

IN RESPONSE – A HEAVENLY HEPTAD, PART ONE

by Dennis Prutow

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Last time I introduced a framework I find helpful for preaching from the Old Testament. There is one God, one covenant, one gospel, and one church. This framework provides general guidelines for biblical interpretation or hermeneutics. I prefer to speak of this quartet as a framework for preaching. Our interpretative endeavors are not ends in themselves. We interpret Scripture in order to teach and preach. Our focus ought to be on that preaching and teaching as an end toward which our study leads.

Feedback from a dear friend adds a fifth important point.¹ There is *one* response to the one gospel and one covenant. It is faith. There is one faith.

The idea of one faith response to the gospel leads to Paul's words in Ephesians 4:4-6. "*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*"

Paul lays out a seven-fold basis for understanding the priority of "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). It is a seven-fold reality rooted in Divine action, Divine outcomes, and the Divine being. It is a heavenly heptad, a complete and perfect ground and basis for following the injunction to preserve already existent unity.

Part of the way we preserve the unity of the Spirit is to understand this heavenly heptad and proclaim its reality. On one hand this heptad presents us with a hermeneutical or interpretive principle. On the other hand it is far more. It sets before us the way the Divine Being presents Himself.

My concern here is with preaching and teaching. If the heavenly heptad of Ephesians 4:4-6 gives us a framework in which God manifests Himself, we have an interpretive principle with coordinate power. We have the Divine hermeneutic accompanied with the Divine dynamic. John Eadie confirms this idea in his comments on Ephesians 4:4-6,

Seven times does he [Paul] use the epithet "One." The church is one body, having one Spirit in it, and one Lord over it; then its inner relations and outer ordinances are one too; its calling has attached to it one hope; its means of union to Him is one faith; its dedication is one baptism: and all this unity is but the impress of the great primal unity—one God. His unity stamps an image of itself on that scheme which originated in Him, and issues in His glory.²

My objective in this short series is to review the seven-fold unity Paul presents in Ephesians and apply what we learn to the story of Gideon found in Judges.

There is one body. "This is not an exhortation but a declaration."³ "The one body is, of course, the church consisting of Jews and Gentiles (2:14-15), the one family in heaven and on earth (3:15)."⁴ Christ made Jew and Gentile one. "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace" (Ephesians 2:14-15). The linkage of Jew and Gentile ties Old and New Testaments together. "To think, for example, of two bodies of Christ, one comprising Jewish believers and the other comprising Gentile believers, would be grotesque."⁵ Once again, the unity of the church in Old and New Testaments is a first principle guiding interpretation.

Paul immediately ties the idea of one body to the emphatic statement that there is *one Spirit*. "The Spirit who came down in power on Jewish believers at Pentecost

is the same as fell on Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius."⁶ "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Salvation occurs the same way for both Jew and Gentile. They are both reconciled in one body to God through the cross (Ephesians 2:16). Paul adds, "Through Him [Christ] we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).

Two hearts in one body would be monstrous. If there be but one body, all that belong to that body should have one heart. The Catholic [universal] church is one mystical body of Christ, and all good Christians make up but one body, incorporated by one charter, that of the gospel, animated by one Spirit, the same Holy Spirit who by his gifts and graces quickens, enlivens, and governs that body. If we belong to Christ, we are all actuated by one and the same Spirit, and therefore should be one.⁷

The unity of the Spirit is a second interpretive principle. The analogy of Scripture lies close at hand. One Spirit inspired all of Scripture, the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:11) and we may rest assured it is "the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."⁸ We therefore have no reservation holding that Scripture interprets Scripture. "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."⁹

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⁶ Bruce.

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 10 vols. (Rio, WI: The Master Christian Library, 1999), 9:122.

⁸ Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:10.

⁹ Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:9.

¹ Dr. Dwight Zeller, Director, Sangre de Cristo Seminary, Westcliffe, Colorado.

² John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Minneapolis: James and Clock Christian Publishing Company, 1977), 275.

³ Charles Hodge, *Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 203.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 185.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Pickering and Inglis, Ltd., 1961), 77.

IN RESPONSE – A HEAVENLY HEPTAD, PART TWO

by Dennis Prutow

Because of the uniform work of the Spirit in and among the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament church, there is one hope. “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling.*” The calling to which Paul refers is an effectual calling. “The urgent invitation of the gospel (the *external* call) has been applied to the hearts of the Ephesians by the Holy Spirit, producing an *internal* or *effectual* call.... Their call had brought them hope, a hope firmly grounded in God’s promises which cannot fail.”¹

The basic Christian hope is the resurrection of the dead. We focus on death as the ultimate event in salvation, when the soul passes into glory. “Preoccupation with the event of death indicates a deflection of faith, of love, and of hope.”² To place our hope on death rather than upon the resurrection, when body and soul together transcend the temporal and enter the eternal state, is to have a truncated view of the Christian hope.

The Apostle Paul affirms that the resurrection is the hope of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

This I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:14-15).

There is one hope. This is a third important interpretive principle.

There is one Lord. The Lord in the Old Testament is Jehovah. Jehovah enters history in human form. The angel announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds in Bethlehem, “Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). “Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed; he is *the Lord*, Lord of all; he is a sovereign prince; nay, he is God, for *the Lord*, in the Old Testament, answers to *Jehovah*. He is a Savior, and he

will be a Savior to those only that accept of him for their Lord.”³ This is a fourth interpretive principle.

“There is only one supreme governor over the church. He is the head of the one body, and the giver of the one Spirit.”⁴ As part of one body, we confess Jesus Christ to be the one Lord to whose rule and reign we submit. This includes a confession of Christ’s divinity. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). This is the confession born of the one Spirit. “I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’; and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Since the confession “Christ is Lord” is born of the Spirit, the faith expressed in and through this confession must also be born of the Spirit. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, and one Lord. There must of necessity also be *one faith*. Is this one faith objective, the body of faith we hold? Or is it subjective, the faith we express as we confess allegiance to Christ and to the body of truth contained in Scripture? It is “the gospel, containing the doctrines of the Christian faith: or, it is the same grace of faith (faith in Christ) whereby all Christians are saved.”⁵ It is both. “True believers have one faith, not only because they profess the same creed, but also because they really and inwardly embrace it. Their union therefore is not merely an external union, but inward and spiritual.”⁶

It is only as to the fundamental doctrines, those necessary to piety and therefore necessary to salvation, that this unity can be affirmed of the whole church as it now exists on earth. Within these limits, all the true people of God are united. They all receive the Scriptures as the word of God, and acknowledge themselves to be subject to their teachings. They all recognize and worship the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. They all trust in his

blood for redemption and to his Spirit for sanctification.⁷

This one faith spans the Testaments. Abraham is the example, he is the father of Jew and Gentile. He “is the father of us all” (Romans 4:16). This is our fifth interpretive principle.

There is one baptism. Baptism is the sign of the work of the one Spirit; it is the seal of the covenant. “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28). The distinction between Jew and Gentile is no longer. “All the baptized make the same profession, accept the same covenant, and are consecrated to the same Lord and redeemer.”⁸ “The point here is that Jewish and Gentile believers alike acknowledged one Lord, shared one faith in him, and had undergone one baptism into His name.”⁹ This is interpretive principle six.

Finally, and seventh, *there is one God and Father of all.* “Whence comes faith? Whence baptism? Whence the government of Christ, under whose guidance we are united, save because God the Father, pouring Himself forth to each of us, employs these means for gathering us to Himself?”¹⁰ God “is over all, and through all, and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). “As Father he is ‘over all,’ for he exercises control over all. He is, however, also, ‘through all,’ for he blesses us all through Christ our Mediator. And he is ‘in all,’ for he draws us close to his heart in the Spirit.”¹¹

Ephesians 4:4-6 thus presents the Divine hermeneutic and the Divine dynamic. If understood and followed, they are the power of God in preaching.

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⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 209.

⁹ Bruce, 80.

¹⁰ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, Torrance and Torrance, eds., 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 11:173.

¹¹ Hendriksen, 188.

¹ Hendriksen, 186.

² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1989), 175.

³ Henry, 5:599.

⁴ Eadie, 274.

⁵ Henry, 6:702.

⁶ Hodge, 208.

IN RESPONSE – THE HEAVENLY HEPTAD AND PREACHING, PART ONE

by Dennis Prutow

We apply what we learn from Ephesians 4:4-6 to the story of Gideon in the Book Judges. We begin with Paul's declaration, "There is one body and one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:4) and Judges 8:1-3,

Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they contended with him vigorously. But he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God has given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

Verse 1 of the Authorized Versions says, "they did chide with him sharply." They did so "from injured pride or jealousy, because Gideon had made war on the enemy and defeated them without the co-operation of this tribe, which was striving for leadership."¹

Scripture says much about jealousy and the body. "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:14-16). Jealousy causes division within the body. From the perspective of the various parts of the body, there is a common enemy. The enemy is not other parts of the body. Jealousy is a deed of the flesh. Jealousy is demonic. It is not from the Holy Spirit. It is a manifestation of evil; it promotes disorder.

We therefore note the following, understanding there is one body and one Spirit. First, Gideon certainly is a God sent deliverer. The Lord asked Gideon, "Have I not sent you?" (Judges 6:14). When Gideon routed and defeated Midian with 300 men, it was certainly a sign that God was with Israel. Darkness is certainly jealous of Divine victory.

Second, centuries later we see a similar situation in the body of Israel. Certainly Christ was the divinely sent deliverer. Certainly the signs performed by Christ validated He was in fact Messiah. After Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, "the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs'" (John 11:47). Certainly the Pharisees, part of the same body, were exceedingly jealous. Third, Christ is at work in the church, His body, today. The abiding miracle and sign is the new birth. We must be on the alert for jealousy erupting and spoiling the victories. Churches may be jealous of churches. Pastors may be jealous of other pastors, of elders, or of deacons. Church members may be jealous of the position of other members, etc., etc., etc. So Christ emerges from Judges 8:1-3.

We continue by applying Paul's words at the end of Ephesians 4:4, "just as you were called in one hope of your calling." There is one body, one Spirit, and one hope. I refer again to Judges 8:3, "God has given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands." Judges 7:25 describes the actual event. "They captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan."

Psalms 83:9-16 memorializes this event. The Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb, their kings, and Zebah and Zalmunna, their generals, are archetypal enemies of God's people. Asaph refers to them when he prays for God's hand against His enemies. We implement the principle of one Spirit in the analogy of Scripture.

Deal with them as with Midian...
Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb
And all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, "Let us possess for ourselves the pastures of God." O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like chaff before the wind. Like fire that burns the forest and like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Your tempest

and terrify them with Your storm. Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Your name, O LORD.

The prayer here, in part, relates to the siege, route, pursuit, and death of Midian, Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah, and Zalmunna. We pray the enemies of God may sense they are in retreat and are being beaten down by forces they cannot control, that their lives are under siege, and that they may meet an untimely, ignominious, and meaningless death. "Do to them as to the Midianites; let them be routed by their own fears, for so the Midianites were."² These are quite real possibilities in the thinking and lives of unbelievers. "We may not prescribe to God, but we may pray to God that he will deal with the enemies of his church in our days as he did with those in the days of our fathers."³ Note the idea of one body here.

Why the prayer, the imprecation? The hoped for result of the pressure applied by God is that unbelievers will see their sin and seek the Lord for relief.

"Let them be broken and baffled in their attempts, that they may seek thy name, Lord! Let them be put to a stand, that they may have both leisure and reason to pause a little, and consider who it is that they are fighting against and what an unequal match they are for him, and may therefore humble and submit themselves and desire conditions of peace. Let them be made to fear thy name, and perhaps that will bring them to seek thy name." Note, That which we should earnestly desire and beg of God for our enemies and persecutors is that God would bring them to repentance, and we should desire their abasement in order to this, no other confusion to them than what may be a step towards their conversion.⁴

There is one hope. We proclaim this hope to all. Our prayers seek this hope on behalf of God's enemies. We work this out further in the next lesson.

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¹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:351.

² Henry, 3:555.

³ *Ibid.*, 556.

⁴ *Ibid.*

IN RESPONSE – THE HEAVENLY HEPTAD AND PREACHING, PART TWO

by Dennis Prutow

Psalm 83:17-18 continues,
Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever, and let them be humiliated and perish, that they may know that You alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth. Men and women ought to seek the Lord for salvation. “If they will not be ashamed and repent, let them be put to shame and perish; if they will not be troubled and turned, which would soon put an end to all their trouble, a happy end, *let them be troubled for ever*, and never have peace....”¹

There is an eternal death into which God’s enemies head unknowing, uncaring. Tempest and trouble in this life may arrest their movement, promote serious seeking, and result in conversion. The hope of the resurrection of the righteous emerges as the only true hope one may have. The deaths of Oreb and Zeeb warn us. Christ stands as either our righteous Judge or our merciful Savior and Lord. We can preach Him from Judges 8:3.

In this context we turn to the application of the principles of Ephesians 4:5, There is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” After winning a stunning victory over Midian, Israel issued an invitation. “Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son’s son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian’” (Judges 8:22). They asked Gideon to establish a dynasty. “But Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you’” (Judges 8:23).

Jehovah shall rule over you. This is Gideon’s stance and confession. “The government in Israel was essentially a theocracy, not a monarchy, and even when the monarchy was introduced it was qualified by this consideration.”² This one Lord who rules his people comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It is incumbent upon us to confess Jesus as Lord. As already indicated, this includes an understanding of and commitment to the truth that Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity.

Church governors are tempted to rule over their flocks forgetting Christ is the King. All that is done should be qualified

by this consideration. Like the children of Israel, we often seek one who will lead us. Or one seeks to lead. It is difficult to restrain rule in the church by elders so that it will not continually devolve into rule by one rather than rule by One. We must have the stance of Gideon. Christ rules over us by His Word and His Spirit. There is little difficulty preaching Christ from Judges 8:23.

In this vein, there is one faith and one baptism. Judges 6:25-27 says,
Now on the same night the LORD said to him [Gideon], “Take your father’s bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.” Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

Gideon served one LORD. His faith rejected violations of God’s covenant set forth in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13). Baal worship was a clear violation of the First and Second Commandments. There is *one* faith. We too must walk in this one faith. It is a “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:16). We must walk according to God’s commandments (2 John 1:6).

Matthew Henry makes an interesting observation in the context of Gideon assuring the people the Lord will rule over them. He quotes 1 Corinthians 1:13. “*Were you baptized in the name of Paul?*”³ “Paul evidently knows the idea in Mt 28:19 and scouts [rejects] the notion of being put on a par with Christ or the Trinity. He is no rival of Christ.”⁴ Gideon knows he is no rival to Christ. We too are not rivals to Christ. Christ is King. Gideon brooks no rivals to the LORD and neither can we. Gideon leads us to preach Christ from Judges 6:25-27.

Finally, according to the heavenly heptad, there is “one God and Father of

all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). The God who is over all, works through all, and is in all, promised Gideon he would deliver Israel with three hundred troops. The one God and Father effected this great victory (Judges 7:19-23). He did so with torches, trumpets, and pitchers.

This method here taken of defeating the Midianites may be alluded to, (1.) As typifying the destruction of the devil’s kingdom in the world by the preaching of the everlasting gospel, the sounding of that trumpet, and the holding forth of that light out of earthen vessels, for such the ministers of the gospel are, in whom the treasure of that light is deposited, 2 Corinthians 4:6, 7. Thus God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, a barley-cake to overthrow the tents of Midian, that the excellency of the power might be of God only; the gospel is a sword, not in the hand, but in the mouth, the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, of God and Jesus Christ, him that sits on the throne and the Lamb. (2.) As representing the terrors of the great day. So the excellent bishop Hall applies it; if these pitchers, trumpets, and firebrands, did so daunt and dismay the proud troops of Midian and Amalek, who shall be able to stand before the last terror, when the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, the elements shall be on a flame, the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the Lord himself shall descend with a shout!⁵

Surely we can, should, and must preach Christ from the story of Gideon. There is power in presentations formed within the parameters of Ephesians 4:4-6.

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¹ Henry, 556.

² A. E. Cundall and L. Morris, *Judges and Ruth* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 121.

³ Henry, 2:174.

⁴ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 4:75.

⁵ Henry, 2:168.