# Glorification: *An Introduction*

GRAHAM A. COLE



"Glorification marries brevity and breadth in a solidly biblical, theologically astute, highly accessible, and sharply focused treatise. Graham Cole both broadens a young student's theological horizon and reignites the preaching imagination of the veteran pastor. A true pastor-theologian, Cole is humbly dependent on God's word, graciously conversant with biblical and theological scholarship, and vitally concerned that we know the glory of God."

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"Graham Cole has given us a brilliant introduction to the doctrine of glorification. Each chapter is grounded in Scripture and informed by key thinkers, ancient and modern. Readers will find serious engagement with the individual, corporate, and cosmic aspects of glorification as Cole offers encouragement in God's wise and glorious plan for his people."

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"The Bible's storyline can be considered from many angles. In this resplendent volume, Graham Cole traces the neglected theme of the glory of God. Remarkably comprehensive, *Glorification* ties together many central doctrines, including the Trinity, humanity, salvation, sanctification, and eschatology. The God of the Bible is glorious, and he shares his glory with us, both now and in the future. An enlightening, edifying, and encouraging read."

Brian S. Rosner, Principal, Ridley College, Melbourne

"Graham Cole guides us through the neglected but precious biblical theme of glorification. The glorious God who created us to bear his image saves us, uniting us to Christ, conforming us into his image, and even sharing his glory with us. Reading *Glorification* not only deepens our theology; it compels us to rejoice in our glorious God and his gifts to us, especially our glorious purpose, our glorious identity, and our glorious future."

**Christopher W. Morgan,** Dean of the School of Christian Ministries and Professor of Theology, California Baptist University

"Glorification is not merely one of many biblical themes. As Graham Cole compellingly argues, it is a one-word summary of the whole biblical story. The Creator God has in Christ begun—and is through the Spirit continuing—to complete a building project drawn up before the foundation of the world: the creation of a cosmos and a human community that would reflect God's own glory. Why is there something rather than nothing? To communicate God's greatness. This is the Christlike vocation in which the redeemed already participate and for which they continue to hope. Glorious!"

**Kevin Vanhoozer,** Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"Graham Cole is a superb theologian, and he has given us here a much-needed overview, at once succinct and profound, of the biblical doctrine of glorification. I gladly recommend this volume to God's people everywhere."

Timothy George, Distinguished Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

"There has been a gap among evangelicals in writing about the wonderful and beautiful truth of glorification. This excellent book fills that gap. Grounding this doctrine in the divine glory of God, Cole keeps his finger in the text of Scripture and his eye on the edification of the believer. For believers, sanctification is glorification begun, while glorification is sanctification complete. In this exceptional book, we are reminded that God's promises for glorification are sure and certain—the Lord who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in God's glorious presence!"

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# Glorification

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# Glorification

An Introduction

Graham A. Cole



Glorification: An Introduction

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## Series Preface

The ancient Greek thinker Heraclitus reputedly said that the thinker has to listen to the essence of things. A series of theological studies dealing with the traditional topics that make up systematic theology needs to do just that. Accordingly, in each of these studies, a theologian addresses the essence of a doctrine. This series thus aims to present short studies in theology that are attuned to both the Christian tradition and contemporary theology in order to equip the church to faithfully understand, love, teach, and apply what God has revealed in Scripture about a variety of topics. What may be lost in comprehensiveness can be gained through what John Calvin, in the dedicatory epistle of his commentary on Romans, called "lucid brevity."

Of course, a thorough study of any doctrine will be longer rather than shorter, as there are two millennia of confession, discussion, and debate with which to interact. As a result, a short study needs to be more selective but deftly so. Thankfully, the contributors to this series have the ability to be brief yet accurate. The key aim is that the simpler is not to morph into the simplistic. The test is whether the topic of a short study, when further studied in depth, requires some unlearning to take place. The simple can be amplified. The simplistic needs to be corrected. As editors, we believe that the volumes in this series pass that test.

#### 10 Series Preface

While the specific focus varies, each volume (1) introduces the doctrine, (2) sets it in context, (3) develops it from Scripture, (4) draws the various threads together, and (5) brings it to bear on the Christian life. It is our prayer, then, that this series will assist the church to delight in her triune God by thinking his thoughts—which he has graciously revealed in his written word, which testifies to his living Word, Jesus Christ—after him in the powerful working of his Spirit.

Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin

## Introduction

Thinking about the future can be daunting for many people. This is true when thinking of oneself. Will I marry? Will I have children? Will I have good health? Will I find satisfying work? Is the best ahead of me or have I passed it already? Is there life after death? If so, what does it look like?

Not long ago, I received a late-night phone call from a man who had recently turned forty. A friend of his a little older than him had just died suddenly from a heart attack. The caller was in tears. This was his first friend of around his age who had died. Now he was not only grieving but also confronting his own mortality.

Thoughts about one's future can be influenced by the society in which one lives. I have lived in three countries: Australia, the United States, and England. I found optimism about the future in both Australia and the United States, but pessimism in England. The English people I lived among seemed to have a sense of a great empire now lost and never to be recovered. In other words, a glorious past was gone forever.

Those interested in scientific scenarios about the future of the universe can also find the latest theories demoralizing. Is a coming generation going to face the heat death of the universe or the big crunch or the big chill? In any of these contemporary scientific scenarios, humankind won't survive. Over a century ago, when the heat death of the universe was commonly held as the best science, philosopher Bertrand Russell argued that in that light, "Only within the scaffolding of these truths [as claimed by the science of his day], only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."

However, for the Christian, the best is yet to be. To rework the Russell quote: "Only within the scaffolding of these truths [as revealed in Scripture about the future], only on the firm foundation of unyielding hope, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built." The scriptural testimony addresses questions about the future at three levels. It speaks of the future for the individual, the future for the church, and the future of the universe.

In systematic theology, matters of the future—our hope—are covered by eschatology (Greek, *eschata*, "last things"). Traditionally this coverage has canvased two subtopics. Individual eschatology looks at the future for the individual in terms of death, judgment, and heaven or hell ("the four last things").<sup>2</sup> Cosmic eschatology examines ideas about the future of the universe. I suggested above that a third element needs to be considered in the light of the biblical witness: the church as the bride of Christ has a glorious future, and so there is a corporate aspect.

The purpose of this work is to examine one of the aspects of individual eschatology in the light of Scripture:<sup>3</sup> the doctrine

<sup>1.</sup> Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," *The Independent Review* 1 (Dec. 1903): 416, Bertrand Russell Society (website), https://users.drew.edu/~jlenz/brs.html, accessed June 6, 2019.

<sup>2.</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton offers the valuable observation that the New Testament writers' greatest interest in last things pertains not to the four last things from the perspective of the individual "but to the great last acts of God, namely, the Return of Christ in glory, the resurrection of the dead, and the Last Judgment." Life after Death: A New Approach to the Last Things (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), xii, original emphasis. He also observes, though, that the individual's future is of "pressing concern" (xii).

<sup>3.</sup> In a work of evangelical systematic theology, Scripture as the normative word of God provides the source of the idea of glorification and the testing instrument of claims

of glorification.<sup>4</sup> In biblical perspective, we shall be glorified beings.<sup>5</sup> I was surprised to find that when I explored this doctrine, the last evangelical monograph to address glorification specifically was that by Bernard Ramm, Them He Glorified: A Systematic Study of the Doctrine of Glorification, published in 1963. Back then, he lamented, "I found no book which systematically explored the doctrine." Here is a lacuna or gap I hope to fill by this brief study. In so doing, some aspects of both corporate and cosmic eschatology will also make their appearance.

In chapter 1, we examine the doctrine of God in terms of the divine glory. In so doing, the chapter follows the biblical plotline and its testimony to the glorious nature of God as rendered in the Old and New Testaments. Several landmarks will figure prominently in the discussion: the theophany which Moses experienced on Mount Sinai (Ex. 33-34), the prophet Isaiah's vision of the temple (Isa. 6), the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot while in exile in Babylon (Ezek. 1), the incarnation of the Word (John 1), the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9), Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), and the end-time picture of the glory of God and the Lamb in the new earth (Rev. 21).

about glorification. Hence, there will be much appeal to passages of Scripture in this work. It follows an evidence-based method, and Scripture provides the evidence.

6. Bernard Ramm, Them He Glorified: A Systematic Study of the Doctrine of Glorification (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 5.

<sup>4.</sup> For a full-orbed discussion of the Bible's teaching on the afterlife that interacts not only with the Old and New Testaments but also with intertestamental literature, see the fine work of Paul R. Williamson, Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).5. Michael Horton writes, "This future hope is what theology identifies as glorifi-

cation." The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 688, original emphasis.

The God of biblical revelation is glorious. Eric L. Mascall appreciates this revelation when he writes, "Only if we recognize that the God of Christianity is a God of utter glory and splendor can we understand the intensity and concentration with which, down the ages, men and women have sought union with him." The startling biblical truth is that this God shares his glory with us.

The glorious God of biblical revelation has a project. Chapter 2 explores this divine project, which includes bringing God's children to glory (Heb. 2:10). In the light of the great rupture delineated in Genesis 3, God has a plan to reclaim and restore his divine image bearers to himself. Divine love motivates the plan. Divine glory is the ultimate goal of the plan. To be restored to the divine image is to become a glorious being.

Understanding Romans 8:30 constitutes an important part of the chapter. The apostle wrote, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29–30). Traditionally, this so-called golden chain of redemption is all about soteriology, as the phrase implies. However, recently New Testament scholar Haley Goranson Jacob has argued that Paul is writing not about salvation but about our restoration to the glorious role of being co-regents with Christ here and now. Being glorified, according to her, is about vocation, not salvation. We participate in this vocation through our union with Christ. Is she right? We will consider her argument.

<sup>7.</sup> E. L. Mascall, *The Christian Universe* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), 57.

Chapter 3 addresses the matter of the glorification experienced in this life. Paul is our guide. He wrote to the Corinthians about how the Spirit transforms us from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). Is this a passive process where God does all the work, or do we share in the process? How does this process relate to our sanctification? These questions and others are dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter 4 explores the prospect of glory. Hope is vital to the Christian life. Our eschatological horizon is so very different to that of the secularist. The prospect is of nothing less than a new heaven and a new earth, for which the groaning creation is longing, and with it the revealing of the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:18-25). The sphere of glory to come requires the transformation of our bodies (1 Cor. 15:44). Our bodies need to become like that of Christ's own glorified body (Phil. 3:20-21). The nature of the glorified body will be explored, as will the question of when that body is received. Aspects of both corporate and cosmic eschatology will also figure in the discussion.

Chapter 5 deals with the question Who will be glorified? C. S. Lewis saw the implications of the hope of glory when he wrote:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one

another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.<sup>8</sup>

Will these "everlasting splendours" only be those who trust in Christ? Such a notion suggests an exclusivity that would make secularists bristle.

But what about those whom Lewis describes as "immortal horrors"? We will explore the traditional view of what that means as well as the speculative suggestions of Lewis and N. T. Wright. What would embodied existence look like when excluded from the divine presence? is an interesting question. However, we need to distinguish carefully between biblically anchored convictions, opinions that are less so, and speculations that have little anchorage in the biblical testimony. Even so, in the end, some may turn out to be true.

A brief summarizing conclusion rounds out this study, together with some further reading suggestions for those readers who want to go deeper.

## **Our Glorious God**

In this chapter, we explore the concept of the divine glory. To do so, we examine the biblical testimony to the glorious nature of God as revealed in the Old and New Testaments. To drill deeper, we then focus on selected biblical passages dealing with glory before turning our attention to an intriguing question of divine glory and the divine attributes. Considering the divine glory is germane to this study of glorification because, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are to reflect the divine glory as we are transformed from one degree of glory to the next.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Concept of Glory

We access concepts through words and how they are used. According to Leslie C. Allen, "In secular usage, the Hebrew word for

<sup>1.</sup> Both the ESV and the NIV have "reflect[ing] the glory of the Lord" in a footnote, while the NLT has both the idea of seeing and reflecting in the main text: "So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." For a brief discussion of the translation issues, see Thomas A. Smail, Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 25.

glory [kabod]... primarily means 'weight,' referring to something substantial as in Isaiah 22:24." There Isaiah writes of how God will honor Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, as the new royal steward: "And they will hang on him the whole honor [kabod] of his father's house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons." L. C. Allen rightly suggests that in this Isaianic context, "the term connotes honor and fame as coming from a social status that includes greatness, wealth, or power, and the acknowledgment of others."2 Interestingly, the first use of kabod in the Old Testament has a very human context. Jacob hears what the sons of Laban are accusing him of doing. In Genesis 31:1 we read, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all his wealth [kabod]." When used of God, as in the phrase "the glory of the Lord," it becomes almost a technical expression of the majesty, weightiness, even beauty of God.<sup>3</sup> In the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX), the word used to translate the Hebrew term for glory (doxa) accented the ideas of honor, reputation, and praise.4 Glory and divine kingship are connected, as Haley Goranson Jacob argues in light of the Septuagint: "God's glory is commonly associated with his status or identity as king." 5 In the biblical writings, various phenomena are associated with the divine glory: shining light (Num. 6:25); thunder, brightness, fire, and beauty (Ex. 24:16-17; Ps. 29:3); and clouds (Mark 14:62).6 The New Testament writers also commonly

2. L. C. Allen, "Glory," in The Lexham Bible Dictionary, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), Logos Bible Software.

<sup>3.</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Glory," in New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000),

<sup>4.</sup> G. B. Caird argues, "Whatever their reasons, they [the LXX translators] chose doxa to represent kabod in almost all its occurrences." The Language and Imagery of the Bible (London: Duckworth, 1980), 77.

<sup>5.</sup> Haley Goranson Jacob, Conformed to the Image of His Son: Reconsidering Paul's Theology of Glory in Romans (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 42.

<sup>6.</sup> See Anthony C. Thiselton, Life after Death: A New Approach to the Last Things (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 192. According to Thiselton, "During the Intertestamental period the rabbis and Judaism spoke of God's glory as the Shekinah, although

used doxa when referring to the divine glory. In both the Old and the New Testaments, this glory is "visible splendor," as Richard Bauckham points out.8

In his classic essay on the plan of God, J. I. Packer captures the Old Testament thrust well: "The term 'glory' thus connects the thoughts of God's praiseworthiness and of His praise of the majesty of the revelation of His power and presence from which religion springs, and of the worship which is the right response when we realise that God stands before us, and we before Him."9

In modern parlance, the concept of glory has some overlap with the biblical understanding of glory. We hear news commentators speak of Olympic glory when an athlete wins a gold medal, or we read of those pursuing academic glory in their schooling. The concept is one of honor, renown, admiration, and recognition. Such achievements bring glory, and others rightly recognize those achievements. So we celebrate our Olympians and give scholarships to valedictorians.

### Some Key Passages

To explore all the relevant texts and significant moments in redemptive history concerning divine glory would require a book in itself. For our purposes, some key passages, key events, key institutions, and key personages will be considered.<sup>10</sup> These include celebrating God's glory (Ps. 19), God's

this is not a biblical term" (192). Shekinah is the transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "dwelling" or "settling." It is understood in this usage that the divine glory is that which dwells in a space or settles on something (e.g., the tabernacle and the temple).

<sup>7.</sup> Caird, Language and Imagery, 78.

<sup>8.</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 44.

<sup>9.</sup> J. I. Packer, The Plan of God, https://www.the-highway.com/, accessed June 28, 2019. 10. Christopher W. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God," in *The Glory* of God, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 155. Morgan provides an excellent survey of the key passages and junctures in the history of redemption that are testimony to the glory of God.

glory and our own (Ps. 8), God's triumph in defeating Pharaoh's forces (Ex. 15), the theophany on Sinai (Ex. 24:15–17; 33–34; 40:34–35), the theophany in the temple (Isa. 6), the chariot of cherubim (Ezek. 1), the incarnation (John 1), the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9; 2 Pet. 1), Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), and the final eschatological picture found in the last book in the canon of Scripture (Rev. 21).

#### Creation

In Psalm 19, the psalmist knows that he worships a glorious God, for creation in all its beauty tells him that. He sings:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. (vv. 1–2)

Exhibit A for the psalmist is the majestic sun,

which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. (vv. 5–6)

#### Tremper Longman comments:

Even to the ancients, who did not have an awareness of the actual vastness of the heavens or the size of the sun, moon and stars, the skies gave a sense of transcendence, of someone above themselves. Even today, with all of modern science's descriptions and explanations, it is not rare for us to have our minds stunned by God's incredible creation.11

The ancients did not have telescopes, so to the naked eye the sun was the biggest celestial object and therefore a fitting object to make the point about God's glory.<sup>12</sup>

#### Humankind

Psalm 8 appears to be a reflection on Genesis 1 put to song. It begins and ends on the note of the divine majesty (vv. 1, 9). The use of the same words at the beginning and end of a passage is known, in literary terms, as an inclusio, and it shows what the psalm is about: namely, God's majesty:

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

God's glory, though, is not lost sight of: "You have set your glory above the heavens" (v. 1). The grandeur of the heavens and moon seem to make humankind so insignificant (vv. 3-4). So why should the glorious God have a care for this creature? The answer lies in God's giving humans a royal role:

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings

and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands:

you have put all things under his feet. (vv. 5–6)

11. T. Longman III, Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 188.

<sup>12.</sup> The biblical writers described the natural world in terms of what could be seen. Even today, we speak of the sun's rising and setting, although we know from astronomy that the reality is different. The philosophical term for the biblical approach is "phenomenological."

The sphere of dominion, which covers the heavens, the earth, and the seas, includes

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (vv. 7–8)

The echoes of the Genesis story are clear. What also is clear is the value that the Creator places on this particular creature. Elmer Martens expresses this point in a provocative way: "If one were to imagine a scale of 1 to 10, with living creatures such as beasts as 1 and God as 10, then so high is the writer's estimation of humanity, he should have to put him at 8 or 9. It is God, and not animals, who is man's closest relative."13

#### The Exodus

God's mighty acts delineated in Scripture are more than creative ones. God not only creates; he also saves and judges. The story of the exodus of God's people from Egypt shows both motifs, especially in the song Moses sang in the light of the defeat of Pharaoh's pursuing army:

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea [God judges].

The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation [God saves]; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. (Ex. 15:1–2)

<sup>13.</sup> Elmer Martens, quoted in Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 269.

There is no God in the ancient Near East like this God, as Moses's question shows when he says:

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Ex. 15:11)

There is only one divine King: "The LORD will reign forever and ever" (Ex. 15:18). As John I. Durham points out, "The poem of Exodus 15 celebrates Yahweh present with his people and doing for them as no other god anywhere and at any time can be present to do."14

The importance of this Old Testament event is shown by Miriam's response. She teaches Moses's song to the women who have experienced the divine rescue:

And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea." (Ex. 15:21)

#### Douglas K. Stuart comments:

Moses had authored this great victory song; Miriam now popularized it among all the women so that it would be known and sung in every family, every home. The result was that every Israelite, whether descended from Abraham or newly joined to the nation (12:38) would know by heart the story of the great divine deliverance of God's people at the sea.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14.</sup> John I. Durham, Exodus, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1987), 210. 15. Douglas K. Stuart, Exodus, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 364. Stuart argues, "The quotation of 15:1 here in v. 21 by

The exodus story was the great old covenant good news story, just as for the Christian the greater story of Jesus's coming, cross, and overcoming death is the new covenant good news story, the gospel.

#### The Sinai Theophany

God appeared to all his rescued people on Sinai. What a sight it was, as Exodus 24:16-17 describes: "The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel." Here are the key accents of glory: divine presence, cloud, and fire. 16 Some forty years later, Moses related the people's response: "And you said, 'Behold, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire. This day we have seen God speak with man, and man still live" (Deut. 5:24). Clearly, the people of Israel had accurately assessed the importance of the experience and rightly categorized the Sinai experience in glory terms.

But Moses wanted more. On Sinai, he asked the Lord to show him the divine glory (Ex. 33:18). God's reply is instructive: "And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. 33:19). As I have written elsewhere: "Moses wanted glory. He wanted to see the majesty of God. Instead God gave him goodness. God's glory lies in his

Miriam is simply a way of saying that she taught the Israelite women the entire song, not just the opening words cited in v. 21" (364, original emphasis).

<sup>16.</sup> See R. A. Cole, Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 195.

goodness, not his might, and that goodness is seen expressed in sovereign grace and mercy."17

Richard Bauckham comments insightfully on Exodus 33-34 in his treatment of the glory theme in the Johannine literature: "The story seems to suggest that God's glory is the radiance of his character, of his goodness, of who he truly is."18 God turned Moses's request in a distinctly moral direction. God's glory resides in goodness and not in raw divine power. God did indeed make his glory pass by Moses. Moses, however, was hidden in the cleft of the rock. The sight of the divine in the face of God would have proved a terminal experience for Moses (Ex. 33:20-23). Even so, it was a dramatic experience that rightly led Moses to worship: "And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped" (Ex. 34:8).

#### The Tabernacle

God's "walking" in the garden in Genesis 2–3 reveals his will to be present with his people, but, as Genesis 3 tragically shows, sin separates humanity from his presence. The question then becomes how a holy God can dwell with an unholy people. The answer is in God's way, not ours. Hence, God gives the elaborate design of the tabernacle. Exodus 25:9 says, "Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it." The design was followed, and so we read: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34). R. A. Cole offers this observation:

Two thoughts are joined in this chapter [Ex. 40]. The first is that God shows his approval of the completed work by

<sup>17.</sup> Graham A. Cole, "Exodus 34, the Middoth and the Doctrine of God: The Importance of Biblical Theology to Evangelical Systematic Theology," Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 12, no. 3 (2008): 27.

<sup>18.</sup> Bauckham, Gospel of Glory, 50.

descending in the cloud of "glory" that shows his presence (cf. 33:9). Indeed, he so covers and fills the tent that now not even Moses, God's faithful servant (Num. 12:7), dares to enter ([Ex. 40] verse 35). The second allied thought is that this same cloud, the symbol of the presence of YHWH, led the way by day and night all through the desert years of Israel's experience (verse 36).<sup>19</sup>

The holy God has come to dwell in the midst of his people.

#### The Failure in the Wilderness

God's old covenant people rebelled in the wilderness at multiple points, despite the exodus and the theophany on Sinai. One such occasion was the reaction of the people to the report of the spies. Canaan, according to the majority report, to which Caleb and Joshua took exception, was full of doom if Israel entered the promised land. So the people hankered for a return to the land of their bondage: "And they said to one another, 'Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt'" (Num. 14:4). Moses interceded for Israel, and the divine response was merciful: "Then the LORD said, 'I have pardoned, according to your [Moses's] word'" (Num. 14:20). And yet, there were consequences for persistent rebellion:

But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. (Num. 14:21–23)

<sup>19.</sup> Cole, Exodus, 248-49.

Glory was coming, but the wilderness rebels wouldn't see it.20 Why should they? They had witnessed it in the mighty deeds of God but did not take it to heart. Psalm 95 sums it up:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. (vv. 7–9)

As Gordon J. Wenham notes, "The divine pardon does not mean Israel will escape all punishment for their sin, only that they will not suffer the total annihilation they deserve."21

#### The Temple Vision

The prophet Isaiah was granted an overwhelming vision of the divine glory: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1). Isaiah experienced not only a theophany but also an angelophany: "Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew" (Isa. 6:2).<sup>22</sup> The seraphim (throne angels) were not silent:

And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isa. 6:3)

<sup>20.</sup> Interestingly, there appears to be an age of accountability in Scripture. The "little ones" in the wilderness will enter the promised land (cf. Deut. 1:39 and Jonah 4:11).

<sup>21.</sup> Gordon I. Wenham, Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 138.

<sup>22.</sup> A theophany is an appearance of God (Greek, theos, "God," and phainein, "to appear"). An angelophany is an appearance of an angel (Greek, angelos, "angel," and phainein, "to appear").

The vision brought to Isaiah a sense of uncleanness before this holy God: "And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isa. 6:5). As with the Sinai theophany, there is a moral aspect to seeing the divine glory.

John's Gospel brings together the temple vision of Isaiah 6 and the suffering servant theme from Isaiah 53 by way of application to Jesus. John writes, "Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him" (John 12:41). Colin Kruse comments:

Referring to the prophecy, the evangelist says, Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. The allusion is to Isaiah's vision of God in the temple and his commission to be his messenger to Israel (Isa. 6:1–13). The evangelist implies that what Isaiah saw in the temple was in fact "Jesus' glory," i.e. the glory of the pre-existent Christ.<sup>23</sup>

The glorious temple presence of Israel's God finds its definitive location in Jesus Christ.

#### Ezekiel's Visions of God

The prophet Ezekiel, some two centuries after Isaiah's vision in the temple, likewise had a vision of the glory of God (Ezek. 1:1-28). The prophet was in exile in Babylon by the Chebar canal. According to G. B. Caird:

In 598 B.C. Ezekiel had his vision of the chariot of the cherubim with its multi-directional wheels, surmounted by a firmament on which was enthroned a figure of celestial

<sup>23.</sup> Colin G. Kruse, John: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 271, original emphasis. Bauckham argues similarly, Gospel of Glory, 53.

radiance. This he called "the glory of the Lord," and from that moment on, so influential was his vision on all who succeeded him, "radiance" became part of the connotation of kabod.24

The descriptors in the vision are striking. Here are some of them: "a stormy wind" (v. 4), "fire" (vv. 4, 13), "living creatures" (v. 5 et passim), "lightning" (vv. 13-14), "shining like awe-inspiring crystal" (v. 22), "a sound of tumult" (v. 24), and "brightness all around" (v. 28). Suffice it to say that the vision of the chariot throne of God with the four living creatures empowering it created a physical reaction in the prophet. Ezekiel 1:28 tells us: "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking." Lamar E. Cooper comments astutely:

Humanity in peril needs a sense of the awesome majesty of God. There needs to be an awareness that God is greater than adversity. He is with his people in the midst of their problems. This was a need of both Ezekiel and the people to whom he ministered. They needed a new vision of and commitment to the holiness and majesty of God.25

The Lord gave Ezekiel that new vision of the splendid glory of God.

Ezekiel also tells of visions of the loss of divine glory. Exile came because of Judah's sin, and neither the city of Jerusalem nor its temple was an exception to the problem. In fact, Jerusalem would be destroyed because of its wickedness (Ezek. 5:5-6).

<sup>24.</sup> Caird, The Language and Imagery of the Bible, 76.

<sup>25.</sup> Lamar Eugene Cooper, Ezekiel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 72.

Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes.

The note of rebellion is sounded more than once in the prophecy (e.g. Ezek. 12:1-3), and so too is the note of idolatry. When sin is against the divine King, rebellion is indeed the appropriate descriptor.

The temple comes in for particular condemnation. The prophet has a vison of the glory of God present in the temple (Ezek. 8:3–4). But so too is idolatry on a striking scale: "the image of jealousy," "great abominations," "idols," "weeping for Tammuz," and "worshiping the sun" (Ezek. 8:3, 6, 10, 14, 16). Cooper sums up the sad story: "The worship Ezekiel described suggested a developed program of regular pagan worship in the sanctuary that was to be exclusively for the worship of Yahweh."26 "The image of jealousy" is a particularly intriguing reference (Ezek. 8:3). The prophet does not elaborate, presumably because the first hearers and readers knew the reference. Leslie C. Allen offers the following plausible explanation of the phrase:

The "image" (סמל) he sees at this place is an anthropomorphic idol, to judge by the usage of the term in Phoenician inscriptions. Significantly, the same term occurs in 2 Chr 33:7, 15, seemingly with reference to the Phoenician goddess Asherah, in connection with an image set up in the temple precincts (2 Kgs 21:7). If this cult, abolished by Josiah, was revived after his death, the cult image may have been placed elsewhere (McKay, Religion 22-23, 93 n. 27). Here it has

<sup>26.</sup> Cooper, Ezekiel, 119-20.

pride of place as a guardian figure. The focus of the narrative lies in the religious significance of the image, as an outrage to Yahweh, more literally a provocation to jealousy (קנא).<sup>27</sup>

And so, in response to such idolatry, the glory of the divine presence departs from the temple: "Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city" (Ezek. 11:22–23). Sin had consequences, and Jerusalem lost the glory of God dwelling in its midst.

However, the prophet also sees a future in which the divine glory returns. The Lord will forgive and restore his people. He won't leave them bereft of his presence forever. Ezekiel sees a new temple. In great detail, he elaborates on its structure, contents, and decoration. Importantly, the glory returns (Ezek. 43:1–5).

Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

As Leslie Allen points out: "In the course of that vision, Yahweh's re-entry through the east gate and the filling of the temple with his glory (43:1–5; cf. v 7) represent a wonderful reversal. Where sin abounded and judgment rightly fell, grace was to superabound in

<sup>27.</sup> Leslie C. Allen, Ezekiel 1-19, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1994), 142.

the holy fellowship of God and his people."<sup>28</sup> In fact, the return of the divine glory is the necessary condition to be met for the prophecy to reach its climax in this claim: "And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There" (Ezek. 48:35).

#### The Word Made Flesh

The prologue of John's Gospel begins in eternity with the Word who is with God and is God (1:1), and climaxes with this Word becoming flesh: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). Richard Bauckham draws out the significance of this verse when he writes in relation to the claim "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us": "This phrase echoes the dwelling of God's glory in the tabernacle and the temple, God's gracious presence at the heart of his people's life. Now the glory in the flesh of Jesus Christ is God's tent-dwelling among his people."29 Vaughan Roberts sums up the significance of John 1:14 more expansively:

Adam and Eve enjoyed God's presence with them in the garden before the fall. God also drew near to the Israelites, living in their midst in the tabernacle and then in the temple. But the temple in Jerusalem was just a shadow of what we receive in Christ. He is the true temple, the place where we may enter perfectly into God's presence. He is not just the true human being; he is the true God. In Christ, God himself has drawn near to us.30

Moreover, John's reference to "grace and truth" echoes the definitive Old Testament revelation of the character of God

<sup>28.</sup> Allen, Ezekiel 1-19, 169.

<sup>29.</sup> Bauckham, Gospel of Glory, 51.

<sup>30.</sup> Vaughan Roberts, God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 118.

on Mount Sinai: the God who is gracious, merciful, and covenantally faithful (esp. Ex. 34:6-7).31

The incarnate Word's glory was witnessed by the disciples at the wedding at Cana when Jesus turned the water into wine: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). Yet that glory, full of grace and truth, was not immediately obvious. At first, Nicodemus, for example, saw Jesus only as "a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). The Pharisees were divided in their estimate of Jesus, as John 9:16 shows: "Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them." Clearly, not all the Pharisees were dismissive of Jesus. Again, Nicodemus serves as an example. Later in John's account, Nicodemus, together with Joseph of Arimathea, showed his devotion to Jesus by burying him according to Jewish custom (John 19:38–42).

That Jesus's glory was not evident to all should not surprise the reader of John's Gospel. John 17:5 provides the clue, one that we shall explore more fully later. Jesus prayed, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." Clearly, Jesus forwent a glory in becoming flesh and taking the form of a servant, but would regain that glory upon his return to the Father.

The next New Testament passage we consider lifts the veil on Jesus's glory.

#### The Transfiguration

Accounts of the transfiguration of Jesus can be found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is a stunning event. Jesus has just informed

<sup>31.</sup> For more on the significance of Ex. 34 for the doctrine of God, see Cole, "Exodus 34, the Middoth and the Doctrine of God," 24-36.

the disciples of his coming death on the cross. Mark's account indicates that some of those disciples will "not taste death until they see the kingdom of God" (9:1). The kingdom of God in the Gospels refers mainly to the active reign of God, rather than the realm in which it is experienced.<sup>32</sup> That active display of divine sovereignty seems to be the thrust of Jesus's prediction. Six days later on a high mountain, Peter, James, and John in the company of Jesus see the transfiguration of their Master (Mark 9:2). Mark tells us, "And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them" (9:3-4).33 Matthew adds that Jesus's "face shone like the sun" (17:2). Luke expands the picture and does so in glory terms: "Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men [Moses and Elijah] who stood with him" (9:32). According to Matthew and Mark, the sight of the transfigured Christ terrifies the disciples (Matt. 17:6; Mark 9:6).

Years later, Peter reflects on his experience when writing to fellow believers. He makes it clear that the story of the transfiguration is not a historical fiction but comes from firsthand experience: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). How then did he understand what happened to Jesus on the mountain? Second Peter 1:17–18 tells us: "For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we ourselves heard this

<sup>32.</sup> For a text that refers to the reign of God on display, see Luke 11:20 (exorcisms), and for one that speaks of the realm that can be entered, see Matt. 5:20.

<sup>33.</sup> The reference to "six days" is unusually specific in Mark's account of Jesus, and I see it as underlining the connection of the transfiguration event to Jesus's promise that some would see the kingdom in their lifetime. It may also be connected to Moses's six days on Sinai (Ex. 24), painting Jesus as the greater Moses with greater revelation.

very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."

#### The Damascus Road Encounter

Saul of Tarsus also experienced that glory, and that event changed his life and the trajectory of Christianity. This once-violent man and, by his own admission, persecutor of the church would become the apostle to the Gentiles who could subsequently write the most profound statement on love to be found in any literature (cf. Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13 and 1 Cor. 13). He was on the road to Damascus with a mission. The book of Acts relates the story: "But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (9:1-2). Then the unexpected happened: "Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him" (Acts 9:3). The risen Christ had a question for Saul: "And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'" (Acts 9:4). Blinded by the light, he had his own question to ask: "And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5).

Twice more in Acts, Saul, now Paul, recounts what happened to him. He references the brightness of the light and that it came from heaven (cf. 22:11 and 26:13). The word "glory" is not in these conversion accounts, but the language of light and brightness is the key to our recognizing glory's presence in Paul's Damascus road encounter with the risen Christ.

#### All Is Temple

Revelation 21, the penultimate chapter in the biblical canon, presents a remarkable prospect: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (vv. 1–2).

Russell Moore captures the theological import of this revelation of the future: "The point of the gospel is not that we would go to heaven when we die. Instead, it is that heaven will come down, transforming, and renewing the earth and the entire universe." Fascinatingly, the new Jerusalem is cubical in shape, and the only other cubical space in Scripture is the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple. The theological import of this rich symbolism is that the new earth is now all sacred temple space replete with the glorious presence of God and the Lamb. Hence, John says: "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22–23). Once again, we see the nexus between glory and light.

Christopher W. Morgan rightly points out that every section of Scripture speaks of the glory of God: "Law, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, General Epistles, and Revelation."<sup>35</sup> (Only in John's letters is there no reference to God's glory per se.) This is remarkable. The pervasiveness of the glory of God theme in both the Old and the New Testaments testifies to its importance.

#### **An Intriguing Question**

The divine attributes are commonly grouped into two categories: the incommunicable attributes and the communicable attributes of God. Aseity, an incommunicable attribute, asserts that only God is

<sup>34.</sup> Russell D. Moore, "Personal and Cosmic Eschatology," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 711; a splendid volume. 35. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God," 154.

self-existent. God relies on nothing and no one outside himself to exist. No other being has aseity; only God has life in himself. Communicable attributes are those that can be attributed to both God and us, though with God there is a perfection we do not share. For example, God loves and we too can love, albeit imperfectly.

Is glory an attribute of God? Bruce Milne argues so. He makes glory the beginning point of his enumeration of the divine attributes. Milne writes: "His glory carries us to the heart of all that is essential to his being as God, his divine majesty, his sheer Godness."36 Bernard Ramm also maintains that glory is a divine attribute but states it differently than Milne: "The glory of God is not, however, a particularized attribute like the wisdom of God but an attribute of the total nature of God, virtually an attribute of attributes."37 In its exaggeration Ramm's affirmation lacks nuance and, for some, may raise questions about divine simplicity. Herman Bavinck is much more careful: "The 'glory of the Lord' is the splendor and brilliance that is inseparably associated with all God's attributes and his self-revelation in nature and grace."38

Christopher Morgan argues that glory can refer to "a summary of attributes of God,"39 which means glory sums up both the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God in some way. This argument has merit. The God of the Bible is gloriously self-existent, gloriously omnipotent, gloriously omniscient, gloriously holy, gloriously loving, and so on. The divine glory also has an aesthetic aspect. It is beautiful. Yet as Bernard Ramm, in his discussion of glory and beauty in the light of the

<sup>36.</sup> Bruce Milne, Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 85, original emphasis of half of the word. Although Milne distinguishes the communicable from the incommunicable attributes, he does not apply the distinction to the elaboration of the attributes.

<sup>37.</sup> Bernard Ramm, Them He Glorified: A Systematic Study of the Doctrine of Glorification (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 18.

<sup>38.</sup> Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 215.

<sup>39.</sup> Morgan, The Glory of God, 157.

biblical evidence, wisely maintains, "The notion that God is beautiful is not a leading biblical notion but a secondary one. The primary focus of Scripture is on the glory of God as such, the aesthetic motif being purely secondary."40

#### Conclusion

The God of the Bible can be described in many ways that are faithful to the biblical text: all-holy, almighty, all-wise, all-good, and all-knowing. The living God is also all-glorious: The Father is glorious; the Son is glorious, and the Spirit is glorious. The triune God is unimaginably splendid. The divine splendor has a moral dimension, as the theophany on Sinai showed and Isaiah experienced in the temple. "Goodness" can be a synonym for "glory." However, goodness does not exhaust what divine glory is. Other descriptors are needed, such as "majesty," "splendor," "weightiness," and even "beauty." Metaphors are relevant too, such as "fire," "light," "shining," and "brightness."

The divine splendor is on display in both Old and New Testament texts as we saw in the key texts we considered. There is thus continuity between the Testaments when it comes to glory. What stands out in the New Testament is the uniqueness of Christ's glory, as Hebrews make clear: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (1:3).

Glory is not an attribute of God, like his omnipotence. Rather glory, to follow a suggestion of Christopher Morgan, is a descriptor that summarizes the attributes of God. 41 As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, the astonishing thing is that the glorious God wills to share his glory with us. More than that. God will make us into glorious beings, albeit in a way that our creatureliness remains. We are privileged creatures with a glorious future.

<sup>40.</sup> Ramm, Them He Glorified, 21.

<sup>41.</sup> Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God," 157.