

Seek | II Chronicles 15:8-15 | 15 January 2017

*They sacrificed... and entered into a covenant to **seek** the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul. (15:12)*

English Dictionary

To go in search or quest of; to try to find or discover by searching or questioning; to try to obtain; to try or attempt . 1191

Seek = zeteo

NIDNTT, Vol. 1

Classical Literature: attested from Homer onwards... has the general meaning of to seek. In classical Greek the word became a technical term for **striving after** knowledge, and especially for philosophical investigation. 530

OT: The LXX uses **zeteo** some 400 times, principally to translate the Hebrew **baqas**, seek, aspire, demand, ask... First of all, **zeteo** can in the LXX refer to non-religious processes: Joseph sought his brothers (Gen 37:16)... It is significant that already this secular OT **seeking entails no mere intellectual process but an activity which involves the whole person**. The men of the ancient East conceived of seeking as having an emotional element. Seeking in the OT included the will and the aspirations of man. **It is an existential act and not an intellectual one**. 530-531

When applied figuratively to man's relationship to God, **zeteo** denotes the conscious turning of the Israelites to their God with all their being, or that of Yahweh to his people... In the Psalms, particularly (24:6; 27:8; 83:16; 105:3 f.) and 2 Chronicles (7:14; 11:16; 15:12; 18:4, 7) there occurs the formula **zetein ton kyrion, theon, to prosopon kyriou, to seek the Lord, God, the face of the Lord**, which has become fixed as a technical term. These expressions are, on the one hand, a summary of what **willing obedience** to Yahweh means; and, on the other hand, they also contain an allusion to **cultic/worship practices occasions like worship and prayers**. To seek God thus acquires the meaning to seek after God, where he is to be found, in the temple and cult/worship practices. Seeking finds its fulfillment in oracles, instructions and adoration. 531

The passages that speak of God's seeking are essentially fewer but are all the more important. Like a shepherd, God will seek again his people who have wandered away, and he will gather them (Ezek 34:12-16). Hence, the theological use of **zeteo** in the LXX serves to express the **reciprocal covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel [the dance]**. 531

NT: In the NT **zeteo** is a word primarily used by the evangelists (Matthew 14 times; Mark 10; Luke 34; John 10) and in the Pauline writings (20 times)... Its range of meaning embraces the Greek and Hebrew

elements in the concept. Thus, **zeteo** in the NT refers, on the one hand, to **following and seeking something** (Lk 15:8), and to probing ideas and reflections (Mk 11:18; 14:1, 11), as well as judicial enquiry (John 8:50b). On the other hand, it means anything from deliberate striving and desiring (Matt 6:33; 1 Corinthians 10:33) to an assertion of one's claims (Mk 8:12). 531

The secular use of the word is instructive. When the parables tell of a merchant looking for beautiful pearls (Matt 13:45), or a housewife hunting through her home to find a drachma (Lk 15:8), or when the Passion-narratives tell of Judas' seeking for an opportunity to betray Jesus (Matt 26:16), the use of **zeteo implies an act of the will rather than reflection of the intellect.** 532

Like the prophets, Jesus' preaching called upon its hearers to seek God, i.e. **to put their whole life at the disposal of God's will and rule:** "But seek first [**zeteite**] God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (i.e. about which you worry) shall be yours as well" (Matt 6:33; cf. 77:f.; Lk 11:9 f., 12:31). According to John's Gospel, the Jews opposed this call by seeking Jesus' life (John 5:18; 7:1, 19; 8:37) and by seeking to establish their own glory (John 7:18; 5:44; contrasted with Jesus in 5:30 and 8:50). 532

Paul gives the clearest statement of the contrast between man's self-assertion and his seeking of God when he rebukes Israel for wanting to establish its own righteousness (Rom 10:3), and sets over against it **the way of faith which seeks to attain to righteousness in Christ** (Gal 2:17). Similarly he censures his opponents who "sought their own interests" (Phil 2:21), while he ventures to assert of himself that he does not seek his own advantage (1 Corinthians 10:33; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:5 love does not seek its own interests). In both cases **zeteo** describes, **not just one aspect of life, but the decisive direction of the human will.** 532

Finally God's **zetein** must be mentioned. It includes both God's claim to the fruits of **obedience** (Lk 13:6, the fig-tree;) to true **worship** (John 4:23) and to faithful **stewardship** (1 Corinthians 4:2), and also the **dedicated pursuit** of the Son of man whose mission it is to **seek that which is lost and rescue it** (Lk 19:10). 532

Christopher Smith and John Pattison, Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus (IVP Books, 2014)

Slow Church is a call for intentionality, an awareness of our mutual interdependence with all people and all creation, and attentiveness to the world around us and the work God is doing in our very own neighborhoods. 16

Scripture is less like the movie of the week and more like improvisation. It provides a basic plotline and then gives our churches, the actors in this drama, extraordinary freedom and creative opportunity. In

his book *Scripture and the Authority of God*, N. T. Wright describes the history of creation as a drama in five acts: (1) Creation; (2) The Fall; (3) Israel; (4) Jesus; (5) The Church. The implications of this are profound, if for no other reason than that it undermines our cultural impulse to be consumers and spectators rather than faithful participants in the unwritten fifth act of God's play. Wright says, "We must act in an appropriate manner for this moment in the story; this will be in direct continuity with the previous acts (we are not free to jump suddenly to another narrative, a different play altogether), but such continuity also implies discontinuity, a moment where genuinely new things can and do happen."

The enactment of Scripture has astonishing formative power. The deeper our engagement with the story, the better our improvisation will be. "Improvisation in the theatre," says pastor and theologian Sam Wells, "is a practice through which actors develop trust in themselves and one another in order that they may conduct unscripted dramas without fear." Similarly, Wells says that it is within the people of God—a community of trust—that we learn to live into the looming unknown of the future. 23

Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: the Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*, (Eerdmans, 2011).

Heavenly participation does not mean that we should ignore earthly concerns. Far from it! As this book will make clear, it is only otherworldliness that guarantees an appropriate kind of this-worldliness. However, heavenly participation does mean that Christ, the eternal Word of God, provides the created order with stability and makes it trustworthy. As the psalmist puts it, in the words quoted in the epigraph, "Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures." Prior to the advent of **modernity** [roughly 17th century], few people would have been able to read these words of the psalm without thinking of Christ as the eternal Word, who himself was the faithfulness of God and who himself had established the earth. They were convinced that created objects found their reality and identity in the eternal Word of God. *It is this link between heaven and earth that allowed premodern Christians to see God's own truth, goodness, and beauty in the world around them.* X

The broad consensus of the church fathers [2nd – 4th century] and medieval theologians [5th – 16th century] – which in this book I am calling the **Great Tradition** – was not satisfied with merely observing "facts." People were convinced that they could perceive the eternal mystery of the Word of God in these facts. This sacramental vision lies behind Augustine's [354 – 430 AD] words quoted in the epigraph: "*We have heard the fact; let us seek the mystery.*" Xi

William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards*, (Cambridge, 2004).

When John Cotton [1584-1652] arrived in New England, the context could not have been more different from the one William Ames had known in Holland. Rather than a traditional culture with highly developed institutions, Cotton saw a rough wilderness in which civilization was only beginning to emerge. Cotton Mather looking back from the end of the century could sum up the achievements in this way: *“never was any plantation brought unto such a considerableness, in a space of time so inconsiderable! An howling wilderness in a few years became a pleasant land, accommodated with necessaries – yea and the conveniences of humane life; the gospel has carried with it a fullness of all other blessings.”* However different the context, the same theological motives would be at work in New England, as the Puritans sought in biblical fashion to restore creation to its original splendor and build a holy commonwealth. As poet Edward Johnson put it: *“This is the place where the Lord will create a new Heaven, and a new Earth in, new Churches, and a new commonwealth together.”* 212-213

Both the order and the lives they sought to live followed, they believed, a biblical model. As in contemporary Holland and England this was a culture that grows out of an intimate familiarity with Scripture, which they read in their homes and heard preached on the Sabbath. As a result it was a highly literate culture – three-fourths of the population could read, which created a publishing industry in Boston that by the end of the seventeenth century was second only to London in the English-speaking world. **Reading was the privileged medium of cultural formation.** This created a culture more intensive than extensive. 213

Externally this was reflected in the way they sought to construct their towns. In the 1630s an anonymous author wrote a treatise entitled *An Essay on Ordering Towns*. This treatise described the way a township is to be laid out in a series of concentric circles. At the center is the Meetinghouse, which, the author comments, is “the center of the whole circumference.” ...This sense of nature as capable of restoration was also rooted in the narrative that New Englanders would have felt they were living. God had called them to live out their holiness in the New England wilderness. Thus they tended to interpret events in terms of providences, and so they would understand their calling to improve the earth as a spiritual calling. The earth after all was once a garden and could again be made to reflect more clearly the order and beauty of its creator. 214-215

The meaning of creation is found not only in the parts, but in the structure by which the parts are related to each other. Here the impulse to reflect their inner orientation in mapping out space becomes clear. The instructions for laying out New England towns, as we saw, prescribed an order that reflected the biblical calling to “restore” creation – create an order that better reflects God’s purposes. The center of each town is to be the meetinghouse, as worship is the center of their lives, then houses are to be laid out in a way that promotes community... The people of God were organizing themselves in a way that anticipated the community of heaven. Town planning then becomes an exercise in imaginative projection of the mystical properties of community as they looked forward to the heavenly kingdom – all controlled by a tradition of biblical interpretation then common. 217, 219