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THE ROLE OF METAPHOR IN THE SERMONS
OF BENJAMIN KEACH, 1640-1704

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
James Christopher Holmes

May 2009

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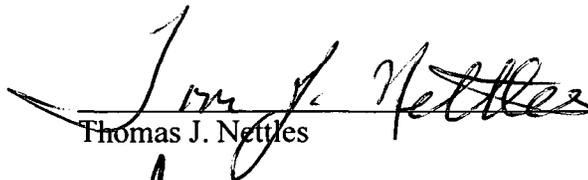
**THE ROLE OF METAPHOR IN THE SERMONS
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James Christopher Holmes

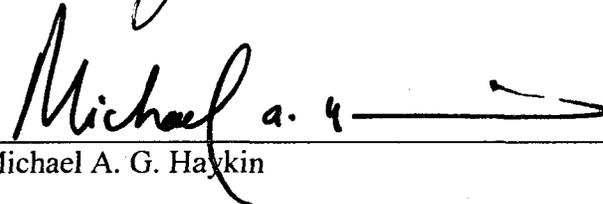
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Michael A. G. Haykin

Date April 17, 2009

To Beth,
ever patient, ever faithful,
ever loving

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PREFACE

This dissertation would never have been completed without the significant contributions of many individuals. Essentially, this work got its start while I was in a hymnology class with Professor Esther Rothenbusch Crookshank and was first introduced to the life and work of Benjamin Keach. I learned much from her, and I am grateful for her instruction.

As I began to explore the possibility of writing a dissertation on Keach, Professor Michael Haykin shared with me an abundance of ideas, wisdom, and resources. Pastor Austin Walker of Crawley, England, provided encouragement, suggestions, and materials. Professor Barry Vaughn brought to my attention Keach's use of imagery in his sermons, which prompted this particular research effort. Ron Miller of Owensboro, Kentucky, graciously allowed me to review his personal copies of Keach's published works.

During the research process, several libraries provided not only books, microfilm, and other materials, but also helpful, patient staff to aid me in my work. The Boyce Centennial Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was the one resource from which I benefited most. The Edinburgh University Library in Edinburgh, Scotland, The John Hay Special Collections Library of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and The Cleveland Public Library in Cleveland, Ohio, were also generous with their materials and assistance.

Professor Robert Vogel has given freely of his wisdom and patience as he has guided me through the process of preparing this dissertation. Professors Tom Nettles and Michael Haykin have provided significant help in the direction of the work, and I am very thankful for their service on my committee of instruction.

My parents, James Albert and Betty Holmes, have given much love and support to me. The members of the New Salem Baptist Church in Cox's Creek, Kentucky, and the Yellow Creek Baptist Church in Owensboro, Kentucky, have blessed me with their encouragement and prayers.

My wife, Beth, has been an unfailing support throughout this demanding and lengthy process. Her many sacrifices have enabled this work to be completed, and I am profoundly humbled by her incredible patience, faithfulness, and love.

Lastly, I am thankful to God for the life and work of Benjamin Keach, who stood for the truth and boldly preached His Word. I pray that I will be as fervent in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and faithful to the One who has displayed such glorious grace to me.

James Christopher Holmes

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2009

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Keach was a seventeenth-century English Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist theologian and pastor. Although he is best known for his introduction of hymnsinging into the public worship of Baptists, Keach accomplished much more in his lifetime. In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, he published several works on a variety of doctrinal issues, including baptism, ecclesiology, and soteriology. Keach produced a sizeable quantity of polemical material against the Quakers and the Roman Catholic Church. He wrote hundreds of hymn texts, published two popular allegories, and released an epic poem.

In addition to this already impressive corpus of material, Keach published well over two hundred sermons, the fruit of a lengthy and faithful preaching ministry. The weekly responsibility of preaching the Scriptures was the foundational occupation from which all of Keach's other efforts proceeded. Keach acknowledged that the proclamation of the gospel was God's ordinance for the conversion of sinners.¹ His published sermons provide important details for understanding Keach and the Baptist preaching of his day. Indeed, they are the largest group of sermons published by any seventeenth-century English Particular Baptist.²

Keach's sermons addressed a wide spectrum of issues, as would be expected from a man who occupied the same London pulpit for nearly thirty-five years. Such

¹1 Cor 1:21. See also Austin Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2004), 224.

²James Barry Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1989), 87.

subjects included the biblical doctrines of justification and perseverance, the covenant of grace, issues of ecclesiology (especially the nature of baptism and church membership), the exclusivity of the gospel, and sabbatarian worship. At least three of Keach's published sermons were funeral messages, and another centered on the responsibility of the nation (of England) to worship God. This sermon was subsequently published in the American colonies by Benjamin Franklin in the mid-eighteenth century.³

Keach's sermons are quite meaty—each one exhaustively explores the biblical text from which it springs and follows a lengthy outline. Typically, his messages indicate that Keach regularly read the works of other pastors and theologians, and that he was well informed about the doctrinal convictions of his contemporaries. While Keach was occasionally incorrect in his interpretation of Scripture, he was relentless about proclaiming the truths of the Bible to any and all who would listen.

Although they are more than three hundred years old, Keach's sermons are actually generating attention once more. In particular, the recent interest in reprinting Puritan sermons and other works has stimulated some to revisit Keach's messages. For example, the present theological discussion about the doctrine of justification has prompted one publisher to issue a reprint of Keach's two sermons collectively titled *The Marrow of True Justification*, with the promise of more of his sermons to come.⁴

A key figure of speech that is present in Keach's sermons is the metaphor. Throughout his preaching, Keach implemented metaphors to accomplish various tasks, including illustration, explanation, and application. Vaughn has noted that "many of his sermons reveal that images, not propositions, were the basic units of his way of

³Charles Evans, *American Bibliography: A Chronological Dictionary of all Books, Pamphlets, and Periodical Publications Printed in the United States of America from the Genesis of Printing in 1639 down to and Including the Year 1820* (New York: P. Smith, 1941), 2:128.

⁴Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification: The Biblical Doctrine of Justification Without Works* (London, 1692; Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 96.

thinking.”⁵ Although Keach readily admitted that his homiletic method deliberately followed the well known Puritan “plain style” pattern of William Perkins, Keach’s regular reliance upon metaphor to engage the mind and affections of his listeners made his sermons anything but “plain.”⁶ The thesis of this dissertation is that Keach utilized metaphors in his sermons as a primary means to enable a greater understanding of the biblical text and to connect readily with the intellect and emotions of his audience.

Background

Personal Interest

I first became aware of Keach’s significance during a seminary hymnology course that I took in 2000, and I found his contributions to Baptist hymnsinging very interesting. Of the dozens of hymns that Keach wrote, one of the few that are still in use is the Christmas hymn, “Awake, My Soul! Awake, My Tongue!”⁷ My curiosity led me to seek more information about Keach, and I found that relatively little had been written about him, except for a few general works. His introduction of hymns into public worship was essentially the only aspect that had received any scholarly attention. When I began my doctoral program in Christian preaching in 2004, I immediately considered Keach and his preaching ministry as potential subject matter for my dissertation.

The research process has increased my admiration for Keach, as I have come to understand not only the enormous hardships that he faced as a Baptist in seventeenth-century England, but also the sizeable number of materials—sermons, hymns, poetry, allegory, polemical responses, theological treatises, etc.—that he published in the

⁵Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology,” 105.

⁶Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace: or the Covenant of Peace Opened. In Fourteen sermons lately preached in which the errors of the present day, about reconciliation and justification, are detected.* (London, 1698), iii.

⁷Some believe Keach only edited the hymn text. See David W. Music, “The Hymns of Benjamin Keach: An Introductory Study,” *The Hymn* 34 (July 1983): 149-50.

relatively brief span of approximately forty years. Throughout all of his works and all of the genres that they represent, Keach consistently proclaims the gospel and the glory of Jesus Christ.

Scholarly Contributions to Date

At present, I am aware of only four master's theses and four doctoral dissertations that have centered on Keach.⁸ Of these, only Smith's thesis has examined Keach's preaching ministry, but it provides only a minimal survey, while leaving many of Keach's published sermons untapped. Vaughn's dissertation contains an insightful discussion of several of Keach's sermons, particularly those on the parables of Jesus, but this material is limited to a single chapter. Spears' dissertation possesses some helpful aspects, particularly in understanding the factors which contributed to the development of Keach's worldview, but the research is fairly broad in its scope.

Walker's recent full-length biography of Keach is a helpful source of historical information about much of Keach's life and ministry, but like Vaughn, Walker utilizes only one chapter (and a few other paragraphs throughout the book) to address Keach's preaching directly.⁹ I am not aware of any other scholarly works that give particular attention to the analysis of Keach's sermons.

⁸Helen Bartlett, "Benjamin Keach and the Bunyan Tradition" (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1936); James Patrick Carnes, "The Famous Mr. Keach: Benjamin Keach and His Influence on Congregational Singing in Seventeenth-Century England" (M.A. thesis, North Texas State University, 1984); David A. Copeland, "A Call to Song and Controversy: The Life and Thoughts of Benjamin Keach" (Th.M. thesis, The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Donald George Smith, "Benjamin Keach, The Minister of the Lord" (B.Div. thesis, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950); James C. Brooks, "Benjamin Keach and the Baptist Singing Controversy: Mediating Scripture, Confessional Heritage, and Christian Unity" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2006); David Bowman Riker, "A Catholic Reformed Theologian: Federalism and Baptism in the Thought of Benjamin Keach, 1640-1704" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2007); William Eugene Spears, "The Baptist Movement in England and in the Late Seventeenth Century as Reflected in the Work and Thought of Benjamin Keach, 1640-1704" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1953); James Barry Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1989).

⁹Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 249-74.

Likewise, few sources are available to provide details about Baptist preaching in England in the seventeenth century. Although several histories of preaching, both old and new, briefly mention Keach's unique contribution to seventeenth-century rhetoric, they generally fail to address the distinguishing marks of any Baptist sermons of that period. To my knowledge, no detailed, comprehensive volume of information about seventeenth-century British Baptist preaching exists. Thus, any pertinent data must be gleaned from a wide array of source materials.

A dissertation assessing the role of metaphor in the sermons of Benjamin Keach may provide a valuable contribution to and an advancement of present scholarship, which to date has not focused primarily upon his sermons. This research is not only significant for understanding Keach, but it is also important for comprehending seventeenth-century Baptist preaching in general, which, remarkably, has received little attention thus far. Although the sermons of many prominent non-Baptists and Puritans have been thoroughly analyzed, information about *Baptist* preaching in the seventeenth century is scant.¹⁰

Methodology

The research for this dissertation is founded primarily upon an analysis of Keach's published sermons and related works. The initial chapters address the biographical aspects of Keach's ministry, particularly those that concern the formative influences upon his preaching, and provide basic details about all 224 of his published sermons. The study then moves toward an understanding of Keach's use of metaphors in the task of preaching.

The first part of this investigation seeks to grasp Keach's own concept of metaphor. From an examination of his significant publication, *Tropologia: A Key to*

¹⁰Repeated database searches for examples of scholarly inquiry into seventeenth-century Baptist preaching have yielded surprisingly few results.

Open Scripture Metaphors, Keach's basic perception of metaphors becomes apparent. This volume is a reworking of notes from sermons that he had preached following his move to London in 1668.¹¹ The next step involves an explanation of the ways in which Keach actually interpreted metaphors, particularly those found within the Scriptures. It is necessary to know Keach's own hermeneutical methods, in order to comprehend the manner by which he handled figurative language.

Lastly, numerous examples from his own published sermons reveal how Keach used metaphors in his sermons. By employing basic rhetorical analysis, instances of metaphorical language can be located within his messages, and their specific functions can be classified. Hart's *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* contains appropriate guidelines for performing these analyses and for locating metaphors. One such model for examining metaphor suggests that the critic should "look for patterns of metaphorical usage . . . [and] find an underlying thematic unity." In turn, these patterns can "identify the speaker's general mental habits and the audience's perceived motivational bases." Questions such as the following are asked of the text: "What families of *metaphors* reside in the text? Are they internally consistent? What is their cumulative effect?"¹² These occurrences of metaphor fall into three different categories: homiletic illustration, theological explanation, and sermon application. The analysis of these divisions of metaphorical usage prove the thesis of the dissertation.

Resources

The research for this dissertation concerned Keach's published sermons, his other relevant works, and other significant primary source materials. Secondary sources

¹¹Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1682), bk. 2, "Epistle to the Reader," 3.

¹²Roderick P. Hart, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997), 147-48.

included pertinent historical and biographical works, research dissertations and theses that address Keach's preaching ministry directly, and resources that aided in the understanding and function of metaphor, including methods of rhetorical criticism.

Having subscribed to Early English Books Online (EEBO), an online database containing the scanned images of thousands of works published in England between 1500 and 1700, the Boyce Centennial Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was well equipped to handle many of the research needs of this project. When coupled with the library's excellent microfilm resources and collection of rare books, nearly all of Keach's published works were available for review.

A few materials had to be obtained elsewhere. The Cleveland Public Library in Cleveland, Ohio, contains the only indexed microfilm copy in the United States of one of Keach's funeral sermons, and the copy was not available for interlibrary loan. Graciously, the library staff were willing to scan the document into digital format and send the pages to me. At his own expense, Austin Walker, who lives near London, England, kindly mailed to me a copy of his 2004 lecture to the Strict Baptist Historical Society. Riker's dissertation on Keach (University of Aberdeen) was completed in the spring of 2007, and he granted my request for an electronic copy, since it was not yet available in the university's library. As well, the Edinburgh University Library allowed me to purchase a copy of Spears' dissertation on Keach.

Because Keach's *Exposition of the Parables* was published in 1701, a scanned image is not available on EEBO (one year too late), and the Boyce Centennial Library does not have a subscription to Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), which would likely have the work in its database. Neither is this work available on microfilm. It was necessary, therefore, to locate an original copy of the book for comparison with the modern edition. The Brown University Library in Providence, Rhode Island, generously permitted me to consult their copy. Ron Miller, who lives in Owensboro, Kentucky, very graciously made his original copies of Keach's works available for my review.

Virtually nothing other than Keach's published works is extant. No sermon manuscripts or relevant unpublished documents are known to exist. The bibliography of Keach's works found at the end of Walker's biography of Keach surpasses all previous bibliographies in its scope and comprehensiveness and is a useful guide for identifying and locating Keach's materials. This bibliography includes the few known instances in which Keach contributed the prefatory material for or in some way endorsed the published works of others.¹³ Thomas Crosby, one of Benjamin Keach's sons-in-law, was one of the earliest Baptist historians. He recorded several first-hand accounts of Keach's sermon delivery, as well as other information about Keach's life that are available nowhere else.¹⁴

Although the number of theses and dissertations that focus on Keach is quite small, a few research projects that directly address seventeenth-century preaching in general were available for review and offered a significant amount of useful information for this dissertation.¹⁵ These works specifically discuss sermonic form and design, showing the evolution of structure and style that occurred throughout the seventeenth century. Additionally, several sources that deal particularly with understanding the nature of metaphors and the role they play in the context of preaching and rhetoric were consulted for any beneficial contributions to the research.¹⁶

¹³Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 395-407.

¹⁴Thomas Crosby, *The History of English Baptists*, 4 vols. (London, 1738-40).

¹⁵Wendell Lyle Baglow, "The Golden Age of Preaching: An Evaluation of the Seventeenth-Century British Pulpit" (B.Div. diss., Gordon College of Theology and Missions, 1954); Ruth B. Bozell, "English Preachers of the Seventeenth Century on the Art of Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1938); Robert Anders Lunt, "The Reinvention of Preaching: A Study of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century English Preaching Theories" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1998).

¹⁶Some of these sources include Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Rodney Kennedy, *The Creative Power of Metaphor: A Rhetorical Homiletics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

CHAPTER 2

KEACH AND PREACHING

Introduction

The early life and ministry of Benjamin Keach coincided with one of the most volatile periods in the history of England, 1640-1662. As these years of tremendous change swept over the nation, the historic events that occurred served as providential catalysts for Keach's conversion, his understanding of the Bible, and his preaching. Although he grew up in the midst of tumultuous circumstances, late in life Keach reflected very fondly upon his childhood:

Brethren, I have told you what choice experiences I had of the love of Jesus Christ unto my own soul, when first in *my youthful days* he manifested himself unto me; I was so raised and consoled with sweet tastes of God's love to me, that by the strength of those cordials I have been supported unto this very day.¹

While Keach is best known for his service as pastor of the large Horsleydown church in London, his introduction of hymnsinging into corporate worship, and his fervent defense of Particular Baptist beliefs, these contributions all took place in the latter half of his life. If it had not been for the pivotal events of Keach's developmental years, he probably never would have matured into the passionate pulpiteer and voluminous writer that he became.

In addition to the rapidly changing political and religious environment of the middle decades of the seventeenth century, Keach was particularly affected by at least two individuals in his early life: Matthew Mead and John Saltmarsh. Although their

¹Benjamin Keach, *Exposition of the Parables* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974), 269. Italics added.

contact with Keach was only tangential, these two men impacted his understanding of the gospel and the nature of true justification, respectively, convictions which formed the foundation of Keach's preaching and his lengthy pastoral ministry.

Following Keach's early years in Buckinghamshire, in which he grew to maturity, was converted, and began to preach, he moved to London and became the pastor of a small congregation in Southwark that would eventually blossom into a thriving church led by such pastors as John Gill, John Rippon, and Charles Spurgeon. Preaching the Word of God was the central focus of Keach's life, the practice of which he never tired. His passion for proclamation was fueled by the certainty that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be communicated clearly, and the struggles that he encountered in his pre-London years served to propel him forward, even when his course led into debate and controversy.

England in the Mid-Seventeenth Century

Between 1640 and 1662 the religious world in England was turned upside down. As a direct result of the Long Parliament's victory in the civil war and the subsequent emergence of the radical New Model Army as a political force, many of the Nonconformists who had suffered harassment and persecution in the pre-war period found themselves part of the ecclesiastical establishment. At the same time, the boundaries of the state church were so wide that freedom of worship was granted to Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Congregationalists. Ironically, it was the views of the Anglican conservatives that were being condemned by the state.²

The implications of the political upheaval, and even more importantly, the astonishing ability of preaching to educate, stimulate, and mobilize England in the mid-seventeenth century were particularly formative aspects in Keach's preaching ministry.

²Susan Doran and Christopher Durston, *Princes, Pastors and People: The Church and Religion in England, 1500-1700*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 129.

Political and Religious Volatility

For all its ambiguities, the Revolution was especially significant, particularly in that it saw the beginning of England's great toleration debate. John Coffey notes that before 1640, "debate had focused on the range of practice and opinion that could be tolerated *within* the established church, and almost everyone agreed that heretics, recusants and schismatics should be punished in some way."³ However, this opinion was soon to be contested, bringing a substantial change to the way that religion was practiced in the nation and directly impacting Keach's future as a Baptist.

In 1644, however, this consensus was noisily challenged, and for the rest of the century a minority of voices kept up a steady assault on the principle of religious coercion. Secondly, the Revolution ensured that England became a remarkably pluralistic religious culture. Before 1640, only a tiny minority of Protestants dared to meet outside the established church. But in the twenty years that followed, the Protestant sects were given enough time to put down deep roots; the persecution of dissent during the Restoration was simply unable to reverse this. Most of the nonconformist denominations . . . (including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers) could look back on the Puritan Revolution as the time when they became firmly established.⁴

By 1647, the religious radicals had also acquired another extremely powerful ally in the shape of Parliament's New Model Army. Formed in 1645, this army made a major contribution to the defeat of Charles I. The New Model Army contained large numbers of Independents, Baptists, and others, whose religious radicalism was sustained by listening to the persuasive sermons of army chaplains such as William Erbury, Hugh Peter, and John Saltmarsh.⁵

After his final defeat in 1648, Charles I was executed in the following year, and a Commonwealth was established. As the chief architect of the victory, Oliver Cromwell emerged as the acknowledged leader. He was a man of deep religious

³John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), 159-60.

⁴*Ibid.*, 160.

⁵Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors and People*, 131.

conviction, and his views on religious toleration were far in advance of most other men of his generation. Dix states that during the Commonwealth “a greater degree of religious liberty was enjoyed than at any previous time in the history of England.”⁶ Many people, including Keach, thrived on this freedom and were able to attend the church of their choice.

In September 1650, Parliament passed an act that removed penalties for people who did not attend church. For the first time since the Reformation, it was no longer legally compulsory to attend one’s parish church on Sunday. While people were still expected to attend some form of Christian worship, the abolition of penalties marked the formal repudiation of the religious uniformity that had been established almost a century earlier in 1559.⁷

In April 1660, while he was waiting at Breda and anticipating a summons to England, Charles II issued a declaration promising religious toleration. Although Charles wanted religious toleration, he wanted the crown more, and in the Declaration of Breda the liberty he promised was provisional, in that such indulgence should be granted by an act of Parliament. The Cavalier Parliament, however, did not share either Charles’s outward indifference to religious dogma or his private sympathy with Roman Catholicism.⁸

The Restoration settlement did not leave the powers of the monarchy and Parliament clearly defined, and during the next twelve years, a struggle ensued between the two, in which Charles tried to keep the promises he had made at Breda, and Parliament endeavored to nullify them. It was an unequal struggle, however. Parliament

⁶Kenneth Dix, *Benjamin Keach and a Monument to Liberty* (Dunstable, Bedfordshire: The Fauconberg Press, 1985), 9.

⁷Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 149.

⁸Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford, 1978), 221-22.

had recently shown that it could rule without a king, and Charles soon found that he could not rule for long without Parliament's money. Thus, the reign of the first English king to endorse toleration was characterized by the determined and often malicious persecution of dissent.⁹

This period of volatility in mid-seventeenth-century England certainly had profound implications for the nation as a whole and for Keach specifically. Although the nation endured a difficult struggle, religious toleration was worth the price of hardship and persecution, and the desire for freedom would ultimately be satisfied, but not until much later in 1689. Remarkably, the "foolishness of preaching" was an incredibly powerful tool, and it could be used to promote nearly any position or viewpoint.

Evolution of Preaching and Sermons

At the turn of the seventeenth century, the act of preaching and the publication of sermons was a rapidly growing enterprise. Wheale has provided an excellent summary of this significant advancement.

Despite this relative under-development of printing as an industry in early modern England, most London stationers produced readable work, and the trade was the means by which the Elizabethan and Jacobean literary renaissance was published and disseminated. In the first twenty years of Elizabeth's reign approximately 3,850 titles appeared, and from 1580 to 1603 this total increased to 7,430. Bibles or religious works of some kind constituted 40 per cent of this production: approximately one hundred editions of the Bible were printed in the period, and another thirty editions of the New Testament alone. Catechisms, or simple dialogues on the fundamental aspects of belief and orthodoxy, were also very much in demand, running to another hundred editions. The single most prolific category of religious publication was probably the sermon, with over 1,000 editions in English, not including both those given in Latin or translated works. . . . After holy writ and theological works, literature—understood in its broadest sense—formed the largest group of titles, and seems to have increased as a proportion of total output during Elizabeth's reign, rising from 13 to nearly 25 per cent by 1600—but falling back to 13 per cent by 1640.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., 222.

¹⁰Nigel Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print, and Politics in Britain (1590-1660)* (London: Routledge, 1999), 58.

For nearly all of the seventeenth century, no occupation in England could compete with preaching in arousing people's interest. Specifically, through the entire generation from 1640 to 1670, preaching filled a significant place in people's thoughts. Religion was then, as always, a popular and controversial subject; to preach or not to preach had been an extremely serious question when William Laud was in power, and it was important again at the Restoration. Even under the Commonwealth, acts of Parliament were necessary to protect the ordained minister from the competition of the lay preacher who earnestly and stubbornly desired to exhort sinners whenever and wherever he sensed the opportunity. During the latter years of this period, many would listen excitedly to pulpit speakers on one day and wonder if anything dramatic might happen to them the next day. Preachers were taken into custody and removed from their pulpits; fines and pillory sentences were imposed; imprisonment—or worse—was common for many eminent clergymen.¹¹ Indeed, the power of preaching was largely responsible for the Revolution itself.

In the middle decades of the seventeenth century, sermon design and Puritan theory were in unison. This was especially true of the “new” sermon structure of doctrines, reasons, and uses, which by 1640, was being utilized commonly throughout England. The adoption of this sermon form meant that nearly every sermon included an application. Thus, the growing popularity of preaching among ordinary people served to reinforce the “plain preaching” advocated in Puritan theories.¹² This style of preaching would have been firmly in place as Keach began to attend church and hear the proclamation of the Word of God.

¹¹Caroline Francis Richardson, *English Preachers and Preaching: 1640-1670* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 48.

¹²Anders Robert Lunt, “The Reinvention of Preaching: A Study of Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century English Preaching Theories” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1998), 76. See also Mary Morrissey, “Scripture, Style and Persuasion in Seventeenth-Century English Theories of Preaching,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (2002): 686-706.

Probably at no time in the world's history has preaching played so important and disproportionate a part in the political and social life as it did in England during the decade 1645-55, and the preachers, according to Mitchell, "were the demagogues as well as theologues of this time. Never before had such numbers of sermons been delivered on public or private occasions, and never before had such quantities of sermons and religious treatises come from the press."¹³ Indeed, Richardson notes that in the heart of the seventeenth century, "people not only sat in pews and stood in aisles to hear sermons, but they bought sermons to read at home, they borrowed them, they stole them, they took them down in shorthand and then printed them with or without the preacher's permission."¹⁴

The influence of Puritan preaching, however, produced results that its adherents had likely neither anticipated nor intended. The gospel of individual liberty that had been proclaimed so powerfully gave birth to a new independence of thought and action that profoundly influenced virtually all aspects of English society, not merely the religious.¹⁵

Shepard colorfully illustrates that the preaching of the day was not an aimless event. On the contrary, in that remarkable and volatile era, preaching was taken just as seriously as any other occupation.

The audiences of the seventeenth century were not jaded by the week's work or distracted by worldly concerns. There was no Sunday Supplement to dull the edge of the morning. They must have been intellectually alert and inured to hard thinking or they could not have tolerated the close and labored dialectic of Sprat and Stillingfleet that seems difficult even in reading to-day. These men threw no sop to the idly curious, they made no attempt to "tickle the ears of the groundlings," they stooped to no meretricious forms of advertising. Week after week they delivered their massive sermons, any one of which would make a book, in our degenerate days, as solid and four-square as though hewn out of granite. . . . [T]he monumental

¹³W. Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of Its Literary Aspects* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 255.

¹⁴Richardson, *English Preachers and Preaching*, 70.

¹⁵Lunt, "The Reinvention of Preaching," 142.

patience of seventeenth century audiences [was not limited] to the Puritans of New England. . . . In book form the sermons of the London preachers sold more widely than any other form of literature of their time.¹⁶

Political prejudice, religious enthusiasm and the necessity of meeting the exigencies of the moment influenced sermon content. The prevailing tone of such sermons could often be gloomy and censorious.¹⁷

Baptist preaching had emerged on the heels of the turbulent sixteenth century, when the Reformation shook the Christian world.¹⁸ The particular context of seventeenth-century England presented peculiar religious and political concerns, and the earliest Baptist preachers shaped their sermons to fit this context and to reflect the Reformed religious mindset.¹⁹

Two printed works in particular profoundly influenced preaching in seventeenth-century England. One work that exemplifies the shift from the blend of classical and medieval theories to the first stages of a uniquely Puritan preaching theory is William Perkins's classic, *The Art of Prophesying*, which was printed in Latin in 1592, but not translated into English until 1606.²⁰ The other is John Wilkins's *Ecclesiastes* (1646), arguably the most comprehensive seventeenth-century preaching treatise.²¹ This book enjoyed long-term popularity and numerous subsequent editions. It was a most systematic treatment that, more fully than any other renaissance work, expresses rules for

¹⁶William O. Shepard, "The Golden Age of the English Pulpit," *Methodist Review* 98 (1916): 737.

¹⁷Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory*, 257.

¹⁸Thomas R. McKibbens, Jr., *The Forgotten Heritage: A Lineage of Great Baptist Preaching* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), 3.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁰Lunt, "The Reinvention of Preaching," 41.

²¹Several such treatises emerged in the seventeenth century. Other notable examples include William Chappell, *The Preacher, or the Art and Method of Preaching* (London, 1656); Joseph Glanvill, *An Essay Concerning Preaching* (London, 1678); James Arderne, *Directions Concerning the Manner and Stile of Sermons* (London, 1671).

the art of preaching in terms of a truly rhetorical theory.²² No clear evidence exists to indicate whether Keach consulted either of these works as he learned to prepare and deliver sermons in his home county of Buckinghamshire, though both would have been available to him.²³

Clearly the central decades of seventeenth-century England were very influential not only upon Keach but also upon the entire nation. As religious toleration came to the forefront and changes occurred in the country's leadership, Keach tasted the freedom to practice his faith in a free state, a principle foundational to Baptists. He perceived that such liberty merited personal sacrifice, and from the time of the Restoration forward, Keach preached with great passion and power, proclaiming the gospel of Christ, the true nature of justification, the proper candidates for baptism, and several other biblical doctrines. Without this stimulus, Keach might never have preached at all, or at least not with the genuine fervency that came to characterize his pulpit ministry.

Early Life of Benjamin Keach (1640-1658)

Between 1640 and 1662, the period between the Long Parliament (stimulus for civil war) and the Act of Uniformity (reinstatement of the Church of England), Benjamin Keach grew from a child into a man. His recent biographer, Austin Walker, summarizes well these rapid transitions: "These were dramatic days in England. The first decade of his life [was] dominated by the civil wars. In 1649, when [Keach] was nine, Charles I was executed. His teenage years were those of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate

²²Ibid., 77.

²³Keach did affirm the basic Puritan plain-style pattern: "I am not for Airy and *Florid Orations* in the Ministration of the Word of God, but for that plain Way of Preaching used by the Holy Apostles, and our Worthy *Modern Divines*." Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace: or the Covenant of Peace Opened. In Fourteen sermons lately preached in which the errors of the present day, about reconciliation and justification, are detected* (London, 1698), iii.

of Oliver Cromwell.”²⁴ Keach’s early years can be divided into two main sections based on significant events of his life: childhood and civil war (1640-ca. 1653), and conversion and call to preach (ca. 1653-1658).

Childhood and Civil War (1640-ca. 1653)

On February 29, 1640, a few months prior to the Long Parliament and many miles from the anticipation of civil war in England, John and Fedora Keach had a second son, Benjamin. Six days later, he was baptized at the parish church in Stoke Hammond in north Buckinghamshire where the family lived. John Keach was the warden of the church, which suggests that Benjamin was a part of a God-fearing family.²⁵ Vaughn has noted the following implications of being a churchwarden in that era.

From the fact that his father was a churchwarden, one can guess that Keach’s family was part of the tradesmen and artisan class. However, churchwardens were not drawn exclusively from the elite in Stoke Hammond; at one time or another most of the householders served as church wardens.²⁶

Though lacking in riches and even the more pleasant circumstances of life, the Keach family was endowed with spiritual blessings; thus early in life Benjamin learned from godly and pious parents who guided his steps. Because of limited income, his parents were unable to give him the education that many of his contemporaries enjoyed. Instead of being able to explore subjects such as the arts and sciences, he began to work as a tailor in Buckinghamshire. However, his abilities could not be concealed, and he made use of every spare opportunity to converse with his silent companions—books and the Bible.²⁷ Described as a “precocious youth,” Keach seems to have been rigorously

²⁴Austin Walker, “Bold as a Lion: The Spirituality of Benjamin Keach,” *Eusebeia* 2 (2005): 20-21.

²⁵Dix, *Benjamin Keach and a Monument to Liberty*, 5.

²⁶James Barry Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1989), 7.

²⁷Donald George Smith, “Benjamin Keach, The Minister of the Lord” (B.Div. thesis, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950), 31.

self-educated.²⁸ Reid has suggested other ways that the Keach family likely influenced young Benjamin.

That his parents called him Benjamin, that he honoured his Creator in the days of his youth, and that a certain Mr. Joseph Keach, a bricklayer and preacher, was probably his brother, would seem to be indicative of the spiritual stock from which he sprung. Another brother, Mr. Henry Keach, was a miller, occupying Stableford Mill at Soulbury. Like most men who have lived for truth and righteousness and God, Benjamin Keach owed much to humble and holy parentage.²⁹

Shortly after Keach's birth, the first battle of the civil war was fought at Edgehill in October 1642. As a boy, Keach likely saw companies of soldiers from the opposing armies. Whether or not Stoke Hammond suffered pillage from the soldiers is unknown, but certainly the neighboring town of Winslow was affected. For example, in 1643 a company of Royalist soldiers suddenly appeared in the town, captured about forty horses, and departed for Swanbourne with a considerable supply of stolen provisions and other goods.³⁰

Keach's childhood was characterized by an upbringing in a godly home, church attendance, frequent Bible study, reading numerous books, and observing the widespread unrest of civil war. The implications of this period played a significant role in Keach's life and particularly in his spiritual development. Had the pervasive influence of the Anglican Church not eased during Keach's childhood, his embrace of the gospel and especially of Baptist convictions might never have happened.

Conversion and Call to Preach (ca. 1653-1658)

During the first twenty years of Benjamin Keach's life, the Anglican Church did experience a severe—but temporary—reduction in power and influence. New

²⁸Beth Lynch, "Keach, Benjamin," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (London: Oxford, 2004), 30:940.

²⁹Adam A. Reid, "Benjamin Keach, 1640," *Baptist Quarterly* 10 (1940-41): 68.

³⁰Dix, *Benjamin Keach and a Monument to Liberty*, 8.

religious and political ideas emerged and were spread by chaplains and preachers in the parliamentary army. General (Arminian) Baptists in north Buckinghamshire flourished during this period. In this climate of freedom, Keach not only had liberty to follow his own conscience, but also he had license to hear whatever preacher he desired and to read whatever he chose. Between 1653 and 1655, Keach briefly encountered the pastoral ministry of Matthew Mead, who proclaimed to him the gospel of Jesus Christ.³¹

Pastoral ministry of Matthew Mead. In his polemical work, *A Counter-Antidote to Purge out the Malignant Effects of a Late Counterfeit* (1694), Keach wrote in response to Gyles Shute, who had argued, among other things, that the Anabaptists were counterfeit and that baptism for believers by immersion was wholly improper.³² The opening remarks of Keach's document contain a brief but interesting reference to the minister of Shute's congregation.

I hope [Shute's] Reverend Pastor (whom I have more cause both to love and honour than ten thousand Instructors in Christ, he being *the blessed Instrument of my Conversion* all most forty years ago) gave no encouragement to him thus to write and abuse his Brethren.³³

Keach was referring to Matthew Mead, the pastor of the Independent church in Stepney. The circumstances that brought Keach into contact with Mead's ministry some forty years earlier were clearly ordained by God.

Matthew Mead (sometimes spelled "Meade") was born about 1629 at Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, only a few miles from Stoke Hammond, Buckinghamshire, where

³¹Austin J. Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2004), 55. Determining that Mead was the person responsible for leading Keach to obey the gospel was a significant discovery for Walker.

³²Citations from the writings of Keach and others of his era contain numerous instances of variant spellings, unusual punctuation and capitalization, etc. These differences are preserved verbatim within this dissertation.

³³Benjamin Keach, *A Counter-Antidote to Purge out the Malignant Effects of a Late Counterfeit, prepared by Mr. Gyles Shute, an Unskillful Person in Polemical Cures* (London, 1694), 3. Italics added.

Keach was born. After studying at Eton College (1645-48), Mead was elected a scholar at King's College, Cambridge, where he was admitted as a fellow on August 6, 1649. He resigned on June 6, 1651, however, possibly to avoid expulsion for refusing to take the engagement to the Commonwealth. From 1653-57, Mead was personally involved in a dispute over the rectory of Great Brickhill, Buckinghamshire, which he ultimately lost.³⁴

During this relatively brief period of disagreement, it appears likely that Keach (and perhaps other members of his family) heard Mead preach in Great Brickhill or at some other meeting in the locality, and having been affected by what he heard, possibly spoke to him privately about what it meant to come to Christ. Because Keach was no longer obliged to attend the parish church in Stoke Hammond, he was free to go and hear whomever he liked.³⁵ Since Keach publicly professed Christ and was baptized in 1655, the window of time in which he encountered Mead must have been very small—1653-55.

Just as Keach's published works were eventually to become popular with the general public, Mead also found a measure of success in his printed sermons. In 1661, as lecturer at St. Sepulchre, Holborn, Mead preached seven sermons on Acts 26:28, seeking to unmask hypocrites and awaken "the formal sleepy professor"; these sermons were published as *The Almost Christian Discovered* (1661), an enormously popular work in the seventeenth century that has been reprinted and made available today.³⁶

Also like Keach, Mead faced his share of persecution for his role as a Nonconformist. His public transition away from the Church of England began when an informant named Edward Potter deemed Mead one of the "Chief Ringleaders" among the

³⁴Richard L. Greaves, "Meade, Matthew," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (London: Oxford, 2004), 37:648. See also the biographical essay in Matthew Mead, *The Sermons of Matthew Mead: Original Sermons on the Jews; and on Falling into the Hands of the Living God* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1836; Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1991), ix-xlv.

³⁵Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 45.

³⁶Greaves, "Meade, Matthew," 648-49. See also Matthew Mead, *The Almost Christian Discovered, or the False Professor Tried and Cast* (London, 1661; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993).

London Nonconformists, which resulted in Mead's removal from his lectureship at St. Sepulchre in 1662. Mead preached his farewell sermon, *The Pastor's Valediction* (1662), from the text of 1 Corinthians 1:3, exhorting his audience to suffer rather than to conform.³⁷ In the years that followed, Mead continued to serve as one of the leaders of the London Nonconformists, which means that he was subject to persecution between 1678-86. During this time, Mead experimented with a variety of practical means for strengthening the brotherhood of Independent ministers, trying to bring rival Nonconformists of various denominations together.³⁸ After John Owen's death in 1683, Mead succeeded him as lecturer at Pinners' Hall, London, a position he held until his own death in 1699.³⁹

Although Mead was about ten years older than Keach, their lives were remarkably parallel, particularly since both were leading Nonconformists in London. It would seem clear, however, that without Mead's faithful witness of the gospel to him, Keach's trajectory might have been quite different.

Baptism and spiritual development. Baptist historian Thomas Crosby, one of Keach's sons-in-law and one of the most important first-hand sources of information about Keach, relates the details of Keach's next important decision—his baptism.

He applied himself very early to the study of the Scripture, and the attainments of divine knowledge; and observing the Scripture to be entirely silent concerning the *baptism of infants*, he began to suspect the validity of the *Baptism* he had received in his infancy, and after he had deliberated upon this matter, was in the *fifteenth* year of his age *baptized*, upon the profession of his faith, by Mr. *John Russel*, and then joined himself to a congregation of that persuasion in that country.⁴⁰

³⁷Greaves, "Meade, Matthew," 649.

³⁸Richard Harvey, "Meade, Matthew (c. 1630-1699)," in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller (Sussex, UK: The Harvester Press, 1983), 2:234.

³⁹Greaves, "Meade, Matthew," 649.

⁴⁰Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (London, 1738-40), 4:269.

The fact that John Russel baptized Keach indicates that he joined a General Baptist church, for Russel was a signer of the General Baptists' "Orthodox Confession." Because Keach's first wife, Jane Grove, whom he married in 1660, was from the Buckinghamshire village of Winslow, it is probable that Keach joined the Winslow congregation.⁴¹

As a young believer, Keach was diligent and always ready to learn more of the things of Christ. His spirituality quickly grew into adult maturity; his gifts and abilities were recognized, and the church set him apart for the work of the ministry. Although Keach was only eighteen years old when this took place, his preaching was a blessing and comfort to those who heard him, both when he first began this work and in the difficult times that were to follow. In Winslow and other similar settings, he met with great success.⁴²

Although Keach would eventually become a stalwart Particular Baptist, initially he embraced Arminian doctrine. Crosby acknowledges that Keach was thrust into the ministry so quickly that he had not yet fixed his position for every matter of theology.

He set out with some sentiments concerning *the extents of Christ's death*, and *freedom of man's will*, which he soon afterwards cast off, and became, more especially in the latter part of his life, a zealous opposer (both in his preaching and writing) of them. This occasion'd some to charge him with fickleness, and weakness of judgment. But it is to be considered, that he had many difficulties to struggle with in his education, being thrust into the sacred office of the ministry very young, and therefore it was almost impossible, that he should have examined thoroughly the different schemes of religion, and be well digested in some of the most difficult, and controverted points of divinity.⁴³

⁴¹J. Barry Vaughn, "Benjamin Keach," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 50.

⁴²Dix, *Benjamin Keach and a Monument to Liberty*, 6. Present-day Winslow contains a seventeenth-century Baptist chapel which residents know as "Keach's Meeting-House," but this structure was not built until 1695, long after Keach moved to London in 1668. Although a plaque above the pulpit in the Winslow chapel proudly claims that Keach was pastor there, there is no evidence that Keach was pastor of any church or that he was even ordained before he moved to London.

⁴³Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:270.

This time of spiritual enlightenment and development for Keach occurred during the period of the Commonwealth. Having established a republican form of government and with Oliver Cromwell its leader, Englishmen lived under the dictates of religious toleration as Cromwell decreed.⁴⁴ However, this freedom was to be rather short lived. Nevertheless, Keach had been converted, baptized, and called to preach the gospel, and he was unusually motivated to fulfill his commission thoroughly, even in the face of opposition.

Influence of John Saltmarsh. Best known for his service as a chaplain in the New Model Army, John Saltmarsh published sermons and other works that had a profound influence on many in seventeenth-century England. A brief allusion in one of Keach's published sermons on the nature of true justification provides evidence that Saltmarsh's influence reached even Keach. Over thirty years later, in 1692, Keach was still able to recall the impact that one of Saltmarsh's books had made on him.⁴⁵

Nothing renders a Man righteous to Justification in God's sight, but the imputation of the perfect Personal Righteousness of Christ, received only by the Faith of *the Operation of God*. When I was a Lad, I was greatly taken with a Book called, *The flowing of Christ's Blood freely to Sinners, as Sinners*. O my Brethren, that's the Case, that's the doctrine which the Apostle preaches; you must come to Christ, believe on Christ, as Sinners, as ungodly ones, and not as Righteous, not as Saints, and Holy persons.⁴⁶

This work by Saltmarsh is actually entitled *Free Grace: or the Flowings of Christ's blood freely to Sinners* (1645). Keach did not mention the author by name when he loosely quoted the title of the book in his sermon, probably because he did not want to give anyone the impression that he was sympathetic to Saltmarsh's antinomianism, a theological position present throughout the book. Nevertheless, Keach clearly regarded

⁴⁴David A. Copeland, *Benjamin Keach and the Development of Baptist Traditions in Seventeenth-Century England* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 15.

⁴⁵Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 50.

⁴⁶Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification or, Justification without Works. Containing the Substance of Two Sermons lately preached on Rom. 4:5* (London, 1692), 8.

the work as being formative in his grasp of the truth of the biblical teaching of justification. No evidence exists that Keach adopted the antinomian opinions of Saltmarsh (all the evidence is to the contrary), and it is possible that Keach had already been insulated from those opinions by the preaching of Matthew Mead.⁴⁷ A very popular work even long after his death, a sixth edition of Saltmarsh's *Free Grace* was published in 1649, and a tenth appeared in 1700. Walker believes that Keach "had apparently taken the good and left the bad from his reading of him," and that Keach was sufficiently spiritually mature to detect and dismiss Saltmarsh's errors.⁴⁸

Initially, Saltmarsh does appear to put forth a position in *Free Grace* that is balanced and biblical. His sincerity seems genuine.

It would be a matter of much *peace* amongst *beleevers*, if the names of *Antinomianism*, and *legal Teacher*, and the rest, might be laid down, and no mark or name to know one another by, but that of *beleevers* that hold *thus* and *thus* for distinction. . . . Some, hearing the *doctrine* of *Free-grace*, think presently there will follow nothing but *loosenesse* and *libertinism*; and the other, hearing of *holinesse*, of *duties* and *obedience*, think there will follow nothing but *legalnesse*, and *bondage*, and *self-righteousnesse*; and upon these *jealousies*, each party *over-suspecting* the others *doctrine*, bends against one another in expressions something too uncomely for both; and there are some *unwarrantable notions* to be found on all sides.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, even though Saltmarsh seems to dislike the name "antinomianism," he clearly endorses a position on justification that is free from any law whatsoever—following true faith in Christ, sin is no longer consequential: "If any man *sin* more freely because of *forgivenessse of sins*, that man may suspect himself to be *forgiven*; for in all *Scriptures* and *Scripture-examples*, the more *forgivenessse*, the more *holinesse*."⁵⁰ What

⁴⁷Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 50-51.

⁴⁸Austin Walker, "Benjamin Keach: 'Much for the Work of Religion,'" in *The Faith that Saves: Papers read at the Westminster Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 2004): 102.

⁴⁹John Saltmarsh, *Free Grace: or the Flowings of Christ's blood freely to Sinners* (London, 1645), viii-ix.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, x.

marked Saltmarsh out from many of his contemporaries was his insistence that grace should not be mixed with the law at all in the Christian life.⁵¹

For Saltmarsh, saving faith was not the first step of many in the mechanism of man's salvation, nor a culminating factor following other necessary steps like repentance, but the only thing needed to receive the "Spirit of adoption." This is the foundational truth that Keach embraced as well—justification by faith alone. However, because Saltmarsh granted repentance, prayer, and other religious duties no role in the salvation experience, not only did he consider them to be nonessential for daily living, but he also perceived no function for a Christian church. Burns notes that in Saltmarsh's later works, "he showed little interest in the church as an institution except to insist that it must be free from the magistrate's control and must allow its members a dominant role in its activities and its governance."⁵²

John Saltmarsh took his M.A. at Magdalene College, Cambridge in 1636, but it was not until 1643 that his radical opposition to all forms of a state church and his commitment to the parliamentary cause became apparent. Saltmarsh became known as a vigorous advocate of toleration and sectarianism, of free grace, and of the New Model Army as an independent political force.⁵³ Burns observes that in his sermons and publications, Saltmarsh's unique "ability to present without distortion the positions of those whose views he did not share was a special talent in an age when few men would have understood the purpose of an unbiased survey of opinions."⁵⁴

⁵¹Roger Pooley, "Saltmarsh, John," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (London: Oxford, 2004), 48:770.

⁵²Norman T. Burns, "Saltmarsh, John (c. 1612-1647)," in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller (Sussex, UK: The Harvester Press, 1983), 3:136.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

Saltmarsh is often described in more recent studies as a mystical writer, primarily because during the mid-1640s, when he was one of the most influential radical preachers and writers in all of England, his defense of toleration, lay ministry, and movements toward democracy all seem to come from a heavy emphasis on the Spirit of God.⁵⁵

In an era of religious practice frequently characterized by the imposition of traditions and regulations, Keach found Saltmarsh's understanding of justification by faith alone to be very refreshing. Fortunately, Keach had the discernment to embrace what was sound and biblical, while fully rejecting Saltmarsh's antinomianism. Although Saltmarsh died when Keach was about seven years old, he left a legacy that helped Keach to understand that faith in Jesus Christ alone was the true means of salvation. Later, when he became involved in numerous debates over the nature of justification—especially with Richard Baxter—Keach relied on the foundation that Saltmarsh had helped to solidify.

Ministry in Buckinghamshire (1658-1668)

Walker has conveyed clearly the ominous events that would soon have direct implications for Keach.

[I]n 1660, when he was only twenty years old and still an inexperienced Christian, a dark shadow was cast over the cause of Dissent. The death of Oliver Cromwell and the failure of his son, Richard, led to the return of Charles II. Varying degrees of persecution became the common experience of many dissenting congregations and—in particular—of preachers.⁵⁶

The religious freedom that Keach—and other Dissenters—enjoyed from the state church during Oliver Cromwell's tenure dissipated with the Lord Protector's death in 1658, the rapid deterioration of the Commonwealth under his son Richard, and the return of Charles II to occupy the throne of England. The Restoration of the monarchy

⁵⁵Pooley, "Saltmarsh, John," 771.

⁵⁶Walker, "Bold as a Lion," 20-21.

would bring immediate repercussions, as its leaders directed their accusations toward the Baptists.⁵⁷ The year that marked the death of Cromwell was also the year in which Keach began to preach. From 1658-1660, he preached both in public and in private, and was never molested, but after the Restoration, he soon encountered resistance.⁵⁸

The year 1660 was certainly memorable for Keach, for it was then that he married Jane Grove, a godly and faithful woman. That year also marked the Restoration, the anticipated return of Charles II to the throne of England, and it proved to be the beginning of a time of great sorrows for those who, like Benjamin and Jane Keach, wished to worship God according to their own consciences and in the light of the Word of God.⁵⁹

When enforcement of the Act of Uniformity began in 1662, Keach was frequently seized while he was preaching and was taken to prison. At times he was bound; sometimes he was released on bail, and occasionally his life was threatened.⁶⁰ Dix recounts a near-fatal instance that occurred about 1664.

A company of soldiers which had been drafted to Buckinghamshire in order to suppress the meetings of dissenters, one day came to a place where Keach was preaching; it may even be that this happened in Winslow itself. The soldiers violently laid hold of him, tied him and threw him to the ground. Then they declared their intention of killing him by riding over him on their horses. As the men spurred their horses forward, an officer appeared and at the last moment saved the preacher from a horrid death. Keach was then tied across the back of a horse, taken off to prison, and reduced to considerable suffering before being released.⁶¹

Perhaps the best known instance of persecution that Keach faced occurred later that same year when he published his primer for children, *A New and Easy Primmer*, in which he attacked paedobaptism and expressed millenarian views. Significant

⁵⁷Copeland, "Benjamin Keach and the Development of Baptist Traditions," 15.

⁵⁸Dix, *Benjamin Keach and a Monument to Liberty*, 11.

⁵⁹Ibid., 6.

⁶⁰Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, 2:185.

⁶¹Dix, *Benjamin Keach and a Monument to Liberty*, 11.

complaints against his writings resulted in a well documented trial in which Keach was ultimately sentenced to two weeks of imprisonment, a fine of £20, a period of two hours at the pillory in Aylesbury, another two hours in the pillory in Winslow a week later, and the burning of all of the available copies of his book. Undaunted, Keach preached powerful, evangelistic messages from the stocks and eventually even rewrote his primer.⁶² During the next four years, he continued to preach regularly in his congregation and devoted himself to writing. It is likely, however, that the threat of persecution was constant.⁶³

In coming face-to-face with his own mortality, Keach could have chosen to forsake his convictions and to preserve his own safety. Instead, this incident served as a potent catalyst to prompt Keach to preach with fervor and passion—he knew that a person’s response to the gospel was an even more serious matter of life and death. Indeed, the first twenty-two years of Keach’s life were filled with rich and vivid experiences, which would prove to be foundational to his future ministry as a Particular Baptist preacher.

Ministry in London (1668-1704)

In 1668, Keach moved his family to London and joined a General Baptist church. Keach was soon ordained as an elder in the congregation, but his presence in London provided opportunities for interaction with Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists. Following a period of intense study, Keach became fully convinced of Particular Baptist doctrine.⁶⁴ Vaughn describes this transformation as “the greatest puzzle of [Keach’s]

⁶²For a reprint of these proceedings, see “The Tryal of Mr. Benjamin Keach at the Assizes held at Ailsbury in Buckinghamshire, October 8th and 9th, 1664,” *Baptist Heritage Journal* 1 (1991):129-40.

⁶³Richard L. Greaves, *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller (Brighton, UK: Harvester, 1983), s.v. “Keach, Benjamin.”

⁶⁴Tom J. Nettles, “Benjamin Keach,” in *The British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 1:96.

life,” because it is surprising that nowhere does Keach clearly record his reasons or motives for this significant change. Even Crosby, who was so closely connected with Keach, does not provide details of this remarkable theological shift.⁶⁵

Greaves postulates that the influence of such prominent London Particular Baptists as William Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys, as well as the urgings of his second wife, Susannah Partridge (a widow), prompted Keach to reevaluate his convictions. At least some of Keach’s congregation continued to follow his leadership after this theological shift, and eventually the church erected a structure in Horsleydown, Southwark, which was licensed according to the 1672 Indulgence.⁶⁶ This church grew so rapidly under Keach’s oversight that the meetinghouse had to be enlarged several times to accommodate the thriving congregation.⁶⁷ Following the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the Act of Toleration (1689), Baptists and other nonconformists were granted freedoms that served to promote their growth.

In 1694, fully ten years before his death, Keach reflected upon his embrace of Arminianism as a young man and his subsequent regret and abandonment of those convictions.

Brethren, next unto the grace of God in my conversion, I have often said, I do look upon myself bound to admire the riches of God’s love and goodness to me, in opening my eyes to see those Arminian errors, which when I was young, I had from some men of corrupt principles sucked in; nay, and when I was about 23 years old I wrote a little book for children [*The Child’s Instructor*, 1664], in which some of those errors were vindicated; which after my eyes were enlightened, and the book with alterations being again reprinted, I left out, and do now declare my dislike of the first impressions, and do now disown what I there asserted.⁶⁸

⁶⁵Vaughn, “Benjamin Keach,” 52.

⁶⁶Greaves, “Keach, Benjamin.” “Horsleydown” is one of many spellings of this London vicinity. It is a compression of “horse-lie-down.” See also Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:272.

⁶⁷William Cathcart, *Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), s.v. “Benjamin Keach.”

⁶⁸Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened; or, The Glory of God’s Rich Grace Displayed in the Mediator to Believers* (London, 1694), 314-15.

For Keach, the thirty-five years following his transition to the city of London were not only a time of significant productivity in his life, but also a period of great controversy. Writing was obviously one of Keach's great passions, and he completed and published numerous works during these decades, particularly during the 1690s. A large number of his publications were critical responses to various books and pamphlets containing biblical and theological errors that Keach felt strongly impressed to address publicly.

In the mid-1670s, Keach introduced hymnsinging into the corporate worship services of his church at Horsleydown, perhaps the one action for which he is best remembered.⁶⁹ Accustomed to singing only from the Psalms, the congregation was obviously skeptical about this new innovation. He initiated this introduction by having the congregation sing a hymn following Communion. Keach was able to offer clear biblical support to his people for this practice (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26). During the next fifteen years, he convinced the church to sing hymns at other specific observances, and ultimately, Keach had the church singing hymns regularly in their gatherings. An abundance of written material exists on this controversial aspect of Keach's ministry, for Keach was the first ever to establish hymnsinging as a regular practice in public worship in an English Protestant church. To provide material for his congregation to sing, Keach wrote hundreds of hymn texts, which he later published in *Spiritual Melody* (1691) and *Spiritual Songs* (1696).⁷⁰ These were among the first hymnbooks ever used in corporate worship by any group of Christians. Although Keach's hymns were rather lacking in quality, he stimulated an interest in hymnwriting among several others.

A considerable dispute accompanied the emergence of this new facet of worship. Vaughn has observed that it consisted of three components: "Keach struggled

⁶⁹Vaughn, "Benjamin Keach," 53.

⁷⁰Greaves, "Keach, Benjamin."

with a group in his congregation who opposed corporate singing and also battled with the leaders of the Particular Baptist community in London (and elsewhere). Keach also engaged in a vitriolic printed debate.”⁷¹ Although involved in controversy throughout his ministry, this particular problem caused him much grief. The wide-sweeping nature of this alteration to traditional worship resulted in an eruption of opinions, emotions, and disharmony. Though he loved peace and unity, Keach was determined to establish corporate hymnsinging. Walker has observed that Keach’s motives concerned revitalizing the spiritual life of the church.

The practice of the joyful corporate praise of God invigorating the spiritual life of the church was Keach’s principal concern in the whole issue, and this predominant theme should not be clouded by the controversy that surrounded Keach’s innovation. Keach had the better argument and was more consistently scriptural than [his opponents] . . . Keach entered into the debate because he felt he had to do so, and because he wanted to establish biblical practices. . . . He was concerned for the reformation of the church and was against formalism; on the contrary, he wanted to promote the praise of God by using psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and to help arrest the decline in spirituality in the churches by reviving this aspect of her corporate life.⁷²

Although Keach had never enjoyed more than mediocre health, in early 1690, he became very sick, and his physicians doubted that he would live much longer. Hearing of his grave condition, Hanserd Knollys, Keach’s good friend and fellow Particular Baptist, came to visit him and “knelt and prayed that God would add to his life the time granted to King Hezekiah in Old Testament times.”⁷³ God saw fit to answer Knollys’ prayer in full, and Keach lived exactly fifteen more years.

Historians Bogue and Bennett have noted that Keach “continued with his [London] flock during the remainder of his life.”⁷⁴ He was able to spend his final years

⁷¹Vaughn, “Benjamin Keach” 53.

⁷²Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 296-97.

⁷³Smith, “Benjamin Keach, the Minister,” 49.

⁷⁴David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of the Dissenters from the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808* (London, 1809), 2:265.

in relative peace, and he wrote and published additional works, including his sizeable *Exposition of the Parables* (1701). Occasional controversies arose, such as his response to the Seventh-Day Baptists, but none required the full brunt of Keach's energies.⁷⁵ By the end of his life, Keach's Horsleydown church swelled to nearly one thousand people. Following a severe illness, Keach died on July 18, 1704, at the age of sixty-four.

Keach had asked his long-time friend (and Sabbatarian Baptist) Joseph Stennett to preach his funeral sermon from the text of 2 Timothy 1:12.⁷⁶ Haykin remarks that "what is fascinating about Keach's request is that he and Stennett differed over which day of the week was to be reserved for Christian worship."⁷⁷ Although Keach believed the New Testament teaching that corporate worship should occur on Sundays and even published this position (*The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated*, 1700), he "was conscious of what was and was not essential. . . . [H]e was obviously able to recognise that disagreement over this issue was not so vital as to imperil fellowship in the Saviour."⁷⁸

The Preaching of Benjamin Keach

Centrality of Scripture

Keach knew of nothing else to preach but the Word of God. Webber has described his sermons as "clear, argumentative, allegorical at times, and often enriched by many proof texts" and notes that in "simple, clear language he defends the inspiration of the Scriptures. . . . In this respect, Benjamin Keach is superior to his famous

⁷⁵Ibid., 265-66.

⁷⁶Smith, "Benjamin Keach, the Minister," 50. The biblical text reads, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (NASB).

⁷⁷Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach—Rediscovering Our English Baptist Heritage* (Leeds, UK: Reformation Today Trust, 1996), 96.

⁷⁸Ibid., 97.

contemporaries. Where they resort to logic, and to a direct appeal to the intellect, Benjamin Keach lets the Scriptures bear witness.”⁷⁹ Walker has commented on Keach’s commitment to preaching the Bible.

Faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ was Keach’s controlling principle as he constantly engaged in the task of being an overseer in the church of Christ. He understood this to mean that he was called to preach the Word of God so that people would be converted and to oversee the life of the church and build it by the rule that Christ had left in the Word. Preaching was his life’s work, a calling he had received from God, and, in which he had first engaged in 1658, three years after being converted as a young man. . . . [Keach preached] wherever he had the opportunity, even if it meant suffering as a consequence, because preaching was God’s “own ordinance.”⁸⁰

As the pastor of the congregation at Horsleydown for over three decades, Keach was well acquainted with this biblical role. He knew that one of the main responsibilities of pastors was the faithful preaching of the Scriptures. In his excellent work on church structure and polity, *The Glory of a True Church, and its Discipline Display’d*, Keach offered the following instructions for the pastors of churches.

The work of a Pastor is to preach the Word of Christ, or to feed the Flock, and to administer all the Ordinances of the Gospel which belong to his Sacred Office, and to be faithful and laborious therein, studying to shew himself approved unto God, *a Work-man that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth*. He is *a Steward of the Mysteries of God*, therefore ought to be a Man of good Understanding and Experience, being found in the Faith, and one that is acquainted with the Mysteries of the Gospel: Because he is *to feed the People with Knowledge and Understanding*. He must be faithful and skilful to declare the Mind of God, and diligent therein, also *to preach in season and out of season*; God having committed unto him the Ministry of Reconciliation, a most choice and sacred Trust. What Interest hath God greater in the World which he hath committed unto Men than this? Moreover, he must make known the whole Counsel of God to the People.⁸¹

One of Keach’s publishers, John Dunton, acknowledged that Keach was well received by the common people: “This War-like Author is much admir’d among the

⁷⁹Frederick R. Webber, *A History of Preaching in Britain and America* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1952), 2:294.

⁸⁰Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 223-24.

⁸¹Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church and its Discipline Display’d, Wherein a True Gospel-Church is described. Together with the Power of the Keys, and who are to be let in, and who to be shut out* (London, 1697), 8-9.

Anabaptists, and to do him right, his Thoughts are easy, just, and pertinent. He's a popular Preacher, and (as appears by his awakening Sermons) understands the Humour and Necessity of his Audience."⁸²

Not only did Keach possess strong convictions about what constituted proper preaching, but he also believed firmly that the proclamatory ministry of the pastor necessitated him to consider how he would construct his sermons to impress biblical doctrine upon his hearers.

I confess, a little learning, and less study, may furnish a man with a solid discourse, as may please some weak persons, that judge of a sermon by the loudness of the voice, and affectionate sentences, or can fancy themselves to be fed with the ashes of jingling words, and cadency of terms in a discourse. But alas! The seeming warmth of affection that is stirred by such means, is as short-lived, as a land-flood that hath no spring to feed it. He that will do the souls of his people good, and approve himself a pastor after God's own heart, must feed them with knowledge and understanding, and endeavor to maintain a constant zeal and affection in them, by well informing their judgments, and such an opening of the mind of God from the scriptures, as may command their consciences: and this is not to be expected, but from him that labours in his study, as well as in the pulpit.⁸³

McKibbens has observed that "Keach's greatest contribution to his denomination is found, not in his many controversies and writings, but by his leadership in providing a model for an intelligent and evangelistic preaching ministry."⁸⁴ Smith has made the following comments about Keach's preaching philosophy.

His entire messages are effervescent with the Bible. One cannot call him an expository preacher in the true sense of the word because he follows an expositional display of knowledge dealing with Scripture bit by bit. It is true, though, that he draws fine background material in many cases apparently from knowing much Biblical and Oriental history. His messages are quite exhaustive."⁸⁵

⁸²John Dunton, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (London: J. Nichols, 1818), 177.

⁸³Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1682), bk. 4, 261-62. According to Keach, this is part of his transcript of an ordination sermon preached in London in 1681 by "Mr. N. C.," who was likely Nehemiah Coxe, another prominent seventeenth-century English Calvinistic Baptist.

⁸⁴McKibbens, *The Forgotten Heritage*, 18.

⁸⁵Smith, "Benjamin Keach, the Minister," 55.

Walker states, “No estimate of Keach will ever be accurate unless his convictions regarding the Bible are fully understood. He was a man of integrity, who made it his aim to live by biblical principles. . . . The Bible, as the word of God, was his supreme authority and guide; his religion was one of sincere obedience to that word.”⁸⁶

Engaging Exposition

Keach was firmly convinced that fervency and zeal should characterize good preaching. He often used figurative imagery in his sermons to enrich their content.

Ministers should see that what they bring forth [must] be hot: cold meat is not so refreshing and sweet as that which is hot; a minister must preach with life, and holy fervency of spirit; cold and lifeless preaching, makes cold hearing; the Lord Jesus Christ “preached as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.”⁸⁷

Using the same metaphor, Walker affirms that “there was a natural manliness about him and . . . while he may not have been endowed with the greatest gifts of language, his sermons were marked by sound biblical teaching. His flock would have gone home satisfied, acknowledging that their preacher had not tried to entertain them with clever words and wit but rather had fed them with meat.”⁸⁸

Crosby also reflected upon Keach’s sermon style and method of delivery, noting that he took up his role as a preacher of the Word of God with considerable effort.

He affected no unusual tones, nor indecent gestures in his preaching, his stile was strong and masculine. He generally used notes, especially in the latter part of his life; and if his sermons had not all the embellishments of language, which some boast of, they had this peculiar advantage, to be full of solid divinity; which is a much better character for pulpit discourses, than to say, they are full of pompous eloquence, and flights of wit.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 367.

⁸⁷Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 271.

⁸⁸Walker, “Benjamin Keach, Tailor and Preacher,” 15.

⁸⁹Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, 305-06. “Head notes” are “notes containing the heads and chief divisions of the discourse, with the leading thoughts under each briefly expressed. It were to be wished that this mode of preaching was universal.” This explanation was given by Howard Malcom in his memoir of Keach’s life which is prefixed to Benjamin Keach, *The Travels of True Godliness* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1854), 24.

One trait of Keach's preaching that is of particular importance is his regular use of metaphorical language. So consumed was Keach with the task of preaching, that he sought to use every means at his disposal to enhance the ability of his sermons to penetrate the hearts and minds of his hearers, so that they would not only comprehend the message of Scripture, but also be motivated powerfully to obey God's commands and apply biblical doctrine to their lives. Keach knew from his Lord's own example in the Gospels that metaphor was an especially powerful tool that could be used for this purpose, and Keach worked to implement them and their ability to prompt understanding within the texts of his sermons.

Keach was conscious of the importance of preaching, and he was aware that many had perverted the task of proclaiming the Word of God and had transformed it into platforms for personal promotion. In the prefatory material to his *Display of Glorious Grace*, Keach offered some pointed reflection on his convictions about preaching and the self-serving efforts of other pulpiteers.

As I Preach not to please Mens Ears, so but little regard ought to be had to the Scoffing Reflections of such Men, who contemn everything of this kind, unless it consists of a Fancy-taking Modelation of empty *Rhetorick*, or a high *Florid Stile*, mixt with Wit, Learning, and Philosophical Notions. Sad it is to see that in *Divine Matters*, nay, in *Preaching*, persons should affect New *Modes* and *Fashions*, (as to the shame of the present Generation, they do in respect of Garbs and Dresses:) I am not for Airy and *Florid Orations* in the Ministrations of the Word of God, but for that plain Way of Preaching used by the Holy Apostles, and our Worthy *Modern Divines*. Besides, could I so Preach or Write, as is the Flesh-pleasing, Ear-tickling *A-la-mode* of the Times, of such who study Words more than Matter, it would be utterly dislik'd by all such *Pious Christians*, for whose sake, and at whose Importunity these Sermons are published. The Holy Apostle (who tho profoundly Learned) disclaims any *Rhetorical Flourishes*, or perswasive Oratory, but professes that *his Speech and Preaching, was not with the Inticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit, and with Power*, 1 Cor. 2:4. I may say of some *Mens Orations*, or *Elocutions*, as *Plutarch* speaks of the *Nightingale*, who was at first taken with his delicate Notes, but when he saw him said, *Thou art a Voice and nothing else*.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, iii-iv.

Indeed, Keach's preaching was powerful and biblical. He was faithful regularly to proclaim the gospel to his people and to teach them the truths of Scripture without compromise.

Summary

Commenting on Keach's significant accomplishments and his exemplary preaching, Dargan acknowledges the potentially overwhelming challenges of early life that Keach encountered and had overcome.

He was a voluminous author, and wrote many controversial and devotional works, besides his published sermons. These show a fine insight into Scripture, a clear and convincing argumentation, a devout and earnest spirit, and a style usually simple and clear and not without graces of expression and occasional eloquence. . . . Keach's success is the best commentary on his character and work. The odds against him were great, but he won the fear and respect of his foes, and the esteem and confidence of his friends, dying in peace and honor at sixty-four years of age.⁹¹

Keach was, first and foremost, a Christian man. After coming to London in 1668, he became a convinced Calvinist in his theology as he came to understand the Scriptures more clearly. He was a Baptist from his teenage years, despite the fact that he was baptized as an infant in the Church of England and subsequently converted to the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of Matthew Mead, a staunch paedobaptist. From his early days as a preacher among the General Baptists in the northern part of Buckinghamshire, he was firmly in the Separatist tradition and eventually a Baptist Dissenter.⁹²

Keach was called to the pastorate in London after a period of suffering and persecution in Buckinghamshire. Having survived being trampled to death by the horses of a company of dragoons, pilloried twice in the open markets of Aylesbury and

⁹¹Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching: From the Close of the Reformation Period to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 2:185.

⁹²Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 365.

Winslow, and robbed by highwaymen on his journey to London, Keach was ordained as pastor in 1668 and ministered for thirty-six years in the same congregation.⁹³

Indeed, the formative influences from Keach's early years were pivotal in establishing a solid foundation for his future as one of the most prominent Particular Baptists and preachers of the seventeenth century. Without these experiences, Keach's life surely would have unfolded in a vastly different direction, and he would have been unable to stand and defend his Christian views before the eyes of many witnesses. His preaching likely would not have been impassioned and biblical, if he preached at all. God's initiatives forged a man who boldly proclaimed Christ crucified and rejected error.

Describing the faithful and intense preaching ministry of his esteemed father-in-law, Thomas Crosby recorded the following tribute to Benjamin Keach.

Preaching the Gospel was the very pleasure of his soul, and his heart was so engaged in the work of the ministry, that from the time of his first appearing in public, to the end of his days, his life was one continued scene of labor and toil. His close study and constant preaching did greatly exhaust his animal spirits, and enfeeble his strength, yet to the last he discovered a becoming zeal against the errors of the day; his soul was too great to recede from any truth that he owned, either from the frowns or flatteries of the greatest. He, with unwearied diligence, did discharge the duties of his pastoral office.⁹⁴

Throughout his life, Keach had witnessed events that shaped English politics and religion for the next three hundred years, and his experiences coincided almost exactly with the rise and decline of Particular Baptists.⁹⁵ The numerous debates and practical initiatives in which Keach so prominently participated had a fundamental influence upon the subsequent development of the Baptist movement within the nation of England.⁹⁶

2. ⁹³Eric Hayden, *A Centennial History of Spurgeon's Tabernacle* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1971),

⁹⁴Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:304.

⁹⁵Vaughn, "Benjamin Keach," 49.

⁹⁶Lynch, "Keach, Benjamin," 942.

While many of Keach's contemporaries resorted to logic and a direct appeal to the intellect in their sermons, Keach simply permitted the Word of God to speak. This trait was absent from even the printed sermons of the best known pulpiteers. Although Keach was not the equal of these men in scholarship, nevertheless, in his direct appeal to the conscience, and by using numerous Scripture verses to prove the gospel and to bring men to repentance, he far exceeded the other noted preachers of his day.⁹⁷ Additionally, Keach regularly incorporated metaphorical imagery into his sermons for the purpose of connecting the content of his messages with the intellect and emotions of his audience, in order that they might respond to the Scriptures with obedience. Keach's preaching reflected who he was—a man forged by past events into a potent mouthpiece for God's glory.

⁹⁷Webber, *A History of Preaching*, 294-95.

CHAPTER 3
KEACH'S SERMONS

Introduction

Although Benjamin Keach is known for his numerous published works on a great variety of doctrinal and theological topics, his preaching ministry was the central focus of his life. Throughout nearly all of his adult years, Keach proclaimed biblical truth on a weekly basis. Following his move to London and his appointment as pastor of the Horsleydown congregation, Keach devoted over three decades to the task of preaching God's Word.

In order to comprehend the content of Keach's preaching ministry, it is necessary to survey his sermons—the weekly investment he made in the lives of his church members. Keach knew the necessity of imparting the Scriptures to the people, and he embraced his calling with zeal. As a largely self-educated man, Keach was able to relate not only to those in his church who had received adequate schooling but also to those who possessed little or no educational training. The responsibility of preaching God's Word required him to consider all of his hearers and to craft his messages in such a way that each could understand. Walker has noted that “The sermons of Benjamin Keach constitute the greater part of his writings and the majority of them were published in the last decade of his life. . . . [A]fter 1689 when freedom of the press became a reality, . . . Keach was able to publish his sermons more widely.”¹

¹Austin Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press), 249.

Stout has issued a significant word of caution to those who would research aspects of preaching based solely on published material alone, as opposed to manuscripts, transcriptions, sermon notes, etc. His warning is appropriate.

Published sermons present limitations because they are not necessarily representative of regular preaching, nor can we be certain they are the best index to what the clergy offered the public on a weekly basis. The vast majority of published sermons (at least after the first generation) originated as “occasional” or weekday sermons, which were expanded after delivery for publication. As such they provide an inexact and even misleading guide to what was being said publicly in most churches on Sundays. . . . The most accurate guide we therefore have to what people actually heard are the handwritten sermon notes that ministers carried with them into the pulpit.²

Nevertheless, Stout is not implying that published sermons have no value or reliability. He notes that “Perry Miller . . . in his magisterial reconstruction of Puritan ideas and values relied almost exclusively on printed sermons. . . . Since that time scholars have . . . followed his method, . . . [but] only from the vantage point of *unpublished* sermons . . . can the full range of colonial preaching be understood.”³

With Keach, no manuscripts, transcriptions, or sermon notes of any kind are known to exist. Thus, while conclusions drawn must be limited, Keach’s published sermons are still capable of providing substantial information about Keach and his preaching.

Keach desired that his sermons be a means to communicate with every person, regardless of an individual’s education, wealth, or position. Knowing that Jesus Himself had taught even the common people by using imagery and illustrations with which they could readily identify, Keach prepared his sermons with this approach in mind. An overwhelming majority of his published messages, such as his 147 sermons on the parables of Christ, were based on biblical texts that contain prominent figurative and

²Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford, 1986), 4.

³Ibid. Italics added.

symbolic language. In fact, even Keach's sermon titles typically referenced some kind of colorful image or theme.

The content of Keach's sermons was typical of most seventeenth-century preaching. While his messages were often rich in descriptive and illustrative materials, Keach usually refrained from using examples from his own personal life in his sermons.⁴ Richardson has noted that although the use of quotations from recognized authorities and even from those who held different views from the preacher was fairly commonplace, "the informal, colloquial 'I knew a man who . . . ' or 'There was a woman that . . . ' is strikingly rare."⁵

Keach's published sermons were almost entirely based on New Testament texts. Even without his 147 sermons on the parables of Jesus, the clear majority of Keach's other seventy-seven published sermons were taken from the New Testament. Other than his two sermon series, *The Display of Glorious Grace* and *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven or Jacob's Ladder Improved*, which contain a total of eighteen messages drawn from Isaiah 54:10 and Genesis 28:12, respectively, only three other individually published sermons were based on Old Testament passages.

In constructing his messages, Keach essentially followed the sermonic pattern suggested by William Perkins in his *Art of Prophesying*.⁶ Perkins's well known Puritan "plain style" approach consisted of four main parts:

⁴James Barry Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1989), 116.

⁵Caroline Francis Richardson, *English Preachers and Preaching: 1640-1670* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 80. Nevertheless, such examples do occasionally appear. When preaching on the parable of the sower, Keach said, "I have heard of a woman that chose to go to the place of God's worship, or where, and when the word was preached, that she might have a sound sleep; she found at such times she could sooner sleep, than at any other time or place." See Benjamin Keach, *Exposition of the Parables* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974), 131.

⁶Citations from the writings of Keach and others of his era contain numerous instances of variant spellings, unusual punctuation and capitalization, etc. These differences are preserved verbatim within this dissertation.

1. To read the Text distinctly out of the Canonick Scriptures.
2. To give the sense and understanding of it being read, by the Scripture it selfe.
3. To collect a few and profitable points of doctrine out of the naturall sense.
4. To applie . . . the doctrines rightly collected . . . in a simple and plaine speech.⁷

Nevertheless, Keach's sermons possessed traits that were indicative of a preaching style that was moving past the era of Puritanism. In particular, the rhetorical eloquence and depth of learning that were so characteristic of Puritan sermons were replaced by a more "homely and vivid" style that identified with a wider audience.⁸

In his published sermons, Keach often used multiple biblical passages to undergird each point. As one who believed fervently in the "analogy of faith," Keach knew that Scripture interprets Scripture—God's Word is its own best commentator. Although the marginal notes of his sermons do contain references to the published works of the scholars and "modern divines" whom he cited in his messages, Keach primarily used the margins to include related biblical texts. While it is unclear whether Keach actually mentioned each of these individual passages in the verbal delivery of his sermons, it is at least likely that the content of these supplementary texts helped to direct the course of his messages.

Occasionally, Keach also employed simple, sometimes humorous, illustrations. In his *God Acknowledged*, for example, Keach pictured those who dispense with the idea of God's involvement in human existence: "Such who do not Acknowledge, that all the good things they receive, to come from *God*; but ascribe it to their [own] care, wisdom and industry, or secondary causes: as I heard of a wicked Man, who had a plentiful crop of Corn; and a neighbour observing it, bid him Praise *God* for it; Praise *God*, said he, praise my dung-cart[!] Such men be sure Acknowledge not *God*."⁹

⁷William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophesying: Or a Treatise Concerning the sacred and onely true manner and methode of Preaching*, trans. Thomas Tuke (London, 1607), 148.

⁸W. Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of its Literary Aspects* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 371.

⁹Benjamin Keach, *God Acknowledged: or, the True Interest of the Nation, opened in a sermon preached Dec. 11, 1695, a Day of Public Prayer and Humiliation* (London, 1696), 34.

One of the first scholars to pursue serious inquiry about Keach has observed that “the homiletical construction of Keach’s sermons was that of his day. He would give the text, the Biblical context, then propound his propositions or ‘doctrines’ in a logical order. . . . He often listed fifteen or twenty reasons why his ‘doctrines’ were valid, then closed with the ‘uses’ or application.”¹⁰

In all, Keach published 224 different sermons. As Vaughn has indicated, however, Keach was not opposed to reusing and republishing his own material; in fact, it was “a regular phenomenon in Keach’s work.”¹¹ At least four sermons that Keach published in the 1690s reappear—usually with some mild editing—in his *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled* (1701). These four include *The Counterfeit Christian* (2), *An Ax Laid to the Root* (1), and *A Trumpet Blown in Zion* (1). Keach’s published sermons can be divided into three basic types: pastoral sermons (4), doctrinal sermons (68), and parabolical sermons (152).¹²

Pastoral Sermons

Sermon: *A Summons to the Grave* (1676)

This sermon is the earliest of Keach’s published messages. Keach delivered this sermon at the funeral of his good friend, John Norcott, on March 28, 1676. Norcott

¹⁰William Eugene Spears, “The Baptist Movement in England and in the Late Seventeenth Century as Reflected in the Work and Thought of Benjamin Keach, 1640-1704” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1953), 144.

¹¹Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology,” 97.

¹²Keach’s *Exposition of the Parables* contains 147 sermons from forty-nine biblical passages. *Exposition of the Parables* is the modern reprint of Keach’s *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled, or, exposition of all the parables, and many express similitudes* (London, 1701). Beeke also has tallied 147 sermons in Keach’s volume on the parables. See Joel Beeke, “Biographical Preface,” in Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification: The Biblical Doctrine of Justification Without Works* (London, 1692; Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 15. In the original edition, Keach’s introduction to *Gospel Mysteries Unveil’d* is called “Sermon I,” and is an actual sermon based on the text of Matt 13:34-35. However, the index to the original edition does not list this sermon, because it includes only the sermons from the parables. The modern version, *Exposition of the Parables*, renders this initial message simply as an “Introduction,” and does not indicate that it is actually a sermon. The textual basis for this sermon is not itself a parable, but it speaks of Jesus’ use of parables as a tool for communication.

had been an earlier leader of the London Particular Baptists. Walker notes that “Keach was living at this time in Shadwell and so Norcott, living in Wapping on the north bank of the Thames and downstream from London Bridge, would have been his near neighbour.”¹³ Both Keach and Norcott had provided prefatory material for Josias Bonham’s *The Churches Glory: or, the Becoming Ornament*, a work on personal holiness with the intention of edifying the church, published in 1674.¹⁴

The text for *A Summons to the Grave* was Psalm 89:48, which reads, “What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?” Walker has observed that even this early sermon largely aligns with Keach’s overall preaching style.

There is much in this sermon that is typical of Keach, and reflects some of the main features of Puritan preaching in particular. In this funeral sermon we are able to see two elements that are found in all of Keach’s preaching: his intention to awaken the conscience of the unconverted so that they will see their danger and turn to Christ for salvation, and his ability to bring comfort in times of grief by pointing them to the power and care of Christ.¹⁵

In this funeral message, Keach refers to several prominent biblical characters. In moving from one of these individuals to another, he mentions the inevitability of their deaths, and conveys that all will come to death, which is a part of God’s design.¹⁶

As Keach described his friend in the epistle dedicatory, he indicated his great affection for Norcott and his ministry.

¹³Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 177.

¹⁴Josias Bonham, *The Churches Glory: or, the Becoming Ornament* (London, 1674), xxi-xxviii. Norcott’s experiences are summarized in a recent brief essay. See Geoffrey F. Nuttall, “Another Baptist Ejection (1662): The Case of John Norcott,” in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes with John H. Y. Briggs (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 185-88.

¹⁵Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 180.

¹⁶Benjamin Keach, *A Summons to the Grave, or the Necessity of a Timely Preparation for Death. Demonstrated in a sermon preached at the funeral of that most eminent and faithful servant of Jesus Christ Mr John Norcott. Who departed this life March 24, 1675/76* (London, 1676), 43-54.

[A]las, I cannot blame you for your mourning, he was a most sweet and choice Preacher, most excellent skill had he to dive into Gospel-Mysteries; he saw, if I may say without offence, as far into a Text of Scripture, as most men now surviving, and as careful in dividing of the Word that every one might have a portion in season; O how sweetly has this Trumpet sounded in your ears, what spiritual joy hath it raised in your hearts! O how powerful in Prayer hath he been! Hath not his prayers and Tears over sinking sinners, tended to melt their Adamant hearts! O the thronging there hath been about him, no marvel he had precious bread always to break unto the children; he knew how to feed with milk, and how and when to feed with strong meat; It was his delight, I am satisfied, to do his Masters work, and in doing of it, I may say, he loved not his life unto the death.¹⁷

As Keach lamented Norcott's passing, he passionately conveyed his sorrow and loss, even as he sought to encourage his audience.

Is it so? Must all die? Can none deliver their own souls from the power of the grave? Must Husbands die, dear Husbands? Must Fathers die, yea tender Fathers? Must Friends, our dearest Friends die? Ministers, nay, our choice and godly Pastors, must they die too? Oh greedy Death! Oh cruel Tirant! Oh that ever we sinned! This may well be for a Lamentation. *Samuel* died, and *Israel* made great Lamentations for him. Your *Samuel* is gone, but no asking for him again, he cannot come.¹⁸

At this point in the sermon, Keach begins to compare gospel ministers to those employed in other secular occupations: laborers, shepherds, fathers, pilots, and captains.¹⁹ These comparisons surely served as the basis for a portion of Keach's *Tropologia* (1681), in one section of which he portrays ministers as having a wide spectrum of duties. Walker apparently agrees.

In *Tropologia* he likens ministers to angels, stars, labourers, watchmen, trumpeters, spokesmen, clouds, fathers, stewards, planters, builders, pillars and shepherds, ambassadors and rulers. . . . [This] shows us how Keach, by incorporating such figures of speech into his sermon, was already developing his framework of thought in the mid-1670s before he published his encyclopedic tome in 1681.²⁰

¹⁷Ibid., v.

¹⁸Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁹Ibid., 48-52.

²⁰Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 180. Walker correctly cites a publication date of 1681 for Keach's *Tropologia*, but the latter part of the work—often called *Troposchemalogia*—was not completed and published until 1682.

One prominent example of illustration in this sermon is Keach's comparison of ministers to the pilots of seafaring vessels: "Ministers are and fitly may be compared to Pilots; the Church to a Ship passing through a troublesome Ocean, amongst many Rocks and Sands; and when such die, how shall the poor Marriners steer, especially, considering the dangerous and grievous storms that do now appear: is not this a ground of lamentation."²¹

Sermon: *The Everlasting Covenant* (1693)

This sermon was preached at the funeral of Henry Forty, the pastor of a church in Abingdon in Berkshire. Forty died on January 25, 1693, and this sermon was delivered four days later on January 29. Forty had spent twelve years in prison for the sake of the gospel.²² A lengthy period of illness ultimately resulted in Forty's passing.²³

According to Keach, the text for Forty's funeral sermon, 2 Samuel 23:5, "was left me by our honoured Brother deceas'd, on his Death-Bed."²⁴ The text reads, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." Keach used this opportunity to address those who differentiated between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. For Keach, these two covenants were identical.

Apparently, Keach preached parts of this sermon on two consecutive Sundays, and then added some final material before submitting it to be printed. In the material prefatory to the sermon, Keach uses the covenant itself as a metaphor, both to enable

²¹Keach, *A Summons to the Grave*, 50.

²²Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant, a sweet cordial for a drooping soul or, The excellent nature of the Covenant of Grace opened: in a sermon preached January the 29th. At the funeral of Mr. Henry Forty. An elegy upon death &c.* (London, 1693), 37.

²³Ibid., 44.

²⁴Ibid., ii.

understanding and to provide reassurance for those who were in the depths of mourning following Forty's passing.

This Covenant is the only *City of Refuge*, for a distressed Soul, to fly to for *Sanctuary*, when *all the billows and waves of Temptations run over him*, or Satan doth furiously assault him: If We fly to this Armory, We can never want Weapons to resist the Devil, nor doubt of Success against him.²⁵

Copeland has said, "While he spoke of the covenant in many places, Forty's funeral sermon, *The Everlasting Covenant*, utilized its entire breadth to address the nature of the covenant."²⁶ When this sermon is coupled with the fourteen sermons that Keach published in 1698 as *The Display of Glorious Grace*, they convey the full measure of Keach's understanding of the covenant of grace. Nettles has noted, "The covenant and all its accompanying blessings are the driving force in, and give coherence to, Keach's entire theological scheme."²⁷ For Keach, the covenant of grace became the means that allowed all the elect to break the bonds with the covenant of works.²⁸

Sermon: *A Call to Weeping* (1699)

The last funeral sermon that Keach published was *A Call to Weeping*, a message delivered at the funeral of Elizabeth Westen on March 20, 1699.²⁹ Unlike his other published funeral sermons, this one was not for a fellow pastor. Elizabeth was the wife of John Westen and had died at the age of thirty-eight. Keach's apparent familiarity with both John and Elizabeth implies that they were a vital part of his congregation. In

²⁵Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, ii.

²⁶David A. Copeland, *Benjamin Keach and the Development of Baptist Traditions in Seventeenth-Century England* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 40.

²⁷Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2005), 1:167.

²⁸Copeland, *Benjamin Keach and the Development of Baptist Traditions*, 42.

²⁹At least one of Keach's sermons in *Exposition of the Parables* contains material from another funeral sermon that he preached. His sermon "Christ the Door of the Sheep," based on John 10:1-9, includes a marginal note that reads, "The substance of what here is said was delivered at the funeral of Mr. James Willmut, June 8, who died Jun 5, 1701." See Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 881.

keeping with the family's request that the sermon be published, Keach edited the manuscript and submitted it to be printed just three days later on March 23.³⁰

Elizabeth had selected the text for the funeral sermon before her death. She chose Luke 23:28, which reads, "But Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.'" From this text, Keach developed two main points: 1) since Elizabeth had died a believer in Jesus Christ, no reason for weeping existed, and 2) any not truly believing in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin have cause to weep for themselves.³¹

Keach deliberates on the first point more than the second, and he focuses heavily on the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ and His dual nature as "God-Man," a favorite reference of Keach's to the divine and human natures fully present in the Person of Jesus Christ.³² Keach's theology of Jesus Christ that is evident in this sermon is thoroughly orthodox, founded upon Scripture and in agreement with the historic creeds and confessions.

Although the subject of death typically prompts people to envision the loss of loved ones and the pain of separation, in one instance in this sermon, Keach used "Death" instead as an illustration in order to provide comfort and peace to his readers.

Death is the Passage into the *True Canaan*, that flows with Milk and Honey, with Innocence, and Happiness for ever; there is nothing which can disturb the Peace, or corrupt the Purity of the Blessed that die in the Lord: All the Faculties of the Soul are raised to the highest Degrees of Natural and Divine Perfection now they are only renewed, but at Death elevated to the highest pitch; the *Understanding* clear, the *Memory* firm, the *Will*, and *Affections* ardent and vigorous.³³

³⁰Benjamin Keach, *A Call to Weeping: or, A Warning touching approaching Miseries. In a sermon preached on the 20th day of March 1699. At the funeral of Mrs Elizabeth Westen, late wife of Mr John Westen* (London, 1699), 4.

³¹*Ibid.*, 9-11.

³²*Ibid.*, 16. When addressing the subject of Christology in many of his sermons, Keach commonly refers to Jesus Christ as "God-Man."

³³*Ibid.*, 33.

As many preachers are prone to do, from time to time Keach reused illustrations from past sermons. In *A Call to Weeping*, he cites the example of King Philip of Macedon and his daily reminder of mortality: “I have read that *Philip King of Macedon* commanded one of his *Pages* to wake him every Morning by crying at his Chamber Door, *Sir remember you are a Man*: He disdained not to be put in mind of his uncertain Breath by his sorry Page; we ought to consider the Certainty of Death.”³⁴

Keach had used this same illustration twenty-three years earlier in his funeral sermon for John Norcott, *A Summons to the Grave*: “I have read, that *Philip King of Macedon*, commanded one of his Pages to awake him every Morning and call aloud to him, *Sir, remember you are a man*: This great Monarch did not disdain to be rouzed every day from sleep with the News of death, though it was but by the Mouth of his poor sorry Page.”³⁵

Keach held fast to a firmly biblical Christology, and he was aware that heresies of many kinds abounded in his day, which would necessarily receive appropriate judgment from God. Speaking of the “horrid Prophaneness of these Times,” Keach proclaimed the biblical doctrines of Jesus Christ to his grieving audience.

Is not the Contempt of all Revealed Religion and the treading of Christ underfoot a sad symptom of Approaching Judgments. Instead of being *Christianized* are we not in danger of being *Paganized*, while Natural Religion is cryed up as sufficient to save mens Souls; men will not believe things which their natural depraved Human Reason, cannot comprehend tho the Gospel is full of Mysteries, yet some are so Bold to affirm there is nothing mysterious in it: But is it not a Mystery to believe Three to be One, and One to be Three; to believe the Father not older then the Son, and the Son to be equal with the Father; to believe in one nature there are three Persons, and in one Person two Natures; to believe the *Ancient of Days* to become a *Babe of a Day old*, to believe a *Virgin* to have been a *Mother*, and her Son to be her Creator, to believe a man is freely forgiven and Pardoned; and yet all his Debts were fully paid; to believe we are Just and without Sin, and yet Sinners; and that we are Justified and Righteous by another Righteousness. I say some, these are your Fancies and Idle Dreams; why so? because they by their Human Reason can't comprehend them. And thus to these Gentiles, the Preaching of the Gospel is accounted *foolishness* as it was of Old to the Learned Greeks,

³⁴Ibid., 8.

³⁵Keach, *A Summons to the Grave*, viii.

1 Cor. 1:18-23. How boldly do some deny the Deity of the Blessed Jesus? what cursed Books daily come forth.³⁶

Sermon: *God Acknowledged* (1696)

This sermon was preached on Sunday, December 11, 1695, a day appointed by King William III for public prayer and humiliation. The sermon text was Proverbs 3:6, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” The sermon served as a sobering reminder both to the whole nation and to individuals that God held their lives, their fortunes, and their futures in His almighty hand. In return, God promised guidance for those who would wait humbly upon Him.

In *God Acknowledged*, Keach sought to deal with a single proposition: “That it is the Indispensible Duty of every Man, or all Men who are Sons of Wisdom, in every thing they enter upon or go about to do, to Acknowledge God, which they must do, if they would Prosper or meet with Success.”³⁷ While this sermon basically follows Keach’s typical sermonic form (doctrines, applications, exhortations), this message has greater formality than many of his other sermons. It is possible that the unusual nature of the occasion of this sermon prompted Keach to modify his usual approach.

Throughout this sermon, Keach presents clearly the absolute sovereignty of God in all matters. He understands that God holds all things under His control and works all things according to His glorious purposes. Prior to offering specific applications, Keach summarized God’s complete authority.

We should *acknowledge God in all our Ways*, because God can do Wonders in the way of his working for his People, when they seek to him: What Wonders did he do of old? *His Hand is not shortened that he cannot Save*: When things are past help or remedy with Men, ‘tis a fit opportunity for God to work: *In the Mount it shall be seen*. He can restrain the Passions of Men, the Waves of the Sea, and the Tumults of the People; he changed *Esau’s Heart to Jacob*; he caused the *Egyptians* to lend their Jewels to the *Israelites*; he can cut off the Spirits of Princes, or strike them with a Panuick Fear, and cause them to fly when none pursues them: He raised up new Troubles upon *Saul*, and made him cease persuing of *David*, when he

³⁶Keach, *A Call to Weeping*, 52-54.

³⁷Keach, *God Acknowledged*, 5.

was in danger. . . . He can make our Enemies to act for our good; he caused *Cyrus* to proclaim Liberty to build *Jerusalem*, and God's own Temple. And how he did turn the Counsel of *Achitophel* into Foolishness, at the Prayer of *David*.³⁸

Significantly, Benjamin Franklin was responsible for printing and selling this very sermon in Philadelphia in 1738, although why he chose to reissue it is not entirely clear.³⁹ Elias Keach, Benjamin's son, had journeyed to Philadelphia in the 1680s and spent approximately five years there preaching and assisting in the establishment of Baptist churches.⁴⁰ Upon his return to England, Elias remained in contact with several of his fellow Baptists in America and even sent copies of his father's books to them.⁴¹ Perhaps an appetite for Benjamin Keach's works still lingered nearly fifty years later, prompting Franklin to publish *God Acknowledged*.

Doctrinal Sermons

Sermon Collection: *The Marrow of True Justification* (1692)

Based on the text of Romans 4:5, these two sermons were the first of several published volleys against an heretical teaching that was advocated by none less than the well known Puritan, Richard Baxter. This "Neonomian" or new law controversy affirmed that "obedience to a new law brought in by Christ—an obedience that took the form of saving faith and holy living—was the actual basis of one's personal saving righteousness."⁴²

³⁸Ibid., 31.

³⁹Charles Evans, *American Bibliography: a chronological dictionary of all books, pamphlets, and periodical publications printed in the United States of America from the genesis of printing in 1639 down to and including the year 1820*, vol. 2 (New York: P. Smith, 1941), 128.

⁴⁰Several sources consulted fail to agree on the actual year of Elias' voyage, putting it between 1684 and 1687. See Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 245; Thomas R. McKibbens, *The Forgotten Heritage: A Lineage of Great Baptist Preaching* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), 129; Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Cruikshank and Collins, 1770), 9-11.

⁴¹Edwards, *Materials Towards a History*, 55.

⁴²Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 334.

Vaughn has noted that justification “was a hotly debated theological topic in seventeenth-century England. . . . There was legitimate reason for Keach’s concern, because Baxter believed in a kind of justification by works.”⁴³ Keach could not let such a pivotal doctrine as justification remain undefended, and he “expounded key aspects of the orthodox doctrine of justification by arguing that all the good works done by that sinner are totally excluded in the justification of a sinner in the sight of God. Justification is wholly due to the free grace of God through the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith.”⁴⁴

In his introduction to the modern reprint, Beeke affirms that Keach’s *The Marrow of True Justification* “makes for a great read still today both in addressing false teaching and in promoting the positive Reformation view of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ and His imputed righteousness. This is one of the best works ever written on the subject. Here the central theme of the Christian gospel and the sure ground of the believer’s hope is expounded with profound scriptural clarity.”⁴⁵

Keach defended the doctrine of justification so fervently for two primary reasons: it gives glory to the perfections of Christ, and sinners may find comfort by no other means.⁴⁶ Keach said that “the Matter of Justification is one and the same; the *Balsam* that cures our *Malady* . . . ‘tis Christ’s Death, Christ’s blood, the Merits of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷

⁴³J. Barry Vaughn, “Benjamin Keach,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 56.

⁴⁴Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 342.

⁴⁵Beeke, “Biographical Preface,” 16.

⁴⁶Nettles, *The Baptists*, 171.

⁴⁷Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification: or Justification without Works: (opened in two sermons at Horselydown) now published with some additions* (London, 1692), 32.

Keach concluded his second sermon with a powerful appeal for his audience to reject any hint of self-trust and to depend only upon Jesus Christ.

Tremble ye who trust in your Moral, or Gospel-Obedience, your Acts of Mercy, or good Deeds, and holy Lives. Tremble ye who rest on your Duties, who glory in your knowledge, and outward Privileges; you fast, and pray, and hear Sermons, and so you may, and go to Hell at last; notwithstanding, these things you must do, but yet not seek to be justified thereby; do them as Duties in point of Performance; but lay them down in point of Dependence.⁴⁸

Sermon Collection: *A Golden Mine Opened* (1694)

This is the second-largest collection of Keach's published sermons. Although the subtitle indicates that "near Forty" sermons were included, *A Golden Mine Opened* actually contains only thirty-six. This collection was assembled from four groups of sermons, each based on a different biblical text, and some of these groups were published separately from this volume. These groups include *A Trumpet Blown in Zion or an Allarm in God's Holy Mountain* (2), *The Blessedness of Christ's Sheep or No Final Falling from a State of true Grace* (16), *The Trial of the False Professor or The Danger of Final Apostacy* (3), and *The Great Salvation or The Salvation of the Gospel Great and Glorious* (15). The sermons in Keach's *A Golden Mine Opened* "present a varied character, a good deal of strength, and not a few quaintnesses in . . . both title and treatment."⁴⁹

Keach declared his purpose for publishing *A Golden Mine Opened*: "I have, it is true, touched upon several controvertible Points; but not as they are Matters of Controversy, but to clear up the Truths of Christ for the Establishment and Comfort of the People committed to my Care. . . . The grand Controversy here insisted upon, is that

⁴⁸Ibid., 35.

⁴⁹Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching: From the Close of the Reformation Period to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 2:185.

about *Election*, and the *Saints Final Perseverance*, which I hope the Reader will find to his satisfaction confirmed.”⁵⁰

In *A Trumpet Blown in Zion*, Keach bases his sermons on Matthew 3:12, “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Keach’s approach in *A Trumpet Blown in Zion* is not unlike that of his *An Ax Laid to the Root*, especially since both collections of sermons are taken from Matthew 3. In fact, Keach notes, “Our text is *Metaphorical*, and as touching the main Scope and Coherence of it, it is one and the same with the 10th verse of this Chapter, which I have already spoken unto, and lately published the *Sermons* unto the World.”⁵¹

These two sermons of *A Trumpet Blown in Zion* were preached on February 5 and March 12, 1693. In the first, Keach included the intended flow and direction of his message: text, terms (images), doctrine, and application. Keach was able to complete all of these tasks in the first sermon, but in the second, he focused on a specific point of doctrine and then addressed the accounts of Francis Spira (Italian) and John Child, two men who had both apostatized from the faith and had committed suicide following severe periods of emotional despair, melancholy, and depression. Keach had known Child personally; indeed, both were from Buckinghamshire. Keach endeavored to make clear to both his congregation and readership that the approaching judgment necessitated careful self-examination and abandonment of personal sin.⁵² Keach concluded this

⁵⁰Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened; or, The Glory of God’s Rich Grace Displayed in the Mediator to Believers: and His Direful Wrath against Impenitent Sinners. With the Substance of near Forty Sermons upon several Subjects* (London, 1694), iv.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 1. Keach edited and republished the first of these sermons in his *Exposition of the Parables*. See Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 40.

⁵²Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, 44-52. For a fuller treatment of Spira and Child, see Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 193-97.

second sermon with an ominous summary of the terrors, anguish, and despair of eternal hell.

The Blessedness of Christ's Sheep is a collection of sixteen sermons that deal with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. All of these messages are based upon John 10:27-28, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The first five sermons are derived from John 10:27, and the latter eleven are founded upon John 10:28.

Walker notes that Keach "took a zoom lens and focused closer attention on one specific part of the covenant of grace (or peace), namely, the perseverance of the saints. Keach presents the biblical case for this doctrine by presenting eleven arguments."⁵³ Keach demonstrated that genuine saints are held securely in the grip of Jesus Christ, and they cannot lose their salvation. People do not achieve righteousness with God, nor do they maintain it. The unconditional election of God establishes and secures the salvation of sinners.⁵⁴

The Trial of the False Professor is a group of three sermons based on Hebrews 6:4-6, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." It is significant that these sermons follow those of *The Blessedness of Christ's Sheep*, since the doctrine of perseverance is of primary concern here as well. At the outset, Keach said, "[B]efore I entered upon this Text, I resolved, in the strength of God, to endeavour to prove the Impossibility of their final Falling, who are True

⁵³Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 261.

⁵⁴Walker provides a good summary of Keach's eleven arguments for the eternal security of the believer. See *Ibid.*, 260-66.

Believers, or such who have Real Union with Jesus Christ, which I hope I have effectually done.”⁵⁵

In the first sermon, Keach examines in detail both what the passage says and what it does not say, ultimately concluding that many persons have some quantity of knowledge about God and an awareness of their sin, but they have never professed true faith in Christ and have not leaned wholly upon Him for salvation. Clearly, self-reliance is still operative in these individuals, and unless they forsake any dependence upon themselves, they cannot experience salvation.

In the second message, Keach investigates the “heavenly gift” referenced in the text. He determines that some who encounter the “goodness and excellency” of the gospel can be so affected by it that they never move from awareness to response. Faith is not exercised; only a taste has been procured.⁵⁶ Keach provides substantial material for reflection and application in his conclusion.

The final sermon focuses on “the powers of the world to come,” the last part of Keach’s sermon text. As with the subjects of the former message, many have only sampled the glorious salvation offered them in Christ, but they have not experienced the fullness of redemption. Keach notes that such persons will not come to repentance—in their minds, there is no compelling need. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit of God: declaring that His witness of salvation in the Son of God is false. These individuals are not saved. Keach states, “[T]he Holy Ghost hath utterly forsaken them, and withdrawn all his Operations from them for ever, whose work it is alone to renew and work Repentance in the Hearts of Sinners: Men cannot repent, when the Holy Spirit hath utterly left them; no, nor have any desire to repent.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, 318.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 334.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 365.

The Great Salvation is a sermon series of fifteen messages on the doctrine of soteriology. The focal passage for the entire series is Hebrews 2:3, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” Walker notes that Keach “divided up his text into two doctrines. First, there were ‘the ways in which salvation is great and glorious’ (the first seven sermons) and second, there were [the ways by which] ‘the means of this salvation may be neglected’ (the remaining eight sermons).”⁵⁸ Keach knew it was necessary that he preach the wonders and greatness of salvation in Jesus Christ, as well as the horrors and terrors that separation from God would bring. In this sense, Keach was balanced in his preaching—he neither sugarcoated the gospel nor shied away from the reality of judgment for sin.

Sermon Collection: *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven* (1698)

This collection of four sermons was submitted for publication on November 4, 1697; however, based on the dates recorded in the margins, it is significant that these sermons were delivered approximately two years earlier, in October and November of 1695. All four of these messages are based on the same text, Genesis 28:12, which reads, “And [Jacob] dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”

In the prefatory material to these messages, Keach dedicates them to six Particular Baptist churches in Hampshire. Apparently, Keach was well acquainted with these churches and their pastors, having traveled to visit them previously on behalf of the national assembly. While in the midst of these congregations, Keach preached these sermons to them, and they later persuaded him to publish them. This may account for the

⁵⁸Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 259.

amount of time that elapsed between the delivery of these sermons and their publication.⁵⁹

The first message focuses predominantly on portraying Jesus Christ as the ladder, applying many aspects of His nature to it. Keach's Christology is excellent, if somewhat strangely utilized. In the second sermon, he is able to demonstrate convincingly that Jesus Christ is Priest, King, and Prophet, and Keach displays some remarkable skill in comparing Jesus to an enormous array of objects and people in Scripture, showing how He is the fullness of each of them.⁶⁰ The third sermon is concerned with exalting and admiring Christ for Who He is. The following exclamation is one example.

Behold this Ladder! Is it not made of beaten Gold? Is it not a costly Ladder, of more Worth than ten thousand Worlds? What are Pearls or Diamonds to this Pearl? What precious Stones may be compared to this precious tryed Stone? This *Ladder* is made of *one precious Stone*, yet so made, that there is firm and sure Footing in it for all that venture thereon, to carry them to Heaven.⁶¹

The fourth and final sermon focuses on angels, the subject of the latter part of Genesis 28:12. In particular, Keach observes that angels are only Christ's messengers, that they are the fellow servants of believers, that they follow Jesus' commands explicitly, and that they minister to the saints.

⁵⁹Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (London, 1740), 4:306. Crosby says, "He was sent by an *association* to preach in several parts of the kingdom, and visit the *baptized* churches. He met with great success in his journey, and had Mr. *Benjamin Dennis* to accompany him. His zeal for the *baptized* interest appeared, not only by his writings in defence of it, but also in encouraging of ministers, who came unto him from all parts, and getting several meeting-houses erected for the public worship of God; as, one in *Limehouse*, another in *Rotherhithe*; one in *White-street, Southwark*, and another at *Barkin* in *Essex*." Clearly, Keach's reputation and ability as a preacher and Particular Baptist leader gave him opportunities to minister in London and the surrounding areas.

⁶⁰Benjamin Keach, *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven, or Jacob's ladder improved. Containing four Sermons lately preached on Genesis XXVII. XII. Wherein the Doctrine of Free-Grace is display'd, through Jesus Christ. Also, discovering the Nature, Office, and Ministration of holy Angels. To which is added one sermon on Rom. 8.1. With some short reflections on Mr. Samuel Clarke's new book, intituled Scripture Justification* (London, 1698), 41-52.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 75.

A fifth sermon was appended to these four—Keach’s *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes*, which dealt primarily with the Neonomian controversy. Perhaps Keach elected to join these sermons together because of their fundamentally similar themes—true justification comes only through Jesus Christ. In the prefatory material to *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven*, Keach says, “The good Lord bless you all, and establish you in the Doctrine of free *Justification*, by Christ alone, and in all other Fundamental Truths, and that you may be kept from all extreams.”⁶²

Sermon: *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes* (1698)

This is a single sermon that Keach preached on Romans 8:1 concerning the doctrine of eternal justification.⁶³ Although Keach affirmed that God graciously elected sinners to salvation in eternity past, he believed that such persons were still in their sins and lost until the point at which they came to faith in Jesus Christ. Those who held to the position of eternal justification understood that God had already declared righteous those whom He elected, even though they had not yet obeyed the gospel.

Apparently, someone in Keach’s congregation was concerned that Keach did not affirm eternal justification. Keach’s opening remarks relate the encounter.

My preaching upon this Subject was occasioned by what I met with from a gracious Person’s mouth (who is a Member of the Church under my charge) who seemed very uneasy in her Communion, because in my preaching she said, tho I hold forth the Doctrine of free Grace, and exalt Christ, yet do positively maintain that the Elect are under Wrath, or in a lamentable state before calling, or before they are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit, or are in a State of Union with him: which might I fear be occasioned through a mistake of that Doctrine some in this City of late so much insist on . . . not that any of our Brethren, I hope, that preach that Doctrine do believe that the Elect are not under the Sentence of Condemnation and Wrath while they abide in the first *Adam*.⁶⁴

⁶²Ibid., iv.

⁶³Vaughn, “Benjamin Keach,” 60.

⁶⁴Benjamin Keach, *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes. Wherein it is proved that the whole First Adam was condemned, and the whole Second Adam justified* (London, 1698), iii.

In the postscript of Keach's *The Marrow of True Justification*, he stated that "if this meets with kind Reception, and I have Encouragement, I shall publish two Sermons more (God willing) and fully demonstrate, That Justification is by the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness, or by Grace alone; and the Nature of Imputation opened, together how we are to understand the change of Persons."⁶⁵

In the prefatory material to *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes*, Keach reaffirmed his views on the doctrine of justification, and he suggests that the sermon is, in fact, the promised sequel that he had mentioned earlier in *The Marrow of True Justification*.

None have reason to think that I favour in the least the *Arminian* or *Baxterian* Errors, considering what I have lately published on the great Doctrine of Justification, in two Sermons on Rom. 4.5, which Doctrine I have farther confirmed in those Sermons preached from the Text this is grounded upon, viz. Rom. 8.1 (this being only the first) in which the Nature of our mystical Union with Christ is opened, and the sweet Consolation that flows therefrom to all Believers largely applied.⁶⁶

Keach did not publish the second sermon, however. Apparently, as he was in the process of submitting his work—containing two sermons on Romans 8:1—to the press, he encountered Samuel Clarke's newly published *Scripture Justification*, and Keach felt impressed to offer a response to it immediately. He elected to append a seventeen-page postscript to his initial sermon on Romans 8:1, in which he flatly stated that Clarke was "striving to revive and maintain the *Baxterian* Error, with such Confidence and barefacedness, that if some able Pen do not answer him, it may do much harm to weak and unwary Christians."⁶⁷

⁶⁵Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification*, 39.

⁶⁶Keach, *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes*, iv. Although Keach did not publish a second sermon on Rom 8:1, it does appear that he did preach such a message, since this one was "the first." It seems likely that Keach felt that his comments on Clarke's *Scripture Justification* would be of far greater benefit than the contents of his second sermon. By offering such a rapid response to Clarke, Keach may have hoped to reduce the overall impact of Clarke's arguments.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 36.

**Sermon Collection: *The Display of
Glorious Grace* (1698)**

This collection of fourteen sermons was sent to the press on May 12, 1698. All of the sermons were based on the text of Isaiah 54:10, which reads, “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.” Based on the marginal notes that Keach included, the latter nine sermons were preached in the early months of 1698, which suggests that the first five messages were delivered late in the year 1697.⁶⁸ Walker has noted that Keach preached these messages “at a time when peace in Europe was uppermost in the mind of the nation, . . . [although] Keach told his hearers he was pessimistic about how long it would last. Rather, he preferred to draw their attention to . . . a peace that God had promised in the gospel.”⁶⁹

This series of sermons is a comprehensive study of the covenant of grace (peace) and the nature of true justification. Keach demonstrates a ready command of the Scriptures as he supports each point of his sermons. Although he cannot entirely avoid repeating material from one sermon to the next, Keach provides a thorough outline of the foundational doctrines of Reformed soteriology. At the same time, he is able to refute the most prominent theological errors of the day and to appeal frequently both to the lost to embrace the covenant and to the saved to live in alignment with their covenant commitments to God and the church. Throughout these messages, Keach boldly affirms each of the doctrines of grace.

Referring to the wonder of God’s sovereign goodness toward man, Keach exclaims, “How amazingly doth it flow forth in this Covenant to sinful Mankind? . . .

⁶⁸Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace: or the Covenant of Peace Opened. In Fourteen sermons lately preached in which the errors of the present day, about reconciliation and justification, are detected* (London, 1698), 130, 189, 205, 281. Keach indicated that he preached sermons 6, 9, 10, and 14 on January 7, February 6, February 10, and April 3, respectively. Assuming they were delivered chronologically, the first five of these sermons must have been preached in the latter months of 1697.

⁶⁹Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 252 n. 8.

Here is a Medicine provided before the Disease, a Pardon for Traitors before the Rebellion broke out. . . . What greater Demonstrations of Love, of Infinite Love could God give?"⁷⁰

Walker has noted the manner in which Keach portrayed the inescapable connection between the task of preaching and the glorious purpose of God in the gracious salvation of sinners.

This comprehensive plan of salvation not only formed the foundation for Keach's own understanding of God's work of salvation but also provided a unified overall structure for him as a preacher of God's free grace. In preaching this salvation Keach expected hearers to see the greatness of their salvation, and recognize that it was the work of God from beginning to end and that they could therefore rely on God entirely. He explained to them that as a result of the covenant of peace their sins were forgiven and they were justified by faith in Christ. . . . [T]hey had been brought to God, who was now at peace with them through Jesus Christ.⁷¹

Arguably, this collection of sermons finds Keach at his best in terms of his coherence of thought and reasoning, illustration and imagery, theological clarity, and passionate delivery. The basic progression of Keach's sermons answers the following questions: What is the covenant of grace? What are the covenant transactions? What is the nature of the covenant? What are the benefits and privileges of the covenant?

Sermon Collection: *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated* (1700)

This group of eleven sermons was submitted for publication on January 12, 1700. Their primary concern is "to prove that the seventh-day Sabbath had been abrogated and that the Lord's Day was a divine appointment."⁷² The messages are divided into two parts: the first seven pertain to the Jewish Sabbath and are taken from Galatians 4:10-11; the last four address the "Gospel Sabbath," and each is based on a

⁷⁰Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace*, 256.

⁷¹Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 255.

⁷²Ibid., 350 n. 45.

different New Testament text.⁷³ Keach affirmed the worship of the early church upon the first day of the week, and he believed that the Sabbath day was no longer compulsory, having been replaced by the Lord's Day.

Although Keach did not believe that those who worshipped on the Sabbath were practicing a particularly grievous error, some young men were creating division within his congregation, and Keach could not allow the dissension to continue. By virtue of Keach's biblical response to the false doctrine that was spreading through the church, the "controversy over the Jewish Sabbath ended at Horsleydown shortly after the publication of *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated*."⁷⁴ Crosby noted, "It stopped the growth of that opinion in his own congregation; and but three or four went off from him to those people that held that opinion."⁷⁵

Keach invested a considerable amount of time in researching not only the Scriptures but also the writings of other reputable biblical scholars on this subject in order to prepare these sermons. Specifically, he gleaned much of his material from John Owen, John Wallis, and Edmund Warren.⁷⁶ For Keach, Owen had long been a trusted source of insight and wisdom about many biblical and doctrinal matters. Keach was overjoyed that God blessed his efforts in these messages and made them fruitful.⁷⁷

⁷³Benjamin Keach, *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated: or, The Saturday Sabbatarians confuted. In Two Parts. First, Proving the Abrogation of the Old Seventh-day Sabbath. Secondly, That the Lord's-Day is of Divine appointment. Containing Several Sermons newly preach'd upon a special Occasion, wherein are many arguments not found in former Authors* (London, 1700). Sermon 1 of this section is based on Matt 28:20; sermon 2 is drawn from Heb 4:8-9; sermon 3 is founded upon Acts 20:7 and Rev 1:10; sermon 4 is not taken from any single text.

⁷⁴Copeland, *Benjamin Keach and the Development*, 62.

⁷⁵Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, 4:302.

⁷⁶Keach, *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated*, iv.

⁷⁷In addition to the localized success of his work, Crosby notes that Keach's "handling of the controversy . . . got him as much reputation as any of his *polemical* works. He had the honour to present one [copy of *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated*] into the hand of the archbishop of *Canterbury*, who highly approved of his performance, and received him into his favour and conversation." See Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, 4:302.

[T]he Brethren saw it was necessary for me to preach upon this Subject, which I my self perceived an absolute necessity to do; and praised be the Lord who hath blessed my Undertaking herein, and answered my hopes, which was not so much to regain those hot-headed and conceited young Men, as to establish, confirm and strengthen others; many being much startled, and doubting which Day they ought to observe, which the Ringleaders I perceived much gloried at, some of them giving it out, that they hoped to bring over [a] great part of the Congregation to their Opinion; but these seasonable and timely Endeavours, through the Blessing of God, have, I hope, finally prevented their Design . . . [a]nd several that were wavering told me how fully all their Doubts were resolved by hearing some of these Sermons preached.⁷⁸

Vaughn has shown that Keach's argument against observing the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week was basically arranged in three parts. First, Keach made clear that the fourth commandment's requirement of rest every seventh day was only part of the natural law and that the instruction to observe the Sabbath (seventh) day was part of the Mosaic Law which had been abrogated. Second, Keach demonstrated that Jesus did not keep the seventh-day Sabbath always. Finally, Keach revealed the two-fold purpose of the Sabbath: a memorial to God's work of creation and a foreshadowing of the coming of Christ. Vaughn concludes, "Both parts of [the Sabbath's] purpose are now redundant; Christ has come, the shadows have disappeared, and Christians should commemorate the new creation, not the old."⁷⁹

Parabolic Sermons

Sermon Collection: *The Counterfeit Christian* (1691)

The Counterfeit Christian is a collection of two sermons based on the text of Matthew 12:43-45, which is the parable of the unclean spirit. Keach later included material from both of these sermons in his *Exposition of the Parables* (1701). *The Counterfeit Christian* contained the first sermons that Keach had published since his funeral message, *A Summons to the Grave*, was published in 1676, some fifteen years

⁷⁸ Keach, *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated*, iii.

⁷⁹ Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology," 78. Vaughn provides an excellent summary of Keach's arguments in the sermons of *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated*. See pp. 76-84.

earlier. Walker notes that by this time, “the political and ecclesiastical climate in England had changed and persecution, at least in the forms that it had taken in the period 1660-1689, ceased.”⁸⁰

According to the marginal notes, Keach preached these two sermons in August of 1690, and he submitted them for printing nearly a year later on May 27, 1691. These sermons appear to have been the firstfruits of Keach’s intent to publish a thoroughly comprehensive work on the parables (and similitudes) of Jesus Christ. It seems that such an effort had not been attempted previously, or at least not until recently, as far as Keach was aware.

It is more than a Year since, I began a Morning-Exercise on the Lord’s-Day at seven a Clock, when I entred upon an Exposition of all the Parables and express Similitudes contained in the four Evangelists, according to the measure of Light and Knowledge received; though by reason of a Journey into the Countrey it has not been continued. The Explication of this Parabolical Speech of our Saviour, I have been prevailed with to make publick. And if this meets with Acceptance, I may in a short time publish Proposals for printing the whole; which in regard of the greatness of the Charge, cannot be done but by Subscriptions.⁸¹

For Keach, the central character of the parable was the counterfeit Christian. Externally, he bore the countenance of a genuine believer, but inside, he had no true love for Jesus Christ. Walker has provided an excellent summary of this individual.

The man in the parable was, in Keach’s estimation, a hypocrite, possessing only the common gifts and graces of the Spirit but with a religion comprised mainly of negatives. Keach provides a character sketch of the man he has in view. He has escaped some terrible evils and sins but the habits of sin are ingrained and his unclean nature remains unchanged. The man does not feel the purity of the law of God and thinks that sin is limited to the outward acts of sin. . . . Thus, while he may have undergone some changes in his life, they are not the changes associated with regeneration. Yet this is a man who does some good, who prays and hears sermons, has a kind of faith, has been baptized, has become a church member, perhaps even a

⁸⁰Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 270.

⁸¹Benjamin Keach, *The Counterfeit Christian or the Danger of Hypocrisy: Opened in Two sermons* (London, 1691), iii. Keach sold his works through the use of subscriptions many times. The practice of receiving subscriptions was fairly common in Keach’s day. See N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), 130.

preacher, and in the eyes of men lives a blameless life, yet he has never actually been regenerated and united to Christ.⁸²

At the conclusion of the message, Keach included a list of twelve pointed questions to aid not only self-deceived persons who believed themselves to be Christians, but also those who stood firmly in the faith who needed reassurance or who longed for greater personal holiness.

1. Were you ever thoroughly convinced of your sinful and lost Condition by Nature, and of that horrid Evil there is in Sin? Did you ever see Sin as the greatest Evil, most hateful to God, not only of the Effects of Sin, but also of the evil Nature of Sin, not only as it has made a Breach between God and Man, but has also defaced the Image of God in Man, and made us like the Devil, filling our Minds with Enmity against God, Godliness, and good Men.

2. Is there no secret Sin lived in and favoured, the evil Habit never being broke? Is not the World more in your Affections, Desires, and Thoughts, than Jesus Christ?

3. Are you willing to suffer and part with all that you have, rather than sin against God? Do you see more evil in the least Sin than in the greatest Suffering?

4. Do you as much desire to have your Sins mortified as pardoned, to be made holy as well as to be made happy? Do you love the Work of Holiness as well as the Reward of Holiness? Do you love the Word of God for that Purity which is in it, as well as the Advantage that comes by it?

5. Have you seen all your own Righteousness as filthy Rags, and have you been made poor in Spirit?

6. Have you received a whole Christ with a whole Heart? A whole Christ comprehends all his Offices, and a whole Heart includes all our Faculties: Is not your Heart divided?

7. Is Christ precious to you, even the chiefest among ten thousand? Are you the same in private as in publick? Do you love Christ above Son or Daughter? Do you love the Person of Christ?

8. Can you bear Reproof kindly for your Faults, and look upon him your best Friend, that deals most plainly with you.

9. Do you more pry into your own Faults, than into the Miscarriages of Others? Are you universal in your Obedience? And do you obey Christ's Word, his Commands, because you love him?

10. Have you been the same in a day of Adversity, as now you are in a day of Prosperity?

11. Can you say you hate Sin as Sin? Is your Mind spiritual, and set upon Heavenly things? Do you love the Saints, all the Saints, though some of them are not of your Sentiments in all Points of Religion?

12. Can you go comfortably on in the ways of Christ, though you meet with little esteem amongst the Saints? Can you stay your Souls upon God, though in

⁸²Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 270-71. As a young man, Keach's own son, Elias, acted for some time with very pious behavior, but he was not truly saved. Not until he traveled to Pennsylvania and tried to obtain favor with the Baptists there by dressing and behaving like his famous father did he come to realize his perilous condition. Preaching in the manner and style of Benjamin, Elias came under conviction of sin from the words of his own sermon, and he dated his conversion from that day. See Edwards, *Materials Toward a History*, 9.

Darkness, having no Light? Is all the stress of your Justification and Salvation built upon Jesus Christ?⁸³

Keach notes the grossly distorted view that the counterfeit Christian has of himself: “Self-love and self-flattery, are the Glasses in which a self-deceived Hypocrite looks daily in, in which he appears indeed that which he is not. Self-love is a Multiplying, yea a Magnifying-Glass. These never had a true sight of themselves, never saw their own Poverty, and horrid pollution of their Nature.”⁸⁴ Nettles has observed that “Keach continued emphasizing the sobering reality that the power of natural conscience, the preaching of the word, the rod of affliction, and different kinds of assistance and help may create a church member, a preacher, or one who in the eyes of men is of blameless life. Yet that person may not be [regenerate].”⁸⁵

Speaking to those who preach the Scriptures, Keach offers this very frank warning to prevent the proliferation of counterfeit believers in Jesus Christ.

Moreover, it sharply reproveth those Preachers whose great Business ‘tis to bring Men into visible Profession, and make them Members of Churches, whose Preaching tends more to bring Persons to Baptism, and to subject to external Ordinances, than to shew them the necessity of Regeneration, Faith, or a changed Heart. For the Lord’s sake take heed to what you do, if you would be pure from the Blood of all Men. We too often see when People are got into Churches, they conclude all is well; and when Conversion is preached, they do not think it concerns them, but others who are openly prophane: and thus they come to be blinded, maybe to their own Destruction; and if their Blood do not lie at some of your Doors, it will be well. I am afraid some nowadays like the Pharisees, may be said to compass Sea and Land to make Proselytes, but when made, are twofold more the Children of Hell than before, as our Savior intimates.⁸⁶

Sermon Collection: *An Ax Laid to the Root* (1693)

Keach apparently preached these three sermons in early 1693, since he submitted them for publication in March of that year. Although he had no initial

⁸³Keach, *The Counterfeit Christian*, 54-55.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁸⁵Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:340 n. 21. Also see Keach, *The Counterfeit Christian*, 29.

⁸⁶Keach, *The Counterfeit Christian*, 54.

intentions to have these three sermons printed, several in his congregation prevailed upon him to make them available to the public.⁸⁷ In addition to several other polemical works that Keach published, these messages staunchly refuted infant baptism. All three were based on Matthew 3:10, where John the Baptist proclaimed, “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.” Keach sought to argue that God had made a two-fold covenant with Abraham and that circumcision—the parallel to paedobaptism—was never connected to the covenant of grace but to the legal agreement God had made with Abraham’s offspring. In 1701, Keach republished the first of the three sermons of *An Ax Laid to the Root* in his *Exposition of the Parables*.

The first two sermons were published separately from the third as Part 1, and responses to John Flavel’s *Vindiciarum Vindex* (1691) and John Rothwell’s *Paedo-Baptismus vindicatur* (1693), treatises that endorsed infant baptism, were incorporated into this section of the work. The third sermon, along with Keach’s responses to Joshua Excell’s *A Serious Enquiry into, and certain producing of plain and express Proofs, that John Baptist, did as certainly baptize infants as the Adult* (1693), appeared later in 1693 as Part 2.

In these sermons, Keach expends a significant portion of time describing and explaining the various images that comprise this passage of Scripture. His comments on the “ax,” “root,” “tree,” “fruit,” and “fire” encompass much of the early portion of the work.⁸⁸ Keach concludes that infant baptism finds no support in Scripture whatsoever, and that baptism of believers in Jesus Christ by immersion remains the only faithful

⁸⁷Benjamin Keach, *An Ax Laid to the Root: or, One more blow at the foundation of infant baptism, and church membership. With an answer to Mr John Flavel’s Vindiciarum Vindex. Also to Mr Rothwell’s Paedo-baptismus vindicatur* (London, 1694), ii.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 4-8.

interpretation of the biblical witness. To pursue any other course violates the clear intention of God's Word.⁸⁹

Sermon Collection: *Exposition of the Parables* (1701)

Origin. The overwhelming majority of Keach's published sermons (147) can be found in his *Exposition of the Parables*.⁹⁰ In this substantial work, Keach includes messages on thirty-seven parables and eleven "express similitudes" within the Gospels. At nearly nine hundred pages in length, it was one of Keach's most significant publications, second only in length to his *Tropologia*, which exceeded eleven hundred pages. In all, Keach spent approximately twelve years preaching through the New Testament parables.⁹¹ In *The Counterfeit Christian*, which Keach later reissued with *Exposition of the Parables*, he had stated that many of his sermons on the parables were delivered in morning exercises at seven o'clock.⁹²

As far as Keach was aware, no one ever had attempted to publish sermons on all of the parables of Jesus Christ, at least not recently.

⁸⁹For a thorough analysis of Keach's arguments in *An Ax Laid to the Root* and other polemics against infant baptism, see David B. Riker, "A Catholic Reformed Theologian: Federalism and Baptism in the Thought of Benjamin Keach, 1640-1704" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2006), 130-255.

⁹⁰Keach's parables were originally published as *Gospel Mysteries Unveil'd*. The modern reprint of the 1856 version is known as *Exposition of the Parables*. Unless indicated otherwise, citations will come from the modern version. Benjamin Keach, *Exposition of the Parables* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974).

⁹¹Keach first mentions his goal of preaching and publishing sermons on the parables in *The Counterfeit Christian*, which was preached in August of 1690 and published in May of 1691. In the prefatory material, Keach notes that more than a year had passed since he had begun to preach on the parables, which means that he likely had delivered the first of this series in early 1690. From that time until the publication of *Exposition of the Parables* in August of 1701, Keach invested twelve years in this task. This concurs with his own statement in the prefatory material to *Exposition of the Parables* which says, "Reader, thou art here presented with the labours of near twelve years." Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, xiv. Vaughn states that Keach began one year earlier in 1689, coinciding with the Act of Toleration and a period of greater leniency for those outside the Church of England. The number of years between 1689 and 1701 is actually thirteen. Therefore, Vaughn's dating is less precise. See Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology," 94, 115. There is a typographical error in his date on p. 94: it should read 1689, not 1698.

⁹²Keach, *The Counterfeit Christian*, iii.

[N]one of our learned modern divines, nor others, have been stirred up to write an exposition upon all the parables and similitudes spoken by our blessed Lord in the four evangelists. Though it is true, some of them have most excellently been written upon, and opened a few of them; but no one author (as I can learn) hath in one or more volumes written upon them all. . . . So that what is here presented to your view, hath not been done by any before.⁹³

One of the only men who had even come close to duplicating this task prior to Keach's efforts was Francis Bragge, Vicar of Hitchin in Hertfordshire, who published his *Practical Discourses upon the Parables of Our Blessed Saviour* in 1694, while Keach was still preaching and preparing sermons for publication. However, Bragge's work only included sermons on fourteen parables.⁹⁴

Keach clearly felt that preaching sermons on the parables of Christ was a worthwhile endeavor. Keach naturally leaned toward preaching biblical texts like those of the parables because such passages were already rich with images he could describe, incorporate into other images, and use as vehicles to convey the propositional truths of God's Word. Vaughn has noted that "Keach's usual homiletical method was to comment and expand upon the images used in the parable. . . . [T]he decision to use the parables was a pastoral one. The parables were more uniquely capable of reaching people intellectually and, more importantly, emotionally."⁹⁵ Walker concurs with this assessment when he states, "Keach was always seeking to be an effective communicator of the truth of the Gospel and not surprisingly saw the advantage of using the ready-made illustrations in the parables. . . . The parables [also] provided Keach with the opportunity of preaching on a wide range of subjects."⁹⁶

⁹³Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, xi.

⁹⁴Francis Bragge, *Practical Discourses upon the Parables of Our Blessed Saviour with Prayers Annexed to Each Discourse* (London, 1694).

⁹⁵Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology," 99.

⁹⁶Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 266-68.

In his *Exposition of the Parables*, Keach listed four specific advantages that he gained from preaching parabolic passages. Keach acknowledged the power of figurative language to aid the memory, to develop the understanding, to stimulate the passions, and to explain the truths of Christ.

1. They greatly tend to help the memory; we are more apt to remember stories, than other things delivered in a sermon. Besides, people when they see these natural things before their eyes, which the Holy Ghost makes use of to explain heavenly things by, they presently are the better enabled to call to remembrance what they have heard; as when they see a sower sow his seed, and the like.
2. They greatly help the mind and thinking faculty, to study the meaning of what they have so heard delivered unto them.
3. They are profitable to stir up, or to excite the affections, and to awaken the conscience; as when hell in a parable is set out by a furnace of fire, and conscience by a gnawing worm; and heaven and glory above, is represented by a glorious kingdom, and by a crown of glory.
4. Also to inform the judgment of the weak; indeed what could any of us do, to understand the deep things of God, if they were not thus opened and explained to us? Yet parables have one great disadvantage to some who hear them, that they being not explained to them, understand them not; as it was in our Saviour's days, it being not given unto all to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; therefore it must needs be no small blessing to have those parables of our blessed Lord opened unto us; so that we may be helped rightly to understand them.⁹⁷

Referring to the simple explanation of parables that many have heard during their childhood years, Stein notes that “it is clear that a parable is more than ‘an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.’ At times . . . defining what a parable is becomes most difficult. . . . [T]he biblical use of the term does not permit any exact definition.”⁹⁸ One commentator has noted, “In his parables, Jesus used many metaphors, such as a king, servants, and virgins, but . . . [t]hey never relate a world of fantasy or fiction. They are stories and examples from the world in which Jesus lived, and they are told in order to convey a spiritual truth by means of a single point of comparison.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 3.

⁹⁸Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 22.

⁹⁹Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 10-11.

Determining which Gospel passages are actually parabolic has never been an easy task. A general survey of popular reference works on the parables of Christ reveals a fairly wide spectrum of opinion.¹⁰⁰ Stein has said, “It is apparent . . . that it is extremely difficult to determine exactly how many parables we possess in our Gospels. What is clear is that we possess approximately fifty sayings or stories which by any biblical understanding of the term must be called ‘parables.’”¹⁰¹ The thirty-seven parables and eleven similitudes that Keach included in *Exposition of the Parables* certainly represent the greater bulk of the parabolic material in the Gospels.

Organization. Keach’s massive work on the parables is divided into four sections: Books I-III and a Supplement. Each of the sections contains sermons that address specific texts from the Gospels. In most instances, each text is the basis for multiple messages. Book I consists of forty-six sermons taken from twenty-three passages and is the longest of the four sections. It includes the numerous parables found in Matthew 13. Book II contains forty-two sermons drawn from only nine texts, and these include the “lost” parables of Luke 15. Book III consists of thirty-two sermons based on four passages, and exactly half of these messages are based on the parable of the marriage supper in Matthew 22. The Supplement holds twenty-seven sermons from thirteen texts drawn from throughout all four Gospels. In all, Keach’s *Exposition of the Parables* boasts 147 sermons drawn from 49 passages yielding a total of 892 pages.

Regarding the specific parables and similitudes that Keach selected for incorporation in his *Exposition of the Parables*, no particular order or thematic arrangement is immediately perceptible. The table of contents clearly indicates that the

¹⁰⁰A comparison of three different reference charts of the parables, as well as a cursory glance at the work of two prominent New Testament scholars (Stein and Kistemaker), indicates that determining an exact number of parables is essentially impossible. These five sources alone encompass a range from thirty-nine to as many as seventy-five potential parabolic passages, with a high level of agreement on approximately fifty of them.

¹⁰¹Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables*, 26.

sermons do not progress in the order of the biblical texts. As well, several of the sermons include dates of delivery in the marginal notes, which reveal that the sermons are not arranged in the order in which they were preached. For example, one sermon near the end of the Supplement was actually delivered on August 17, 1690, and was one of the first messages Keach preached in this series.¹⁰²

One possible method that Keach could have used in arranging these parabolic sermons for publication was to place them in the chronological order of Jesus' life and ministry. If so, Keach could have used a harmony of the passages in the four Gospels to assist him in this task. Each of the four sections of *Exposition of the Parables* appears to be at least loosely arranged in this kind of pattern, flowing not always in accordance with the biblical order but generally in alignment with the chronological events.¹⁰³ Another piece of internal evidence appears to support this method of arrangement. In seven of the sermons in Books I-III of the volume, Keach includes a marginal note that references the "Year of Christ's life," marking Jesus' approximate age, and the "Year of Christ's ministry," signifying the approximate length of Jesus' ministry at that time. From one marginal note to the next, the numbers are always increasing, which indicates, at least for the seven passages from which these sermons were taken, that Keach understood them to be in the chronological order of Jesus' life and ministry.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²It is significant that the modern reprint of *Exposition of the Parables* includes fewer than half of the number of sermon delivery dates as the original printing. An inspection of the modern version reveals only ten different delivery dates, while the 1701 printing contains twelve more.

¹⁰³In most cases, Keach's arrangement of the parabolic texts varies only slightly from the order found in a modern harmony of the Gospels, such as Robert L. Thomas and Stanley R. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). Similar reference works would have been available to Keach as well. For example, see John Lightfoot, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (London, 1658).

¹⁰⁴Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 119-20, 168, 253, 272, 434, 466, 643. These marginal notes range in scope from Jesus at age 31 and in the second year of His ministry to Jesus at age 33 and in the fourth year of His ministry.

Although Keach may have included some texts that were obviously less parabolic than others in his *Exposition of the Parables*, nevertheless, he did omit one passage that is clearly a parable—the parable of the fig tree (Matt 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33). Present in all three Gospels and specifically designated by the word “parable,” this account would seem to be especially appropriate for Keach to address in his work. It is unclear why Keach failed to include this particular parable.¹⁰⁵

Vaughn finds it curious that Keach failed to include the “parable” of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46). Apparently, Keach simply did not consider this to be a parabolic text, which explains his failure to include it. Vaughn suggests that Matthew Poole’s *Annotations*, a popular commentary that Keach frequently consulted, was the reason for the omission. Poole held to Baxterian soteriology, and exegeted Matthew 25:31-46 in accordance with that position. Keach’s abhorrence for conditional justification, Vaughn believes, may have prompted him to avoid the exposition of this parable altogether. Although Vaughn admits that such a scenario is unlikely, and that Keach could have easily selected other commentaries for aid if he had needed them, Vaughn offers no other alternatives for Keach’s omission.¹⁰⁶

In addition, as Vaughn examines the themes of Keach’s sermons in *Exposition of the Parables*, he insists that the very few references to infant baptism—normally one of Keach’s primary emphases—is “surely an indication that he hoped to sell his book to pedo-baptists as well as Baptists.”¹⁰⁷ Vaughn states that Keach’s only mention of baptism occurs in one of his sermons on the parable of the vineyard, when he references the distinguishing marks of a true church, and the allusion is very brief.¹⁰⁸ However, the

¹⁰⁵This parable should not be confused with the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), which Keach does include.

¹⁰⁶Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology,” 102-03.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 116.

¹⁰⁸Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 476.

first sermon of Keach's *An Ax Laid to the Root*—a series which dealt specifically with baptism—is included in *Exposition of the Parables*, and although this message does not mention baptism as much as the other two sermons in this series, it contains more references to baptism than those found in the parable of the vineyard.¹⁰⁹ Still, an even more likely reason for Keach's relative silence on baptism is simply that baptism is not a focal point in the parables that Keach exegeted.

Although *Exposition of the Parables* was completed near the end of Keach's life, these sermons still follow faithfully the same basic pattern as the messages that he preached and published as many as twenty-five years earlier. Several times in his *Exposition of the Parables*, Keach alludes to his “usual method” of sermon preparation. Each instance includes a nearly identical list of four components:

1. Open the scope of [the text].
2. Explain the terms.
3. Observe several points of doctrine, and prosecute them distinctly.
4. Apply the whole.¹¹⁰

Amazingly, each of Keach's 147 sermons in *Exposition of the Parables* adheres essentially to this “usual method.” This uniformity exists not only because Keach intended for these sermons to serve as a reference work for pastors and preachers, but also because Keach followed this paradigm throughout his preaching ministry. Keach's congregation knew what to expect from their pastor week after week—messages designed to convey the truths of God's Word in a manner that engaged both the intellect and emotions of his audience.

Summary

Keach published 224 sermons during his tenure of nearly thirty-five years as the pastor of the Horseleydown congregation in London. These sermons were pastoral,

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 35, 39.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 775. See also pp. 72, 168, and 284.

doctrinal, and parabolical in nature. Keach's messages demonstrate his commitment to the authority and reliability of Scripture, while employing elements of figurative language to connect his audience to the truths of biblical teaching. Frequently, Keach's sermons were intended to address the concerns of his church and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. As well, Keach used his pulpit to proclaim the doctrines of the Bible and to give instruction to the believers in his congregation who were moving toward maturity in Christ.

Keach often sought scriptural texts rich in imagery—such as the parables—upon which to construct his messages, knowing the power of language to impart divine truth. Keach's sermons are valuable in that they not only reveal much about his understanding of God's Word, but they also provide insights into the task of preaching in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Keach's *Exposition of the Parables* was a landmark accomplishment which had never been attempted, at least not in such a comprehensive manner.

CHAPTER 4

KEACH'S CONCEPT OF METAPHOR

Introduction

In his well received work, *The Myserie of Rhetorick Unveil'd*, John Smith enthusiastically affirms that Scripture “abounds with tropes and figures of all sorts, as containing the most excellent and sublimest eloquence, and is like a pleasant garden bedecked with flowers; or a fruitful field, full of precious treasures; I apprehended it a work worthy the undertaking, to dig into those sacred Minerals for the better finding out the Metaphors, Metonymies, Synecdoches, &c. which lie hid there.”¹ Indeed, the Word of God contains an abundance of figures of speech and other stylistic devices. In his popular reference work *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, Bullinger catalogues more than two hundred distinct figures, many of which possess thirty to forty different varieties.²

Within this wide array of examples of figurative language is the metaphor, a particular type of trope whose name is commonly known, yet it is very frequently misunderstood. Because some interpreters have associated metaphors with essentially any kind of figurative language, they usually conclude incorrectly that metaphors and metaphorical language should be altogether dismissed. On the contrary, metaphors are

¹John Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorick Unveil'd* (London, 1656), vi-vii. Smith desired his work to be “Eminently delightful and profitable for young scholars . . . enabling them to discern and imitate the Elegancy in any Author they read” (title page). The work was endorsed by Joseph Caryl, whose publications Keach frequently cited. A *trope* is any literary or rhetorical device in which words are not used in their literal sense.

²Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1968), ix.

words whose function is representation, a transference of meaning from one thing to another.³

Within Scripture, metaphors are both numerous and prominent. The metaphorical language of the Bible bears substantial exegetical and theological significance. Osborne provides a clear explanation of this fact.

[T]heological concepts in Scripture are often presented via metaphors. Terms like *salvation* or *baptism* are clearly metaphorical, the first building upon the Exodus imagery of the ‘deliverance’ and the second upon the cultic imagery of being ‘washed’ or made pure before God. In fact, most theological concepts in Scripture are essentially metaphorical. This is because eternal truths cannot be expressed in human, temporal language with exactness. Metaphors are not only the best way to depict such concepts; they are the way God has chosen to express himself in Scripture. Moreover, it is not correct to intimate that metaphors by nature are vague or dispensable. The answer is a proper understanding of metaphor as a theological tool and a proper delineation of its referential nature.⁴

To comprehend Keach’s concept of metaphor, it is first necessary to obtain a general perspective on the nature of metaphor. Then Keach’s own published works on understanding metaphor must be inspected in detail. This information yields not only a clear view of Keach’s concept of metaphor but also provides implications for the task of preaching.

Nature of Metaphor

In order to understand the nature of metaphor, two important aspects of this type of imagery are particularly relevant—its definition and analysis.

Definition of Metaphor

Throughout modern history, scholars have made numerous attempts to define metaphor. Fontanier’s work *Les Figures du discours*, which was one of the last treatises on rhetoric in Europe, states that metaphors present “one idea under the sign of another

³Ibid., 735-36.

⁴Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 299-300.

that is more striking or better known.”⁵ Bullinger defines metaphor by distinguishing it from a simile, a related figure of speech. He says, “[W]hile the *Simile* gently states that one thing is like or resembles another, the *Metaphor* boldly and warmly declares that one thing IS the other.”⁶

Essentially, metaphor implies a transference. Vanhoozer conveys this idea through several significant statements:

In metaphor, a name is transferred from its proper place and assigned to a context where it does not belong. Metaphor is a matter of words playing truant. . . . [M]etaphor does not discover or express something new, but only states more decorously what could be said literally. . . . Metaphor provides the opportunity to set the unfamiliar in the context of the familiar in order to understand it in new ways. Metaphor is the imagination making creative connections, thinking laterally, talking out loud. . . . Unlike symbols, which are tied to things, metaphors are the free creations of discourse. . . . Metaphor signifies the irrevocable captivity of thought to language.⁷

In the twentieth century, Ricoeur published a masterful treatise entitled *La métaphore vive*, which was later translated into English as *The Rule of Metaphor*. In his work, Ricoeur “links fiction and redescription” and defines metaphor as “the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to describe reality.”⁸

Thus metaphor can be understood properly as the transfer of meaning from one word to another that results in a comparison for the purpose of explanation. Familiar examples of metaphor would include “A mighty fortress is our God” (Luther) or “All the

⁵Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), 99.

⁶Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 735.

⁷Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 128-31.

⁸Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 7. Although his work presents some difficulties, Ricoeur has much good to offer to those wanting to know more about the role of metaphor within the context of preaching. See David L. Allen, “A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43/3 (September 2000): 501-05.

world's a stage" (Shakespeare). Keach affirms that metaphorical language necessarily involves a transference of meaning from one image to another.⁹

Analysis of Metaphor

Keach sought to undertake a thorough analysis of the metaphors in God's Word. As with any accepted and trustworthy approach to hermeneutics, a reliable assessment of the figurative elements in Scripture seeks to consider all pertinent factors associated with the particular period of time, geographic region, and cultural traits that are connected to a specific biblical pericope. Keach attempted to comprehend all of these aspects as he identified, classified, and catalogued the metaphors of Scripture. He published this repository of information in his *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors*.

Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors

Tropologia was the medium in which Keach published all of his data on biblical metaphors, and it is a key source to understanding not only Keach's concept of metaphor, but also aspects of his theology and hermeneutical methods. Regarding this work, John Ryland, Sr. stated that "nothing can be imagined more adapted to inform the Understanding, in point of Knowledge, and at the same Time, to please the Imagination, enrich the Memory, and raise the Affections to Christ."¹⁰ As well, Charles Spurgeon humorously remarked that *Tropologia* "is open to much criticism on the score of making metaphors not only run on all-fours, but on as many legs as a centipede."¹¹ Nevertheless, with "a steady realism that flew into the face of some current wild allegorical preaching,

⁹Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1681), bk. 2, "Epistle to the Reader," iv.

¹⁰John Ryland, Sr., "Recommendations" in Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London: J. W. Basham, 1779).

¹¹Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977), 1:109. Spurgeon actually gave *Tropologia* a strong endorsement, noting its significant value for young preachers. Ibid., 3:66.

Benjamin Keach provided an extended explanation of [nearly] every metaphor and simile found in the entire Bible.”¹² In order to examine *Tropologia* thoroughly, aspects such as its origin, organization, and objectives must be explored.¹³

Origin

Early in his London preaching ministry, Keach began an intensive study of the different forms of biblical figurative language, particularly the metaphors. Keach carried his research into the pulpit. In the prefatory material to *Tropologia* Keach states,

[P]artly, a particular Inclination, but principally the Edification of my Hearers, drew out my Heart to study the Nature of Scripture *Metaphors*, and other *Tropes* and figurative Speeches there used; and finding the Scriptures abounding with *Metaphors*, *Allegories*, &c. and that those Divine Matters which the Holy Spirit dictates, are represented by Similitudes borrowed from earthly Things; yea, that they are often called by the very Names that material or earthly Things are; God, by gracious Condescension, conveying the knowledg of spiritual Things by preaching them by their respective earthly *Parallels*: I betook my self to preach upon some *Metaphors*, which, by the Aid of Divine Goodness, wanted neither Success, nor the general Satisfaction of my Auditory: And having many brief Heads of my Notes, respecting some principal *Metaphors*, by me, it was judged by divers worthy Men, worth my Time and Pains to compile an entire Work upon this Subject, for Publick Good.¹⁴

Keach’s interest in metaphors was fundamental to his thinking, his writing, and his preaching. Taking seriously his divine call to be a preacher of God’s Word, Keach was always conscious of the need to communicate with his congregation and his readers in the clearest manner possible. Failure to consider how his audience received his messages could easily lead to misunderstanding and possibly even boredom. Clearly, Keach invested a considerable amount of time in the careful selection and use of

¹²Thomas R. McKibbens, Jr. *The Forgotten Heritage: A Lineage of Great Baptist Preaching* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), 18.

¹³Citations from the writings of Keach and others of his era contain numerous instances of variant spellings, unusual punctuation and capitalization, etc. These differences are preserved verbatim within this dissertation.

¹⁴Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 2, “Epistle to the Reader,” iii.

metaphorical imagery so that his hearers initially and his readers subsequently would connect earthly illustrations with heavenly verities.

Evidence suggests that even before his move to London, metaphors already occupied a prominent place in Keach's thinking. According to comments made in the preface to the work, Keach's *Tropologia* was "the Fruit of near twenty Years Study."¹⁵ This would date the beginning of Keach's research into biblical metaphors near 1662, the year the Act of Uniformity was issued, and the beginning of the period of persecution that Keach experienced while in rural Buckinghamshire.¹⁶ This season of suffering eventually necessitated Keach's move to London in the hope that a measure of anonymity there might ease the persistent difficulties that he and his family were experiencing.

At least one indication that Keach's thoughts were heavily focused on the subject of metaphor during the years immediately prior to the publication of *Tropologia* can be found in the commendatory poem that he wrote for William Balmford's *The Seamen's Spiritual Companion*, in which Keach employs several maritime metaphors.

Faith is the Cable-Rope, to which make fast
The *Anchor, Hope*; which rightly thou must cast
Into the *Rock of Ages, in the Vail*.
And you'll be safe in time of strongest Gale . . .
Thy Weather-beaten Vessel may be tost
Upon the Waves, but never shall be lost:
Yea, though upon the churlish Rocks it hit,
Yet shall thy Vessel neither sink nor split;
Stear but by Heaven's appointed Compass, and
Fear neither Winds nor Waves, nor Rocks, nor Sand.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., vi.

¹⁶In 1666, Keach published an elongated poem entitled *Sion in Distress*. The work addressed the increasing Roman Catholic influence that Keach perceived as a significant threat to the Protestant congregations. No copies of the 1666 edition are extant, but the work was enlarged and reissued in 1681. While it is impossible to ascertain fully the content of the original text, the abundance of metaphorical language in the 1681 version suggests that the former edition also contained several metaphors. This may indicate that metaphors were a substantial part of Keach's thinking prior to his transition to London.

¹⁷William Balmford, *The Seamen's Spiritual Companion: or, Navigation Spiritualized* (London, 1678), vi. Keach's extensive use of maritime references appeared elsewhere in his works, particularly in his excellent collection of sermons entitled *Display of Glorious Grace* (1698).

Keach also affirmed that some of his work on metaphors was derived specifically from sermon notes. Regarding his work on “light” as a metaphor, for example, Keach said, “Such who would see what Improvement may be fairly made of a Metaphor, may read *Light*, . . . which contains the Substance of several Sermons, preached upon *2 Cor. 4.4* with good Acceptance.”¹⁸ Keach deals fully with this metaphor over the span of forty pages in *Tropologia*.¹⁹

Keach actually coauthored *Tropologia* with his friend Thomas Delaune.²⁰ Delaune was born in Ireland and raised Catholic, but he embraced Protestantism and eventually Baptist convictions after moving to England. Haykin has described some of Delaune’s significant contributions to Baptist causes.

A number of theological tracts and treatises came from his pen during the 1670s and early 1680s. Some of them took up the defence of Baptist principles against various paedobaptist authors, including the prominent nonconformist Richard Baxter. Delaune was clearly highly regarded by the leadership of the London Particular Baptist community. In July 1675, for instance, he co-authored a book with Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin, and three others that defended believers’ baptism.²¹

McBeth notes additionally that Delaune was “a schoolmaster and printer by occupation, [who] published *A Plea for the Non-Conformists* in 1683. . . . Delaune sought to show that Baptist views were orthodox and innocent. This treatise greatly impressed Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, who republished it in 1706.”²² Unfortunately, government authorities perceived his work as dangerous and soon arrested Delaune, and he was joined eventually by the rest of his family in prison, where the “utterly miserable

¹⁸Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 2, 6.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, bk. 3, 1-40.

²⁰James Barry Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1989), 95.

²¹Michael A. G. Haykin, “Delaune, Thomas” in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (London: Oxford, 2004), 15:718.

²²H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1987), 117.

conditions . . . broke their health and the entire family perished there, Delaune dying last, in 1685.”²³

Delaune prepared the material in Book I of *Tropologia*, which was the more technical section of the work that described and explained nearly every type of figurative language in Scripture. This first portion included a translation of much of Solomon Glassius’ *Philologia Sacra* (1623), which had originally been published in Latin. Few today are conscious of Delaune’s contribution to *Tropologia*, and they commonly—and erroneously—attribute the entire work to Keach alone.

Not only does Keach’s *Tropologia* represent an enormous effort of study and writing, but it also demonstrates a level of learning, intellect, and accomplishment that propelled Keach forward for the next twenty years, perhaps the most productive period of his life. Walker sees Keach’s *Tropologia* as a benchmark achievement.

I would suggest that *Tropologia* should be seen as a watershed in Keach’s ministry. It was first published in 1681 at a point close to the middle of his life as a preacher, when he was forty-two and in the prime of his life, reaching a maturity of outlook and understanding. . . . Many of the matters that he was to write about were but further developments or specific applications of his understanding of the Bible forged in these earlier years and expressed in *Tropologia*.²⁴

Indeed, Keach’s numerous imaginative works, including his hymn texts, poems, and allegories, all stem directly from the nearly exhaustive research on biblical imagery that can be found in his *Tropologia*.²⁵

Organization

Keach’s *Tropologia* was a remarkable work for its day and was initially printed in two large volumes of over five hundred pages each.²⁶ The sheer quantity of

²³Haykin, “Delaune, Thomas,” 719.

²⁴Austin Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press), 192-93.

²⁵Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology,” 95-98.

²⁶The first volume contained 646 pages, and the second volume contained 514 pages, which totaled a sizeable 1,160 pages.

material required the printer to prepare and release one volume at a time. These volumes were subdivided into books. The first volume of *Tropologia* to be printed contained Books I-III.

Book I was Delaune's translation of the majority of Glassius' *Philologia Sacra* from Latin into English. Glassius' work was essentially a reference work on various literary devices used in Scripture (e.g., metaphors, similes, metonymies, etc.), which has been described as "an important treatise on Sacred Rhetoric . . . [that] is by far the fullest account of Biblical Figures ever published."²⁷ Book I contained the portion of *Philologia Sacra* that pertained to biblical tropes and figures. In addition, Book I included an epistle to the reader, an alphabetical table of subjects, a synopsis of its contents, and an index of Scripture references.

Book I of *Tropologia* was not only a translation of Glassius' *Philologia Sacra* but was also an entirely new treatise by Delaune in that he included material and commentary from other scholars. Walker notes, "This . . . technical section . . . was, in fact, partly translated and compiled from works of continental divines and *Philologia Sacra*."²⁸ Regarding the preparation of the work, Keach states that "we have not absolutely tyed our selves to [Glassius'] words but have to the best of our abilities exprest his sense, abridging where need was, and supplying out of other Learned Authors to which he referr'd, or who had written of the same thing in our Language, which we consulted, and inserted what was judged necessary for the compleating of this work."²⁹

Books II and III appear to be original work by Keach in which he listed specific metaphors from Scripture in one column and the corresponding parallel or disparity in a second column. Book II contained metaphors specifically related to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It also included an epistle to the reader

²⁷Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, viii.

²⁸Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 189.

²⁹Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 1, "Epistle to the Reader," vi.

detailing Keach's reasons for producing the work and a very brief index to the metaphors in Books II and III. Book III focused solely on the metaphors for God's Word and was approximately one-fifth of the size of Book II. Book III also contained a detailed alphabetical index for the content of both Books II and III. Such an arrangement of material was not very convenient, particularly since the first volume of *Tropologia* represented only slightly more than half of the work. Nevertheless, it was necessary, since the second volume was not immediately available.

When the second volume was released in 1682, it contained Book IV by Keach and the second part of Delaune's translation of *Philologia Sacra*. Book IV was called *Troposchemalogia: Tropes and Figures* to distinguish it from *Tropologia*, and it focused on a more diverse array of figurative language—metaphors, allegories, and similes—related to the “Graces of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Ordinances of the Gospel.”³⁰ Keach included another epistle to the reader and an index to Book IV. Also prefixed to Book IV is a significant sixteen-page essay entitled “The Divine Authority of Holy Scriptures,” in which Keach elaborated on many of the most important facets of the doctrine of Scripture such as inspiration, infallibility, unity, and preservation. In all, Book IV spans 462 pages.

The remainder of the second volume is Book II of *Philologia Sacra*, which contains a comprehensive list of the schemes and figures of Scripture with an explanation of each. This section also includes a treatise on all the types, parables, and allegories in the Old and New Testaments, as well as an alphabetical table of the contents of Book IV. This portion of the second volume is fairly brief, spanning only fifty-two pages. It is somewhat curious that this material was not published with Book I in the first volume. Whether more time was needed to complete the translation, or whether it was simply a marketing tactic to encourage people to purchase this supplemental volume, the reason for this particular decision will likely remain unclear.

³⁰Ibid., bk. 4, 1.

Cognizant that his audience might have occasional concerns about the content of *Tropologia*, which suggests not only his own awareness but also the possibility of some misgivings, Keach repeatedly insists that his work aligns fully with historic Christian doctrine: “I have endeavoured with all diligence to conform all my Parallels to plain Scripture, and the Analogy of the Orthodox Faith; and if I go beyond what the Scope of a particular Text is, yet I agree with the general Tenor of God’s Word.”³¹ Keach knew that his work on metaphors might be construed occasionally as too fanciful, which is an ever-present risk when producing a resource that is nearly exhaustive in nature. Keach wanted his readership to know that he longed to enlarge their love for and use of the Holy Scriptures, rather than to diminish them.

In accordance with his desire to reinforce his audience’s use and understanding of the Bible, Keach enthusiastically affirmed the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. In the initial prefatory epistle to *Tropologia*, Keach makes this conviction clear.

The Mysteries which God proposes to be believed in his holy word, as they are in themselves most true and best, although all humane Reason, which Judges by its own wisdom or carnal conclusions, should otherwise determine. So their Eloquence (an inseparable companion of Divine Wisdom) is to be esteemed the *best* and *most* elegant by the faithful, unless we suppose that God who immediately dictated them to his *Amanuensis*, spoke nonsense, and is inferior to his Creatures in that qualification, which is down right *Blasphemy*, and an assertion that deserves not only derision, but the severest castigation.³²

Doubtless, Keach produced *Tropologia* as a resource to aid preachers and pastors with their biblical interpretation. Book IV includes a detailed sixteen-page essay by Keach entitled, “The Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures,” which is a significant testimony to Keach’s high view of Scripture and its inherent authority. In the essay, Keach makes such bold statements as “we may rely on that book, as the infallible

³¹Ibid., bk. 2, “Epistle to the Reader,” iv.

³²Ibid., bk. 1, v.

storehouse of heavenly verities, that great and only Revelation, whereby God does inform, rule, and will judge the world.”³³

The bulk of Keach’s essay is a comprehensive, seventeen-point argument intended to prove conclusively that the “Scripture, or book called the Bible, is of divine original, inspired by the Spirit of God, and therefore of infallible truth and authority.”³⁴ Keach sought to anticipate the questions and even the criticisms of the most astute. The seventeen points are as follows:

1. The sublime Matter of the Scriptures shew them to be Divine
2. The Antiquity of the Holy Scriptures
3. The Majesty and Strangeness of the Stile
4. Its Design to promote Holiness
5. The Harmony of the Scriptures
6. The Credit of the Pen-men
7. Scripture-prophecies, and the Accomplishments prove ‘tis Divine
8. Miracles confirm its Divine Original
9. The wonderful Preservation of the Scriptures
10. The Success of the Scriptures in converting the World
11. Their inward Efficacy
12. The Testimony of the Church and Martyrs
13. The Acknowledgement of the Heathen
14. No [other special] Revelation from God to the World
15. The Scriptures can be neither the Invention of the Devils or Men
16. Satan’s Suggestions & Temptations against the Bible, argue it Divine
17. The internal Evidence of the Spirit³⁵

In Keach’s essay, he argues passionately and convincingly for Scripture’s inspiration and infallibility. These characteristics establish the solid foundation of biblical authority and reinforce the trustworthiness of God’s Word.

Throughout the various prefatory articles for *Tropologia*, Keach repeatedly apologizes for the significant length of the work, which apparently took him by surprise.³⁶ One section of Book IV that Keach considered including but later decided to

³³Ibid., bk. 4, ii.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., bk. 4, ii-xvi. For additional commentary on each of the points of Keach’s essay, see L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 77-79.

³⁶Ibid., bk. 1, 207; bk. 3, 76; bk. 4, “Epistle to the Reader,” iii.

reject was an essay on the validity of the Authorized (King James) Version (1611). Given that this translation of Scripture was not even a century old, Keach wanted to commend its use and to give assurance of its reliability. Keach noted that “there is one Thing omitted, or left out, which was in the *Specimen, viz. Demonstrations touching the Validity of our Translation.*”³⁷

Still, *Tropologia* contains material on some subjects that cannot be found anywhere else in Keach’s published works. Walker has suggested the following examples: “[S]ome of the clearest statements he put in print on the Trinity are found here. It is also clear that he had a high view of the nature and calling of the Gospel minister and the need for order and discipline in the church. . . . [T]here are many references to the Roman Church as well as to the persecution Dissenters were continuing to experience in the 1680s.”³⁸

Objective

Keach’s *Tropologia* was intended primarily as a reference work for young students and ministers who were preparing to preach. Speaking of the way in which the volumes would be printed, Keach said, “Our design [is] to compleat this said *Philology* for the benefit of such as want the acquirements of humane Literature, and are Students in sacred *Learning*. ‘Tis *certain* that no sort of men, have more need of *Learning* than the *Ministers* of the Gospel, because their Employment is of the highest concern.”³⁹

Walker has suggested seven reasons why *Tropologia* should be considered Keach’s most important work for preachers:

³⁷Ibid., bk. 4, “Epistle to the Reader,” iii. As noted previously, Keach routinely advertised for the public to purchase subscriptions for some of his published works. Apparently, Keach’s advertisement for *Tropologia* included a specimen, a kind of prospectus, in which he described the anticipated contents of the volume.

³⁸Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 191-92.

³⁹Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 1, “Epistle to the Reader,” vi.

1. It is presently available and makes accessible Keach's thought on a wide range of biblical subjects.
2. It is clearly intended as a means of help for young students and ministers in their preparation for preaching.
3. It allows Keach to employ image-based illustrations that made biblical teaching tangible, especially to those with limited literacy.
4. It provides at least an embryonic view into some of the themes for Keach's later sermons and books.
5. It illustrates Keach's understanding of the doctrine of the church's ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper).
6. It contains materials that are not covered anywhere else in Keach's writings (e.g., the doctrine of the Trinity).
7. It demonstrates Keach's unique abilities as "a man of considerable parts and experience."⁴⁰

Even the nineteenth-century Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of several well known individuals who succeeded Keach as pastor of the Horsleydown congregation, alludes to the value of *Tropologia* for ministers-in-training. To his students at The Pastors' College, Spurgeon said,

I think it would be very useful to some of you who are not yet adept at the art of illustration if you were to *read books in which there is an abundance of metaphor, simile, and emblem*. . . . I like Keach's *Metaphors* where he points out the disparity between the type and the Anti-type. Sometimes, the contrasts between different persons or objects will be as instructive as their resemblances.⁴¹

Keach's influential reference work on figurative language in Scripture remains available to assist in the preparation of present-day preachers. The modern reprint of *Tropologia* remained in print for much of the twentieth century. Kregel Publications reissued Keach's work under the name *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible* (1972). It is a reprint of the 1856 version which used a completely new and more readable typeset for the work.⁴² This version condensed and in some cases eliminated some of the prefatory material, grouped all of Delaune's translation of *Philologia Sacra* and Keach's work on metaphors into individual sections, and placed all indices at the end

⁴⁰Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 189-92.

⁴¹Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 3:66. Italics his.

⁴²Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1856). Some details concerning the printing of this edition appear in a brief notice in *Baptist Magazine* 48 (1856): 28-29.

of the work. Even with the modifications, this version still contains more than one thousand pages.

Not only is *Tropologia* valuable for those either in or preparing for the gospel ministry, but it is also significant in that it provides great insight into much of Keach's understanding of Scripture, his hermeneutical principles, and his theological and doctrinal convictions. Walker has likened Keach's *Tropologia* to a treatise on systematic theology, something quite uncommon among the Calvinistic Baptists of the latter half of the seventeenth century. Walker states, "[T]hese sermon notes . . . are the closest Keach came to producing a systematic theology. They form an important source of information for understanding Keach and [his] theology. They show how his biblical and Calvinistic theology was not only well established during the 1670s, but also how that theology undergirded the remainder of his ministry until his death."⁴³

In addition, Vaughn has suggested that the unusually large number of different works that Keach published, including his many "sermons, hymns, exegetical tools (i.e., *Tropologia*), and religious allegories provided us with what is perhaps the most systematic exposition of the way Puritans and Nonconformists used symbols."⁴⁴ Such influence is possible only because Keach put forth such a sizeable quantity of material, more than any other Particular Baptist of his day and even more than many of his non-Baptist contemporaries.

Keach's Concept of Metaphor

Meaning

In his dissertation concerning Keach's life and thought, Spears sought to comprehend the most significant factors that formed Keach's worldview. In Spears'

⁴³Austin Walker, "Benjamin Keach (1640-1704): Tailor and Preacher," *Journal of the Strict Baptist Historical Society* 33 (2004): 8.

⁴⁴Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology," 322.

words, he wanted to grasp “Keach’s understanding of the cosmos.”⁴⁵ He asserts that Keach “held the view of the Universe common to the great mass of his countrymen: it consisted of the central earth, the various spheres about it, and beyond, the heaven of heavens and the throne of God . . . a three-tier Universe—heaven, earth, and hell.”⁴⁶ Within this cosmology, Spears affirms that those of Keach’s day perceived a connectivity between planes of existence that prompted them to seek correspondences that linked material and spiritual reality. Spears concludes, “During Keach’s formative period the intellectual curiosity of the people found satisfaction in tracing remote parallels, and seeing the close connection between planes easily led to allegorical writings. . . . [This] method of reasoning was the accepted method of his day.”⁴⁷

Not only did Keach perceive his own inclination regarding metaphors, but he also understood that those to whom he preached were also subject to the profound impact and influence of metaphorical language. Thus, this realization naturally affected his philosophy of sermon preparation and delivery. Walker has noted the significance of Keach’s preoccupation with metaphors and its effects upon his preaching: “By using metaphors Keach was employing image-based illustrations that made biblical teaching tangible especially to those with limited literacy. He believed such images were a great aid to effective preaching.”⁴⁸ Vaughn would seem to concur with this assessment when he observes that Keach’s “writings are additional examples of a controlling feature of

⁴⁵William Eugene Spears, “The Baptist Movement in England and in the Late Seventeenth Century as Reflected in the Work and Thought of Benjamin Keach, 1640-1704” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1953), 62.

⁴⁶Ibid. Spears draws much of his support for this view from E. M. W. Tillyard’s *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1943), which is a concise study of the concept of order in the era of such literary figures as Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton.

⁴⁷Spears, “The Baptist Movement in England,” 63-64.

⁴⁸Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 190.

Keach's way of looking at the world; they show that he was concerned to communicate the invisible things of heaven by using the visible things of earth."⁴⁹

Keach affirmed the abundance of metaphorical language in Scripture, and he acknowledged that God routinely revealed Himself and His ways through the clarifying power of metaphor. Keach makes this completely clear in the prefatory material to *Tropologia*.

'Tis obvious to every one's Observation, that the Holy Scripture abounds with *Metaphors, Allegories*, and other *Tropes* and *Figures* of Speech. Similitudes are borrowed from Visible Things, to set forth and illustrate the excellent Nature of Invisible Things.; yea, heavenly Things are often called by the very Names that material or earthly Things are called, which is not to obscure or hide the meaning of them from us, but to accommodate them to our Understanding; God by a gracious Condescension, conveying the Knowledge of Himself, and spiritual Things, by preaching them by their respective earthly Similitudes.⁵⁰

In *Tropologia*, Keach recorded the findings of his lengthy study of biblical metaphors. Even though Keach neither translated Glassius' *Philologia Sacra* nor did he personally write the material on defining and classifying metaphors, Keach clearly gave full approval to Delaune and the portion of *Tropologia* that he provided. Keach said of him, "I have procured such Helps [in writing *Tropologia*] . . . particularly, the Help of the Gentleman that translated our *Philologia Sacra*, he being my Friend, and one that had leisure, and a willing mind to contribute his Assistance. After much Labour and Pains, it is brought so far as thou seest; and if thou reapest any Benefit by it, give God the Praise."⁵¹ Although Delaune—and not Keach—presented the technical aspects about metaphor in *Tropologia*, Keach thoroughly endorsed them and produced his material in full accordance with them.

Book I of *Tropologia* defines *metaphor* as a word that is "*translated from its proper and Genuine signification to another less proper—or when like is signified by*

⁴⁹Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology," 318.

⁵⁰Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 4, "Epistle to the Reader," ii.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, bk. 2, "Epistle to the Reader," iv.

like.”⁵² Later, Delaune adds that a “*Metaphor* may be taken, either from a simple *similitude*, or from *Analogye*. . . . Of the first sort is that *Metaphor*, when *drops* of *Dew* are called *Pearls*, when *Flowers* are called *Stars*, or a gross corpulent man is called a *hog*. Of the latter are, when the *master of a Ship* has been by Poets compared to a *Waggoner*, . . . because he takes the same care of his *Waggon*, as the *Master* does of his *Ship*.” Delaune concludes that the identical distinction would be observed throughout all of *Tropologia*.⁵³

Moving beyond a simple definition to his regard for the beneficial qualities of metaphors, Delaune inserted the following affirmation.

As to its *Dignity*, as this *Trope* is the most frequent, so it [is] the most florid and pleasant, giving a most wonderful energy or power, and evidence to the style of Holy Scripture, so that it may be truly called, *the Academy or School, where God Communicates the knowledge of Nature and the Creation to his Scholars*, affording matter enough for their most serious and diligent study, making *plain* those Divine and glorious matters therein revealed in terms which call for deep *scrutiny* and searching to their *Nature* and *Proprieties*.⁵⁴

Regarding the enormous quantity of material in *Tropologia* in which Keach dealt directly with metaphors, Walker has observed Keach’s regular methodology. He notes, “[Keach’s] method was to take a metaphor and then analyze it from every possible angle and to give the parallel from the Scriptures. In this way, he provided the reader with his own exposition and interpretation of the metaphor.”⁵⁵ Commenting on his own approach to handling figurative language, Keach explained, “Metaphors [are] Terms borrowed from Things that have divers Properties, as far as they yield Parities or Disparities (with the Object represented) agreeable to the Word of God, if they tend to Edification, may be safely used: As for example; God (in a Metaphorical Notion) is called a *Father*; how can a Parallel be limited, till you apply all the good Properties of a

⁵²Ibid., bk. 1, 38.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 39.

⁵⁵Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*, 189.

natural Father to Him? So of *Christ a Shepherd*, &c. . . . The like may be said of many other general Terms, &c.”⁵⁶

Thus, Keach understood metaphors to serve as explanatory tools for enabling a fuller comprehension of Scripture. Walker has cited an excellent example of this methodology in action. He notes that “Keach had his own vivid way, using biblical metaphors, of expressing the way in which the three persons of the Godhead fulfill their respective redemptive roles in the covenant of grace.”⁵⁷

The third Person that is concerned in this Salvation, is the Holy Ghost: The Father chuses, the Son purchases, and the Spirit applies the Blessings purchased. Salvation is called a Garment; *He hath clothed me with the Garments of Salvation, he hath covered me with the Robe of Righteousness*. The Father may be said to prepare the Matter which this Robe is made of; the Son wrought it, he made the Garment, and the Holy Spirit puts it on the Soul; the Garment of Salvation is Christ’s Righteousness. Again, the Father sought out or chose the Bride, the Son espouses and marries her, but it is the Holy Ghost that inclines her Heart and stirs up, nay, that causes the Soul to like and to love this Blessed Lover, and brings it to yield and consent to accept heartily and willingly of Jesus Christ. We were sick of a fearful and incurable Disease, and the Father found out the Medicine; the Blood of Christ is that Medicine, and the Holy Spirit applies it to the Soul. We were in Debt, in Prison, and bound in Fetters and cruel Chains, and the Father procured a Friend to pay all our Debts; The Son was this our Friend, who laid down the infinite Sum; and the Holy Spirit knocks off our Irons, our Fetters and Chains, and brings us out of the Prison-house. The Father loved us, and sent his Son to merit Grace for us; the Son loved us, and died, and thereby purchased that Grace to be imparted to us; and the Holy Spirit works that Grace in us. O what is the Nature of this Salvation; how Great, how Glorious! That the whole Trinity, both the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are thus imployed in and about it, that we might have it made sure to us for ever.⁵⁸

Tropologia also made clear that handling metaphors could occasionally be problematic. Delaune included a word of caution: “More particularly there ought to be care taken, that one *Metaphor* be not *strained* to express things in themselves quite *opposite*, nor make the *parallels* run till they grow *lame*; for one *Metaphor* may be brought to signifie *many* things, with respect to some *different* qualities and *diverse*

⁵⁶Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 2, “Epistle to the Reader,” iv.

⁵⁷Walker, “Benjamin Keach (1640-1704),” 13.

⁵⁸Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened; or, The Glory of God’s Rich Grace Displayed in the Mediator to Believers: and His Direful Wrath against Impenitent Sinners. With the Substance of near Forty Sermons upon several Subjects* (London, 1694), 382-83.

Attributes.”⁵⁹ Keach was conscious that metaphors could be contorted beyond their proper sense, but simultaneously, he was passionate to uncover the full measure of meaning in each biblical text. While Keach was able usually to maintain a reasonable balance between the proper sense of a metaphor and its full range of meaning, undeniably, he was out of balance on occasion, which prompted some to issue words of correction and even ridicule.

Classification

Regarding the manner in which metaphors should be classified, Delaune noted the essential relevance of the background information that underlies nearly all metaphors. His consideration is consistent with many modern methods of rhetorical analysis.

As to the *manner of handing*, whereas the *properties* of things from whence they are deduced, are *many* and *various*, there must be great *care* and *accuracy* used to find out the *Reason* of the *similitude*, and the *Scope* or intention of *Comparison*, lest there may be an *Aberration* from the proper coherence of the Text, or the *Analogy* of Faith, to do this it is needful that a person be well acquainted with the respective *Natures*, and the *Phylosophical Notions* and *Theories* of all things from whence this Trope is taken, also with the peculiar *Customes*, and distinct qualities of other Nations, particularly the ancient *Jewish* state in their Ecclesiastical and Civil Government and *Oeconomy*; besides the knowledge of the *Original* Languages, . . . which very frequently carry a native *Grace* and emphatical *fullness*, hardly expressible (with the same beauty and significancy) in a Translation.⁶⁰

In addition, *Tropologia* affirms that the classification of metaphors requires the critic to follow a process of systematic organization. The selection of headings under which the metaphors can be arranged requires substantial planning. Delaune has elaborated on this subject.

Others say, that ‘tis as *possible* to empty the Sea with a *sieve*, as to reduce or confine *Metaphors* to certain *Classes* or bounds. The like may (in a manner) be said of the *Metaphors* in Holy Scripture. But in as much as it is very profitable for such as are studious in that Sacred Writing, it shall be endeavoured so to dispose of most, if not all, the *Metaphors* (as much as may be done among such a *multitude* of them) found there, especially the most frequent and illustrious, as that they may be

⁵⁹Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 1, 39.

⁶⁰Ibid.

reduced to a certain *Order*, under their respective *Heads*, which will enable us to give a sound judgment of the most Elegant and Rhetorical part of the Bible.⁶¹

Historically, ancient rhetoricians such as Plutarch and Quintilian recommended certain primary areas or headings into which each metaphor could be classified. These particular groupings are quite simple and straightforward. Delaune included the following example.

As to the *right distribution or distinction of Metaphors* into their right *Classes* or *Heads*, some take the Method of *Plutarch* or *Quintilian* (who to avoid confusion in such an infinite variety, which can scarce be concluded or terminated by art, rightly say, that the most illustrious sort of *Metaphors* are to be expounded and distinguished under certain heads) and they make them four, viz.

1. From *animate things* (viz. such as have life) to *animate*, as when *God* is put for a *Magistrate*, or a *Shepherd* for a *Prince* or *Ruler*.
2. From *animate things* to *inanimate* (viz. things which have no life) as when the *Earth* is said to *Groan*, and the *Olive* to *Lye*.
3. Or from *inanimate things* to *animate*, as when *Christ* is called a *Door*, a *Vine*, etc.
4. Or from *inanimate things* to *inanimate*, as when the *Mystery of Salvation*, is called a *foundation*.⁶²

Another way in which metaphors can be classified requires the critic to evaluate the grammar—in particular, the parts of speech—and to arrange the metaphors in a text under these respective headings. Delaune does not offer abundant support for this model, although he acknowledges that it has had limited success. He states that “[o]thers, not respecting things as they are in Nature, observe a *Grammatical series*, or order, because *Metaphors*, are found in *Nouns*, *Verbs*, and *Adverbs*.”⁶³ Such an approach would seem to be a poor means of arranging metaphors because it lacks the very specificity required for proper classification.

The method employed in *Tropologia* for the classification of metaphors is neither that of Plutarch and Quintilian nor the use of divisions based on grammatical parts of speech, because metaphors from Scripture are more distinct from those of other genres

⁶¹Ibid., 40.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

of literature. The process implemented by Delaune and Keach arranges biblical metaphors in the following manner:

- But waving these, our method shall be to consider this Trope
- (1.) More *Specially*
 - (2.) More *Generally*
 1. More *Specially*, which shall be about things that are translated to *God*, which properly belong to *Man*.
 2. About what things belonging to *other* Creatures are ascribed to *God*.
 3. When things *properly* ascribable to persons, are attributed to things that are *not* persons.
 4. More *Generally*, which shall be to lay down the distinct *Heads* and *Classes* of Metaphors, with succinct Explications of each.
 5. We shall produce such *Metaphors* taken from *God* and the Creatures, as are obvious in Universal Nature.
 6. Such as are taken from *Sacred* persons and things, as *Divine* Worship, etc.⁶⁴

More specifically, the system of classification of metaphors found in *Tropologia* consisted of three main divisions: anthropopathy, prosopopeia, and other metaphors. *Anthropopathy* is primarily concerned with (1) metaphors translated from man to God, including the parts and members of human beings, and human affections, actions, and adjuncts, and (2) metaphors translated from other creatures to God, including actions of living creatures ascribed to God, and the parts and members of living creatures.⁶⁵ Next, *Prosopopeia* refers to metaphors in which things that are proposed as persons are not persons at all. Lastly, *Tropologia* classifies the various other metaphors under four broad headings: (1) metaphors taken from God, angels, and the elements of light, time, fire, air, water, and earth, (2) metaphors taken from minerals, plants, and living creatures, (3) metaphors taken from man and that which belongs to man, including the human body, human living, senses, actions and adjuncts, and the places and habitation of man, and (4) metaphors taken from sacred persons and things and anything that relates to divine worship, including men, places, and rites sacred to God.

⁶⁴Ibid., 40-41.

⁶⁵Delaune uses *anthropopathy* to mean essentially the same thing as *anthropomorphism*, which is the expression that is more commonly used today. The former term, which was apparently synonymous with the latter in the mid-seventeenth century, presently refers to human feelings and emotions which are attributed to a being or beings that are not human, especially a deity or deities.

Having put forth a clear definition of metaphor and establishing a strict pattern with which to classify the metaphors in Scripture, Keach proceeded to study nearly every metaphor in the Bible that fit this arrangement. As a result, Keach not only produced a remarkably helpful interpretive reference work for gospel ministers, but at the very same time he also developed a sizeable yet easy-to-use reservoir for locating and selecting metaphors that could be utilized in sermons.

Implications for Preaching

In *The New England Mind*, Miller explores the worldview of the Puritans in the American colonies in the seventeenth-century and gives particular attention to the manner in which they prepared and delivered sermons. He states insightfully that “the minister imitates God’s manner in the composition of his sermons; he states his meaning first, and if he can find a metaphor at hand which helps embody the meaning for a rude and unformed audience, he adds it . . . in order to win the affections of his congregation.”⁶⁶ Thus, Miller sees metaphor as a means to facilitate understanding.

Additionally, Miller perceives the use of metaphors in sermons as a unifying force, enabling the preacher to traverse the various educational and sociological barriers present in his church. He notes, “Puritan use of the tropes and figures of rhetoric was further delimited by an important sociological consideration: Puritan literature was addressed to the people, the common people, and therefore was always dominated by a principle of utility. A sermon or tract was to be, God willing, a ‘means of grace.’”⁶⁷ Essentially, the view in England was much the same.

Some preachers were even able to handle metaphors in the pulpit so adeptly that the images could remain latent in the minds of those in the assembly for a time and

⁶⁶Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 328.

⁶⁷Perry Miller, “Introduction,” in Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948), 4.

suddenly erupt into a clear understanding even long after the conclusion of the message. Speaking of the imaginative skills of Puritan Richard Baxter, author of *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), Ferguson has noted vividly that “his sermons so connected with life in 17th-century Kidderminster, England, that the truth he spoke exploded during the week like time bombs planted in his congregation’s memories.”⁶⁸ In this way, metaphors were indeed a potent means of congregational transformation.

Stout believes that when used properly, metaphors in sermons become vehicles that enable the accurate interpretation of Scripture. He asserts, “Frequent references to biblical types and metaphors taught ordinary audiences to view Scripture on multiple levels of significance and so to become rudimentary literary critics. Beyond that, it encouraged them to become sensible to spiritual nuance in the natural world and in history, and to insert themselves directly into the world of biblical promise and prophecy.”⁶⁹

Stott elaborates on the significance of using metaphorical language in sermons, as well as the danger of handling metaphors haphazardly. He says, “In addition to being simple, the preacher’s words should be vivid. That is, they should conjure up images in the mind. . . . Meanwhile, . . . stories, . . . even single words or idioms, if figures of speech, can illumine what we are trying to say. . . . When we use metaphorical speech, however, we run the risk of mixing our metaphors and so of confusing people by the jumbled images we present to their imagination.”⁷⁰ Thus, Stott strongly encourages preachers to “search for simple words which [the audience] will understand, vivid words which will help them to visualize what [they] are saying, and honest words which tell the

⁶⁸Sinclair Ferguson, “Preaching to the Heart,” in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002), 210.

⁶⁹Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford, 1986), 45. Stout is not saying that Scripture has multiple meanings but that the types and metaphors were perceived as having both immediate and future significance.

⁷⁰John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 234.

plain truth without exaggeration.”⁷¹ Given the enormous power of metaphors to engage both the mind and the affections, no room exists for any preacher to treat them carelessly.

Preaching that truly engages the whole of the person has always been a primary task of biblical exposition. Such was Keach’s desire and the motivation that prompted his intensive study of scriptural metaphors. Ferguson affirms that the goal of sermon preparation and delivery is the reformation of every component of each individual’s life. When used properly, metaphors are very capable of catalyzing this process.

In this sense, when we think about speaking or preaching to the heart, we do not have in view directly addressing the emotions as such. In any event, as Jonathan Edwards argued with such force, the mind cannot be so easily bypassed. Rather we are thinking of preaching that influences the very core and center of an individual’s being and makes an impact on the whole person, including the emotions—but does so primarily by instructing and appealing to the mind. Such a focus is of paramount importance for preachers because the transformation and renewal of the heart is what is chiefly in view in their proclamation of the gospel (cf. Romans 12:1-2).⁷²

Summary

As a rudimentary building block of imagination, metaphors were an unusually powerful tool that could be employed to facilitate association between the audience and the speaker, as well as to convey biblical doctrine. Miller observes,

The most useful tropes, in the Puritan view, were those which could be worked into the text after the abstract proposition had been posed: similes, metaphors, illustrations, and examples. By facing their doctrines with comparisons, by announcing flatly that this truth is comparable to this fact or to such and such an experience, they could achieve the ends of rhetoric, appeal to the sensible soul by a sensory image, and yet the doctrine would not be submerged in the rhetoric.⁷³

Likewise, Elliott affirms that preachers of the seventeenth century capitalized on their unique circumstances by using easily recognizable language. He says that the sermons of the Puritan era “provided the myths and metaphors that helped the people express their

⁷¹Ibid., 235.

⁷²Ferguson, “Preaching to the Heart,” 193.

⁷³Miller, *The New England Mind*, 356.

deepest feelings, emotions created by their peculiar cultural situation and aroused by crucial social events.”⁷⁴

Stout has noted, “To flesh out [a sermon’s] skeleton, [the preacher] had recourse to a broad range of tropes and metaphors drawn from Scripture and from the common experiences of his listeners. In metaphor or ‘similitude’ all the latent extravagances of the preacher’s imagination might find legitimate expression, as long as it was not at the expense of biblical truths or popular understanding.”⁷⁵ Indeed, elements of figurative language, such as the metaphor, were able to serve a wide range of functions within sermons, whether for purposes of illustration or explanation, and they were capable of connecting with the audience at the most basic level of thought. Modern investigation into metaphor in both the philosophical and rhetorical arenas has concluded that “there is a certain tension involved in metaphor, that metaphor is indispensable to all disciplines, that metaphor occurs in the relation of the utterance to the total speech situation in which it occurs, . . . [and] that metaphor is a fundamental principle of thought and action.”⁷⁶

Keach’s concept of metaphor is in accordance with the classical understanding of this figure of speech, and Keach was conscious of the connective and transformative power that the judicious use of this language form enables. He defines metaphor as the transfer of meaning from one word to another. Keach’s *Tropologia*, which features some technical material written by Delaune and translated from Glassius’ *Philologia Sacra*, presents biblical metaphors in a manner that adheres both to secular criteria and to patterns endemic to God’s Word. Keach organizes the metaphors of Scripture in a pattern that permits appropriate and meaningful classification, rather than simply

⁷⁴Emory Elliott, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), viii.

⁷⁵Stout, *The New England Soul*, 43.

⁷⁶Rodney Kennedy, *The Creative Power of Metaphor: A Rhetorical Homiletics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 93.

following established methods of arrangement. Keach primarily intended *Tropologia* to be a homiletical reference work for students and preachers to enable them to select elements of figurative language for sermon preparation and delivery, but the work functions even more significantly as a hermeneutical guide to understanding biblical metaphors. When used in the proper balance, metaphors enhance the task of preaching by accentuating explanation, facilitating illustration, and prompting spiritual transformation.

CHAPTER 5
KEACH'S INTERPRETATION OF METAPHOR

Introduction

While instructing his students in the practice of selecting and using illustrations in their sermons, Spurgeon indicated the enormous benefit of reading volumes containing an abundance of different varieties of figurative language. Significantly, though, he also reminded his learners of the essential nature of drawing as much imagery as possible from Scripture itself. Spurgeon said to them,

When you have read [each] book once, and tried to mark all the figures, go through it again, and note all the illustrations you missed in your first reading. You will probably have missed many; and you will be surprised to find that there are *illustrations even in the words themselves*. How frequently a word is itself a picture! . . . Your selection of similes, metaphors, parables, and emblems will not be complete unless you also *search the Scriptures to find the illustrations that are recorded there*. Biblical allusions are the most effective methods of illustrating and enforcing the truths of the gospel; and the preacher who is familiar with his Bible will never be at a loss.¹

While the use of metaphorical language certainly possesses substantial power to connect the speaker to the audience, Spurgeon was conscious that the ever-present temptation was to diminish or even dispense with God's Word altogether, which would render the sermon essentially impotent as a means for spiritual transformation. He knew, as did other scriptural preachers, that a proper balance between the quantity and use of figurative elements and the unadulterated proclamation of doctrine would enable clear communication while halting any drift from biblical moorings.

Unfortunately, many preachers, including some Baptists, in the seventeenth century were guilty of reducing the scriptural content of their messages, while

¹Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977) 3:66-67.

simultaneously increasing the amount of illustrative material. These padded sermons inevitably resulted in people's disinterest in and even deviation from God's revealed will for their lives. McBeth acknowledges that in a century in which great numbers of people were departing from clear biblical teaching (e.g., the Quakers), many Baptists were conscious that "the mere quoting of biblical verses and phrases, without interpretation, was of little value." In addition, the reckless allegorizing of Scripture caused many to be "led away from the true message of the Bible."²

Keach seemed to understand this need for propriety. On the one hand, because of the existence of such a sizeable quantity of parabolic material in the Bible, particularly in the Gospels, Keach believed that the preacher's use of metaphorical language in sermons was completely validated. On the other hand, however, he was aware that great caution was needed to promote rather than detract from the faithful proclamation of biblical doctrine and the clear delivery of God's truth. Keach said that the presence of "these parables and similitudes spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ . . . justifies those who, in their preaching, do make use of apt similes to illustrate the matter they are upon, to affect the hearts of the people; yet it greatly concerns them all to see they use fit and proper allusions, lest they darken counsel with words without knowledge; and so instead of giving more light, expose the gospel and name of God to reproach."³ Vaughn notes,

In Keach's sermons earthly objects became charged with divine meaning. The Bible became a commentary on the world, e.g., as [he said in the introduction to his work on the parables], the candle is there not just to light up a dark room, but it has a spiritual significance which takes precedence over its earthly use. For Keach, the candle was a tangible sermon preaching the truth, 'Our dark hearts need God's light.' But the world also becomes a commentary on the Bible: When we see a husband and wife we learn something about Christ's relationship to the Church.⁴

²H. Leon McBeth, "Early Baptist Hermeneutics," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 93.

³Benjamin Keach, *Exposition of the Parables* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974), 6.

⁴James Barry Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1989), 123-24.

Thus, Keach proceeded to use metaphorical language regularly. Many of his sermons abound with figurative elements, both those taken directly from Scripture and those examples which he lifted from cultural, social, and occupational activities. In his messages, he attempted to achieve a proper balance between imagery and doctrine. Vaughn notes that Keach believed “that the objects of nature (and human society, as well) offered a useful collection of symbols for teaching divine truths [to enhance] the pre-eminent pedagogical instrument, the sermon. . . . By being a vehicle of divine truth, a candle (or any other object Keach spiritualized) was more than merely a didactic or mnemonic device. Vehicles of divine truth enlightened the mind, and the enlightenment of the mind could effect reconciliation with God.”⁵

Nevertheless, maintaining such a delicate consistency was difficult, not only for other preachers of that era, but also for Keach as well. His passion for vivid and connective illustration sometimes outweighed sound biblical interpretation, although there is no evidence that Keach ever deliberately exchanged sound doctrine or exegesis for more choice language and imagery. McBeth has noted Keach’s occasional strays from the ideal. He states, “Clearly, the early Baptists saw the need for interpretation of Scripture and, for the most part, they followed good principles of hermeneutics. If they fell occasionally into allegory and spiritualizing of texts, as Benjamin Keach did, they did so less than most of their day.”⁶

Indeed, Vaughn is correct that Keach was sometimes exhaustive in his treatment of the images found in Scripture. He says that Keach “wrested every drop of significance” contained in the figurative language of biblical texts.⁷ Perhaps Kennedy’s assertion that “Christian preaching by its very nature is metaphorical and not literal,” which appears to be a misapplication of Lakoff and Johnson’s straightforward thesis that

⁵Ibid., 124-25.

⁶McBeth, “Early Baptist Hermeneutics,” 97.

⁷Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology,” 120.

“human thought processes are largely metaphorical,” provides at least some explanation for the intermittent examples of excessive allegorization in Keach’s sermons. In other words, it is possible that Keach’s preoccupation with metaphors sometimes prompted him to focus more intently on explaining the imagery rather than precisely interpreting the biblical text.⁸

In seeking to understand the manner in which Keach interpreted metaphor, several elements required investigation. First, Keach’s commitment to the authority of Scripture was determined, since the way he viewed the Bible necessarily impacted how he handled it. Next, a general exploration of hermeneutics—the methodological principles of interpretation—was required. Finally, several examples from Keach’s own writings and sermons illumine his own interpretive rules for metaphorical language.⁹

Authority of Scripture

Reformation Tradition

One of the primary achievements of the Protestant Reformation was to return the Bible to a place of prominence and authority. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments comprise the whole of God’s special revelation to man. While the Bible should not be seen as a guide to the sciences or to secular occupations—even though its allusions to them are true and trustworthy—Scripture is most properly understood as the manifestation of God’s glorious plan to save sinners through the work of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Richard Baxter, well known Puritan and contemporary of Keach, once said that Scripture is not a “perfect Rule of natural sciences, as Physicks, Metaphysicks, &c,

⁸Rodney Kennedy, *The Creative Power of Metaphor: A Rhetorical Homiletics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 106. See also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 3.

⁹Citations from the writings of Keach and others of his era contain numerous instances of variant spellings, unusual punctuation and capitalization, etc. These differences are preserved verbatim within this dissertation.

. . . [nor] Medicine, Musick, Arithmetick, Geometry, Astronomy; Grammar, Rhetorick, Logick; nor for Mechanicks, as Navigation, Architecture; and all the Trades and occupations of Men; . . . [but it does contain] all the essentiall and integral parts of the Christian Religion.”¹⁰

According to Renihan, seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists continued to embrace “the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*,” which means that they held to a single objective source of authority, the Word of God, and rejected any other.¹¹ In fact, it was this renewed commitment to the Bible and a clear understanding of its doctrines that prompted some to begin to practice what would eventually become known as Baptist distinctives. Indeed, Baptist origins were inextricably connected to the rediscovery of Scripture in seventeenth-century England, which is particularly evident in the biblical emphasis characteristic of early Baptist confessions of faith.

Keach clearly affirmed the authority of Scripture, which is evident throughout his writings and particularly so in his sixteen-page essay “The Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures” that is prefixed to Book IV of his *Tropologia*. Conscious of the many sacrifices made to recover the preeminence of the Bible during the Reformation period, Keach purposed to do all he could to preserve and promote that position, even when instances of doctrinal error necessitated his response. Describing Keach’s reverence for the Scriptures, Walker says, “He was consumed with a burning passion to promote true godliness at every point, to see God glorified in the church. Keach was not about to see the gains of the previous two hundred years be lost through indifference to issues of truth and error, even though he found controversy painful. To defend and maintain the truth—

¹⁰Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory, or, a Summ of Practical Theologie*, 2nd ed. (London, 1678), 3:168.

¹¹James M. Renihan, “The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705: The Doctrine of the Church in the Second London Baptist Confession as Implemented in the Subscribing Churches” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1997), 372.

especially so foundational a truth as justification by faith—was to defend and maintain the life-blood of the church of Christ.¹²

One of the most significant ways that post-Reformation Christians, including Baptists, were able to clarify and advance their religious convictions was through preparing and distributing confessions of faith. These documents were summaries of their beliefs about the most pertinent doctrines in Scripture. While neither exhaustive nor superior to God’s Word, these confessions were particularly useful to seventeenth-century Baptists, and insights regarding their views on a variety of important biblical teachings can be gleaned from them. For Keach, one of the most significant of these was the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith.

Second London Confession

Hulse states, “The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith . . . was actually formulated in 1677, but only published widely in 1689 when the political situation was less dangerous and circumstances were more propitious,” following the commencement of toleration.¹³ The Second London Confession of Faith contains some aspects that find their origin within the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), and in several respects is quite different from the (first) London Confession of Faith (1644). The Second London Confession was “formally approved and signed by Keach and several other [Particular] Baptist pastors and other ministers in England in 1689” and later became one of the most important Baptist confessions.¹⁴

Walker affirms Keach’s wholehearted support of this confession. He says that Keach “believed that the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* was an accurate

¹²Austin Walker, “Benjamin Keach: ‘Much for the Work of Religion,’” in *The Faith that Saves: Papers Read at the Westminster Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 2004), 106.

¹³Erroll Hulse, “The 1689 Confession—Its History and Role Today,” in *Our Baptist Heritage*, ed. Erroll Hulse (Leeds, UK: Reformation Today Trust, 1993), 2.

¹⁴William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 236-39.

summary of what the Bible taught. . . . [H]e and his son Elias published a shortened version of the *Confession* in 1697 for their respective churches . . . to ensure that their churches knew what they believed and that they could obtain it cheaply.”¹⁵

The Second London Confession of Faith was the first Baptist confession with its comments on Scripture at the beginning, as opposed to articles relating to God, since they believed that any objective truth about God or other spiritual matters could be found solely in the Bible.¹⁶ Three different paragraphs (or portions thereof) under the heading “*Of the Holy Scriptures*” are pertinent to this discussion of scriptural interpretation—one, seven, and nine.

1. The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience.

7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for Salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.

9. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture it self: And therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one) it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly.¹⁷

Paragraph one conveys quite clearly that those subscribing to the confession must affirm the sole authority of the Bible. The seventh paragraph indicates not only that Scripture contains everything necessary to comprehend God’s gracious plan of salvation, but also that the meaning of some passages within God’s Word are not fully plain to everyone. Lastly, paragraph nine relates that the Bible is its own best means of interpretation. The whole counsel of God must be brought to bear upon all matters,

28. ¹⁵Austin Walker, “‘Bold as a lion’: The Spirituality of Benjamin Keach,” *Eusebeia* 2 (2005):

¹⁶McBeth, “Early Baptist Hermeneutics,” 91.

¹⁷Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 248-52.

including difficult doctrinal questions. Indeed, the entirety of the confession is saturated with Scripture.¹⁸

Keach often referred to the “analogy of faith” as the boundary marker that he would not exceed when interpreting the Bible. While Vaughn is correct that Keach never provided a specific definition for this guideline,¹⁹ Keach sought to interpret in a manner that was fully consistent “with the purpose (salvation) and focus (Christ) of Scripture.”²⁰ Keach clearly affirmed the statements from the Second London Confession regarding the nature of Scripture and its inherent authority, and they had a definite impact on the manner in which he interpreted the Bible.

Role of Holy Spirit

In accordance with his convictions about the nature of Scripture, Keach was concerned that a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, one who regularly handled the Word of God, should take his calling to preach the Scriptures with the utmost seriousness. Keach said that these ministers must not “preach or argue philosophically, like an Athenian philosopher, but use a familiar, plain style, giving forth the naked truths of God, without any paint or gaudy phrase.”²¹ In *The Glory of a True Church and Its Discipline Display'd*, his treatise on church order and discipline, Keach made the following statement about the role of the pastor and his commitment to the ministry of the Scriptures.

The work of a Pastor is to preach the Word of Christ, or to feed the Flock, and to administer all the Ordinances of the Gospel which belong to his Sacred Office, and to be faithful and laborious therein, studying to shew himself approved unto God, a

¹⁸L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 61-72.

¹⁹Vaughn, “Public Worship and Practical Theology,” 120.

²⁰Jim Spivey, “The Hermeneutics of the Medieval and Reformation Era,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 85.

²¹Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, xii.

*Work-man that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. He is a Steward of the Mysteries of God, therefore ought to be a Man of good Understanding and Experience, being sound in the Faith, and one that is acquainted with the Mysteries of the Gospel: Because he is to feed the People with Knowledge and Understanding.*²²

Interpreting these “naked truths,” however, as the Second London Confession stipulated, was sometimes a source of difficulty. McBeth states, “For Baptists, Bible study was more than a mere academic exercise. They wanted to discover where the Bible touched their lives, where its message impacted them personally. They wanted to know what the Bible *said*, what it *says*, and what *response* they should make. To the Baptists, Bible study was intensely practical. . . . [They made] an honest effort to go beyond a mere historical understanding of the Bible’s message.”²³ In order for this to happen, the enablement and illumination of the Holy Spirit was indispensable. Packer has said, “Understanding of what Scripture means when applied to us—that is, of what God in Scripture is saying to and about us—comes only through the work of the sovereign Holy Spirit, who alone enables us to apprehend what God is and see what we are in His eyes.”²⁴

Keach was very troubled that some failed to acknowledge the Spirit’s aid in the interpretive process, seeking instead to rely on their own cleverness rather than to submit to divine authority. Ironically, this problem occurred all too often among those who had received formal ministry training; some even insisted that without a schooled clergyman that the proper handling of the Scriptures was beyond the reach of other, less fortunate ministers. Keach found such arrogance repulsive.

Certainly, nothing is more necessary to understand the Scripture (whether metaphorical or parabolical, or not) than the help, teachings, and influences of the Holy Spirit, which some of late (as well as formerly) as it seems to me, have cast

²²Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display’d* (London, 1697), 8-9.

²³McBeth, “Early Baptist Hermeneutics,” 97.

²⁴J. I. Packer, “Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 337.

contempt upon, to the dishonour of God, his Blessed Spirit, and to the scandal of our sacred religion, intimating as if without the knowledge of the tongues or school-divinity no men are capable, truly and profitably, to preach the Gospel nor understand the Scripture.²⁵

In fact, Keach was quite blunt when he remarked on the often detrimental effects of formal education upon the gospel ministry. Keach quoted “a late bishop of the church of England” with whom he agreed wholeheartedly: “There hath not been a greater plague to the Christian religion than school divinity, where men take upon them the liberty to propose new questions, make nice distinctions, and rash conclusions of divine matters, tossing them up and down with their tongues like tennis balls.”²⁶

Keach saw clearly that the empowerment of the Holy Spirit made the proper interpretation of the Scriptures possible. Nevertheless, the task of “rightly dividing the word of truth” was not always easy for him, just as it can pose difficulties for anyone. The nature of biblical hermeneutics includes not only a set of interpretive rules, but also an understanding of the different varieties of figurative language that require explanation, and the means by which the concepts within the text can be elicited.

Nature of Hermeneutics

Before an accurate assessment can be made of Keach’s interpretation of metaphor, it is necessary first to comprehend the essential nature of hermeneutics, including its definition, as well as some basic rules to which biblical interpreters must adhere if they desire to understand the full measure of God’s truth from the Scripture.

Definition

Regarding the central thrust of the Bible, Harrison has observed, “Most seventeenth-century exegetes believed that it was the primary intention of the scriptural

²⁵Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, xii.

²⁶*Ibid.*, xii-xiii. Keach does not name his source, but he is quoting Herbert Croft, Bishop of Hereford, who is remembered for his rather blunt (and occasionally humorous) commentary on the state of the Church of England in the latter half of the seventeenth century. See Herbert Croft, *The Naked Truth: or, the True State of the Primitive Church* (London, 1689), 3.

writers to point out the path to salvation.”²⁷ However, the task of biblical interpretation should ultimately seek to enable an accurate comprehension of all of the Scriptures, not just those portions that are more readily understood, such as those which convey the need for man’s salvation from sin. Proper hermeneutics should permit the Word of God to speak all of its truths plainly and clearly. Packer would seem to agree when he states that hermeneutics “is the theory of biblical interpretation or . . . the study of the process whereby the Bible speaks to us.”²⁸ Ramm affirms, “God has spoken! But what has He said? This is a primary and basic need of hermeneutics: *to ascertain what God has said in Sacred Scripture; to determine the meaning of the Word of God.*”²⁹ In addition to these, Article X of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* (1982) asserts emphatically that “Scripture communicates God’s truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms.”³⁰ Thus, genuine hermeneutics seeks to allow the entire biblical canon to speak the full truth of God with clarity throughout all of its component forms of language. This process agrees with the long-standing hermeneutical principle *Scriptura humane loquitur*—Scripture speaks in human language.³¹

Although such a goal is desirable, those striving for it occasionally encounter difficulties, particularly with metaphorical expressions. With these concerns in mind, Vanhoozer notes, “Interpretation is not a matter of translating all figurative language into clear and distinct propositions. Our interpretations may adequately, though not exhaustively, grasp the metaphorical and textual meaning. . . . Hermeneutics involves

²⁷Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 132.

²⁸Packer, “Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,” 332.

²⁹Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 2.

³⁰*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics in Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 883.

³¹Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, 133.

more than a wooden application of methodological principles; hermeneutics requires good judgment.”³² It is particularly at this point that the aid of the Holy Spirit is essential in overcoming the obstacles inherent in applying interpretive rules to the whole spectrum of biblical texts.

Rules

McBeth has provided a succinct account of the interpretive principles endorsed by Particular Baptist Hercules Collins in his *The Temple Repair'd* (1702).

In interpreting a Scripture passage, Collins taught, one should first examine the background. In a passage that could easily come from a modern work on hermeneutics, Collins said one must first determine the author, date, occasion, and overall scope of the passage studied. Those who know the biblical languages should use them, along with lexicons and dictionaries, for word studies. Collins also recommended the use of commentaries, and listed some of those considered helpful in his day.³³

Keach closely adhered to the same interpretive guidelines as his contemporary, Collins. Although Keach did publish his approach to interpreting biblical metaphors, he did not provide a full summary of his interpretive paradigm for all the Scriptures. However, his published sermons reveal the essentials of his approach, which is in substantial agreement with the methods Collins used. Keach’s messages regularly provide the information necessary to determine the context of the passage, as well as abundant evidence of his use of commentaries and lexical resources.

In his discussion of Keach’s understanding of covenant, Nettles has noted, “The covenant [of grace] and all its accompanying blessings are the driving force in, and give coherence to, Keach’s entire theological scheme. It provides, therefore, strategic supportive strands in Keach’s web of interpretation.”³⁴ Keach’s hermeneutical pattern

³²Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 140.

³³McBeth, “Early Baptist Hermeneutics,” 94.

³⁴Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 1:167.

was heavily influenced by his understanding of the covenant of grace. Indeed, he once stated, “*When I was a Child, I thought as a Child, I understood as a Child*, as the Apostle speaks. And let me intreat you to study the Nature of the Covenant of Grace; for until I had that opened to me, I was ignorant of the Mysteries of the Gospel.”³⁵

More recently, Packer has provided four basic but essential modern rules for proper biblical interpretation. These established guidelines are consistent with a high view of Scripture and its inherent authority as the Word of God, and they assume the goal of interpretation is to determine that singular meaning originally intended by the author.

1. Interpretation should adhere to the *literal* sense, that is, the single literary meaning which each passage carries. The initial quest is always for what God’s penman meant by what he wrote. . . . Symbols and figures of speech must be recognized for what they are, and arbitrary allegorizing (as distinct from the drawing out of typology which was demonstrably in the writer’s mind) must be avoided.
2. The literal sense of each passage should be sought by *the grammatical-historical method*, that is, by asking what is the linguistically natural way to understand the text in its historical setting. Textual, historical, literary and theological study, aided by linguistic skills—philological, semantic, logical—is the way forward here.
3. Interpretation should adhere to the principle of *harmony* in the biblical material. Scripture exhibits a wide diversity of concepts and viewpoints within a common faith and an advancing disclosure of divine truth within the biblical period. These differences should not be minimized, but the unity which underlies the diversity should not be lost sight of at any point.
4. Interpretation should always be *canonical*: that is, the teaching of the Bible as a whole should always be viewed as providing the framework within which our understanding of each particular passage must finally be reached and into which it must finally be fitted.³⁶

Packer’s hermeneutical principles emphasize the literal interpretation of the biblical passage, which seeks to identify the unique meaning of the text. Should figurative language—such as metaphor—be present, it should be explained in a manner that is consistent with the intent of the passage. Underlying these important aspects is the foundational rule that the meaning of an individual text of Scripture must fall within the

³⁵Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened; or, The Glory of God’s Rich Grace Displayed in the Mediator to Believers* (London, 1694), 315. The writings of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) provide a full summation of the principles of covenant or federal theology.

³⁶J. I. Packer, “Exposition on Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 909-11.

parameters of the overall canonical content. Keach's principles essentially agree with Packer's: Keach was committed to a literal hermeneutic whenever possible; he felt compelled to assess the text from historical, literary, and theological perspectives; his doctrine of Scripture affirmed material harmony, biblical truth, and canonical unity; and his calling to proclaim the whole counsel of God aligned with his convictions regarding the preaching and teaching of all of God's Word.

In addition to Packer's guidelines, Grudem's list of ten general principles for the proper interpretation of Scripture is an important contribution to the rules with which biblical texts are analyzed. The third principle states, "Every interpreter has only four sources of information about the text." Grudem lists four types of data that are available to everyone seeking to explain a biblical text.

1. The meanings of individual words and sentences
2. The place of the statement in its context
3. The overall teaching of Scripture
4. Some information about the historical and cultural background³⁷

Particularly as an interpreter is forced to address instances of metaphorical usage in a passage, Grudem's four sources of information become vital criteria for understanding and explaining them, because each one directly impacts an aspect of metaphorical imagery. The qualities of meaning, placement, biblical teaching, and background all pertain to metaphors. Using these basic guidelines can assist the interpreter in avoiding hermeneutical extremes. With the knowledge that some interpreters have been subject to an overwhelming temptation to allegorize, the value of Grudem's list immediately becomes clear.

Figurative Language

The presence of figurative language in Scripture, even with its occasional difficulties, is the precise intention of the Holy Spirit who inspired it. Jesus Himself used

³⁷Wayne Grudem, "Right and Wrong Interpretation of the Bible: Some Suggestions for Pastors and Bible Teachers," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 57-60.

parabolic illustrations and even provided the explanations for them in some instances. In *Tropologia*, Delaune addressed many different kinds of “tropes and figures,” but Keach focused his attention primarily on biblical types and metaphors, seeking to provide as much insight as possible, particularly regarding those elements that were obscure. For example, when referring to the parable of the treasure hidden in a field, Keach said, “This treasure was hid, (and is still) [in] dark, parabolical, symbolical, or tropical expressions uttered by our blessed Lord, many had the field, I mean the parables and similitudes, they were spoken to in multitudes, but the treasure hid in them few saw; and it is sad indeed to see how some men mistake the design of our Saviour in many of his parables; it is evident the treasure is still hid from most in our days.”³⁸ Keach wanted to lay bare as much of the meaning of the biblical text as possible, even if it was predominantly metaphorical in nature. Like those who heard Jesus’ parable, the “field” was at hand, as was the “treasure,” but many who heard the story were ignorant of the meaning of Jesus’ imagery and were looking for earthly pleasure rather than spiritual satisfaction. The people could relate to the images, but the meaning Jesus assigned to them was beyond their perception.

While many forms of figurative language, such as types, metaphors, parables, and allegories, have specific traits that are distinctive from the others, the underlying commonality in these forms is their representative nature—one person, event, or thing represents another. Seeking to interpret these figurative elements, while striving to determine their literal sense, can be challenging. Some might even suspect such an effort is impossible or at least illogical, but this is not so. Harrison has commented on this tension.

The recognition of the historicity of the biblical texts, combined with efforts to mine scripture for historical and scientific information, raised a number of questions about the religious functions of the Bible and the intentions of its authors. . . . The sacred history set down in scripture . . . was edifying because it was replete with “types”—events and characters which . . . represented patterns or personalities

³⁸Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 213.

which would recur in later times. . . . [T]he popularity of typological readings in the seventeenth century may seem to run counter to the prevailing trend towards literal interpretation, but in fact the two developments *are quite compatible*. . . . Typological [as opposed to allegorical] interpretation was also justified . . . by appealing to the literary forms of antiquity.³⁹

Nevertheless, biblical interpreters must be conscious of the need to evaluate figurative language and not simply take these elements at face value, lest they come to the wrong conclusion. Keach said, “[T]ropical writers . . . say, That a parable is a continued metaphor, or an allegory of words, . . . which is a continuation of tropes, especially metaphors. Though learned Glassius seems to differ from them. A parable, according to Jerome, is a comparison made of things different in nature: others say, A parable is a comparison or a similitude. . . . Our Saviour [is] referring to something else than what the literal sense denotes.”⁴⁰ Thus, instances of figurative language require proper handling in order to determine their actual meaning.

Keach sometimes blurred the distinctions between forms of metaphorical imagery, describing one form of expression in terms of another. This practice seems to have been fairly common in Keach’s day. Keeble has commented on this occurrence:

[T]win preoccupations—the personal experience of saving grace and the operation of Providence—were never for long kept apart. It is this which gives to [Old Testament] narratives their distinctive resonance. Within the unified structure created by the image of the journey, various levels of significance are constantly in play: many journeys go forward at once. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is “about” Christian; but it is also about Bunyan himself, is, indeed, a reworking of *Grace Abounding*; it is about the state of England during the Restoration period, to which topical and satirical reference is several times made; it is about the Old Testament experience of similar circumstances; and it is about the New Testament resolution of both Israel’s earlier and England’s later history. The mode of nonconformist story, that is to say, is at once realistic, allegorical in the old medieval sense, picturing forth theological abstractions, and symbolic in the manner of modern subjectivism, investing particular experiences with figurative significance. Its method was a peculiarly intimate and personal use of the traditional typological exegesis of the Old Testament which survived the Reformation and continued to be promoted in the seventeenth century by such works as . . . Benjamin Keach’s massive *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (1681).⁴¹

³⁹Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, 129-30. Italics added.

⁴⁰Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 90-91.

⁴¹N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), 264.

Typology can serve as an aid in the work of interpreting figurative language. Harrison adds, “[T]he main reason for the compatibility of literal sense and typology is to do with the fact that the typological reading is just as much a way of understanding history as of interpreting texts. Just as allegory implied a certain symbolic view of natural objects, so typology carried with it a conviction about the nature of historical events: allegory is to do with things, typology with people and events.”⁴²

Keach’s Interpretation of Metaphor

Having examined the nature of biblical interpretation, focusing specifically upon understanding and characterizing some of the most common forms of figurative language and the challenges they pose to interpreters, particular attention can be given to Keach’s own interpretation of metaphor and the methods he used to explain them. The biblical texts which Keach selected for preaching often contained metaphors which he explained throughout the course of his sermons. Examining his selection of these metaphorical texts, whether they be figurative, allegorical, or parabolical in nature, is an especially useful means for understanding how Keach interpreted metaphor. Even the exegetical difficulties that Keach occasionally encountered shed light on his methods.

Selecting Texts

In his commentary on the substance of Article X of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*, Geisler has noted, “The Bible is God’s Word, but it is written in human words; thus, revelation is ‘verbal.’ . . . [T]he Bible is a human book which uses normal literary forms. These include parables, satire, irony, hyperbole, metaphor, simile, poetry, and even allegory. . . . God adapted Himself through human language so that His eternal truth could be understood by a man in a temporal world.”⁴³ Somewhat more

⁴²Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, 131.

⁴³Norman L. Geisler, “Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 895.

pessimistically, Vanhoozer says, “Of all words that impede the philosopher’s progress, metaphors have traditionally been thought to be the worst. Metaphors are equivocal; they do not have one clear sense, so that they cannot give rise to clear and distinct knowledge. Metaphor thus represents the epitome of textuality; in metaphor, meanings refuse to stand still.”⁴⁴

As noted elsewhere, Keach was not as pessimistic as is Vanhoozer with respect to the clarity of meaning that can be determined from metaphors.⁴⁵ Keach clearly believed that the metaphorical content of parables—as well as other forms of figurative language—could and should be explained and applied. He said, “Though the scope of a parable be the chief thing we should attend upon, yet more generally many other things may be made use of to the advantage of the hearers; even so far as it bears a clear analogy of faith, as in metaphorical Scriptures.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Keach believed such biblical passages possessed innate qualities that the Holy Spirit could use to communicate divine truth.

Figurative Texts

Perhaps the most significant of Keach’s interpretive principles was his commitment to locating the most literal sense of a text possible. It is true that Keach’s published sermons seem to indicate an inclination toward texts that contained elements of language that could be enlarged in an exposition, but those 224 sermons are only a small fraction of the total number of messages that Keach would have delivered in his London ministry of more than thirty-five years. Given Keach’s commitment to proclaiming the “whole counsel of God,” it seems unlikely that he would have been so exclusive in his selection of sermon texts.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 127.

⁴⁵Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1681), bk. 1, 39.

⁴⁶Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 3.

⁴⁷Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 262-63.

Perhaps the most confusing aspect of Keach's interpretive system was the way in which he amalgamated specific figurative language elements such as types, allegories, parables, and metaphors all into a single category of "tropes and figures." Apparently, this was not uncommon. Rowe has observed that even the full title of Keach's *Tropologia* "betrays a mounting confusion during the seventeenth century that elided sacred types with 'Scripture-Metaphors' with tropes, although his treatise includes primarily biblical types and metaphors."⁴⁸ Although Keach indicated distinct differences among these elements, he did not always treat them differently.

[The use of topical] headings would seem to distinguish types from metaphors: in fact the copious catalogs belie [Keach's] assertion that "there is a great difference between *Metaphorical* or *Allegorical*, and *Typical* Scriptures" by indiscriminately mingling them together. For example, under the all-inclusive heading "Metaphors, Allegories, Similes, Types . . . Respecting the Lord Jesus Christ," Keach includes types (brazen serpent, prophet, priest, king, altar, manna), scriptural metaphors (sun of righteousness, root of David, true vine, bright and morning star, saints' wedding garment), and less definitively biblical metaphors (door, lion, compassion to sinners under the similitude of a hen, captain of our salvation, ambassador, eagle). . . . In short, the seventeenth-century theological tradition . . . encompassed not simply acceptable types, but also numerous metaphors, sanctioned by their biblical origins or by repeated usage.⁴⁹

In fact, Keeble finds it curious that the plain style of preaching so prevalent in that period actually accommodated sermons containing uses of figurative language. Keeble states,

[T]he two traditions of Israel's origins, in the Abraham legends and the Exodus saga, is repeated the same pattern of decision to leave, journey under divine guidance, testing in the wilderness and covenant. This pattern came to control the narrative shape of the Protestant—still more, Puritan—imagination, for here was a Biblically authorised model for the representation of experience. It is an anomaly of the cultural history of Protestantism that, despite its stress upon plainness in artistic as well as in liturgical and devotional practice, allegorical and symbolic hermeneutical methods and literary modes survived the Reformation.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Karen E. Rowe, *Saint and Singer: Edward Taylor's Typology and the Poetics of Meditation* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 242.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* The material quoted from Keach is taken from Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1682), bk. 4, "Epistle to the Reader," iii. The heading is found in *Tropologia*, bk. 2, 86.

⁵⁰N. H. Keeble, "'To be a pilgrim': Constructing the Protestant Life in Early Modern England," in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 245.

Rowe seems to agree with Keeble: “Despite their denunciations of allegorism, Puritan commentators do acknowledge and interpret the infrequent allegorical portions of Scripture. [In his descriptions of allegory,] Benjamin Keach captures the essential distinction between Puritan concepts of allegorical Scripture and patristic allegory.”⁵¹

Allegorical Texts

Keach knew the difficulties inherent in handling allegorical passages in the Bible, particularly in distinguishing what was and what was not figurative. In the attempt to define an allegory, for example, Keach gave a two-fold answer that made a clear distinction between an *allegorical exposition* of Scripture and an exposition of *allegorical Scripture*.

For the first, there is a great difference betwixt an *Allegorick* Exposition of Scripture, and an Exposition of *Allegorick* Scripture: The first is that which the Fathers and School-men fail in, *i.e.* when they allegorize plain Scriptures and Histories, seeking to draw out some secret meaning, other than appears in the Words, and so would fasten many Senses upon one Scripture. This is indeed unsafe, and is justly reprobable; for this makes clear Scripture dark, and obtrudes Meanings on the Words never intended by the Spirit: As suppose one speaking of *Goliath's* Combat with *David*, should pass by the *Letter*, and expound *Goliath* to be Flesh, or the Devil; and *David*; to mean the Spirit or Christ. Such Expositions may have some pleasantness, but very little solidity; and such who commonly thus interpret Scripture, often fall into Errors, and guilty of this Fault *Origen* is thought to be.

2dly, An Exposition of *Allegorical* Scripture is the opening and expounding of some dark Scripture, (wherein the Mind of the Spirit is couched and hid under Figures, &c.) making it plain and edifying by bringing out the Sence according to the meaning of the Holy Spirit in the place, tho at first it seems to bear no such thing. So *Mat. 13*. Christ expounds that Parable or Allegory, (for tho *Rhetoricians* make a difference between *Metaphors*, *Similes*, *Parables*, and *Allegories*, yet in Divinity there is none, but that *Allegories* are more large and continued) calling the *Seed* the *Word*, and the *Sower* the *Son of Man*, &c. This way of expounding such dark Scriptures is both useful and necessary, and was often used as edifying by our Lord Jesus to his Disciples. Now 'tis this we speak of, which teacheth how to draw *plain Doctrines* out of *Metaphors*, *Allegories*, &c. and not to draw *Allegories* out of *plain Histories*.⁵²

⁵¹Rowe, *Saint and Singer*, 11. The material quoted from Keach is taken from *Tropologia*, bk. 4, “Epistle to the Reader,” v. Rowe notes that Keach’s distinctions are taken verbatim from James Durham, *Clavis Cantici: or, an Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (Edinburgh: George Swintoun & James Glen, 1668), 22. Keach cites Durham’s work twice in the margins of the prefatory material.

⁵²Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 4, “Epistle to the Reader,” v.

Keach also sought to explain the precise conditions under which a passage of Scripture should be understood figuratively or allegorically (as opposed to a literal interpretation). Keach's explicit answer contained five substantial components which are essentially hermeneutical guidelines. These principles reveal that Keach apparently used the descriptive terms "metaphorical," "allegorical," and "figurative" in an interchangeable fashion, which occasionally presents difficulty in comprehending Keach's meaning.

1. When the literal proper meaning looks absurd-like, or is empty, nothing to Edification; as when 'tis said, *Unless ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, &c. This is my Body, &c.* And so those Scriptures that command to *pluck out the right Eye, and cut off the right Hand, take up our Cross, &c.* All which, if literally understood, were absurd and ridiculous; and therefore the mistaking such *Scriptures*, hath occasioned many *grievous Errors*, as that of the *Anthropomorphites*, attributing *Members viz. Head, Hands, Feet, &c.* to God; and *Passions, yea, Infirmities*, as Anger, Repenting, &c. because the *Scriptures* in such places, speaking after the manner of Men, *metaphorically* attribute such things to him.
2. Those Places of *Scripture* are to be accounted *Metaphorical* or *Allegorick*; which reach not the *Scope of Edification* intended by them, if literally understood; as, when Christ spoke of *Sowing, Mat. 13*, the Disciples thought, something more was intended than at first appeared, for his Aim could not be to discourse of Husbandry to them.
3. When a *literal Sence* would obtrude some Falsity on the *Scripture*, then such Places are to be taken *Allegorically*; as when Christ said, *Destroy this Temple, and I will build it up again in three Days*: Which if understood of the *Material Temple*, Christ's Words would not have had their Accomplishment; But he spoke, *figuratively*, of his Body. So when Christ said, *Except a man eat my Flesh, and drink my Blood, he cannot live*; it cannot be understood literally, because many who have obtained Life, never did so eat his Flesh, &c.
4. Any *Scripture* is to be accounted *Figurative* or *Allegorical*, when the *literal Sence* agrees not with other *Scriptures*, and is repugnant to the Analogy of Faith, or Rules of good Manners; as when we are commanded to *heap Coals of Fire upon the Head of our Enemy*; now we being required not to avenge our selves, it followeth clearly, this *Scripture* is not properly or literally understood.
5. When a *literal Sence* answers not to the present Scope of the Speaker, and the Speaker would be thought impertinent, if his Words were properly taken; then it ought to be expounded in a figurative Sence. So *Mat 3.10* when *John* is pressing Repentance, he saith, *Now is the Ax laid to the Root of the Tree, &c.* And the Parable of Christ, *Luk 13.7*. If these Places were only properly to be understood, they would not enforce Repentance.⁵³

⁵³Keach, *Tropologia*, bk. 4, "Epistle to the Reader," v-vi. Keach includes all five of these components, nearly verbatim, in his introduction to *Exposition of the Parables*, where he lists six rules to distinguish biblical texts that should be interpreted figuratively (parables) from those that should be understood literally. By basing his interpretive methodology on these same principles for nearly twenty-five years, Keach was able to maintain a high level of consistency in the content of his sermons. See Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 3-4. In rule 5, the "Speaker" refers to the Holy Spirit.

Parabolic Texts

Regarding Keach's specific hermeneutical principles, Vaughn notes that "Insight . . . can be gleaned from his published sermons, especially *Gospel Mysteries* and *A Golden Mine*. However, *Tropologia* provides a more systematic statement of those principles."⁵⁴ Indeed, Keach's sermons on the parables of Jesus allowed him to impart to his audience not only practical instructions to be lived, but also, and more importantly in Keach's perspective, doctrinal truths to be believed. Keach lamented that such was not the typical order.

I perceive that some men render many things (spoken by our Lord in many parables) very insignificant or to little or no purpose mentioned by him, and so not to be improved by us to our spiritual profit; which to me seems to cast a kind of contempt upon the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as it clearly contradicts his own exposition of those parables He Himself explained. Moreover, I think those expositions of the parables of some men, who only (or principally) improve them to instruct people into practical duties, or rather only how they should live, than how they should believe, are worthy of blame; as if our Saviour chiefly designed by speaking so many parables, to teach us how to lead our lives, and not so much to open to us the great doctrine of the Gospel, or to show us the necessity of faith in himself, or to instruct us into doctrinal truths; whereas the latter seeming directly to be the main scope of our Lord in most of his parables.⁵⁵

Indeed, Keach believed that parables were an excellent medium for communicating doctrinal truth. He strongly affirmed that "parables, . . . in their main scope and design, intend not matter of fact (as types do), but are principally doctrinal, and are brought to open the mind of God the better to our weak capacities, move upon our affections, and convince the conscience, as the parable of Nathan in David's case."⁵⁶ Keach understood that parables were essentially metaphorical in nature, in that they compare one thing with another. He noted that, "a parable . . . denotes conferring,

⁵⁴Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology," 118. These are Keach's two largest collections of published sermons, totaling 183 messages. Keach's *Exposition of the Parables* was originally published as *Gospel Mysteries Unveil'd*.

⁵⁵Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, xii.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 1-2.

comparing, or the collocation of different things. . . . Properly and strictly it signifies an artificial narrative of a thing done, to signify another thing.”⁵⁷

Regarding the interpretation of parabolic passages, Keach stated, “It is not always to be expected, that every particular thing, passage, or action, mentioned in a parable, should be answered by something in the explication thereof. Some for want of considering this, run into many errors.”⁵⁸ Likewise, Keach acknowledges that haphazardly assigning identities for types, such as those that occur commonly in Old Testament passages, is another common source of mistakes. He warns stringently that “men are not to frame, or make types, nor ought any to attempt once to do so; for after that rate men may turn all historical Scriptures into allegories, as some will have Pharaoh a type of the devil. I am satisfied that all persons and things that were types under the Old Testament, God hath somewhere or another given us grounds to believe, that they were types or figurative.”⁵⁹

As well, Keach understood the immense value of amassing as much related knowledge as possible when engaging in biblical interpretation. He offered the following comments: “[S]uch that handle the parables of our Saviour, ought to have the knowledge of natural, moral, and civil histories, and consult classic authors, &c.; which so far as I am capable I have endeavoured; together with the customs and practice of the Jews and the eastern countries, also their plants, seeds, &c., some of which differ from ours.”⁶⁰

Difficult Texts

Nevertheless, Keach was not flawless in his exposition of the imagery in every biblical text. For example, Keach’s treatise *Antichrist Stormed* (1689) dealt primarily

⁵⁷Ibid., 2.

⁵⁸Ibid., 3.

⁵⁹Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰Ibid., 2-3.

with the events of the Glorious Revolution in England (1688), which Keach believed—and interpreted—signalled the beginning of the end for the Roman Catholic Church, which he and other Particular Baptists had long understood to be the “antichrist” mentioned in the book of Revelation. Newport states that for Keach, this was the “point at which history and prophecy coincided, . . . drawing to a close the 1260-day prophecy of Revelation 11.3.”⁶¹ Because of the advent of William of Orange to the kingly throne and the departure of Catholic James II, at least the political influence of Catholicism diminished significantly.⁶² Referring to the hermeneutical approach that Keach followed in making this assertion, Newport observes,

Keach employs fairly standard interpretive principles in seeking to work out his exposition and reflects by and large the kind of prophetic *eisegetical* school existent in England at the end of the seventeenth century. . . . The seriousness with which [Keach] approached the text is obvious, and the seriousness with which he sought to explain contemporary events in the light of what he found in Revelation are no less so. . . . [Keach’s] understanding of Revelation, like all others, reflects . . . individual circumstances and is highly personal. . . . [I]t is clear that text and interpreter interact.⁶³

Although Keach occasionally made unintentional interpretive mistakes, nevertheless, his firm commitment to the authority of Scripture insulated him from many more potential errors and enabled him to convey a wide array of truths with great accuracy and conviction. In a firm reminder that the Bible is and functions as an organic whole, Rowe has stated that “in preaching and exegesis, figurative biblical texts and similitudes sometimes usefully clarify the Scripture’s literal sense, but they prove

⁶¹Kenneth G. C. Newport, “Benjamin Keach, William of Orange and the Book of Revelation: A Study in English Prophetic Exegesis,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 36 (1995): 44.

⁶²For a fuller treatment of the events surrounding the Revolution in England, see John Spurr, *Religion, Politics, and Society in Britain: The Post-Reformation, 1603-1714* (London: Pearson Education, 2006), 173-92.

⁶³Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42. Italics added. According to Kaiser, *eisegesis* is “‘a reading into’ a text what the reader wants it so say, . . . [such as personal] prejudices, feelings, judgments, or concerns.” See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 45.

nothing, . . . when divorced entirely from the literal meaning or when used as sole doctrinal proofs.”⁶⁴

Summary

Metaphors are an unusually potent tool that can be used in biblical sermons to enhance the association between the preacher and his audience for the purpose of conveying doctrine and impacting the conscience. The fact that Scripture is replete with these figurative elements not only indicates that metaphorical usage was of divine intention, but also suggests that using such language within the context of the proclamation of God’s Word is appropriate and even beneficial. Keach often referred to multiple forms of figurative language, such as parables, allegories, and types as “metaphorical” in nature. While these elements indeed possess qualities innate to metaphors, they are not identical, and Keach’s handling of them—particularly his grouping of all of them under the same heading of “tropes and figures”—occasionally proves challenging for those seeking to understand his interpretive methods.

Like many other Baptists of the seventeenth century, Keach was convinced of the supreme authority of Scripture, and his treatment of biblical texts reflects this concern. Evidence for this conviction can be found abundantly in his own writings and sermons, as well as the confessions of faith contemporary with Keach, especially the *Second London Baptist Confession*. Keach also knew of the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in properly interpreting and comprehending the Bible.

Hermeneutics and exegesis work in concert to enable the correct understanding of God’s Word. Rules for interpretation must be governed by an underlying reverence for the Bible. More often than not, simplicity should guide the exegete, rather than a myriad of criteria that fail to account for the full nature of the Scriptures. With this in

⁶⁴Rowe, *Saint and Singer*, 11.

mind, whenever possible, the literal sense of a text is the desired goal of interpretation. Figurative language poses challenges to this process, but they are not insurmountable.

Keach declared many of his own interpretive rules in his *Tropologia*, and nearly twenty-five years later, he cited them again in his *Exposition of the Parables*, which is evidence of substantial consistency in Keach's hermeneutical approach as well as the content of his sermons. The wild allegorization of Scripture was a practice that Keach sought to avoid, although even he occasionally stumbled into it. Nevertheless, Keach repeatedly sought to interpret the Bible in a faithful and accurate manner that was consistent with Scripture's own boundaries, which Keach called "the analogy of faith." Keach's sermons on the parables of Jesus afforded him significant opportunity to employ imagery in his sermons, both those metaphors from the biblical texts and those he crafted to illustrate the passages and to engage his hearers.

CHAPTER 6

KEACH'S USE OF METAPHOR

Introduction

In the task of preaching, Benjamin Keach was well acquainted with the importance of connecting with his audience. He desired that each of his hearers not only understand the biblical texts from which he preached, but Keach was also eager for the truth of the Scriptures to impact the heart and the mind—the whole person. By seasoning his sermons with appropriate metaphorical imagery, doctrines and applications were coupled with explanation and illustration. As a result, Keach's messages possessed a greater capacity to engage those who personally heard him preach or who purchased and read his sermons. His messages conveyed more than dry facts and biblical data; they were designed to make contact with people's emotions and to stimulate their affections in such a way that they understood the sermons more clearly and retained their contents more fully. In his discussion of seventeenth-century Puritan preaching, which was essentially the style of preaching Keach used, Stout notes the significance of this practice.

Diversity of speech and imagery best served the didactic and exhortatory function of metaphor in Puritan preaching. Ministers generally preferred similes and analogies to instruct the understanding and bring divine doctrines down to earth, and they employed metaphors drawn from Scripture and common experience to arouse and explain godly affections. . . . To aid the minister in his selection of images, a variety of reference works were compiled that indexed all biblical metaphors and showed the context in which they were used. Such metaphors fell into several broad categories, including natural and domestic imagery.¹

The figurative language that Keach used was not added to make his sermons less biblical but to make them more experiential. The most ordinary of people, even

¹Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford, 1986), 44. Stout notes that Keach's *Tropologia* was "the most famous of these reference tools." See p. 327 n. 36.

those without any education, could relate to the imagery in Keach's messages and make the connections that enabled understanding. This approach was certainly not original with Keach. In fact, Keach took great comfort in knowing that this method of proclamation was practiced and endorsed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Regarding this straightforward means of communication that employed comparisons and common vernacular, Long has said,

The kingdom of heaven, Jesus said, may be compared to a farmer who sowed good seed in a field or to a ruler who wished to settle accounts with his servants. Jesus also said that the kingdom of God is like leaven which a woman took . . . a grain of mustard seed . . . treasure hidden in a field . . . a merchant in search of fine pearls . . . a net thrown into the sea . . . a woman searching for a lost coin . . . a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. Jesus came preaching in stories and parables, and when he spoke of the reign of God he often did so in familiar images drawn from ordinary experience. Christian preachers ever since have followed Jesus' example and have continued to communicate the gospel through narratives, images, metaphors, and similes drawn from everyday life.²

While it would be impossible to determine all the biblical texts that Keach selected for the thousands of sermons that he preached over the course of his lengthy pulpit ministry in London, those that Keach chose for his 224 published sermons are known. Desiring to connect his audience to the teachings of God's Word, Keach frequently selected scriptural passages that contained metaphorical imagery in them already or texts that could serve as a backdrop for and be enriched by Keach's own figurative elements.

Selection of Biblical Texts

Choosing portions of Scripture from which to prepare sermons has always been an exceedingly important process. An analysis of Keach's published messages reveals some general information about his manner of text selection, and it suggests the specific types of texts he preferred to use in his sermons. This is not to say that Keach was conversant with only certain parts of the Bible. On the contrary, his messages are

²Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 156.

filled with marginal references to passages throughout the canon. Keach's published sermons indicate which kinds of biblical literature he used, and they reveal the areas of Scripture to which Keach appealed most frequently.

Scriptures Keach Selected

By listing the various passages of Scripture that Keach used throughout the entire corpus of his published sermons, the specific biblical books that he frequented in his messages become clear. The particular books Keach chose, as well as those he did not select, provide at least some indication of Keach's favorite portions of the Bible.

Keach's published sermons draw from the Old Testament in only five places: Genesis, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah. Significantly, these few occurrences come from all three major divisions of the Old Testament—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Nevertheless, given the substantial amount of material in the Old Testament, Keach's appeal to only five books is somewhat puzzling, especially given the enormous number of narrative texts in the Prophets and the figurative language in the Writings, both of which would seem to be most fitting for Keach's style of preaching.

The New Testament is the portion of Scripture that Keach clearly favored. He drew his sermon texts from all four Gospels, Acts, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and Revelation. Interestingly, Keach published very few sermons that were taken from the New Testament Epistles; indeed, he chose passages from only three of the twenty-one epistolary books.

Genres Keach Preferred

By tabulating the actual number of sermons that Keach preached from the particular books of Scripture he chose, the kinds of biblical literature that Keach selected most frequently—at least for his published messages—become evident. The results provide important insights into the specific genres of the Bible from which Keach preferred to preach.

Of Keach's 224 published sermons, twenty-one (about 9%) were based on Old Testament texts. The fourteen sermons of Keach's *Display of Glorious Grace* are among these and were taken from Isaiah 54, a prophetic chapter that focuses on the everlasting nature of God's covenant of grace. Thus, Keach selected relatively few of his sermonic texts from the Old Testament; ninety-one percent came from New Testament passages.

Twenty-nine of Keach's published messages (about 13%) were drawn from the New Testament Epistles, and nineteen of these were from the Epistle to the Hebrews, a remarkable letter with a high concentration of Jewish and typological imagery. One sermon was based dually on texts from Acts and Revelation. Thus, fewer than one-fourth of Keach's published sermons were founded on texts outside the Gospels.

Keach put forth 172 sermons based on passages from the Gospels (about 77%). Most of these (154) were based on texts that were almost universally considered to be parabolic in nature and were published in Keach's *Exposition of the Parables*. Passages such as these contain many figurative references, which made them excellent teaching tools. Significantly, sixteen of the remaining eighteen sermons were drawn from John 10, a rich chapter heavily saturated with metaphorical references to "sheep" and the "Good Shepherd."

These statistics suggest that Keach was particularly fond of selecting biblical texts that were parabolic in nature, as well as those possessing metaphorical elements that Keach could readily employ during the course of sermon delivery. The particular methods that Keach used in choosing passages for his sermons are not known precisely, but some information can be inferred from the choices that he made.

Texts Containing Metaphors

One aspect that seems to have been typical of the scriptural texts that Keach selected for his messages is that they contained metaphors. In addition to Keach's published sermons, his massive *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* was based largely on sermon notes that had been reorganized and arranged to fit the paradigm

of a reference work for ministerial students, pastors, and others. Vaughn has shown that Keach incorporated some of his early work with metaphors in *Tropologia* into his later sermons.³ Given its almost exhaustive nature, it is likely that during Keach's research for *Tropologia*, he surveyed the whole Bible, seeking metaphorical passages to expound. He could have used one of several different methods for this, but it appears probable that he was looking especially for potent images that could be described and handled with ease in the context of sermon delivery.

Another somewhat less important aspect of Keach's sermons that indicates his preference for metaphor is his sermon titles. Nearly all of Keach's published sermons have titles containing metaphorical imagery. Examples include his *A Summons to the Grave*, *The Marrow of True Justification*, *A Trumpet Blown in Zion*, *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven*, or *Jacob's Ladder Improved*, *An Ax Laid to the Root*, etc. In nearly all of these cases, Keach's sermon titles arise from the texts upon which they are based. Thus, Keach's preference for preaching from Scriptures containing metaphors is clear. One matter of significance remains to be explored—the particular way in which Keach used metaphors in his sermons.

Keach's Use of Metaphor

Determining Keach's specific sermonic use of metaphor is a process that requires two basic steps: locating metaphors within his messages and classifying the metaphors by their particular function. This method generally aligns with the two pertinent questions that Hart has recommended to the analyst: "To what extent does a message employ nonliteral language?" and "What specific purposes does such language serve?"⁴

³James Barry Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1989), 94-98.

⁴Roderick P. Hart, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997), 144.

Locating Keach's Metaphors

Locating metaphors within Keach's sermons is not especially difficult, given his abundant use of them throughout his messages. However, familiarity with the proper definition of the term is essential for the critic to identify metaphors within the text of a sermon most precisely and to classify them properly according to their function.

Although it is true that Keach occasionally applied a wider variety of figurative language to the term *metaphor*, calling other forms of imagery "metaphorical," he usually adhered to the accepted understanding, in which the meaning of one person, thing, or event is transferred to another.

Some of Keach's metaphors arise from the biblical texts upon which the sermons are based, and others are figures that Keach crafted specifically to enrich his messages. As the analyst works through the sermon text, examples of "nonliteral language" are observable. The metaphors often appear individually, sometimes in apposition to elements in Scripture; alternatively, the metaphors may be arranged in a clustered or "family" format. Keach did not follow any particular configuration as he employed metaphorical examples in his sermons; he simply used them as he perceived a homiletical need.

Classifying Keach's Metaphors

The classification of Keach's sermonic metaphors involves two steps: examining their characteristics and assigning them to specific categories based on their function. Examining the traits of metaphors located within a sermon requires a comparative type of analysis. Hart notes that most critics look for "systematicity," or patterns of metaphorical usage, and that they should ask the following kinds of questions: "What families of *metaphors* reside in the text?" "Are they internally consistent?" "What is their cumulative effect?"⁵ In particular, Keach often used a "family" of

⁵Ibid., 147.

multiple metaphors, by employing several figurative examples that were closely related (e.g., “ship,” “sails,” and “seas”). Using metaphors in this way, Keach could create an entire landscape of images in the minds of his audience. Such an approach was an especially effective means of communication, because these images could impact the intellect and emotions of his audience all at once.

The specific ways in which Keach’s metaphors functioned is a particularly important step in determining how he used them. Hart notes that throughout the book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson suggest four different metaphorical functions: 1) they highlight ideas; 2) they are often generative; 3) they often mask ideas and values; and 4) they have entailments.⁶ These qualities are suitable to classify most metaphors, regardless of the kind of literature in which they are found. The task of organizing sermonic metaphors, however, would seem to require a modified system of classification, because sermons are a particular kind of literature with a specialized vocabulary and a distinct culture. They are not ordinary forms of discourse, hence the need for an altered method of classification.

In the process of sermon preparation, each main point requires various kinds of development in order to convey fully the thrust of the biblical passage. McDill believes that the development of sermon points “is to be done by the use of explanation, illustration, argumentation, and application.”⁷ Similarly, Chapell believes, “The most powerful sermons bring truth to life by demonstrating and applying textual truths. Traditional expository messages fulfill these obligations when they include illustration and application along with explanation in every main point.”⁸ Chapell does not include

⁶Ibid., 146-47. See also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁷Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 149.

⁸Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 163.

argumentation as one of his primary categories of development, because he understands argumentation to be a supportive aspect of explanation, rather than its own division.⁹ In the other categories, however, he is in substantial agreement with McDill's approach. Together, these three areas of sermonic development are able to appeal to the whole person.¹⁰

Although the three aspects of explanation, illustration, and application all work toward the goal of communicating the full truth of Scripture, they are distinct from each other. McDill provides a summary definition of each category in terms of its role in sermon development.

Explanation is sermon development which aims for an understanding of the biblical and homiletical concepts by using background and interpretation material.

Illustration is the function of sermon development which illuminates the sermon idea for the imagination of the hearer; it is any word picture that gives the biblical truth a familiar enough image that the listener can see it in his mind.

Application is that form of development which presents the implications of sermon ideas for human experience. It can be descriptive in analyzing contemporary life or prescriptive in advocating certain behavior.¹¹

In the context of preaching, Robinson has noted the significance of explanation: “[W]hen a preacher wants his congregation to understand a doctrine of the Bible, . . . offering an audience a clear explanation of a biblical passage may be the most important contribution an expositor can make in his sermon.”¹² Illustrations, according to Chapell, “are essential to effective exposition not merely because they stimulate interest, but also because they expand and deepen our understanding of the text.”¹³ Regarding application, McDill

⁹Ibid., 121-22.

¹⁰McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills*, 188-89.

¹¹Ibid., 185. The entire section of McDill's book that addresses these aspects is excellent. See pp. 184-93.

¹²Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 116.

¹³Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 166.

indicates that it “is a call for action, for putting the principles of Scripture to work in our lives.”¹⁴

According to McDill, each of the categories is intended to impact a different aspect of the hearer. He associates explanation with a person’s intellect, illustration with imagination, and application with volition.¹⁵ It is in these areas that Keach found ample opportunities to incorporate metaphorical elements into his sermons. Such a practice was not unique to Keach. In fact, many Puritan preachers were conscious that “different types of metaphors were better fitted to different ‘faculties’ or compartments of the mind, including the ‘will,’ the ‘understanding,’ the ‘imagination,’ and the ‘affections.’ Since all the faculties needed to be addressed in the course of the sermon, ministers rarely dwelt exclusively on [a single] metaphor but preferred to scatter a variety of figures of speech throughout the discourse, each calculated to engage different faculties.”¹⁶ With the judicious use of metaphor, Keach was aware that he could aid his hearers in understanding and applying Scripture, or he could appeal to their emotions, and occasionally, he could accomplish all of these things at once.

Of these three categories, illustration is unusual, in that it can be applied to explanation and application. McDill notes, “Illustration has a special role in that it can serve each of the other elements. It can help to explain, argue, or apply the truths of the text.” In this study, Keach’s uses of metaphor are sorted into the three categories suggested by Chapell and McDill: homiletic illustration, theological explanation, and sermonic application. Each of these divisions is distinct from the others, revealing the different ways in which Keach was able to employ metaphorical language. Nevertheless, it must also be acknowledged that depending on the particular example, sometimes

¹⁴McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills*, 187.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁶Stout, *The New England Soul*, 43. See also Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 240-41.

Keach's metaphors can be arranged under more than one heading. For example, there are occasions in which imagery used for theological explanation can look very much like homiletic illustration. Although this blending of categories might initially appear to be a significant weakness, in fact it is actually a substantial strength: Keach's metaphors often were able to have impact in multiple areas simultaneously, which was a clear advantage and not a disability. Classifications of metaphors were determined based on the evaluative questions of rhetorical analysis, as well as their functional agreement with the definitions of the three categories.

As examples of Keach's use of metaphor are examined, illustration will be treated first, not only because of its ability to enhance the other two aspects, but also due to its prevalence among Keach's overall metaphorical usage.¹⁷ Though a fully quantitative analysis to determine the precise categorical distribution of Keach's metaphors has not been performed in this study, a general sampling indicates that approximately half of Keach's uses of metaphor were illustrative in nature, which is consistent with its ability to serve the other functions.

Homiletical Illustration

Following McDill's definition, elements categorized as homiletical illustrations are metaphors that illuminate the sermon idea for the imagination of the hearer; it is any word picture that gives the biblical truth a familiar enough image that the listener can see it in his mind.

Nature of Christ. As Keach sought to provide his audience with potent illustrations in his sermons, he often took advantage of metaphors that connected with the day-to-day duties of so many of his hearers. For example, in a sermon from Genesis

¹⁷Citations from the writings of Keach and others of his era contain numerous instances of variant spellings, unusual punctuation and capitalization, etc. These differences are preserved verbatim within this dissertation.

28:12, Keach spoke of Jesus Christ when he said, “As he is the Fountain that contains all things, so he is the Conduit-Pipe, thro’ whom all good is conveyed to us also.”¹⁸ True to the definition of metaphor, Keach clearly transfers the meaning of “fountain” and “conduit-pipe” to Jesus Christ, who is the channel of spiritual blessings. This use of metaphor creates a mental image of earthly, water-related devices, but the source of the flow is Jesus Christ. These metaphors are consistent and serve well as an illustration of the role of Christ as the one Mediator between God and man. Keach used this same image along with others in another sermon in his *Exposition of the Parables*:

“Such are the personal excellencies of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he in his person God-man, is that glorious sluice, conduit-pipe, or conveyance of all those blessings, and that communicable good to us, which is in God; not one dram of any good thing, any favours, grace, and comfort, either to body or soul, flows from God to us, but it all comes to us through Jesus Christ. . . . [H]e is the sluice or outlet through whom all good is conveyed, or flows from God into our empty vessels.”¹⁹

In this illustration, Keach again referred to different kinds of metaphors that are commonly associated with the flow of liquid: “sluice,” “conduit-pipe,” “dram,” “outlet,” and “vessels.” Here, he clearly used a family of metaphors, all pertaining to a similar theme. The metaphors are consistent, in that Keach used them appropriately and described how Jesus Christ channels good to believers—not the smallest measure is lost, and the emptiness of His followers is fully satisfied.

When describing the “one pearl of great price” from the metaphorical passage in Matthew 13, Keach employed biblical Christology, but his illustration was somewhat unusual, which he acknowledged. Keach cautioned,

I hope I may without offence mention this parallel-wise with the birth of the “pearl of great price.” Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth according to the flesh, or his conception, was marvelous; God manifested in the flesh. A woman shall compass a man, a virgin, the mother of this transcendent pearl, (as touching his

¹⁸Benjamin Keach, *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven, or Jacob’s Ladder Improved* (London, 1698), 39.

¹⁹Benjamin Keach, *Exposition of the Parables* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974), 191-92. The “sluice pipe” (drain) apparently was a favorite image for Keach, given the number of times he used it. See also p. 33. As well, note the appearance of this metaphor in Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant, A Sweet Cordial for a Drooping Soul* (London, 1693), 6.

human nature) was overshadowed by the Holy Ghost, and when her time was come, she brought forth the pearl of pearls, viz. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.²⁰

Keach was concerned that his illustration might be construed as too inappropriate for his audience. He did not want to diminish the matchless value of Jesus Christ in any way. Nevertheless, he risked offense in order to demonstrate the parallel between a developing pearl—presumably within an oyster—and Jesus Christ who grew within his virgin mother’s womb. The text speaks metaphorically, portraying Jesus Christ as the pearl of great price. Indeed, there is nothing of greater value, nothing more highly prized than Jesus Christ. Even the most select of precious stones is incomparable to Him. Keach’s reuse of this single metaphor provides a useful illustration, even if some believed his boldness to be unacceptable. Certainly, this image garnered attention.

Preaching Jesus’ illustration of the treasure hidden in a field in Matthew 13, Keach’s purpose was to illustrate the incomparable magnitude of finding Jesus Christ. In order to do this, he used multiple families of metaphors. Keach speculated,

Suppose a man mortally wounded should find a balsam, which being applied, heals all his sores, would he not part with joy, or throw away all his old plasters, which to no purpose he before applied.

Or suppose a man was in prison, in chains and fetters, being condemned to die, and meets with a friend that has got his discharge and free pardon, would he not with joy part with his chains and filthy prison, and rejoice and triumph in his liberty? what is sin, the world, self-righteousness, but as chains and fetters, which he that finds this treasure with joy parts with?

Or suppose a poor man was digging in a field, to get his bread, and had nothing but rags to cover his nakedness, and should find a vast treasure, a million of guineas, or broad pieces of gold, would he not rejoice, and willingly sell all he had, could he but find a friend to bestow this field, and all the treasure that lies still hid in it, on him, would he not sell or part with his rags, his pick-axe, and his spade, by which means before he thought to live by hard labour, seeing now he is become very rich, and need not dig or work for his bread any more.²¹

In each of Keach’s metaphorical illustrations, a desperate man discards everything he once considered valuable so that he might obtain that one “balsam,” “discharge,” and “treasure.” His use of families of metaphors elicits attention. The example of the man in prison who would “part with his chains and filthy prison” is not entirely consistent with

²⁰Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 174.

²¹*Ibid.*, 216-17.

the other two. In the other instances, each man forsakes what he once believed essential, but that is not the case with the prisoner's restraints. Nevertheless, the overall attempt at illustration is successful. Jesus is that which each desperate man must have. More subtly, Keach reinforces that a person must surrender everything in order to receive Christ, and that people may not be aware of their need for Christ until they come to the point of desperation.

When Keach desired to illustrate the person and work of Jesus Christ in the funeral sermon *The Everlasting Covenant*, taken from 2 Samuel 23:5, Keach employed metaphorical images to represent Jesus. Keach said, "A Testator among Men, cannot be a Witness to his own last Will and Testament; but so is Christ: he is given by the Father for a Witness to the People of all those Gospel or Covenant-Blessings, he himself a Testator of his own last Will and Testament bequeathed to all Believers; he witnesseth these things are his Will, as well as the Father's, and he is the true and faithful Witness."²² Using a family of figures related to the transfer of wealth and property, such as "testator," "witness," "last will and testament," and "bequeathed," Keach focused on the nature of the inheritance that those who believe in Jesus Christ will enjoy for eternity. Jesus executes the will—the covenant of grace—and ensures that the full measure of blessings come to believers, those bound by that agreement. Jesus cannot fail to make good on His promises and commitments, since He is "true and faithful." This use of metaphor creates an excellent word picture, and Keach crafts the various images in a consistent manner.

Nature of believers. Occasionally, Keach combined the metaphors that were inherent to the passage he was preaching with his own images that he tailored specifically to align with them. For example, in his sermon from Matthew 3:12, Keach adds the

²²Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 20.

metaphor of the “barn,” which he uses to refer to those under the old covenant, to those figures already present in the text (e.g., “wheat,” “chaff,” “garner,” “floor”).

But now the Lord Jesus was come, with his *Fan in his hand*, to separate the *Wheat* from the *Chaff*, and not let them remain any longer together on that *floor*, in that *old Barn*, i.e. in the *Legal Jewish Church state*, according to the external Covenant of *peculiarity* God made with *Abraham*, and his natural Seed as such: Which had stood near its full period of time perfix'd by the Almighty, but now must be pulled down, Jesus Christ being come, and just a going to build a new *spiritual Garner*, or Gospel Church, to put all his choice *Grain* or *Wheat* into, viz. all believing and true penitent persons.²³

The metaphors innate to the text are essentially a family of images that relate to themes of harvest and agriculture. The addition of the “barn” aligns with the existing language and allows Keach to illustrate that the old covenant has been swept away in favor of the new “garner”—the church—into which the Lord of the harvest places His choice grain, which represents genuine believers.

When Keach sought to illustrate the situation of those believers who periodically experienced a measure of doubt and unbelief, he used two metaphorical couplets to portray what had actually happened to them at salvation in his sermon from Romans 4:5. The “pardon” and the “plaster” (bandage) show that at their conversion, God extends the grace necessary for them to believe and obey the gospel. Such salvation is permanent, not temporal. Keach reassured his audience:

The Person that we speak of, hath *Faith*, he *believes in Christ*, therefore the Gospel charges him not, and the Law cannot: *Here is a Pardon, if you receive it, you are acquitted: Here is a Plaster, if you apply it, you are healed.* The Man receives the Pardon, applies the Plaster; he is by the Grace of God helpt to believe, he is therefore delivered from Death, and put into a State of Justification, *and shall not come into Condemnation*, Rom. 8.1.²⁴

Although only two primary metaphors are used, the way they are arranged serves to emphasize their effect. All were facing judgment; all were gravely ill. God’s grace, however, made all the difference and brought those who believed from “death” to

²³Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened; or, The Glory of God’s Rich Grace Displayed in the Mediator to Believers* (London, 1694), 4.

²⁴Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification: or Justification without Works* (London, 1692), 30.

“justification” (life). Keach does not overlook the importance of human responsibility in salvation, which is evident in his instruction to “receive” and “apply” what God has provided.

When preaching to distinguish between the fleshly and spiritual natures in Genesis 28, Keach pointed out their differences by highlighting the traits of someone who has obeyed the gospel in comparison with someone who has not. Keach declared,

The Saints are not only the *Adopted Sons*, and the *Spouse of Christ*, but they are *born of God*, they are *begotten and born of God*; born from above: they that are thus called, have an heavenly Birth, therefore it is an *high-calling*, this gives them meet and fit frames of Spirit, such which become their noble Station, and blessed Relation: What would a relative Change signify, without a real Change, I mean a Change of State, without a Change of Heart? Can a *carnal heart* see Beauty in Christ, or in heavenly things? Can an *earthly Spirit*, prize or value spiritual Honour, or Riches? No no, a *Swine* may as well take delight in the Glory of a King’s Palace: Alas, he had far rather be on a Dunghill, *or wallow in the Mire*.²⁵

After listing a number of descriptive references, Keach makes his illustration crystal clear by adding a metaphorical comparison between a person who is without Christ and a common swine, who cares nothing whatsoever for spiritual things. Keach employs a wide array of metaphorical language in the form of two families: the first of these themes is family (“sons,” “spouse,” “begotten,” “relation,” etc.), and the second is the flesh (“carnal,” “earthly,” “dunghill,” “mire,” etc.). Keach’s use of metaphor provides an excellent illustration that is particularly effective in showing the disparity between those who are spiritual and those who are of the world.

While preaching on the covenant of grace from Isaiah 54:10, Keach gave a description of the nature of true believers in Jesus Christ: “They that are God’s *peculiar People*, are become dead to the Law, to that cruel Husband, and to all their own Righteousness, *accounting it but Dung*, or a dead Carkase, or *Dogs-meat* in comparison of Christ; . . . The Union with that Husband is dissolved, they seek not Life and Justification by the Law, or are not in love with Self-Righteousness, but dead to it, whilst

²⁵Keach, *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven*, 63.

others make an Idol of it, and trust in it.”²⁶ Keach discussed the Christian’s hatred of the rigidity and inflexibility of the Law’s demands, and he pointed out the glorious freedom enjoyed by those who are in union with Christ who satisfied the Law’s unceasing demands. In addition, Keach’s illustration portrayed all human, fleshly righteousness as nothing more than filthy refuse. Keach equated personal righteousness and achievement with all that is thoroughly repugnant. Having dealt previously with those who elevated human accomplishment to a role in the salvation process, Keach was well acquainted with the vital importance of convincing those tempted to trust in the flesh to acknowledge Christ alone as the sole means of justification. Keach noted that many were prone to make an “idol,” a poor, empty substitute, out of self-righteousness, rather than to trust wholly in Christ. Keach’s illustration is both clear and effective.

In a funeral sermon taken from Luke 23:28, in which Keach illustrated the joys of being in God’s glorious presence in heaven, Keach described heaven metaphorically and then shared examples of things not found in heaven, which doubtless brought comfort to his grieving listeners.

“They at Death gain a *better Place*, they go from the *Valley of Tears*, to the *Mount of Joy*; from a place of Dragons, nay of Devils to a place where no Devil is, nor Diabolical Emissaries. It was a strange Saying of a *pretty Child*, about Six Years of Age, to his Mother not long since, and not far off of this place, *Mother, I would not live here, but go to a place where there is no Devil*. Indeed this World is full of Devils who go about like *roaring Lions seeking whom they may devour*. But there is no Devil above!”²⁷

While a worldly existence only leads to sadness and hopelessness because of Satan’s menacing presence, heaven, to the contrary, is filled with bliss, peace, joy, and no devils! Keach appealed to the imagination of his audience and made the stark comparison between the “valley of tears” and the “mount of joy.” Satan and his emissaries may

²⁶Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace: or the Covenant of Peace Opened* (London, 1698), 247.

²⁷Benjamin Keach, *A Call to Weeping: or, A Warning Touching Approaching Miseries* (London, 1699), 34.

occupy the “valley,” but the enemy is not to be found upon the “mount.” Though simple, this illustration is clear and appropriate for the sermon context.

Nature of man. In Keach’s first published sermon, a funeral message from Psalm 89:48, he illustrated the brevity of life by using multiple metaphors (e.g., “flower,” “vapor,” “web,” “shuttle,” “ship,” etc.) that were completely unrelated, except for their precise ability to portray just how short time truly is, particularly for human beings. To his grieving hearers, Keach proclaimed that “Mankind is like *Jonah’s* Gourd, that came up in the night. Nothing fades sooner than a flower, oh measure thy dayes by that and by the vapour that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away; the Spiders Web, the Swift Post, the Weavers Shuttle, or a Ship under sail.”²⁸ Each of these images portrays something that exists briefly and passes quickly. Keach insists that his hearers measure their days by these vanishing figures, so they will realize the brevity of life. The illustration is concise and effectively displays that no one can escape the grave—all will face death.

In one of his sermons regarding the Sabbath from Galatians 4:10-11, Keach illustrated clearly how that people may be exposed to the demands of the Law regularly and yet remain unaffected and unchanged by it. Keach stated, “Men may read *Moses’s* Law, and hear it preach’d every day; nay write it on the Walls of their Houses, and carry it in their Bosoms, but yet it may have no operations on their Hearts: no, ‘tis the Ministration of the Law in Christ’s hand by his Spirit, that wounds the Conscience, pierces and melts the hard Heart, that God’s Law may be written there.”²⁹ Keach knew that a divine incursion was necessary in order to alter the human heart and to make it receptive to the overtures of God’s Spirit. Metaphorically, Keach remarked that Christ

²⁸Benjamin Keach, *A Summons to the Grave, or the Necessity of a Timely Preparation for Death* (London, 1676), 35. The “Swift Post” may refer to a kind of courier who traveled quickly, delivering the mail.

²⁹Benjamin Keach, *The Jewish Sabbath Abrogated: or, The Saturday Sabbatarians Confuted* (London, 1700), 145.

could use the Law like a weapon to “wound,” “pierce,” and “melt” the hardness of man’s heart so that it might receive God’s Law. Unfortunately, so many are literally surrounded by the Law each day: people read it; they hear it; many write it or carry it with them; etc. Without God’s intervention, the hearts of these individuals would remain unaffected. Keach’s illustration is essentially clear—a simple intellectual awareness of divine truth is altogether insufficient for salvation. The Holy Spirit must operate upon the human heart in order to make it receptive to the things of God.

In another sermon on this same topic, Keach used figurative language to portray God’s work of transforming the human heart in very familiar, ordinary terms. He said, “This shews we are not to go to the Tables of Stone, to Mount *Sinai*, for the Law of God, now the Antitype of that is come. God’s Finger has wrote his Law in better Tables; tho naturally our Hearts were like Stone, yet his Spirit can and hath written his Law there. What is God’s Law but a Transcript, or a gracious Impression of his holy Nature, or his Divine Image stampd on our Souls?”³⁰ For illustration, Keach employed a family of metaphors on the common theme of leaving a permanent mark. He used such images as “transcript,” “impression,” and “stamp” to portray the manner in which God works to alter the hearts of people. Keach even employed anthropomorphism in his reference to God’s “finger” writing the Law upon stony—hard, cold, and lifeless—human hearts. Keach’s effective illustration created a relevant mental landscape.

Nature of judgment. When preaching on the torments of hell in a sermon based on Matthew 3:12, Keach sought to illustrate the torturous fires of God’s judgment. Keach prompted his hearers to imagine not only the figurative portrait of an “oven” or “furnace,” but also the action of being “thrown” into a source of excruciating suffering. Such a combination would surely have caused the audience to envision clearly the horrors of eternal separation from God.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 159.

The Torments of the damned will be dismal, intolerable and amazing, because they shall be *cast into a lake of fire*, or tormented with fire. O how amazing is it, to be thrown into a fierce fire! look into a *Glass-house*, (behold their burning Furnaces) or into a hot *Oven*; can you bear the thoughts of being thrown into one of them? whether the fire of Hell be material or metaphorical Fire, however the reality and extensiveness of the Torment is signified by it, held forth by it, and as in other tropes in the Scripture, the things signified or held forth by those Metaphors far exceed what they are borrowed from, so no doubt it is here, our ordinary fire is not an adequate Representation of the fire of Gods Wrath, tho' it may seem to set it forth to our Capacities in some measure.³¹

For the purpose of illustration, Keach suggested the image of a “glass house” where glass was blown, shaped, and formed by using a large “furnace” to melt the glass. He also cited the figure of an “oven” as representative of the fires of God’s judgment. Keach explained that his—and possibly even the Scripture’s—metaphorical representation was insufficient in this instance to convey fully the indescribable magnitude of everlasting torment, the unimaginable intensity of heat, and the ultimate despair in the fires of hell. Keach illustrated clearly and effectively that earthly parallels to the judgment fires of God poorly represent their horrific nature.

Keach was not afraid to speak out boldly when he became convinced that the clear instructions of God’s Word were not being heeded. Such was certainly the case with infant baptism and the obviously unbiblical and heretical practices of the Roman Catholic Church which Keach addressed in several polemical writings and sermons. In a message from *An Ax Laid to the Root*, he took his text from Matthew 3:10 and gave a particularly specific description of the “ax” and its ultimate target in the course of his message.

Time is pictured with a *Sythe*; but then Man is compared to Grass, but it may be pictured with an Ax, since Men are compared to Trees; a *Syth* is no fit Instrument to cut down Trees: Men, as you have heard, are here compared to Trees, and when once the Time’s set for the Jewish Church to stand, or abide in the World, was expired, Time, or the Dispensation of God’s Providence, like an *Ax*, cut it down for ever; and so will the prefix’d Time appointed by the Lord, when ‘tis come, even cut down at the Root, *the bloody Idolatrous Church of Rome*, when the *Beasts 1260 years are expired*, down she shall go with Vengeance; and unless Time lays The Ax at her Root, and at the Root of all other Corrupt and National Churches, there will be no cutting them down, nor will there be any, then able to save her or them: the

³¹Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, 55.

standing of all Humane and Ecclesiastical States and Constitutions, are determined by the Almighty, who works all Things according to the Counsel of his own Will.³²

Keach understood the ax to represent the passage of time, or more explicitly, God's providential workings. Keach stated his firm conviction that a time was coming when God would severely judge the Roman Catholic Church as well as other state churches. In this way, the ax is a metaphor for judgment. However, the ax is also a symbol of power, sovereignty, and comfort for God's people, in that He who wields the ax is in complete control of all nations, rulers, and authorities. Keach's illustration serves to reinforce an understanding of God's complete authority in all matters.

Theological Explanation

While a complete analysis of all of Keach's 224 sermons cannot be presented here, the examples cited clearly demonstrate that he used metaphors for the purpose of explanation, in addition to illustration. A sampling of the sermonic material reveals that about one-fourth of Keach's metaphors served the function of explanation.

In accordance with McDill's definition, metaphors classified as explanatory aim for an understanding of the biblical and homiletical concepts by using background and interpretation material. At times, Keach clearly used metaphors for the purpose of explaining theological principles to his audience. Certain biblical teachings are notoriously difficult to grasp, and Keach wanted to be able to facilitate the understanding of these matters in his sermons.

Nature of Christ. As Keach preached the text of Matthew 3:10 in one of his sermons from *An Ax Laid to the Root*, he sought to show the distinctions between the old and new covenants, and he used metaphors as his primary means of explanation.

³²Benjamin Keach, *An Ax Laid to the Root: or, One More Blow at the Foundation of Infant Baptism and Church Membership* (London, 1693), 7. Keach's grievances against infant baptism can be seen in his hatred for the Roman Catholic Church and other "National Churches," which typically sprinkled or poured water on newborns—supposedly valid modes and candidates for baptism—and thus added them to the membership of the church. In nearly every case, this practice resulted in a false sense of security for these individuals, because they believed that they were in a right relationship with God.

For *Hager* and her Son are cast out, that are the Old Covenant, and the Fleshly Seed; this old Root and Right, now in Gospel Days is struck at. The Ax is laid to the Roots of the Trees, *i. e.* To your old standing on the Old Covenant Root, as you are the lineal Seed of *Abraham*: The time is come now, that the Old Covenant, and Covenant Seed, are to be rooted up, the old House and Constitution pulled down; God is now about to build a new Temple, and a more spiritual House, a spiritual Temple of living Stones; and rather than he will want Materials, he can of these Stones raise up Children unto believing *Abraham*, and so make good the Covenant of Grace, or Gospel Covenant made with him: Now you must be united to a living Foundation, *i. e.* Believe in Christ, whose way I am come to prepare, and make ready fit Matter for this new Building, namely the Gospel Church, which is not to be, by natural descent from *Abraham* as such, but only those who have the Faith of *Abraham*. . . . You must grow out of a spiritual Root, *i. e.* Be Married to Christ.³³

In particular, Keach used a family of metaphors on the theme of buildings. As well, he described the kinds of structures that could be built upon each of the covenant foundations. He asserted boldly that those trusting in the old covenant enjoyed only a temporary “house,” while those who built upon the “foundation” of the new covenant would possess a completely new “temple” or “house.” Union with Christ was the key to this distinction. The ax, as before, represented the end that would come to the old covenant, in favor of the new covenant and its “building,” the “gospel church.” Keach’s use of metaphor explains more clearly that confidence in the old covenant results in destruction. The new covenant in Christ lasts forever.

While preaching the Old Testament account of Jacob’s ladder in Genesis 28, Keach desired to explain to his hearers the true nature of the “ladder” and what this biblical metaphor represented theologically. Not only did Keach believe that the ladder served as a symbol of Jesus Christ, but Keach also took the time to discuss several of Christ’s attributes, using the additional metaphor of “rock” for this purpose.

Now Jesus Christ, this spiritual Ladder; tho’ he be Man, yet he is also God, the most high God, Co-eternal, Co-essential, and Co-equal with the Father; and therefore he is mighty strong, he is able to bear the weight of all our Sins; and of our Persons, and Infirmities; *He is mighty to save: Cast thy Burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.* Though he is represented in our Text by a *Ladder*, yet he is also called a *Rock*, a *strong Rock*, a *high Rock*, an *everlasting Rock*; and pray what is firmer than a *Rock*? A *Rock* is *locus exelus*, a high place; *Rocks* . . . tho’ they have their Roots very low, and deep, yet their Tops are high and soaring, and lifted up

³³*Ibid.*, 11.

above the surface of other parts of the Earth: Some Rocks reach to the Clouds; the Lord Jesus is a high Rock.³⁴

Jesus has attributes like those of a ladder: He is strong and is able to support believers as they stand on Him; He enables believers to reach high places; He connects low places with high places. These characteristics reflect the nature of Christ as He is the perfect interface, mediator, and advocate for believers before the Father. Keach adds the metaphor of the rock to his explanation, in order that the parallel traits between ladders and rocks can be seen. He understands the rocks to be like mountains—the low roots, high tops, and rocky hills or cliffs that can reach high into the sky. Keach creates several mental pictures with his metaphors and provides an effective explanation of the passage as he understands it.

Keach was especially adept at using metaphorical imagery in his sermons to explain theological truths about Jesus Christ (an entire section of his *Tropologia* is devoted to such metaphors). Preaching from Isaiah 54:10 on the covenant of grace, one of Keach's favorite topics and a central theme to his whole theological system, he used several rapid-fire metaphors to portray the nature of Jesus Christ in a manner more comprehensible to his audience. Such a tactic likely served to amplify the intensity of Keach's explanation. He stated passionately,

Doth the Soul want light? Christ will give it; *He is the Light of the Gentiles: The Light of the World.* Doth he want Liberty? Christ releases the Captives. Doth he need Rest? Christ gives the *wearry* and *heavy-laden* rest: In a word, Christ in the Covenant is *Food* to the *Hungry*, *Cloaths* to the *Naked*, *Strength* to the *Weak*, *Health* to the *Sick*, *Courage* to the *Faint-hearted*, *Succor* to the *Tempted*, *Beauty* to the *Deformed*, *Riches* to the *Poor*, *Peace* to the *Troubled*, *Life* to the *Dead*. Christ is all in this Covenant.³⁵

These metaphors point to the absolute sufficiency of Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace. Through the covenant agreement, Jesus provides for all of the spiritual needs of the believer. Although the numerous metaphorical references are unrelated in themselves, they provide a significant additive effect when used in rapid succession.

³⁴Keach, *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven*, 18.

³⁵Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace*, 196.

While some of the images are of physical things such as food or clothing, Keach means that as essential as those things are to the physical body, Jesus provides all of the essentials for the believer's spiritual body. Keach's explanation is both effective and clear—the covenant of grace is beyond compare in terms of its value and importance.

Nature of salvation. One of Keach's most notable uses of metaphor for explaining the nature of salvation is found in his *Display of Glorious Grace* (1698), his excellent sermon series on the covenant of grace and the marvelous salvation that God has offered to sinners. In sermon thirteen, Keach describes at length the wonderful relationship that is enjoyed between man and God. He says, "Glorious Trade is opened to Heaven for poor Sinners by the Covenant of Peace. . . . *Free Trade to Heaven* [is] one of the great and chiefest Blessings that follows a Peace made between Princes and States on Earth."³⁶ Adding the metaphor of "war" to represent sin, Keach describes the interactions between man and God.

*War stops up, or interrupteth all Trade and Commerce betwixt those Kingdoms and States that are at War with one another, (the sad and bitter Effects of this we in this Nation have lately felt, by means of the late War, which now is happily ended;) even so, my Brethren, all Spiritual Trade and Commerce between God and Man, was stop'd, and utterly interrupted by that fearful War, which was occasioned by our Sin and Rebellion against God in the first Adam; The Flaming Sword that turned every way, was a Token of this: Poor Man could not now make any approach to God, no Trading to Heaven any more for Mankind, until his Peace is made, or procured.*³⁷

Keach provides an immediate explanation of his metaphor: "By this Trade or Traffick to Heaven, I mean, our free Intercourse or Access to the Father."³⁸ The image of war clearly denotes sin, in that sin severs all ties between man and God. The holiness of God will not relate to the unrighteousness of man. No "spiritual trade" is possible, which

³⁶Ibid., 258-59.

³⁷Ibid. The "late War" is likely a reference to the Nine Years' War, which was fought from 1689-1697 and would have ended just prior to Keach's publication of this sermon series. For more information about the cause and effects of this conflict, see John Spurr, *The Post-Reformation: Religion, Politics, and Society in Britain, 1603-1714* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2006), 193-94.

³⁸Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 261.

means that until some way is provided to restore the peace and to mend the relationship, no spiritual “commerce” can occur. The covenant of grace is that wonderful means of reconciliation. Keach’s explanation of the severity of sin is made clear through the use of the war metaphor.

Keach does not stop there, but he employs another metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit, the “River”:

The *Navigable River*, by which we Trade to Heaven, by virtue of this Peace, is opened, *viz.* the Holy Spirit is poured forth, . . . and this it doth not only, in that it supplies God’s People, or his Holy City with Water to drink, (which is indeed the Water of Life) but also in that it is by it we Trade to Heaven all our Spiritual Trade and Traffick, is in and through this River: Our Trade, my Brethren, is a Trade of Merchandise—*For the Merchandise of it, is better than the Merchandise of Silver, and the Gain thereof than fine Gold* [(Prov 3:14)].³⁹ . . . [T]his River is opened by the Sacrifice of Christ, or by that Peace he hath made.

In this use of metaphor and in the former, Keach portrays the before-and-after situations between God and man: initially sin completely impeded any relationship between God and man; with the covenant of grace enacted, interaction between God and man is a regular occurrence. The metaphor of the “river,” which represents God’s Holy Spirit, doubtless would have produced immediately in the minds of his audience vivid images of the Thames flowing through London. Such a river is large enough for ships to move from place to place, and it enabled transportation of both people and goods. The figure of “merchandise” does not refer to earthly material but spiritual blessings beyond value. Keach’s explanation is both clear and colorful, and it effectively conveys the state of affairs between God and man.

Keach also used metaphors to explain theology when he preached from Matthew 3:12 on the image of the winnowing. In particular, he described those who try to exhibit externally the qualities of a Christian yet are lifeless, vacant, and hollow internally. Keach used several comparisons in order to convey the image clearly. Keach bluntly explained to his hearers,

³⁹Ibid., 262.

Such are chaff that only have the husk or shell of Christianity. Chaff is the husks of wheat. Many professors please themselves with the external part of religion, having a form of godliness, but are strangers to the life and power thereof. Like the foolish virgins, they have lamps, but no oil; a name, but want the nature of true believers; can talk and discourse of religion, of the covenant of grace, and excellency of Christ. They may have, I grant, clear notions in their heads of the mysteries of the Gospel, and defend it too against opposers, yet their hearts are unsanctified, and never felt nor experienced the work of faith with power; they have the outside of the true Christian, the shell of the wheat, but if tried and searched there is nothing but chaff, no kernel in them, they want the root of the matter.⁴⁰

Significantly, Keach cautioned that some people may have even a full understanding of the gospel itself but may have never obeyed it. Keach employs a family of agricultural metaphors in his explanation, including “chaff,” “husk,” “shell,” “kernel,” “wheat,” and “root.” He drew a clear distinction between true Christianity and that which is only external. Keach added supplementary metaphors, the oil-less lamps and the nature-less name. He not only points out the empty state of the false professors, but he also implies their imminent danger, for the winnower is coming to separate the chaff from the wheat, and the chaff will be destroyed. Keach provides a clear explanation to this passage and its inherent metaphors by adding additional imagery and creating a landscape effect that enabled a clear understanding of the text.

Later in the same sermon, with this identical theme in mind, Keach shifted the description from the metaphor of the “chaff” to that of the “wheat.”

Wheat is commonly weighed, to know the goodness of it; so God weighs the actions of men: thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting: weighed in a balance, alluding to the weighing of gold or goods exactly in scales. God tries men and women, that all may know he will proceed justly and righteously with them; he weighs them in the balance of the sanctuary, or tries them by the touchstone of his word, and if found full weight, or pure gold, then he declares that they are his, and he owns them as his people, as his wheat; but if too light, or hold not weight, but are greatly wanting, there being no worth in them, but are dross, chaff, light, and empty persons, unsound and unsanctified ones, then he rejects them as none of his, but are as reprobate silver, false coin, people of no value with him.⁴¹

Using a family of metaphors that pictured terms of assessment such as “weigh,” “balance,” “scales,” “try,” and “value,” Keach explained clearly that God has a standard

⁴⁰Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 45.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 51.

by which He measures individuals, hence his inclusion of the “touchstone.” Keach added the metaphor of “gold” to the overall scene that he created, in order to show that God correctly evaluates people as either “wheat” and “gold” or as “chaff” and “dross.” If a person is only an empty shell, if they are not pure, these traits will become manifest as God assesses them. Keach’s effective explanation includes an implied warning to turn to God for salvation.

When Keach preached the parable of the new wineskins (“bottles,” AV) from Matthew 9:17, he provided a very detailed explanation of this scriptural metaphor and its theological implications.

[O]ur blessed Lord it is evident refers to bottles that are cracked or broken bottles, or such bottles that are very old and rotten; and the old heart, the unregenerate heart, is like to such a broken, cracked, or old rotten bottle, that will not hold or retain the wine of divine consolations, or the wine of heavenly comfort, if it were put in; unless at the same time the heart was renewed, it would all presently run out again like a leaky vessel; . . . A cracked or broken bottle must be new made, or if it be a glass bottle, it must be by the glass-maker be melted down; so must the old unrenewed heart, like a cracked bell, or cracked glass bottle, melted down by the divine Spirit, and be new cast or new made, before God will pour in the wine of heavenly consolation, the heart must be melted in the fire of God’s Spirit, there is no mending of it. Some strive to amend the old garment, and the old bottle, but it cannot be done; we must have a whole new garment, the righteousness of Christ for our justification, and a new heart through the Spirit’s operation, for our sanctification.⁴²

In particular, Keach noted that metaphor of the “bottle” portrays the human heart, and the newness or oldness of the wineskin varies directly with the presence or absence of God’s saving grace. Keach described how each person’s “bottle” must be reformed and made new by the Lord Himself through His Holy Spirit, or it will be incapable of containing “wine,” the blessings that accompany new life in Christ. Although “bottle” is more properly translated “wineskin,” Keach is able to convey the creation of a new bottle by depicting its composition not as animal skin but as glass. Keach then developed the landscape of a glassblower who melts the broken or cracked glass and then remakes the bottle. He even uses the glassblower’s fire as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. Keach also

⁴²Ibid., 108-09.

alluded to the previous verse in the text and cited the metaphor of the new garment as a direct parallel with the bottle. Keach's explanation of these images and of the biblical passage itself is clear and effective.

When discussing the subject of death in a funeral sermon taken from Psalm 89:48, Keach noted that for those who are believers in Jesus Christ, death has been overthrown and has no lasting power. Using a small family of metaphors that spoke of terms of battle, such as "conquer," "triumph," and "conquest," Keach portrays clearly the Bible's assertion that for those in Christ, death no longer has any "sting." He said confidently, "Consider [that] Death cannot keep the body long under its power, nor keep soul and body apart; 'tis but a little while and they will meet again. Death and the Grave are conquered enemies. Saints by faith can now, through Jesus Christ triumph over them, and shall have a compleat, a full Conquest, over a short space."⁴³ Simply put, Keach explains that "death" and the "grave" are defeated foes. As such, they have no ability to impair believers, who through the work of Jesus Christ enjoy complete victory. In this brief explanation, Keach reminded his audience of the biblical promise of eternal life for those in the family of God.

Referring to the nature of the covenant of grace, Keach noted that the arrangement between God the Father and God the Son was contracted in eternity past, prior to the creation of the world and the fall of man.

*In respect of God's early contrivance and making of it for us with Christ; it was provided (my Brethren) before Man sinned, or ready against the very time of need: Poor Adam when he had sinned knew nothing of it. But God provided the Plaister before we received the Wound; he provided us a Physitian, before we were Sick; or a Saviour in this Covenant, before we had sinned; had not this Covenant been made before with Christ for us, we had been lost no doubt for ever that very moment Man fell, every thing being Beautiful in its time, or proper season.*⁴⁴

Indeed Scripture describes Jesus as the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world." Using a family of metaphors related to personal health, such as "plaster," "wound,"

⁴³Keach, *A Summons to the Grave*, 60.

⁴⁴Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace*, 198.

“physician,” and “sick,” Keach clearly explains the implications of the covenant. God foreknew man’s need of reconciliation and graciously prepared the sole solution for this urgent deficiency before the need actually existed. Keach portrays this twice, showing that God’s provision of grace was ready even prior to the initial transgression by Adam in the garden. Later, Keach added, “When the Soul and Conscience of a sinner is wounded, and his wounds bleed; then is the Balm of the Covenant applied to heal him.”⁴⁵ His explanation effectively portrays Keach’s understanding of the manner in which the covenant agreement was made and its effects upon believers in Christ.

In a sermon from Romans 8:1, in which he addressed the theological matter of eternal justification, Keach offered a simple yet particularly effective explanation to clarify what he believed to be the correct biblical interpretation of this potentially divisive doctrine. In very ordinary language, Keach noted several common delays that often occurred between what had been ordained to happen publicly and the actual carrying out of the decree. Keach noted,

“The Price may be paid for the Redemption of Captives, and yet they may not presently be delivered, but may remain in Bondage, in Slavery, and lie in Chains: A Surety may satisfy the Law for a Criminal, or for a Debtor, yea pay the utmost Farthing; but he may notwithstanding lie under the Sentence of Death, or remain in Prison for a time, and not have his personal Discharge.”⁴⁶

Using one metaphor after another from a family of images related to imprisonment and captivity, Keach clearly explained his understanding that God had, in eternity past, contracted the covenant of grace with the Son. Nevertheless, until such time as man sinned and was in need of the covenant provisions of salvation through Jesus Christ, justification did not occur. In opposition to those who argued that God’s declaration of righteousness before the foundation of the world was already in effect when the world and its inhabitants were created, Keach demonstrated that God’s plan to save sinners was

⁴⁵Ibid., 199.

⁴⁶Benjamin Keach, *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes. Wherein It Is Proved That the Whole First Adam Was Condemned, and the Whole Second Adam Justified* (London, 1698), 17.

merely prepared and in place, but not yet enacted, until man transgressed God's law and Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected. Through the use of simple, metaphorical imagery, Keach provided a helpful explanation for his audience.

Sermonic Application

The survey of Keach's sermons presented here demonstrates that Keach certainly used metaphorical language for the purpose of application, in addition to illustration and explanation. This sample of Keach's sermons indicates that approximately one-fourth of his metaphors were designed to function as sermonic application. Metaphors categorized under this heading present the implications of sermon ideas for human experience. They can be descriptive in analyzing contemporary life or prescriptive in advocating certain behavior.

Nature of salvation. While Keach demonstrated ability in illustrating and explaining elements in his sermons with the aid of metaphors, he was no less able to persuade his hearers to act upon what they heard in his sermons by using metaphorical language. In a sermon from Isaiah 54:10, Keach referred to those who would obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Keach conveyed to them the blessings of their salvation by using a family of maritime images, a theme that Keach used often. He made it clear to his audience that "whosoever will venture out by Faith, and Trade in these Seas, or on this Voyage, shall obtain a sure Interest in Christ, and in God through Jesus Christ for ever."⁴⁷ In another sermon from the same series, Keach revisited these same metaphors.

Hereby as you have heard we have free access to the Father, Heaven is opened, by this Peace, and Christ's Treasures of Grace and Glory are free to all Believers, to all Spiritual Merchants, and Holy Traders; but you must set out with full *Sails of Faith*, and with a *sweet Gale of the Spirit*, and then you will return well freighted, your Ship shall be laden with the rich Merchandise of Heaven, being filled with Peace and Joy and Consolation.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace*, 264.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 290.

Keach sought here to apply what he had conveyed thus far in his sermon. As he pictured metaphorically the scene of believers “trading” with heaven and enjoying its rich “merchandise,” having full access to the Father through the Son, Keach stated that such commerce was dependent upon the faith of the believer and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. If a Christian’s faith was intact, he would receive the full measure of heaven’s blessings. Not only does Keach refer to the salvation of believers, which demands their faith in Christ, but he also alludes to the ongoing relationship between God and Christians, in which they regularly interact and fellowship on the basis of faith. Keach’s metaphors provide a helpful and effective application for these biblical teachings. Stout has noted that “maritime images [conveyed] man’s sin and [a] passageway from death to life.”⁴⁹ Keach knew his audience would relate well to them, and he believed they would function well in the process of application.

Using maritime images in quite a different way, in his funeral sermon taken from 2 Samuel 23:5, Keach sought to persuade his audience to forsake their “leaky vessels”:

Man suffered shipwreck, when he had so firm, so strong, and well-built Ship; and when he had so good a Pilot, as his *Will* was to him before he fell, and a calm Sea; who will be mad to venture to Sea now, on such a leaky and rotten Vessel? and have no better a Pilot, than his own base, depraved, and corrupt *Will* to steer this ship on such tempestuous and dangerous Seas.⁵⁰

Keach employed a family of metaphors, as he had previously, to portray the course of life as a voyage upon the “sea” in a “ship” with a “pilot.” Unfortunately, the corruption and depravity of sin had so distorted every human will, rendering each vessel entirely unsafe and the seas upon which it would sail thoroughly dangerous. Keach desired that his listeners put on the new nature in Jesus Christ, which would repair every ship, give direction to the pilot, and calm the seas. This use of metaphor is fairly effective in

⁴⁹Stout, *The New England Soul*, 44.

⁵⁰Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 41.

accomplishing Keach's purpose. In this instance, the application is more descriptive than prescriptive.

Keach not only wanted the lost to be conscious of their precarious state, but he also wanted the saved to be aware of the ultimate safety and protection that they had in Jesus Christ. In his sermon on building a tower from Luke 14:28, Keach said confidently,

Your tower will stand firm, and endure all the battering rams, and roaring cannon Satan lets fly against it; neither need you fear any mines, for your tower is built upon such a hard rock, that the cunning miner, Satan, cannot pierce it, no pick-axe of the devil can enter into this rock, nor can the enemy storm your strong tower; for besides its strength the Lord of hosts dwells therein, and Jesus Christ is always within the walls thereof; your tower is also fenced round with salvation, which God had prepared for walls and bulwarks. For as it is thus with Sion in general, so the same fortification has every believer.⁵¹

By using a family of metaphorical images on the theme of combat, such as "tower," "battering rams," "cannon," "mines," "bulwarks," and "fortification," Keach portrayed to his listeners that the security they enjoyed in Christ was superior to anyone or anything that might seek to overtake them. The "tower" of Jesus' protection and security is impenetrable and is fully trustworthy; salvation is unshakable in Christ. Even the enemy, with his "mines" and "pick-axe" cannot hope to gain entry. Not only is this series of metaphors applicational, in that it persuades the lost of the surety that is in Jesus, but it is also explanatory, in that it details the traits present in one's saving relationship with Christ.

In *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven*, taken from Genesis 28:12, Keach spoke of the glorious salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

Our union with Christ is commonly expressed in the Scripture, under the notion of a Marriage: Now to be married to *the Prince of Princes*, to *the Prince of the Kings of the Earth*, is a wonderful elevation: Should an earthly Prince set his heart upon, and marry, a poor Virgin one that was but a *Scullion-maid*, or a *Begger*, clothed with filthy Rags, what an advancement would this be, for such a one to become a *Queen*, and have a Crown of Gold set upon her Head, and be embraced in

⁵¹Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 100.

the Arms of a great Monarch, or mighty Prince, and to lie in his Bosom, and to have the attendance of his Servants, or Noble retinue!⁵²

To convey the majestic nature of redemption, Keach used a family of metaphors that spoke of royalty, such as “prince,” “monarch,” and “noble.” Keach then employed a second family of metaphors possessing exactly the opposite imagery such as “scullion-maid,” “beggar,” and “filthy”; these figures pictured those in the lowest levels of society. Keach’s comparison and contrast was unmistakable. More specifically, however, Keach crafted the staggering portrait of an honorable prince at the pinnacle of recognition marrying a maiden from the very bottom of the culture. While such union would have been thoroughly unthinkable to most people, Keach knew that Scripture portrayed exactly such an event. Salvation was glorious in that the Son of God sought to marry a bride that was initially sinful and repugnant. In His grace, however, Jesus Christ laid down His own life for the purpose of preparing and purifying a holy and chaste bride truly fit to marry a King. Keach seized upon this remarkable image from Scripture and used it to apply his point clearly that not only is Christ the sole way to heaven, but He is also the source of all spiritual blessings and the focus of creation.

In the same sermon, when acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the sole means that God has provided for the salvation of sinners, Keach passionately exhorted the lost to obey the gospel message:

There is (you have heard) no other way to go to Heaven; Christ is the *Way* in which we must *walk*, the *Foundation* on which we must *build*, the *Door* by which we must *enter*, or the *Ladder* by which we must *ascend*, even by the *Vail*; that is to say, his *Flesh*, or by the *blood* of his *Cross*. Do not dream of getting to Heaven by your Tears or Prayers, or by your good *Deeds*, or good *Duties*; or by the broken *Ladder* of *Free-will*; or by the *Light within* all. What, O what will become of them that strive to throw down this Ladder, and think to be saved some other ways!⁵³

Keach’s plea describes Jesus by using a family of metaphors that portray images that provide access or entry, such as “way,” “door,” “veil,” and “ladder” (already within the text). Jesus is the only path to a right relationship with God, to justification. No other

⁵²Keach, *Christ Alone the Way to Heaven*, 61. *Retinue* refers to a group of attendants.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 55.

course exists. At the same time, Keach denies the efficacy of personal will or good works. Such an attempt to reach salvation is “broken.” He shudders to think of the outcome of those who seek to be saved by some other means. Keach’s application is obvious—people must embrace Christ as the God-given way of salvation, and they must forsake all other hopes. His use of metaphors is clear and effective, in that his hearers have the information they need in order to take action. They also have the warning that those attempting to be saved in another way will be sorely disappointed.

In his sermon from Matthew 5:25, on agreeing quickly with one’s adversary, Keach implored his hearers to forsake all trust in worldly things and to cast their dependence upon Jesus Christ for salvation and all of its associated blessings and benefits. He reasoned,

Moreover, you may have peace on easy terms, your sins are the plague and sores of your souls; no man but would be cured of the plague, or of a mortal disease; are you not willing to throw your filthy rags away, to be clothed with a glorious robe, or to accept of a plaister to heal your wounds? Would a man wounded with a spear, not have it pulled out of his side? You are polluted, and it was to wash and be clean. What poor virgin would think it a hard thing, to yield to be espoused to a glorious prince, when courted by him? Doth not Christ deserve your choicest love and affections?⁵⁴

Using a family of metaphors primarily dealing with sickness, such as “plague,” “sores,” “disease,” “plaster,” and “wounded,” Keach sought to persuade sinners to come to Christ and to take action, in order that they might receive spiritual healing. He wanted to make them understand the obviously grievous nature of their sinful condition and the singular source of relief and wholeness in Jesus Christ. The application of Keach’s message was fairly straightforward—his hearers needed to forsake sin and to embrace salvation. Keach’s metaphorical use made this altogether easier to understand.

Similarly, in a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan, Keach used metaphors of sickness and impending death to plead with sinners to seek the only

⁵⁴Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 64.

“physician” available to them who could actually provide healing for their mortal wounds. Keach exhorted,

Sinner, thou art mortally wounded. O fly to this physician; if Christ heals thee not, thou must die eternally. Know that Christ can heal thee, let thy disease be what it will. He is not only able, but also very ready, and willing. . . . He is now come, and stands knocking at the door. He will make a perfect cure, yea cure thee for ever. Thou mayest have a cure, though thou hast no money, no righteousness, no worthiness in thyself, no qualifications, or nothing to recommend thee to him, but art in thy sins wounded, and ready to bleed to death.⁵⁵

The images of “mortal wounds,” “dying eternally,” and “bleeding to death” portray not only a state of need but also a perilously desperate situation. Keach conveyed great urgency as he sought to apply the message of the parable. He made clear that those who came to Christ in faith alone, forsaking all other attempts at self-righteousness, would find the true “cure” for their illness. Keach’s application is pointed and effective.

In one of his sermons taken from Romans 4:5, Keach implored sinners to come to Christ by using a family of judicial metaphors. Indeed, Scripture often portrays our status before God in legal terms, and in this instance, Keach employed similar images for the purpose of application.

Let a Man place himself in the Condition wherein *Job* was to stand before the Bar of God’s Justice; and let him attend to the Charge he hath against him; and let him consider what will be his best Plea at God’s Tribunal, that he may be justified. . . . This must be our Plea when we come to die, *i. e.* My Trust is in Christ, in his Blood, in his Death, in his Righteousness: This is only pleadable now, and in the Judgment-Day; this will give ease to a convinced, terrified Conscience, that knows the Nature, Holiness, Purity, and Justice of God.⁵⁶

Metaphors such as “bar,” “justice,” “charge,” “tribunal,” “plea,” and “judgment day” reinforce the theme that justification, or righteousness with God, is a legal transaction that is only available through Jesus Christ. Keach made clear that Jesus is the only Advocate for sinners, and he passionately persuaded his hearers to put their sole trust in Him. Keach’s application is effective, in that he clearly conveys the people’s status and their only course of action.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 319.

⁵⁶Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification*, 34.

Nature of judgment. In a sermon from Hebrews 6:4-6, Keach appealed passionately to the lost to obey Christ's gospel, and he pointed out the terrors of facing God's wrath.

May not I cry out, *Fire, Fire?* Such a Cry hath often startled and amazed many of you that live in and about this City. Sirs, a Fire is just breaking out, which you cannot escape, unless you look about you the sooner. When People hear the Cry of Fire in the Night, how do they cry out, *Where, Where?* Alas, this Fire seizes not on your Houses, nor Goods, no nor on your Bodies only, but on your Souls; it has already kindled even the Wrath of God, which no Sinner can escape that neglects this Salvation. God's Wrath is compared to Fire, and it has perhaps already taken hold of some of your Consciences; but if it be not kindled there, yet it is kindled in God's Anger.⁵⁷

Keach knew that those without Christ were destined to experience the full brunt of God's judgment in hell. Using the figurative imagery of fire, Keach alerted his listeners to their imminent danger. *Fire* was probably a very potent metaphor, since the tragedy of the Great Fire of London (1666) likely was still vivid in his audience's memories. Keach made clear that God's fire would not only impact the human body but also the soul, and the application of his message was evident.

Likewise, Keach also proclaimed that all who followed neonomianism, or the "new law" controversy, which was championed by such notable individuals as Richard Baxter, were essentially adding human works to that of Christ in salvation and would altogether be disappointed, finding no benefit in any of their self-efforts. Walker notes that "Keach was jealous to maintain that justification depended entirely on the free grace of God. In the closing words of a lecture on one of the parables Keach pleaded with his hearers and explained to them the dangers of Baxterianism."⁵⁸ In a sermon from Matthew 3:12, Keach's warning to those contemplating neonomianism was clear:

And to you sinners, if you would be found wheat in the day of Christ, then receive Christ's true doctrine, labour to distinguish between truth and error; beware of that strange and new scheme that darkens the free-grace of God, and tends to destroy the covenant of grace; remember to exalt Christ alone in your salvation.

⁵⁷Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, 497.

⁵⁸Austin Walker, "Benjamin Keach and the 'Baxterian' Controversy of the 1690s," *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 3 (January 2006): 13.

How do some turn the gospel of God's free grace into a law, by the performance of which, as the conditions of life and justification, tell thee, thy salvation doth depend. See what subtle opposers (of the clearest gospel) are risen up amongst us, and labour to avoid them; though their tongues should seem to be tipped with silver, yet their doctrine is copper.⁵⁹

Keach not only cautions his hearers against any other means of salvation than the free grace of God, but he also charges them to be watchful of those who endorsed the neonomian position and could argue persuasively in favor of it. Keach insists metaphorically that indeed, such doctrine is “copper.” This application of the sermon is clear—salvation is wholly of God's grace and is not earned or maintained by any works of man.

Authority of Christ. Keach wanted his audience to pursue God's guidance in each and every aspect of their lives, not only when decision making was easy, but also when choosing a course of action was especially difficult. Preaching from Proverbs 3:6, he cautioned,

Men should acknowledge the Lord in all things they go about; because they may be brought into such straits, and have such difficult Cases before them, that they may see the work is too hard for them, or they may not know what to do; their Wisdom may fail them, or Men may be brought into such straits, as sometimes the *Sea Men* are, that they are at their *Wits end*; but God then can help the States-men how to project matters, and order their difficult Cases; and the Seaman, when he cries to God, wants not help, *God makes the storm a calm, and causes the proud waves to cease, and brings them out of all their troubles*. . . . Men may want Wisdom, though they have great Power; or want Power, though they have great Wisdom, or may want time, and a fit opportunity, tho' they have both Wisdom and Power; but God wants neither Power, Wisdom, nor Opportunity: Therefore we should acknowledge him.⁶⁰

Keach used two different metaphorical couplets to bring clarity to the application. The first, the “straits” and the “seamen,” were combined with the images of “cases” and “statesmen.” These metaphors portray individuals seeking to determine a course of action, whether a person on the water or someone charged with making legal and political decisions. True success comes from following and acknowledging God's instructions at

⁵⁹Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 52.

⁶⁰Benjamin Keach, *God Acknowledged: or, The True Interest of the Nation, Opened in a Sermon Preached Dec. 11, 1695, a Day of Public Prayer and Humiliation* (London, 1696), 28.

all times. Keach's application—that men should recognize God in all things—is displayed clearly and effectively.

Keach was saddened by the ongoing departure of believers and churches from the truth of God's Word. To Keach, it seemed in his day as if fewer and fewer Christians were practicing their faith in a biblical way, and their apostasy appeared to be ever increasing. He lamented,

Ah poor *England*, poor Church of God, where are thy brave old Heroes, that stood up to maintain the Truths of Christ? what Apostacy is here from the Orthodox Faith? what decay of doctrinal and practical Christianity? what dark Clouds spread over our Heavens? How are many fallen from the Faith? . . . Now that the Lord would scatter this Cloud, and all other dangerous Errors, let it be all our Prayers both Day and Night. Yet I doubt not but the present opposition against this Fundamental Point of Faith will cause the Truth in the end to shine more clear and bright, which the Lord grant in his Infinite Mercy, to the praise of his own Glory.⁶¹

Keach represented such bleak conditions metaphorically as “dark clouds” over the nation, and he longed for the truth to “shine more clear and bright” throughout the land. Keach knew the Lord was able to grant such an indulgence, and he longed for Him to turn the tide and to restore what was being lost so rapidly. The “cloud” of “errors,” though seemingly thick and foreboding, was not invulnerable to God's penetrating illumination. Keach was not only seeking that God would display His truth, but he was also eager for God to invade the hearts of the people, particular his own countrymen, that they might respond to His gracious initiative to save them. Keach's application for the people was for them to pursue God and His righteousness, in order that they themselves might be saved and that, in turn, they might reach their fellow men with the gospel.

Likewise, in his funeral message from Luke 23:28, Keach noted the worsening trend in people's behavior, and that even believers in Jesus Christ seemed to have little impact on the nation's culture and morality.

Is it not the horrid Prophaneness of these Times a Just ground to fear, that a Shower of Wrath and Divine Vengeance is a coming? was there worse Wickedness found in *Sodom* than is now in *London*, nay is not *Sodom* and what not found in this City? Be astonished, O ye Heavens! what is *London* a City of such Light, a

⁶¹Keach, *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes*, 52.

place of Vision, become the Shame and Derision of Nations. Have not our Fruits been Grapes of *Sodom*, and our Clusters of *Gomorrah*, sure the Harvest is near Ripe for cutting down.⁶²

By using a family of agricultural metaphors to describe the city of London, specifically “fruits,” “grapes,” “clusters,” “harvest,” and “ripe,” and by coupling them with biblical examples of God’s judgment, Keach encouraged his listeners to apply faithfully the biblical instruction that they encountered within Scripture, lest London and even all of England should suffer a similar consequence. This clear use of metaphor advocated that the people live holy lives and forsake sinful pursuits, in order that God might mercifully forgive their sin and heal their nation. Keach’s application of this passage was both effective and timely.

Summary

In the task of preaching, Keach was convinced that using metaphorical language, both those metaphors already present in Scripture and those he could design and implement on his own, was an unusually powerful way of communicating with virtually every individual in his audience. Keach believed that the abundance of metaphors in the Bible was God’s clear sanction for their use in the preaching act, an activity that Keach fervently believed was God’s specially ordained means of broadcasting the truths of His Word.

An analysis of Keach’s 224 published sermons indicates that, at least for those messages, Keach preferred to select passages of Scripture from the New Testament in general and from the Gospels in particular upon which to base his sermons. Fewer than ten percent of Keach’s sermons were taken from Old Testament texts, although he regularly used passages found throughout the entire Bible for support. Keach clearly favored preaching from Gospel texts, since more than seventy-five percent of his published sermons were drawn from these four books.

⁶²Keach, *A Call to Weeping*, 52.

Not only did Keach prefer preaching from texts taken from the Gospels, but he also regularly selected those biblical passages which already contained metaphorical imagery. In this way, Keach was able to explore and explain those figurative elements, and he could insert other self-made metaphors into his messages when needed. Even Keach's sermon titles indicate his propensity for using the power of imagery at every available opportunity. Keach used metaphors in his sermons in three primary ways: homiletical illustration, theological explanation, sermon application.

As the Lord Jesus Christ had done when He taught and proclaimed the Scriptures, Keach thought it appropriate and even essential to illustrate his sermons with metaphoric images. He wanted to be able to identify with even the most ordinary of his hearers, so that they could understand the content of the messages just as clearly as those who were educated and accomplished. Such a tactic also reinforced that the salvation that God offered in Christ was available to all persons who would obey the gospel, as God is not a "respector of persons."

Keach also enhanced his presentation of theological material with the aid of metaphors. Such important aspects of the orthodox faith as Christology, soteriology, the old and new covenants, the Sabbath day, etc. were doctrines that Keach made more clear and lucid by adding elements of figurative language. Often, Keach's efforts to explain the theological concepts of Scripture were precisely on target with the intent of the biblical text.

Sermonic application was a third area in which Keach employed metaphors. Keach knew that the goal of preaching was not simply the dissemination of information; preaching is about motivating and persuading people to obey the commands of God that are found in Scripture. In addition to making the teachings of the Bible clear and understandable, Keach also desired to prompt his audience to act upon what they had heard, whether they needed to obey the gospel and profess Christ as Lord or to grow in spiritual maturity by following Christ's instructions more closely and by putting away

sinful and empty pursuits. Keach also pointed out from time to time that the lifestyles of those to whom he preached regularly had a profound impact on the greater population of London and even the rest of the nation of England.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Benjamin Keach was a pivotal figure among English Baptists in the latter half of the seventeenth century. In her dissertation examining the achievements of many early Particular Baptists, MacDonald has summarized Keach's life and work in the following comments:

Benjamin Keach was as prolific a writer as he was polemical a personality, and, for a man reputed to have been in chronic ill health, seemingly indefatigable. He was clearly the single most important apologist for Calvinistic Baptist views in the period 1689-1702. He not only published on congregational hymn singing, but on ministerial maintenance, laying on of hands on baptized believers, first day worship, enthusiasm, eschatology, the Church of Rome, believer's baptism and justification. He produced a confession of faith, a church order, a catechism, a political poem dedicated to William and Mary, a hymn book and many sermons. . . . [Others] wrote in defence of believer's baptism, but neither the scope or extent of their works matched Keach's production.¹

Likewise, Nettles has produced a brief, descriptive synopsis of Keach's philosophy and lifestyle and of the impact that this relatively unknown English Particular Baptist pastor had upon the religious landscape all around him.

[Keach] seemed never to be convinced that he had exhausted all truth, or even his own capacity for understanding as much truth as possible. Pressing, challenging, correcting, debating, examining, interpreting, Keach bumped and bristled his way through life leaving everything around him much different from what it was when he discovered it. . . . [By the time of his death,] both church and state had made radical adjustments and, largely owing to the energy of Keach, Baptists had become a definitive force in the development of English Dissent.²

Indeed, Keach was unusual, in that he was able to complete a sizeable number of accomplishments in his lifetime, which proved advantageous not only to his

¹Murdina D. MacDonald, "London Calvinistic Baptists 1689-1727: Tensions within a Dissenting Community under Toleration" (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1982), 77.

²Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 1:163.

contemporaries but also to those today who continue to benefit from Keach's rich and wonderful legacy.

In particular, Keach's preaching ministry was especially significant, in that he served as the pastor of the Horseleydown congregation for approximately thirty-five years. During that time, Keach prepared and delivered hundreds of sermons and fulfilled numerous other pastoral responsibilities. Remarkably, Keach was able to publish a total of 224 sermons in the years between 1676 and 1701, some even before Toleration was enacted.

Keach's sermons are a rich treasure filled with insights pertaining to many aspects of seventeenth-century preaching, such as text selection, sermon organization, use of figurative language, theological and pastoral concerns, hermeneutical principles, etc. More importantly, Keach's messages are by far the largest body of early Particular Baptist sermons available today, since no other Calvinistic Baptist from that period published quantities of sermons even close to those of Keach. Haykin has noted that "in terms of both character and thought, Keach may be rightly regarded as one of the most significant Calvinistic Baptist divines of the seventeenth century."³ Similarly, Ivimey favorably described Keach as one of "those useful and distinguished ministers" who possessed "principles and zeal."⁴

Keach generally adhered to the basic Puritan plain-style sermon structure that dominated the earlier part of the seventeenth century, but in the latter half of Keach's life, sermonic organization fluctuated slightly, both as Puritan influence diminished in England and as the people's appetites turned more in the direction of vivid expression rather than dull rhetoric saturated with quotations from ancient philosophers and theologians. This fundamental shift in sermonic expression, combined with Keach's own

³Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach: Rediscovering Our English Baptist Heritage* (Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 1996), 97.

⁴Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London, 1823), 3:x-xi.

interest in the power and influence of metaphoric language, served to foster a substantial volume of output both from Keach's pen and his pulpit.

Early in his ministry, Keach had embarked on a vast study of the metaphors in Scripture. This research initially supported his pulpit ministry, as he prepared and preached sermons based on the images of the Bible. Eventually, he teamed with Thomas Delaune and produced the major work, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors*, a repository of information about biblical types and figures that remained in print even throughout most of the twentieth century. This work was an indicator of the level of focus that Keach had reached in his understanding of Scripture, metaphorical expression, and theological interpretation.

In addition to the typical elements of doctrines, reasons, and uses (applications) that were common to sermons of that period, Keach began to use metaphors in his sermons in a deliberate and frequent manner. It is true that Keach occasionally understood the term *metaphor* as a catch-all heading for several kinds of figurative language, such as allegories, metaphors proper, figures, and parables, but Keach had in mind the fundamental similarities among all of these expressions—their representative nature in which one person, event, or thing stands in the place of another. Keach intentionally used metaphors to enhance several aspects of his sermons.

Keach had become convinced that the abundance of metaphoric language in Scripture was not accidental but was, in fact, deliberately included by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. In addition, Jesus Himself repeatedly taught and illustrated by using figurative elements. For Keach, this was sufficient evidence to prompt him to incorporate metaphors into his own sermons, not simply those found in normal, everyday means of expression, but metaphors already contained in Scripture as well as those that Keach could tailor for specific purposes. Keach learned that he could accomplish at least three distinct (but related) goals by using metaphors throughout his sermons: homiletical

illustration, theological explanation, and sermonic application. Examples of these uses of metaphor are present throughout Keach's sermons.

By using metaphorical language, Keach was able to provide illustrations for his sermons, so that his hearers could grasp the truths he was trying to convey. The function of illustration seeks to illumine the sermon idea for the imagination of the audience and to form a word picture that associates the biblical truth with a familiar image so that the listener can visualize it. Metaphors enabled Keach to substitute a familiar expression for one less recognizable; thus, Keach's audience could understand the meaning of the biblical text much more easily, particularly if the subject matter was already unclear.

Keach was also able to use metaphors to facilitate the explanation of points of theology in his sermons. Explanation involves generating an understanding of the biblical and homiletical concepts by using background and interpretation material. Some aspects of biblical theology are notoriously complicated, and through the use of figurative language, Keach was able to put his hearers at ease and to unfold the truths embedded in the scriptural texts underlying his messages.

A third way in which Keach was able to employ metaphorical imagery in his sermons was to use them to apply the teachings in the scriptural texts. Application presents the implications of sermon concepts for human experience and can be descriptive in assessing contemporary life or prescriptive in promoting certain kinds of behavior. Keach knew that the task of preaching was not only concerned with the communication of biblical information, but it was also focused on motivating the congregation to put the truths of God's Word into practice in their lives. Metaphors made this charge easier by creating mental images of ways in which the contents of Keach's messages could be applied.

The thesis of this dissertation has been that Keach utilized metaphors in his sermons as a primary means to enable a greater understanding of the biblical text and to

connect readily with the intellect and emotions of his audience. This objective has been satisfactorily accomplished through a series of specific steps. Following a survey of Keach's life, in which the influences upon his preaching ministry were examined, his 224 published sermons were identified and generally described. From this point, Keach's understanding of metaphors was investigated, which revealed that Keach viewed them as a powerful tool for the task of preaching. The manner in which Keach interpreted metaphor was probed next, indicating that while he typically adhered to the standard definition of metaphor, in which meaning is transferred from one thing to another, he occasionally included more than one form of figurative language under the broader heading of metaphor. Lastly, an exploration of Keach's use of metaphors showed that Keach employed them for particular purposes within his sermons, specifically to illustrate, explain, and apply. These purposes prove the thesis of the dissertation—Keach's used metaphors to enable understanding and to engage the minds and hearts of his hearers.

Malcom, who wrote an early biographical essay of Keach's life, has noted favorably that with all of the challenges and hardships that Keach faced in his service for the Lord Jesus Christ, he repeatedly demonstrated faithfulness, dependence upon God, and a seriousness of temperament and conduct. Malcom stated,

Though he had suffered much from persecution, his temper never became sour, nor his religion tinctured with austerity. His industry, both in preaching and writing, was astonishing. He was not less prudent than peaceable; not less condescending than powerful; not less charitable than courteous. Grave, impartial, and faithful, he managed the affairs of his congregation with success, and deported himself so as to secure the respect of his most inveterate enemies.⁵

Walker has described Keach's unswerving commitment to Scripture as the inspired, infallible, and living Word of God, and he points out the impact that this belief had on every aspect of Keach's existence.

⁵Howard Malcom, "Memoir of the Rev. Benjamin Keach," in Benjamin Keach, *The Travels of True Godliness*, ed. Howard Malcom (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1854), 25.

[Keach] was a man of integrity, who made it his aim to live by biblical principles and biblical convictions. The Bible, as the Word of God, was his supreme authority and guide. His religion was one of sincere obedience to that Word. His first concerns were not his own interests and advantage but the honour and the glory of the God whom he served. Keach possessed a deep sense of gratitude to and love for God who he fervently believed had graciously set his love on him and had saved him from his sins.⁶

Metaphorically, Keach conveyed his lifelong conviction that God's Word is an invaluable blessing that is worthy of our faithful study, prayerful contemplation, and wholehearted obedience. Keach issued the same promise that he had already experienced in his own life and ministry:

He who sincerely giveth up himself to frequent Prayer and Meditation, and resolves to be in the continual Pursuit of this chief of Blessings, may assure himself of Success, having the Promise of a faithful God, who cannot lie, for his Security. The Means are plain, and the Encouragement great, beyond comparison: It is therefore in the Interest of every Christian to converse with the Word of God, in order to obtain a Purchase so eminently dignified with the Title of *Principal Thing*.⁷

⁶Austin Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2004), 367-68.

⁷Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1682), bk. 4, "Epistle to the Reader," i.

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF METAPHOR IN THE SERMONS OF BENJAMIN KEACH, 1640-1704

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This dissertation examines the manner in which Benjamin Keach used metaphors in his published sermons. The first chapter provides a thorough introduction to the dissertation, including the research objective, methodology, and source materials.

Chapter 2 concerns Keach's role as a preacher. In particular, the chapter assesses the formative influences upon Keach's preaching, including the political and religious environment of England in the mid-seventeenth century. Keach's preaching in rural Buckinghamshire as well as his pastoral ministry in London are explored.

Chapter 3 contains a survey of Keach's published sermons. These messages are organized into three primary groups: pastoral, doctrinal, and parabolic. Each sermon or collection of sermons is examined for general themes and textual basis.

Chapter 4 considers Keach's own understanding of metaphors in general, which is necessary in order to demonstrate the ways in which Keach employed metaphors and perceived the relationship of metaphor to the task of preaching. Keach's *Tropologia* contains substantial material pertinent to this investigation.

Chapter 5 explores the various ways in which Keach interpreted specific metaphors, both metaphors from Scripture and those from his personal experiences. His interpretive method was informed heavily by a commitment to the authority of the Bible.

Chapter 6 details the manner in which Keach specifically used metaphors, and his sermons provide many supporting examples. The use of established rhetorical criteria makes possible the task of locating, categorizing, and evaluating the material.

Chapter 7 synthesizes the pertinent information from the previous chapters and draws specific conclusions from the research. These conclusions support the thesis of the study and bring the dissertation to an appropriate end.

This work contends that Keach utilized metaphors in his sermons as a primary means to enable a greater understanding of the biblical text and to connect readily with the intellect and emotions of his audience.

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