Individualism and collectivism are categories employed by sociologists to describe the characteristics of a particular people or culture. These elements and their importance depend heavily upon the culture’s particular world view. This study examines these extremes—particularly in the context of the NT metaphor of the church as a body.¹ In light of the fact that the data of the Hebrew Bible are often ignored, in this study I will review five controversial passages from the Hebrew Bible that are relevant to the topic (i.e., Abraham’s household and the blessing of the covenant, the commandment language, divine transgenerational retribution, and individual responsibility) and will probe their significance for a Scripture-based ecclesiology.

Key Words: individualism, collectivism, biblical theology, anthropology, world view, ecclesiology

¹. The body metaphor is very important in Paul’s ecclesiological masterpiece, the Epistle to the Ephesians. In an earlier study, I have attempted to “draw” a metaphor map of Ephesians, which underlines the importance of the metaphor. However, it must be kept in mind that Paul is also using other relevant metaphors, such as family and household, that seem to represent a theological development and continuation of the important Hebrew Bible concept of Israel as a significant part of the family of God (note: a significant part, not the significant part, although it is considered the firstborn [Exod 4:22–23] of Yhwh). See my “Metaphors and Pragmatics: An Introduction to the Hermeneutics of Metaphors in the Epistle to the Ephesians,” BBR 16 (2006): 273–93. A thorough discussion of Israel as YHWH’s firstborn and the theological implications of this concept can be found in Merling Alomía, “El motivo del הַנֵּפֶשׁ en el libro de Exodo,” in Inicios, fundamentos y paradigmas: Estudios teológicos y exeénticos en el Pentateuco (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil; Serie monográfica de estudios bíblicos y teológicos de la Universidad Adventista del Plata 1; Libertador San Martín: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2004), 191–227.

The present study is a significantly revised and updated version of an earlier paper presented at the Fourth South American Biblical-Theological Symposium in October 2001 at River Plate Adventist University, Argentina, and has purposefully retained some of the style of an oral presentation. The original presentation was subsequently published in my “Entre individualismo y colectivismo: Hacia una perspectiva bíblica de la naturaleza de la iglesia,” in Pensar la iglesia hoy: Hacia una eclesiología adventista. Estudios teológicos presentados durante el IV Simposio Bíblico-Teológico Sudamericano en honor a Raoul Dederen (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil et al.; Libertador San Martín, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002), 3–22.
INTRODUCTION

Living at the beginning of the 21st century is not always easy. While it is a pleasure to enjoy running clean water (though still often limited to the western hemisphere), electricity, an improved health care system, and higher life expectancy, profound world view changes have taken place over the past century or two. We live more isolated than we did 200 years ago when the next-door neighbor lived one or two kilometers down the road.\(^2\) We do not know the ones living next to us—and sometimes we simply do not care. This change is not an accidental change. It is the subtle result of a changed paradigm of roles involving myself, my family (or clan), the community I live in, the country whose passport I hold, and the church I belong to (if I belong at all!). Sociology has provided some helpful criteria for describing culture.\(^3\) Individualism versus collectivism is one of these criteria, on which I would like to focus in this study and which also seems to be useful when considering the anthropology of the Hebrew Bible. A brief look at U.S. culture in the 21st century clearly suggests a strong emphasis on the individualistic side of this continuum. Furthermore, due to the dominant political, economic, and technological position of the U.S. in the international context, one can note a strong cultural influence in most areas of daily life that goes beyond New York, Los Angeles, or Washington DC, reaching New Delhi, Manila, Buenos Aires, Berlin, and Capetown.\(^4\)

In this article, I will endeavor to do the following: First, I will describe the tension between the two extremes as influencing the contemporary Christian church, which does not and cannot subscribe to a single cultural system. Second, due to the general lack of integrating evidence from the Hebrew Bible into a Scripture-based ecclesiology involving the individualism-collectivism continuum, I will focus predominantly upon


\(^3\) See here the work of Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (rev. ed.; New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 3–138. Hofstede studied different cultures in the context of business organizational structures as part of a large research team financed by IBM. Hofstede has suggested four relevant “bi-polar” dimensions of culture: (1) power versus lack of power, (2) collectivism versus individualism, (3) feminine versus masculine, and (4) certainty versus uncertainty (ibid., 14). I would like to thank my colleague and friend Ronald Vyhmeister for pointing me to Hofstede’s work.

this part of Scripture, with a brief look toward the NT.\textsuperscript{5} This will lead to the formulation of a number of important principles that may help our understanding of the issue in the context of the “metaculture” of the church at the beginning of the 21st century.

**TENSION OF THE INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM CONTINUUM VISIBLE IN THE 21ST-CENTURY CHURCH**

Modernism and postmodernism both have significantly influenced the individualism-collectivism continuum and seem to have tipped the scale toward individualism.\textsuperscript{6} This individualism has different expressions, as can be seen in its economical, philosophical, political, and—most relevant for this research—religious dimensions.\textsuperscript{7} The Christian church in Africa, or in Central and South America and—increasingly—in Asia, come down at different points on the individualism-collectivism continuum. African, Hispanic, and Asian cultures emphasize corporate development and group accountability.\textsuperscript{8} On the other hand, the face of the Western church—obviously not immune to the surrounding prevailing culture of individualism,

\textsuperscript{5} I have shown elsewhere the unfortunate neglect of the Hebrew Bible in the systematic study of the church in current ecclesiological thinking. See my “‘Church’ in the Old Testament: Basic Concepts and Historical Development,” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9 (2006): 3–23. This focus on the Hebrew Bible is due, first, to the limited space of a journal article and, second, to my personal field of specialization and interest.

\textsuperscript{6} See here Theodore A. Turnau III, “Speaking in a Broken Tongue: Postmodernism, Principled Pluralism, and the Rehabilitation of Public Moral Discourse,” *WTJ* 56 (1994): 355–56. Not everybody agrees on this point, as can be seen in the following quotation: “In reaction to modernism’s radical individualism and lack of emphasis on group identities, the recent rise of postmodernism has helped to regain an appreciation for both the corporate dimension of the self and the influence of one’s group or interpretive community on the interpretive process” (Walt Russell, “Insights from Postmodernism’s Emphasis on Interpretive Communities in the Interpretation of Romans 7,” *JETS* 37 [1994]: 511). However, Russell’s opinion is a minority viewpoint. It seems to me that postmodernism is not a complete break with modernity but could be described as “hypermodernism” or the ultimate modernity. Compare here Dennis E. Johnson, “Between Two Wor(l)ds: Worldview and Observation in the Use of General Revelation to Interpret Scripture, and Vice Versa,” *JETS* 41 (1998): 71–72.

\textsuperscript{7} Turnau, “Speaking in a Broken Tongue,” 355, summarizes four distinct concepts in the religious sphere that should be noted. First, there is the concept of covenant, whereby the individual’s existence is independent of and prior to his inclusion in the covenanted group. Each is to pursue his own spiritual interests. The community is a collection of people with like interests. Second, there is a doctrine of subjective conversion, whereby the genuineness of any individual’s faith is not open to challenge from other members of the group. One’s salvation is independent of community inspection and authority. Third, there is the insistence on the independence of each congregation from the authority of other congregations. Fourth, there is the doctrine of temporal calling, wherein each is to pursue his own worldly interests as he pursues his spiritual interests.

self-reliance, and independence—is rather different. Leadership style is another area where these cultural differences appear. Whereas North American or European leadership styles are characterized by participatory, (more) democratic features and an emphasis upon accountability and efficiency, African and Hispanic leadership tends to be more direct. Other areas where differences are glaringly obvious include practical church life, the standing of pastors, and the issue of how decisions are to be made.

I submit that these differences are based on different world views that result in distinct value systems and do not always function on the cognitive level, that is, the underlying reasons for doing what is being done are not always clear. In this context, it might be useful to define the term *world view* as utilized in this study. I am basing it here on the work of Ronald A. Simkins:

Worldview encompasses the mental functioning that directs human actions. It is the cognitive basis [the emphasis should be on the basis and not so much on cognitive] for human interaction with the social and physical environments. . . . It is a view of the world, a way of looking at reality. . . . A people’s worldview shapes and is shaped by their social and physical environments.9

World view is dynamic. It is not just something that our parents instilled in us during the first month of our lives, but it is shaped by our personal experiences and subject to both internal and external factors. This makes globalization an all-encompassing topic in basically any field of research.10 Figure 1 depicts a model of world view dynamics, stressing the strategic role that world view plays in the dynamics.11

**POSSIBLE TENSION OF THE INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM CONTINUUM VISIBLE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE**

Recent literature concerning the basic sociology or anthropology of the Bible, involving particularly the dimension of individual/corporal respon-
sibility in both Old and New Testaments, is growing rapidly. While most authors seem to be aware of the difficult issue involved in the existence of both viewpoints in Scripture, some opt for explanations (such as the

omnipresent concept of evolution) that are less than satisfying. Interestingly, Wolfhart Pannenberg has included an important discussion of the question of the individual and the faith community in the context of soteriology. However, before any integration of scriptural data into some kind of systematic model can be made, Scripture itself needs to be scrutinized and understood. In the following, I will discuss five key references involving aspects of the individualism-collectivism continuum in ancient Israelite society and religion. This, in turn, may provide significant data for a Christian understanding of the church. A number of the observations that I include in the discussion of the five key references from the Hebrew Bible have been made before and I do not claim originality here. However, it seems to me that their integration into a more holistic perspective of a biblical ecclesiology involving the tension between “I” and “we” has not yet been undertaken.

Abraham and His Household

The important story of the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) stands at the beginning of a new era of YHWH’s dealing with humankind after the flood narrative (Gen 6–9) with its accompanying genealogies. The tower of Babel story in Gen 11 functions as some type of connection, bridging the gulf between general (“humanity”) and individual (“Abraham and Sarah”) history. It is interesting to note that Abraham’s call is written in the

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15. Full exegetical treatment of the references will be impossible and can easily be checked in the standard commentaries. It should also be noted that I am following a thematic order of the texts (beginning with transgenerational blessings [Gen 12, Exod 20, Deut 5], followed by transgenerational retribution [Josh 7], and ending with individual responsibility Deut 24:16, Jer 31:29–30, and Ezek 18:1–4]), and I have no hidden diachronic agenda as to their occurrence in Israelite thought and texts.

singular.\textsuperscript{17} It does not call Abraham \textit{and} Sarah, but it is only Abraham who is addressed. This pattern continues in the following patriarchal narratives (Gen 13:14–17; 15:1–6, 18–21; 17:1–2), with the only exception being God's specific promise of motherhood to Sarah (Gen 17:15–16, 19; 18:10–15), although it must be noted that even then Sarah is addressed not directly but via her husband.\textsuperscript{18} In Gen 21:1, the MT is ambiguous about who received the promise and reads רָאָֽיָהוּ לְאִשָּׁ֔ה מֵאֲשֵׁר אָסַ֖פָת אֶלָּ֑והִי, “and YHWH visited Sarah, as he had said (earlier).” While it is possible that the reference is to Sarah individually, Gen 21:2 seems to challenge this interpretation because the MT reads לְמוֹרֵעַ אֲשֶׁר דָּרָ֣ב יִהְוָ֥ה אֵלָ֖יהוּ, “at the time/moment, that God had promised/spoken to him.”\textsuperscript{19} Once circumcision is established as the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen 17:10–14), Abraham decrees that all male members of his large household are to be circumcised (Gen 17:23–27). This was not a voluntary decision made by the members of his household but the result of a divine order given to Abraham.

Individual freedom—an important and indispensable ingredient of individualism—is not as important in the societies of the ancient Near East. Manfred Dietrich has correctly pointed out that personal freedom in the ANE is living within the known limitations and spaces provided by the creator-deity.\textsuperscript{20} Independence and self-realization were not vital top-

\begin{enumerate}
\item The main verbal form found in Abraham’s call is an emphatic imperative Qal 2ms, אֶרְּאָ֑ק, “go, you!” Furthermore, all the references to country (כֹּלֹא מָ֖רֹא, “from your country”), kindred folk (כֹּלֹא מְרֹא, “and from your kindred”), and father’s house (כֹּלֹא בֵּֽיתַךְ, “and from the house of your father”) include a pronominal suffix, 2ms. The promises of nationhood and a name in Gen 12:2–3 continue with this pattern.
\item Carol L. Meyers (Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 169–70) suggests the notion of balanced responsibilities among males and females in ancient Israel. Phyllis A. Bird (Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel [OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 81–102), suggests that women in the Israelite religious sphere—a notion that in itself is difficult, because there were so many distinct historical contexts!—had a similar position in everyday life, namely, lesser authority, sanctity, and honor. Judith Romney Wegner (“‘Coming Before the Lord’: The Exclusion of Women from the Public Domain of the Israelite Priestly Cult,” in The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception [ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler; VTSup 93; Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 3; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 451–65) and Georg Braulik (“Were Women, too, Allowed to Offer Sacrifices in Israel? Observations on the Meaning and Festive Form of Sacrifice in Deuteronomy,” HvTSt 55 [1999]: 909–42) discuss the role of women in the Israelite cult, coming to quite-different conclusions.
\item The direct pronoun “him” in English is expressed by a direct object marker with a pronominal suffix, 3ms, clearly referring to Abraham.
\item Dietrich, “Die Frage nach der persönlichen Freiheit,” 49–58. His discussion of specific Akkadian and Sumerian terminology such as \textit{andu}r\textsuperscript{a}, “freedom, exemption, release from slavery,” and \textit{s}u\textit{b}a\textit{ra}r\textsuperscript{a}, “exemption, to institute an amnesty, to confirm/increase freedom” (cf. Jeremy Black et al., eds., \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian} [SANTAG: Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000], 17, 379) should rather be considered introductory and needs to be expanded. Regarding the limitations of the creator-deity, Dietrich (“Die Frage nach der persönlichen Freiheit,” 57) writes: “Deterministisch sah sie der Bewohner des Alten Mesopotamien durch Geburt—d.h. konkret: kraft des Ins-Lebengeburufen-Seins durch seinen Schöpfert—eine gottgewollte Ordnung gestellt. Diese Ordnung war für ihn der Kosmos . . . Hier war der Platz, an dem er frei entscheidend, sich frei

\end{enumerate}
ics, nor were they considered essential for the religious or philosophical discussion. In the case of Abraham, his leadership—both in the religious and political realm—of his household or clan points to the underlying integrated and interconnected world view. It is noteworthy that the circumcision sign is only connected to the male members of the family/clan/people, but included women and children as partakers of the covenant blessings. It is not a private individual ceremony but rather a public statement that focuses upon Yahweh’s grace toward Abraham and the free and servant members of his household. Ishmael, who although not part of the future people that God is raising still is Abraham’s son, partakes in the communal blessing. Thus, in this context, collectivism in the OT is a means of extending grace and sharing blessings.

Commandment Language (Exodus 20:5, 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9)

Important individualism/collectivism terminology can be found in the commandment sections of the Hebrew Bible, involving the phrase יְהוָה אֲחַזְקַק (‘visiting (participle, referring to Yahweh as the acting agent introduced by יוהי אבות ‘I am Yahweh, your God’ in Exod 20:2) the guilt (or iniquity) of the fathers.’) It is important to note the reference to three/four generations in all of these verses, pointing to the future referents of the punishment to be dealt out by one of the covenant partners. Hebrew poetry and prose is full of numerical devices, among which the \( x/x+1 \) device is known as a graded numerical sequence or a type of parallelism. John Davis proposes the meaning of intensification and/or progression and

bewegend und frei handelnd wirken konnte, an dem er, soweit es das Miteinander zuließ, mit anderen Worten persönlich frei war.”

21. Ibid., 57–58.
23. It should be noted that the patriarchal texts often contain highly abbreviated statements that require deciphering. A good example for this can be found in the crucial altar-construction texts that suggest a ritual that is important for the entire clan, although it is only referring to the clan leader Abraham. See here my detailed discussion in “Altars, Ritual and Theology: Preliminary Thoughts on the Importance of Cult and Ritual for a Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures,” VT 54 (2004): 495–515.
24. See Exod 20:5, 34:7; Num 14:18; and Deut 5:9. A more inclusive translation of “fathers” should be “parents.” The discussion concerning the so-called Urtext appears to be fortuitous. The sections under consideration often repeat—not always with the same details—the main legal focus of the Ten Commandments.
Klingbeil: Between “I” and “We”

...dismisses the actual numbers utilized.26 The phrase is marked by covenant terminology and should be classified as legal language.27 יְהֹוָה extends his covenant to his people and lays down the conditions. He does so employing 2ms verbal forms, which emphasize the individual responsibility of each member of the covenant people. He expects “undiluted loyalty” and promises חֵנָּה, “loving kindness,” to a thousand (generations) of those who “love me and keep my commandments” (Exod 20:6).28 The contrast between three or four generations and a thousand is marked and deliberate, emphasizing the unlimited response of יְהֹוָה to those who love him but the limited punishment of those who disobey, reaching to the third and fourth generation.29

Harrison has included an interesting observation, based upon the family structure of ancient Israel. It is most probable that three or four generations lived together under the same roof and were thus affected by divine punishment.30 This proposal coincides with the archaeological data of Iron Age Palestine, where nuclear-family dwellings (of 4–5 persons) and multiple-family compounds (of 10–15 persons) that included three-generation multiple families were commonplace.31 This would mean that

26. John J. Davis, Biblical Numerology: A Basic Study of the Use of Numerals in the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 93–94. However, Davis does not include a detailed discussion of the phrase and references under discussion.


28. “Undiluted loyalty”: See here John I. Durham, Exodus (WBC 3; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 287, and compare also the introduction of the Ten Commandments, which reads: ייִהְוָה אל נא תֹּקֵן נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָם אֵלֶּהָ נְא הָאָדָמ

29. See the discussion of Freund, “Individual vs. Collective Responsibility,” 281–88, of the history of interpretation and the interrelatedness of the four Pentateuchal references. Freund seems to adhere to standard historical-critical presuppositions and solutions that do not provide a satisfying solution to the issue. It should be noted that all four references are not exact copies, but rather seem to connect to the main spirit of the laws. Examples for this include the lack of the reference to the “children of the children” found in Exod 34:7. Furthermore, Num 14:18–19 does not contain the reference to the thousand generations that will receive יְהֹוָה’s mercy.


divine retribution is concerned rather with immediate contamination of those living together in the larger family unit and not necessarily with vindictive judgment covering three or four subsequent and nonparallel family generations. Furthermore, the marked quantitative opposition with the thousand generations’ future blessing emphasizes theologically the merciful character of YHWH. This does not resolve the tension between individualism and collectivism, but it helps to understand the true weighing of the concept in biblical theology.

Divine Transgenerational Retribution (Joshua 7)

Joshua 7 is the classical locus of transgenerational retribution. Joshua 7:1 describes the problem with the μηρ, “devoted things,” as affecting the entire people of Israel. The verse states μηρ οἱ δύναμεν τῶν μαρτυριῶν, “now the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully [plural], full of unfaithfulness concerning the devoted things.” Theologically, the tone is set and it is plural or collective. Achan, being a member of the people of Israel, brings upon the entire


33. A similar perspective is visible in Josh 7:11, which states יִתְם שִׁאנוֹל לְהָעָבָר אֵלָה בְּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִשְׁחַל, “Israel has sinned [sg., referring to the people as a whole], and they [pl.] have also transgressed my covenant.”
people disgrace and divine punishment. The army unit sent off to conquer Ai comes back defeated (Josh 7:4–5), and, as a result, the entire momentum of the conquest appears to be fading away. The MT here reads literally “and the heart of the people melted away so that it became water.” Earlier in Joshua’s account, Israel’s enemies suffered the melting syndrome (Josh 2:11—inhabitants of Jericho; Josh 5:1—Amorite and Canaanite kings), but now Israel itself experiences this terrifying state. In the raid, people die—a significant number if one understands the reference in Josh 7:4 to be three fighting companies. Joshua and the elders of Israel mourn the loss graphically; perhaps they fear the “first blood” omen, a well-known ANE belief that the result of the first battle is taken as an omen for the remainder of the military campaign.

God’s response is precise and calls for a major assembly: “Israel has sinned.” By means of lots, first the tribe and then the clan and finally the family is “taken.” Achan is the fourth link in the chain and confesses his deed (Josh 7:20–21), but only after being confronted by Joshua. The stolen consecrated war spoil is recovered from beneath Achan’s tent. Joshua 7:24 is crucial in our discussion of the nature of collectivism or corporate solidarity. Those taken to the Valley Achor include Achan, the stolen consecrated items, his sons (יוֹבָא), his daughters (יוֹנָה), his animals, his...
tent, and all his belongings. Israel stones him (and supposedly his family and belongings), and then everything is burned. The act of burning is significant. It appears to be an act of purification, associated with total destruction, and was also closely linked to ritual performance. It represents one of the most severe forms of punishment. The inclusion of animals is also significant. Animals belong to the creation order established by YHWH and thus had to suffer the consequence of the fall, the flood, and other individual disasters. They are an integral part of the larger household—a concept challenging the 21st-century church living in societies that often have a highly utilitarian world view, in which animals are only “useful.” The human members of Achan’s household affected by his abominable act included sons and daughters, which in Hebrew usage might even include grandchildren or great grandchildren. No specific mention is made of Achan’s wife, which may be because women were embedded in the family identity. Interestingly, Achan is introduced as the “son of Serach” (Josh 7:18, 24; 22:20), but the biblical text does not suggest the execution of his parents. Most probably, this is due to the fact that Achan had already formed his own household and his sin affected only his household. The reason for the severe punishment involves three significant elements: (1) direct and willful contradiction of the stipulations of YHWH’s covenant, (2) contamination of other Israelites (specifically his household) by Achan’s sin, and (3) the specific nature of the μηριμματικός ban. As a result of Achan’s sin, his larger community suffered, including his immediate family, his animals, his tribe, and the confederacy of tribes, representing Israel as a people.

40. The Hebrew here reads ירש את בתים והשכירים, “and they burned them with fire.” The indirect object marker indicates a plural point of reference.

41. Gerald A. Klingbeil, A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination as found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1998), 273, concerning the use of the phrase נשר, “through fire/by means of fire,” in sacrificial contexts. The noun is often used with the verb🔘, “to burn” in ritual contexts (ibid, 205–6). In Lev 13:52, 55, 57, every item of clothing or other thing that had contact with leprosy (or whatever skin disease may represent) had to be burned.

42. A similar series of destructive acts as a means of punishment can be found at Ugarit. Compare Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus (JPS Torah Commentary 2; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 207.

43. Compare here also the following works: Hermann-Josef Stipp, “‘Alles Fleisch hatte seinen Wandel auf der Erde verdorben’ (Gen 6,12): Die Mitverantwortung der Tierwelt an der Sintflut nach der Priesterschrift,” ZAW 111 (1999): 167–86; Simkins, Creator and Creation, 15–40. The basis for this close relationship is rooted both in the creation of the world and in God’s covenant with his people. Writes Simkins (Yahweh’s Activity in History and Nature in the Book of Joel [Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 10; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991], 71), “The covenant again demonstrates the fusion of human and natural history in the history of creation from the fact that Israel’s historical deeds have ramifications in the natural world. Moreover, according to the dogma of the covenant, Israel’s actions in human history have effects, by inner necessity, in all creation.”

44. This can also be seen in the Sabbath commandment in the context of the Ten Commandments, in which the wife does not appear while other members of the household are explicitly mentioned.
Thus, Josh 7—as opposed to Abraham’s story or even the commandment language—illustrates graphically the interaction of individual decision and collective responsibility. Similar examples can be found in the OT record, such as David’s sin that results in death of his first child from Bath-sheba and his subsequent family problems (2 Sam 12:14–20). There is also the account of the ill-advised census of David, resulting in the plague that killed 70,000 people in Israel (2 Sam 24). In this case, however, there may be some textual markers in the chapter, suggesting that the punishment of the people was the result of previous sins.

Joel Kaminsky includes additional examples, such as Num 16:1–17:15, where the wrath of God strikes down 14,700 Israelites who where unhappy with the divine judgment executed upon Korah, Dothan, Abiram, their followers, and all their households. In his discussion, Kaminisky focuses upon three central ideas connected with transgenerational retribution: divine wrath, holiness violation, and bloodguilt.

Individual Responsibility, Part 1 (Deuteronomy 24:16)

One of the most important declarations focusing upon individual responsibility can be found in Deut 24:16. The MT reads as follows: the fathers shall not die because of the sons, nor shall the sons die because of the fathers; a person shall die [or “be put to death”] for his/her sin. Most modern exegetes would explain this verse as an indication of theological maturing.
in Israel’s religious literature. This is based upon the philosophical presuppositions of traditional historical criticism, which suggest a conceptual growth and a wide-ranging editorial process for the literature of the OT that is, however, very distinct from its internal evidence, which places Deuteronomy in a period prior to the settlement of Canaan and the monarchy and should not be ignored. In the particular case of Deuteronomy, the situation is even more complex, because the entire covenant focus of the book presupposes a collective or communal perspective of responsibility, thus invalidating the evolutionary perspective of historical criticism, which generally argues for a development from the corporal to the individual. Some important references to the corporal or collective perspective of the book include Deut 5:1, where the appeal to heed the following laws, which govern the covenant between Israel and YHWH, is directed not to the individual Israelite but rather to the people as a whole.

Deuteronomy 17:2–7 emphasizes the communal responsibility of isolating and cleansing evildoers from the midst of Israel. A similar emphasis on the responsibility of the individual for the benefit of the entire people can be found in Deut 13:7–12. In Deut 23:10–15, the legislation for keeping the army camp pure indicates that a lack of complying with these regulations will result in God’s turning away from the entire camp. This, in turn, would result in disaster.

Returning to Deut 24:16, it is interesting to note the specific context of this regulation. Deuteronomy 24:6–25:4 is a collection of miscellaneous laws and leads to legislation concerning a hired man. Verses 17–22 emphasize the rights of the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. The refrain of these laws is: treat other people (especially those with lesser social and economical clout) justly and even compassionately. Verse 16 takes on crucial


53. Moses addresses לְכֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל, “to all of Israel.” The verbs at the end of the verse are also kept in plural.

54. Deut 23:15 reads והָּאָרָא אֲלֵךְ קָנָהְךָ וְדַעְתֵּךְ, “and your camp shall be holy, so that nothing shameful (or, literally, ‘naked’) shall be found in it, and thus he will turn away from amongst you.”
importance, because it emphasizes the individual responsibility of those in positions of power. From this perspective, it should not be construed as a legislative principle designed to counteract the well-established principle of collective solidarity/responsibility but rather seems to function as an important reminder that collective responsibility does not lead to a juridical collective, in which one could hide and not individually comply with these issues of social justice.\textsuperscript{55} Writes Christopher Wright:

This law must be seen in its proper context—namely, the administration of criminal law in human courts. Deuteronomy elsewhere expresses a deep understanding of corporate solidarity of the people of God, through the covenant that spans the generations. . . . The law fits in the present context because, like the surrounding laws, it is concerned to protect the vulnerable—in this case the relatives of one found guilty of a capital offense, who, though personally innocent, might be exposed to community anger or vengeance.\textsuperscript{56}

Jacob Milgrom, studying the foundations of biblical dietary laws in the so-called Priestly texts (P), suggests that fundamentally there are two realms—the supernatural, divine realm and the human realm. Both operate by distinct principles. While God punishes collectively (from the perspective of the divine realm), only the individual guilty party may be punished by humans.\textsuperscript{57} While not agreeing with his perspective of the literary development of the Pentateuch, the Hebrew Bible fundamentally points to the two realms, including references to the heavenly sanctuary (Exod 25:9), which was the “pattern, figure, Urbild” of the earthly sanctuary.\textsuperscript{58} Job 1–2 also provide a view of the heavenly reality, as can be found in other prophetic literature of both Old and New Testaments. However,
I am not sure that one could argue theologically that they operate on distinct principles.


Historically, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were contemporaries, working in two distinct geographical spheres. Whereas Jeremiah’s ministry was predominantly concerned with the time before the final destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., Ezekiel’s ministry only began in 593 B.C. and continued well into the Exilic Period. It seems that both prophets make reference to the same proverb, although Ezekiel expands on it in more detail.

Jer 31:29. “In those days it will be said [intransitive] no longer: the fathers ate the sour [unripe] grapes, but the teeth of the sons will be blunt.”

Jer 31:30. “because everyone will die for his [own] sin; every person who eats sour grapes will blunt his own teeth.”

The spotlight of the theological discussion concerning the exile and its cause focused upon collective or corporal responsibility. Both Jeremiah’s audience in Judah and Ezekiel’s audience in Babylon wrestled with similar issues and tried to come to grips with crucial questions of guilt and the cause of the unthinkable—the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem. Gary Smith has argued that both prophets attempted to correct an incorrect reconstruction of reality by means of citing and correcting a false statement.

The use of the proverb seems to indicate an unbalanced interpretation of collective/corporal solidarity, which was convenient, because it removed individual responsibility. Both prophets—to their respective audiences—indicate that personal sins were at the root of individual suffering. Their statements emphasized a principle elaborated and known in Israelite his-
tory that had to be balanced with the other guiding principle of collective/corporal solidarity. Furthermore, it also appears that both prophets combat a “fatalistic view of life engendered by self-pity and a one-sided emphasis of moral collectivism.”

It is enlightening to look at the specific context of Jeremiah. Following the quotation and correction of the popular proverb, Jeremiah focuses upon the new covenant. He draws deeply from Deuteronomy, which—as seen above—emphasizes both collective and individual concepts concerning responsibility and community. In Jer 31:31, the object of the new covenant is the house of Israel and the house of Judah—not the individual Israelite. This community is a community before YHWH, “because all will know me, from their smallest to their biggest” (31:34). To be sure, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had preached collective solidarity (Jer 2:30, 3:25, 16:10–13, 18:21–23, etc.; Ezek 16) before and were not on an ideological war path to contextualize worn-out theology. Rather, they both fight fatalism, resignation, and an invalid theology that does not accept responsibility.

Ezekiel presents a powerful counter thesis to the one promulgated by the popular proverb and declares in 18:4: Behold! Look out! All living beings are mine. Behold! The soul of the father, as well as the soul of the son they are mine. Behold! The soul of the one who sins, he shall die.” This is a significant verse that includes three powerful interjections. The main point of Ezekiel in the context of chap. 18 has to do with creation theology. Based upon the doctrine of creation, all creatures belong to YHWH and are thus subject to his judgment. Creation theology actually anchors both the individual and the collective/corporal perspective, because it emphasizes the doctrine of man created in the image of God (which involves the ability to choose) and reminds us that humanity was created for community.

Conclusions of Biblical Evidence Gleaned from Five Critical Passages of the Hebrew Bible

It is clear that a short article cannot do justice to all of the biblical data concerning the issue of collectivism/individualism. However, the above discussion has provided sufficient data to draw some general conclusions.

1. When utilizing a synchronic (versus diachronic) approach to Scripture, accepting its historicity and inspiration, it becomes

62. Kaiser, Toward Old Testament Ethics, 70. Thompson (Jeremiah, 579) seems to evaluate the principle of collective responsibility/solidarity as inferior to individual responsibility.

63. Similar thoughts can be found in Num 16:22; Isa 42:5; Job 12:10, 27:3, 34:4–15; and Ps 104:29–30.

64. Compare here the essays in Johannes C. de Moor, ed., Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis: Papers Read at the Ninth Joint Meeting of Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en Belgie and The Society for Old Testament Study (OtSt 34; Leiden: Brill, 1995).
clear that the concepts of both collectivism (or corporal solidarity, as Kaiser would want to call it) and individualism are firmly established in Scripture.

2. Both concepts form the matrix of the texture of Israelite anthropology and society and need to be appreciated for what they are and not necessarily evaluated with a 21st-century bias.

3. Individuals and groups can be blessed because of the initiative or faithfulness of one person. Examples of this include Abraham’s household, Lot and his family, Rahab’s family during the conquest, the people of Israel on numerous occasions (with Moses as their mediator), Israel as an entity (during the reign of faithful kings), and, finally, the larger Christian community. Clearly, Christ’s sacrifice for humanity has similar effects and is thus based upon the ideal of collective/corporal solidarity, where one person can change and affect an entire group. Paul puts it in the following words: “Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all” (Rom 5:18).

4. Divine retribution can reach entire households and groups. The reason for these acts of divine justice include prevention of contamination in the face of God’s holiness—a concept of utmost importance to both OT and NT authors. It might be helpful, especially in cases of divine acts of retribution, to introduce the concept of foreshadowed final judgment. God knows the heart and decision of the group/individuals and already executes what will only be realized at the eschaton for most of us.

5. Creation theology can be positioned as the basis for both collectivism and individualism. God creates individuals and endows them with the ability to choose and act and make decisions. However, God created humanity with the need to live in community—Adam needed a partner, children need their parents, families need the larger clan, and so on. Thus, built into humanity was a finely tuned balance between the collective and the individual. The scriptural data pertaining to the fall (Genesis 3) suggests that this finely tuned balance has been destroyed by sin, and since then humanity swings between two major extremes—collective fatalism and extreme individuality.

**CONTRIBUTION OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF ANCIENT CULTURES**

Sociology and anthropology can provide important windows to understanding ancient and present-day realities. It is clear that the results have to be carefully weighed and cautiously integrated into the biblical account—and not the other way around. However, these disciplines can make significant contributions to our understanding of Scripture and the culture
in which Scripture originated. Contemporary anthropology has long abandoned theories based upon the distinction introduced by Lévy-Bruhl (such as “prelogical thinking” and the notion of “primitive mentalities”). In its place, researchers are beginning to understand the nature of the dyadic personality of ancient Mediterranean cultures. A dyadic personality is defined as a specific group or unit set in relation to other groups or units and set within a given social and natural background. “Every individual is perceived as embedded in some other, in a sequence of embeddedness so to say.” A comparison taken from the realm of computer technology would be the interconnectedness of servers on the internet. Each server has its own function, but rules and particular specifications exist on how it may communicate with other servers. As a matter of fact, they are interconnected and embedded.

The table below provides some of the marked distinctions between Western culture and a dyadic (Mediterranean) culture based on Hanson's table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Culture</th>
<th>Dyadic Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasis on autonomy and individualism</td>
<td>• Emphasis on sociality and group orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasis on rights and the right to experiment and change individually and socially</td>
<td>• Emphasis on duty and loyalty with the obligation to remain in one's group(s) and abide by its decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preference for majoritarian decision making, with the willingness to abide by the will of the majority</td>
<td>• Preference for consensual decision making, with dissatisfaction should one be omitted from the consensual process of one's peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect for efficiency, ability, success</td>
<td>• Respect for hierarchy, seniority, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality of life assessed in terms of individual success, achievement, self-actualization, self-respect</td>
<td>• Quality of life assessed in terms of family/group success, achievement, respect of others for the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality of work life judged by a task's challenge to the individual and the intrinsic needs of the individual that it meets</td>
<td>• Quality of work life judged by degree to which a job allows the individual to fulfill obligations to the family/groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoiding guilt, either internalized or applied by another for some infraction, is a fundamental concern</td>
<td>• Avoiding being shamed by others, and thus maintaining one's family's/group's honor, is a fundamental concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preserving self-respect is basic</td>
<td>• Preserving face, i.e., respect from one's reference groups, is basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children learn to think of themselves as “I”</td>
<td>• Children learn to think of themselves as “we”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67. Ibid., 171.
**Western Culture**  
- A person-based culture: there are relatively overlapping social roles for males and females, labor with no explicit sexual division of labor. Dominant values are those of males.

**Dyadic Culture**  
- A gender-based culture: a sexual division of labor with no overlapping roles. Dominant values are those of males embedded in males.

**CONCLUSIONS**

It is clear that the culture of the Hebrew Bible and the NT was much closer to a dyadic culture (embedded and interrelated culture) than to the present-day dominant Western cultural world view in both theory and practice. This challenges 21st-century Christians to renegotiate their culturalization. But given the fact that culture and world view both generate values and depend on values, is this possible? There is a need for a biblically based value system. This value system could perhaps even function as a kind of biblical “metaculture.” Metaculture is definitely not a specific “authorized” culture whereby we need to “take off” our native culture and “redress” in the new culture with new forms, practices, actions, and values. Rather, a biblical metaculture would function as a type of roof, under which 21st-century Christians can come together and understand each other and appreciate the diversity of practice and upbringing, because they all share in the same important divinely inspired values. The 21st-century Western emphasis on individualism and its accompanying values and lifestyle choices need to be questioned on the basis of the overall biblical value system. While it is true that individual liberty, efficiency, and task orientation are important values and benefits of the 21st century, responsibility toward a larger whole, to the “we” mentality, the desire for consensus, respect for hierarchy and family structures, and the overall larger picture should not be forgotten. It is obvious that the recognition of these issues and their underlying world view provides a much broader base to solve the perceived conflict between individualism and collectivism in the context of the 21st-century church based upon principles discovered in Scripture.

Taking the clue from creation theology, both aspects of individualism and collective solidarity can be found in Scripture, because they are both present in the account of the beginning. The principle of responsibility toward the next generation(s) can be found in the basic legal code given by God to Israel (and through Israel to humanity), and as a result life must be understood as an interconnected affair in which my lifestyle and choices affect my family and their families in a decisive manner. However, this is balanced by a gracious God who shows his mercy to a thousand generations, thus promising to be able to overcome our wrong choices. Another relevant biblical concept concerns God’s holiness. Holiness violation demands justice, and the examples of collective retribution from the Hebrew Bible need to be understood in terms of a foreshadowed final judgment. This is a so-

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68. See the model of dynamic world view interaction by Kearney, p. 323 above.
bering thought, because it reminds us as a church that we are responsible to a holy and gracious but real God who will one day ask for explanations.

Understanding the intricate relationship between collective and individual responsibility helps us to overcome the increasing perception of isolation that eats up entire communities in the Western world. We are not alone, but are part of something bigger. This is a concept that needs to be emphasized. Community is not an option, but a must in order to survive the crisis lying before us. In this context, it is important to note that the last book of the NT, describing scenes both on earth and in heaven, mostly utilizes group imagery, thus emphasizing the existing concept of collective/corporal solidarity.69

Finally, the blessing aspect of corporal solidarity needs to stressed. Humanity was designed to live in community. Both as a church and as individuals, we can be a blessing. In Abraham, all nations were blessed. Through Christ, the second Adam, all humanity can find the way back to the Father. Through our lives and work in different cultures, these cultures can be blessed—or can deteriorate. It is a choice we need to make, both individually and collectively as the church.

69. Compare the description of the churches (Rev 1–3), the group of 24 elders (4:4), the 144,000 and the great multitude (7:4, 9; 14:1), those who overcame (15:2), the great multitude in heaven (19:1, 6), and so on.