

# AGENCY IN THE BIBLICAL STORY

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Creation, Sin, Babel, Jesus, and the Restoration Logic Behind HAPI

A Working Theological Thesis Paper for Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure

Author: Michael Bower

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## **Core thesis**

The biblical story can be read as a history of agency given by God, distorted by sin, captured by false powers, and restored through Jesus. HAPI translates this structural pattern into a modern framework for preserving human agency in systems, institutions, and agentic AI.

## Abstract

This paper develops a theological and structural reading of agency in the Bible as a foundation for HAPI, Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure. It argues that agency is not merely individual freedom or preference. In the biblical pattern, human agency is a gift from God, expressed through image-bearing, stewardship, obedience, love, responsibility, and participation in creation. Sin does not only break rules. Sin fractures agency by distorting perception, corrupting desire, producing shame, dividing relationships, and placing people under powers that reduce meaningful participation. The biblical story then repeatedly presents God as the source who restores agency: liberating Israel from bondage, forming a covenant people, confronting false worship and oppressive systems, and finally restoring human agency through Jesus Christ, who heals, forgives, calls, sends, and reconstitutes human participation under the kingdom of God.

The paper maps biblical themes of agency being stripped away, including deception in Eden, violence in Cain, institutional overreach in Babel, coercive labor in Egypt, idolatry, legalistic burdening, demonic bondage, imperial domination, accusation, and death. It then maps the restoration pattern: truth replacing deception, forgiveness replacing accusation, healing replacing paralysis, vocation replacing passivity, Spirit-empowerment replacing fear, and accountable community replacing scattered self-protection. The result is a theological support structure for HAPI: systems should be audited by whether they preserve or strip away clarity, authority, refusal, memory, accountability, and meaningful participation. Governance, in this frame, is the product of preserved agency.

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# 1. Introduction: Why Agency Belongs in the Biblical Conversation

HAPI begins with a modern concern: powerful systems can reduce people to ornamental participants. A person can be present in a process while lacking enough clarity, authority, refusal, memory, and accountability to meaningfully shape the outcome. In AI governance, this appears when a human is asked to approve actions they do not understand. In institutions, it appears when people are held responsible for decisions they did not truly control. In everyday life, it appears when people become overloaded, manipulated, dependent, ashamed, or trapped inside patterns they cannot easily break.

The Bible speaks to this problem more deeply than it may first appear. Its central drama is not merely rule-keeping. It is the ordering, corruption, and restoration of human participation under God. Human beings are created to act, name, cultivate, guard, love, judge, obey, build, rest, repent, forgive, and worship. These are agency words. They are not simply mental beliefs. They involve action under meaning.

The thesis of this paper is that the biblical story repeatedly shows three movements: agency given, agency corrupted or captured, and agency restored. God gives human beings real participation. Sin distorts that participation. False powers capture it. Jesus restores it. The Spirit distributes it. The church is meant to embody it. The final vision is not humanity erased, but humanity healed, ordered, and participating rightly before God.

## Working claim

The Bible supports HAPI not by using modern infrastructure language, but by revealing the same load-bearing pattern: human beings need truthful conditions for meaningful participation. When those conditions collapse, governance becomes false. When they are restored, people can act responsibly again.

## 2. Core Definitions

Term	Working definition in this paper
Agency	The God-given capacity to understand, choose, refuse, act, remember, and remain accountable under truth.
Capacity	The support conditions that make agency possible, including strength, knowledge, time, community, authority, and spiritual formation.
Corrupt agency	Agency used against truth, love, stewardship, neighbor, or God.
Agency loss	A state where a person remains present but cannot meaningfully participate, refuse, remember, or remain accountable.
False gate	A power, institution, person, or system that blocks or permits without rightful authority.
True gate	A boundary that preserves rightful passage under truth, authority, discernment, and accountability.
Restoration	The rebuilding of conditions that allow people to act freely and faithfully under God.
HAPI	A theory, governance model, and infrastructure project for preserving human agency in modern systems.

The distinction between corrupt agency and agency loss matters. Sin can appear as rebellion, where a person misuses agency. But sin also produces bondage, where a person is dominated by patterns, powers, accusations, and desires that reduce their ability to act in truth. Scripture holds both together: humans are responsible, yet they also need rescue.

### 3. God as the Source of Human Agency

The biblical story begins with God as the source of being, order, speech, life, and vocation. Human agency is not self-created. It is received. Genesis presents God speaking creation into ordered reality, then giving humanity a role within that order. Humans do not invent their own existence or authority. They receive life, location, relationship, blessing, command, and task.

This means agency is not absolute autonomy. Biblical agency is participation under God. The human being is not a machine, not a slave to creation, and not God. Humanity is placed in a middle vocation: creaturely but responsible, dependent but active, limited but meaningful.

- **Received life:** Humanity receives breath and existence from God, so agency is grounded in gift rather than self-origin.
- **Received authority:** Human dominion is delegated stewardship, not ownership without accountability.
- **Received limits:** The command in Eden shows that agency requires boundaries, not limitless impulse.
- **Received relationship:** Human agency is relational from the start: God, creation, man, woman, future generations.

For HAPI, this gives the first principle: agency is not preserved by removing all limits. Agency is preserved by restoring rightful participation within truthful order.

### 4. Creation: Agency as Image-Bearing Stewardship

Genesis 1-2 portrays humanity as made in the image of God and placed in the garden to cultivate and guard it. This is a foundational agency pattern. The human being is not merely observing reality. The human is entrusted with meaningful work. Adam names animals, receives command, participates in creation, and lives inside a world that is both gift and responsibility.

Image-bearing means humans represent God within creation. Stewardship means human authority is delegated and answerable. The garden itself is not a cage. It is a place of formed freedom, where life, work, relationship, command, and rest are integrated.

**Figure 1. Agency as Given Stewardship**

God	Humanity	Creation	Command	Accountability
source of life and authority	image-bearing participation	field of stewardship	truthful boundary	responsible action

Figure. A structural flow showing agency as received, distorted, captured, and restored.

The creation account therefore supports HAPI at the deepest level: human beings are meant to participate meaningfully. A system that removes meaningful participation is not neutral. It works against the grain of the created human vocation.

### 5. Sin as Agency Loss and Corrupt Agency

Sin is often reduced to disobedience. Disobedience is central, but the biblical pattern is wider. Sin also corrupts agency. In Genesis 3, the serpent attacks clarity before action. The humans are not first forced by physical coercion. Their understanding is distorted. Trust is weakened. Desire is redirected. The boundary is reframed. Once action occurs, shame enters, hiding begins, blame spreads, and responsibility fragments.

This is a profound agency sequence: deception distorts clarity, distorted clarity corrupts choice, corrupt choice produces shame, shame produces hiding, hiding disrupts accountability, and blame transfers responsibility. Agency does not disappear completely, but it becomes fractured.

## Sin as agency fracture

Sin is not only the wrong use of agency. It is also the condition that makes agency less truthful, less free, less accountable, and easier to capture by false powers.

Cain deepens the pattern. In Genesis 4, sin is pictured as a crouching power that desires mastery. Cain is warned, but he does not govern the impulse. He acts violently, then refuses accountability. The result is not freedom. The result is exile, alienation, and marked existence. The more sin claims agency, the more agency becomes disordered.

Paul later develops this bondage dimension. Romans 7 presents the divided human condition: wanting the good while being pulled by another power at work. This does not remove responsibility, but it shows that human agency under sin is damaged. People need more than information. They need rescue, forgiveness, new life, and Spirit-enabled participation.

## 6. Themes of Agency Being Stripped Away

The Bible repeatedly shows agency being stripped away through personal sin, oppressive power, false religion, deception, fear, and death. These patterns are not abstract. They are the same kinds of agency erosion HAPI names in modern systems.

Pattern	Biblical expression	Agency function weakened
Deception	Eden, false prophets, demonic temptation	Clarity and discernment
Shame	Hiding after sin, social exclusion, accusation	Accountability and participation
Fear	Israel before enemies, disciples before the cross	Courage, refusal, action
Oppression	Egyptian slavery, unjust rulers, exploitation of the poor	Capacity, authority, choice
Idolatry	Serving created things as ultimate powers	Right worship, truthful desire
Legalistic burdening	Heavy burdens without mercy or justice	Freedom, clarity, restored participation
Accusation	Condemnation, despair, Satan as accuser	Memory, forgiveness, future action
Death	The final enemy and the limit of fallen agency	Embodied participation and hope

These patterns matter because HAPI is not just about AI. It is about agency in systems. A workplace can deceive. A bureaucracy can shame. A policy can burden. A platform can capture memory. An AI agent can act before human refusal is possible. These are modern forms of old agency problems.

## 7. Babel: Collective Agency Without Rightful Order

The Tower of Babel is one of the clearest biblical pictures of collective agency becoming disordered. The people have coordination, technology, language, ambition, and shared execution. They are capable. But their capability rises without proper submission to God. They seek a name for themselves and centralize power in a way that resists the creational mandate to fill the earth.

Babel is not a condemnation of building, technology, or coordination itself. The problem is collective agency detached from rightful order. Capability becomes self-referential. The system scales around its own name. Human coordination becomes a substitute for faithful participation. The result is scattering and confusion.

Babel pattern	HAPI translation
Scale without submission	Capability outruns truthful governance
Name-making as central motive	Institution protects image over agency
Unified language used for self-exaltation	Shared metrics hide wrong purpose
Centralized power resisting vocation	System captures participation instead of distributing it
Confusion and scattering	Loss of coherence after governance fails

In HAPI language, Babel is an agency capture event. People are coordinated, but their participation is organized around false order. The system is powerful, but not rightly governed. This supports the HAPI claim that governance cannot merely measure capability. It must ask whether capability preserves rightful agency.

## 8. Exodus and Covenant: Liberation Plus Formation

Exodus is one of the Bible’s central agency-restoration stories. Israel is not merely given better feelings or private spirituality. Israel is freed from forced labor, oppressive rule, and false claims of ownership. Pharaoh represents a system that extracts human capacity while denying rightful agency. God hears the cry, confronts the power, liberates the people, and forms them into a covenant community.

But liberation is not the end of the story. A freed people must be formed. The wilderness shows that agency requires more than escape from oppression. It requires trust, law, worship, memory, leadership, discipline, and dependence on God. The commandments are not merely external control. They are a structure for preserving freedom under God.

Exodus pattern
God restores agency by liberating people from false ownership and then forming them into responsible covenant participation.

For HAPI, this matters because agency preservation is not anti-governance. Bad governance captures agency. Right governance protects restored agency. The biblical pattern is liberation plus formation, not liberation into chaos.

## 9. Prophets and False Religion: The Agency Critique

The prophets repeatedly attack systems that preserve religious appearance while violating justice, mercy, truth, and care for the vulnerable. This is extremely close to the modern idea of governance theater. A people can have rituals, sacrifices, leaders, courts, temples, and public language of righteousness while the actual system exploits widows, orphans, workers, foreigners, and the poor.

Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah, and other prophets expose a split between official story and lived reality. When worship becomes detached from justice, it becomes a false gate. It claims divine legitimacy while stripping agency from those under its power.

- **Prophetic critique of appearance:** The system can look ordered while being internally unjust.
- **Prophetic critique of oppression:** The vulnerable are often where agency loss becomes most visible.
- **Prophetic critique of false peace:** Leaders may say things are safe while underlying conditions are collapsing.
- **Prophetic restoration:** True religion repairs justice, mercy, truth, and accountable covenant life.

This supports HAPI’s claim that audits must look beneath official artifacts. Policies, statements, dashboards, ceremonies, and compliance programs can all exist while agency is being stripped away. The prophetic question is

not, “Does the institution claim righteousness?” The question is, “Does its actual operation preserve truth, justice, and rightful participation?”

## 10. Jesus as the Restoration of Agency

Jesus appears in the Gospels as the one who restores human beings to truthful participation before God. He forgives sins, heals bodies, casts out demons, calls disciples, teaches the kingdom, confronts false religion, restores outcasts, and sends people back into meaningful life. His ministry is filled with agency restoration.

The paralyzed are told to rise. The blind receive sight. The possessed are restored to themselves. Tax collectors are called into repentance and restitution. Sinners are forgiven and told to sin no more. The fearful are called to follow. The excluded are brought near. The burdened are invited into rest. The disciples are formed, corrected, empowered, and sent.

Jesus theme	Agency restored
Healing	Embodied capacity to act
Forgiveness	Freedom from accusation and shame
Truth-telling	Clarity against deception
Calling disciples	Vocation and meaningful participation
Confronting Pharisaic burdening	Freedom from false gatekeeping
Casting out demons	Deliverance from enslaving powers
Teaching the kingdom	Reordered desire, loyalty, and action
Sending witnesses	Restored people become responsible participants

Jesus does not restore agency as isolated self-expression. He restores agency under the kingdom of God. The restored person is not merely free from something. The restored person is free for love, service, truth, worship, courage, repentance, and witness.

### Jesus and HAPI

Jesus restores the human person at the level HAPI cares about structurally: clarity, authority, refusal of evil, memory, accountability, capacity, and meaningful participation under rightful order.

## 11. Cross, Resurrection, and the Defeat of Accusation

The cross and resurrection are the center of Christian restoration. In agency terms, they defeat the deepest powers that strip human participation: sin, accusation, condemnation, fear, and death. Accusation traps people in the past. Condemnation collapses future action. Fear makes refusal costly. Death ends embodied participation. Jesus enters these realities and overcomes them.

Forgiveness is therefore not merely emotional relief. It restores the possibility of truthful action. A forgiven person can stop hiding. A forgiven person can confess, repair, obey, reconcile, and move forward. Resurrection restores hope that agency is not finally swallowed by death. The future is reopened.

This matters for HAPI because many systems strip agency through accusation and fear. People become unable to participate because they are afraid of blame, punishment, exposure, or exclusion. A restoration framework must preserve accountability without weaponizing condemnation. The cross shows that truth and mercy are not enemies. Real restoration requires both.

## 12. Spirit, Church, and Distributed Restored Agency

After the resurrection, restored agency becomes distributed through the Spirit and the church. Acts presents frightened disciples becoming witnesses. The Spirit empowers speech, courage, discernment, generosity, healing, and communal life. Paul describes the church as a body with many members, each participating according to gifts. This is not a passive crowd. It is distributed agency under one Lord.

The New Testament vision of the church supports HAPI because it resists two extremes: isolated individual autonomy and centralized agency capture. The body has many members. The members need one another. No single part is the whole. Authority exists, but it is for building up, not domination. Gifts exist, but they are for love, not self-exaltation.

Church pattern	Agency principle
Many members, one body	Distributed participation under shared order
Gifts for service	Capacity exists to build up others
Mutual accountability	Agency includes correction and care
Discernment of spirits	Not every signal should be trusted
Bearing burdens	Support should restore capacity
Freedom in love	Freedom is not selfish autonomy but faithful action

## 13. Everyday Agency Themes in Scripture

The biblical agency pattern is not only visible in grand narratives. It appears in everyday themes: wisdom, work, rest, speech, money, family, justice, temptation, prayer, confession, and discipline.

Everyday theme	Agency meaning
Wisdom	The capacity to perceive reality and act rightly.
Work	Participation in cultivating and serving creation.
Sabbath rest	A boundary against totalizing labor and extraction.
Speech	Words can bless, curse, deceive, heal, or govern action.
Money	A tool that can support agency or become a master.
Family	A formation environment where agency can be nurtured or wounded.
Justice	Public restoration of right order for the vulnerable.
Prayer	Agency reoriented through dependence on God.
Confession	Memory and accountability restored through truth.
Discipline	Capacity formed over time, not instant autonomy.

These themes show that agency is not a niche topic. It is woven through ordinary faithfulness. The Bible does not treat people as decorative observers of reality. People are formed to act.

## 14. How This Supports HAPI

HAPI claims that systems should be audited by whether they preserve or strip away human agency. The biblical story supports this claim through its repeated concern for truthful participation, rightful authority, liberation from bondage, resistance to false powers, restoration of responsibility, and memory before God.

HAPI claim	Biblical support pattern
Agency is received, not self-created	Creation, image of God, breath, vocation, stewardship.

HAPI claim	Biblical support pattern
Agency requires truthful clarity	Eden, wisdom literature, Jesus teaching, prophetic truth.
Agency requires refusal	Temptation narratives, resistance to idols, faithfulness under pressure.
Agency requires memory	Sabbath, Passover, covenant reminders, receipts of God's acts.
Agency requires accountability	Prophets, judgment, confession, repentance, reconciliation.
Agency can be captured by false powers	Pharaoh, Babel, idols, legalism, demonic bondage, empire.
Agency can be restored	Exodus, return from exile, Jesus healing, forgiveness, Spirit empowerment.
Governance emerges from restored agency	Covenant community, kingdom ethics, body of Christ.

**HAPI theological support statement**  
 The biblical story repeatedly shows that God preserves and restores the conditions of meaningful human participation. HAPI brings that pattern into modern governance and infrastructure: systems should not reduce people to rubber stamps, overload them, bypass them, deceive them, or leave them accountable without authority.

## 15. Implications for Institutions and Agentic AI

If the biblical story is concerned with agency, then modern institutions and AI systems should be judged by more than efficiency. They should be judged by whether they preserve meaningful human participation. A system that is efficient but strips refusal, memory, contestability, or accountability is structurally dangerous.

Agentic AI intensifies this issue because agents can convert intention into action quickly. They can summarize, decide, route, publish, approve, notify, delete, schedule, transact, and execute. If governance is weak, the agent can make the human ornamental. The human appears in the loop but cannot truly shape consequence.

- **PGDL:** Preserves clarity by challenging distorted proposals before action.
- **AAG:** Preserves authority and refusal at the action boundary.
- **Runtime Binding:** Preserves fidelity during execution so action does not drift.
- **Receipts:** Preserve memory and accountability after consequence.
- **Governance Reality Report:** Audits whether governance is real or theater.
- **Continuity Findings:** Ask whether governance remained coherent across time.

The biblical pattern does not require rejecting technology. It requires putting power back under rightful order. Babel warns against capability without submission. Exodus warns against systems that extract labor while denying agency. Jesus warns against leaders who burden others without mercy. The Spirit shows a better pattern: empowered participation under truth and love.

## 16. Conclusion

The Bible can be read as a great agency story: God gives agency, sin corrupts agency, false powers capture agency, and Jesus restores agency. This reading does not replace traditional doctrines of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. It gives them a structural lens that is especially relevant in an age of institutions, automation, and agentic AI.

HAPI stands on a claim that is both modern and deeply biblical: people must not be reduced to rubber stamps. Humans are created for meaningful participation under God. Systems that bypass, deceive, overload, shame, or

capture people work against that vocation. Systems that preserve clarity, authority, refusal, memory, accountability, and capacity can support restored participation.

Governance is therefore not merely control. Governance is what emerges when agency is preserved. In theological language, rightful order protects life-giving participation. In HAPI language, agency preservation produces real governance. In AI language, oversight is meaningful only when humans can still affect outcomes before consequence and remember what happened after consequence.

#### **Final thesis**

HAPI is supported by the biblical pattern because the Bible repeatedly treats human beings as responsible participants whose agency must be protected from deception, oppression, false gates, accusation, and death, and restored through truth, liberation, forgiveness, Spirit, and rightful order.

## Appendix A. Scriptural Theme Map

Theme	Key references	Agency reading
Creation and image	Genesis 1-2; Psalm 8	Human beings receive delegated stewardship and meaningful participation.
Fall and shame	Genesis 3	Deception fractures clarity, choice, responsibility, and accountability.
Cain and mastery	Genesis 4	Sin appears as a power to be governed, and violence corrupts agency.
Babel	Genesis 11	Collective capability rises without rightful order and produces confusion.
Exodus	Exodus 1-20	God liberates people from false ownership and forms covenant agency.
Covenant memory	Deuteronomy 6; Joshua 24	Memory preserves identity, worship, obedience, and responsibility.
Prophetic justice	Isaiah 1; Amos 5; Micah 6; Jeremiah 7	God rejects appearance without justice and agency-preserving righteousness.
Jesus healing	Mark 2; Luke 4; John 5; John 9	Restoration includes embodied capacity, forgiveness, sight, and vocation.
Jesus and false burdens	Matthew 23; Luke 11	Religious authority can become false gatekeeping when it burdens without restoring.
Cross and resurrection	Romans 6-8; 1 Corinthians 15; Colossians 2	Sin, accusation, and death are defeated so new life can act.
Spirit and gifts	Acts 2; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 5	Restored agency becomes distributed participation in love.
New creation	Revelation 21-22	The end is not erased humanity, but healed participation before God.

## Appendix B. HAPI Biblical Agency Invariants

1. Agency is a gift from God, not a self-created possession.
2. Agency requires truth. Deception is one of the first agency attacks.
3. Agency requires boundaries. Limitless impulse is not biblical freedom.
4. Agency requires memory. People must remember what happened and why.
5. Agency requires accountability. Responsibility without truth becomes blame-shifting or accusation.
6. False powers strip agency by deception, oppression, shame, fear, and burdening.
7. False religion can preserve external order while destroying meaningful participation.
8. Jesus restores agency through forgiveness, healing, truth, calling, deliverance, and sending.
9. The Spirit distributes restored agency through gifts, courage, discernment, and love.
10. Governance is real only when people can meaningfully understand, refuse, revise, remember, and remain accountable.

## References

Biblical references are thematic and include Genesis 1-4; Genesis 11; Exodus 1-20; Deuteronomy 6; Joshua 24; Isaiah 1; Amos 5; Micah 6; Jeremiah 7; Matthew 4; Matthew 23; Mark 2; Luke 4; Luke 11; John 5; John 9; Acts 2; Romans 6-8; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 15; Galatians 5; Colossians 2; Revelation 21-22.

HAPI references: Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure working theory, Agency Preservation Test, Agent Action Gate, Pre-Gate Deliberation Layer, Runtime Binding, Receipts, Governance Reality Report, and Governance Continuity Findings.