

Clarion

Numbers 10:1-10

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ANGELS SERVED AS GOD'S MESSENGERS OF HIS SALVATION



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Worshipping with Angels

Angels served as God's messengers of his salvation

When we congregate for holy worship on the Lord's Day, we are in the presence of God (cf. 1 Cor 3:16). He greets us through his servant, the minister of the Word. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:3). It is his Word that is being proclaimed, and according to Christ's promise his Spirit is present (Matt 18:20). Are the angels also present?

Scripture does not tell us all that much about the angels, but there is enough to give pause for reflection. Angels are certainly interested in the gospel.

Angels are interested in the gospel

In his first letter, the Apostle Peter notes that the Old Testament prophets preached the gospel which Christians are privileged to know in fullness – a gospel into which "even angels long to look" (1 Pet 1:12). The verb used for "longing to look" literally means "to bend over for the purpose of looking," that is, "to bend over to get a better look." The angels want to know about the gospel in the service of which they had been messengers for so many centuries. They want to hear and learn more about it, especially in the fullness of time in which we live, when the promises of the gospel have been fulfilled in Christ's blood.

Peter's reference to the angels bending down to take a look at the gospel reminds us of the two cherubim that gazed down on the atonement cover or mercy seat of the ark where the blood of the covenant was sprinkled (Exod 25:20; Lev 16:14-16). These angels figuratively peering down on the mercy seat and seeing the blood splattered there once a year were, however, in the dark as to pre-

cisely how this sprinkling would play out. How different for angels in the New Testament fulfilment of the sacrifice of Christ!

Angels today hear the gospel through the church's proclamation. We can deduce this from Scripture. When the Apostle Paul instructs the women of the Corinthian church to honour the gender distinctions as ordained by God, which in their case meant that women should wear head coverings in worship, he gives a reason. It is necessary "because of the angels" (1 Cor 11:10). The best explanation for this rationale is that the angels were attending the worship service and that they would be offended if the gender distinctions were not honoured. Also elsewhere Scripture suggests that angels attend worship services with God's people. The Apostle Paul in his Ephesian letter notes that God's "intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Eph 3:10). These rulers and authorities are angels, probably in the first place, good angels. A primary way that the manifold wisdom of God is made known is through the preaching of the gospel during the worship service (cf. Eph 3:8). And so one can assume that also angels hear the gospel there.

Furthermore, as those charged to take care of the church (Heb 1:14), one can expect the angels to be there on Sundays to witness what is going on. This also seems to be intimated by the Apostle's charge to Timothy which he made "in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels" (1 Tim 5:21).

From bearers of the gospel to hearers of the gospel

When one reflects on the above, then one could say that the place of angels has changed in one respect. Prior to Pentecost, angels were messengers of the gospel. After Pentecost, they became hearers of the gospel, although in the apostolic age their task as messengers was not yet completely finished (cf. Rev 1:1).

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 3 begins with Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's editorial, which asks the question: are angels present in our worship services? He discusses the change of the angels' role between Old and New Testament and examines the scriptural evidence that angels are with us during the worship service.

Another question asked in this issue: "Is Christian burial going underground?" Written by Rick Ludwig, this article discusses the changing trends of funeral customs.

Dr. Theo Lodder continues his series of articles on music in the worship services. In this installment he examines musical instruments and musicians in the Old Testament.

We have a report from the fifty-first annual women's league day. At the same time we wrap up a three-part series from Rev. Reuben Bredenhof on the "Woman of Wisdom," an article that was originally his speech at the league day.

Issue 3 contains several regular columns, Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, and Ray of Sunshine. We also have a book review and a Mission News insert.

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Angels “are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14). As the coming of the Saviour came closer, the task of the heavenly messengers to bring God’s news of salvation came to the forefront. An angel announced the birth of John the Baptist to a startled and disbelieving Zechariah and the angel Gabriel visited Mary to announce the birth of the Lord Jesus (Luke 1:13, 30). After the birth a great company of the angelic army announced the good news to the shepherds outside Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-15). A heavenly messenger also announced the resurrection of Christ (Matt 28:5). Angels served as God’s messengers of his salvation.

The children of God take over from God's servants the beautiful responsibility to proclaim the glad tidings of Jesus Christ

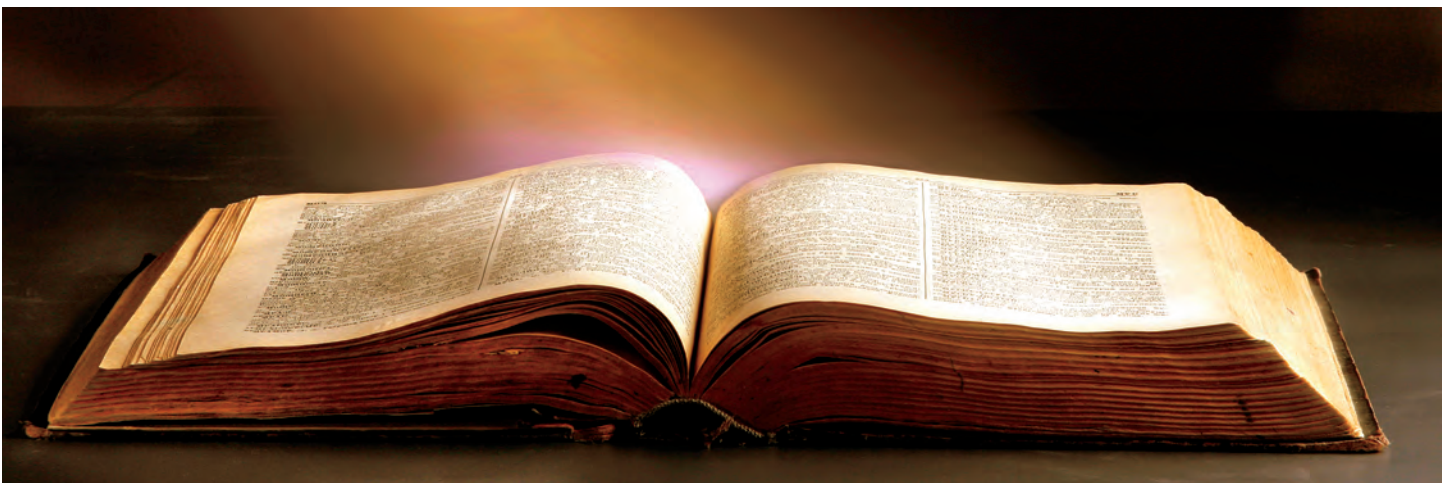
But notably at Pentecost there was no need for angels to make announcements. After all, subsequent to his resurrection, the Saviour had been teaching and telling his disciples all that was necessary for them to proclaim after his ascension (Acts 1:3-9). Equipped with Christ’s teaching and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles were God’s messengers of Christ’s accomplished work on the day of Pentecost. The task of proclaiming good news went from the angels to the church. To put it differently, the angels as God’s messenger servants proclaiming his salvation must step back. The children of God take over from God’s servants the beautiful responsibility to proclaim the glad tidings of Jesus Christ.

In church with the angels

This development does not however mean that the angels can now put the matter of the gospel out of their minds. To the contrary! They are vitally interested in the gospel and “long to look into these things” (1 Pet 1:12). They rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10) and they keep an eye on things that happen on earth (cf. 1 Cor 4:9; Heb 1:14). And as we saw, they attend worship services. This is no surprise, for they worship God in heaven. Isaiah saw them flying around God’s throne and calling to one another “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3; cf. Ps 103:20; 148:2).

All this has implications for our worship and our attitude to it today. For example, if angels, God’s servants, are busy worshipping, how much more should God’s children, who are the direct beneficiaries of the salvation in Christ! Furthermore, would you really want to miss a worship service where the angels will be present? Their presence underlines the significance of what is happening.

In the context of this article, what is important is that during worship the gospel of the blood of reconciliation is proclaimed and applied. The sacrificial blood once splattered on the mercy seat which the cherubim gazed at so long ago has now finally been fulfilled. After many centuries of worship services of seemingly unending sacrifices, and praying for the coming of *the* lamb of God, we today may rejoice in the reality that he has come and that *the* blood of the covenant has been poured out for the forgiveness of *all* our sins (Matt 26:28). Small wonder that angels also rejoice in this reality and are present when we worship, longing to know as much about the gospel as possible, and therefore listening to the preaching, prayers, and singing. With the servants of the Most High present, would the children of God want to be absent?





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What Did Satan Know?

"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

(Matthew 16:23)

One of the questions that arises as we read the gospels is to what extent the evil one knew God's plan to save the world through the suffering and death of Jesus. Many interpreters assume that Satan was fully aware of what God was doing in Christ. For this reason, they also interpret certain events in the gospels as Satan's attempts to seduce the Christ away from the path of the cross.

One of these events is described in Matthew 16. In this chapter we find the well-known rebuke of Peter. Why did our Lord call Peter "Satan"? The answer is that Peter was resisting Christ's proclamation of the cross. Jesus had just told his disciples that they were heading to Jerusalem but it wouldn't be, as Peter imagined, for a coronation. Jerusalem would bring not a crown but a cross.

Clearly, Jesus sees a satanic influence at work in Peter's resistance to the way of the cross. As they engage with this point of the narrative, interpreters often assume that Satan is working through Peter to tempt Jesus away from the path of suffering and death on the cross because Satan knew that this event would be his undoing.

Is that assumption correct? Did Satan really know God's plan of salvation? Did he understand that the cross would be an atoning sacrifice through which Christ would liberate the people of God who were in bondage to the devil?

To get some more biblical perspective on this matter, let's call to mind Luke 22:3 where we read that "Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve." This bit of information leads to a question. If Satan knew that Christ's arrest would lead to the cross and if he knew that the cross would be God's victory over sin and evil, why would he direct Judas to betray Jesus? Would Satan on the one hand use Peter in an attempt to prevent Christ from going to the cross, while on the other hand use Judas to accomplish the opposite? That would make for an incoherent devil, and while the Bible informs us that the evil one is deceitful, there's no evidence of him being illogical.

If we are right in thinking that Satan did not know of God's plan to save the world through the cross, why does Jesus call Peter "Satan" in Matthew 16:23? The answer must lie in Peter's concept of the Kingdom of God. Peter was thinking about the Kingdom of God in crassly materialistic categories, as if it were just one more of the many kingdoms of this world. Jesus sees Peter's whole concept of the Kingdom as coming straight from the devil. It's from the flesh and not from the Spirit.

Now someone might suppose that the evil one would have known about the way of the cross from the Old Testament. Don't the Scriptures

speak about a suffering Saviour? Doesn't the devil know the Scriptures? It's true that the devil does know the Bible. He could quote it in his dialogue with Jesus. And yet there is a depth to the Word of God which can be known only by faith and only through the Spirit.

We can go further with this thought. Being thoroughly evil, can the devil even understand the concept of sacrificial love? Can he comprehend the Saviour's love for sinners, a love so great that he would lay down his life for them as a sacrifice for sin? Love is entirely foreign to the mind of the evil one and so it would seem unlikely that he could grasp that Christ would defeat him through an act of love.

Through the direct influence of Satan, then, Jesus was eventually put to death on the cross. It looked like a victory for the power of darkness. In reality, however, the cross was Christ's victory over Satan. By dying for sinners Jesus destroyed the claim of the devil over sinners. He took away the devil's power to accuse and condemn.

We today know so much more than Satan knew. We know God's amazing plan of salvation. We know the depths of divine love which sent Jesus to the cross. Let us therefore live joyfully in the light of his victory over sin, Satan, and death. **C**

Is Christian Burial Going Underground?

"My child, let your tears flow for the dead; as one who is suffering terribly, give voice to your sorrow. Lay out their bodies in accordance with their wishes, and don't neglect their burial."

Ecclesiasticus 38:16

The North American landscape concerning funeral and burial customs has been transformed over the past twenty years with the increasing popularity of cremation and a general decline in religious practice. Many funeral events today follow on the heels of the quick disposition of the dead body, often removing the context and diminishing the benefit of the funeral. As a result, a generation is approaching the death of their baby boomer parents with increasing uncertainty regarding the significance of the burial of the dead and the events surrounding it. Even Christian churches are reluctant to promote the practices that once pointed to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and have exchanged their funeral liturgy for a greater emphasis on eulogies and sharing of memories in Celebration of Life services. Many times whimsical thoughts cloak the presence of death, and happy memories trump the realities of the impact of loss in a broken world. Even more alarming, the presence of death is often banned from the festivities. The dead are no longer welcome at their own funerals. Life is celebrated, death is denied.

This dramatic change in funeral practice has introduced an element of chaos into the funeral planning process. Traditional services were designed to help face loss and find purpose for today and hope for the future. Contemporary practices try to leapfrog past the pain and significance of loss. The modern day funeral director is often trying to piece together meaning for the bereaved through fragmented funeral plans. The customs of the past followed a logical process, travelling the somber

route from the place of death to the graveyard. Stops were made along the way to allow time to face the death, to receive support from family and friends, to receive comfort with words of faith, and then participate in the harsh reality of returning the body to the earth. The climax of the funeral event was at the graveside, where the words of the Christian faith were most poignantly declared. The funeral process prepared for letting go of a loved one with an eye for eternity. Victory was proclaimed while facing death!

Life is celebrated, death is denied

In combination with today's purposeful distancing from death's reality is a drawing away from sharing in grief. The old maxim, "Grief shared is grief diminished" is losing meaning as grief is suppressed. Today, privacy is most important for the bereaved, and recovering is championed above mourning. Private family funeral services and burials are on the rise. Again, the past customs had an opposite intent as they slowly included community in the grieving process. The journey started with a private family gathering around the death bed when possible. This opportunity was then extended to a sharing with family and friends during set visiting hours for paying respects. Finally, the public (including faith and social communities) were invited to a funeral service which culminated in a communal procession to

the graveside. This practice slowly increased the social safety net around the mourners as they travelled the road of grief. It also allowed them a gentle transition from the initial isolation from others often sought in grief to integration with others that is most needed while grieving. It was understood and appreciated as a community that a period of mourning would follow a loss. Confronting death together allowed for the general acceptance that life had changed.

In addition to the trend of moving away from facing death, is the collective obsession with time management and scheduling. Previous generations respected the ebb and flow of life and knew when to set things down, and when to pick them up again. Death in a community was a clear indication for a time to pause, to pay respects, to allow time for the funeral, to see things through to their natural conclusion. Today there is more concern with fitting things in, rather than stopping. Pragmatism rules planning and even funeral events must fit tight time-lines so that there is little disturbance of anyone's schedule. Accommodating this often means that the process of events may overrule the purpose. A burial preceding the funeral ceremony might save some time, and some travelling inconvenience. It might allow more people to participate in the reception and minimize some of the coordination required to plan the event. However, it lacks the logical sequence of preparation for the family to be led to the best moment for them to meet death's last stand. Taking the time to gather and face the reality of the death, and then hearing the gospel proclaimed and singing the songs of victory, prepares us to stand at the grave and make our confession of faith. Lowering our loved one's body into the ground is best done when one is filled with hope, refreshed by God's promises. Doing that in the fellowship of the saints, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, adds to the faith strengthening experience. Testifying to our friends, who do not know Jesus Christ and stand beside us in the cemetery, makes the burial an evangelical moment!

Purposefully, many Protestant churches have made it clear that funeral planning is not an ecclesiastical event, but rather a family affair. In this way they have taken a

firm stand against the teaching that the burial of the dead is a sacrament administered by the church and under her direction. It would be a mistake, however, to stray too far from the warm embrace of the church and flirt with the secular customs of today. In life and in death we belong to Jesus Christ! The members of Christ's body have a strong tradition of declaring this publicly when they sow the body into the ground in expectation of a greater day. Funeral customs developing today confront and challenge this rich testimony. The current trend is moving away from addressing death's reality. As a result, in the modern funeral there is no need to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The purpose and intent of the ceremony is to turn our eyes away from what is actually happening!

In life and in death we belong to Jesus Christ!

British statesmen, William Gladstone once observed, "Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead, and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people." In the face of current funeral customs around the continent, the more discerning question is, "What can God's people do to help witness to *his* tender mercies in the manner they care for their dead?" Do not neglect the burial! By making the funeral event a public testimony to Jesus Christ's victory over death we can draw out its deepest meaning and its richest healing power. By following this through right to the graveside we boldly exclaim, with the Apostle Paul:

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:55-57).

This victory message is worth repeating for ourselves and also sharing with others every time we go to the cemetery, until the day our Lord returns and calls the dead back to life. Only on that day will it be safe to turn our backs on death. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus! **C**



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Musical Instruments and Musicians in Worship in the Bible: The Old Testament (Part 1)

Last time, we considered why singing and making music to the Lord in worship is so pivotal to Christian worship. I proposed that there are weighty biblical and church historical grounds for devoting considerable attention to which musical instruments are most suitable for inclusion in the church’s song, especially since our churches are facing a changing reality when it comes to musical instruments and musicians.

The Bible, of course, is the best place to begin mapping a good course. In this article, we will begin a survey of the biblical data. Remarkably, the Old Testament has a lot more to say about this than the New. More than one article is needed to do justice to the Old Testament data. So, let’s get started.

Among the patriarchs

Musical instruments were an integral part of the human cultural enterprise right from the beginning. Early in the Bible is found the story of Jubal, who is named “the father of all who play the harp and flute” (Gen 4:21). From the earliest references to musical instruments in the Bible, furthermore, there is every indication that musical instruments were mostly used to accompany singing. Laban told his fugitive son-in-law Jacob, who had fled with Laban’s daughters and grandchildren, that he would have wanted to host a festive send-off “with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps” (Gen 31:27).

During the exodus

The prophetess Miriam, and the women who joined her in praising God after the exodus, sang and danced to the accompaniment of tambourines (Exod 15:20-21). The first recorded instance of God explicitly commanding

his people to use musical instruments in worship appears already in the Pentateuch. In the wilderness, God commanded Moses to make two trumpets of hammered silver (Num 10:1-10). These trumpets, as it says there, were to be used to gather the assembly or the leaders, to signal the breaking of camp, to invoke Yahweh’s help during war, and to commit the offerings to God as a memorial during the appointed feasts and times of rejoicing.

Musical instruments and singing

There are a number of instances in the Old Testament where singing is not specifically mentioned in connection with the use of musical instruments. In most of these instances, however, it is quite possible, even likely, that those who played the instruments also sang if they were able. The company of prophets, for example, whom Saul met after he was anointed Israel’s first king by Samuel, prophesied to the accompaniment of lyres, tambourines, flutes, and harps (1 Sam 10:5). Also, Saul, when he was continually tormented by an evil spirit, hired David to play the harp as a means of soothing him (1 Sam 16:15-23). With respect to the latter, since David was not only a musician but also a poet and song-writer, as is clear from the many psalms which he composed, it is likely that the music he made for Saul was instrument-accompanied song. With respect to the former, 1 Chronicles 25:1 calls the musical ministry of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun “the ministry of prophesying,” suggesting the possibility that the prophesying of the company of prophets which Saul joined was in the form of song. Even the trumpet blasts from the rams’ horns during the fall of Jericho (Josh 6) were accompanied by a loud shout from the people.

Before and during David's kingship

Even before David organized the Levitical ministry of song, the Israelites made music before the LORD with instrument-accompanied song. When they were in the process of bringing the ark of God back to Jerusalem, “David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals” (2 Sam 6:5). Clearly music-making, while not yet highly organized, was an integral aspect of Israelite life, culture, and worship.

When the ark finally arrived in Jerusalem, one of the first things David did was appoint some of the Levites to the ministry of music and song. They were “to minister before the ark of the LORD, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel: Asaph was the chief, Zechariah second, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel. They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God” (1 Chron 16:4-6). When David appointed these Levites, he also committed to them a psalm of thanks to the LORD (1 Chron 16:7-36), which was surely to set the tone for their ministry and music-making with instruments and song.

Of the 38,000 Levites, David set aside 4,000 for the ministry of music (1 Chron 23:3-5). More than one-tenth of the Levites, therefore, a generous tithe, spent their time of holy service making music. Clearly, David allocated a considerable portion of the human resources at the temple to the ministry of music.

Place and role under David's reign

The ministry of song to which the Levites were called was a service (1 Chron 6:31, 32). As such, these Levites were “put in charge of the service of song” (1 Chron 6:31).¹ They were to lead the praises of God's people (2 Chron 23:13).² In other words, the musicians were to *serve by leading*, and to *lead by serving*.

By definition, musical instruments had a specific function. They were called instruments *for* song or instruments *of* song (1 Chron 15:16; 16:42; 2 Chron 5:13; 7:6; 23:13; 29:27; 34:12; Neh 12:36; Amos 6:5). The root meaning of the Hebrew word *keli* is “useful object.”³ Occurrences of this word refer to objects, then, that have a particular utilitarian function – carrying, storing, containing, furnishing; or serving as a tool or weapon of war.⁴ The particular function of musical instruments, then, was to carry, lift up, and enhance holy song.

The appointed musicians were by no means expected to be subdued in their music-making, as suggested already by their sheer number. When the ark was brought to Jerusalem, the musicians were commissioned to “play

loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy” (1 Chron 15:16, ESV; cf. 15:28). They were to play “to be heard;” thus, “the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away” during the rebuilding of the wall (Neh 12:43). The musical instruments, likewise, were described as instruments of power (2 Chron 30:21; 1 Chron 13:8).

While the Levites were to play their instruments loudly, the music they made was to blend well with the words being sung. The musical instruments of the Levites were actually called “instruments for sacred song” (1 Chron 16:42). The voices and instruments were to blend together into one sound, rather than competing to be heard. They were to join “in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD” (2 Chron. 5:13).

The LORD's musical instruments

The musical instruments were also called “the LORD's musical instruments, which King David made for praising the LORD” (2 Chron 7:6). In other words, although David was the one who had manufactured them and they were always closely identified with him (1 Chron 23:5; 2 Chron 29:26-27; Neh 12:36), the musical instruments belonged to none other than the LORD himself. Indeed, they were manufactured “for praising the LORD” (2 Chron 7:6). The Chronicler makes clear, furthermore, that the Levitical ministry of music – instruments and musicians included – had been “commanded by the LORD through his prophets” (2 Chron 29:25) and therefore was not merely dreamed up by David.

At the height of his kingdom's splendour, Solomon imported unprecedented amounts of almugwood. This high quality wood was used not only to make supports for the temple and royal palace, but also to make harps and lyres for the musicians (1 Kings 10:11-12). These musical instruments, then, displayed the splendour and glory of Israel's king and kingdom – and especially the glory of Israel's God, Yahweh!

Next time we will see how the health and vitality of music and song in Israel reflected her spiritual condition.

¹ The Hebrew verb that is used for “ministry” means “to serve, minister, be in service of God,” William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

² Ibid. The Hebrew verb that is used for “leading” means “to make known, to teach” here in the form of an active participle. In meaning, the Hiphil form can be causative, permissive, declaratory, or “expressive of the development of a state or quality,” A. B. Davidson, *An Introductory Hebrew Grammar* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1966), § 24.1.1.b; cf. E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), § 53.2. In the Hiphil form, then, this word suggests that there was a teaching aspect to the musical ministry of the Levites, an aspect to which we will return in a later article.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



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The ABCs of a W.O.W. (Part 3)

This article is a revised presentation from the 2012 Women's League Day at London, Ontario

The woman in relationship

We've studied the portrait of a woman of wisdom in Proverbs 31 by zooming in on her worshipful heart, her prudent mind, and her active hands. Finally, we want to look at this woman in another respect: her relationships.

1) Supporting her husband

Books on this chapter often provide two lists: good wives in the Bible, and bad wives. On the good side we have wives like Abigail, Priscilla, Ruth, Mary – even the wife of Pontius Pilate makes the cut! (for her advice to him when Jesus was on trial). And then on the bad side: Eve, Delilah, Rebekah, and Sapphira. Well, there's no question where this woman stands, for she brings blessing to her husband: "He has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value" (v. 11). When a wife is a woman of God, her husband can trust her judgment and conduct and he can be greatly helped by her.

One such benefit is seen in verse 23, "Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land." Before we criticize him for sitting around, remember that the gates of Israel's cities were places for judgment; this is where the elders would rule on important matters for God's people. Her husband sits there – yes, because of *his* wisdom, *his* fear of God. But he's also there because he's actively supported and encouraged by his wife. He's able to carry out his calling in the community exactly because he knows that she's managing just fine at home. "She's got his back," as they say.

That's not something intangible, either. Every husband can tell you that if things are unsettled on the home front, if home's no haven, then it's hard to carry on the daily work without a divided focus and depleted energy. To put that more positively, every husband needs the

thoughtful encouragement that his wife can provide him. He needs her wise counsel and her womanly perspective on the different challenges of life. He needs her to be busy in prayer for him as husband and leader.

And isn't that's what God always intended a wife to do? To be a helper for her husband (Gen 2:18), someone to assist him in every good thing. That's the path to mutual blessing, when each carries out their role in service of God. So the husband praises her in verse 29, "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Let every husband recognize how good it is to have found a wife of noble character – to say it to her, and to thank God for her!

2) Instructing her children

The kids show up here and there in our passage, but the best glimpse comes in verse 28. It's a powerful one: "Her children arise and call her blessed." Children don't always see it when they're growing up, but with time they often come to cherish their mother. For her impact endures. Certainly the food and clothing had something to do with it – you can't have life without these good things! But more than that, her children praise her because they've received her good guidance and counsel. As in verse 26, "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue." Like Proverbs does so often, this verse makes us think about the words we speak. Also the words spoken to your children: Are they sarcastic words? Impatient words? Angry words? In the crush of daily life, they can easily become that. Or are they nurturing words? Are they words of wisdom?

Mothers (and fathers) might want to impart any number of good lessons to their children. To give a sense of responsibility and independence, to foster qualities like being polite and punctual, to encourage hard work and compassion. But then we remember the holy W.O.W. factor, to keep "God's curriculum" at the top, or better, at the centre. It begins early, laying the groundwork for

the future. Teaching who God is, and how great he is. Teaching who Christ is, and what he did for sinners like us. Teaching how to pray, how to read the Word, how to worship the LORD, and how to love your neighbour.

***When a wife is a woman of God,
her husband can trust her judgment
and conduct and he can be greatly
helped by her***

As they grow, children need so much guidance: how to live godly lives, as they seek entertainment, as they choose a spouse and find a career, as they spend money, and as they serve in church. Because God and his Word have everything to do with this life, the “teachable moments” are so many. It makes it a daunting task. But few things are more important than what you say to your children by your example and by your word. Such speech is indeed “a fountain of life” (10:11). For the Christian home is the Master’s workshop; it’s here that the process of character-molding is lovingly, faithfully, and by God’s grace successfully carried on.

3) Helping her neighbour

Daily work, whatever it is, can pretty well absorb us. Especially when you’re busy with the good things of a household, you can forget that there’s more to life than you and your husband and children. But if we fear God, then we’ll also honour God’s priorities. And when we read Scripture, we notice that the poor and suffering are close to God’s heart. This is why the Proverbs 31 woman does this, “She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy” (v. 20). Notice that her concerns are wider than her own family.

There’s still a calling here for us. Jesus said that the poor will always be with us, in our churches and in our communities. There will always be those who are needy: if not needful of material support, then needful of an extra visit, or needful of kind words, or needful of our earnest prayers. It’s just the nature of this world: that people run stuck, lose their jobs, make mistakes, or find themselves suddenly alone. It’s then that Christ’s people have work to do. For a Christian woman there are different times of life, of course, when involvement in helping

one’s neighbour can be more front-of-mind, when there are more time and more resources. Even so, we ought never to forget those who are needy among us. To find them, we don’t have far to look. And to serve them, we have to open our arms and extend our hands.

4) Fearing her God

Time for one last relationship. It’s the one we’ve been considering all along: the woman of wisdom fears her God. More than anything, she wants to grow in love for him. And fearing God changes not just a woman’s outward behaviour, but her inner attitude.

I’ll highlight just one more aspect of this: that she *trusts* in God. That comes out so wonderfully in verse 25, “She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.” That’s harder than it sounds. Try to look ahead a week, or two weeks, or six months – maybe two or ten years. What’s your reaction to the future: a bit of fear for tomorrow, some lingering worry, or maybe the full onset of despair? Maybe over money, over relations with your family and fellow church members, about how the kids will do in school and who’ll they marry? Maybe there’s uncertainty over what God really wants you to do with your time here on earth. There can be no end to the worries about tomorrow! Well, the Proverbs 31 woman looks at the future and she laughs. Not irresponsibly or naively, but (one more time) because of the W.O.W. factor: she knows her God, and she fears him! She understands that the LORD is faithful and almighty and the king of absolutely everything, great and small. So she’s not worried about the snows of winter, or about the invasions of the Philistines, nor even about the rising prices of wool and flax.

***In Christ, we have great value and
untold worth***

Today, a woman of wisdom need not excel in the sin of worrying, overwhelmed by everything that might go wrong. Because she’s much more impressed with the glory of God, and everything that he can make right! She’s confident in him, that he is kind and wise and almighty, that he is faithful and true and compassionate, for the sake of Jesus Christ his Son.

Called by the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario to serve as co-pastor:

Rev. Nick Smith

pastor of the United Reformed Church of Nampa, Idaho

CHURCH NEWS

This gives your whole life a foundation that cannot be shaken, even when that inevitable heartache comes, and when that stress multiplies, when illness strikes and death draws near. You're not worried, because you know your God, the one who's become your Father. You're not worried, because you fear this God and marvel at his greatness. You laugh at the days to come. You laugh, because you're clothed with strength and dignity – clothed in the garments that God has given you!

Conclusion: Mirror, mirror

In the first chapter of his letter, James likens God's law to a mirror. That means when we gaze into the Word and when we consider our reflection with all honesty, we see what we're really like. We see our finer points, and we also see our warts and blemishes. So now that we've come to the end of Proverbs 31, that's the inevitable question: How do you measure up?

***Are the words spoken to your children
sarcastic words? Impatient words? Angry
words? In the crush of daily life, they can
easily become that. Or are they nurturing
words? Are they words of wisdom?***

There's a real potential for false guilt – guilt because you don't bake your own bread, and you don't clip coupons like some other ladies, and because you've never been on the education committee. Put that false guilt far from you! But there can be a real guilt too, when you look in the mirror and realize that you're failing: failing as a sister to someone needy in your church, failing as a wife to your husband, as a mother to your children, failing to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

But then remember our central point: as a woman of wisdom, the greatest treasure you have is how you're in relationship with the God of glory! It means that in Christ you've been made righteous. In Christ, God wipes away your failings, in whatever sphere of life your sins have been committed. In Christ, we have great value and untold worth – “more than rubies,” because for us he's paid his precious blood!

Being in covenant with God also means we can seek his help for the work that remains, his teaching for those ABCs that we still need to learn. Says James, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously and to all without finding fault” (1:5). As you look into the mirror, gird yourself in prayer. Earnestly ask him to keep renewing you, according to the image of his Son.

And finally, in the struggle that this life can be, in the challenges that you presently face, don't lose sight of your reward. Don't forget what it's all for. As Paul once wrote, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Gal 6:9). Don't become weary. Or if you are weary, find your rest in Jesus Christ. For your labours, your efforts, your struggles and successes – they do have a purpose. And they're not for you. They're for the glory of the LORD who loves you, and who's given you the honour of serving him!

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Fifty-first Annual League Day Report

On October 24, 2012 ladies in Ontario were blessed with a wonderful opportunity to spend a day devoted to studying the Word of God at the Fifty-first Annual League Day.

The beautiful day was lead by our very capable and humorous League President, Jane Oosterhoff. After beginning the day by singing she led us in prayer and Bible reading and welcomed all 362 registered ladies attending this League day. All Ontario Canadian Reformed Churches were represented as well as a few URC members, and some came to enjoy the day as far away as Grand Rapids and from Western Canada!

After singing the League Song, "Sing God's Glory," we read from Proverbs and sang Psalm 111 in preparation for our speaker, Rev. Reuben Bredenhof.

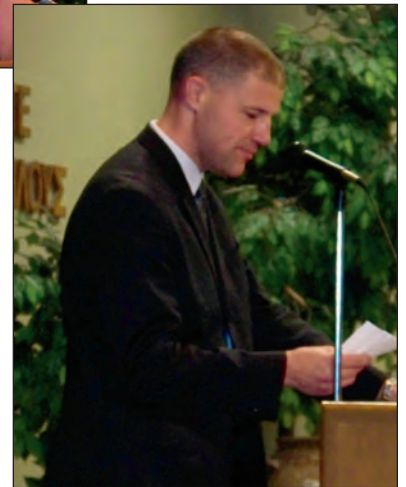
Using Proverbs 31 as a guide, Rev. Bredenhof gave an encouraging and uplifting message on being a Woman of Wisdom.

He began by saying how often this passage can be deflating to women whether they are married, single, divorced, or widowed and it can be viewed as a mission impossible. We need to see that this is not a list of rules, but see this as becoming a Woman of Wisdom, which is the work of God. The woman's secret is found in her relationship with God. A woman must put her whole being into working for God. If you fear the Lord, you will be actively serving him. A Woman of Wisdom is in command of her spirit and is a disciple of Christ. She has a heart that is worshipful and will kneel in awe of God's splendour. There is nothing more essential to a wise life than knowing the Author of our wisdom; therefore she needs to be in his Word daily. This Woman of Wisdom oversees the activities of the house and sees to it that things are in order. She gives thoughts to the needs of others and will set about her daily tasks with vigour. Busy hands bring praise to the Lord and she does these daily tasks for the glory of God, not for men. A Woman of Wisdom supports her husband, providing thoughtful encouragement. Her husband is respected by her and he



League
President
Mrs. Jane Oosterhoff

Rev.
Reuben Bredenhof



needs to praise his wife. She is also busy instructing and nurturing her children with words of wisdom. All women single or married, with children or not, need to lead by example, help her neighbours, and open her eyes to the poor and her hands to the needy. She must fear the Lord and grow in love for him. She trusts in God and for this reason does not fear the future.

Rev. Bredenhof left us by saying that as women of worth we have untold value. We must ask God for wisdom, who gives generously. Do all for the glory of God! He was thanked for his encouraging speech and we were then able to sing a song of praise to God.



*Mrs. Tracy
VanBerkel*

This was followed by an opportunity for round table discussions and, if anyone had questions, an opportunity was given to write them down for Rev. Bredenhof to answer.

The morning was brought to a close by raising our voices in song, followed by the reading of James 3:13-18, and then a delicious lunch was served!

The afternoon session started with a visit from London's own queen, who greeted the audience with a wave, answered some questions, and shared what was in her purse. Following the regal presence of Monica Koopman, the ladies were shuffled to different tables, according to the number on their name tags.

Tracy VanBerkel introduced the topic for the remainder of the day, "Finding Rest in a Restless World." It is a

gift and a blessing to preserve the Sabbath day. The command to keep the Sabbath came from God, who blessed it for Adam and Eve, who needed rest and refreshment. On this day we can celebrate God's glory. In Deuteronomy 5 we are told to observe the Sabbath, and to remember his mighty act of deliverance between God and his chosen people. After looking at the history, we turned our attention to the Sabbath day today, to keep it holy, to keep it happily, honestly, and humbly. Let's pray that we keep the Sabbath the way God intended it. It is a gift and not a burden. Let us find our rest in God alone.

Discussion continued at the tables.

The president then thanked the speaker and opened the floor for general discussion. The collection taken before lunch totalled \$2,386.50 for Anchor Association. In general business thanks was given to Helen, the general manager of the hall, and we sang happy birthday to her. Kerwood and London ladies were thanked, as well as the accompanists, Rebecca Bredenhof and Marjorie Bergsma. The babysitters were acknowledged for their help also. After singing Hymn 77 and offering thanksgiving prayer, the day officially ended. Many lingered inside and out as farewells were given. The day that began with fog and the threat of rain, turned into a beautiful sunshiny day as we left the Hellenic Hall in London.



*Group photo
of the ladies
attending
league day*

Life and Death

By Connie Van Amerongen
(Anchor Home, Beamsville)

My life is good, when I keep GOD in the centre of it;
Good friends, a loving family, a roof over my head.
Nothing here is perfect, sin covering this world with
grit.

In spite of all the grief and pain, with joy I am fed!
Although it's not nice, death is also a part of this life,
Old people, yes, even young people sometimes must
die.

This sinful world filled with many wars, no end to
strife.

There are many things to laugh about, many times
to cry.

In this present time, life and death are what we call
"the norm."

Sometimes things happen, and we don't know why
they have to be,

By leaning completely on JESUS I realize that HE'S
with me in the storm!

I look for God's hand in everything, believing HE
knows what's best for me.

Yes, this earth's filled with sorrow and pain with
JESUS there is only gain,

When I am finally in HEAVEN with my Saviour,
I'll be totally free from pain!

Birthdays in February:

6 TREVOR BUYS will be 33

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2

12 CONNIE VANAMERONGEN will be 48

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2

18 CORA SCHOONHOVEN will be 62

93 Oxford Street, Richmond Hill, ON L4C 4L6

24 FRED LUDWIG will be 61

653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Congratulations to everyone celebrating a birthday
in the wintry month of February. We hope and pray
that you may have an enjoyable day, together with
your family and friends, and that in all things we may
live in the joy of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

If there is anyone who would like to be a part of
the Ray of Sunshine column please do let us know, and
we will have you included. Parents or caregivers please
give us name, date and address. For those currently
who are in the Ray of Sunshine column please take
a moment to ensure that we have the correct mailing
addresses.

We are also currently recruiting anyone who
would be interested in taking over the managing of
this column. If you have any questions, feel free to get
in touch with us.

Till next month!

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

*If there are any address or other changes that we need to be
aware of, please let us know as soon as possible. You can
contact us by the following means:*

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

Phone: 905-957-038, email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca

God and Government

Cornelis Van Dam. *God and Government: Biblical Principles for Today: An Introduction and a Resource*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011

Additional Information: \$29.50

***God and Government* is available from the website of the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) for a donation of \$35.50 including postage.**

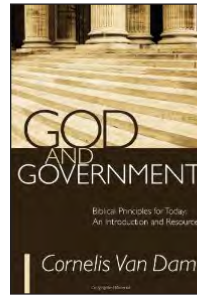
Go to <http://arpacanada.ca> and follow the books link. All proceeds from this book go to ARPA.

What does the Bible say about governance? What is a Christian perspective of environmental laws or capital punishment? Can Christians compromise? If so, how much? Is it acceptable for the government to tolerate evil? Is God's law enforceable by the government?

In his comprehensive study of a biblical understanding of the role of the state, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam answers these questions and many more. *God and Government* is a new resource unique to the Canadian political context. In this book, as with his other writings, Van Dam takes the reader on an excursion from Old Testament times right through to the present. He explores with the reader how biblical principles ought to be applied to various areas of public policy. But before he does so he sets the stage with an in-depth look at the scriptural basis for civil government and the relationship between the church and state.

As Canada has moved away from its biblical foundation it has become increasingly difficult for Christians to know their place in the public sphere. Humanists attempt to exclude the Christian perspective by arguing that church and state should remain separate. Dr. Van Dam shares with the reader various struggles between the church and state, leading to the Synod of Dordrecht in 1574 deciding that "ecclesiastical assemblies could only deal with ecclesiastical matters" (p. 50). Van Dam quotes Calvin, who in his *Institutes* wrote that "Christ's spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct" (p. 50).

After detailing the history behind Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, the author launches into what I found to be one of the most interesting parts of the book. He tackles three different positions on the relationship between church and state: voluntarism and pluralism,



theonomy, and principled pluralism. This is crucial, as there continues to be much confusion and differences of belief on this matter, also in the Canadian and United Reformed Churches.

Dr. Van Dam also includes a fascinating chapter on human rights - where they come from, how they are applied, and how they've evolved over the past number of decades due to a secular influence. It's a must read chapter, and would be a great antidote for Reformed youth (everyone actually) against the skewed understanding of rights we are being fed by the mainstream media.

In discussing how a government should view evil in a secular society Van Dam says, "When a democratically elected government is unable, due to political realities, to pass laws that are consistent with God's expectation for his creations, then the unavoidable result is that such a government is forced to tolerate what should not be tolerated" (p. 89). At first reading you may wonder where Van Dam is going with this. Shouldn't we expect more from the men and women we elect to serve in Ottawa? Dr. Van Dam gives the reader something to ponder here: there is a marked difference between tolerating evil and approving it. Those called by God to govern have a difficult challenge in post-Christian times and the reader will gain an appreciation for this challenge through Van Dam's explanation.

Next Dr. Van Dam examines five topics of relevance in today's political landscape. Life and Death, Marriage and Family, Work and Rest, Environment, and Multiculturalism are all areas in which Reformed Christians have varying thoughts. Van Dam starts each one by exploring what Scripture has to say and equips the reader with a proper understanding so they are enabled to counter the secular understanding of each of these issues.


God and Government is unique in that it doesn't just outline all the problems facing Canada as we move farther from our Christian heritage. It also exhorts the reader to political action. (Chapter 11 gives a list of no less than twenty-five organizations which serve as a resource or an avenue in which to become involved).

All too often we find ourselves lamenting the evil around us and then continue with our daily lives. As the famed evangelist John Stott once said, "We should not ask, 'What is wrong with the world?' for that diagnosis has al-

ready been given. Rather we should ask, ‘What has happened to salt and light?’” Van Dam rightly points out that to be a salt Reformed Christians are to engage in a way “that prevents or slows down decay” (p. 227). This goes beyond fulfilling our obligation to vote. The author outlines how we can be involved in defending freedom itself (p. 242).

God and Government - Biblical Principles for Today: An Introduction and Resource is a must have for all Reformed Christians. I believe Van Dam’s book has great potential to be used (if even in part) in the Bible or Social Studies curriculum of Reformed schools. The youth of today are growing up in a Canada even more secularized than their parents. This book will not only compel them

to get involved, it also provides them the resources they need to be involved effectively. The questions associated with each chapter will assist the teacher in blending this with their current curriculum and should make it all the easier to implement. Those not in school or inclined to politics will also greatly benefit from working their way through this 311 page treasure. This could be done personally or worked into a group Bible study.

God and Government is full of historical examples as well as Old Testament and New Testament passages which support the over-arching theme that God’s Word has everything to say about politics and law and the Lord’s directives are still very much relevant today. I heartily recommend it. 

Cornelis Van Dam

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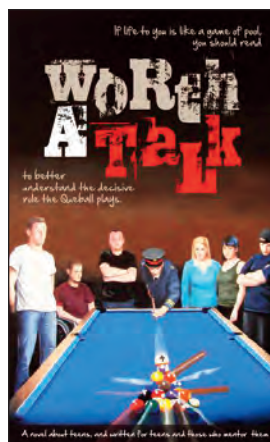
Worth a Talk

**Ed VanWoudenberg, *Worth a Talk*
Marnick Press, 2012**

**Additional Information: 580 pages, about \$24.95
US. Kindle version \$9.99. The book’s website is
www.worthatalk.net**

Ed VanWoudenberg has a real passion and compassion for teens and their challenges. He has been extensively involved in working with youth as a chaplain at a Bible camp and as a counsellor for inmates in prison— a work he and his wife, Audrey, have been involved in for many years. This book is one consequence of his desire to help youth face the challenges of life in a biblical way.

Worth a Talk is an interesting and fast-moving novel, but it is not typical of the genre. There is lots of drama and suspense, but what really sets this book apart is that it acts as a vehicle to reach teens and encourage them to talk about the issues they are facing with their par-



ents, peers, and mentors. Hence the title *Worth a Talk*. The topics covered in novel form include: substance abuse and addiction (marijuana, alcohol), sexting, Internet pedophiles, dating, premarital sex, abortion, prostitution, creation-evolution debate, bullying, family and sibling relations, divorce, and reaching non-Christian teens with the

gospel. There is no doubt that the majority of teenagers will encounter most of these issues in one form or another on their way to adulthood. To facilitate discussion, the author has questions for discussion for each chapter in the back of the book (fifty pages in total). There are thirty-four chapters so one could take the better part of a year going through this book and discussing it within the family circle or within a teen study group. Going through the book in this way will open up discussion on topics often left untouched.

The strength of this book is that it realistically depicts the poverty of our secular society in dealing with real life issues and shows the power of the gospel in giving true hope and direction. The wisdom of God's Word and the peace and healing it gives to broken relationships are amply illustrated. The author, whom I know well and very much appreciate, has obviously drawn from his many years of interacting with and helping youth. The scenes and dramas he so effectively portrays ring true and are convincing. Also worthy of note is the prominent place that he gives to restorative justice which is a biblical concept. A weakness of the book, in my opinion, is the coarse and crude language one encounters in it occasionally. I found it offensive and it will probably deter some from using it. In his prologue, the author acknowledges that one may find some of the language "too ex-

plicit for tender minds" but denies this to be the case. On the basis of his many visits to inmates, he notes that "it reflects the harsh reality that is out there and which your children will encounter." Of course, not all church youth are acquainted with prison and street culture.

In any case, I share the author's hope that those who read and discuss this book will be helped by it because it points them to the Lord our God who is awesome and all-powerful and who gave his Son so that parents and teens, young and old, may have true joy and meaning in life. No sin is too big to be forgiven, and no problem too difficult to handle. God's Word is indeed a lamp to our feet and a light on our path.

A final note, true to his love for the youth VanWoudenberg is donating forty percent of the net proceeds to five Christian charities involved in helping young people.



Jephycca and her sister were adopted by Stan and Jackie VanGrootheest from Haiti, shortly after the earthquake. They were part of a group of teens that attended Stepping Stones Bible Camp 2012 where I was Chaplain. They are members of the Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church.

Photo credit: Kristy Schouten

