Washington State, where at the time of his death he was director of the Department of Energy's Institute for Interfacial Catalysis.

Mike was a longtime member and elder of the Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ in Austin and served on the Board of Austin Graduate School of Theology. Mike is survived by his wife Gwen; son Mark and daughter-in-law Melissa; daughter RaeAnne and son-in-law Todd Landrum and their children; and his son Paul. He is also survived by his mother, Frances, and four siblings.

A friend and administrative associate described Mike as "a mentor, a teacher, a friend, a model for righteous living, and a loving husband, father, and granddad. He treated those he met with respect and generosity, and his passing leaves a mighty gap in not just the academic and scientific community but also in the circles of faith in which he served and lived."

Mike's common exhortation to friends was "Press on." And we will press on; and because of having walked a part of the journey with Mike, we will do so with more resolve, and courage, and expectancy than had we not known him.

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Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom in the Old Testament

R. Mark Shipp

Recent years have seen renewed interest in the ideas of divine sovereignty and determination of human actions. Popular writers such as John Piper,[1] John MacArthur,[2] and R. C. Sproul[3] have brought traditional Calvinism back into discussion, after Reformed theologians such as Karl Barth[4] had distanced Reformed theology from its foundations. Churches of Christ have not escaped the impact of this revival of Calvinism. Most churches of any size will have members who are aware of these writers and who subscribe to at least some Calvinist beliefs.

But in every age, radical determinism will be countered by an equally radical affirmation of human freedom: every Augustine has his Pelagius, every Calvin his Arminius. The present revival of Calvinism has as its counterpoint the radical "free-will-ism" of Postmodernism and Open Theism. The

[1] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 150.

[2] John MacArthur, Jr., *Saved Without a Doubt: How to Be Certain of Your Salvation* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1992), especially chapter three, 39–51.

[3] R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Grason, 1992).

[4] Note Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. II, Part 2: The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 43. Barth says, "[God's election] is intended for every man, and it concerns and determines every man. But it does so without necessitating that he should be elected or rejected immediately and in advance."

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debate rages on. Just how free are we? Can humans respond freely to a loving God, or is human freedom illusory?

All sides in such debates appeal to scripture. What *does* the Bible say about divine sovereignty and human freedom?[5] My thesis is that there is a mystery at the heart of the matter: God is completely sovereign and humans are completely responsible. God, who exists beyond time and sees "the end from the beginning" (Isa 46:10), determines that his will ultimately be accomplished for his people and his creation, but at the same time God permits human freedom and fully engages the human will.[6]

Three Old Testament texts—the plague narratives of Exodus 7–12, Psalm 51, and Jeremiah at the potter's house in Jeremiah 18—shed light on the issue of divine sovereignty and human freedom.

Determinism and Freedom in the Plague Narratives

The plague narratives in Exodus are well known for the "hardening of the heart" motif: God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he does not acquiesce to Moses' demand to let the children of Israel go. If one appeals to God's statement to Moses in chapter 7:1–5 ("I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and

[5] For a good review of four ways of looking at the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom, see *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, David and Randall Basinger, eds. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1986). While the subject is immense and has had much literary output devoted to it over the centuries, the Basingers have isolated four representative views: 1) Proponents of the *specific sovereignty* of God, which holds that human freedom does not limit God's specific will for his creation. This is the freedom of humans doing what God knew they inevitably were going to do. These proponents can be further subdivided into those who believe all human action is determined by what has happened before, and therefore real "choices" are possible, and those who believe that human freedom is real, so long as humans are free to do what they want to do. 2) Proponents of *general sovereignty*, which holds that human freedom places limitations on God's control. These are also further subdivided into those who believe that God retains complete foreknowledge of events and those who believe that human freedom is incompatible with divine foreknowledge.

[6] Terence Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 102.

though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you"), it would seem to tip the scales in favor of divine determinism. God has ordained a hardening of Pharaoh's heart, so that he might get glory over Pharaoh and that Israel and Egypt might know who the LORD is. Nor does it help to suggest that this is simply an account of God's foreknowledge. It is not just foreknowledge which is in view here, but active hardening!

In examining the actual plague accounts, however, the picture becomes somewhat different. In the first five accounts, God is never mentioned as the active agent of hardening. In each of these, the simple active (*hazaq,* "to be strong, stubborn") or stative verb (*kabed*, "to be heavy") is used, with "Pharaoh's heart" as the subject, without specifying the agent of hardening.[7] In one of the initial plague accounts, however, the agent is clearly specified. In the fourth plague, Pharaoh hardens *his own* heart (*wayyakbed*). Since the first plagues do not specify the agent, but use mainly a stative verb (*kabed*), it is tempting to read "Pharaoh's heart was hardened," along with the RSV, as a circumlocution for God's activity. The formula "Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he did not let the people go" is better understood, however, as parallelism: "he did not let the people go" explains what it means to say that "his heart was hardened."

[7] Several terms are used for "harden" in the Exodus plague narratives. *Kabed* ("to be heavy," "to make heavy" in the causative) is used five times relative to Pharaoh's agency, in Ex 7:14, 8:15, 8:32, 9:7, and 9:34. It is used of God's agency in 10:1, 14:4, and 14:17. *Qashah*, "to make hard" in the causative, is attributed to God in 7:3 and to Pharaoh's agency in 13:15. Finally, *hazaq*, "to grow strong or stubborn," is used of Pharaoh's agency in 7:13, 7:22, 8:19, and 9:35. It is used of God (all in the *piel* conjugation, in a causative sense) in 4:21, 9:12, 10:20 and 27, 11:10, 14:4, 14:8, and 14:17. These all appear to be synonymous and are used interchangeably, irrespective of sources which may predate the narrative as we have it.

The agent of hardening in the first five plagues is Pharaoh himself.[8] The fourth plague narrative in 8:20–32 makes it inescapably clear that Pharaoh hardens his own heart (*wayyakbed par`oh et-libbô*, "and Pharaoh made his heart hard"). This is followed by "this time *also*," suggesting that a pattern of willful hardening had been set by Pharaoh. Also, plague five (plague on cattle) begins with a warning from the Lord to Pharaoh: "For if you refuse (*ma`an*) to send (them) away and you are still holding them (the causative of "to be strong, hard"), then the hand of the Lord will be on your cattle" (Ex 9:2–3). Pharaoh's stubborn refusal and persistence in "hardening"—holding the people captive, the same word used for Pharaoh's hard heart in 8:19—eventuate in further plagues and judgment upon Pharaoh and Egypt. Finally, as mentioned above, it is only with the sixth plague that God is explicitly mentioned as the active agent of hardening. Distinct from the first five plagues, from the sixth plague on the Hebrew is explicit that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

It seems that the statement in chapter 7 ("I will harden Pharaoh's heart") is indeed proleptic, but it is more than that. God actively hardens Pharaoh's heart, but only after several plagues have made it abundantly clear that Pharaoh's heart is hard and no amount of warnings or destructions will alter that.[9] From the sixth plague on, God allows the hardness, participates in it, encourages it, and hastens Pharaoh and the Egyptians to their judgment.[10]

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[8] Fretheim, 98.

[9] David Gunn, "'The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart': Plot, Character, and Th e-ology in Exodus 1–14," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Narrative* (JSOTS No. 19; Sheffield: JSOT, 1982), 79–80 suggests development in Pharaoh's relationship with God and Moses: "'Pharaoh's heart was hardened' . . . becomes a kind of shorthand for 'Yahweh caused Pharaoh's heart to harden.' If Pharaoh may have been directly responsible for his attitude at the commencement, at the end of the story he is depicted as acting against his own better judgment."

[10] Fretheim says, "God's statement concerning Pharaoh's refusal to listen is not an absolute statement about the future" and "If Pharaoh is an automaton, a 'puppet in

One is reminded of other passages which deal with "divine complicity" in human wickedness, such as 2 Thess 2:9–12:

> The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Such texts can be multiplied. Chief among them is the story of Ahab and Micaiah son of Imlah in 1 Kings 22, in which Micaiah tells Ahab that God had sent lying spirits to his prophets, so that he might go to battle and be killed. Ahab believes neither the truth (that he will believe a lie and be killed), nor the lie given by Micaiah ("Go forth and prosper"). The fact that he cannot hear the truth and the divine word by Micaiah paradoxically hastens Ahab's demise.

I know of no better passage than the plague narratives to underscore the complex and profound interplay between God's will and human freedom. In the ancient Near East God is seen as the ultimate agent of all things—all agency is attributable to God. Therefore it is *God* who hardens Pharaoh's heart, since agency is his. On the other hand, as the plague accounts develop it is clearly Pharaoh who hardens his own heart. The plague accounts demonstrate the profound mystery of divine involvement in human actions: God is sovereign and directs the course of human history, while at the same time humans are utterly responsible moral agents.

Psalm 51 and Human Evil

Another passage often cited in connection with traditional Calvinism is Psalm 51. In this psalm, attributed to David, the psalmist opines that his sin is

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the hands of God,' then God is not shown to be much of a God at all" (Fretheim, 100, 102).

so deep-seated that he has been a sinner from his birth. R. C. Sproul connects this passage with the doctrine of original sin when he writes:

> We are sinners not because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners. Thus David laments, "Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."[11]

Sproul goes on to cite the Westminster Confession, that "we are wholly inclined to do evil," and that out of this sinful nature "proceed all actual transgressions."[12] Is this interpretation of the psalmist's cry correct? Is it a fair evaluation of what the psalmist intended?

Clearly, the Old Testament consistently portrays the universality of sin.[13] That sin is a universal human reality is not in question. The controversy revolves around v. 5: "Lo, I was born in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me." On the surface, this appears to suggest either that sin is communicated from mother to child, or that the birth process itself is sinful. It is unnecessary to go to either of these extremes. As was the case with the plague narratives in Exodus, careful exposition of Psalm 51 clarifies the difficulties. I will look first at the concepts of sin and cleansing in Psalm 51 and then at similar terminology in ancient Near Eastern literature.

Sin and cleansing in psalm 51: Psalm 51 is one of the seven penitential psalms of the Psalter.[14] Penitential psalms—individual laments, where the complaint is against the self—are typical in structure and imagery. What makes Psalm 51 unusual is the graphic portrayal of personal sin and the cry for forgiveness, where petitions and cries for help abound.[15] Historically, the

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[11] Sproul, 146.

[12] Sproul, 146.

[13] "All have sinned" (Rom 3:23), "the imagination of their hearts was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5), "no one born of a woman can be righteous" (Job 15:14, 25:4), and others.

[14] Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.

[15] James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 198.

focus of the interpretation of Psalm 51 has been upon the concepts of sin, repentance, and forgiveness reflected both in the body of the text and in the psalm's superscription. However, the actual interpretation of the structure and theology of the text has not received adequate attention.[16]

Vv. 1–2 introduce the themes which characterize the whole: the pervasiveness of sin—impurity and covenant breach—and request for cleansing. It is impossible to understand the psalm without recourse to the language of ritual impurity and cleansing found in Leviticus.

The "complaint section" of this lament, where the lament is articulated and the petition is made, is in vv. 3–13. Here, the language of sin and transgression abounds. The psalmist's sin (*hattat*, covenant-breaking[17]) and tran sgression (*pasha`*, willful rebellion) are clear and obvious to the psalmist (v. 3). Sin *always* involves harm to another—there is no such thing as sin which does no damage to the neighbor, no completely private sin. But in this psalm, guilt against and harm to the neighbor pale in comparison to the covenant breach against the Lord and the offense done to him ("against you *alone* have I sinned," v. 4). The result of this personal offense against the Lord is the knowledge that God is completely just and correct in condemning the psalmist. Indeed, God is portrayed as "clean" in his judgments (v. 4), as opposed to the psalmist, who is dirty, requiring cleansing (v. 1) and washing (v. 2). The psalmist's sin is so pervasive that he cannot remember a time when he was

[16] For a recent example of interpreting Psalm 51 via the superscription, see James Limburg, *Psalms*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: W/JKP, 2000), 71–72.

[17] Edward Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 134, suggests the semantic range of √ *hata'* as "to miss (goal or way)," "to wrong," "to sin." Note in Tiglath-Pileser III's Summary Inscription 7: "Zaqiru, lord of Sha'alli , sinned against (*hatû*, cognate with Hebrew *hatta'*) the covenant of the great gods . . ." √ *hatû* often occurs in Assyrian royal inscriptions relative to covenant-breaking. See Hayim Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 162–163.

not a sinner. He is so steeped in sin, he has been unclean from his birth and even before (v. 5).

The text deals with that which is hidden and that which is revealed. God desires truth in hidden places and in the inmost self (v. 6). The sins which were committed in secret, God has graphically revealed to the psalmist (v. 3). Consequently, the psalmist petitions the Lord to hide his face from the psalmist's sin (v. 9).

The complaint of vv. 3–6 includes six occurrences of terms for wrongdoing—sin (*hattat)*, transgression (*pasha`*), evil (*ra`*), and iniquity (*`awôn*)—, but the petition section of vv. 7–12 barely mentions sin. In the petition, the imperative mood predominates, including several words for ritual cleansing: hyssop (v. 7),[18] wash (*kabas*),[19] cleanse (*tahar*),[20] and blot out (*mahah*).[21] Finally, inasmuch as his sinfulness is utterly pervasive, stretching back to the womb, it is only a new creation (*bara'*, v. 10) which will suffice to deliver him from his guilt.

Edward Dalglish makes the case for the psalm reflecting both the pervasiveness of sin in human society (that the psalmist is thrust into a sinful world from the very beginning, v. 5) and that this does not excuse one's sin.

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[18] Hyssop occurs 12 times in scripture, and all but two of those occurrences refer to its function in the sacrificial system, especially relative to ritual cleansing (see Ex 2:22, Leviticus 14, and Num 19). See Dalglish, 134–135. As is so often the case, things mean what they mean and their opposite. Here, "to purge" in v. 7 is also based upon √ *hata'*, but with the meaning "to purify from sin," *piel* stem. This term also is used almost exclusively in ritual contexts in Leviticus, Numbers, and in Ezekiel, the prophet most influenced by priestly ideology.

[19] *Kabas* occurs 51 times in the Old Testament and all but a handful of occurrences deal with cultic and ritual purity.

[20] For *tahar* see especially Leviticus 11–17.

[21] See Num 5:23 (but note that "blot" is used most often in the Old Testament to refer to God's actions in annihilating the Canaanites and all others who were guilty of gross sin or who opposed Israel). *Mahah* also occurs relative to priestly ritual activity. In Psalm 51, the psalmist requests that God not blot him out, but rather blot out his sin (v. 9).

As sin was with him from the beginning, so were truth and wisdom (v. 6). God desires truth and wisdom in the innermost self. The psalmist knows his sin (v. 3). There is no excuse for sin, for though sin is present everywhere, so is truth, wisdom, and the knowledge of God.[22]

While the response or resolution section typical of laments is difficult in this psalm, the vows of vv. 13–15 are typical of resolution sections in laments, so I assign the "shift" in the psalm to v. 13. As the psalmist has himself been guilty of transgression, he will teach transgressors (v. 13). Underscoring the ritual orientation of this psalm are the trust assertions of vv. 16–17, where the true sacrifice, a broken spirit, is commended to the reader.

In place of a closing benediction or call to praise is a petition that God might do good to Jerusalem, specifically to "build" or "rebuild" its walls. With a restored Jerusalem, presumably inhabited by all those who have offered the righteous offerings of a contrite heart, then the typical sacrifices and whole burnt offerings will be acceptable to God (vv. 18–19).

It is clear that Psalm 51 is filled with the language of impurity, cleansing, and sacrifice taken from the cult and ritual. This is the thought world of the psalmist, one which also informs his understanding of conception and birth. The sexual act bestows ritual impurity, requiring cleansing before the Israelite can return to worship in the sanctuary (see Lev 15:16–18, 31–32). Birth, also, brings ritual impurity, and Israelite women must go through a cleansing process before returning to worship (see Lev 12; note that even though it is "ritual," and not "moral," impurity, a sin offering must still be offered!).[23] The psalmist is not making a theological statement about original

[22] Dalglish, 121–127.

[23] Jonathan Klawans, *Sin and Impurity in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 36. In discussing Psalm 51, Klawans says, "The real key to understanding these passages is this: the hope expressed is that full atonement from sin could prove to be as easy a matter as purification from ritual impurity."

sin and the bondage of the will. He is stating that his entire life was characterized by sin and impurity, from conception, to birth, to the present. It is no wonder that he is so impure—his life has been pervasively impure from the beginning.

Other Old Testament and ancient rabbinic writers also understood the passage to refer to cultic impurity: that a human is conceived and is born in ritual impurity.[24] But this does not connote moral evil. The OT, however, does not make a clear distinction between ritual and moral impurity—both render the person impure and unqualified for worship.[25] Given the repeated references to cultic terms (hyssop, sacrifice, etc.) in the psalm, my suggestion is this: the psalmist knows that he is indeed extremely sinful, and rightly so: his very conception was in impurity, a paradigm for his entire life. He is profoundly frustrated because of his frailty and tendency towards impurity, and this impurity goes back all the way to his conception.

Psalm 51:5 and ancient Near Eastern Literature: The literature and themes of Psalm 51 are not *sui generis* in antiquity. There is a rich background of Egyptian and Assyro-Babylonian penitential literature which sheds light on Psalm 51, particularly v. 5. As with the Old Testament understanding of the pervasiveness and universality of human sin, so with ancient Near Eastern literature.

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[24] See Lev 12:8 and 15:18; see also *Seder Tohoroth,* tractate *Niddah*, which describes the ritual impurity of birth reflected in Psalm 51:5 in much the same way I have here. The *Talmud,* tractate *Niddah* 31b, says "R. Isaac and R. Ammi further stated: A woman conceives only immediately before her menstrual period, for it is said, "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity" (*Niddah* 31b, in *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Tohoroth*, ed. by I. Epstein (trans. Israel Slotki; London: Soncino, 1948), 217.

[25] Klawans, 36–37, suggests that there is a distinction between ritual and moral defilement, but that they "overlap in various ways," particularly in the use of the *hattat* (sin!) sacrifice for both ritual and moral defilement. Note that Psalm 51 uses *hattat* in vv. 2–4, along with other symbolic language from the sphere of the sacrificial system.

Among the most interesting laments in the ancient world is the Sumerian Job-like poem, "Man and His God."[26] Here, the sufferer cries out to his god for deliverance from suffering and for forgiveness of sin.[27] In continuity with their understanding of the universal tendency towards sin, the Sumerian scribe says

> They say—the valiant sages—a righteous word and straightforward:
> "Never has a sinless child been born to its mother,
> . . .A sinless workman has not existed from of old."[28]

There are several connections in "Man and His God" with Psalm 51. Note the connection between the universality of human sin and birth into the world, as in Psalm 51:5. Second, in spite of the universality of sin, the sinner is responsible for his or her own sin and can respond with contrition and penitence. In lines 111ff of "Man and His God," the lamenter says

> My god, now that you have shown me my sins,
> . . .I, the man, would confess my sins before you.[29]

The god then hears his lament and restores him (lines 117–131).[30]

Psalm 51, Divine Sovereignty, and Human Freedom: In what sense do Psalm 51 (and Near Eastern penitential psalms) inform our understanding of divine sovereignty and human freedom? Here again one one must be careful not to overemphasize either divine determinism or human freedom. The psalmist had no say about the ritually impure state in which he entered the

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[26] Samuel N. Kramer, "'Man and His God': A Sumerian Variation on the 'Job' Motif," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, *festschrift* H. H. Rowley, eds. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 3; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 170–182.

[27] Kramer, 170–172.

[28] Kramer, 179.

[29] Kramer, 180.

[30] Other penitential psalms in the ancient Near East include the Sumerian *erschahunga* lament (for which see Dalglish, 128) and Canaanite penitential prayers (for which see Marie-Joseph Seux, *Hymnes et Prieres aux Dieux de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* [Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976], 203–207).

world. Likewise, that humans come into a world which is morally perverse is beyond the psalmist's control. On the other hand, the psalmist uses terms which connote personal and willful culpability in covenant-breaking: *pasha`* (rebellion), *hattat* (covenant infraction), *`avôn* (iniquity). Also, v. 6 stands as a counterpoint to v. 5 in Psalm 51: God expects truth and wisdom in the innermost being. The psalmist woefully confesses that human sin is inevitable, but not necessary.

Jeremiah 18: Jeremiah at the Potter's House

A third text often cited in support of divine determinism is Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah at the potter's house. Jeremiah is commanded by the Lord to go to a potter's house and observe him making pottery. When the clay he was using became "spoiled," or misshapen, he destroyed that vessel and began fashioning a different one. This "living parable" demonstrates that Israel is like the clay in the Divine Potter's hand. If Israel becomes spoiled in the business of being shaped, then God could destroy her and begin again. God, the Divine Potter, can do as he wills with his clay. This text would seem to favor determinism—God has arranged matters so that people have no choice but to respond to his shaping.

As is the case with the plague narratives, however, reading further in the text can be illuminating. Divine determinism is not so much the focus of this text as is the interplay of human freedom and divine sovereignty. What at first appears to be divine caprice and arbitrariness in judgment—the clay is completely subject to the potter's will—quickly becomes an illustration of God's grace in responding to Judah's repentance.[31] It is true that Judah r e-

[31] Ronald Clements says, "[D]ivine justice does not exclude the possibility of human repentance. Rather it demands and expects it!" Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 113. According to Clements, God's relationship to Israel relative to the future is an open one. John Bracke, on the other hand, is more impressed with the futility of the extension of grace to Israel: v. 12 says "It is

fuses to repent, but this is a far cry from the Lord refusing to extend the possibility of repentance because the outcome was inevitable.

One is reminded of the inevitability of judgment upon Israel in Amos 5:2 ("Fallen, no more to rise, is virgin Israel!"), yet at the same time, Amos 5:6 says, "Seek the Lord and live!" Thus the inevitability of judgment on sin and the possibility of repentance both remain as realities, even in Amos, a book characterized by almost unrelieved judgment on Israel. Furthermore, one must ask the reason for such proclamations of judgment. That Amos is willing to hold out a dim "perhaps" to Israel, even in the midst of thoroughgoing judgment, is witness to the need for balance in the human perceptions of divine determinism and human freedom.

Conclusion

The themes of God's sovereign oversight of his creation and the reality of human freedom are not presented in the Old Testament as if they are in conflict. On the one hand, to limit God's sovereignty in order to safeguard the reality of human freedom is to construct a God different from the one who "sits enthroned above the cherubim." Yet, to suggest that human "freedom" is only the freedom to be what God has already ordained paradoxically limits not only humans but God as well. What are we saying about a deity who cannot or will not grant true choices to humanity?[32] What does a human "response" to God mean in worship, prayer, and devotion in a deterministic system?

The incarnation is the point at which divine sovereignty and human freedom find their fullest expression and meaning. "God with us" means that God in his sovereignty has entered our human situation. God's initiative in

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no use, we will follow our own plans." "God's people are incapable of repentance. God has little choice but to 'pluck up and break down and destroy'." Bracke, *Jeremiah 1–29*, Westminster Bible Companion (Atlanta: W/JKP, 2000), 153.

[32] See Fretheim, 102.

Christ implies that his will for his creation will not be thwarted—that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). It also implies vulnerability on God's part, that humans can and do neglect, abuse, and deny his grace. Ironically, as Reformed theologian Karl Barth said relative to divine sovereignty and human freedom:

> According to Scripture, the divine election of grace is an activity of God which has a definite goal and limit. Its direct and proper object is not individuals generally, but one individual—and only in him the people called and united by him . . . It is only in that one man that a human determination corresponds to the divine determining. In the strict sense, only He can be understood and described as "elected" ...[33]

[33] Barth, 43.

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