

LIFE IS WORSHIP

A festschrift in honour of
DOUGLAS A. THOMSON
on the occasion of his seventieth birthday

Life is WORSHIP

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Life is Worship

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For **Douglas A. Thomson** on the occasion of his seventieth birthday

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FOREWORD

It is a great joy to honour our colleague and friend Doug Thomson for his faithful and fruitful ministry. Dr. Doug Thomson has led the music department at Heritage since 1987. It would be hard to overestimate the impact he has had on the lives of students, and through them, on local churches.

All who know Doug admire his exceptional musical ability. If you have attended one of the Benton Street Baptist Christmas festivals, you know Doug shines in leading congregational singing, playing the piano or organ and directing a large choir and symphony orchestra. In addition to being a gifted musician, he's a very effective instructor. Whether he's teaching a conducting course or giving a private piano lesson, Doug knows how to bring out the best in those he trains. His shaping of lives goes far beyond the classroom; he regularly mentors individual students, taking a personal interest in their lives and ministries. Students in Doug's courses not only develop musical skills, they also deepen their understanding of worship. I have heard numerous students speak of how Dr. Thomson helped

enlarge and deepen their understanding of worship. Rather than simply equating worship with singing, they come to see musical worship as one important expression in a life of total worship to God.

In addition to his ministry at Heritage, Doug has shown an ongoing commitment to the ministry of the local church. Throughout the decades, he not only has taught a full load of courses at Heritage but also has served several local churches as their minister of music. As a result, he knows how to prepare students for effective service in a local church. Throughout his decades of service at Heritage, Doug has been supported by his faithful wife, Beth. Together they have opened their home and hearts to the students Doug trains at Heritage.

In the pages that follow, some of Dr. Thomson's colleagues honour him with essays related to themes that have marked his ministry. It's our desire that your life will be strengthened and stretched as you read. I also hope you will join me in thanking the Lord for Dr. Doug Thomson.

Rick Reed

*President, Heritage College and Seminary
January 2023*

Douglas A. Thomson **—a biography**

Lee Brubacher

As a student at Heritage from 1994 to 1999, it was my privilege to be one of Doug Thomson's music students. I participated in several years of the Heritage Singers (choir), three years of travel team Sunday ministry, a music missions trip to Brazil and an internship at Forward Baptist Church. During this year of internship under Doug's supervisory direction, I clearly sensed the call of God on my life toward full-time vocational music ministry in the local church. Much of what I learned about music theory and philosophy, conducting, the theology of worship and even worship leadership itself, I learned from Dr. Thomson. Since my graduation in 1999, Doug and I have shared annual ad hoc mentoring meetings where we have shared struggles and ideas, and where I have learned and grown. We have joined our choirs together for a few events over the years and even attended a worship conference together. Along with music and worship, we share a love of boating and the regaling of stories that automatically accompany both loves. It is an honour to contribute this biographical sketch of my friend and mentor, Dr. Doug Thomson.



Doug playing the piano aged 2.

By the age of thirteen, Doug was asked to be the organist of the church.

During the summer of 1973, Doug met and started dating a girl named Beth Fex, a northern Ontario girl whose father Len was a travelling pastor among the Plymouth Brethren. A few weeks later,



Doug and Beth's wedding on August 21, 1976.

The early years

Doug Thomson was born in Wingham, Ont., on November 12, 1953, into a family of six, with three much older sisters. The family attended Wingham Baptist Church—the place where Doug was led to Christ by his Sunday School teacher, and the place where Doug first gained experience playing piano for a

congregation. By the age of thirteen, Doug was asked to be the organist of the church.

During the summer of 1973, Doug met and started dating a girl named Beth Fex, a northern Ontario girl whose father Len was a travelling pastor among the Plymouth Brethren. A few weeks later, Doug left to begin studies at the University of Western Ontario in London. On Sundays, he attended North Park Chapel. The summer after he graduated with an honours BA in Music, Doug and Beth married and went on to have three sons: David, Jonathan and AJ. Doug also earned an associate diploma in piano performance from Western Ontario Conservatory of Music, and a licentiate diploma in piano performance from Trinity College, England.

Call to ministry

During the first three years after graduation, Doug taught music at Alma College in St. Thomas. In June 1979, at a Christian youth conference, Doug strongly felt God was leading him in a different direction than secular teaching. However, at the time, Doug had no idea what that might be. One month later, he had his answer.

In July 1979, Doug received a phone call from Pastor Don Fitchett, a complete stranger, inviting him to be the music minister at Faith Baptist Church in St. Thomas. Doug did not think he could make a career of being a music minister part-time. When the two men met, and Don realized Doug worked with young people at church, Pastor Fitchett asked Doug to come to Faith full-time as minister of youth and music. At this point in his life, Doug was quite nervous even to pray in public, and yet, recognizing that God was calling him, he agreed to begin this new adventure.

Faith Baptist Church, St. Thomas, Ont.

Over the next couple of years, Doug began to form the youth group around more than just entertainment. He developed a philosophy of youth ministry, coached in part by Marvin Brubacher, who became lead pastor at Faith in April 1981. Before Marvin came, Doug was called upon to be the *de facto* senior pastor at Faith after Don Fitchett resigned. Also in 1981, Doug began an MTS degree at Ontario Theological Seminary in Toronto while continuing to work full-time at Faith. He was honoured to study under such men as Dr. Don Carson and Dr. Bill McRae. During these years David and Jonathan were born to the Thomsons.



Faith Baptist youth group, 1980s.

Within four years of beginning at Faith, the tiny collection of teenagers had grown to become a large group of young people,

enthusiastic about following Jesus Christ, and the music ministry had burgeoned also. Doug was asked to become full-time music pastor and Rick Donald was called to be the full-time youth pastor. Shortly thereafter, in the fall of 1982, Faith launched a Christian school where Doug was involved in teaching music and leading school choirs. These were the years of large choir cantatas at the church as well.

London Baptist Bible College & Seminary, and West Park Baptist Church, London, Ont.

In 1987, shortly before their third son, AJ, was born, Doug was contacted by Dr. Gerry Benn and asked to head up the music program at London Baptist Bible College (LBBC).¹ In his interview, conducted by Dr. Benn and another area pastor, Doug mentioned he had heard this pastor preach at Faith Baptist not too long before. The pastor said to Doug, “Oh, what did I preach on?” Doug immediately responded, “What did I play on the organ?” That line of questioning ceased. Regardless, Doug was hired at the college. He remained as half-time music director at Faith and began a full-time professorship at LBBC.²

That first year at LBBC, Doug had two students who were studying for a Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE) with a music minor. A few years later, in 1990, Gerry Benn resigned and Marvin Brubacher became the president of LBBC and London Baptist Seminary (LBS). In 1991, Gerry Benn, who had become the senior pastor at West Park Baptist Church in London, asked Doug to join their staff as half-time worship and music pastor, while continuing at LBBC. God’s leading was very clear and the family moved from St. Thomas to London.

In 1989, Doug began work on an Master in Music (Choral Conducting) at the University of Hartford, Connecticut, USA.

¹ During the college’s short history (since 1976), it had utilized the musical leadership of Sharon Harris, Ken Young and Don Howard. Through Doug Thomson’s leadership, the music program became fully established, with all courses redesigned.

² Beth Thomson writes, “As a teenager, Doug had dreamed of being a music pastor at a church and also a Bible college professor. Now he watched as God unfolded that dream.”

This involved part-time course work over several summers and also included studying with the world-renowned maestro Robert Shaw at Furman University in South Carolina. Doug would make the twelve-hour drive after classes on Friday evenings, spend Saturday with his family, lead two Sunday morning services at West Park, and then leave for Hartford again. In spite of the heavy load, Doug graduated from the University of Hartford with high marks, having learned much that was helpful for him in his teaching.



Doug with David, Jonathan and AJ, 1991.

Notwithstanding a very busy schedule, Doug was absolutely committed to spending time with his sons. He attended their sports games, made sure to be home for dinner every evening, and after family time, would tuck each boy into bed with games, then prayers and kisses. A son usually accompanied him on college choir tours and travel team ministry. His boys grew up thinking they were college students, too. Doug likes to tell the story of an event that took place while he was teaching theory to his students. He had one of his sons with him for the day. He asked a question which none of the students could answer, so he asked his son who immediately gave the correct answer.

Heritage College & Seminary—London and Cambridge, Ont.

On March 27, 1993, London Baptist Bible College and Seminary amalgamated with Central Baptist Seminary to form Heritage College & Seminary. In the fall of 1995, Heritage relocated from London to Cambridge. This move was strategically done to position the school midway between its residential roots in London and Toronto. During the 1990s, the school choir regularly visited

churches across Ontario. Linda Seabrook, who worked at the school for around eleven years, fondly remembers being asked to be a



“ringer” in the college choir for a cantata written by Don Moen, Jack Hayford, Tom Hartley, Tom Fettke and Camp Kirkland called “God With Us.” This presentation, and its sequel “God For Us” provided the Heritage Singers with strong ministry for a number of years.

Forward Baptist Church, Cambridge, Ont.

In 1995, with the move to Cambridge, Doug resigned from West Park and accepted the call to a half-time position as pastor of worship



and music at Forward Baptist Church in Cambridge.³ The family relocated to Cambridge at the same time. Dave and Sandy Epstein became good friends with Doug and Beth. Sandy writes:

I was in the choir with Doug as the choir director and he was amazing! I loved how he interacted with the choir, the music he would choose, the way he personally cared

³ Pastor Dave Epstein writes, “What to say about Doug Thomson? The best thing is he married Beth—clearly his better half! But Doug himself is one of the most wonderful co-labourers in the gospel I have ever ministered with. I recruited him hard, and when the Lord led him to Forward we were thrilled and so grateful to God. And he didn’t disappoint! Doug’s genuine walk with God, his beautiful family, his loving leadership, his special musical gifts, and our personal friendship as brothers in Christ were a super blessing for Sandy and I.”

Biblical studies

Cursed to bless: The power of speech in the oracles of Balaam

Joel Barker

Introduction

The Balaam saga (Num 22–24) offers a fascinating presentation of both human and divine use of language in the Old Testament.¹ As Gordon Wenham correctly notes, through the interplay of irony, humour and well-crafted poetry, this material is both “very funny and deadly serious.”² It comes at a point of transition within the book of Numbers as Israel finishes its wilderness wandering and begins preparations for entry into the Promised Land. Curiously, Moses, Aaron and the rest of the Israelites are absent from these chapters. Instead, the text shifts its point of view and makes Israel the object of the concerns of Balak, the Moabite king, and Balaam, his hired visionary. The Balaam material directly follows Israel’s military defeat of Sihon and Og, two imposing Amorite rulers (Num 21:21–35, cf. Deut

¹ It is a privilege to dedicate this essay to Doug Thomson, a man whose life and career vividly expresses the power of language to direct praise to God.

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2008), 185.

2:24–3:11). This establishes a sense of threat as the text transitions to Balak’s perspective and justifies his summons of Balaam. Balak’s intended solution is to pronounce a curse on Israel, permitting him to defeat them militarily and remove them from his territory (Num 22:5–6).³ In doing so, he seeks to use the power for performative speech to bring death upon an adversary.

The focus of this study is on the power of speech to enact blessing and curse. It quickly becomes evident in the world of the biblical text that blessings and curses are not mere words. Rather, they portend serious consequences. Within the biblical witness, blessings and curses are typically relatively straightforward, with the speaker pronouncing blessing upon friends, family and allies, while cursing enemies and those who transgress a community’s standards. However, the Balaam material is more complex. It portrays a professional spiritualist who seems to accept a commission to curse Israel, only to pronounce blessing every time he opens his mouth. Blessings and curses, though speech available to everyone, take on special significance when such expertise is invoked.⁴ A professional maledictor claimed an “extraordinarily close relationship with the supernatural.”⁵ Within this established framework, the text sets up

³ Jeff S. Anderson states: “Balak fully expects Balaam’s curse to soften up Israel’s defenses before the big battle.” See his *The Blessing and the Curse: Trajectories in the Theology of the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 77.

⁴ Anne Marie Kitz, *Cursed Are You! The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 3. Speaking of curses, Kitz states “Every member of society used them, from slave to king, from young to old, from men and women to the deities themselves.”

⁵ Kitz, *Cursed*, 398. In the case of Balaam, his evident ability to receive multiple messages from God confirms that he has access to the divine realm. Balaam’s exact status is matter of dispute. Jacob Milgrom and R. Dennis Cole suggest that Balak expected Balaam to operate as a sorcerer, that is, one who manipulates the power of the spiritual world for various purposes, while in actuality Balaam is a diviner, one who reads omens and discloses the divine will. Timothy R. Ashley suggests that Balaam’s roles have overlap between a Mesopotamian diviner/seer and an exorcist. Given that Balaam appears to accept Balak’s commission, and that God instructs him on multiple occasions to speak only what he permits, it seems best to read these oracles from the perspective that Balaam could have cursed Israel if he was permitted. See Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 472; R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, New American Commentary 3B (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 366–367; Timothy R. Ashley, *Numbers*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 436.

a situation in which Balaam's uttered curses could pose a significant threat to Israel.

The interplay between blessing and curse is most evident in Balaam's oracles, although the narrative episodes prefigure Balaam's challenge in fulfilling Balak's commission. Balaam's motives remain opaque throughout, making it possible to view him as either "a good man checking with his deity what to do," or wonder if he is "in reality holding out for prophecy-for-hire in the hope of financial gain, even though he should know better?"⁶ A full treatment of this and other issues in the Balaam chapters cannot be achieved within this study, though on balance, the text is best read as attributing self-serving motives to Balaam. Instead, this study focuses on the performative nature of speech in the Balaam oracles and the interplay between the human and divine speakers. This reveals how the text turns speech intended to pronounce death on Israel into words of life that affirm its blessed status before God.

The function of blessing and cursing

The tension at the heart of the Balaam oracles is between Balak's commission to curse and the expressed divine intention to bless. Both blessing and curse are examples of performative speech: words uttered for the purpose of accomplishing something. A blessing may "invoke, distribute, or celebrate the well-being that comes from divine favor," while curses convey the opposite.⁷ Curses seek to call down misfortune or calamity upon the recipient, typically through spiritual or divine agency. Anne Marie Kitz equates curses with petitionary prayers since they "solicit a deity to do harm to a person, place or thing."⁸ She further expresses the belief that the intention of a curse is death: whether immediate or through the progression of surrounding events.⁹

⁶ Richard S. Briggs, *Theological Hermeneutics and the Book of Numbers as Christian Scripture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 233.

⁷ Anderson, *Blessing and Curse*, 26.

⁸ Anne Marie Kitz, "Curses and Cursing in the Ancient Near East," *Religion Compass* 1 (2007): 616.

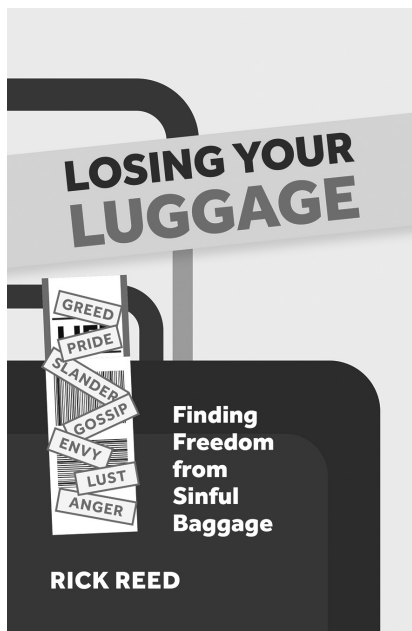
⁹ Kitz, *Cursed*, 214. "All curses seek one goal: death.... The scope of the injury can move seamlessly from a strenuous life, to a premature death, and finally to extinction."

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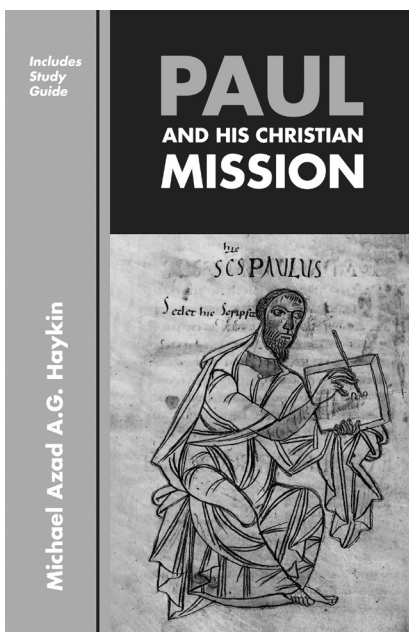
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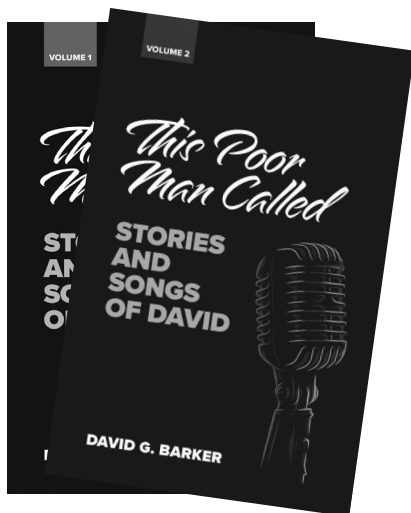
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