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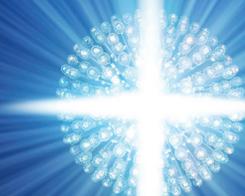
Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology

**Westminster
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Philadelphia

**International
Reformed
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Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology

Dr. Edward J. Young (1907–1968)[1]

ALLAN M. HARMAN

Near the end of my arts course at the University of Sydney, I was given a copy of Edward J. Young's *Isaiah Fifty-Three* (1952). I knew of him and his colleagues at Westminster Theological Seminary, but this was my first exposure to his writings. The simplicity with which he wrote and the rich devotional tone of the book struck me immediately. That book was but the first of several of Young's books that I had read before I went to study at Westminster.

During master's and doctoral studies at Westminster, I had the privilege of taking several courses with Dr. Young. For some courses, such as Aramaic and Syriac, I was his only student at the time and hence had much personal contact with him. On one occasion I went and asked him for some information on a passage in Syriac, and he read the text aloud and commented that he would love to have time just to carry on such reading. I quickly realized what a remarkable man and scholar he was. A brilliant linguist, with a vast knowledge of the Scriptures, he was also a humble Christian who was able to communicate easily with those who did not possess the information that was at his command.

Young entered on his teaching career at Westminster Theological Seminary with thorough preparation, especially in the areas of linguistics and

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[1] For a more detailed account, see Allan Harman, "Edward Joseph Young," in *Bible Interpreters of the 20th Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 189–201. For a good introduction containing a select bibliography of Young's works, see Edward J. Young, *The God-Breathed Scripture*, foreword by Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2007).

background to the Bible. He was brought up in a Christian family in San Francisco, and at the age of fifteen made his decision to study for the Presbyterian ministry. He planned his tertiary studies with that goal in view, including specialization in Hebrew and other Semitic languages. Whether he was deliberately following the pattern set by the notable Old Testament scholars at Princeton Theological Seminary, Joseph Addison Alexander, William Henry Green, and Robert Dick Wilson, is unclear, but certainly, he understood early on the intense study needed and extensive knowledge that he would require for successful lecturing and writing.

After graduating *cum laude* from Stanford University in 1929, he traveled to Europe and the Middle East for two years before returning to California and enrolling at San Francisco Theological Seminary. Already he was committed to a high view of Scripture, and after one year, he transferred to Westminster Theological Seminary. After completing his theological course and getting married in July 1935, he returned to California to be examined for ordination by the California Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. While many of his views were out of keeping with prevailing positions in that church, he was ordained, though he transferred to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shortly after that.

He and his wife left for Germany, where he studied on a fellowship, and in the spring of 1936, he received an invitation to return to Westminster and teach Old Testament. This invitation he accepted, and in September he began his teaching career there, continuing until his sudden death on February 14, 1968. He joined a distinguished faculty, but soon his brilliance as a teacher and an Old Testament scholar added to Westminster's reputation. After joining the faculty, he pursued postgraduate studies at Dropsie College in Philadelphia and was awarded the PhD degree in 1943.

When Young joined the faculty at Westminster, evangelicalism was at a critical stage. Many of the older seminaries had departed from their original doctrinal standards, and scholarly defense of orthodox Christianity was the need of the day. This situation resulted in the Westminster faculty being very much in demand for preaching and lecturing engagements, as well as for writing commitments. Later, the foundation of new seminaries, such as Trinity, Covenant, Fuller, Biblical, Gordon-Conwell, and Reformed, provided much additional support for the defense of the gospel. The Westminster faculty formed a cohesive group, dedicated to historic Calvinism as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the published work of all the members displayed that. Young was no exception, and his writings demonstrated his commitment and his ability to articulate the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

Several things stand out in regard to Young and his ministry. The first was his absolute commitment to the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. That commitment, made as a teenager, was maintained and defended right through the rest of his life. All his writings display this appreciation of the nature of biblical revelation. His faculty colleague Paul Woolley described his "tenacious loyalty to the inerrant Scriptures." The first occasion on which he developed his views at length, apart from class discussions, was his contribution in 1946 to *The Infallible Word*, a volume that consisted of a symposium on the doctrine of Scripture by faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary. Young commenced with viewing Jesus's attitude to the Old Testament and how it confirmed the attitude of the Jews of his day to the Old Testament canon.[2]

Eleven years later Young published a full study on the doctrine of Scripture entitled *Thy Word Is Truth*. It was aimed at intelligent lay people, and he disclaimed any intention to write "a technical theological treatise." His aim, he wrote, was to produce "a popular book, designed to acquaint the intelligent layman with the Biblical doctrine of inspiration and to convince him of its importance."[3] The significance of this book can be seen in that it has been kept in print for over sixty years. He gave special attention to neo-orthodox views, which had become popular. His position is set in contrast to alternative positions that, while using the traditional language of the Bible and the church to describe the Scriptures, failed to recognize it as God's objective revelation given in inerrant form. Discussions by Young on the matter of the Old Testament canon confirm how consistently he held to the position that the Bible was divinely inspired, without error, and testifies to its own origin.

The second feature of his work as a lecturer and writer was his ability to communicate with his hearers and readers. I do not think this was just a natural ability, but something that Young developed over the years. There was a claim, which seems to be true, that he used to practice rephrasing Dr. Cornelius Van Til's more difficult prose to see if he could reduce it to a much simpler presentation. Van Til heard about this and commented, "Young feels that I can't write something that is popular enough." While Van Til doubted whether Young was familiar enough with modern philosophy to write a primer in apologetics, Young was well noted for the way he

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[2] Edward J. Young, "The Authority of the Old Testament," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, rev. ed. (1946; repr., Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 53–87.

[3] Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (1957; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1963), 7.

could present difficult material in a way that could be easily understood. In this respect, he was rather like Bishop J. C. Ryle (1816–1900) of England, who though a brilliant scholar (obtaining a first-class degree in classics from the University of Oxford), deliberately set out to simplify his English style in order to communicate his message better. At times, Young was considered lacking in substance in his writings because of the simplicity of his style. Nothing could be further from the truth. His vast knowledge on many subjects lay behind his presentations, and his former students can testify to the wealth of detail that came when they asked him questions.

His skills as a writer are especially evident in his popular works. As early as 1934, while he was still a theological student, Eerdmans published his *Study Your Bible: A Self Study Course for Bible Believing Christians*. Later, in 1948, the Christian Education Committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church published his work *Old Testament Prophecy: A Course Designed for Individual Home Study*. These books demonstrate his concern for Christians regarding important biblical concepts, and his ability to relate to the average believer in his presentation and language. The same is true of his other popular exegetical works such as *Genesis 3: A Devotional and Expository Study* (1966), *In the Beginning: Genesis Chapters 1 to 3 and the Authority of Scripture* (1976), and *The Way Everlasting: A Study in Psalm 139* (1965). He understood his audiences and wrote in such a way that made the truth plain and also in a way that evoked devotion and praise of God and his Word.

The third characteristic of Young that demands attention was his skill as a linguist. This was not just a general interest with him, but one directed in the main to biblical research and writing. What was in one sense a hobby was in another an ability that he utilized in relation to holy Scripture. From the time of his conversion, he knew that his gifts were to be employed in Christian service, and so he planned his courses of study accordingly. This was true not just at Stanford University, San Francisco Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary, but also for the time he spent in Europe and the Middle East. He acquired there the modern languages he needed, and also the ancient ones, especially Semitic languages that were significant for Old Testament study. He wrote introductory textbooks on biblical Hebrew and Arabic, and at Westminster he taught these languages, along with Aramaic and Syriac. Arabic remained a real interest for him, and just three years before his death he published a review of a new reader on modern literary Arabic in the *Westminster Theological Journal*. His immense knowledge of ancient languages in particular is visible in his commentary on Isaiah, as the footnotes display knowledge of over twenty languages. Languages did intrigue him, and he was constantly looking at

new ones, sometimes with the aim of using a specific one on an overseas visit to lecture on the Old Testament.

A fourth characteristic was his ability as an exegete. It is unknown how early in his career he was introduced to the great exegetical tradition from Princeton Theological Seminary, with Old Testament scholars of the caliber and ability of Charles Hodge, Alexander, Green, and Wilson, and New Testament ones like Hodge, Alexander, and J. Gresham Machen. Then, too, at Westminster, he had been a student under Oswald Thompson Allis and Machen, and also of Allan McRae. Young soon replicated the skills his teachers had shown him in his work, with a concentration on a historico-grammatical approach, coupled with attention to biblical theology. It is true that not a great deal of Young's writing deals directly with biblical theology, but there is no doubt that his understanding of it followed strongly in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos. This emphasis was made plain in his lectures delivered for London Bible College on the occasion of the opening of its new premises in 1958 (published as *The Study of Old Testament Theology Today*). He commenced by dealing with the relationship between Old Testament theology and history before speaking of the nature, content, and influence of Old Testament theology. The following year, commenting on a review of this book, he asked a very significant question: "Who has done more to bring Old Testament Theology to its rights than Geerhardus Vos?" An additional influence that strengthened his integrative approach to the Old Testament was that of Dr. Benne Holwerda, who for a few short years (1946–1952) was a professor at the theological seminary in Kampen, the Netherlands.

The first major commentary that Young authored was on the book of Daniel (published by Eerdmans in 1949). In this commentary, he was not only trying to explicate the Hebrew and Aramaic text but also to do so pointing out the weaknesses in two approaches different from his own. On the one hand, he wished to highlight the inconsistencies in the liberal view-point, while on the other hand, he also wished to distinguish his view from that of dispensationalists, especially the claim that much of Daniel's pro-phetic content related to the seven years after the return of Christ. He made it plain that while writing to help pastors, he was also aiming at providing a commentary for the average educated reader. He pursued his interest in Daniel in two further works. When InterVarsity in the United Kingdom published the *New Bible Commentary* in 1953, he was the author of the section on Daniel, thus making his views on prophecy in general, and Daniel in particular, available to a much wider audience. His views on Daniel 7 received even greater attention in his Tyndale Lecture in 1958, *Daniel's*

Vision of the Son of Man. When dealing with Daniel 7:13–14, Young saw depicted there an individual figure, the Messiah, which figure Jesus took over in his teaching and rightly applied to his own ministry.

The Old Testament book to which Young gave the greatest attention was the prophecy of Isaiah, and he was able to produce a large three-volume commentary on this book before he died. On approaching this book, he had a model commentary that he admired from Alexander of Princeton. Young acknowledged that Alexander had superb gifts as a linguist and philologist, but his prime qualification for writing was "sincere and humble piety coupled with firm faith in the Bible and reverence for the Bible as the Word of God."[4] Young had read extremely widely (as is displayed in his book, *Studies in Isaiah* [1954]), not only writers who shared his evangelicalism, but also liberal writers, for he wished to know what claims they made about the book, and how he could point to their failure to come to grips with its text. While his presentation is a popular exegetical study, he did not shirk from introducing discussions on the Hebrew text, and including material like those from the Targums and the texts from Ugarit.

The unity of Isaiah and its ascription to Isaiah of Jerusalem was given very little space in the commentary because these issues had been dealt with elsewhere (for example, in *Who Wrote Isaiah?* [1958] and in his *Introduction to the Old Testament* [1949; repr., 1964]). Many other aspects of the book were covered in articles or other presentations, including the general approach that he took to prophecy. To that he devoted a full book (*My Servants the Prophets* [1952]), as well as his popular lectures on Old Testament prophecy delivered in Toronto in 1965. Perhaps Young's three volumes on Isaiah have not been as influential as could have been expected simply because of their size. A shorter presentation in one volume may well have had a greater impact and made his views accessible to a broader audience.

The final aspect of Young's life that I consider significant is his ecclesiastical work. He was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1935, but he transferred to the newly formed Orthodox Presbyterian Church the year after and maintained that commitment till his death. He was active on the local level, as well as serving on many denominational committees. In 1956, he was elected as moderator of the General Assembly. An amateur cellist and a student of hymnody, he was deeply involved in the preparation of the *Trinity Hymnal* (first published in 1961). All his scholarly endeavor took place in a life that was closely integrated with his local church fellowship and denominational affiliation. There was

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4   Edward J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 10.

no separation between scholarly work on Scripture and the worshiping community of which he was a part. Proclaiming the gospel was for him "the most beautiful task on earth."

Fifty years have now passed since Young passed away, but his legacy lives on. Many of his books remain in print, both in the United States of America and in Great Britain. His cultivated simplicity of style makes them so accessible all over the world, while his multifaceted knowledge is still nourishing the life of the church. Probably the last word in this editorial should be given to his colleague, Professor John Murray:

> Edward J. Young adorned his Christian profession. So many were the virtues making up this adornment that it is difficult to single out any for special appreciation. But his humility was so conspicuous that no one could fail to mark it. For those who knew him more intimately his circumspect consistency was no less evident. Unassuming and reluctant to make his own voice heard he was always ready to speak out when the honour of Christ and the claims of truth demanded it. He burned with holy jealousy for the integrity of God's Word and for the maintenance of the whole counsel of God.[5]

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[5]   John Murray, "Edward J. Young: An Appreciation from a Former Colleague," *The Banner of Truth* 54 (March 1968): 1–2.

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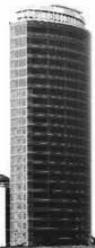
The Canon of the Old Testament

WALTER C. KAISER JR.

Abstract

After defining the concept of canon, the article provides a survey of early witnesses to the Old Testament canon (Jesus and early Jewish and Christian texts) that shows a broad consensus about the numbers of books to be included in the Old Testament. The rabbinic discussions at Jamnia are not so much the establishment of the canon as they are the acknowledgment of its reality. The principle to establish the canon is more internal (the structure of its authority and the notion of prophecy). Protestants together with Jews, in contrast to Catholics, do not accept the Old Testament Apocrypha as canonical. (These, written between the Old and New Testaments, are briefly reviewed.)

Sometimes it is reasonably asked, Who was responsible for setting up the criteria that were used to determine which books, or even how many books, should be included in what we now call the "canon," or the official and authorized set of books, in the Old Testament? Was a special Jewish group of rabbis charged with this task, and did such a group set up the standards and the rules as to which books should be accepted as part of such an identified collection? Or were these books progressively recognized by the generations in which they appeared as part of divine revelation, perhaps under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the work of a stream, or chain, of true prophets commissioned by God over the years?

I. *The Concept of a Canon*

The term *canon* has become a standard designation for those titles that were and still are accepted as the authoritative books of the Old and New Testaments. The word "canon" comes from the Hebrew word *qaneh*, meaning a reed or stalk (1 Kgs 14:15; Job 40:21), which was used to measure things. The Greeks adopted the word into their language as *kanon*, which also meant a measuring rod, but with a slightly broader sense of a rule, standard, or guideline.

It should also be noted before we go too far into this discussion that the designation "Old Testament" is itself an anachronistic term that was not used internally within the first thirty-nine books as the way to refer to the complete set of books that appeared first in the order of books in the Bible. Some say it was the Alexandrian church father Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254 AD) who began to use the term canon to refer to the church's "rule of faith." Nevertheless, it became an ecclesiastical convention that now dictates our continued use of the term Old Testament. Others more correctly point to Bishop Athanasius (AD 296–373) as the one who first used the word canon in a letter he circulated around AD 367, but the concept may already have been in vogue by that time. Originally, the Jewish population referred to this collection of books with such designations as "the Scriptures," "the Writings," "the Law and the Prophets," "Moses and all the Prophets," or "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms."[1] The Jewish rabbis, however, also spoke of these books as those that "defile the hands." These, then, were the books in our canon that were esteemed to be holier than all other books and the ones that represented the words of God.

At other times, verbal formulas were employed, such as "God said," "Scripture says," "Isaiah says," or "Moses wrote" to indicate the superior status of their content and the divine authority these books possessed. These designations became the proper way to appeal to the divine authority these books contained as well as the basis and ultimate source of their written material. The prophets were seen as "men of the Spirit" (Hos 9:7; 1 Cor 14:37), just as the Holy Spirit was seen as the "Spirit of prophecy" (Acts 2:17). From the perspective of the later testament (i.e., the New Testament), they saw the books of the earlier and emerging testament precisely in just this way:

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[1] For Scripture references to these terms, see E. Earle Ellis, "The Old Testament in the Early Church," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 653, nn. 4–8.

> All Scripture [which at that time included only the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament] is inspired by God [or "God-breathed"] and is profitable[/useful] for teaching, rebuking, correcting in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16–17)

> No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man but, being carried along by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God. (2 Pet 1:21)

If it is asked whether all prophetic words were included in the holy Scriptures, the answer seems to be no, for in 1 Samuel 10:10, King Saul joined a procession of prophets and soon he too prophesied. But there does not appear to be any record of what they said on this occasion in the Scripture.

There were also a number of books no longer known or available to us mentioned in the historical books of the Old Testament. For example, there is "the Book of Jasher" (Josh 10:13), "the Book of the Wars of the Lᴏʀᴅ" (Num 21:14), "the Book of the Acts of Solomon" (1 Kgs 11:41), "the book of the genealogy" (Neh 7:5), along with 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs by Solomon (1 Kgs 4:32), of which we seem to possess only a small fraction!

II. *First-Century Witness to the Canon*

1. *Jesus of Nazareth*

In Luke 11:50–51a, Jesus spoke of the range of the earlier canon by referring to all the blood that was shed from the foundation of the world, specifically, the blood of Abel shed by Cain, who were both Adam and Eve's sons (Gen 4:8), until the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God (2 Chr 24:20–22). When Jesus used this summary, he covered the complete corpus of the Old Testament's thirty-nine books, for the first murder was in the book of Genesis and the last murder was in the book that appears last in the book of Chronicles in the Hebrew order of the books of the Old Testament. The reference to "Zechariah" probably was a reference to the son of Jehoiada, who was stoned to death in the court of Yahweh's sanctuary because he spoke by God's Spirit as he rebuked the king and the people of Judah for transgressing the commandment of the Lord. Thus, then, Jesus was saying "from the first murder in the Bible until the last [murder]" mentioned in the set of books now called the Old Testament. This statement showed the breadth and scope of his approval of the canon of those thirty-nine books; it would be like saying today (to use our current order of the books of the Old Testament) "everything from Genesis to Malachi."

Another designation for the extent of the Old Testament canon was "the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings." The one place that may reflect this threefold division (here referred to as "the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms") of the older testament is found in Luke 24:44. On the first Easter Sunday, our Lord suddenly joined the two headed for the town of Emmaus. There he reminded them that "everything written of [him] in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." In this instance, the word "Psalms" denoted, in addition to the obvious contents of the Psalms, the contents of the whole third division—the Writings, of which the book of Psalms was the first book—and thus was used in this case to stand for the entire collection of Writings.

2. *Flavius Josephus*
Both Jewish and Christian writers gave early witness to the same canon of books. Usually, the name of the Jewish-turncoat-historian named Flavius Josephus (ca. AD 37 to ca. 100) is mentioned first in the study of the canon, for he is said to be the earliest witness to the same. This citation from Josephus is of a response Josephus made in a debate with the anti-Semite Apion:

> We do not have myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other. Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time.
> Of these, five are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and the traditional history from the birth of man down to the death of the lawgiver. This period falls a little short of three thousand years. From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes as King of Persia, the prophets [who were] subsequent to Moses wrote the history of events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.[2]

Josephus's count of twenty-two books (5 + 13 + 4) is equal to our present thirty-nine (5 + 30 + 4), for they may be tallied up according to this way of counting in that era:

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[2]   Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.38–41 (LCL).

The Five Books of Moses	Prophets (Thirteen Books)	Four Hymns
1. Genesis	1. Joshua	1. Psalms
2. Exodus	2. Judges-Ruth	2. Proverbs
3. Leviticus	3. 1 and 2 Samuel	3. Song of Solomon
4. Numbers	4. 1 and 2 Kings	4. Ecclesiastes
5. Deuteronomy	5. Isaiah	
	6. Jeremiah-Lamentations	
	7. Ezekiel	
	8. Twelve Minor Prophets	
	9. Daniel	
	10. Job	
	11. 1 and 2 Chronicles	
	12. Ezra-Nehemiah	
	13. Esther	
Five books	**Thirty books**	**Four books = Thirty-nine books**

3. *Philo of Alexandria*

Philo (ca. 20 BC–ca. AD 50) is a second Jewish witness to the canon. While he is less specific, he is nevertheless in essential agreement with Josephus. Philo was a Hellenized Jewish thinker who tried to reconcile Greek philosophy with biblical thought. This is what he said of the books of Moses:

> [The Jews] have not altered even a single word of what had been written by him [who gave them their laws] but would rather endure to die the thousand times than yield to any persuasion contrary to his laws and customs.[3]

4. *The Wisdom of Ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus*

A third early witness would be the Wisdom of Ben Sira, for he may be cited as another witness besides Jesus (in Luke 24:44, "the law of Moses, and the Prophets, and Psalms") to a tripartite division of the Old Testament. In his prologue to a work in Hebrew under his own name (ca. 132 BC), he wrote,

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[3] A hyperbolic statement found in a fragment of Philo's *Hypothetica* 6:9, but preserved in Eusebius's *Preparation for the Gospel* 8:6–7, 11. While it exaggerates, it is nevertheless a witness to the sanctity accorded to the Scriptures.

"My grandfather Jesus [devoted himself] to the law and the prophets and the other ancestral books."[4]

Ben Sira emigrated from Palestine to Alexandria, Egypt in 132 BC, where he translated his grandfather's book, called *Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus*, from Hebrew into Greek. In the prologue to that book, he depicted his grandfather as a student of "the law and the prophets and the other books of our fathers."

III. *Second- and Third-Century Witnesses to the Canon*

1. *Melito, Bishop of Sardis*

Melito (died ca. AD 190) answered an inquiry concerning the "number" and "order of the old books," and thus he wrote the following around AD 170:

> When I came to the east and reached the place where these things were preached and done, and learnt accurately the books of the Old Testament, I set down the facts …. These are their names: five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua the son of Nun, Judges, Ruth, four of the Kingdoms, two books of Chronicles, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon and his Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Job, the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve [Minor Prophets] in a single book, Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra.[5]

In light of subsequent lists, this listing of books includes Samuel within Kings, Lamentations within Jeremiah, and an identification of Ezra-Nehemiah as Ezra.

Thus, apart from Esther, Melito's enumeration included the same listing of books as those we have today as the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

2. *Tractate Baba Bathra*

This tradition comes from the Jewish Babylonian Talmud. It read,

> Our rabbis taught that the order of the Prophets is Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the twelve (Minor Prophets). … The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Chronicles.[6]

There was some variation in the order or the sequence of the books, but the total number of books accords well with our present canon of the Old Testament. In this listing of the books, combination gave a total of twenty-four

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[4] Prologue to the Wisdom of Ben Sira.
[5] Quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.26.12–13 (Lake, LCL).
[6] As quoted in Ellis, "Old Testament Canon," 660. The Jewish Talmuds seem to have originated in the time period before AD 200.

books: five for the Pentateuch, eight for the Prophets, and eleven for the Writings—or, as the Hebrew has it, the Ketuvim ("Writings").

IV. *The Discussion at Jamnia*

Following the collapse of the Jewish commonwealth in AD 70 at the hands of the Roman army, the rabbis set up headquarters at Jamnia or Jabneh in western Judea, just south of Tel Aviv and Joppa, under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai. In their view, Jewish life had to be adapted to new situations, especially since the temple had been destroyed and its services discontinued.

One of the discussions these leaders took up was which books of the Jewish people "defiled the hands"—a technical expression that denoted those books that were the product of divine inspiration. One had to wash one's hands before and after handling the Scriptures, a practice that kept them from handling the Bible casually or in a haphazard way.

In more recent times, the Roman Catholic Church has accepted seven additional books at the Council of Trent (AD 1546), including Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, treating them as deuterocanonical, that is, with a secondary status in the churches. This church also accepted as part of Scripture additions to the book of Esther, additions to Daniel, and the letter of Jeremiah. The Eastern Orthodox Church also included in addition to the above list, Psalm 151, as well as 3 and 4 Maccabees, but the AD 1548 Council of Trent rejected the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. However, the same thirty-nine books of the Old Testament regarded as canonical by Protestants were also received as authoritative and canonical by the Roman Catholic Church.

One of the most popular pieces of misinformation frequently repeated among a good number of scholars was that the Council of Jamnia, held in AD 90, took a vote on which books should be included in the Old Testament canon. It is true, of course, that Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, who escaped the siege of Jerusalem, is supposed to have asked the Roman general for permission to establish a school of Jamnia/Jabneh. However, though this school did not label itself (or even grant to itself the authority usually held) as the Sanhedrin or even a council, it did begin to exercise some of the legal functions as the great law court in Jerusalem had. But it is wrong to say that Jamnia shaped the content of the Old Testament canon; such an incorrect thesis has three flaws in it: none of the deliberations of this discussion group had binding authority; only the book of Ecclesiastes and the Song of

Solomon were discussed; and only the meaning or interpretation of these two books was discussed, not their canonical status. Jack Lewis, who investigated this matter as part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, concluded,

> It would appear that the frequently made assertion that a binding decision was made at Jabneh covering all Scripture is conjectural at best.[7]

Sid Leiman came to the same conclusion:

> The widespread view that the council of Jamnia closed the Biblical canon, or that it canonized any books at all, is not supported by the evidence, and need no longer be seriously maintained.[8]

It would appear that the Hebrew canon had already been recognized before AD 100 and was fully in use.

V. *A Recognized Succession of Writing Prophets*

My teacher Laird Harris[9] introduced me to the concept of a chain of verses, or one of passing of the mantle of canonical status of any book from one prophet to another, especially in 2 Chronicles. Here we are provided with the best claims and evidences for the canonicity in the Old Testament, especially during the times of the kings of Israel and Judah.

The writing of the Old Testament, following the claim of Mosaic authorship for the Torah, was under God's prompting (Exod 17:14; 24:4–7; 34:27). Moses, the father in the work of the prophets, strikes us as being of particular interest. But then, just as Moses (Deut 31:26) and Joshua (Josh 24:26) had done, so likewise Samuel, perhaps the first in the line of the prophets, wrote his book and "laid it out before the Lord" (1 Sam 10:25). What seems to follow, then, especially in the books of Chronicles, is a chain of references by a series of prophets that gives us a virtually continuous history of the Israelite kings, particularly those of Judah; these successive prophets sort of passed the torch of divine authority from one to the next.

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7   Jack P. Lewis, "What Do We Mean by Jabneh?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 32 (1964): 125–30.

8   Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1976), 124.

9   R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible: An Historical and Exegetical Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), esp. 166–79.

For example, 1 Chronicles 29:29 indicates that the history of David's life and reign was recorded by the prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. Likewise, in 2 Chronicles 9:29, the history of David's son Solomon was recorded by the prophets Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo. The story continued with Solomon's son Rehoboam in 2 Chronicles 12:15, which was written by the prophets Shemaiah and Iddo. After that, the history of Abijah (2 Chr 13:22) was added. The reign of Jehoshaphat was recorded by Jehu the prophet, son of Hanani (2 Chr 20:34). King Hezekiah's life was covered by Isaiah the prophet (2 Chr 32:22), but King Manasseh's reign was recorded by an unnamed "seer" (2 Chr 33:19). Additional records of the other kings were recorded in the "book of the kings of Israel and Judah" (2 Chr 35:27).

VI. *The Appearance of Extra-Biblical Literature*

Christians refer to the late Second Temple period as the intertestamental period. It stretched for some four hundred years between Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, until the appearance of the New Testament in the middle of the first Christian century. Some refer to these as the "silent years," yet they were anything but silent. True, Scripture for the moment ceased, but in its place came an avalanche of writings.

During this time, Judah was under the control of the Persians and almost fifty thousand Jewish people were released from Persian control to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it. In the meantime, however, another change had taken place, Alexander the Great, who had conquered Persia just before his death in 323 BC, introduced Hellenism into the cultural and political stream of what had been Jewish culture in the land of Israel. This development led to severe persecution of the Jews, which in turn triggered a revolt by the Maccabees that overthrew the Greek (Seleucid) control of Israel beginning in 166 BC. But the Maccabean era ended in 63 BC as the Roman general Pompey entered Jerusalem and placed the country under Roman rule. The First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–73) ended with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple.

During this time of political and military upheaval and disarray (185 BC to AD 100), an enormous amount of Jewish literature was produced. This literature attempted to answer such questions as, Had the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob failed? What was going to happen to Israel's continued occupation of the land? Was God going to remain faithful to his promises? What was the future for the nation Israel?

This literature is called the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature. The Old Testament Apocryphal (Greek, "concealed, hidden" things) books

(not to be confused with the New Testament Apocrypha) contains fourteen Jewish documents written mostly in Hebrew or Aramaic. Some examples include 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, and the Prayer of Azariah.

The Hebrew Bible did not include these books, but they did appear in the final form of the Greek and Latin versions of the Scriptures, the Septuagint and the Vulgate respectively. Given the dominance of the Septuagint in the Eastern Church and the Vulgate as the standard translation in the Western Church for some 1,000 years, the presence of these books was rarely questioned.

The situation with the Pseudepigrapha, meaning "falsely titled," was somewhat different. It included a collection of approximately sixty-five documents composed between 250 BC and AD 200. Each book was written under a pseudonym (often a proper name from the canonical Hebrew Bible) in order to gain some credibility for the work! This literature can be grouped into four genres: legendary, as for example, the Book of Jubilees and the Testament of Twelve Patriarchs; apocalyptic, as seen in Enoch and Baruch; poetical, including the Psalms of Solomon; and didactic, including the Magical Book of Moses. Neither the Old nor New Testaments refers explicitly to the apocryphal or pseudepigraphic books. The single allusion that some point to in Jude 14–15 does come from the book of Enoch 1:9. That citation reads, "Enoch the seventh from Adam" and may only be a historical reference to the biblical Enoch in Genesis 5:18–24. However, even if it is an allusion to the pseudepigrapha, it does not follow that Jude viewed that source as inspired, just as the apostle Paul's citations of the poet Epimenides in Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12 did not imply that this source possessed divine authority or canonical status.

VII. *The Determining Principle of the Old Testament Canon*

Even though there is clear evidence for a fully developed canon already in the second century BC, there is no early evidence outside the books themselves for the origin of the canon. The canon of thirty-nine books was approved by our Lord and the apostles, which is in itself quite a high commendation, but the question as to what the principles in antiquity were for including certain books and excluding others is a much more difficult question.

We know, for example, of a fairly extensive library of books from ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources, as well as a vast literature from the intertestamental era, but none of this literature was included in either of the

biblical canons. Some hoped that part of the task of canonization had been effected by an ecclesiastical council or even the so-called Jewish Council at Jamnia in AD 90. However, as we have seen, such an appeal to a "council" at Jamnia is without any evidence, and none of the early Christian councils took up the matter or provided us with a decision or criteria that could have been used.

The closest to placing this question before the Jewish men of the Great Synagogue is the tractate entitled *Pirke Aboth*, "Sayings of the Fathers." This tractate did not result from a Jewish council but a conversation among a great generation of rabbis who followed the tradition of the scribe Ezra. These rabbis represented a chain of tradition, perhaps going back all the way to the seventy elders who assisted Moses. What these rabbis attempted was to distinguish between what was authoritative and what was merely advisory.

The key to what was regarded as authoritative, however, was more dependent on who wrote these books and what claim they made for what they wrote. The men who were called by God were also those who could pass the five tests for a prophet (Deut 18:15–27 and 13:1–11) and the men who spoke the word of the Lord. For example, the prophet Jeremiah wrote in just these same terms, for he announced, "What the LORD says, that will I speak" (Jer 26 and 28). The five tests for a prophet were these: he must be Jewish (i.e., "from your own brethren" [Deut 18:15c, 18b]), he had to "speak in my name" (i.e., in the name of the Lord [vv. 19–20]), his near prophetic words had to come to pass and be fulfilled (v. 22), he had to announce signs and wonders (i.e., miracles [Deut 13:1–3]), and his words had to agree and to be in accord with what had been taught and predicted earlier in Scripture (vv. 6–11).

VIII. *The Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical Books*

The Roman Catholic Church since the days of the Council of Trent in AD 1546 has continued to receive the following additional books as deuterocanonical: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sira or Ben Sirach), Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, as well as some additions to the canonical books of Esther and Daniel. Each of these may briefly be investigated before we conclude.

TOBIT is a novella, a literary form that is shorter than a novel, having a compact style and plot. It is set in the days immediately following the deportation of the ten northern tribes of Israel by the Assyrians in 721 BC. The novella begins with Tobit's acts of charity, especially his burying Jews who had been executed or murdered by the Assyrians. When the Assyrians

learned what he was doing, they seized his property and left him and his family destitute. Tobit then became blind, which forced his wife and son Tobias to support him. If Tobit were going to survive this crisis, he needed to retrieve some money his father had entrusted to him in the city of Ecbatana in Persia, so he commissioned Tobias to make the journey. As Tobias went along, he met with a family that had a daughter named Sarah, who has been plagued by the acts of the demon Asmodeus. This demon had killed seven of her bridegrooms on their wedding nights. An angel, then, was sent to help Sarah as he brought Sarah and Tobias together. The angel Raphael accompanied Tobias, who now went in disguise, to an old man named Azariah, who advised him how to defeat the demon. This defeat would be accomplished by using the odor of a liver and the heart of a fish. Raphael also cured Tobit's blindness, noting his many former deeds of charity. The story ends well, as Jews of the diaspora are told to trust God and pray to God when in danger.

JUDITH is a short story about the heroic actions of a Jewish widow named Judith, who is described in glowing terms as being pious and righteous. This story is full of historical confusions (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar is said to be king over the Assyrians). Judith can act quite coolly in beheading the enemy in order to save her people, and she often lies and murders to save her people. This story was very popular with the Jews during the Hellenistic period.

WISDOM OF SOLOMON is a collection of wisdom sayings and admonitions coming from the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt, sometime between 30 BC and AD 50.

SIRACH or ECCLESIASTICUS was written by Jesu Ben Sira, a teacher in Jerusalem from 200–180 BC, and he completed his book just before the Maccabean revolt in 168–142 BC. Even though the book is rather jumbled and disjointed, he does frequently emphasize "right speech" and "famous men." In this time of turmoil over the invading Hellenistic culture, he urged "honorable" action and avoidance of shameful acts.

BARUCH is not the same man who was the prophet Jeremiah's secretary. The book has three unconnected poems: a prose prayer, a wisdom poem, and a poem of consolation.

THE LETTER OF JEREMIAH, using the epistolary form so prevalent in the New Testament, purports to being addressed to the exiles in Babylon. Its principal goal is to warn exiles not to worship foreign gods. This letter has ten warnings against idolatry.

FIRST and SECOND MACCABEES are most useful in reconstructing the history of the Hellenistic period. The tension between the Greeks and Jews started when Antiochus Epiphanes constructed an altar to the Greek god

Zeus and placed it in the temple in Jerusalem, making it the "abomination that makes desolate" (cf. Mark 13:14). This event sparked a revolt led by the priest Mattathias, which began in the village of Modein, northwest of Jerusalem. Mattathias killed the first Jew at Modein who dared to sacrifice to an idol and then led his five sons into the hill country to wage a guerrilla war on the Greek Seleucids. By 165 BC, Mattathias's son, Judas, had taken over as head and was named the Maccabee (meaning "the hammer"). Judas recaptured the Jerusalem temple in 164 BC. The rededication of the Temple is still remembered today as the feast of Hanukkah.

FIRST ESDRAS is composed of a selection of parallel passages from Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, but taken from a Greek work that has at many points a different version of the biblical material. One unique feature in this book is a debate between three "bodyguards" in chapters 3–4 over the relative strength of wine, kings, and women.

SECOND ESDRAS is the only book in the Apocrypha that is an apocalypse with symbolic visions and revelations concerning the end of time.

THE PRAYER OF MANASSEH is a penitential prayer based on 2 Chronicles 33:10–17 that provides the setting for King Manasseh's restoration to the throne of Judah.

The ADDITIONS TO DANIEL include the prayer of Azariah and the song of the three Jews. These two pieces are usually inserted between Daniel 3:23 and 3:24 as part of the story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. The twenty-two verses of the prayer of Azariah constitute a national lament very much like Psalm 44. There is a detailed description of the furnace and its fuel. It finishes with a song of thanksgiving to God for his deliverance.

SUSANNA is found in the Greek version of the book of Daniel as the thirteenth chapter of Daniel. Susanna concerns the false accusation of a beautiful married woman who arouses the sexual desires of two of Israel's elders who serve as judges in the exilic community of Babylon. They propose that she give herself to them or they will denounce her as an adulteress. Instead, she cries out, and Daniel appears as a fair judge who separates the two judges and sees in their contradictory witness that they are lying and therefore guilty. Absolved, Susanna and her husband give thanks to God for raising such men as Daniel.

BEL AND THE DRAGON is added as chapter 14 in the Greek version of the book of Daniel. It has a more fantastic form of the lion's den story recounted in Daniel 6. Daniel, in this new version, is denounced by the priests of Bel for not worshiping their god, but Daniel is able to convince the king that the priests of Bel and their families eat meals fed to the god Bel. Daniel kills the

"great dragon" by feeding it a mixture of pitch, fat, and hair. By doing so, Daniel is able once again to prove that the dragon is no god.

Conclusion

The gap that came after the last book of the Old Testament and the arrival of the New Testament writings was partially filled in by the books of the Apocrypha, which in Roman Catholic tradition were called and regarded as deuterocanonical. Since there are various ways of counting these additions (some as individual works and others as additions to books already existing), this collection is said to consist of seven to eighteen books and cover the period from 300–100 BC.

These additions are not found in the Hebrew canon, but they appear in both the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate versions of Scripture. Accordingly, it is best to limit the Old Testament canon to thirty-nine books and in doing so follow the teaching of Jesus and his disciples in the question, Which books are the authoritative books that should form the canon of the Old Testament?

Motifs and Old Testament Theology

BRYAN D. ESTELLE

Abstract

The article discusses the importance of motifs for understanding Old Testament literature. *Motif* is defined as the term is used in the biblical studies guild. The article begins by tracing the "clothing motif" in the Joseph narrative. Next, it progresses to a brief discussion of the methods of intertextuality, especially cultivating allusion competence and recognizing how motifs develop in Scripture. The article also demonstrates how this methodology can be applied to one specific motif: the "wilderness" as it unfolds in several early chapters in the book of consolation from the prophet Isaiah. This article demonstrates that studying motifs and their development intertextuality is a method that is beneficial and essential to a deeper description of Scriptural teaching.

S tudying motifs in the Old Testament can unveil insights into the inner coherence of Scripture in ways that make for deeper understandings of the message that God wishes us to derive from his Bible. This article will first discuss what constitutes a motif generally, then more specifically in biblical studies. In order to help illustrate motifs more broadly, I illustrate the definition by a reference to the "clothing motif" in the Joseph narrative. Next, I will describe a method that may be used for the contemplation of almost any major theme or motif in the Old Testament. This approach is integrally connected with another skill I will discuss, which I call *allusion competence*. Next, I will

discuss what dividends are accrued in the application of this kind of study. I will illustrate the method with an example (i.e., the "desert/wilderness motif") from the Old Testament, demonstrating the kind of study that can be accomplished using the method I propose in this article.

I. *What Is a Motif?*

Not surprisingly, the term *motif* was first used in the English language around 1848 or 1850 in the fields of visual art.[1] By 1887, it was used to describe recurring fragments in the work of Wagner's operas.[2] By 1897, it was being applied to the book of Ruth in biblical studies. Almost everyone can recognize the notion of a recurring musical motif; however, coming to appreciate repeating motifs in biblical studies may take a little more sustained reflection.

Leland Ryken defines a motif as "a discernible pattern composed of individual units, either in a single work or in literature generally." He adds that it is basically like a "pattern."[3] The Oxford English Dictionary defines a motif as "a recurrent character, event, situation, or theme."[4] This definition is helpful, since it especially shows that a motif can be "in a more restrictive sense (a recurrent character, event, situation, or theme), as well as in a broader sense (a recurring event or situation)."[5] Let us examine how this can happen by observing an Old Testament example: the use of clothing in the Joseph narrative (Gen 37:2–50:26).[6] "References to the garments of Joseph form a unifying pattern in the story," claims Ryken.[7]

At the outset of the Joseph narrative, the *multicolored garment* is given to Joseph (Gen 37:3). What does this symbolize? Joseph is marked out as Jacob's favorite with the gift of the multicolored coat; meanwhile, his brothers hate him. When Joseph has a dream and tells it to his brothers, the brothers hate him even more. You can almost hear their speech dripping with sarcasm as they see him approaching from a distance and say, "Here comes the master

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[1] Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Desert Motif in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible: Form and Content* (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1993), 225.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 361.

[4] Quoted by Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative*, JSOTSup 231 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 19.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 101–2.

[7] Ibid., 101.

of dreams" (Gen 37:19). Almost all of the characterization in this opening chapter focuses on the brothers (consistently negative), not Joseph. The narrator will describe his character in greater detail in later chapters. The disrobing and distribution of the garment signals the hero's break from his family (v. 23).

Thus, the account opens with Joseph portrayed as a "spoiled brat, tale-bearer, braggart."[8] One could say (at least at the beginning of the narrative) that Joseph's bad report runs counter to the advice of Proverbs to "draw a veil over the transgressions of others."[9] Stuart Weeks, criticizing the view that Joseph is a paragon of wisdom, remarks,

> Joseph's tale-bearing (cf. Prov. 11.13), his indiscreet revelation of his dreams, and his false accusations against his brothers (cf. Prov. 12.17ff.), are all of importance in the story, and in the portrayal of Joseph, but are hardly in accord with the ethical ideals of the wisdom literature. It cannot be denied that we should expect in a didactic, idealizing text not only a more lucid, but also a more consistent idealization.[10]

Later in his essay, after commenting on the possible parallels between wisdom literature on avoiding the loose woman and Joseph's behavior with Mrs. Potiphar, he says, "It is difficult to find any other point in these chapters where Joseph's behaviour, while he is in a position of responsibility, serves as a possible model for emulation."[11] Nevertheless, Joseph is a type of Christ. Summing up Stephen's speech in Acts 7, Nils Dahl writes, "In Stephen's speech Moses and, to some extent, Joseph are seen as types of Christ, but the typology is subordinated to the recurring pattern of prophecy and fulfillment."[12] Joseph may also be an antitype of Adam, a notion beyond what can be developed here.[13] However, our immediate interest is in considering the motif of clothing in the narrative.

Genesis 38 is often not considered as part of the Joseph narrative (37, 39–50), since Joseph does not appear nor is even mentioned. However, the narrative effect of placing the story of Judah and Tamar here may be to

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8 Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 98.

9 Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 499.

10 Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 94.

11 Ibid., 99.

12 Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 73.

13 Lindsay Wilson, *Joseph Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37–50* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 231–32.

build suspense by slowing down the plot.[14] Lindsay Wilson contends, however, that if the story is read within the context of the Joseph narrative, then it is pregnant with meaning.[15] The clothing motif plays a prominent role in this chapter and becomes an important part of developing how Tamar is presented as a wise woman.

In Genesis 39:12–18, the garment motif (pattern) is picked up again to show Potiphar's disfavor, which foreshadows Joseph's being outcast. In Genesis 41, Joseph is called forth from prison, and the author says, "When he had shaved himself and *changed his clothes*, he came in before Pharaoh" (v. 14). The point becomes clear in this verse: clothing becomes a signal that you are in a critical transition point in the text.

Chapter 39 has resumed with Joseph being a slave (v. 1); however, by the time we reach Genesis 41:57, he has become second in power and all the world is coming to him to be saved. The rise in power and influence within the court was not due to his rhetorical savvy, as Gerhard von Rad had suggested, but was "the result of a unique set of circumstances, [including his being] summoned from prison to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams."[16] These chapters clearly communicate the rise of Joseph, but in Genesis 39:2–6 we learn how Joseph prospers because "the Lord was with Joseph" (v. 2a).

Notice the extent of Potiphar's trust in Joseph and the emphasis on the fact that Yahweh was with Joseph. This should not be understood from a psychological perspective with regard to Joseph, as if he needed to know that Yahweh was present with him at this time. The implied reader is the one the narrator is informing at this point and therefore "Yahweh is introduced into the story to link Joseph's rise with Yahweh's behind-the-scenes care, but without distracting our attention from the person of Joseph."[17] In the next section of the plot, when Mrs. Potiphar makes repeated sexual overtures to Joseph, the true character of Joseph emerges, as does his true wisdom (cf. Prov 6:26; 5:21–22). The contrast between how Joseph uses privilege and power and how Mrs. Potiphar does could not be starker. The story continues in Genesis 39:13–18 with a deception about the garment. She serves as a foil to Joseph's integrity as she shrewdly misrepresents the facts stating that *Joseph's garment* was left beside her (vv. 15, 18), as it was instead left in her hand (v. 12). Furthermore, she claims that Joseph's alleged indiscretions have become a threat against all Egyptians.

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[14] Ibid., 86.

[15] Ibid., 93. His more elaborate argument that Genesis 38 is a microcosm of the fuller Joseph narrative is given on pages 285–92.

[16] Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, 94–95.

[17] Ibid., 101.

When we come to Joseph's rise in prison in chapters 39–40, it is important to note that the text does not register this elevation as a result of Joseph's strength of character; rather, it is because Yahweh was with him (e.g., 39:21). In Genesis 41:42, Joseph is clothed in "garments of fine linen" at the time he is promoted to a higher status. In addition to being *clothed in fine garments*, Joseph is given a signet ring and a gold chain to wear around his neck. All these items are loaded with symbolic value: they demonstrate his newly appointed royal power and authority.[18]

Chapter 42 begins a new section where Jacob and Joseph's brothers are reintroduced, but attention on Pharaoh now recedes. Clearly, the focus is on Joseph and his family. Commentators are divided as to whether the narrator presents a positive or negative appraisal of Joseph in these chapters, especially in relation to his treatment of his brothers (cf. 42:7). Perhaps he is just playing the part of an Egyptian official here.[19] His treatment of them, however one interprets it, is under the good hand of God and, as Bruce Waltke notes, "mark[s] an important transformation in the brothers' characters from being untrustworthy to trustworthy and in their interrelationships from dysfunctional to functional."[20] Although at first glance some of Joseph's actions may seem to be marked by revenge, his episodes of crying later reflect his true feelings: "Neither the narrator nor the protagonists at any time suggest that Joseph is angry with them or motivated by revenge."[21]

Chapter 45:1–15 contains one of the most beautiful denouements in all of world literature. Joseph finally reveals his true identity. God, active behind the scenes, remains a primary focus of the narrative (cf. vv. 5, 7–8). Because of these delightful circumstances of providence, Joseph's family may find refuge in Egypt now, a land and culture in which Joseph has learned to delight in the midst of his honor (cf. vv. 9 and 13). In the reunion scene with his brothers (v. 22), Joseph gives to each of his brothers *festal garments*. Egypt generally, and this Pharaoh more particularly, are pictured favorably in the subsequent verses (vv. 16–28).

In the remaining chapters (46–50), the Abrahamic promises spoken of in previous chapters of this book come to the fore again (especially in Gen 26:3, which echoes Gen 12:2).[22] The narrative not only relates Joseph's wise administration (cf. Gen 47:13–26), but also that the resolution with his brothers leaves no uncertainty about cordial fraternal relations and prepares for the next books of Scripture.

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[18] See Wilson, *Joseph Wise and Otherwise*, 133.
[19] Ibid., 145.
[20] Waltke, *Genesis*, 543.
[21] Ibid., 544.
[22] See Wilson, *Joseph Wise and Otherwise*, 185.

The Joseph narrative has highlighted his ability not only to end family strife through shrewd planning but also his administrative gifts in bringing relief from the famine, not just for his family but for many others as well (cf. Gen 41:57). The clothing motif marked significant turns in the story. Joseph's unique circumstances would make it hard for anyone analogously to emulate today; nevertheless, "he clearly shows the right way to use power once in a position of authority."[23] He was a man of faith, looking to the future at the end of his life, making provisions for his bones to be brought out of this temporary residence as he looked toward another homeland (cf. Heb 11, esp. v. 22).

II. *Method?*

In the previous section, I introduced definitions of motif and an example of a motif, clothing in the biblical Joseph narrative. In this part of the article, I will discuss additional techniques that can further enhance the study of biblical motifs.

Recent studies in biblical narrative (particularly in the Hebrew Bible) have demonstrated the difficulty for the interpreter in getting to grips with essential abstract ideas. In other words, much of the biblical story and message is not given in propositions: there is a "dearth of systematic presentation of speculative thought."[24] As Shemaryahu Talmon says, the student of Hebrew literature is "forced to have recourse to the conjoining of disjunctive bits of information extracted from a diversity of texts."[25] What is beneficial from studying these recurrences, however, is that "a discerning analysis will show that some such patterns, particularly motifs, are in fact condensed signifiers of speculative thought."[26] In other words, they are "condensations of the biblical authors' and editors' ideas and thoughts."[27]

At this juncture, we need to make our definition of motif in biblical literature even more precise. In 1966, Talmon proposed the following definition, at least for biblical studies:

> A literary motif is a representative complex theme that recurs within the framework of the Hebrew Bible in variable forms and connections. It is rooted in an actual situation of anthropological or historical nature. In its secondary literary setting, the

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[23] Ibid., 240.
[24] Shemaryahu Talmon, "Literary Motifs and Speculative Thought in the Hebrew Bible," *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 16 (1988): 150–68.
[25] Ibid, 151.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 19.

> motif gives expression to ideas and experiences inherent in the original situation and is employed by the author to reactualize in his audience the reactions of the participants in that original situation. The motif represents the essential meaning of the situation, not the situation itself. It is not a mere reiteration of the sensations involved, but rather a heightened and intensified representation of them.[28]

In order to understand how motifs "function" in literature, and in our case the Bible, we first need to discuss how literary theorists talk about "influence" and then connect this with the identification of and function of motif study.

"Influence" is a term used in literary-critical circles to describe the attempt to find or forge links between various themes in texts.[29] Strictly speaking, influence should refer to relations between mere texts; however, influence studies often also comment on shared intellectual backgrounds.[30] Of special interest to the study of motifs is that an expanded definition and sense of influence "allows one to shift one's attention from the transmission of motifs between authors to the transmutation of historically given material."[31] In other words, this nuanced approach to how a subsequent author uses a motif from a previous author demonstrates how the latter author is using and developing the motif in new and significant ways. This "associative strategy" has had a long and recognized history; in modern literary criticism, however, few have been more influential than Harold Bloom.[32] Bloom's theory of poetry "remains essentially a theory of literary influence."[33] While admitting to the primary influence of Nietzsche and Freud, Bloom sets forth his thesis:

> Poetic influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets—always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.[34]

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[28] Talmon, "The Desert Motif," 225–26.

[29] See Louis A. Renza, "Influence," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 186.

[30] Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality," in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3.

[31] Ibid., 6.

[32] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). Walter Jackson Bate could also be listed here and anticipated many of ideas that Bloom published just a few years later.

[33] James K. Chandler, "Romantic Allusiveness," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1982): 461–87, esp. 462.

[34] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 30.

Consequently, in Bloom's project, all work is *editorializing*; driven by the weighty burden of working under and after previous authors, the new and subsequent author is motivated to do something original and different. This leads to constructive writing, Bloom asserts. There is constant angst to overcome one's precursor. One of Bloom's favorite concepts is agon (Greek, "contest," from which "agony" is derived).[35] This drives and characterizes influence. Every poem, every literary work should be seen as a revision. Only exceptional poets and writers (Bloom uses Milton as an example) can escape this anxiety and become independent thinkers. Some have been critical of the Bloomian thesis. Is Bloom himself caught in a "vicious oedipal circle" of his own making?[36] Bloom thinks this is a caricature of his work and an unfair reading.[37] One can hardly mention the role of "influence" in literary circles without referring to Bloom's thesis.

My claim in analyzing motifs is that precisely defining how an author in biblical literature is referring to a motif is done through one of four devices: direct quotation, subtle citation, allusion, and echo.[38] A direct citation is when a subsequent author refers to another author (usually previous, but perhaps contemporary) with a citation formula such as "as it is written." A subtle citation is similar: there are enough dictional links to recognize that a citation is being made, but there is no introduction such as "as it is written." The latter two categories, allusion and echo, are a bit more complicated and therefore need more explanation.

The difference between influence and allusion is that the concept of influence focuses on which works affect a subsequent text, whereas the concept of allusion identifies the specific treatment of one text or motif by subsequent texts. Since both concepts include some notion of diachronic development, they are important for our study, but they express different literary dynamics.[39] What, then, is an allusion?

An allusion is usually defined as a tacit or indirect reference to another's work. Most would maintain the intentional aspects of allusion: "An allusion is an intentional echo of an earlier text: it not only reminds us; it means to remind us."[40] However, biblical scholars have often operated with received

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[35] See ibid., 6–8, 20, 88.

[36] See Renza, "Influence," 192.

[37] Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 9.

[38] See Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 30–39.

[39] Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 14–15.

[40] Chandler, "Romantic Allusiveness," 463.

assumptions and practices about how an allusion works. Most authorities in the area are aware that something more is required: a rigorous analysis of how allusions work and function.

This need for an allusion theory was addressed in the 1960s. Interestingly, the center for work in this area has emerged in Israel,[41] where Ziva Ben-Porat has provided some of the most extensive analyses of identifications of allusions.[42] She thinks the reigning definition needs to be supplemented and begins by clarifying terminological distinctions at the theoretical level. She regrets the neglect of vigorous analysis of allusion and attempts a clarification between literary allusions and other types of allusions. As for literary allusions, she says,

> The literary allusion is a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts. The activation is achieved through the manipulation of a special signal; a sign (simple or complex) in a given text characterized by an additional larger "referent." This referent is always an independent text. The simultaneous activation of the two texts thus connected results in the formation of intertextual patterns whose nature cannot be predetermined.[43]

Ben-Porat's theory of allusion can be described as having several stages of recognition:

> noticing the marker, identifying the source, bringing the marked sign to bear on the interpretation of the sign which includes the marker, and also noting additional aspects of the source text which affect the reading of the alluding text generally.[44]

Ben-Porat takes pains to understand the nature of literary allusions in a way that goes beyond traditional dictionary definitions. According to her, the traditional views allow almost everything to come under the cover of allusion, making all literature "a massive tissue of allusion."[45] First, she asserts that the language of literature is opaque, "drawing attention to itself as well as its referents."[46] Second, she further states that every reader is

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[41] Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics*, Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society Series (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 114–42.

[42] Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976): 105–28; and "The Poetics of Allusion" (PhD diss., University of California Berkley, 1967).

[43] Ben-Porat, "Poetics of Allusion," 108–9.

[44] Sommer summarizing Porat, in Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 15.

[45] Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Allusion," 24.

[46] Ibid., 25.

aware of certain conventions; that is to say that every allusion is made within the bounds of a certain set of conventions that constitute a genre. This point opens the way for the third point: the role of the reader. The nature of literature, according to Ben-Porat, is that "everything represented in a literature text is always presented only partially and with varying degrees of distortion."[47] It is then that the reader's responsibility to provide the links to infer a pattern come into play. Indeed, she is especially interested in bringing the role of the reader into the process of understanding allusions, something that has been strangely absent from traditional approaches to biblical literature.[48]

In this process of "actualization," according to Ben-Porat, a reader goes through several different stages. First, there is the recognition of allusive markers in the text and source identification. Next, there is the realization of the contextual elements that link the allusive markers in each text. For Ben-Porat, the reader takes an active role, not a passive one, in the interpretation of an allusion. In fact, the reader "creates" the complex patterns that form the markers in an allusion. This perspective may sound dangerous, especially to "champions of the objective text" prevalent in many literary theories. Even so, Ben-Porat's point is that the reader plays a crucial and complex role in the development of a pattern whereby all elements of an allusion coalesce into the actualization of a meaningful allusion.

What must the reader do in these creative circumstances? "The reader must distinguish between a so-called 'allusion' to a word, which is actually a form of punning, and a literary allusion introduced by means of a word, which is a true allusion in the sense in which the term is used in this study," says Ben-Porat.[49] In a true *allusion*, vis-à-vis *borrowing* (i.e., citation), a reader implicitly agrees to invoke contextual meanings from the original context incorporating something of the evoked text.[50]

Echo is another crucial concept for this study on motif. John Hollander's fine book on the nature of allusion, *The Figure of Echo*, is essential here.[51] He begins by noting the analogy with nature. Just as there are surfaces seen throughout the natural world (mountains, rocks, caves, forests, etc.) that provide reflective surfaces that can produce serial echoes, so literature

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 29.

[49] Ibid., 40.

[50] Ibid., 92–93. She comments, "In a borrowing the reader agrees to disregard recognition of other texts within the text and not to activate the original context. The *only* criterion for allusion is the validity of the activation of elements from the summoned text."

[51] John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

(especially poetry) raises questions of the rebounding nature of language itself in subsequent reflecting literary surfaces.[52] In other words, whether it is in Scripture itself, or English literature echoing classical literature and themes, there are always secondary or derivative reflections for the sensitive ear and observant eye. "Texts are haunted by echoes," Hollander maintains.[53] Having these four categories before us, I present the following chart.[54]
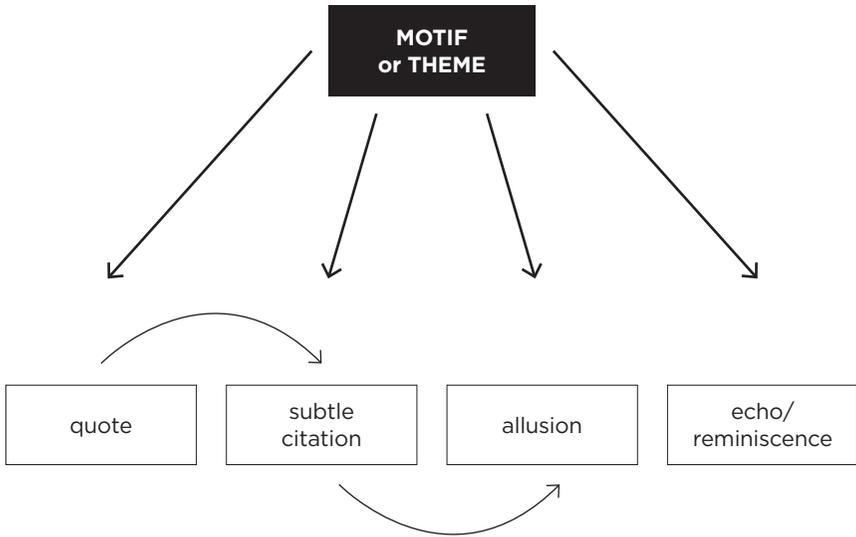
Any motif or theme could be plugged into the "superordinate" box above (e.g., storm, rain, Sodom and Gomorrah). Then, the influences of this motif can be searched in contemporary or subsequent biblical books.

III. *An Example*

Consider as an example of motif in the Old Testament the biblical concept of "desert" or "wilderness." In Hebrew, the typical word for wilderness is *midbar* (although other synonyms can occur); however, wilderness in the

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[52] Ibid., 21–22.

[53] Ibid., 23.

[54] For the idea of the arrangement of the boxes in linear fashion given above, I am indebted to Christoph Uehlinger, from the University of Zurich, "Subtle Citations? Identifying and Evaluating Interplays between Images and Texts," paper delivered November 25, 2013 to the National Association of Professors of Hebrew section of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

American mind means something vastly different from what it meant to the ancient Hebrew. For the ancient Hebrew, wilderness evoked associations of uncivilized space, danger, wild animals that could harm you, a scarcity of water, and possible thieves and thugs that would assail you. For the modern Westerners, especially Americans, the associations are vastly different. We tend to think in romantic categories about a green space of beauty set aside for purposes of refreshment and revitalization. Therefore, the American reader of the Bible needs to build an interpretative bridge between the ancient Hebrew's understanding of *midbar* with all its cultural significations and his own associative tendencies with the word in order to understand how one might affect the other. In short, the best translation of *midbar* in most contexts in the Old Testament for Westerners (especially Americans) is *desert*.

An interpreter will observe some interesting trends when this motif is traced throughout the Old Testament (and in the New Testament as well). For example, early in the Old Testament, the word can have very negative connotations. This is the place where the Israelites pilgrimaged before they reached their promised land. This is the place of trial, testing, and disobedience, as they were often reminded ("Meribah" and "Massa," cf. Exod 17; Num 14, 20; Ps 95; Heb 3:12–4:13).

As an interpreter performs the archeology of allusion hunting in the Old Testament using this important conceptual grid, the results are quite striking.

Wilderness imagery, issuing from the creation narrative and specifically the expulsion from the garden of Eden, and the pilgrimage theme, is an important motif as it is reworked throughout redemptive history.[55] In Walter Brueggemann's terms, the Israelites were going to be "turfed," and the Jordan represented the boundary of "confidence of at-homeness … the moment of empowerment or enlandment, the decisive event of being turfed and at home for the first time."[56] The wilderness theme triggers a transformation to salvation history in which the land is promised to the wandering-in-the-wilderness Israelites.

Talmon analyzed the occurrences of *midbar* into three geographical areas: grazable land in southern Palestine, borderland between the desert and cultivated land, and finally the desert proper.[57] John Wright adds a fourth

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[55] Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Desert Motif," and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "The Usefulness of the Cross," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1978–1979): 228–46.

[56] Walter Brueggeman, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, OBT, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 43.

[57] See Talmon, "The Desert Motif," 216–54.

category not covered by Talmon: the Judean wilderness, with its deep wadis and yet its proximity to major population centers.[58] The wilderness is symbolic for a rite of passage that exists between the exodus and the promised land. As Talmon has demonstrated, early on in the biblical theology of the Hebrew Bible, this wilderness (i.e., desert) motif basically denoted a place of punishment and a transitory state in the restoration of Israel to its ideal mode of life.[59] It is this "betweenness" which is crucial. Other studies have recently confirmed that the Sinai pericope extends all the way to the end of the book of Exodus.[60] The complexity enters when we realize that the wilderness motif gives rise to numerous later symbolic ideas, sometimes seemingly conflicting ones.[61] However, the main point here is that the desert becomes a strong trigger for symbolic use later in Scripture.

The Jewish people have recognized for a long time the importance of this transitional period in the wilderness as memorialized in *Sukkot*, or the Festival of Booths.[62] The desert becomes iconic, "the place where they entered the dangerous sphere of freedom, where 'everything is possible.' The desert represents the time separating what was already given (liberation from Egypt) from what was not yet a reality (the Promised Land)."[63]

In the following illustrations about the "desert motif" in the Old Testament, I will restrict my observations to the earliest chapters of Isaiah 40–55, the so-called "book of consolation." The main concern of these chapters is comfort. Indeed, God will answer the people's plight since they find themselves in a "way-less wilderness."[64]

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[58] See John Wright, "Spirit and Wilderness: The Interplay of Two Motifs within the Hebrew Bible as a Background to Mark 1:2–13," in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 269–98.

[59] Talmon, "The Desert Motif," 217.

[60] For example, see Michael L. Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, Biblical and Theological Studies 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 208, who is building on the work of Alviero Niccacci.

[61] Wright, "Spirit and Wilderness," 273.

[62] See, for example, James K. Hoffmeier, "'These Things Happened,' Why a Historical Exodus Is Essential for Theology," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James Hoffmeier and Dennis Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 117–18.

[63] Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 44.

[64] Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40–55*, FAT 28 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 144.

1. *Isaiah 40:3–5*

> A voice of one calling:
> "In the desert [*midbar*] prepare
>   the way for the L<small>ORD</small>;
> make straight in the wilderness
>   a highway for our God!
> Every valley shall be raised up,
>   every mountain and hill made low;
> the rough ground shall become level,
>   the rugged places a plain." (Isa 40:3–4 N<small>IV</small>)

The chapter continues to emphasize the incomparability of God in addition to the futility of idols and the overall transitory nature of nations.

What is especially significant in the quoted passage is where God will appear. A way is prepared—not through the desert, but *in* the desert.[65] The imagery is that of a royal road prepared for the sake of easing travel for the king's journey, a lord on a journey to reveal himself in the "hopelessness of desert, exile and catastrophe."[66] The importance of verse 3 among biblical exegetes and extrabiblical material has been significant. Walther Zimmerli argued that Isaiah 40:3 is a literal highway, which is later to be understood as metaphorical.[67] J. Gordon McConville argued the opposite. For him, metaphor was primary and the way of the Lord should be understood as a call "to depart from Babylon with Ezra and return to Yehud."[68]

The importance of this passage also becomes evident with the discovery of the Qumran documents, especially the Rule of the Community [1 QS]. The Jews at Qumran hid this scroll, along with many others, for protection in what is now known as cave 1 as the Roman army rolled in from the north.[69] Except for the phrase, "a voice of one calling," the quotation at the Qumran text (1 QS 8:13–16) is verbatim from Isaiah 40:3–4.[70] So profound was the influence of this verse, research of echoes at Qumran lead Charlesworth to

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[65] Erich Zenger, "The God of Exodus in the Message of the Prophets as Seen in Isaiah," in *Exodus—A Lasting Paradigm*, ed. Bas van Iersel and Anton Weiler (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 22–33, esp. 23.

[66] Ibid.

[67] For a summary of Zimmerli's views, see Bo Lim, *The "Way of the Lord" in the Book of Isaiah*, LHBOTS 522 (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 2–6, 34–37, 103–5, and esp. 109.

[68] Lim, "Way of the Lord," 109. See also J. Gordon McConville, "Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfilment of Prophecy," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 205–24, esp. 208.

[69] See James H. Charlesworth, "Intertextuality: Isaiah 40:3 and the Serek Ha-Yaḥad,"in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 197–224.

[70] A "fuller" manner of spelling and writing the Hebrew script.

conclude, "This verse is the most important of all the prophetic words of Scripture for the development of the Qumranites' conceptual universe and their self-understanding."[71] What is interesting as we trace the motif of "desert" in this limited corpus is the transformation of meaning: the concept has evolved from its negative connotations to one of eschatological hope.

2. Isaiah 41:16–20

The beginning of this chapter (vv. 1–7) is commonly referred to as a trial scene in which God invites the nations to court in order to establish facts in a case.[72] This leads to three sections in which "comfort and assurance are presented," verses 8–13, 14–16, and 17–20.[73] This text also is commonly referred to as a second exodus text, in which "the future destiny of Israel is described in terms of the Exodus experience."[74] *The importance of this pericope is the transformation of the wilderness or the desert.* However, the immediately preceding verses are also crucial, for God has announced that Israel will be a military force (cf. 41:15–16) and that Judah will wipe out all her enemies.

The wilderness wanderings play a major role in the whole exodus complex, for the wilderness (*midbar*) is symbolic for a rite of passage that exists between the exodus and the promised land.[75] The passage promises with confidence that the exiles will march through a transformed wilderness, a virtual paradise, and that a new eschatological figure will lead them:

> The poor and needy search for water,
>   but there is none;
>   their tongues are parched with thirst.
> But I the LORD will answer them;
>   I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.
> I will make rivers flow on barren heights,
>   and springs within the valleys.
> I will turn the desert into pools of water.
>   and the parched ground into springs.
> I will put in the desert
>   the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive.
> I will set pines in the wasteland,
>   the fir and the cypress together.

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[71] Ibid., 223.

[72] Friedbert Ninow, *Indicators of Typology within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2001), 172 (what German exegetes call *Gerichtsrede*, "judgment speech").

[73] Ibid., what German exegetes call *Heilsorakel* ("salvation oracle") or *Erhörungsorakel* ("[legal] hearing oracle").

[74] Ibid.

[75] See Talmon, "The Desert Motif."

so that people may see and know,
    may consider and understand,
that the hand of the Lᴏʀᴅ has done this,
    that the Holy One of Israel has created it. (Isa 41:17–20)

Creation language and theology are evident here. Verse 20, by using the verb "create," signals that this Isaianic new exodus through the wilderness is a new creation.[76] During this future messianic age, a transformation of the wilderness will occur.[77]

3. *Isaiah 42:14–17*

The beginning of chapter 42 opens with God's assurances that his people are chosen and there is a brighter future ahead. Again, there is a similar transformation of the motif. Leading up to our passage, however, is the revelation of God as warrior (cf. v. 13). The bellicose outcry is similar in passages having to do with warrior culture in surrounding cultures.[78]

Although at first glance it seems that God's actions contradict his transformation of the wilderness, which is such a prominent theme in Isaiah, the resolution of the apparent contradiction is found in God's acts of judgment against oppressors and for the oppressed.[79]

"For a long time I have kept silent,
    I have been quiet and held myself back.
But now, like a woman in childbirth,
    I cry out, I gasp and pant.
I will lay waste the mountains and hills
    and dry up the pools.
I will lead the blind [the exiles][80] by ways they have not known,
    along unfamiliar paths [they do not know][81] I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
    and make the rough places smooth.
These things I will do;

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[76] Ninow, *Indicators of Typology*, 175. This blossoms into full flower possibly in Isa 65:17 (a text outside of our consideration in this article), since it seems that new exodus gives way to new creation here. But this is an important text that ultimately shows influence on Revelation 21:1–8.

[77] Augustine Stock, *The Way in the Wilderness: Exodus, Wilderness, and Moses Themes in Old Testament and New* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1969), 130.

[78] See Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 161–62.

[79] Lim, *The "Way of the Lord,"* 72–73.

[80] See Lund, *Way Metaphors*, 128. Although, the "blindness" may be an indirect criticism of the people despite the overall pericope pertaining to a message of salvation. See ibid., 136.

[81] The New International Version unjustifiably drops this repeated phrase, probably following the note by the editors of the *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, who consider it *add(itum)* (added [by the Masoretes or other later Scribes]). Such a move is unnecessary.

I will not forsake them.
But those who trust in idols,
     who say to images, 'You are our gods,'
     will be turned back in utter shame." (Isa 42:14–17)

Although the word we have been examining, *midbar*, does not occur in these verses, the conceptual overlap based on the use of synonyms is too significant to ignore: the transformation of the desert into a paradise for the purposes of ushering in a new exodus is evident. The new transformation is even more dramatically explained in chapter 43.

4. *Isaiah 43:14–21*

The Lord now smooths a way back through the wilderness to home for the exiles. Even more than in the previous passage, however, the desert motif is now described in paradisiacal conditions and provides a solid foundation for a future hope:

"This is what the LORD says—
     your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
For your sake I will send to Babylon
     and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians,
     in the ships in which they took pride.
I am the LORD, your Holy One,
     Israel's Creator, your King.

This is what the LORD says—
     he who made a way through the sea,
     a path through the mighty waters,
who drew out the chariots and horses,
     the army and reinforcements together,
and they lay there, never to rise again,
     extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:
Forget the former things;
     do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
     Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the desert (*midbar*)
     and streams in the wasteland.
The wild animals honor me,
     the jackals and the owls,
because I provide water in the desert (*midbar*)
     and streams in the wasteland,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,
     the people I formed for myself
     that they may proclaim my praise." (Isa 43:14–21)

One clear purpose here is to demonstrate the ease with which Yahweh tames unruly forces.[82] Although the passage obviously has roots in the exodus event, the enemy conquered now is not "the sea," but the desert!

The importance of this motif of the desert, the "wilderness," once we open the Gospels hardly needs mention. In at least one of the Gospels, the wilderness motif becomes a unifying theme throughout its prologue (Mark 1:1–8).[83]

Conclusion

Studying motifs in the Old Testament, especially their transformation in redemptive history, can provide a deeper understanding of the unfolding revelation in holy Scripture. Fortunately, in recent years, biblical scholars have been paying closer attention to how motifs function in literature and the Bible.

In this article, I defined motif and illustrated one minor motif, the clothing motif, in the Joseph narrative. Then, I proposed a method for noting the development of motifs by noting how citations and allusions function in Scripture using the categories of direction quote, subtle citation, allusion, and echo. In this discussion, I noted recent scholarly work on the notion of literary influence and especially on how allusions work in literature (including Scripture).

Although I noted that the desert motif often bore negative connotations early in redemptive history, I then demonstrated the transformation of the motif towards a positive, eschatological hope in the early chapters of the book of consolation in Isaiah (Isa 40–43). Most of the interactions with this particular motif of desert (*midbar*) in these chapters would fall under the category of allusion. This positive transformation of the desert motif (by means of allusion) in Isaiah undoubtedly put literary and theological pressure on the New Testament apostles as they wrestled with the meaning and significance of Jesus life and ministry. Ultimately, the transformation of this motif in Isaiah plowed the way for a denouement in the future that ultimately culminated in the advent of the Messiah in the fullness of time.

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[82] Richard Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (New York: Paulist, 1984), 60.

[83] See Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 208–16.

On Finding the Theological Message of Old Testament Books: A Plea for Paying Attention to the Redemptive-Historical Context

GERT KWAKKEL

Abstract

What is the theological message of an Old Testament book? How should one proceed in attempts to trace and formulate it? The answer to these questions is vital for the study biblical theology. These are likewise relevant for students working on the exegesis of a pericope or ministers preparing a sermon series on a specific book. In this study, I will argue that it is not only helpful but also necessary to pay more attention to the position of the books in the broad context of the history of Israel and the history of redemption. As this context is particularly relevant for the interpretation of the historical books and the prophets, I will focus on examples taken from these books.

I. *The Normal Practice in Dictionaries of Biblical Theology*

Afew years ago, I was working on a new course on the Prophets. I took the opportunity to read the entries on these books in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* and the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*.[1] When reading the various contributions, I noted that the authors often formulated the theological message of a book in terms of themes such as the sovereignty of God, sin and judgment, retribution, and covenant. Later, I found a similar approach in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* and the *Introduction to the Old Testament* by Tremper Longman and Raymond Dillard.[2] The information was beneficial but also raised questions regarding the relevance of the historical context of each book and its position in the history of redemption.

Amos may serve as an example. In the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Robert Chisholm opens with an overview of the contents of the three sections of the book (chs. 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9). Next, he reviews three topics. The first relates to the prophet's portrayal of the LORD as the sovereign ruler of the world, a warrior-king, and creator. The second is about the LORD and the nations. Chisholm observes that Amos also holds the nations responsible for keeping the LORD's demands and suggests that it relates to the divine mandate to Noah in Genesis 9:7. The third is the LORD's relationship with Israel. Although Chisholm says that this is the focus of Amos's prophecy, he treats it more briefly. Amos refers to Israel's election as God's covenant people, the deliverance from Egypt, and the conquest of Canaan. Israel broke the covenant through injustice, greed, pride, and hollow, ritualistic religion. The LORD had already implemented several covenant curses, but Israel refused to repent. Now the LORD's patience has run out, and he will punish his people with destruction and exile. However, "as always," divine judgment will be "discriminating and purifying": a faithful remnant will be brought back to the land, and the Davidic dynasty restored.[3]

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[1]   T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000); hereafter *NDBT*. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig C. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright, eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); hereafter *DTIB*.

[2]   Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996); hereafter *EDBT*; Tremper Longman III and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nottingham: Apollos; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007); hereafter *IOT*.

[3]   Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Amos," in *NDBT*, 242a–45a (quotations on 244b). Cf. also *IOT*, 431–32.

In the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Robert Hiebert proceeds somewhat differently by starting with a description of the historical context of Amos's message, the northern kingdom of Israel in approximately 760 BC. In those days, the nation prospered but was also "in an advanced state of social, moral, and spiritual decay." Otherwise, his treatment largely corresponds to Chisholm's, except for his comments on Amos 9:11–15, for which see below.[4]

Both authors are aware of the historical context, as they mention the fact that Amos's prophecies are addressed to the people of the northern kingdom and point to the advanced state of decay prevailing among the audience. Moreover, unlike Chisholm, Hiebert explicitly relates the sins denounced by the prophet to the historical situation during the reign of Jeroboam II around 760 BC.[5] However, neither of them specifies the function of Amos's intervention in terms of the overarching story of redemption, which moves from creation and the fall of Adam to the birth of Jesus Christ. In other words, I wonder how the theological message would have been different if Amos had interacted, for example, with the repeated apostasy in the period of the judges.

Of course, if Amos had lived in the premonarchical era, he could not have spoken to the northern kingdom, but what is the theological relevance of the fact that he did? This question is of particular relevance to the last words of the book (Amos 9:11–15), which announce the future restoration of Israel and the royal house of David. According to Hiebert, the perspective of this passage "seems to be that of an exile from Judah"; it portrays the bright side of the eschatological day of the LORD, "the light of which will never dawn on the intransigent Israelites to whom Amos ministers."[6] These comments show that he is aware of the problem. Yet one is left with the question as to what the conclusion of the book implies for the role of the northern kingdom and its downfall in God's plans, as well as for those northerners who were not "intransigent," but did not live long enough to witness Judah's exile, let alone the future restoration.[7]

All this does not mean that the contributors to these dictionaries of biblical theology reject the idea that biblical books should be read in connection with the overall history of redemption. For example, Brian Rosner,

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[4] Robert J. V. Hiebert, "Amos, Theology of," in *EDBT*, 17a–21a (quotation on 17a).

[5] Ibid., 17a, 18b.

[6] Ibid., 20.

[7] In *DTIB*, Karl Möller somehow circumvents the problem, as he posits that the book is addressed to Judeans who read the book after the fulfillment of Amos's prophecies in the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BC; see Karl Möller, "Amos, Book of," in *DTIB*, 37.

one of the editors of the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, argues that biblical theology should pay close attention to the Bible's overarching story. In his view, the analysis of the theology of a biblical book includes considering "its unique part in the progressive unfolding of God's plan of salvation for humanity."[8] In line with this principle, several entries briefly describe the "plot" of the Bible's story or part of it, thus offering a framework in which to interpret the individual books.[9] However, things are a bit different when it comes to the entries on the various books.

Everybody will agree that the link to the overall story is particularly relevant for the historical books, such as Genesis to Kings. A few examples may illustrate how much attention this element receives in the entries on these books.

In Duane Garrett's overview of the theology of Genesis, he observes that the book "tells of the fall into sin but also immediately begins the story of redemption through the promised son."[10] Kenneth Mathews mentions Genesis's report of the partial fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs and how the book prepares for the following phases of the story: God's election of Israel, the monarch, and the coming of Jesus Christ.[11] Gordon Wenham points out that the author of Genesis presents the call of Abraham as God's answer to the problems of humankind described in Genesis 3–11, that is, "the effects of sin on the human race."[12]

Whereas the authors just mentioned refer to the connection with the beginning of the story in Genesis only in passing, it has a prominent role in Peter Enns's discussion of the theological themes of Exodus. He not only relates the story told in the book to God's promises to the patriarchs, but in particular makes efforts to show that Israel's departure from Egypt, the giving of the law, and the building of the tabernacle are acts of re-creation.[13]

The sketches of the theology of subsequent historical books tend to pay less attention to the question of how the history told in the book contributes to the unfolding of the initial promise of Genesis 3:15. Instead, the description

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[8]   Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *NDBT*, 4, 6a; cf. also his definition of biblical theology, which includes the phrase "maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus" (10b).

[9]   See Philip E. Satterthwaite, "Biblical History," in *NDBT*, 43–51; Craig L. Blomberg, "The Unity and Diversity of Scripture," in *NDBT*, 67a–69b; T. Desmond Alexander, "Genesis to Kings," in *NDBT*, 115a–20a; cf. also Richard S. Hess, "History of Israel," in *DTIB*, 299b–302b.

[10]   Duane A. Garrett, "Genesis, Theology of," in *EDBT*, 285b.

[11]   Kenneth A. Mathews, "Genesis," in *NDBT*, 140b–46a, esp. 141a and 146a.

[12]   Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis, Book of," in *DTIB*, 249b.

[13]   Peter E. Enns, "Exodus (Book)," in *NDBT*, 146a–49b. On the law and the tabernacle, see also *IOT*, 75–80.

of its role in the history of redemption is often restricted to its relation with more recent phases of the story, with what will follow soon, and with the fulfillment in the New Testament. The entries on Samuel and Kings illustrate this tendency.

As for Samuel, the broadest scope is found in Robert Vannoy's treatment, wherein he affirms that God's promise of an enduring Davidic dynasty in 2 Samuel 7 carries forward both the promises to the patriarchs and that of Genesis 3:15. He further points out that the Davidic covenant "provides the framework for the flow of redemptive history from the old covenant (the Sinai covenant) to the new covenant." Like the Sinai covenant, the Davidic covenant includes obligations for individual covenant members, but failure to live up to the obligations "would not jeopardize the ultimate fulfillment of the promise through the line of Abraham and David."[14] Philip Satterthwaite presents a more limited view and restricts himself to stating that the reign of David brought a partial fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs and was a turning point in the outworking of God's purposes of salvation. From that time on, the question will be whether the monarchy is indeed a blessing for Israel.[15] The last element is also mentioned by Longman and Dillard, who further observe that from Samuel onward God's choice of Jerusalem as the place for his house is inseparably tied with his choice of David.[16]

Reflections on the redemptive-historical role of the monarchical period described in Kings concentrate on its end: the fall of the kingdom of Judah and the Davidic dynasty, as well as the glimmer of hope provided by the release of Jehoiachin in 2 Kings 25:27–30. According to Iain Provan, the ending of the story suggests that the fulfillment of the promise to the patriarchs still lies in the future and looks forward to the coming of the ideal Davidic king.[17] In Mark Chavalas's view, Kings shows that because of Israel's sins, the immediate future of the nation will be "without monarchy, government, or structured religious center"; instead, the nation will be identified by "fidelity to the Mosaic religion and the demands of the covenant."[18]

These are all useful observations, but they do not provide a satisfactory answer to the question as to the historical role of the Davidic monarchy in the realization of God's purposes of salvation. Its emergence gave rise to the royal family in which the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be born, and its

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[14] J. Robert Vannoy, "Samuel, First and Second, Theology of," in *EDBT*, 708a.
[15] Philip E. Satterthwaite, "Samuel," in *NDBT*, 178b, 182a.
[16] *IOT*, 163–64.
[17] Iain W. Provan, "Kings," in *NDBT*, 185a, 187a.
[18] Mark W. Chavalas, "Kings, First and Second, Theology of," in *EDBT*, 456b.

failure contributed to the longing for a better David.[19] But is that everything that can be said? These authors mentioned do not explain the role of the temple of Solomon, the construction and demolition of which are an essential element of the storyline of Kings. Why did God have this sanctuary built if he knew beforehand that it risked ending its existence in ruin (cf. 1 Kgs 9:6–9)?

II. *A Learning Process*

In summary, the link to the overall history of redemption receives at least some attention in a number of entries of the dictionaries of biblical theology. However, several authors restrict themselves to retelling the contents of the book, or outlining its theological message on a thematic basis without much consideration for the historical context or any comment whatsoever on its role as part of the large story.[20] Besides, when they do consider the relationship with the large story, one misses a discussion of vital historical elements, such as the role of the northern kingdom or the function of the temple.

Things are remarkably different in Stephen Dempster's 2003 book *Dominion and Dynasty*. In his sketch of the theology of the Old Testament, he relates the substance of every book to the two themes that dominate biblical history from the beginning. The first is dominion or geography: When God created humans in his image, his purpose was that they would be in relationship with him and represent his rule over the world. The promise of the holy land and its fulfillment as well as the construction of the tabernacle and the temple bear relationship to this theme. The second theme is dynasty or genealogy: After the fall, God promised the coming of the seed of the woman, by whom he would restore the lost glory.[21] By continually referring to these themes, Dempster succeeds in showing not only the unity of the Old Testament but also how each book contributes to the development of its plot.

Tracing the influence of Dempster's study on subsequent discussions of the theological message of Old Testament books is beyond the scope of this

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[19] Cf. also *IOT*, 165; Vannoy, "Samuel," 708; Brian E. Kelly, "Samuel, Books of," in *DTIB*, 720a.

[20] See, e.g., G. Michael Hagan, "Exodus, Theology of," in *EDBT*, 226b–29b; Nobuyoshi I. Kiuchi, "Leviticus," in *NDBT*, 152a–56a; Kelly, "Samuel," 718b–19b; Richard S. Hess, "Kings, Books of," in *DTIB*, 422b–25b; Joel R. Soza, "Jeremiah," in *NDBT*, 223b–27b; Thomas Renz, "Ezekiel, Book of," in *DTIB*, 218b–23a; Robert D. Spender, "Hosea, Theology of," in *EDBT*, 357b–59b; Paul Ferguson, "Jonah, Theology of," in *EDBT*, 427a–28b. Cf. also *IOT*, 84–91 (Lev), 181–89 (Kgs), 367–70 (Ezek), 405–8 (Hos).

[21] Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Leicester: Appolos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); see, e.g., 49, 68–70.

article. In this connection, only two observations can be made. First, Gregory Beale can be mentioned as an author who has learned from Dempster's approach. In his 2011 study on the unfolding of the Old Testament in the New, he presents an overview of the storyline of the Old Testament in which he very briefly comments on each book's relation to the fulfillment of God's commission to Adam to reign over the earth.[22] Second, the same is not true, however, for Bruce Waltke's textbook on Old Testament theology published in 2007.[23] In this massive volume, Waltke still follows the familiar pattern of retelling the contents of the books—including numerous interpretative comments—and describes their theological message from a thematic perspective.[24] Not much attention is paid to the question of how the story starts at the beginning of Genesis and moves on in a particular book.

Despite Dempster's and Beale's innovative contributions, it seems worth further evaluating the usual thematic approach. In accepting this challenge, it is not my aim just to criticize this approach, let alone reject its results. I must even admit that I followed the same line when I wrote a chapter on Hosea as part of a book on theological themes in the Latter Prophets published in 2012. In that contribution, I structured my review of the theology of Hosea thematically, under headings like "Exclusive Love," "Israel's Adultery," and "God's People Reunited." I tried to do justice to the historical context of Hosea's prophecies and their being addressed to the northern kingdom, but hardly reflect upon their relationship with the overall story of the Bible.[25] In other words, if I am advocating a different approach now, this is part of a personal learning process that will hopefully continue in the coming years.

III. *Understandable and Problematic Aspects of the Thematic Approach*

What are we looking for in a quest for the theological message of a biblical book? How does one define the term "theological" in this connection? These

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[22] Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 29–87.

[23] Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

[24] Waltke's discussion of the theology of the "Deuteronomist" (Deut–Judg and 1 Sam–2 Kings) is a fine example of a purely thematic approach; see Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 738–52.

[25] Gert Kwakkel, "Hosea, Prophet of God's Love," in *The Lion Has Roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, ed. H. G. L. Peels and S. D. Snyman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 27–39.

questions are of major importance for all reflections on the proper way of doing biblical theology. One could, for example, use a strict definition, limiting the theological message to what a book says about God himself, and more particularly about his eternal virtues. In that case, it can be expected that the historical element will be filtered out in favor of eternal truths. Those taking this lead will certainly find many helpful insights in the books of the Old Testament, for these writings say a lot not only about God's historical acts, but also about his unchanging nature.

An alternative option would be to take theology in the sense of the message of a particular book for the church of today. Just as with the first option, one can easily understand that following this line, historical elements that no longer seem relevant are left out of consideration.

Another argument in support of playing down the relevance of historical aspects could be that some Old Testament books lack a clear relationship with a specific point in time. This is true for Job and Proverbs, but also for a prophetic book such as Joel, which does not provide any information as to the era in which the prophet lived and has resisted all efforts to present a definite view on its historical context.

It seems, then, an obvious step not to attach considerable importance to the historical details when one assumes the task of describing the theological message of an Old Testament book. However, this evidently does not hold for the relationship between the contents of a book and the overall history of redemption. According to the firm conviction of Reformed theologians, Scripture gives evidence of a long storyline that moves on from the beginning at creation to the fulfillment of God's purposes in the new creation described in Revelation, with Jesus Christ as its center. Admittedly, the link with this storyline may be stronger in the historical books than in others, such as the wisdom literature or a few prophetic books. In some cases, it can be hard to tell how a particular book—let alone a single event or passage—contributes to the development of the overall plot. If one continually tries to present a clear answer to this question, one easily runs the risk of schematism and speculation.[26] Nevertheless, if it is true that a long storyline links the beginning of Scripture with its end, it is necessary at least to ponder whether something can be said about the relationship between a particular book and the main storyline of Scripture. If one fails to do so, one risks

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[26] Cf. Cornelis Trimp, *Heilsgeschiedenis en prediking: Hervatting van een onvoltooid gesprek* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1986), 101–3; English translation: *Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Scarsdale, NY: Westminster Discount Book Service, 1996), 127–30; Piet Houtman, *"This Is Your God": Preaching Biblical History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 127–28.

isolating the book from its canonical framework. This can only be detrimental to a proper assessment of its theological message.

What about other historical aspects? Can they be stripped off without drawbacks? As observed, this may lead authors to neglect important elements (e.g., the role of the temple of Solomon in Kings). Besides, this procedure may generate problems, particularly when affirmations about a specific theme in one book or passage seem to contradict what is found in others. The following examples illustrate this point: two from 1 and 2 Samuel and the others from the Prophets.

First, as is commonly agreed, kingship is a major theme in Samuel.[27] The establishment of the Davidic monarchy was a vital step towards the coming of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes. Thus a favorable look on Israel's being ruled by a king is already found in passages such as Deuteronomy 17:14–15 and Judges 17:6; 21:25. However, this positive stance contrasts with the apparent negative evaluation in 1 Samuel 8:6–18; 10:19; 12:12, 17–20, where both Samuel and God himself severely disapprove the people's request for a king and take it as a rejection of God's kingship. As may be expected, the theological dictionaries consulted in the course of this study address the problem and suggest solutions.[28] On closer inspection, I wondered whether it would be possible to improve their solutions by considering even more the historical context of Samuel's view on kingship. Is it a good idea to study the texts by asking the thematic question whether the monarchy was a good thing for Israel or other peoples?[29] Could such an approach also distort the theological message of the book?

Second, in 2 Samuel 7:14–16, God promises David and his family an everlasting kingdom. He will keep this promise, even if he must discipline David's offspring for committing iniquity. Psalm 89:29–38 expresses the promise in similar unconditional terms. Other texts apparently deviate from this pattern when they affirm that there will always be a descendant of David on the throne *if* his descendants respect God's covenant and commandments, which implies that they may lose the throne if they refuse to do so (see 1 Kgs 2:4; 9:4–9; Ps 132:11–12). What does this imply for God's covenant with David? Is it conditional or unconditional? The issue is of great importance for biblical and systematic theology, as God's covenants are a central theme for both. Is the conventional distinction between conditional and unconditional covenants valid?

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[27] Cf., e.g., Vannoy, "Samuel," 705a; Kelly, "Samuel," 718b.

[28] See Vannoy, "Samuel," 705; Satterthwaite, "Samuel," 179b–80a, 182a; Kelly, "Samuel," 718b.

[29] Cf. the brief overview of the use of Samuel in political theology in Kelly, "Samuel," 720.

Third, Amos proclaims more than once that God's judgment on Israel is irrevocable and that he will no longer spare his people (Amos 2:6; 7:8; 8:2; cf. also 8:11–12). He also gives voice to the hope that the Israelites may live and receive God's grace if they really seek him, love what is good, and maintain justice (Amos 5:4–6, 14–15). Does this suggest that notwithstanding his strong affirmations about the inevitability of judgment, it is always possible to escape through repentance? In support of this idea, one could point to Jeremiah 18:7–8, which says that if a nation turns from evil, God will indeed relent of the disaster with which he has threatened it. Conversely, 2 Kings 23:25–27 says that even the unrivaled faithfulness of King Josiah did not drive God to turn from his burning anger provoked by the sins of Josiah's grandfather Manasseh. What, then, does the Old Testament teach about the theme of repentance and judgment: can one always count on God's compassion if one breaks with evil?

Fourth, the last example builds on the previous one, by narrowing down the issue to the apparent discrepancy between the prophetic messages of Jonah and Nahum regarding the fate of Nineveh. According to Jonah 3:10, when God saw how the Ninevites turned from their evil way, he relented from the disaster announced by his prophet. He always reserves the right to have mercy upon such a great city, with so many ordinary people and so much cattle (Jonah 4:10). By contrast, Nahum's message does not refer to this possibility. Instead, it proclaims God's resolute intention to take vengeance on and destroy the proud capital of the enemies of his people. How can one reconcile these two perspectives on God's attitude towards Nineveh? Is Jonah written in response to Nahum, to temper its message of doom?[30] If so, how does one account for the fact that Nahum comes after Jonah in the canon, which rather suggests the opposite?

IV. *Exploring a More Redemptive-Historical Approach*

Could paying closer attention to the redemptive-historical context help in finding solid solutions to these biblical-theological issues? I now review them again in order to show to what extent a close consideration of the historical context can contribute to a better understanding of the theological messages of Old Testament books.

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[30] Thus Stephen G. Dempster, "Prophetic Books," in *NDBT*, 125a; cf. also Thomas Renz, "Nahum, Book of," in *DTIB*, 527b.

1. *The Apparent Rejection of Kingship in 1 Samuel*

In Deuteronomy 17:14–20, Moses says that when the people of Israel have taken possession of the promised land and settled in it, they may have a king if they desire so. The king, however, had to be totally different from what was usual in the ancient Near East. He would neither be allowed to set up a strong army—at the price of bringing the people back to Egypt, the house of slavery— nor to acquire a vast harem. Instead, he would have to study the *Torah* of Moses throughout his life, in order to keep the commandments of the LORD. In other words, a king who could help the people was a person with special knowledge of God's will, not a commander-in-chief always out on enlarging his power.

According to Joshua 21:43, the ideal situation anticipated in Deuteronomy 17:14a had materialized: the Israelites had taken possession of the land and settled in it. However, history developed in a way opposed to what Moses had wished. Time and again, the people forsook the LORD and served other gods. The religious and moral chaos of those days made it clear that they needed a king *like the one described by Moses* (cf. Judg 17:6; 21:25). Their apostasy resulted in oppression by hostile nations living around them, but when they cried out to the LORD for help, he delivered them by raising judges. After Gideon had saved them, they expressed for the first time their desire for a king. However, when they asked Gideon to become their king, they did not do so because they wanted him to lead them according to the *Torah*, but because he had delivered them from the Midianites (Judg 8:22). Gideon refused, but after his death, his son Abimelech became king at Shechem, which was a terrible experience (Judg 9).

Samuel would be the last judge. In his days, it became clear once again that the Israelites did not need a king to be saved from their enemies. For that purpose, it sufficed that they put away the idols, confessed their sins, performed rituals including making a sacrifice, and had Samuel pray on their behalf. When they did these things, God promptly responded by destroying the Philistines (1 Sam 7). Nevertheless, when Samuel had become old, they asked him to appoint a king for them. The king they had in mind would be such that they could become a nation like the others. He would be their commander-in-chief and fight their battles (1 Sam 8:20). They were even willing to pay the highest price: the king could take everything he wanted from them and make them his slaves (1 Sam 8:11–19). The king they desired was different from the one that Moses had in mind and had allowed to the people. They had not taken to heart the lessons of the period recorded in Judges, nor those of the recent events related in 1 Samuel 7. They did not see that their real problem was not defense but disobedience and apostasy.

Instead of asking for a leader who would teach and guide them the ways of God, they desired a king because that was the best way to be free from their enemies and live safely. They refused to trust in the Lord, who was willing to give them freedom and safety and was strong enough to do this by his power. Thus, he rightly affirmed that by asking a king, they had rejected him as their king over them (1 Sam 8:7; cf. also 1 Sam 10:18–19).

It follows that the question at the heart of this part of 1 Samuel is not whether the monarchy would be a good political system for Israel. As is apparent from 1 Samuel 12:14–15, the central question was: does Israel want to listen to the Lord and obey his will? They needed a king, first of all, to help them to remain faithful and obedient to God. As the period of the judges had amply demonstrated, there was a real risk that the promises of the covenant made at Sinai and renewed in the land of Moab would not materialize (cf. Deut 29:1 [28:69]). The safe and prosperous life of Israel in Canaan, which was meant as an important step towards the restoration of God's living with people as in the garden of Eden, was really in danger. God's project was threatened. Therefore, they needed a king, and God accepted their request despite all its flaws, by first giving Saul as a king according to their own desires, and next David, who really was a good shepherd for the people (cf. Ps 78:70–72).

Accordingly, as regards the theological message for today's church, this element from Samuel reminds us of the God's marvelous wisdom and providence. His project did not fail because of the repetitive apostasy of his people, far from that. He could even make use of a request implying his own rejection, to provide for what they needed and to continue his work towards the fulfillment of his promises (including the coming of kings from Abraham and Jacob; cf. Gen. 17:6; 35:11). Furthermore, the leaders that the people of God need are not those who excel in power or anything that commonly makes them attractive for our contemporaries. Their first duty is to keep the church on the track towards salvation by humbly studying the Word of God and teaching it to the people.

2. *Davidic Kingship and Covenant*

After David had become king over all Israel, he decided to transport the ark—the symbol of the royal presence of the Lord among his people (cf. Jer 3:16–17)— to his new capital, Jerusalem. During the festivities celebrating the arrival of the ark, David showed his willingness not to exalt himself above his fellow Israelites, in line with Deuteronomy 17:20 and in contrast with Saul (2 Sam 6:20–22). Next, he wanted to honor the ark by building a house for it. God replied that he would first build a house for David. This

meant that David's own son would succeed him. God would firmly establish his kingship, and he would build a house for the name of the LORD. David's son and successor would be as a son to God, whom God would discipline if he committed iniquity. Even then, God would not withdraw his steadfast love from him, as he had done with Saul but would establish David's royal house and kingship forever (2 Sam 7:11b–16).

When David was about to die, he reminded his successor, Solomon, of this promise. In words that recall Deuteronomy, he said to Solomon that his kingship would prosper if he kept the commandments of the LORD. Then God would fulfill his promise that David would never lack a son on the throne of Israel (1 Kgs 2:1–4) if his sons walked faithfully before him with all their heart and soul. David emphasizes the conditions attached to God's promise more than God himself had done in 2 Samuel 7. However, his interpretation is confirmed in 1 Kings 9:4–5, where God expresses himself in similar terms. How can one account for the difference?

The books of Samuel and Kings do not offer an explicit explanation but only a clue in 1 Samuel 2:30. There a prophet says to Eli the priest that God would certainly not fulfill the promise he made to his family that they would always serve him as priests. From this point onward, readers of Samuel know that God reserves the right to annul an everlasting promise if the recipients fail to meet his expectations. If David was familiar with this event, he was aware of the consequences for the fulfillment of God's promise, which might follow grave sins. Therefore, one can imagine that after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed Uriah, he may have found it necessary to emphasize more what God expected from him and his offspring.[31]

David's fear came true. Since Solomon became unfaithful at the end of his life, his son Rehoboam lost the throne of all Israel. He and his successors only reigned over Judah and Jerusalem. During several centuries, God kept his promise only by not taking this "lamp" from David's royal dynasty (1 Kgs 11:36; 2 Kgs 8:19). However, this part also seemed to have come to an end when the Babylonians deprived David's descendants of their kingship and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. In the end, however, God fulfilled the promise by sending his own Son as the ultimate and faithful Davidic king.

It follows that the unconditional aspect of God's promise to David related to God's decision never to replace his dynasty by another one, as he had

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[31] For more details on the relation between 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Kings 2, see Gert Kwakkel, "The Conditional Dynastic Promise in 1 Kings 2:4," in *Reading and Listening: Meeting One God in Many Texts; Festschrift for Eric Peels on the Occasion of His 25th Jubilee as Professor of Old Testament Studies*, ed. Jaap Dekker and Gert Kwakkel, ACE BTSup 16 (Bergambacht: 2VM, 2018), 79–87.

done with Saul and later with Jeroboam, Baasha, and Jehu. For the rest, the promise was conditional: David's descendants would only prosper and reign over all Israel or Judah themselves if they respected God's commandments.[32]

Coming to the theological message, the first aspect is the strong link between the two houses: the royal dynasty and the temple. This is an essential part of 2 Samuel 7, as well as Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8 (cf. Ps 132). Israel needed kings like David and Solomon to protect the sanctuary against the decline described at the beginning of 1 Samuel, which had led to the loss of the ark. Once again, a king appears to be necessary for God to fulfill his purpose of dwelling among his people. In the end, it did not work, for even God's presence in Solomon's temple with its sacrifices and other rituals did not suffice to keep the kings themselves on the right track.[33]

Secondly, when read in its historical context, the story of God's promise to David shows how God interacts with people, in particular those whom he charges with a special task. The relationship intensifies over time, as can be seen in 2 Samuel 7, where God responds to David's zeal for the ark. Moreover, the promises of this chapter concentrate on David's son Solomon and his building of the temple, without making the fulfillment of the core of the promise of an everlasting dynasty conditional. Subsequent passages focus more on later descendants of David and are more explicit about the conditions, probably in connection with what had happened in the meantime.

Finally, these passages show that God's promises must be received by faith and in obedience. This is so obvious that there is no need to say it every time, though God may also make it explicit later when circumstances require.

3. *Judgment or Mercy in Amos*

Amos's prophecies primarily address the northern tribes when they had lived outside the Davidic kingdom and away from the temple in Jerusalem for about two centuries. Nevertheless, these two "houses" hold a prominent place in the book. Amos 1:2 says that "the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem," thus drawing attention to the fact that Solomon's temple is still his dwelling place among his people, even for those living in the North. Amos 9:11 announces the restoration of David's house as the

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[32] For a succinct nuanced discussion of the topic, see Vannoy, "Samuel," 708a.

[33] For this paragraph and this whole section, I have benefited much from Henk de Jong, *Van Oud naar Nieuw: De ontwikkelingsgang van het Oude naar het Nieuwe Testament* (From Old to New: The Progressive Development from the Old to the New Testament; Kampen: Kok, 2002), esp. chs. 1 and 2. For the role of the temple, see also Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

first step towards Israel's bright future. Thus, the two "houses" figure at the beginning and the end of the book, forming an *inclusio* encompassing all other oracles.

Israel's separation from David and Jerusalem was due to Solomon's infidelity, but also corresponded to their own choice. Although they were outside the mainstream of the fulfillment of his project, God had not abandoned them. At the same time, their conduct demonstrated how hard it was to remain faithful to him in such conditions. That may explain why Amos offers them so little prospect, affirming that God's irrevocable judgment will soon put an end to the existence of their nation, long before the downfall of Judah.[34]

The theological import of all this is that the life of God's people and the fulfillment of his promises cannot be guaranteed for those who prefer to live apart from the Davidic king and God's dwelling place. Even if it is possible to be saved living in such conditions, one really runs the risk of missing the boat of salvation. Just as this message may have encouraged the Judeans to appreciate their privileges, it should convince people of our time to seek their life in him who is the Davidic king and the fulfillment of the temple (cf. Matt 12:6; John 2:19–21).

So far, closer attention to the relation between a biblical book and the history of redemption seems to be fruitful. It is doubtful that this also holds for the apparent tension between Amos's proclamations of irrevocable doom and the call for conversion as a possible means of escape (Amos 5:4–6, 14–15). One way out of the problem may be to date these prophecies before or in the same period as the first two visions in Amos 7:1–4, when it was still possible for the prophet to avert judgment. Still, it is more natural to account for the difference in terms of prophetical rhetoric. An oracle of irrevocable doom warns those hearing it not to entertain the illusion of easy escape. There may be a moment at which God decides not to change his mind anymore but to punish even his own people, whatever they do. The serious nature of this element is given its due by the phrase "it may be," which goes with the call for conversion in Amos 5:15 (cf. also Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9; Zeph 2:3). For their part, such calls, which still open up the possibility of escape, do not encourage illusions, but instead argue against those who would use the message of irrevocable doom as a pretext for their unwillingness to change their lives.

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[34] Admittedly, Amos 2:4–6 proclaims Judah's irrevocable doom too. If one rejects the fairly common view that the passage is a later addition, it remains that Amos's prophecies address primarily the northern kingdom.

4. *Jonah and Nahum and Niniveh's Fate*

Similarly, the difference between Jonah and Nahum as regards their message on Nineveh might relate to what the city had done between the era of Jonah (most probably the eighth century BC; cf. 2 Kgs 14:25) and that of Nahum (i.e., between the fall of Thebes in Egypt in 663 and that of Nineveh in 612 BC; cf. Nah 3:8–10). It makes at least as much sense, however, to account for it in connection with the different purposes of these books.

Although Nahum addresses Nineveh, his prophecies are directed no less to the people of Judah, whereas the story of Jonah mainly concerns Israel. The purpose of Jonah is to warn the Israelites not to resent God's compassion for others, as this is the only basis of life for them as much as for all other sinners, irrespective of their belonging to God's people. As for Nahum, his task was to comfort the people of God, by telling that God had not forsaken them but would certainly intervene against his and their enemies and eliminate them. In that connection, it was not useful to speculate about a possible conversion of the Ninevites.

Conclusion

It turns out that paying close attention to the redemptive-historical context of the contents of Old Testament books can yield fresh insights that may remain hidden for those who primarily focus on thematic elements. It would, however, be an exaggeration to state that this is always true. In some cases, the benefit of the approach explored in this study mainly consists in seeing the same things more clearly or in refining the interpretation of the message of the biblical books under scrutiny. Furthermore, it could be established that the approach may protect biblical theologians against asking the wrong questions. In short, it is a helpful and a necessary perspective worth considering by all who study the Old Testament, in order to find its theological message for today.

Too Many to Choose from? The English Bible Translation Controversy

LANE KEISTER

Abstract

There are too many English translations in existence, but the church need not limit herself to just one. Five or six translations would all be appropriate for the church to use, either for worship or individual use. This article examines four preliminary issues: the New Testament text-critical issues underlying various translations, the various translation philosophies, the literary characteristics of good English, and gender inclusivity in translation. Then follows an examination of various translations, with an eye towards churchly and individual use.

I. *Preliminary Issues*

The text-critical issue can be rather simply stated: does the translation in question follow the *Textus Receptus*/Majority Text, or does it follow the eclectic text tradition of Nestle-Aland? The name *Textus Receptus* means "the received text," a publication of the Greek New Testament by Stephanus in 1550. The Majority Text differs little from the *Textus Receptus*. It does, however, differ in certain places. The term *Majority Text* refers to a text-critical philosophy that what the majority of the manuscripts say is the original reading. The eclectic text (such as the Nestle-Aland) weighs the value of ancient manuscripts

according to date, relation to other manuscripts, point of origin, and degree of purity. Most modern translations that follow the Nestle-Aland text (which rejects the longer ending of Mark and the pericope of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53–8:11, known as the *pericope adulterae*) will still print a translation of those two texts and enclose the passages with double brackets and a note explaining that some early manuscripts do not include the passages. While the differences between the competing underlying texts are significant, they do not rise to the level of challenging any major doctrine that is established from Scripture.[1] Furthermore, the practice of modern versions in including the longer ending of Mark and the *pericope adulterae* in brackets minimizes the differences still more. Twisting the words of Scripture by means of mistranslation does far more harm to God's Word than choosing either the *Textus Receptus* or Nestle-Aland as a textual basis.[2]

The second preliminary topic is translation philosophy. There are four discernibly different translation philosophies on offer, if it is desirable to categorize (formal equivalence, loose formal equivalence or essentially literal, dynamic equivalence, and optimal equivalence). Formal equivalence means "word for word." A word in the source language (Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, in the case of the Bible) is matched with the nearest equivalent in the target language (English in this case). This translation philosophy depends almost entirely on the idea that meaning is focused on the level of the individual word. The virtue of this philosophy is that such translations can achieve great transparency to the source language. The deficiency is that if it is not done well, it can result in stilted English. Also, idiomatic expressions can suffer greatly in this kind of translation philosophy. The most extreme examples of such biblical translations are the New American Standard Bible and the American Standard Version.

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[1] See Moisés Silva, *God, Language, and Scripture, in Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 270–73; and John Skilton, "The Transmission of the Scriptures," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 137–87, esp. 154–57.

[2] Excellent discussions of the text-critical issues between the two abound. See Dean John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Collingswood, NJ: Dean Burgon Society Press Reprint, 2000); D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 15–78; Gordon Fee and Mark Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 111–18; Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Ron Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Bible Translations* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2009), 227–38; James White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 149–91, 251–71.

The second kind of translation philosophy is a more relaxed formal equivalence, an essentially literal approach. This philosophy is very similar to the formal equivalence, except that it pays more attention to the existence of idiomatic expressions that might not translate as well from source to target language. If an idiomatic expression is present, the essentially literal approach will abandon literalness in favor of getting the meaning of the phrase across. Many translations fall into this category, including the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New King James Version, and the English Standard Version (ESV).

The third translation philosophy is dynamic equivalence. Often called "thought-for-thought," this translation philosophy holds that the focus of meaning is at the phrase level, and not so much at the word level. This philosophy gained near-supremacy in translations after the work of Eugene Nida[3] and has to some extent influenced almost every translation that emerged after his work. The strengths of this philosophy are considerable: it recognizes more than any other that the context determines what a word means and that words only have meaning in context. It has several weaknesses, however. Firstly, it tends to downplay that individual words can have specific referents. If the word is "propitiation," then it should be translated "propitiation," not "satisfaction," even if there is some overlap in meaning between the two terms. Secondly, dynamic equivalence quite often eliminates ambiguity in the text. It is usually so focused on gaining a clear meaning from the text that when the text is not as clear, possible interpretations are unnecessarily eliminated.

Optimal equivalence is perhaps the most sophisticated translation philosophy, though it is not obscure.[4] Optimal equivalence recognizes that every level of the text has something to contribute to the meaning. Words can have meanings (but only in context!), phrases have meaning, clauses have meaning, sentences have meaning, paragraphs have meaning, chapters have meaning, books have meaning, the canon has meaning. All of these levels need to be taken into account in the translation process.[5] This approach is by far the best translation philosophy. It refuses to jettison the importance of individual words (as the dynamic equivalence philosophy is so prone to

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[3] Eugene Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964); Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969).

[4] While not officially recognized by scholarship so far as a separate philosophy, it deserves a place at the table.

[5] The context of the whole canon does not always bear directly on the translation of individual verses. Likewise, the larger levels of context (book, book group, and canon) will often bear only indirectly on the translation of individual passages.

do), without relegating the main weight of meaning to the word level (as the formal equivalence philosophies tend to do). There is a healthy reciprocity between a word and its context(s), and neither level has priority, but rather mutually informs each other. The optimal equivalence model has only been articulated recently, and mostly in response to the excesses of both formal and dynamic equivalence.[6] The Holman Christian Standard Bible and its major revision, the Christian Standard Bible, are the only two translations that explicitly adopt this philosophy—indeed, the nomenclature was coined by these translators.

The third issue is the literary quality of good English. Many different opinions exist as to the proper kind of English that should characterize a translation of the Bible. Should the Bible be a high literary work, similar to Shakespeare? Should the Bible speak in everyday language? Should there be a mixture of these ideas? The Bible consists of many different kinds of literature. History, poetry, instruction, letter, sermon, apocalyptic, and various subsets of these are prominent in Scripture. Some of these genres have a higher literary style than others. For example, poetry is perhaps the highest literary genre of all. Letters, however, are written in much less formal language, more everyday language. Therefore, it would seem appropriate to make the letters of Paul seem a bit less formal than the Psalms. History writing is somewhere in between, with differences even between various history writers in the Bible. Luke's Greek style, for instance, is more formal Greek than John's more Hebraic style. It would seem appropriate, then, to match the literary style of the source language to the target language.

The fourth issue is the modern gender-inclusivity debate.[7] Although the New Revised Standard Version (published in 1989) had thoroughly rewritten the Bible in order to cater to modern opinions on gender inclusivity, the debate only really got heated in evangelical circles when Zondervan decided to revise the New International Version along gender-inclusive lines (late 1990s and early 2000s).[8] The gender-neutral New International Version (Today's New International Version) was published in 2005, and after 2012, Zondervan would not allow anyone else to use the original 1984 version. What is particularly problematic is that the New International Version (NIV) was republished in 2011 without any indication of it being a new edition, and yet it is only a slight modification of the gender-neutral version,

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[6] See the introduction to the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

[7] The definitive work on the subject is Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

[8] For an excellent history of the controversy, see ibid., 13–35.

not a republication of the original 1984 version. Christians buying an NIV today, then, are not obtaining the original version but rather a modern gender-inclusive one.

This chain of events initially caused a rather large backlash against the NIV, with many churches changing to the ESV or some other translation. The claims of Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem concerning gender-inclusivity are well worth pondering. Will the church bow to the secular feminists and change the teaching of the Bible? If, however, supposedly patriarchal language is no longer acceptable, then why was it acceptable before in the process of God's inspiration of the text? Poythress and Grudem admit that some changes are worthwhile. If, for instance, the plural Greek *anthropoi* ("humans") refers to both men and women in context, there should be no objection to translating the noun as "humans" or "people." Generic "men" is accurate as well. As is well known, however, gender-inclusive translations do not stop with these kinds of changes. They object to generic "he," which creates all sorts of problems. The only useful substitutes are the pedantic "one" or the distorting "they." Changing singulars into plurals does not clarify the meaning of the original. Furthermore, as Poythress and Grudem note, only the generic references to males are changed in the Bible, never the generic references to females.[9] This betrays a prejudice against maleness that has nothing to do with accuracy in Bible translation. While some of the translations surveyed below will be gender-inclusive, none of the translations making the final cut will be.

To prove that there are too many English translations is straightforward, once it is remembered that English is not the only language spoken in the world today. Why should Christians pay for so many new English translations when so many of the world's languages do not have a Bible at all? The answer, of course, is money. There is a market for English-language Bibles that dwarfs most other languages. However, the church has a duty according to the Great Commission to bring the Bible to every tongue, nation, and language. Indeed, since God speaks in human language in the Bible, the church should make sure that God speaks in every human language.

The proliferation of English translations has had an exceedingly negative effect: the English-speaking world no longer has a united scriptural consciousness. People cannot allude to Scripture in subtle ways and know that the recipients will catch the allusion. Furthermore, the differences in translations are fuel for the postmodern claim that no one has access to the truth and that everything is simply a matter of one's own interpretation. The

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9   See ibid., 108–9, adducing Psalm 113:7; Matthew 25:1–13; Luke 13:20–21; 15:8–10 as examples of passages that refer to women but certainly have application to men as well.

postmodern can say, "You have your Bible, and I have mine." It hurts the unity of the church, as even within denominations different churches will use different translations, and confusion often results.

This argument must be nuanced. New English translations should not stop altogether for the following two reasons. Firstly, the English language does change over time. Secondly, new English translations can be quite useful to those who are translating the Bible into foreign languages, if that translator knows English well.

Limiting the number of translations in this survey is necessary. Many worthy efforts by single authors will not come into view. Only candidates for being a church Bible will come into consideration. These would be translations that were made over time by a committee and that have some influence today.

II. *Survey of Translations*

1. *King James Version*

Undoubtedly, the King James Version (1611) is the most influential English translation of all time.[10] It held sway over most of the entire English-speaking world from 1611 until the Revised Version of 1885 (slightly altered and published in America as the American Standard Version). However, many churches did not switch over to these revisions due to the objections raised against them.[11] Many churches and individuals continue to read the King James as their primary Bible. It was still the second-best-selling translation in 2016, and the fourth-best-selling translation in 2017.[12]

The textual basis for the King James New Testament is the *Textus Receptus*. This delights some people and not others. The stance taken here is that both the *Textus Receptus* and the Nestle-Aland can be called the Word of God, as can the Majority Text. Nevertheless, there are places where the King James Version follows the *Textus Receptus* where it should not.[13]

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[10] Many histories detail the process by which it came about. The most accessible is Leland Ryken's excellent volume, *The Legacy of the King James Bible: Celebrating 400 Years of the Most Influential Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). More scholarly and detailed is David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). However, the definitive history of English translations as a whole must be David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), who spends 73 pages detailing the origin and influence of the King James Bible.

[11] Burgon was probably the most vocal critic of the RV, but he was by no means the only one.

[12] According to the following websites: for 2016, http://blog.rose-publishing.com/2016/09/10/top-bible-translations-2016/#.Wh9JGkqnGM8; for 2017, http://christianbookexpo.com/bestseller/translations.php?id=1117.

[13] For a good list and evaluation, see Jack Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 41–44. The sections on

The translation philosophy of the King James has been variously assessed. On a spectrum, it lies somewhere between loose formal equivalency and optimal equivalency. There is a freedom of rendering that is not slavishly devoted to having only one English word translate one biblical-language word, as there is a recognition by the translators that good English will employ the riches of the English language.

The literary quality of the King James Version sets it apart from all other translations. It is famous for its rhythm, its cadence, its majesty, its force of expression, its memorable turn of phrase, and many other admirable literary qualities. The exceptions to this good literary style are twofold. Firstly, it uses the word "and" to start way too many verses and sentences. The English conjunction "and" is meant to connect two thoughts or two items in a list. The Hebrew *waw* consecutive does not have this specific connective property. Usually, a *wayyiqtol* only has as its purpose a continuation of the narrative. Printing verses in paragraphs, or using "so" or "then," is quite an adequate translation of *wayyiqtol*. Similarly, the Greek *de* and *kai* are, most of the time, simply not as strong a connective as English "and." Any English textbook will explain why it is not good English style to begin sentences with conjunctions on a regular basis. Unfortunately, this problem plagues the revisions that follow the King James, including the Revised Version/American Standard Version, Revised Standard Version (though reduced), New King James Version, and ESV. (The New Revision Standard Version, for all its other serious faults, does much better on this particular score, though it is unacceptable on other grounds.) This problem can be alleviated by simply omitting the "ands" during public reading.

The second stylistic problem is the archaic forms of expression. Of course, they were not archaic in 1611. However, these have led to a misinterpretation of the King James style as a whole. When the King James translators were at work, they used the standard English of 1611, not a high style. It was normal English. There is a noticeable leap into a higher style going from the King James to Shakespeare. A comparison between the two reveals that the King James is far simpler. Although literary, it was written in the spoken English of 1611.

The King James Bible, whatever its faults, is still one of the very best translations of the Bible ever made in any language, and deserves remembrance and honor. Certainly, churches should still consider using it as their translation, especially if the majority of the people in a given church are of

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mistranslations (44–48) and archaisms (48–61) are also worthy of consideration, though some of his conclusions are questionable.

an older generation. However, this recommendation does not imply endorsement of the various King-James-Onlyisms.[14]

2. *Revised Version/American Standard Version*

As the American Standard Version (1901) can be considered an American version of the Revised Version (1881–1885), they will be treated together.[15] The textual basis for both versions in the New Testament was the newly released Greek edition by Westcott and Hort. While many regarded their text as an improvement over the *Textus Receptus*, some resisted its influence. Wescott and Hort were far too slavishly devoted to the two fourth-century codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, and significant refinements to their methods have occurred.

The translation philosophy of the Revised Version and the American Standard Version is formal equivalence, and these versions employ periphrastic translation far more rarely than does the King James. As such, the Revised and the American Standard Version represent a step towards more literalness, not less. This is evident in that far fewer English words translate the same Greek or Hebrew word than in the King James Version: a gain in consistency, but a loss in artistic expression. The verdict of Charles Spurgeon sums it up very well: "Strong in Greek, but weak in English."[16] F. F. Bruce notes a helpful distinction in translation philosophy between the Cambridge and Oxford schools at the time, saying that Oxford was noted for a more periphrastic translation philosophy that aimed for the sense without slavish adherence to formal equivalence, whereas Cambridge was famous for its literalness. The Cambridge mindset characterized the Revised Version.[17] The Old Testament translation of the revisions is quite different from that of the New Testament; it offers an advance on the King James in accuracy, given improvements in understanding of Semitic languages in general, and Hebrew more particularly, without as much of the blockish school-boy feel of the New Testament.[18]

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[14] See Carson, *The King James Version Debate*, and White, *The King James Only Controversy*.

[15] Lewis, *The English Bible From KJV to NIV*, 69. For histories and analyses of the RV/ASV, see Burgon's, *The Revision Revised*; F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 135–52; Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV*, 69–105; Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 99–104; Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 683–700, 735–37; David Dewey, *A User's Guide to Bible Translations: Making the Most of Different Versions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 135–37.

[16] Cited in Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV*, 76.

[17] Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 142.

[18] Ibid., 144–47.

3. *Revised Standard Version*

In the 1930s and 1940s, with advances in knowledge of the languages, as well as manuscript discoveries, it became evident that there was a need for further revision. The Revised Standard Version is not a *de novo* translation, and its textual basis is similar to that of the Revised and American Standard Versions, except that a more eclectic approach is visible in its text-critical decisions. The seventeenth edition of Nestle-Aland is the basis for the New Testament of the Revised Standard Version. The longer ending of Mark and the *pericope adulterae* were put back into the text (they were absent from the previous versions), but with spacing and notes, as most modern translations now do. It is not, however, primarily in the text-critical realm that the main differences arose.

With the Revised Standard Version, the translation philosophy actually went back more to the King James style of translating. The reduction in strict formal equivalency and increase in loose formal equivalency resulted in better English style, but not necessarily more accurate renditions. Isaiah 7:14 and Romans 9:5 are obvious examples here, although Bruce is correct to caution people against accusations that the Isaiah 7:14 passage was altered for ideological reasons, given the clear support of the virgin birth in the New Testament texts.[19] Less defensible is its translation of Romans 9:5, which removes a reference to Jesus as God that is clear in the Greek. The discussions about this revision got heated in evangelical circles, as many people believed that an agenda drove some of these changes.

It is in the literary realm, however, that the most obvious differences with previous translations surface. The Revised Standard Version replaced "thees" and "thous" with simple "you."[20] The "eth" on the ends of verbs became "s." Archaic forms fell by the wayside in large numbers. This was a truly modern translation in more than one sense: it had some modernistic agendas, but was also a translation seeking to speak to modern man.

The Revised Standard Version sold well and had enormous influence, far greater than the Revised and American Standard Versions. However, because of its agenda, it would never have the impact that the King James had.

4. *New English Bible*

For the first time in history, a committee-based translation came about not as the result of revising some previous work, but from scratch. The New

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[19] Ibid., 198.

[20] Of course, this created intelligibility problems, as "you" cannot bear the weight of distinguishing between singular and plural, a fact well documented by Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 189.

English Bible (1970) is a British product. Based on the eclectic principle in the New Testament, it had a similar text basis as the Revised Standard Version. However, in the Old Testament, it made use of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek translations of the Hebrew to make many emendations, for which it was criticized.

The translation philosophy of the New English Bible is far more periphrastic than any previous translation. In some places, however, mistranslation greatly affects its quality. It translates Genesis 1:1–2 in such a way as to deny creation *ex nihilo*. Isaiah 7:14 translates as "A young woman is with child." (For any translation, incidentally, that does not use the word "virgin," how is it that this could possibly be a sign?) Romans 9:5 is mistranslated as well. There seems to be a liberalizing bias to this translation.

The style of the New English Bible, however, is quite beautiful. It is excellent literary English, as many have recognized (and also in its revision, the Revised English Bible). It is mostly modern English, with a few "thees" and "thous" when the text addresses God.

Some of the shortcomings of this translation were altered in the Revised English Bible. Genesis 1:1, for instance, reads in the more traditional way, though Romans 9:5 is still mistranslated, and Isaiah 7:14 is still problematic. It removed the "thees" and "thous" and reduced the number of conjectural emendations on the basis of the Septuagint.[21] It introduced some gender-inclusive language. As paraphrases go, however, it has a high reputation.

5. *New American Standard Bible*

The New American Standard Bible (and its update in 1995) offers a translation based on the Masoretic Text in the Old Testament (rejecting all emendations) and the Nestle-Aland text in the New Testament. The work came about as conservatives wanted an update to the American Standard Version that did not liberalize the text as the Revised Standard Version had done.

The translation philosophy is extremely literal, to the point of woodenness in places. There is a recognition of idioms, but probably not as many as should be recognized. For instance, the rendering of Paul's famous denial *mē genoito* as "may it never be" is an overly literal translation that fails to convey the force of the expression. Closer is something like "Perish the thought!" or the New English Translation/Christian Standard Bible rendering "Absolutely not!"

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[21] See Dewey, *A User's Guide to Bible Translations*, 169.

Its literary qualities are marred to a significant extent by this overly literal translation philosophy. Here it becomes obvious how much a translation philosophy affects the literary outcome. The ideal is to have good English render the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek accurately. However, as in the other King James-related translations/revisions, the New American Standard Bible uses the English "and" far too much in rendering Hebrew *waw* and Greek *de* and *kai*.

The New American Standard Bible is free (and remains free) of gender-inclusive translation practices, even in the 1995 update. While it is not ideal in many ways, it remains one of the most trusted translations and one remarkably free from bias. It is therefore one of the five recommended English translations for churches.

6. *New International Version*

The NIV (original version 1984) is based for the New Testament on the Nestle-Aland tradition of manuscripts and is a mostly "thought for thought" or dynamic equivalence translation. It was the first translation that could significantly challenge the King James for first place in the hearts of English-speaking Christians. The combination of readability, decent English, relatively accurate renderings with no gender-inclusivity (at first), and smooth transitions made it very popular and still make it one of the best private reading Bibles on the market. However, it is less suitable for public preaching and teaching, as it makes too many decisions for the preacher. One of the worst instances occurs in John 11:5–6, which should read something like: "Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus. Therefore, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days." The NIV, however, reads "Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick …" The original Greek is quite clear: Jesus's love for Lazarus's family was the *cause* of his delay in returning, so that they would see his glory in raising Lazarus from the dead. The NIV's translation, however, makes the cause of Jesus's delay to be some unknown thing that obviously *over-rode* his love for the Lazarus family.

The history of the NIV is fraught with somewhat underhanded tactics by Zondervan.[22] Just the most obvious is that a revised, gender-inclusive NIV is now published today without any markers telling the public that it is a revised version. Indeed, the original 1984 NIV is no longer published by Zondervan at all.[23]

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[22] For a detailed history, see Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 13–34.

[23] Robert Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Carlisle, PA:

7. *New King James Version*

Some conservatives were unhappy with the way the King James Bible had been revised through the Revised and American Standard Versions-Revised Standard Version chain. These had not given them what they really wanted: an updating of the King James that sought to retain its good qualities while updating the archaic forms of speech. Furthermore, they did not like the textual swing away from the received text. By contrast, the textual basis of the New Testament of the New King James Version (1982) is the same *Textus Receptus* upon which the King James was based, with one rather major exception: the editors decided to make marginal notes where the Nestle-Aland differed from the received text.

The translation philosophy is the same as that of the King James, somewhat less literal than the Revised and American Standard Versions, but a bit more literal than the Revised Standard Version. The editors themselves call it a "complete equivalence." The term seems to mean to convey as much of the original as possible. However, there is no definition of what that means, at least not in the preface to the New King James Version. It contains no trace of liberal or feminist bias, and traditional theological terms remain.

Some have criticized this translation for not revising the style of language enough.[24] However, all the most obvious archaisms were removed, such as "thees" and "thous," "eths" on the ends of verbs, and words changed out that no longer mean what they used to mean (such as changing "prevent" to "awake" in Psalm 119:148). As with all the other King James-genetics translations, however, the problem with "and" persists.

Overall, the translation must be judged a success. For anyone who grew up on the King James Bible, the New King James Version is not a shock. It is recommended as one of the best translations available for personal and public, liturgical use.

8. *New Revised Standard Bible*

A revision of the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version (1989–1990) is a loosely formal equivalent translation that updates

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Banner of Truth Trust, 1989) is a thoughtful critique of various aspects of the NIV's translation technique. He argues that dynamic equivalence violates the doctrine of plenary inspiration (68–69). While I share many of his critiques, I do not share his opinion on dynamic equivalence, since all translations are a paraphrase to a certain extent.

[24] See, e.g., Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV*, 350. Lewis quotes several writers to the effect that the New King James Version does not really match the English of any age. That may be strictly true. However, revising the King James Version while still being able to keep "King James" in the title of the translation was going to result in precisely that outcome anyway. The aim was to keep of the King James language what they could, and the result is quite readable.

the language to modern English, removes most gender-specific references —it was the first attempt at a gender-inclusive translation—and displays clear liberalizing tendencies. The textual basis in the New Testament is the Nestle-Aland text.

Its translation philosophy is "as literal as possible, as free as necessary."[25] However, it has a firmly left-leaning tendency, as can be seen in the following litmus test passages. In Genesis 1, the translation denies creation *ex nihilo*. In Isaiah 7:14, the wording is "young woman" instead of "virgin." Romans 9:5's translation obscures a clear reference to the deity of Christ. Further-more, the whole book of Proverbs is addressed to the father's "child" instead of "son," thus obscuring the references to Lady Wisdom as being a desirable "woman" to pursue.

It has become the standard scholarly translation for mainline scholars, as well as the standard Bible for mainline denominations. Its gender-inclusivity has resulted in distortions of the biblical text. Due to its thoroughgoing rejection of generic "he," the New Revised Standard Version pluralizes texts that need to be singular in order to point out the individual relationships that God has with people.[26] This translation cannot be recommended for church or private use.

9. *New Living Translation*

Unlike the first Living Bible, which was a paraphrase of a translation, not a translation of the original languages, the New Living Translation (1996) is a translation of the original languages done by a committee. Its New Testa-ment textual basis is Nestle-Aland.

The translation philosophy of the New Living Translation is a fairly thoroughgoing dynamic equivalence, going beyond the NIV in its embrace of dynamic equivalence. However, there does not seem to be much in the way of liberal bias. Genesis 1:1 affirms creation *ex nihilo*, Isaiah 7:14 trans-lates *'almah* as "virgin," and Romans 9:5 very clearly affirms the deity of Christ.

There is a moderate amount of gender-inclusive language. However, it is mostly limited to removal of generic "he." John 14:23 demonstrates (as with the New Revised Standard Version) the problems of substituting plurals for singulars. Pronouns referring to God are still male. In general, the transla-tion is one of the best dynamic equivalent productions. However, it cannot be recommended as a church's first choice, for two reasons. Firstly, even

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[25] Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Bible Translations*, 119.
[26] Ibid., 124, citing John 14:23 as an example.

the moderate gender-inclusive language will be harmful. Secondly, as with all dynamic equivalent translations, too many decisions are made for the preacher, and on too many occasions, he would have to correct the translation.

10. *English Standard Version*

Evangelicals wanted an update of the Revised Standard Version that was not liberal like the New Revised Standard Version. Crossway therefore published the ESV in 2001. The textual basis for the New Testament is the Nestle-Aland.

The translation philosophy is formal equivalence that seeks to acknowledge the presence of idioms and to achieve a less wooden feel than the New American Standard Bible, while being more literal than the NIV. There is certainly no liberal bias whatsoever in the ESV, which passes the three-passages "litmus test" with flying colors.

The main problem with the ESV is its literary style. It is even more incessant in translating Hebrew *waw* with "and" than the King James was. As an example, one can point to the infelicitous repetition of "and" in Deuteronomy 5:18–21, a repetition that the Revised Standard Version did not have, as it translated the *waw* with the far better "neither." This is poor English.

Two of the three best study Bibles on the market are ESV (the *ESV Study Bible* and the second edition of the *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, which is called simply *The Reformation Study Bible*). Crossway has made the ESV available in an almost bewildering variety of bindings. It has steadily gained on the NIV in popularity, and now that the NIV has ceased being published in its original form, more and more conservative churches are switching to the ESV.

The ESV can still be recommended as one of the very best translations available, though with its literary faults kept in mind. One can read it aloud while skipping the "ands."

11. *Holman Christian Standard Bible/Christian Standard Bible*

Out of the furor arising from the gender-inclusive debates swirling around the NIV, conservative Baptists desired to make a completely new accurate and readable translation, the Holman Christian Standard Bible. The textual basis for the New Testament is Nestle-Aland. There is no liberal bias in Genesis 1, Isaiah 7:14, or Romans 9:5. It was published in 2003, and the major revision, the Christian Standard Bible, came out in 2017.

The translation philosophy is the newly coined term "optimal equivalence." This translation philosophy states that there is meaning on every level of the text, all of which must be taken into account. This is very similar to "complete equivalence," except that "optimal equivalence" makes more of a point of delineating the various levels on which the meaning resides, whereas "complete equivalence" is more of a general term embracing the idea that everything in the original ought to transfer to the translation. In practice, there is probably little difference, except that these two new translations tend to have better English than the various revisions of the King James. For instance, the Holman Bible does not start nearly as many sentences with "and." This feature alone is a welcome relief. However, together with the Christian Standard Bible, it does, on occasion, end sentences with a preposition, a practice generally rejected by the English-language scholarly guild.

Both versions are especially to be commended in recognizing the true meaning of John 3:16. The King James accurately translated *houtōs* as "so," as long as it is understood that "so" means "in this way." However, many people have wrongly come to the conclusion that "so" is an indication of the extent of God's love. The New Living Translation, in particular, gets this verse wrong by translating "God loved the world so much …." The Christian Standard Bible reading is "For God loved the world in this way …."

The Christian Standard Bible is now the single best translation available in balancing accuracy and readability, good English style with as much transference from source to target language. It has, in my opinion, the best translation philosophy. Furthermore, it widened its denominational base in the revision, so it can no longer be called "the Baptist Bible." (Iain Duguid, a Presbyterian pastor and scholar, was one of the main consultants in the Old Testament revision.) Finally, to churches that desire a switch from the NIV to some other translation, the Christian Standard Bible would be a smoother transition than the ESV.

12. *New English Translation*

The New English Translation shows how translations will most likely be done in the future. The 2005 edition utilized the full resources of the Internet in soliciting feedback for the translation (much of which has been incorporated in various revisions), as well as using the Internet for propagating its text. Its New Testament is based on the Nestle-Aland text and is a dynamic equivalent translation, although less periphrastic than some. It does well on Genesis 1 and Romans 9:5, but fails the test of Isaiah 7:14, translating the text as "young woman."

It is a fine dynamic equivalent translation, joining with the New Living Translation and the Revised English Bible as the best periphrastic translations available. It does use some gender-inclusive language but is not as intrusive as some. Certainly, its bias comes nowhere near the New Revised Standard Version. In John 14:23, the New English Translation retains the generic use of "he." Its practice is self-described as "gender accurate" rather than "gender inclusive."

What sets this translation apart from other translations is the more than sixty thousand translation notes that allow the reader to peek over the translator's shoulder, as it were, to see the process. Frequently the notes will give a more formal equivalent so that the process of paraphrase is transparent.

This version cannot be recommended for church use, however, as there are numerous translation problems (such as Isaiah 7:14). Besides, as with the other dynamic equivalent translations, too many decisions are made for the preacher.

Conclusion

The five translations that are most highly recommended for use in church are the King James Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New King James Version, the ESV, and the Christian Standard Bible. If the old NIV were still being published, that would make the list as well. All translations have both strengths and weaknesses. The King James Bible has a high literary style and great accuracy of expression. It is not as difficult to read as many suppose. However, its archaic forms of expression can be off-putting to some new believers and visitors. The "ands" are distracting, which are a feature of all the translations that are in the King James genetic line (which includes all of the five recommended translations except the Christian Standard Bible). In addition, the King James has a higher literary style today than it did in 1611. The New American Standard Bible is a highly accurate translation. However, it is so woodenly literal at times that clarity is missing. The New King James Version is one of the best of the five, as it retains much of the majesty of the King James while updating the language into modern idiom and is one of the only modern translations to be based on the received text, which is either a strength or a weakness depending on how one evaluates the textual data. The ESV goes more towards formal equivalence and sacrifices good literary English at times to accomplish that goal. The Christian Standard Bible is highly accurate as well, while being flexible enough in its translation practice to recognize that good English should not be sacrificed on the altar of accuracy.

The Torah of Eden and the Conception of Ishmael: Genesis 3:6 and 16:3–4

RON BERGEY[*]

Abstract

Abram and Sarah's plight of childlessness turns into the drama of a hapless Egyptian servant. Fewer than twenty Hebrew words suffice to relate Sarah's taking Hagar, her giving her as surrogate to Abram, and his having relations with Hagar. The keys words are drawn from another story, that of Eve's taking the forbidden fruit, her giving it to Adam, and his eating it. The latter story is retold in the former by reemploying the same verbs and sentence structures, only replacing the characters' names and roles. The purpose of this study is to explore the literary and theological import of this intertextuality.

Introduction

Medieval and modern commentators draw attention to the series of linguistic correspondences between the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 and the narrative of the fall in Genesis 3. Juxtaposing both accounts suffices to enable the reader to see their similarities. As examples: "Your desire [*teshuqatekh*, תְּשׁוּקָתֵךְ] shall be toward your husband" (3:16) and "Its [sin's] desires [*teshuqatho*, תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ] are toward you" (4:7); Adam and Eve are banished "at the east of the garden of Eden" (3:24), and Cain is driven "east of Eden" (4:16). Why would the narrator take pains to redact the story of Abel's murder and its consequences using language drawn from the story of his parents' disobedience?[1] The reason seems clear. He wanted to show that fratricide is a consequence. Sin is communicable, and it spreads! Can one assume this authorial intention even if it is never stated as such? As illustrated here, literary devices weave a purposeful narrative pattern into a story by drawing language and thereby themes into a formative story.

Accordingly, such stories echo Eden. Eden's story becomes torah. In Genesis, torah is expounded not in precepts and judgments but through literary subtleties wrapped in narrative form as instruction.[2] These stories beckon the reader not to lose sight of the fall, its consequences, and the dire need of redemptive grace. They serve "as examples for us" (1 Cor 10:6).[3]

The first object here is to shed light on the literary or linguistic affinities that signal intertextuality, that is, the importation of language from one text into another with the intention that the source text influence the reading of the target text.[4] This literary device also leads to thematic or theological relationships between these texts. The latter is a second object of this study.

As the title of this article indicates, attention shall be devoted to the relationship between the fall narrative focusing on the specific act in Genesis 3:6

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[1]   Michael Fishbane points out ten textual correspondences of these stories, including these two, in Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Shocken, 1979), 26–27.

[2]   "Torah" (תּוֹרָה < *yrh*, ירה) may be judicial law (e.g., Exod 12:49) or parental instruction (Prov 1:8). The verb derivative (*yarah*, יָרָה) means "to point one's finger at," by extension "to show how, teach" (cf. *moreh*, מוֹרֶה [< *yrh*], "teacher," Isa 30:20). Genesis 46 recounts the arrival of Jacob and his family in Goshen and Joseph meeting his father (vv. 28–34). Prior to his arrival, Jacob sent Judah to Joseph so that Joseph would "show" the way (v. 28, *yarah*) in Goshen where the family would settle.

[3]   Paul is referring to the divine judgment of the golden calf incident (Exod 32; see Rom 15:4).

[4]   On this subject, see Ron Bergey, "The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32.1–43) and Isaianic Prophecies: A Case of Early Intertextuality?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28.1 (2003): 33–54.

and the narrative of the actions leading directly to the conception of Ishmael in Genesis 16:3–4. Before taking a closer look at the latter story, a brief collation of other narrative extracts will shed light on a literary device that links them to Genesis 3:6, which appears here:

> So when the woman *saw* [*wattere'*, וַתֵּרֶא] that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she *took* [*wattiqqakh*, וַתִּקַּח] of its fruit and *ate* [*watto'khal*, וַתֹּאכַל], and she also *gave* [*wattitten*, וַתִּתֵּן] some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

The disobedience consists of actions described by the four italicized verbs: "to see" (*ra'ah*, רָאָה), "to take" (*laqakh*, לָקַח), "to eat" ('*akhal*, אָכַל), and "to give" (*nathan*, נָתַן).

I. *The Torah of Eden in Other Stories*

There are three narratives that appear to be linguistically linked to Genesis 3:6. In turn, they are related to each other and, as such, to the main story to be examined in this light. Only the verses directly related to the fall extract are presented below.

1. *The Union of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Man*

First to be examined is the story of the sons of God and the daughters of man in Genesis 6, with verses 2 and 4 quoted here: "The sons of God *saw* [*wayyir'u*, וַיִּרְאוּ] that the daughters of man were attractive. And they *took* [*wayyiqkhu*, וַיִּקְחוּ] as their wives any they chose. … The sons of God *came in to* [*yavo'u 'el*, יָבֹאוּ אֶל] the daughters of man."

The story employs the same first pair of verbs in the same order as in Genesis 3:6, "see" and "take."[5] Their union is described by "came in to" (*ba' 'el*, בָּא אֶל), which is found in other examples presented below (Gen 6:4). But it should be borne in mind that this is somewhat unexpected given the recurrent use, up to this point, of "know" to describe sexual relations (Gen 4:1, 17, 25) now purposely avoided in Genesis 6:4. Also, one can legitimately ask what the verb has to do with the third verb "ate" in chapter 3. It is in the same sequential position as "eat" in the fall narrative, and "eat" can refer metaphorically to coitus. Proverbs 30:20 reads, "This is the way of an adulteress: she *eats* and wipes her mouth and says, 'I have done

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5   In Genesis 9:23, concerning Shem and Japheth, sons of Noah, the order of the verbs is "they took" a garment, and walked backwards, "they did not see" followed by the complement "their father's nakedness." The latter term can refer to his genitals (see Lev 18:6) or an improper sexual act (Deut 23:15).

no wrong."'[6] In Song of Songs consummation of marriage is presented as eating: the young bride in the ardor of her passion says, "Let my beloved come to his garden and *eat* its choicest fruits" (Song 4:16b). The husband expresses his pleasure: "I came to my garden, my sister, my bride … I *ate* my honeycomb with my honey, I drank my wine with my milk" (Song 5:1).

The narrative extract of the union of the sons of God with the daughters of men employs the same two verbs describing Adam and Eve's disobedience and a third verb falling into the semantic range of the source verb. Having heard by echo "saw" and "took," the ear is tuned into the metaphorical use of "ate," even though here a concrete verb is necessarily employed. The latter verb, following in the same order as the verbs describing the fall, is purposefully assimilated to the former, thereby clearly—although literarily discretely!—reproving the sexual relations in the Genesis 6 narrative as was reproved the eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree in Genesis 3.

2. *The Defilement of Dinah*

The narrative of the family of Jacob's arrival at Shechem relates the tragedy of his daughter's rape by a man of the same name: "Shechem …, the prince of the land, *saw* her, he *took* her and *lay* [*wayyishkav*, וַיִּשְׁכַּב] with her" (Gen 34:2).

Here too the same verbs, "see" and "take," appear in the same order as in the fall narrative. As in the former story, a verb meaning "have sexual relations" follows, which overlaps the semantic domain of "eat." Shechem's act is condemned from three angles. First, the verb "lay" (*shakhav*, שָׁכַב) refers to an illicit union (e.g., Gen 19:32–33; Exod 22:18). Then, it is deplored in an editorial note: "an outrageous thing in Israel … for such a thing must not be done" (v. 7). Last, by following the two other verbs, "lay" echoes by assimilation the first couple's eating the fruit in the garden of Eden, a violation of the will of God.

3. *The Marriage of Judah with a Canaanite*

The third and last example before the main passage is treated deals with Judah's marriage to a Canaanite: "There Judah *saw* the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He *took* her and *went in to* [*wayyavo' 'eleyha*, וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ] her" (Gen 38:2).

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6   In the warnings the father gives his son regarding adultery, Proverbs 5 says, "Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad …?" (vv. 15–16; see also vv. 5 and 20).

If what has been proposed concerning the preceding examples be granted, it is difficult not to draw the same conclusion here. By using the verbs "see" and "take," the narrator creates an echo effect of Genesis 3:6 amplified by the third verb "went in to" (*ba' 'el*) which, as also suggested earlier, semantically concretizes a metaphorical sense of "ate." This torah instruction censure will become codified torah, proscribing mixed marriages of this type (Deut 7:3; cf. Gen 28:1, 8).

II. *The Torah of Eden in the Story of the Conception of Ishmael*

Attention shall now be given to the key passage, the story of the conception of Ishmael in Genesis 16. The opening verses set the scene. The narrator informs the reader that after ten years in Canaan, despite the renewed divine progeny-promises, Sarai has still not been able to bear a child to Abram (vv. 1 and 3). Sarai advises Abram to take her Egyptian servant, Hagar, so that through her she might "obtain children" (v. 2).[7] According to customary Mesopotamian law, a woman who could not give a son to her husband was to give him a maid to establish his lineage.[8] Hagar is probably one of the female servants Pharaoh had given Abram in Egypt (Gen 12:16).[9] If so, Abram had given her to Sarai.

The linguistic parallels between this story and the fall narrative inextricably weave the two together.[10] The roles of Sarai and Abram in the conception of Ishmael intentionally echo those of Eve and Adam. So much is drawn from the source text—vocabulary and syntax—that virtually only the names are substituted in the target text. The two texts are juxtaposed below in the author's word-for-word translation:

She [Eve] TOOK of its *fruit … she* also GAVE **some** *to her husband* [Adam] *… and he* ATE [**it**]. (Gen 3:6b).

Sarai … TOOK *Hagar … and she* GAVE **her** *to her husband* Abram *…. And he* WENT IN TO **Hagar** *….* (Gen 16:3–4a)[11]

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[7] Or "I may be built" (passive, Niphal of *banah*, בָּנָה), which here means founding a family, viewed as "building a house" (Ruth 4:11).

[8] In the preceding chapter, Abram's plan to adopt his male servant as heir was nullified (15:2–4).

[9] According to the haggadah (Genesis Rabbah), she was one of Pharaoh's daughters. Louis Ginsberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1937), 1:237.

[10] Cf. Ron Bergey, *Découvrir Dieu à travers le Pentateuque* (Romanel-sur-Lausanne: Maison de la Bible, 2016), 104.

[11] Literally translated, the entire verse 3 reads, "Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar, the Egyptian, her maid, ten years after Abram had settled in the country of Canaan, and she gave her to Abram, her husband, to him as a wife." The woman (Sarai) is the one who establishes the formal

Both women act the same way: they "took" something, Eve the fruit and Sarai the servant Hagar. The link is thus established between the forbidden fruit and Hagar. Like the fruit, Hagar is the object of the verb "to take." Both women "gave" what they had taken. The identical complement heightens the linguistic concordance: "to her husband."[12]

What of the two men? Adam "ate" the fruit given him by Eve, and Abram "went in to" Hagar, the servant Sarai had given him. His doing so is undeniably echoic of Adam's eating the fruit. As indicated in the three preceding examples, having sexual relations is metaphorically in the semantic range of "eat." Like a judge before pronouncing a sentence, God issues indictments, both containing the same charge: Adam, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten …" (Gen 3:17); Abram, because he "listened to the voice of Sarai. … And he went in to Hagar" (Gen 16:2, 4).[13]

On the one hand, if "listened" means Eve had to convince Adam to eat the fruit, the narrator does not make the reader aware of her persuasive speech. On the other hand, what Adam listened to may be his wife's responses to the serpent's questioning. If so, he did so passively, neither intervening nor helping her resist the temptation. In either case, the text underlines that Abram, like Adam, was both complicit (by not preventing) and an accomplice (by participating).[14] Both men failed to remind their wives of the

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bond between the husband and the other woman (Hagar). Like later Keturah, she would have been Abram's legal wife, having the status of concubine (cf. Gen 25:1, 6). Rabbinic tradition holds that Abram, in sending her away (Gen 21:14), had divorced Hagar. "Send away" (*shalakh*, שָׁלַח) may mean "divorce" (Deut 24:1).

[12] A parallel text can be found in the story of Leah and her maid Zilpah: "When Leah *saw* that she had ceased bearing children, she *took* her servant Zilpah and *gave* her to Jacob as a wife. … Zilpah bore Jacob a son" (Gen 30:9–10). There was implicit sexual intercourse. The verb "give" is an echo of Eve's act who "gave" the fruit to her husband.

[13] In Genesis 3:17 and 16:2, "voice" is preceded by the preposition *le-* (לְ) as complement of the verb "listen" (see also Exod 15:26; 1 Sam 15:1). The complement can also be introduced by *'et* (אֶת, Gen 3:8; 21:17) or *be-* (בְּ; 21:12; 22:18) the latter normally meaning "obey."

[14] Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman, 1194–1270) interprets the expression "listen to the voice" as a sign of Abram's deep respect for Sarai. He would never have taken Hagar without his wife's permission. According to the rabbi, other elements support this claim. It was Sarai, "Abram's wife," who "took" and "gave" Hagar to "her husband." In accepting this act, Abram wanted nothing but to satisfy Sarai's desire to have a son. That Sarai gave Hagar "as a wife" and not a concubine also shows Sarai's just character and her respect for her husband. Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit* (Jerusalem: Haomanim, 1974), 154. To us, this interpretation of "listen to the voice" does not adequately account for the linguistic correspondences with the fall narrative. John Calvin's commentary more accurately states, "It is true Abram's faith wavers, when he draws back from the Word of God, allowing himself to be carried away by his wife's solicitation to seek a remedy God had forbidden." John Calvin, *Genèse* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 1978), 246. In another comment, his reproach is more biting: "Abram … cannot be excused for obeying his wife's foolish and perverse advice" (Calvin, *Genèse*, 244).

promises the Lord had made to them. This was as much a lapse of the men's faith as it was their wives', if not more so. Like Adam, Abram tried to obtain by human effort what the Lord had graciously promised. Their being formally accused places upon them the responsibility for the condemned act and its consequences.

1. *Immediate Consequences*

As in the "pains" Adam and Eve suffered as a result of their disobedience (Gen 3:16–19),[15] the consequences are also bitter for Abram and Sarai. Once Hagar is pregnant, the simmering tension in the story will boil over. Hagar stirs the pot by despising her mistress (Gen 16:4). Since she rose to the status of wife[16] and is bearing Abram's child, Hagar feels secure in her household position. She will be the one to fulfill Abram's most profound desire, whereas his barren wife will likely be marginalized.

Sarai confronts Abram with the problem as he is now Hagar's husband. Resentment gives way to harsh words. Sarai says to her husband: "May the wrong [*khamas*, חָמָס, 'violence'; cf. Gen 6:11] done to me be on you! … May the Lord judge between you and me!" (Gen 16:5). The irony is that now they each will have what they desired: a child, and if a son, an heir. However, the intimacy leading to Hagar's pregnancy—"your embrace"[17]—became too bitter a pill for Sarai to swallow.

Abram washes his hands of the matter by telling Sarai to deal with it: "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please" (Gen 16:6a). Does he renege on his responsibility? Does he want to avoid conflict? Be it one or the other, or both, the door is open for Sarai to mistreat her servant.[18] No doubt fearful for her child's life and her own, Hagar flees (v. 6b). Granted, the pregnant women in the eye of the storm is no longer there, but the child she is bearing, on which Abram and Sarai's hopes lay, is gone with her. Abram and Sarai are back to where they started, except now their relationship is whipped by the winds of discord.

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[15] Ron Bergey, "Pathologie et guérison spirituelle: la 'douleur' et le remède en Genèse 3," *La Revue réformée* 62 (2011): 7–22.

[16] Cf. notes 11 and 14 above.

[17] Literally "in your breast/on your chest" (v. 5; cf. Deut 13:7; 28:54; see also 2 Sam 12:8; 1 Kgs 1:2). Here it is contextually paired with making love.

[18] According to Ramban, by mistreating Hagar in this way, Sarai sinned; Abram did too by letting Sarai do so. Cited by Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 120. The verb "mistreat" (Piel of *'anah*, עָנָה) implies removing someone's rights, leaving that person in a precarious position, like the Israelites afflicted as slaves in Egypt (Gen 15:13; Exod 3:7) or a humiliated rape victim (Gen 34:2; Deut 21:14) no longer by custom marriageable except by the rapist (Deut 22:29).

These relational challenges resonate with those of the first couple because of their disobedience. In shame they covered themselves, each hiding intimate parts from the other's regard. They mutually accuse and shift blame, both unable to take responsibility for their own faults. In addition, the first parallel mentioned at the beginning of this study (Gen 3:16 and 4:7) suggests Eve would henceforth challenge Adam's headship,[19] and Sarai will dictate her terms concerning Hagar and her son to Abram (Gen 21:10).

2. *The Ultimate Outcome*

After the fall, the Lord sought out the hiding couple and spoke one-on-one to Adam and Eve. Here in Genesis 16, he comes unannounced and unexpectedly speaks to Hagar first. No doubt intending to return to Egypt by the northern Negev route to Shur—on foot, pregnant, and alone—she is in grave danger. The angel of the Lord (v. 7, first mention), however, appears and comes to rescue her from her distress. He questions her (v. 8) as the Lord did the couple in Eden (Gen 3:8, 13). After instructing her to return to her mistress (Gen 16:9), he assures her with a promise—"I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude" (v. 10b)—virtually identical to the one God had made to Abram (cf. Gen 15:5 and 13:16). Moreover, he tells Hagar to name the son she is bearing Ishmael (God hears/listens) as a reminder that "the Lord has listened to [her] affliction" (Gen 16:11). The conception story ends with Hagar giving birth to a son, Ishmael (v. 15), echoing the aftermath of the Eden story; Eve gives birth to a son, Cain (Gen 4:1).[20]

Despite Abram and Sarai's attempt by carnal means to resolve their problem of not having a son and their mistreating Hagar, no reprimand is explicitly voiced. The text does, however, implicitly make the point in an echoic literary way that they fell short, like the first couple, of God's standards. Instead of reproof, Abram and Sarai receive a promise. Not only is a previous promise renewed; it is also greatly enlarged. To Abram:

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[19] Interpreting *teshuqah* in Genesis 3:16 as a desire to dominate, as in 4:7. Cf. Susan T. Foh, "What Is the Woman's Desire?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 376–383. Compare "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband" (ESV 2016) and "your desire shall be for [note, 'against'] your husband" (ESV 2001). The literary technique described above also supports this interpretation. Cf. Ron Bergey, "Le Cantique des cantiques, la célébration de la sexualité," in *Bible et Sexualité*, ed. Paul Wells (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma; Charols: Excelsis, 2005), 11–25, esp. 20; Bergey, *Le Pentateuque*, 54–55, 63.

[20] Both sons will end up being driven from their homes (Gen 4:12, 16; 21:10, 14).

> Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of na-
> tions. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham,
> for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly
> fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will
> establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout
> their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring
> after you. (Gen 17:4–7; cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5)

Concerning Sarai, now called Sarah (Gen 17:15): "I will bless her, and
moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become
nations; kings of peoples shall come from her" (v. 16). She will bear the heir,
Isaac, through whom the covenant promises will be transmitted (vv. 19, 21).
As if this were not enough, Ishmael too is included: "As for Ishmael, I have
heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and
multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him
into a great nation" (v. 20).[21] Even though he will not be the heir so longed
for, God does not abandon him.[22] This florilegium of "seed" promises also
has Edenic roots. The first seed promise was made immediately after the
fall, the *protoevangelium* (Gen 3:15), a promise of redemption through the
seed of the woman.

Conclusion

On a linguistic, literary level, the use of keywords (and syntax) borrowed
from the fall narrative in the story of the conception of Ishmael draws
attention to the guilt and the just judgment of those involved. On a thematic
level, the sequel highlights the Lord's showing mercy and grace, mercy in
mitigating the judgment and grace in lavishing blessings upon them. The
emphasis on the promise in the narrative following the conception of

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[21] The names of these twelve nations are given in Genesis 25:13–16. In Genesis 16:12, it is
said of Ishmael: "He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's
hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." The wild donkey (*pere'*,
פֶּרֶא), the desert's most noble creature, is independent and untamable. The picture of the
onager is not negative (see Ps 104:11; Job 24:5; 39:5–8; Hos 8:9). In this figure, he represents
nomadic life, that of the bedouin, in contrast with the farmer's sedentary life (see Gen 25:18;
37:25; 1 Chron 27:30). Rather than a prophecy of the conflict between Ishmaelites and Israel-
ites, the conflict suggested in this verse may be due to the cultural confrontation between those
leading these very different lifestyles. The Ishmaelites initially lived in the northern region of
the Sinai peninsula, in the desert of Paran (Gen 21:21), just south of the Negev, the southern
border of Judah, and west of the desert of Shur, the eastern border of Egypt (Gen 25:18).

[22] Chapter 17 ends with Ishmael's circumcision at the age of thirteen (v. 25). He was the
first child to receive the covenant sign (cf. vv. 2, 11). It is interesting to note that the first re-
corded circumcision also involves adults and Abram's household.

Ishmael, especially taking into consideration the ultimate realization in Christ, highlights a crucial theological principle. This principle is summed up in two New Testament statements that certainly apply to the fall narrative and its echo in the conception of Ishmael story: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20), and similarly, "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jas 2:13). Of course, for the grace of redemption to be efficaciously applied, faith must seize the promises. Should one spurn this grace, like Ishmael, he may still taste God's temporal goodness.[23]

Genesis 16:15–16 exudes this divine beneficence by emphatic recurrence involving the three characters with a threefold reference to "Hagar" and to "Abram" and with a quadruple reference to "a son … his son … Ishmael … Ishmael." John Calvin emphasizes this note of grace in his commentary on these last two verses of chapter 16, saying that Abram was grateful for God's grace "because he names his son … and celebrates God's goodness in showing compassion for Hagar's misery."[24] Abraham discerned grace in God's dealing with him and those he loved. Carl Keil concludes on a similar note: "Thus, instead of securing the fulfillment of their wishes, Sarai and Abram had reaped nothing but grief and vexation. … But the faithful covenant God turned the whole into a blessing."[25] To this we can join Isaac Watts's third stanza of "Joy to the World" which equally applies to the torah of Eden woven into the story of the conception of Ishmael:

> No more let sins and sorrows grow,
>   Nor thorns infest the ground;
> He comes to make his blessings flow
>   Far as the curse is found.

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[23] Referring to the topic, Calvin says: "For in promising [Ishmael] wealth, dignity, and other things pertaining to the present life, he proves him to be a son according to the flesh … not for the sake of cutting Ishmael off from the hope of eternal life" (Calvin, *Genèse*, 269). Ishmael had a long life of 137 years (Gen 25:17) but was not a spiritual heir to the promise (Gen 21:9 and Gal 4:23, 29). On this question, on the promise made concerning Ishmael, Calvin says in his commentary, "Even though the covenant of eternal life does not belong to Ishmael, however, for him not to be entirely cut off from grace, God makes him father of a great people. In that we can see how in regards to the present life his goodness extended to Abram's carnal posterity." He goes on in qualifying Ishmael's name of "a memorial to his temporary grace" (250).

[24] Ibid., 254.

[25] Karl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, "The First Book of Moses," *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 219.

The Paradigmatic Role of Genesis 3 for Reading Biblical Narratives about Desire

CEPHAS T. A. TUSHIMA

Abstract

The biblical Hebrew texts of sexual politics (often involving sordid sexual violence, especially against women) have been studied in the last forty years with an ideological bent that employs contemporary literary analysis. This essay is an attempt to allow the biblical text to furnish strategies for reading its troubling narratives rather than imposing external ideologies over it. An ethical narrative close reading of the text of primeval desire (Gen 3) led me to the discovery of four themes—desire, particularly its derivative, sexual passion; power-play; alterity; and peril—and to the biblical authors' characterization of God in divine response to human deviant behavior as heuristic tools for reading these texts of desire.

Introduction

Sex is an important aspect of human life.[1] Indeed, the Bible discusses sexual relationships of all sorts, including noncongenial ones (cf. Gen 26:8; 38:1–30; 2 Sam 13). In the explicit discussion of sexual relations, the Bible has undeniably more records of dysfunctional sexual encounters than those arising from

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[1] O. Palmer Robertson, *The Genesis of Sex: Sexual Relationships in the First Book of the Bible* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002).

agreeable circumstances. Sex of any kind flows from passion or desire.

My goal in this essay is to study Genesis 3 through a narrative close reading for the leitmotifs in its composition. As a text of primeval desire, Genesis 3 embodies strategies for the ethical reading of biblical narratives of inordinate desire. The opening pages of all good literature provide guide-posts for understanding what ensues, and this is true of biblical literature: the prefatory positioning of Genesis in the larger Israelite history (Genesis to Kings) is indicative of its role in the reading of history and the critical place of primeval history.[2]

The texts of inordinate desire in Hebrew biblical narratives have been variously addressed. Robin Parry, for example, in sketching a path for appro-priating the ethical potential of biblical Hebrew narratives, surveys the current biblical-theological ethical approaches to Old Testament narratives and the history of interpretation of Genesis 34. He then carries out a close reading of the text in its canonical context, highlighting the different under-standings of the narrative in patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian contexts. He concludes by responding to the different feminist readings of this text and affirming its canonical patriarchy.[3] Parry reads the narrative with the narrator but is willing to give voice to the voiceless women in it. Insights from his work and others of this nature provide a general direction for the ethical appropriations of Old Testament narratives for the present essay.

Following James Muilenburg's epoch-making Society of Biblical Litera-ture presidential address of about half a century ago, I will raise questions and seek answers from within the structural patterns and literary fabric that shape the text into a literary unity,[4] not from an agenda imposed from outside of the text. Muilenberg's proposition regarding biblical texts is applicable to the Bible globally; and this is where one of the cardinal prin-ciples of Reformation hermeneutics becomes relevant, namely, that Scripture is its best interpreter. Thus, Genesis becomes essential even in seeking how best to read other Hebrew narratives.

I. *Aspects of the Study of Old Testament Ethics*

Since this essay pertains to the field of Old Testament ethics, it will be helpful to provide a basic understanding of the discipline. Allen Verhey

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[2] See David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 3–4.

[3] Robin Allinson Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

[4] James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 8.

defines ethics as "a disciplined reflection concerning moral conduct and character."[5] Ethics—as moral philosophy—deals with issues of moral values and conduct. Discussions of biblical ethics, particularly, ought to presuppose persuasions about the divinely revealed truth of Scripture. This, however, is not always the case.[6]

How biblical ethics has been studied can be broadly categorized in three ways, using the prepositional phrases "behind the text," "in the text," and "of the text." Ethics behind the text is mostly a historical enterprise. Studies in this form tend to focus on outlining the historical development of Israelite morality, giving attention to the cultural and historical sources of the ethical formulations of the text studied.[7] At the heart of the contemporary development of this approach is the attempt to expose the crudities of ancient Israelite ethical development that scandalizes modern readers.[8]

Writings on Old Testament ethics in the modern period, in the frame of ethics "in the text," is traceable to the late 1800s.[9] The focus here is on the biblical text and what it says. Several studies in this vein focus on merely describing what is found in the text, thereby adopting historical, anthropological, and sociological stances to the text to reconstruct the variety of ethical perspectives operative in the text, depending on its layered history, ideologies, and social settings.[10]

The third set of approaches consists of ethics "of the text." This approach refers to the ethics generated by the possibilities of the world of the text. These approaches tend to be literary or canonical in orientation, recognizing the authority (literary, through textual compositional rhetorical strategies,[11] or canonical—from a confessional standpoint[12]) of the text to shape morality. Within this framework two main approaches are used:

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[5]   Joel B. Green and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *Old Testament and Ethics: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1.

[6]   Ibid., 14.

[7]   See Hinkley G. T. Mitchell, *The Ethics of the Old Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912); John Merlin Powis Smith, *The Moral Life of the Hebrews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923).

[8]   See Andrew D. H. Mayes, ed., *Text in Context: Essays by Members of the Society for the Study of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 116–40; John W. Rogerson, Mark Daniel Carroll, and Margaret Davis, eds., *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 248–71; Neils Peter Lemche, "The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 9.1 (1995): 159–60; and S. Min Chun, *Ethics and Biblical Narrative: A Literary and Discourse-Analytical Approach to the Story of Josiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29.

[9]   William Straton Bruce, *The Ethics of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895).

[10]   See Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[11]   Green and Lapsley, *Old Testament and Ethics*, 34.

[12]   Ibid., 17.

ethics as decision-making, focusing on the law, the prophets, and wisdom,[13] and ethics as moral formation, focusing on narrative and to a lesser extent wisdom.[14]

This essay studies narrative and its role in character (re)formation and socio-ethical transformation. Understanding the role of characters/actants is critical for unpacking the textual meaning of narrative. God also surfaces regularly in the biblical narrative as a character, so in attending to characters and their roles in biblical narratives, one must give special attention to God as well,[15] knowing that his role as a character (his thought, words, feelings, actions/inactions, and identification by other characters) is pivotal. Juliana Claassens has used the characterization of God as a theological resource in discussing the Gideon narrative in Judges 6–8.[16] Gordon Wenham shows that the bar for ethical behavior is higher in narrative than it is in the law. His point is that the law only sets the limiting point for moral behavior, while narrative aims higher, and he links that to God's actions in narratives.[17] He also demonstrates that the importance of the imitation of God in Old Testament ethics has been receiving growing recognition from a variety of scholars.[18] Considering the significance of God's place in narrative ethical development, I will be employing divine response as a critical heuristic tool (among others) for an ethical study of biblical narratives. The outcome of this narrative reading of Genesis 3 will provide a framework for reading the biblical narratives of perilous passionate desires.

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[13] See Bruce N. Kaye and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., *Law, Morality and the Bible: A Symposium* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978); Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); John Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Hetty Lalleman, *Celebrating the Law? Rethinking Old Testament Ethics* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

[14] See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Characters* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics*; L. Juliana M. Claassens and Bruce C. Birch, *Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Human Dignity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015); and Anne W. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[15] Christopher Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 133; See also Bruce C. Birch, "Moral Agency, Community, and the Character of God in the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 66 (1994): 23–41, esp. 29.

[16] L. Juliana M. Claassens, "The Character of God in Judges 6–8: The Gideon Narrative as Theological and Moral Resource," *Horizons in Theology* 23 (2001): 51–71.

[17] Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 104–5.

[18] Ibid., 105.

II. *Reconnoitering Desire*

In discussing Genesis 3 I will explore the role of desire (a major factor in the fall) in human conduct, among other issues. Sarah Coakley defines desire as "the physical, emotional, or intellectual longing that is directed towards something or someone wanted."[19] The longing for objects of many kinds is what humans experience throughout any given day, and it provides the impetus for the things that people do. William Irvine observes that all the choices we make "typically reflect our desires: we choose what, all things considered, we want."[20] Desire is, indeed, integral to human nature.[21]

The Bible has a lot to say about desire. In the Old Testament, it can have a positive or negative connotation. A survey of the Hebrew Bible points to five main terms used in their different morphological (verbal, adjectival, and nominal) forms for the concept of desire. The first is *khamad* (חָמַד), which in the verbal form means to "desire and try to acquire."[22] The idea is that having a strong longing for something or someone, a person is driven to seek possession thereof. It occurs predominantly in the nominal form and can have positive or negative connotations (cf. Gen 2:9; Exod 20:17; Josh 7:21; Ps 19:11; Song 2:3). The second, *'awah* (אָוה), means "[to] desire, long, lust, covet, wait longingly, wish, sigh, crave, want, be greedy, prefer."[23]

The words *khamad* and *'awah* share a common semantic domain, dealing with a longing or craving for something that drives one to seek it, and only the fulfillment of that desire brings satisfaction (cf. Prov 13:12, 19). Although these two terms are occasionally used as synonyms, a nuance exists between them: while *khamad* refers to the desire of an object for the essence of its being (ontological), *'awah* focuses on its physical characteristic (phenomenological) features. The clearest demonstration of these is seen in the book of Song of Songs, where *khamad* is found exclusively on the lips of the

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[19] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 346, as cited by Paul Dominiak, "The Logic of Desire: A Reappraisal of Reason and the Emotions in Richard Hooker's *Lawes*," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 16.1 (April 2014): 37–51.

[20] William B. Irvine, *On Desire: Why We Want What We Want* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91.

[21] David Hutchinson Edgar, "Desire," in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 219.

[22] William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 108.

[23] "40 אָוה," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:18 (hereafter *TWOT*); cf. Num 11:4, 34; 2 Sam 3:21; Ps 10:17; 132:13–14; Isa 26:8–9; Song 1:5).

lover, who desires her beloved for the totality of who he is (Song 2:3; 5:16), while *'awah* is found solely in the speeches of the beloved, who is moved with desire by the beautiful physical features of his lover (Song 1:5; 2:14; 4:3; 6:4). In Genesis 3:6, where both terms occur, this pattern of *'awah* drawing upon the impact of outward appearance and *khamad* reflecting that which comes from deep within (such as a desire for wisdom) is manifested.

The third word is *khaphets* (חָפֵץ), whose distinction lies in its greater emphasis on the emotive element than the other desire terms.[24] The core idea in the word is delight or pleasure. It has a lot to do with the impact or impression that the object makes on the subject (cf. 1 Kgs 5:23–24 [ET, vv. 9–10]; Prov 3:15; 8:11; Eccl 12:10; Isa 54:12). The fourth term is *kasaph* (כָּסַף), "[to] yearn for, long after."[25] It has been used in only two places with this express denotation (Gen 31:30; Ps 84:3 [ET, v. 4]). It has the same semantic field as *khamad* and *'awah*, but based on what we said above, it is closer in meaning to *khamad* than to *'awah*. The fifth term, *teshuqah* (תְּשׁוּקָה), has much fewer occurrences and a more complex range of meanings than the other terms. Thus, I will discuss it in my discussion of Genesis 3, one of the few passages where it occurs.

From a synthesis of the previous survey of desire, I have identified three categories of desires.[26] The first of these is *abidance* desires. These are desires for those things necessary for the continuance of human life, including food, shelter, clothing, and security. The second group consists of *sybaritic* desires, which are meant to bring pleasure purely for its own sake. In this category are included aesthetics, beauty and fashion, concupiscence, and certain kinds of recreational activities. Lastly, we have the *prestige* desires. These are desires that when attained bring a sense of significance, fulfillment, and power, as well as a level of influence on others. Admittedly, there is some fluidity in the dividing line between these categories, as some desires may belong to one category, but when pushed to a different level would spill over into another. For example, at the level of the species, sex leads to healthy pleasure and procreation, and could be viewed as an abidance desire. However, the inclination toward whimsical unrestrained fulfillment of this desire, with an assortment of persons, moves it beyond the realm of abidance into concupiscent sybaritism.

With this survey, we can examine the account of primeval desire in Genesis 3, its outcomes, and the divine response, using the narrative critical

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[24] "712 חָפֵץ," *TWOT* 1:310–11.

[25] "1015 כָּסַף," *TWOT* 1:450.

[26] In working on this, I drew a lot of inspiration from the work of Irvine, especially his fourth chapter (Irvine, *On Desire*, 55–67).

reading approach. This analysis intends to yield a paradigm for examining the pursuits of desire, particularly the sybaritic (especially sexual) and prestige (power) desires with their catastrophic consequences in subsequent biblical Hebrew narratives.

III. *Desire in Genesis 3: Its Outcomes and Divine Response*

Genesis 3 has a straightforward plot, with the status of the serpent among the animals and other creatures (v. 1) as its foreground. It advances with tension rising between divine will and human desire (vv. 2–5). The actual conflict and climax comes rather too soon (vv. 6–7), when human desire trumps divine will. The second peak comes in the divine interview with the first couple (vv. 9–13) and is followed by the anticlimax, wherein the divine sentence falls squarely upon all the actants in the narrative (vv. 14–19). Finally, we have the denouement, with the implications of the divine judgment (vv. 20–24). The narrative could also be outlined in terms of the narrator's form of presentation, beginning with a dialogic presentation in two acts (Gen 3:1–7 and 3:8–19) and then a report or narration of the conclusion (Gen 3:20–24). The detailed discussion below follows this latter form of outline.

Act 1: The First Couple and the Debacle of Their Desire (Gen 3:1–7)

Scene 1: The Woman's Tango with the Serpent (Gen 3:1–5)
The introduction of the serpent presages the surprising presentation of the serpent as a talking and walking beast. This has affinities with the perception in the ancient Near East, where the serpent was feared or revered as possessing mystical powers.[27] Extant texts show the serpent was associated with fertility, health, immortality, occult wisdom, and evil, and it was often venerated or worshiped.[28] In biblical literature, this use of the serpent is more than a mythic conception, though there are divergent scholarly interpretations. Ian Provan observes that the association of the serpent with the

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[27] For details, see John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis–Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 203; and Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamian Gods and Pantheons," in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. William L. Moran (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 24.

[28] Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 24, cited by Walton and Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 203. Also see John Scullion, *Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: Glazier, 1992), 47; and Karen R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Haddonfield, NJ: Haddonfield House, 1974), 19–24.

devil has no basis in the text but that it arises from Second Temple sources such as 2 Enoch 31:5.[29] Walter Brueggemann overtly denies that the serpent is Satan, seeing it merely as a literary device,[30] but this reading fails to take into account the canonical shaping of the biblical text. By contrast, Laird Harris, Gleason Archer Jr., and Bruce Waltke affirm that only "naturalistic theology could hold that it was a mere snake referred to in myth or legend."[31] While within its context in Genesis there is nothing to explain this enigma, when read in the context of the biblical canon, the explicit association of the serpent with Satan becomes understandable (cf. Job 26:6–13; Ps 91:13; Isa 27:1; Luke 10:18–19; Rev 12:9; 20:2).[32]

In the serpent's dialogue with the woman, its initial goal was to raise doubts in her mind concerning the integrity of God and the veracity of his word: "Did God indeed say, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (Gen 3:1). The negativity of the question insidiously sowed distrust, making the first couple doubt God's generosity and believe instead that God's boundaries were barriers keeping them from a better life.

In the woman's response she acknowledged that they were given everything except one thing, but in talking about the consequence of eating the tree, she omitted God's strong expression of certain death ("you will *surely* die," Gen 2:17, emphasis added). Her altering of God's threat provided the serpent the opportunity to develop its initial seemingly benign suggestion by negating the certainty of death God had decreed.[33] Indeed, her exaggeration of God's prohibition—"God said, 'You shall not eat from it *and you shall not touch it*, lest you die'" (Gen 3:3, emphasis added)—is indicative of rising discontent within her.[34] The serpent, taking advantage of discontent, then contradicted God's word by saying, "It is *not* certain that you will die" (Gen 3:4, emphasis added). It was the adverbial form, not the verbal form, of God's speech that the serpent negated, so raising doubt as to the certainty of the prescribed consequence for disobedience.[35] Cleverly, the serpent

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[29] Ian Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, Discovering Biblical Texts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 79.

[30] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*. Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 47.

[31] "1347 נחש," *TWOT* 2:571.

[32] See Allen Ross, *Genesis*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 1 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 49–50.

[33] On the serpent's distortion of God's word, see Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 23.

[34] On Eve's distortion of God's word see Ross, *Genesis*, 51.

[35] For a fuller explanation of this grammatical form, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 583; Walton and Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 205; and Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 344.

sought to avoid outright contradiction of God and the risk of incredulity.

Having insidiously cast doubts on the certainty of God's word, the serpent subsequently assaulted the credibility of God by accusing God of undermining the interest of Adam and Eve—hiding from them that which would widen the vistas of their knowledge and make them God-like (Gen 3:5). The goal of this was the sundering of the relationship between the first humans and their Creator. Consequently, the couple moved away from God and chose to act independently (Gen 3:6–7).

Propelled by desire, following the serpent's instigation, the couple separated from God. In a moment the woman experienced all three types of desires (abidance, sybaritic, and prestige). Her inordinate desires took her in a direction contrary to God's unambiguous ordinance. As she fixed her gaze on the tree and its fruits, she saw the tree was good for food (an abidance desire), pleasing (*'awah*) to the eyes (a sybaritic desire), and desirable (*khamad*) for making one wise (a prestige desire).

We note that God had already provided for these desires. Genesis 2:9 shows that God's created flora had all that Eve was looking for: it was pleasing to the eyes (sybaritic desire), desirable for food (abidance desire). The tree of life, in contrast with the tree of knowing good and evil, met their prestige desire. Moreover, humanity already had the likeness to God that the serpent was offering them through disobedience (Gen 1:26–27). In the creational mandate, God's address to the first couple provided for their prestige desires—to have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). Additionally, he addressed their abidance desires in providing an abundance of food for them (Gen 1:29). Lastly, God himself testified that his creation was adequate for satisfying sybaritic desires, as he *looked* at it and declared it to be "very good" (Gen 1:31). In their rebellion, in pursuit of their desires (Gen 3:6), the first couple threw away what they had for a mere illusion.

Scene 2: The Couple's Pursuit of Their Desire and Its First Disappointment (Gen 3:6–7)

The second scene of act 1 (Gen 3:6–7) constitutes the climax of this narrative: the outcome of the conflict. Its two sentences are replete with a flurry of activities (the persons concerned doing things), conveyed in finite verbs (nine in all) that are on the main storyline, one of the characteristics of climactic settings: she *saw … took … ate … gave* to her husband … he *ate …* eyes *opened …* they *knew* they were naked … *sewed* fig leaves … *made* loin-covering. The promise of the serpent was partly fulfilled; their eyes were opened; they now knew evil—they had known only good previously—but they became less God-like (cf. v. 4). One of the immediate consequences of

their sin was the sin itself: separation became a given in human life. When they were at one with God, they were at one with each other—naked before each other but unabashed (Gen 2:23–25). Having separated from God, their emergent alterity generated shame from the resultant consciousness of their nakedness. This is just a prelude to the manifestation of separation from God (the first installment of death) that will become palpable in act 2.

Act 2: The Fallout of Fulfilled Desire (Gen 3:8–19)

As act 1 built up to the climax of the narrative, act 2 is its anticlimax. Act 2 consists of two scenes. Scene 1 (Gen 3:8–13) is made up of a transition, which is a vivid portrayal of the hostility that ensued between Adam and Eve on the one hand and between both humans and God on the other following the pursuit of their desires apart from God (Gen 3:8). The bulk of scene 1 consists of the interview between God and his creatures (Gen 3:9–13); and scene 2 contains the announcement of sanctions for the violation of the divine command (Gen 3:14–19).

This narrative has several indicators of the excellence of its compositional artistry. Genesis 3:8, which reflects human separation with God, is back-to-back with Genesis 3:7, which tells of separation within humanity. Scenes 2 and 3 form a perfect ideational chiasm:

A	God queries Adam	3:9–12
B	God queries Eve	3:13
C	God is told of the serpent	3:13b
C´	God curses the serpent	3:14–15
B´	God's punishment for Eve	3:16
A´	God's punishment for Adam	3:17–19

In God's speech to the offending parties, the chiasm shows he begins with Adam and ends with him (A and A´). This highlights Adam's leadership, which he abdicated to his wife, but God brings him back to its reality. The placement of Eve between Adam and the serpent fits the malevolent mediatory role she played between the serpent and her husband (in B and B´). The serpent is found at the core of the chiasm (in the woman's discourse C and God's judgment pronouncement C´), implying it is the chief culprit.

Scene 1: Immediate Consequence of Sin and the Divine Interrogation (Gen 3:8–13)

The immediate outcome of human disobedience to the divine command was the visible widening of the gap between humanity and deity that had begun conceptually during the temptation phase earlier in the narrative.

The first couple hid as they heard the approach of their maker (Gen 3:8), yet the voice of the one from whose eyes nothing is hidden came calling with prodigious love, inquiring, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9), which begins the ensuing series of interrogations. Adam, in response, told of his hiding due to fear because of nakedness. It is sad that the voice that was once a delight had now become a terror because human rebellion had vitiated the divine glory with which humanity was clothed at creation so that, contrary to the promise of the serpent, they could not withstand the dazzling glory of their creator (Gen 3:10).

Like a just judge in court, God reached no conclusions until after a thorough cross-examination, affording the errant pair a fair hearing. God's first question was followed by a series of others to the man and the woman, both of whom deflected the questions by passing the buck to others (Gen 3:11–13). Two things are noteworthy in this narrative. First, God was completely silent during the temptation of the first couple. Second, after the rebellion, God engaged with Adam and Eve but did not engage the serpent directly, even though it is mentioned in the dialogue. Silence, in the first instance, reflects the relative autonomy that humanity had as free moral agents, who nonetheless were accountable for their actions. However, divine silence also portends danger. God's engagement with an errant party indicates that the person may be judged, but the judgment will be mitigated by divine grace (as his engagement with Adam and Eve shows). In contrast, when God averts direct engagement with an errant party (like his non-engagement with the serpent), judgment in such a case comes with certain finality.

Scene 2: The Divine Pronouncement of Judgment (Gen 3:14–19)

In the previous scene, God engaged Adam and Eve after they had fled (albeit in vain) from his presence. The divine interview proceeded from Adam to the woman, who eventually passed the buck to the serpent. As the woman's answer closed with the mention of the serpent (Gen 3:13), the divine judgment began with the pronouncement against the serpent (Gen 3:14–15). The series of judgments consist of reversals of fate. The serpent, which was the shrewdest of all the animals, would become the most cursed of them all (Gen 3:14). In the place of friendship with humanity, there will be an interminable enmity; likewise, the seed of the woman, whom it lured into death, will give it the deadly strike on the head (Gen 3:15).

The reversal of fate is also found in the judgment against the woman. Whereas she had sought to be on par with God, she will be reduced to a place lower than her initial estate at creation. When created, the Creator

blessed and mandated them to multiply and fill the earth without any intimation of pain as concomitant with birthing. Now in her fallen state, she will henceforth be attended with great pain as she bears children. Similarly, as she was driven by prestige desire (seeking for God-likeness), demonstrated in usurping leadership from her husband, she was placed under the headship of her husband, notwithstanding her continuing contention for leadership (Gen 3:16).

It is pertinent at this point to unpack the preceding statement, which is an interpretation of a portion of Genesis 3:16 on which scholarly consensus is lacking. I translate the second part of the judgment on the woman as "and your desire will be against[36] your husband, but he will rule over you."[37] The noun *teshuqah* occurs only thrice in the Hebrew Bible, twice in Genesis (3:16; 4:7), and once in poetry (Song 7:11). The noun has the primary meaning of desire, longing, or craving for something.[38]

Opinions diverge sharply as to the kind of *teshuqah* the woman was going to have toward her husband. Susan Foh compares Genesis 3:16 with Genesis 4:7, where the idea is that of desire for dominance. Supporting her analysis with comparative linguistics (with an Arabic cognate), Foh concludes that it points to the woman's desire for dominance over her husband.[39] John Walton and Victor Matthews, in disagreement with Foh, suggest that she went too far afield to use Arabic for the explanation of the word. Using Song of Songs 7:11, they take the noun to be what they call instinct, without specifying what they mean by that, and conclude that *teshuqah* refers to a woman's instinctive desire for children and motherhood, and this will subordinate her to her husband.[40] Nothing could be further from the truth. There are several things that Walton and Matthews fail to factor into their discussion. Firstly, they fail to reckon with the genre, which is most crucial

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[36] For similar use of the preposition *'el* (אֶל), see Genesis 4:7–8; 1 Samuel 24:8; Exodus 14:5; Numbers 32:14; Nahum 2:14.

[37] I have rendered the *waw* prefixing the pronoun "he" (*hu'*, הוּא) as a contrastive conjunction because of its *we-X-yiqtol* construction in direct discourse, rather than the usual storyline *weyyiqtol* format. Gesenius gives the following as examples of similar uses: Genesis 17:21; 19:19; Leviticus 2:12 (E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910], 484–85 [§154]). So also Holladay, *Concise Lexicon*, 85. For an elaborate discussion of this, see Alveiero Niccacci, "Basic Facts and Theory of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Prose," in Ellen Van Wolde, ed., *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996* (Leiden; Brill, 1997), 170–90.

[38] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 1003; Holaday, *Concise Lexicon*, 396; "2352a †תְּשׁוּקָה," *TWOT* 2:913.

[39] Susan T. Foh, "What Is the Woman's Desire?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974): 376–83.

[40] Walton and Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 228–29.

when dealing with language use. They furnish no justification for jumping over Genesis 4 and rather importing the signification from Song of Songs. Secondly, they ignore the context: Genesis 3 is not discussing the congeniality of family relations but the entrance of sin and its effect in rupturing relationships, which spills over into Genesis 4. Relevant here are both the subject matter of the narrative and the extent of coverage. Thirdly, there is a fair argument that the conjunction prefixing the desire's object is contrastive, not copulative. Lastly, if the contrastive sense is correct, it would be unexpected for God to overrule an affectionate feeling with leadership. The uses of *teshuqah* in Genesis 3 and 4 contextually have the same signification, the desire for dominance.[41] As the woman usurped leadership in rebellion, the consequences of sin will subsequently exacerbate the contest for control. The divine verdict sustained male headship. God's preamble to his judgment against Adam ("Because you harkened to the voice of your wife, and ate from the tree" [Gen 3:17a]) reinforces this position.

Male headship was implicit in the creative order. With respect to other creatures, the vicegerency of humanity was clearly stated in Adam's naming the animals. God brought the animals to Adam and whatever he called them became their name (Gen 2:19–20). As for the woman, while male priority is not explicitly stated, several things make this obvious. First, in the biblical world, primogeniture signifies priority, and that is why any deviations from it were viewed as errant (cf. Gen 48:13–18). Secondly, the language used in Genesis 2 and 3 is also indicative of Adam's headship. The very terms used in Genesis 2:19–20 about God bringing the animals to Adam, and him naming them, are used of God bringing Eve to Adam and him naming her (Gen 2:22–23). Sin problematized male headship, but God restated his creative purpose. It is in this regard that after the fall, Adam's first act was renaming (the same verb form, *weyyiqra'* [וַיִּקְרָה], is still used) his wife as a way of reasserting his authority (Gen 3:20).

After the reproach of Adam for failed leadership in respect to the forbidden fruit, the major part of God's judgment was that the ground (from which he came) would be in "rebellion" against him to make providing food arduous for him. The root for "eat" (*'akhal*, אָכַל) acts as a *leitwort*, occurring five times in three sentences in active verbal forms (Gen 3:17–19). Though industry was implicit in the creational mandate (cf. Gen 1:28), it was not to consist of toilsome labor. God had already made adequate provision for human sustenance (Gen 1:29), and he even planted their garden; humans were merely to tend it and reap from where they had not sown (Gen 2:8,

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[41] For a similar analysis with nuanced conclusions, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 201–2.

15–16). In rebelliously eating what was forbidden, they made eating a problem: only with painful toil would they find their food subsequently (Gen 3:18–19). The point of their sin (eating or food) becomes the tool of their punishment.

Adam was the federal representative of all humanity, so all humanity fell with him and were damned with him. The principle of degeneracy pronounced on creation because of Adam affects all creation (Gen 3:17c–18a). The last pronouncement in Adam's punishment sealed human fate with finality, affirming the certainty of death: the ground will unremittingly harden itself against humans until they fall dead into it (Gen 3:19). Though the serpent, at the beginning, questioned the certainty of death, God had the final say; he affirmed the certainty of physical death, even as spiritual death (separation) was already a *fait accompli.*

Dénouement *(Gen 3:20–24)*

There is a shift from the scenic presentation in the first part of the chapter to narration in the last five verses. These last verses bring closure to the doleful tale of the fall. The unraveling of the harmony that had defined the world of Adam continued its downward spiral. As distance was introduced in the human-divine relationship, it invariably affected relations in the human realm. Adam, who had previously reveled exuberantly in the communion he shared with his wife (Gen 2:22), with the distance now between them could only celebrate her as the mother of his children (Gen 3:20).

God did not abandon his own, despite failure, but showed abundant grace. For the future of humanity, grace was offered in the promise of the triumph of the woman's seed over the serpent (Gen 3:15). This promise is a triumph because of the symbolism of the parts of the body where their blows would fall: the serpent strikes the heel of the woman's seed but is smitten on the head. For the moment, God stepped down to clothe them in animal-skin clothing, more durable than the ephemeral leafy loin-covering that Adam and Eve had made for themselves (Gen 3:21), and this began a ritual that would recall their alienation daily.

Divine mercy does not obliterate divine retribution (Exod 34:6–7). Thus, humanity must face its fate. To this end, there was a divine deliberation (Gen 3:22) regarding the future option for humankind. In choosing to eat from the forbidden tree, humanity now lost unhindered access to the tree of life (the restoration of which will occur for the elect only in the eschaton, cf. Rev 2:7; 22:14). Consequently, not only were humans thrown out of Eden, but sword-wielding angels were also posted sentry to ensure the blockage of access to the tree of life for fallen humanity (Gen 3:23–24),

thereby ensuring the inevitability of human death.

IV. *Genesis 3 as Paradigm for Reading Other Passages of Desire*

We began with the Reformation hermeneutical principle of Scripture as its best interpreter. The goal of this narrative reading of Genesis 3 was to explore its fabric as the text of primeval desire, to guide our reading of other texts of desire in biblical Hebrew narratives. Three things emerge from our reading of this narrative. First, through paying attention to the questions that drive the narrative, we find direction as to how to make ethical choices and live ethical lives. The entire narrative is driven by questions, questions we will do well to pause each day to reflect over apropos of our own lives. The first question was first asked by the serpent: What has God said? Correctly understanding God's communication is determinative for right living; therefore, the serpent sought to pervert and distort human understanding of the divine word. The second question, the one asked by God, is Where are you? It is important to constantly ascertain where we stand relative to God: do we stand with God or with some other god or idol? Are we maintaining our assigned estate, or have we moved on to places of our choosing? Thirdly, we should ask ourselves, To whose voice are we listening? This reflects the question God asked Adam, "Who told you that you are naked?" There are many voices speaking today, and loudly too, that drown out the voice of God. It is easy to be carried away with the voices from friends, spouses, the media (especially electronic), popular culture, and the state, among many others. All must be weighed against the one voice—that of the Shepherd. Fourthly, we always should ask ourselves, "What have you done?" Answering this question will help us discover which voices we have been listening to, where we are in our journey in life, and whether we are still staying true to what God has said.

Second, a set of themes provide a framework for reading other biblical narratives of passion. These themes are rooted in desire, whether abidance, sybaritic, or prestige. Out of these three categories of desire, only abidance desire has to do with the survival of humans as a species. Wrong application of it moves it into the realm of either sybaritic or prestige desires. Thus, priority is given to these latter two, and particularly to sexual passions and power plays. The theme of alterity is also prominent, beginning in Genesis 3, with the first couple conceptually distancing themselves from God in their volition, and eventually spatially (at least in their conception). It is not possible for us to hurt others if we feel at one with them. It is only as we view others as "other," including even family members, that they become

objects for attack. The fourth theme is that of peril. The combination of the first three themes inevitably leads to disaster either at the individual level or the communal level or both, as we see in the story of Adam and Eve. The themes of pleasure and power embody the driving motivations for the actions in the narrative; alterity offers the rationale, while the resultant peril is the consequence.

The third matter arising from our discussion that could inform our ethical reading of other narratives, is divine response. Divine response is significant because it helps point us in the direction of proper and approved patterns of being in the world (biblical ethics). Careful attention to the moral issues in these narratives and how God responded to them can help inform our ethical orientation and decisions. The various ways of divine response to given situations or characters include engagement and nonengagement; each of these has implications for the kind of consequences for those on the receiving end. For example, divine engagement in the face of Adam and Eve's sin shows they would receive mitigated judgment, whereas nonengagement and response are more indicative of nonmitigated consequences, as the case is with the serpent in this narrative.

From what precedes, five themes arising from human actions with damaging consequences were identified, which could provide biblical lenses for reading other biblical narratives of passion. These themes are (sexual) passion, power play, alterity, peril, and divine response.

How the Dwelling Becomes a Tent of Meeting: A Theology of Leviticus

L. MICHAEL MORALES

Abstract

This essay proposes that the theology of the book of Leviticus centers on the question of how the dwelling, God's *mishkan*, becomes a tent of meeting, the *'ohel mo'ed*. By the end of Leviticus, the tent of meeting has become the place where Israel's community can enjoy fellowship with Yahweh—a Sabbath goal symbolically portrayed in Leviticus 24:1–9. The cultic festivals of Leviticus 23–25, with 24:1–9 at their heart, demonstrate that the dwelling has become a "tent of meeting" indeed and that the purpose for the cosmos—namely, fellowship with God—can now be realized through Israel's cultus.

T he theology of the book of Leviticus may be discerned in the movement of how God's dwelling becomes Israel's meeting place with God, the tent of meeting—that is, how the *mishkan* (מִשְׁכָּן) becomes the *'ohel mo'ed* (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד).[1] This goal, it will be argued, is portrayed symbolically in Leviticus 24:1–9. We will begin therefore by probing the cultic symbolism of the lampstand and bread of the presence in Leviticus 24:1–9, and then, positioning that

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[1]   This essay represents a summary of three chapters of my book, L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 109–220.

account within the overall movement of Leviticus, we will endeavor to demonstrate that it functions as the heart of the book's resolution.

I. *The Symbolism of the Lampstand and the Bread of the Presence*

In this section we argue that the lampstand shining upon the bread of the presence offers a symbolic picture of the Sabbath: Israel basking in the light of God's blessed presence, mediated by the cultus. A careful comparison of the priestly benediction of Numbers 6:23–27 with the lampstand ritual of 8:1–4 shows that both texts present the blessing of God upon the people of God, mediated by the priesthood of God.[2] The arrangement of the holy place in Numbers 8:1–4 thus portrays the ideal of Israel basking in the light of the divine presence, a symbolism which, as we will see, accords with Leviticus 24:1–9.

1. *The Lampstand and Bread of the Presence in Leviticus 24:1–9*

Turning to Leviticus 24:1–9, we will consider the text's two subdivisions—vv. 1–4 pertaining to the lampstand and vv. 5–9 pertaining to the bread—together as one complete portrait. Both sections highlight Aaron's duties (vv. 3–4, vv. 8–9) and the people's contribution to the ritual (vv. 2, 8), and they contain requirements referred to as everlasting statutes (vv. 3, 9). Both sections, furthermore, emphasize the continual nature of these requirements through the use of *tamid* (תָּמִיד), "daily" or "continual." While the tending of the lampstand is a daily *tamid*, evening and morning, yet the renewed arrangement of the fresh bread with the addition of incense is performed as a weekly *tamid*, specifically on the Sabbath, and is dubbed an everlasting covenant.[3]

Roy Gane, though treating the bread ritual alone, makes two observations useful to our purpose.[4] First, as the only offering designated "an eternal covenant," the bread of the presence uniquely symbolizes the relationship between Yнwн and his people.[5] He rightly associates the twelve loaves with the twelve tribes of Israel, suggesting that even the division into two piles of

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2   Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 106–7.

3   The bread, with the addition of pure frankincense as a memorial, is also said to constitute an *'isheh* (אִשֶּׁה), a gift by fire to Yнwн (v. 7). As their due, the priests receive the bread that was removed and are to eat it in a holy place (v. 9).

4   Roy Gane, "'Bread of the Presence' and Creator-in-Residence," *Vetus Testamentum* 42.2 (1992): 179–203.

5   See also Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann, *Sefer Vayikra*, trans. Zvi Har Shefer and Aharon Leiberman (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971), 2:212.

six supports this understanding (cf. Exod 28:9–12; Deut 27:11–13). In addition, in order to symbolize the covenant relationship, the bread of the presence in vv. 5–9 should be read in the light—literally!—of the lampstand ritual (vv. 1–4). The original instructions for the lampstand in Exodus 25:37, quite similar to those found in Numbers 8:1–4, make the inclusion of the table of shewbread *normative* for the lampstand's symbolism. The lampstand's main purpose is to shine upon the table of showbread:

> You shall make seven lamps for it, and then arrange its lamps so that they shine light in front of it.

Secondly, Gane affirms that the changing of the bread on the Sabbath defines its meaning in terms of Sabbath (and creation) theology, noting that the Sabbath itself is referred to as an "eternal covenant" and "a sign" between Yhwh and Israel (Exod 31:16–17). Now given that the menorah is made up of seven lamps, which require the evening and morning *tamid*, it could be that a cosmological symbolism links this ritual with the bread *tamid*, focusing on the Sabbath in particular.[6] Along similar lines, Vern Poythress writes that the seven lamps correlate

> with the general symbolism for time within Israel. The heavenly bodies were made in order to "serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years" (Genesis 1:14). The whole cycle of time marked by the sun and moon and stars is divided up into sevens: the seventh day in the week is the Sabbath day; the seventh month is the month of atonement (Leviticus 16:29); the seventh year is the year of release from debts and slavery (Deuteronomy 15); the seventh of the seven-year cycles is the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25). Fittingly, the lampstand contains the same sevenfold division, symbolizing the cycle of time provided by the heavenly lights.[7]

Just as the creation account establishes the evening and morning of days for the sake of the Sabbath, the daily *tamid* ritual of verses 1–4 of Leviticus 24 similarly establishes a rhythm of days for the sake of the Sabbath *tamid* ritual in verses 5–9. Already, then, one may discern the profound homology between cosmos and cult: just as the cosmos was created for humanity's Sabbath communion and fellowship with God, so too the cult was established for Israel's Sabbath communion and fellowship with God. "Sabbath

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[6] Andreas Ruwe, for example, believes the menorah may be associated with the sevenfold structure of Genesis 1 (Andreas Ruwe, *"Heiligkeitsgesetz" und "Priesterschrift": Literaturgeschichtliche und rechtssystematische Untersuchungen zu Leviticus 17,1–26,2* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 324–25).

[7] Vern Sheridan Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (1991; repr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 18–19.

by Sabbath" (*beyom hashabbath beyom hashabbath,* בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת), as verse 8 has it, the twelve loaves of bread are renewed in the light of the lampstand. This cultic symbol, we propose, conveys the ideal Sabbath, the twelve tribes of Israel basking in the divine light, being renewed in God's presence Sabbath by Sabbath.

2. Leviticus 24:1–9 within the Context of Chapters 23 through 25

We turn now to investigate the significance of Leviticus 24:1–9 within the context of chapters 23–25. Leigh Trevaskis has recently (and convincingly) argued that Leviticus 24:1–9 presents the ideal of Israel paused in worship before Yhwh on the sabbatical occasions described in chapters 23 and 25, which frame it.[8] He notes that two common themes unite chapters 23 and 25. The first is a concern for calendric time. Israel's annual feasts are delineated in chapter 23, emphasizing their dates in particular. This stress on calendric time is especially evident when compared with the enumeration of feasts in Numbers 28–29, which devotes more attention to the prescribed offerings than to their appointed times. Chapter 25, establishing the (seventh year) land Sabbath (vv. 1–7) and the (fiftieth year) Jubilee Sabbath (vv. 9–55), is also clearly concerned with calendrical time.

The second unifying theme is a sabbatical principle. The two Sabbaths detailed in chapter 25 are apparent enough, yet the same is also true for the appointed feasts of chapter 23: there are seven major festivals, seven days of rest, several festivals occurring on the seventh month, every seven years being a sabbatical year, and there is a grand sabbatical year after the seventh of the seven-year cycles. Since we have already noted how the *tamid* rituals of the lampstand and the bread of the presence both underscore the element of time in a way similar to the creation account—that is, the rituals focus upon the Sabbath—it seems Leviticus 24:1–9 fits well within the thematic context of chapters 23–25; as a cultic symbol, the lampstand's shining upon the twelve loaves captures the ideal for Israel's sacred convocations, which are themselves rooted in the Sabbath.[9] Indeed, the introduction (Lev 23:1–4)

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8 Leigh M. Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context," *Vetus Testamentum* 59.2 (2009): 295–312; cf. John H. Walton, "Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11.2 (2001): 302–3.

9 Frank Gorman also makes the observation that "Leviticus 23 divides the year into two parts by placing emphasis on the activities of the first month and the seventh month. The two-part division of the year reflects the two-part division of the day—day and night. Two seven-day observances are also required, one in the first month and one in the seventh month. In addition, seven holy convocations are identified in the calendar (vv. 7, 8, 21, 24, 27, 35, 36)" (Frank H. Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community: A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel, 1997], 127). If valid, the two- and sevenfold nature of the annual feasts comports well with the lampstand and bread *tamids*, respectively.

to the festival legislation bookends the Sabbath (v. 3) with dual references to the appointed feasts of Yʜwʜ (*mo'ade yhwh*, מוֹעֲדֵי יְהוָה) and the holy convocations (*miqra'e qodesh*, מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ; vv. 2, 4). What the insertion of the Sabbath accomplishes in Leviticus 23:1–4 is likewise accomplished by the insertion of Leviticus 24:1–9 between chapters 23 and 25. "Once we have recognized the notion of the 'Sabbath' to be an important thread running through Leviticus 23–26," writes Wilfried Warning, "one must admit that this keyword—occurring twice in 24:5–9—may have prompted the ancient author to place this pericope here."[10] The lampstand shining its light upon the twelve fragrant loaves is a symbol of the covenant, itself signified by the Sabbath—Leviticus 24:1–9 *is* a picture of the Sabbath. We may therefore conclude that Leviticus 24:1–9, as a cultic symbol, is the theological heart of chapters 23 through 25.

3. *The Relationship of Leviticus 24:1–9 with the Blasphemer Tale*

Since understanding the unity of chapter 24 as a whole will be helpful toward considering the structure of Leviticus below, the relationship between 24:1–9 and 24:10–23 (the blasphemer tale) must be addressed briefly.[11] Building on the work of Bryan Bibb,[12] Trevaskis explains the function of the blasphemer story in verses 10–23 as serving as something of a foil to the cultic ideal expressed in verses 1–9, in effect extending the ideal holiness of the community represented in the ritual (vv. 1–9) to every aspect of life in the camp/land—even to the sojourner (vv. 10–23). His fine analysis may be buttressed by reflecting upon the tale's emphasis on the sacred "name" of Yʜwʜ, noted three times (vv. 11, 16 [2x]). Recalling now that the Levitical blessing of Numbers 6:23–27, in which Yʜwʜ's face is made to shine upon Israel, is formally characterized as "placing my Name upon them" (v. 27), we may see how Israel's Sabbath by Sabbath basking in the divine presence sanctifies the community particularly by placing the sacred name upon them. Significantly, Leviticus 22 closes with legislation concerning the divine name in terms quite similar to that of the Sabbath: neither the "holy" name

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[10] Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 94.

[11] Typically, scholars explain Leviticus 24:10–23 as a rather obvious interpolation that, perhaps, maintains structural balance with the Nadab and Abihu narrative (10:1–7), yet without manifesting any coherence with its literary context. See, e.g., Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2082.

[12] Bryan D. Bibb, "This Is the Thing That the Lord Commanded You to Do: Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Books of Leviticus" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 210–15; now published as Bryan D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

nor the "holy" Sabbath is to be "profaned" because it is "Yнwн who sanctifies you" (Lev 22:32–33; cf. Exod 31:13–14). The holiness section of Leviticus is itself laced with warnings against profaning the divine name (see 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32). Tamar Kamionkowski understands the name as expressing the holy bond that binds God and Israel together, serving as a "portal" or meeting place between the divine and human, and concludes that the sojourner's blasphemy was a sort of penetration (*naqav*, נָקַב) into the divine sphere akin to an unwelcome entry into the holy of holies,[13] a relevant analogy, as we will see in the next section. Along with the sanctuary, the Sabbath and the divine name are the major sancta that can be desecrated by Israel.[14] Understanding God's name as something of a sanctuary outside the sanctuary, related to the light of his countenance, then the literary placement of the blasphemer story obtains coherence. The shift from cult (vv. 1–9) to community (vv. 10–23) in Leviticus 24, moreover, offers in microcosm the general movement of the book of Leviticus from cult (chs. 1–16) to community (chs. 17–27)[15]—a movement to which we now turn our attention.

II. *The Movement of the Book of Leviticus*

In this section, in order to demonstrate that Leviticus 24:1–9 functions to portray symbolically that the *mishkan* has now become an *'ohel mo'ed*, which is nothing less than the book's goal and theological import, we will rehearse the threefold movement of Leviticus. Briefly, Leviticus may be divided into three subsections: chapters 1–10, 11–16, and 17–27.[16] While space precludes a defense of this outline, the division is a common one and without controversy. Furthermore, we understand the promises and threats of chapter 26 as the *application* of chapters 1 through 25, a sure signal that

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[13] S. Tamar Kamionkowski, "Leviticus 24, 10–23 in Light of H's Concept of Holiness," in *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions*, ed. Sarah Shectman and Joel S Baden (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2009), 73–86.

[14] Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 99; see also John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 11–12.

[15] Cf. Leigh M. Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context," *Vetus Testamentum* 59.2 (2009): 307–12.

[16] The first two movements build upon the work of Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*. For a similar reading of the Pentateuch (Leviticus) within the context of the lost and regained divine presence, see Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW 189 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

the basic content has been covered.[17] We proceed, therefore, with the supposition that chapters 23–25 (with Lev 24 as their heart) form the climax to the theological movement of the book, a climax that is both festive and jubilant.

1. *The Terms* Mishkan *and* ’Ohel Mo‘ed

A preliminary discussion on the terms "dwelling" (*mishkan*) and "tent of meeting" (*’ohel mo‘ed*) is necessary at the outset. Is it legitimate to make much of terms that may otherwise appear to be used synonymously (as translated, e.g., by the Lxx and Vulgate)? No doubt, some scholars would not concede such a nuanced use of terms, even at the level of redaction. Historically source critical scholarship has maintained that, after incorporating the designation "tent of meeting" from earlier sources (E and J, possibly D), the Priestly writer used the terms *mishkan* and *’ohel mo‘ed* indiscriminately, without any intended difference in meaning.[18] Several factors, however, suggest that the possibility is at least worth exploring. First, etymologically, of course, there is a clear difference of emphasis in both terms, even though they have the same referent. *Mishkan* highlights the tabernacle as God's dwelling-place, the earthly copy of his heavenly abode, while *’ohel mo‘ed* underscores the tabernacle as the place designated for Israel to meet with God at the appointed times.[19] Menahem Haran notes the fundamental distinction between these two terms (God's "abode" versus the place to which he comes at "the appointed time"), but only at the source level (as a distinction between the P and E tents), asserting that P uses both terms indiscriminately.[20] This assessment has not gone unchallenged, however. Benjamin Sommer, for example, has affirmed P's intended difference in these terms, suggesting they manifest a tension between two orientations toward divine presence within P itself.[21] On either approach, the point stands.

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[17] Chapter 27, linked with chapter 25 by the motif of redemption, should likely be regarded as something of an epilogue (though no mere afterthought) that keeps the book from ending with covenant threats/curses. See John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1992), 479; Christopher R. Smith, "The Literary Structure of Leviticus," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21.70 (1996): 30; and Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 94.

[18] See, e.g., Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 272.

[19] See, e.g., Richard E. Averbeck, "Tabernacle," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 807–27.

[20] Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 269.

[21] Benjamin D. Sommer, "Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *Biblical Interpretation* 9.1 (2001): 56.

Secondly, at least *some* of the time, the Pentateuch does appear to use each of these terms in a manner that is sensitive to their etymological nuance. While our suggestion for the movement of Leviticus will present a test-case (in relation to Exod 40:34–35), yet just such a careful and deliberate use of these terms also appears in Exodus 25:9–33:7. Within this section, Exodus 25:9–27:19, which for the most part contains instructions for making the various furnishings and curtains of the tabernacle (and courtyard), utilizes *mishkan* exclusively (19 times). Exodus 27:20–33:7, however, which includes instructions regarding Aaron's garments and the cultic functions within the tabernacle, utilizes *'ohel mo'ed* exclusively (17 times). Here it is perhaps not insignificant that Exodus 27:20–21—constituting the first use of the term *'ohel mo'ed* in the Pentateuch—relates the daily *tamid* of the lampstand. Indeed, the transition from the former section to the latter is marked by the only occurrence of the term *'avodah* (עֲבֹדָה), "service," within Exodus 25–27 (27:19), manifesting the shift in focus from the tabernacle's construction/equipment to its cultic function.[22] Moreover, since Exodus 25–31 is widely attributed to P,[23] a literary approach to the material seems likely to have more potential for explaining word choice than a simple source critical one. In a three-part study of the usage of these two terms in Exodus 25–40, Ralph Hendrix concludes that the expressions *mishkan* and *'ohel mo'ed* are discrete and specific rather than interchangeable and that most analyses of this text have lacked sensitivity to the distinction between these two terms, which he explains as follows: in Exodus 25–40 *mishkan* is used within the context of constructing the tabernacle as a transient dwelling place, whereas *'ohel mo'ed* is used when the context is the tabernacle's cultic function.[24] A few decades earlier, Peter Kearney had already observed as much, in relation to the first (Exod 25:1–30:10) of the seven speeches that comprise chapters 25–31:

> Most of it separates readily under two general headings: the Dwelling and its furnishings (25:8–27:19) and the priesthood of Aaron (27:20–29:42). One clear distinction between these two parts is in the name of the sanctuary: *mishkan* ("Dwelling") in the first and *'ohel mo'ed* ("Tent of Meeting") in the second. "Tent of Meeting" is

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[22] Averbeck, "Tabernacle," 810.

[23] See, e.g., Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster, 2004), 529–37.

[24] Ralph E. Hendrix, "The Use of Miskan and 'Ohel Mo'ed in Exodus 25–40," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30.1 (1992): 3–13. Cf. his two other studies, "Miskan and 'Ohel Mo'ed: Etymology, Lexical Definitions, and Extra-Biblical Usage," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29.3 (1991): 213–24; and "A Literary Structural Overview of Exod 25–40," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30.2 (1992): 123–38.

an apt name in this second section, where the redactor builds climactically towards a continuous sequence of cultic "meetings" with God (cf. 29:38–43).[25]

Our suggested significance for Leviticus 24:1–9 corresponds well with Kearney's insight, making sense of the use of *'ohel mo'ed* in 27:20–29:42 and explaining why the inclusion of Aaron's care of the lamps (27:20–21; 30:7–8) was of such importance, since it portrays the goal of the covenant symbolically, as it is expressed and experienced through the tabernacle cultus. Although this topic merits separate address, the case for an undifferentiated use of *mishkan* and *'ohel mo'ed* is inconclusive and contested, while that for a logical use of these terms according to their etymology appears strong, at least in some sections of the Pentateuch. This point leaves open the possibility we are pursuing, namely, that the difference in these terms is key to the movement of Leviticus.

2. *The Movement of Leviticus 1–10: Approaching the House of God*

Broadly, the first ten chapters of Leviticus detail the legislation for sacrifice (chs. 1–7) and the consecration of the priesthood (ch. 8), both as prerequisites for the inauguration of the cult (chs. 9–10). This rather straightforward sequence, however, takes on new significance when read in light of the crisis introduced at the end of the book of Exodus. In Exodus 40:35 we read that Moses "was not able to enter the tent of meeting" as a result of verse 34, the substance of which is repeated in verse 35 (to envelop Moses's inability to enter):

> [34] Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yʜᴡʜ filled the dwelling.
> [35] And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because (*ki*, כִּי) the cloud rested (*shakhan*, שָׁכַן) above it, and the glory of Yʜᴡʜ filled the dwelling.

Moses's barred entry is a shocking statement, as throughout the narrative of Exodus Moses alone *is able* to ascend into God's presence within the clouded summit of Sinai.[26] If Moses is not able to enter the tabernacle, then nobody is able—and yet, it is with this dire reality that Exodus closes. Yʜᴡʜ God has taken up his dwelling on earth, but no human being—no Israelite, not even Moses the mediator—is able to approach his abode. Christophe Nihan rightly understands this crisis as generating the dramatic movement

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[25] Peter J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89.3 (1977): 375.

[26] See L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, BTS 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 219–30.

of Leviticus 1–10, although he does not probe for any significance in relation to the different terms used for the tabernacle in these verses.[27] Interestingly, Moses's barred entry is given specifically in relation to the "tent of meeting," the *'ohel mo'ed*, which is covered by the cloud that is "resting" (*shakhan*) upon it; while the glory's in-filling of the tabernacle is given in relation to the term "dwelling." When the glory of Yhwh fills it, the tabernacle becomes a dwelling—a *mishkan*—indeed. The cloud, however, now covers the "tent of meeting," apparently serving as a barrier so that it, along with the indwelling glory, is given as the reason (*ki*) for Moses's inability to enter. The tent, in other words, has become a *mishkan* but as yet it cannot *function* as an *'ohel mo'ed*, a "tent of meeting." The terminology used appears quite precise. The book of Exodus ends, therefore, with the climactic in-filling of the tabernacle so that it has become, in accord with the promises given in Exodus 25:8 and 29:45, a *mishkan* without question. What the book's end does question, however, is how this tabernacle will come to function as an *'ohel mo'ed*. Accordingly, within the narrative of the Pentateuch, the remarkable statement of the mediator's inability to enter serves a particular function, namely, it serves to introduce the book of Leviticus, *to underscore the necessity of its revelation* of the cultic legislation and personnel ordained by God as *the way* by which Israel may approach Yhwh. How may Israel approach Yhwh's abode? Through divinely revealed sacrifices and a divinely chosen and ordained priesthood to offer those sacrifices on behalf of Israel. In this manner, Leviticus recounts and theologizes how the *mishkan* steadily becomes the *'ohel mo'ed*, a resolution that is not complete until chapters 23–25.

Part of the narrative strategy evident already is that the movement contextualizes the legislation (chs. 1–8) between the crisis and the resolution. Leviticus 9 recounts the inaugural worship of the tabernacle cultus, wherein Moses and Aaron are allowed for the first time to enter the tent of meeting and the people behold the glory of Yhwh (v. 23)—the sacrificial cult has established a new form of relationship between Yhwh and Israel.[28] The gap between Moses's inability to enter in Exodus 40:34–35 has been abolished in Leviticus 9, *through the sacrificial cult revealed by God* (Lev 1–8).

In Leviticus 10 a new crisis is introduced that will require for its full resolution the developments that take place in the final two sections of the book, the first ending in chapter 16 and the second with chapters 23–25. Since its tension propels the second movement of Leviticus, we will consider Leviticus 10 in the next section.

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[27] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 89–95.
[28] Ibid., 91.

3. *The Movement of Leviticus 11–16: Cleansing the House of God*

Leviticus 10:1–3 recounts Nadab and Abihu's fatal approach to Yʜwʜ with "strange fire." God then responds in Leviticus 10:10—highlighted as the only divine speech addressed exclusively to the high priest—by instructing Aaron to teach Israel how to distinguish "between holy and profane" (the subject matter of the third section of Leviticus, chs. 17–25) and between "unclean and clean" (the subject matter of the second section of Leviticus, chs. 11–16). The second narrative movement, the death of Aaron's sons, Nihan observes, creates a twofold problem: firstly, the sanctuary needs to be cleansed from corpse pollution, the most dangerous and contagious form of uncleanness;[29] secondly, and assuming Aaron's sons had attempted to enter the inner sanctum with their censors, the question of how near God's people may approach him has been raised.[30] The legislation for the Day of Atonement, though removed by five chapters, is revealed on the same day as Nadab and Abihu's tragedy in Leviticus 16 and offers the remedy for both problems. The Day of Atonement ceremony provides for the annual cleansing of the tabernacle so that it may be called a ritual of restoration or "re-founding,"[31] and this day also provides for the nearest approach into the divine presence—within the holy of holies.

As with the previous section, we find here a narrative strategy whereby the laws of clean/unclean (chs. 11–15) have been inserted within the narrative movement from Leviticus 10 to 16, creating a theological context for those laws so as to underscore their consequence within the cultic system. As the capstones of their sections, chapters 9–10 and 16 recount the creation of the cultus and the regular re-creation of it by way of cleansing—institution and restitution.[32] They are also both marked by references to the divine presence (9:23; 16:2), which track the gradual abolishment of Israel's distance from God in his *mishkan*.

4. *The Movement of Leviticus 17–27: Meeting with God at the House of God*

When we consider chapter 26 as the *application* of the covenantal gift of the tabernacle cultus (i.e., of the *whole* book of Leviticus), then we are led to

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[29] See Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, JSOTSup 56 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 66–85.

[30] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 92–105.

[31] Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*, JSOTSup 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 61–102.

[32] Benedikt Jürgens, *Heiligkeit und Versöhnung: Levitikus 16 in seinem literarischen Kontext*, Herders Biblische Studien 28 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2001), 302; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 101.

look for the third section's resolution *before* the blessings and curses stipu-
lated in Leviticus 26.[33] Here, our particular angle on the theme of Leviticus
—how the *mishkan* becomes the *'ohel mo'ed*—reveals its usefulness. The
first two sections of Leviticus as we have presented them, approaching
God's house (chs. 1–10) and cleansing God's house (chs. 11–16), do not
convey the significance of the term *'ohel mo'ed*. These sections do, however,
serve as necessary preliminaries before the tabernacle can function as a
"tent of meeting." And, indeed, as we will see, Leviticus 23–25 (symbolized
by 24:1–9 as their center) have this precise function as their subject. For this
final section of Leviticus, we will present four lines of reasoning that support
understanding Leviticus 24:1–9 as symbolizing the goal of the *mishkan*'s
becoming an *'ohel mo'ed*. We will consider the theme of sacred time with
which this third section closes, how that theme relates to *'ohel mo'ed*
terminology, how our proposal fits the overall narrative strategy discerned
in the previous two sections, and how our proposal corresponds with the
literary structure and theme of Leviticus.

a. The Theme of Sacred Time

Keeping in mind the cult and cosmos homology, Walter Vogels makes two
relevant points regarding the fourth-day creation of the heavenly lights in
Genesis 1:14–18.[34] First, the word for light or luminary, *ma'or* (מָאוֹר), is rare;
elsewhere in the Pentateuch it always refers to the lamps of the tabernacle
lampstand. Secondly, the chief function of the heavenly "lamps" is for the
sake of the *mo'adim* (מוֹעֲדִים), a word which is better translated as "cultic
festivals" rather than "seasons (of nature)" (Gen 1:14). Significantly, Vogels
notes that the singular *mo'ed* (מוֹעֵד) refers 135 out of the 160 times it appears
in the Pentateuch to the "tent of *meeting*," with the vast majority of the other
cases referring either to the "fixed time" of a cultic festival or simply as a
synonym for the "festival" itself. The creation account, let us recall, is
structured by a sabbatical principle, opening with a seven-word sentence,
containing seven paragraphs with seven days, and climaxing on the seventh
day of divine rest. The first, middle, and last days all deal with time: the
period of a day (Day 1), the heavenly lamps for marking annual cultic

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[33] Nihan himself refers to chapter 26 as a "concluding exhortation" (Ibid., 99) and notes
that Leviticus 25 may "legitimately be viewed as the conclusion to the entire legislation on
holiness in Lev. 17–25" (534).

[34] Walter Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen.
1:14b)," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 11.2 (1997): 163–80; see also David J.
Rudolph, "Festivals in Genesis 1:14," *Tyndale Bulletin* 542 (2003): 23–40.

festivals (Day 4), and the weekly Sabbath (Day 7).[35] The message of Genesis 1:1–2:3 is clear: the cosmos was created to be the meeting place between God and humanity, specifically on the appointed days of meeting—built upon the Sabbath.

Understanding the tabernacle as a mini-cosmos, one would expect a similar purpose for its construction, and such is indeed the case (cf. Exod 31:12–17).[36] The goal is for the tabernacle to become an *'ohel mo'ed*, the place where Israel meets with God Sabbath by Sabbath. If we understand this as the end toward which the narrative has been leading, then we can discern the significance of chapters 23–25 of Leviticus. Although generally a foreign concept in the present era, sacred time was a standard category in the ancient world; not until Yнwн has revealed the sacred calendar to Israel, setting up the appointed times of meeting, can the dwelling finally function as a tent of meeting.

b. Terminology

Just here it is critical to consider the *'ohel mo'ed* terminology. The word *mo'ed* is built from the root *y'd* (יעד), meaning "to appoint, meet." That this function of the tabernacle, far from incidental, is essential to its purpose may be seen from the programmatic statement in Exodus 29:42–43 (cf. 25:22; 30:6, 36), which contains a threefold use of the root *y'd*:

> The daily burnt offering shall be throughout your generations at the door of the tent of *meeting* (*mo'ed*, מוֹעֵד) before Yнwн, where I will *meet* (*'iwwa'ed*, אִוָּעֵד) with you [pl.] to speak with you there. And I will *meet* (*weno'adeti*, וְנֹעַדְתִּי) with the sons of Israel and it shall be sanctified by my glory.

Ralph Klein observes that the term "meet" is at the heart of this "summary paragraph, which articulates the central significance of the whole institution of the tabernacle."[37] This usage, moreover, is not an isolated instance.

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[35] Peter Weimar, "Struktur und Komposition der priesterschriftlichen Schöpfungserzählung (Gen 1,1–2,4a)," in *Ex Mesopotamia et Syria lux: Festschrift für Manfried Dietrich zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Manfried Dietrich et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 836; Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen. 1:14b)," 164, n. 4; 176–79; Frank H. Gorman, "Priestly Rituals of Founding: Time, Space, and Status," in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 52–53.

[36] See the parallels between the cosmos and tabernacle in relation to the Sabbath in Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy"; Moshe Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple, and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3," in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. André Caquot and Mathias Delcor, AOAT 212 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 501–12.

[37] Ralph K. Klein, "Back to the Future: The Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus," *Interpretation* 50.3 (1996): 268.

"There I will *meet* (*weno'adeti*, וְנוֹעַדְתִּי) with you," Yhwh says with reference to the atonement lid in the instructions for the ark in Exodus 25:22; "where I will meet (*'iwwa'ed*, אִוָּעֵד) with you" in Exodus 30:6; and "in the *'ohel mo'ed* where I will meet (*'iwwa'ed*, אִוָּעֵד) with you" in Exodus 30:36. All passages have the making of the tabernacle and the establishment of the cult in view. In Exodus, moreover, the people of God become the *'edah* (עֵדָה), built from the same root, the cultic community appointed to meet with him. Finally, the root *y'd* not only designates the place to meet with God and the people who will meet with God, but as we have already noticed, it designates the times appointed to meet with God, the *mo'adim*. Leviticus 23, being a chapter concerned with cultic festivals, is itself defined by its sixfold use of *mo'adim* (vv. 2 [2x], 4 [2x], 37, 44). The *'edah* meets with God at the *'ohel mo'ed* for the *mo'adim*. Just as the Sabbath marks the time for the bread to be renewed under the light of the lampstand, so, too, the Sabbath marks the time for Israel to convene, a *miqra'-qodesh* (מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ) (Lev 23:3), as a sacred assembly for fellowship and communion with Yhwh.[38]

Returning now to the movement of Leviticus, what greater affirmation can be given to demonstrate that the sanctuary has finally become the tent of *mo'ed* than these chapters calling Israel to gather about the sanctuary specifically for the *mo'adim*? Once more, we suggest that the goal of the tabernacle, in harmony with that of the cosmos, is portrayed symbolically in Leviticus 24:1–9. We have already noted the correspondences between the lamps of the menorah and those of the cosmos, along with the seventh day and the Sabbath *tamid*. In short, all the necessary elements of Genesis 1:1–2:3 are found in Leviticus 24:1–9 for the sake of presenting a cultic picture of Israel basking in the renewing light of God's Sabbath day presence—a beautiful, theological symbol for the significance of the tabernacle cultus as it has unfolded in Leviticus. Just as the creation account narrates the founding of both cosmos and the Sabbath/sacred time, so Leviticus narrates the founding of the tabernacle and the Sabbath/sacred time. More importantly, the message of Leviticus is that the Sabbath/*mo'adim* convocations with God for which the cosmos-as-temple had been created (but which had been frustrated through the latter's defilement), may finally take place through Israel's cult. The unfulfilled purpose for which the cosmos was created may now be realized through the tabernacle cultus of Israel. Inasmuch as Leviticus 23–25 describe festive pilgrimages to God's house, along with the redemption and rest entailed in the jubilee legislation, these

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[38] Timothy K. Hui, "The Purpose of Israel's Annual Feasts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 148, 151–54.

chapters form a fitting celebratory resolution, signaling what the tabernacle has become for Israel, a tent of meeting-with-God.

c. Narrative Strategy

Our suggestion for the true resolution to the third section of Leviticus yields a narrative strategy similar to the one for the previous two sections. As already mentioned, these chapters are to be understood as a further answer to the original Nadab and Abihu crisis, in relation to the priestly duty of distinguishing between holy and profane (10:10). The arc from Leviticus 16 to chapters 23–25 contains the insertion of holiness legislation, which is appropriately contextualized by chapters 23–25 and their emphasis upon the Sabbath (and sanctuary). Bracketing the bulk of the book's third section, we find the following words repeated verbatim (Lev 19:30; 26:2), which link the Sabbath with the sanctuary:[39]

> You will keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am Yhwh.

The narrative logic of the inserted legislation becomes plain upon considering that Sabbath engagement with God in his sanctuary is not only the *goal* of holiness but also the regular *means* for Israel to become holy, as evident from Exodus 31:13:

> Surely, my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Yhwh who sanctifies you.

God's presence in the tabernacle is the source of sanctification, while Israel's sacred calendar prescribes the occasions for entering his sanctifying presence. It is the light of Yhwh's countenance that sanctifies, and this is experienced particularly on the Sabbath, the "sanctuary in time" and "the beachhead of holiness in the world."[40] Time was the first object of sanctification in Scripture and, indeed, marks the only use of the term "holy" (*qdsh*, קדש) in Genesis (2:3),[41] because it is the time set apart for setting

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[39] For more on this link, cf. Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1995), 10–19. Ruwe sees these bookends as establishing the basic two topics for this section of Leviticus: for chapters 17–22 it is the sanctuary; and for chapters 23–25 the Sabbath (Ruwe, "*Heiligkeitsgesetz*" *und* "*Priesterschrift*," 103–120). Nihan refers to the two coordinates of holiness, space and time (Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 478).

[40] Edwin Firmage, "Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 24.82 (1999): 110.

[41] Cf. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), xvi–xvii.

humanity apart unto God. Understanding holiness from the angle of Israel's cult, "holy" means "belonging to God." Entering into the Sabbath regularly, Israel was steadily to grow in its calling of belonging to God. It is not incidental, then, that the third section of Leviticus parallels the emphasis upon time found in Genesis 1:1–2:3, as we have noted already.[42] Remarkably, the Day of Atonement, which opens with Aaron's being forbidden to enter the inner sanctum "at just any time" (v. 2), concludes with the book's first mention of the Sabbath (v. 31). After the holiness legislation (chs. 17–22), chapters 23–25 then mark a significant spike in the use of *shbth* (שבת, which occurs twenty-six times in these chapters). Since the Sabbath is the sign of Israel's covenant with God, and since like the cosmos the tabernacle cultus was established for Sabbath day engagement with God, it comes as no surprise that Leviticus 26 applies the covenant in terms of the Sabbath (*shbth* occurring nine times in this chapter).

d. Literary Structure and Theme of Leviticus

Our focus upon Leviticus 24:1–9 finds confirmation in the literary structure of the book.[43] Various scholars have noted that chapters 8–10, 16, and 24 of Leviticus relate and allude to one another self-consciously, a significant phenomenon for the book's structure. Christopher Smith points out, for example, that Leviticus 16 begins by alluding to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (10:1–3), and it also ends by indicating that the Sabbath legislation applies equally to both the native and the sojourner (16:29), which then forms part of the resolution to the blasphemer story (24:22).[44] Bibb notes the remarkable parallels between the blasphemer's execution and the scapegoat ritual in Leviticus 16, including the laying of hands on their heads and their bearing away iniquity.[45] Our approach, once more, requires a

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[42] Volker Wagner has also argued that chapters 23–25 deal with "sacred times"; Volker Wagner, "Zur Existenz des sogenannten 'Heiligkeitsgesetzes,'" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86.3 (2009): 314–15.

[43] For some of the issues involved with Leviticus 24 in relation to the book's structure, see John R. Master, "The Place of Chapter 24 in the Structure of the Book of Leviticus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 414–24.

[44] Smith, "The Literary Structure of Leviticus." Even if one disagrees with Smith's understanding that all three pericopes are "narratives" (i.e., including the Day of Atonement legislation), the point that there is intertextuality among chapters 8–10, 16, and 24:10–23 stands nevertheless.

[45] Bibb, "This Is the Thing That the Lord Commanded You to Do," 213–14; see also Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context," 310. Taking Kamionkowski's previous analogy, we may posit that the blasphemer story entails an elimination rite for the community with respect to the name, whereas the Day of Atonement is an elimination rite for the community with respect to the sanctuary.

holistic reading of Leviticus 24 (vv. 10–23 read as an extension of vv. 1–9), as well as understanding Leviticus 24 as central to the concern of chapters 23 through 25. In fact, the connections with Leviticus 16 include prominent references in these chapters that frame Leviticus 24 (cf. Lev 23:26–32; 25:9).[46] Understanding Leviticus 24 as the climactic resolution to the book's third section (and, indeed, to the book itself), therefore, corresponds well with the structural significance of the narrative in 24:10–23, as noted by various scholars.[47]

In retrospect, we can see that each of the three movements of Leviticus culminates with a theophany that takes place within the context of worship, mapped on Israel's calendar, and within one of the three areas of sacred space so that the *entire* tabernacle complex is encompassed:[48] (1) on the tabernacle's inauguration upon the eighth day (of Nisan, New Year) in the courtyard, (2) on the Day of Atonement (the "Sabbath of Sabbaths") in the holy of holies, and (3) on the Sabbath regularly in the holy place. With this scheme in mind, the full significance of Leviticus 24:1–9 becomes apparent: it constitutes a *cultic* theophany within the holy place.

Conclusion

The symbolic significance of Leviticus 24:1–9 for which we have argued, that it portrays the ideal of Israel basking in the light of Yнwн's Sabbath presence, forms a fitting and climactic resolution to the book's thematic movement and literary strategy, also validating the chapter's structural significance. Whereas the book of Exodus ends with Israel's mediator being unable to enter the *'ohel mo'ed*, the book of Leviticus ends with a lengthy and festal portrayal of Israel's sacred assemblies at the sanctuary to commune and fellowship with God—it ends, in other words, with a fully functioning *'ohel mo'ed* in the life of Israel. While the book's first half establishes the regular cleansing and maintenance of God's house, the second half focuses upon how God's house will function as a meeting place with Israel—and this as the goal and means of Israel's holiness. One might therefore describe the movement of Leviticus justly as "from cult to community," or from the *mishkan* to the *'ohel mo'ed*.

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[46] Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context," 310.

[47] Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 195–217; Smith, "The Literary Structure of Leviticus"; Didier Luciani, *Sainteté et pardon*, vol. 1, *Structure littéraire du Lévitique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 98–305.

[48] Here, we are adjusting the proposal of Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, who suggests that Leviticus 26:12 recounts the third and final theophany.

The Immanuel Prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 at the Crossroads of Exegesis, Hermeneutics, and Bible Translation

STEFAN FELBER

Abstract

In this study of the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and its reception, I will show how the relation of exegetical, hermeneutical, and translational decisions influences the process of understanding before any translation is done. I wish to maintain that Matthew's use of Isaiah 7 is coherent with its wording and logic. I would like to invite translators and exegetes to determine textual and exegetical matters under theological premises, that is, under a biblical hierarchy of authority.

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet …" (Matt. 1:22)

I. *Significance and Dimensions of the Prophecy*

The Immanuel prophecy is the first literal quotation of an Old Testament passage in the New. It is also the first out of five by which Matthew depicts Jesus's early history. These quotations determine not only the selection of the story materials but also their wordings. Memories of the childless matriarchs whose

womb the Lord opened (Gen 29:31; cf. 30:2) are present in conventional vocabulary:[1] initial barrenness, divine promise, pregnancy, birth, and naming (and an etymological explanation) are recurring elements in the narratives of Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah.[2]

As for Christology, the evangelist attributes fundamental importance to Isaiah's prophecy, since he substantiates the angel's message to Joseph by referring to Isaiah 7:14. He stresses that the connection is not arbitrary and manmade but God given. Matthew does not customize the passage to his purposes, but rather lets God speak and act according to his predicted will in Isaiah:

> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (Matt 1:22–23 ESV)

For Matthew, the name Immanuel and the divine sonship of Jesus, which became apparent in the virgin birth, belong inseparably together. Immanuel indicates that it is God himself who is with us in the incarnate Son. At the end of his gospel, Matthew picks up the same point: Christ, sending his disciples to all nations, solemnly declares: "*I am with you* always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).

"Immanuel" did not become Jesus's first name but identifies his essence: He bears God's name because he is God with us and for us.[3] Dogmatically speaking, Christology and soteriology are knit together.[4] If Matthew had ascribed him God's name merely for rhetorical purposes, we could not pray to him, and if we were to, we would be idolaters.

It is often overlooked that as an interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1 is as important as Matthew 1. According to Luke 1:27, the angel Gabriel is sent to a virgin, Greek *parthenos*. The precision with which Isaiah speaks of her

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[1] Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Gregory K. Beale and Donald Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker 2007), 3; Ulrich Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments I/4* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005), 94.

[2] Cf. Samson's birth and the nameless son of the Shunammite (2 Kgs 4).

[3] Robert L. Reymond, "Who Is the עלמה [*ʿlmh*] of Isaiah 7:14?," *Presbyterion* 15 (1989): 7.

[4] The church fathers (Ireneaus, Theodoret, Tertullian, Chrysostom, and others) hold this connection as well; see Johannes Bade, *Christologie des Alten Testaments* [Münster: Deiters, 1850], 60). For them, the prophecy (Isa 7:1–16) announces the virginal birth of Jesus Christ, describes the circumstances of this birth (Isa 8:1–4), and expresses its joy (Isa 9:1–6); cf. Marius Reiser, "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl oder: Was hat Jes 7,14 mit Jesus und Maria zu tun?," in *Bibelkritik und Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift*, ed. Marius Reiser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 297. As to the entanglement of Christology and anthropology, cf. my contribution on Psalm 8: Stefan Felber, "Anthropologie und Christologie: Der 8. Psalm und die Salzburger Erklärung," in *Erkennen und Lieben in der Gegenwart Gottes*, ed. Stefan Felber (Wien: LIT, 2016), 57–67.

(using the article *ha-'almah*), is now revealed: "And the virgin's name was … Mary." This answers the question, Who is the virgin?[5] Then, the angel greets Mary: "The Lord is *with you*!" (v. 28), which links to the meaning of Immanuel. Verse 31 repeats Isaiah 7:14 (as well as Judg 13:5) almost verbatim: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." She is told to name her son Jesus instead of Immanuel. Later, Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Spirit," refers to the unborn Jesus as her Lord (Luke 1:41–45).

According to Matthew 1 and Luke 1, the Immanuel prophecy is foundational not only for Christology but also for hermeneutics. Whoever tries to grasp this more precisely stirs up a hornet's nest. Many take issue with the idea that Matthew 1 is an adequate, exemplary, and authoritative exegesis of Isaiah 7. Feminist or historicist critics renounce the idea of virgin birth. Others insinuate that Matthew manipulated an Old Testament quote for his purposes. Others still argue that through a translation error, Matthew made the narrative a virgin story. I will pass over unaesthetic recent interpretations (e.g., of Margot Käßmann or Maria Jepsen, both former bishops in Germany). As early as the nineteenth century, Franz Delitzsch complained that some read the virgin narrative as a myth woven out of Isaiah 7:14. However, he respected church tradition, receiving Matthew 1 as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.[6] Since early Christianity three hermeneutical paradigms have contended with each other.

The *first* paradigm follows Matthew and builds upon the evangelists and church fathers. Here, the Immanuel prophecy is messianic and a direct reference to Christ in its *literal sense*. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and into the early modern period, this notion was retained. Even in the nineteenth century, it was defended against Jewish and rationalist critiques.[7] Christian and Jewish exegetes respected each other's arguments even if they did not share their results.[8] In the last decades, this paradigm became a minority position.[9]

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[5] The older Rabbis had expected the Messiah to be borne by a virgin, without father (R. Simeon Ben Jodai, R. Jehuda Haqodesch, R. Hadarsan, R. Barachias). Therefore, according to Bade (Bade, *Christologie des Alten Testaments*, 64), some, who claimed Messiahship, had called their mother a virgin (e.g., Simon Magus).

[6] Franz Delitzsch, *Messianische Weissagungen in geschichtlicher Folge* (Leipzig: Faber, 1890), 100. The term "Immanuel" also became root of the French term for Christmas: *noël*.

[7] For example, the Lutheran Abraham Calov, the Calvinist Campegius Vitringa, and the later Lutheran confessionalist Ernst Hengstenberg (Jesus "not the highest, but the only fulfillment," *Christologie des Alten Testaments* [Berlin: Oehmigke, 1855], 2:58), and the Catholic scholar Laurenz Reinke.

[8] Reiser, "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl," 305, 314.

[9] Edward J. Young, John Motyer, and Pope Benedict XVI.

In the *second* paradigm, the direct reference becomes indirect. A person from the time of Ahaz fulfills the prophecy as a type of Jesus Christ. It includes a messianic prediction in a duplication of the literal sense and results in a secondary typological or allegorical interpretation. The proponents of this paradigm are quite diverse. As early as the second century, Justin Martyr argued with Tryphon, a Jew, who identified the son of Ahaz as the Immanuel (i.e., Hezekiah).[10] Jerome also knew "one of ours" (*quidam de nostris*) teaching this way. Both, however, rejected this interpretation, since Hezekiah was nine years old when Isaiah came to meet Ahaz.[11] Later others identified Isaiah's son as Immanuel of 7:14.[12]

The *third* paradigm cuts the connection entirely. In the mid-seventeenth century the European intellectual climate changed dramatically. Predictions concerning distant future events were no longer credible. Academic theologians aimed at an exegesis ever less dependent on the New Testament and tradition and more focused on the presumed communication between Isaiah and Ahaz. Thus, Immanuel is identified with either Ahaz's son (Hezekiah),[13] Isaiah's next son (Isa 8), or someone unknown, at any rate without intentional reference to Jesus. Approaches like this were first found in Jewish exegesis in early Christian times; in the Christian realm, Wilhelm Gesenius established this paradigm. Once immanent reasoning was accepted, the third paradigm became predominant. Ulrich Luz openly acknowledges this in his widely used commentary on Matthew 1:

> The traditional Christian interpretation of the Messiah Jesus is untenable. Matthew 1:22–23 paradigmatically confronts the church with the problem of Old Testament hermeneutics. We can no longer speak about a God-performed fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. What we can say is that there was some *faith* in this fulfillment. God's acting in history has been—I exaggerate—replaced by the faith in this acting. And these words of Scripture, which the church used against the Jews, are replaced by embarrassment.[14]

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[10] Justin, *Dialogue with Trypon* 43.8; 67.1.

[11] Reymond, "Who Is the עלמה [*ʿlmh*] of Isaiah 7:14?," 6, reckons 19 years.

[12] Johann Albrecht Bengel (*Gnomon* [1742]), Wilhelm Vischer, Theodor C. Vriezen, and Walter Kaiser followed this line. Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 158–62. Craig Blomberg, Gleason Archer, Ray Ortlund, Robert Chisholm, and John Joseph Owens identified Isaiah's son as Immanuel of 7:14. Cf. Blomberg, "Matthew," 4.

[13] E.g., Ronald E. Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy of Isa. 7:10–17 and Its Messianic Interpretation," in *Die hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte*, ed. Erhard Blum and Christian Macholz (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 225–40.

[14] Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, EKK I/1, 5th ed. (Zurich: Benzinger, 2002), 152, quoted according to Reiser, "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl," 292 (my translation).

A changing of the guard had occurred. Exegesis under such principles acts like Ahaz, who declared himself a servant of the foreign superpower (2 Kgs 16:7). Scholars following the third paradigm have, in my view, stepped outside the realm of the church, bound and defined by the apostles and prophets. Isaiah 7:14 raises a problem of Old Testament hermeneutics that can only be decided on the authority of modern standards. Does not the array of interpretations turn into a pluralism without boundaries?

The development of these paradigms influences Bible translation, which exerts a formative influence on the next generations. The link between the Testaments is cut. The virgin birth, the credibility of holy Scripture, and the nucleus of Christology are lost.[15]

Hermeneutical paradigms concerning the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah	Translation of 'almah in Isaiah 7:14	Statement on Mary's virginity
1. The Immanuel prophecy applies *directly* to Jesus's incarnation.	*virgin*	Orthodox: biological virginity
2. The Immanuel prophecy applies *indirectly* by means of a type to the incarnation. The type is a contemporary of Ahaz.	*young woman*	Orthodox: biological virginity
3. The Immanuel prophecy is not to be understood *messianically or as referring to a distant future*. Typology reduced to analogy, done retrospectively.	*young woman*	Liberal: no virginity. Popular or feminist: Believing in biological virginity is *the* result of a translation mistake.

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[15] The inconsistency can be found in a footnote of the Living Bible. Its main text still reads "virgin," but on the same page it states, "The controversial Hebrew word used here sometimes means 'virgin' and sometimes 'young woman.' Its immediate use here refers to Isaiah's young wife and her newborn son (Isaiah 8:1–4). This, of course, was not a virgin birth. God's sign was that before this child was old enough to talk (verse 4) the two invading kings would be destroyed. However, the Gospel of Matthew (1:23) tells us that there was a further fulfillment of this prophecy, in that a virgin (Mary) conceived and bore a son, Immanuel, the Christ. We have therefore properly used this higher meaning, 'virgin,' in verse 14, as otherwise the Matthew account loses its significance."

II. *Isaiah's Path to the Immanuel Prophecy*

There was a fratricidal war between Israel and Judah at the time of Ahaz king of Jerusalem. It was not the first conflict, but the consequences were more far reaching than before. Against the northern tribes and the Syrians, Ahaz had sought help from Assur (2 Kgs 16; 2 Chr 28). By doing so, he contributed decisively to the northern tribes' exile (722 BC, cf. 2 Chr 28:23), brought his own country into lasting dependence on Assyria, made the divorce of the northern and southern kingdoms permanent, proved his unbelief to be a result of hardening of his heart (Isa 6:9–10), and rendered the southern kingdom's way into exile unavoidable (though 150 years later), with the loss of Elath as a harbinger (2 Kgs 16:6).

In about 734 BC, when Ahaz inspected Jerusalem's defenses and its water supply, Isaiah gave him a word of comfort about the end of his enemies (Isa 7:1–2, 4–5). Would Ahaz heed the message or harden his heart (Isa 6:9–10)?[16] Isaiah 7:1–9 and 10–17 work as opposed warnings to the house of David: Because of your unbelief, you will not stand in this crisis—but the Lord himself is offering you a sign of confirmation. Following Isaiah's call, "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all!" (v. 9)—a word aimed at renewal or hardening—Ahaz at first remains quiet (vv. 9–10).[17] His mind was set. "In his heart, there was a secret better comfort than the word of the prophet."[18] Amidst his reservations, the Lord prompts him to ask a sign: "Let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (v. 11). Man cannot provoke a God-given sign designed to expose unbelief or strengthen weak faith (vv. 10–11). What was Ahaz's unbelief? He did not rely on Yahweh but on Assur. Moreover, he did not wait for the intervention of the superpower but sought to encourage it. Instead of believing in his privileged state, grounded in the unbreakable covenant with David (2 Sam 7:12–14), he confessed allegiance to Tiglath-Pileser III's son and servant.[19] The son of David, the son of God declares himself servant of a heathen king—what discouragement for the faithful remnant!

Ahaz has to decide whether to ask for a sign or not. This is risky because if God does give a sign, Ahaz has to abandon his proud unbelief, and his

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[16] With Edward J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (Grands Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 153.

[17] Ibid., 152, commenting on verse 10: "It is more natural to regard these words as a continuation of the preceding, introduced to show the reader the solemnity of the occasion."

[18] Franz Delitzsch, *Jesaja*, 4th ed. (1889; repr., Gießen: Brunnen, 1984), 139.

[19] Probably, this event was before the meeting with Ahaz, contrary to Antti Laato, *Who Is Immanuel? The Rise and the Foundering of Isaiah's Messianic Expectations* (Åbo: Åbo Academi University, 1988), 123, and Erling Hammershaimb, but with Johann J. Stamm, "Die Immanuel-Weissagung: Ein Gespräch mit E. Hammershaimb," in *Vetus Testamentum* 4.1 (1954): 24.

covenant with the Assyrians. Or, if no sign follows, he has to condemn the prophet and get rid of him—also a risk. That Ahaz decides not to ask for a sign shows he formally acknowledges the living God, though weakly. In unbelief, he declines the sign and remains under Baal, Marduk, and Tiglath-Pileser.

Verses 11 and 13 do not differentiate between God and Isaiah as the speaker. God, not man, speaks, asserting that no other can help. Ahaz should ask for a sign in the depth or on high: for example, a resurrection from the dead, an earthquake, or a mountain cast into the sea. Ahaz refuses to admit that he does not want to change, and he resorts to pseudo-theology (v. 12), with a devout statement that points to Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test" (*lo thenassu*, לֹא תְנַסּוּ, likewise *nsh* in the Piel).[20] The highest level of unbelief reasons theologically: this is being hardened! "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?" (v. 13).

The king of the chosen people ought to know God's power, but his apathy reveals the opposite, trying God's patience. It is surprising that unbelief wearies the God who called the universe into being by not to taking him at his word.

In the exposition of Isaiah 7, some overlook that Isaiah expands the audience to include the whole house of David (vv. 13–14) not only Ahaz (v. 10). This point is important because the relevance of the sign for Ahaz stretches until the incarnation of the Son of God (Matt 1:1–17).[21]

III. *The Immanuel Prophecy*

> Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, *the virgin* shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isa 7:14 ESV).

The sentence construction and content resemble Genesis 16:11 or Judges 13:3, 5, 7, addressing expectant mothers. These passages announce a natural, not a virginal act of procreation, without divine naming (cf. Gen 17:19). The address is given in the plural, like "house of David" (v. 13), expanding the relevance beyond Ahaz's contemporaries (from v. 16 going back to the singular).

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[20] Cf. Young, *Studies*, 154.

[21] With Origen, Theodoret, Laurenz Reinke (Reiser, "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl," 300); Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT (1965; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1:284, cf. 1: 286: "We must be guided [by] not how we think Ahaz would have been affected, but only by the text itself."

Isaiah often uses "therefore" (*lakhen*, לָכֵן) to introduce a word of judgment.[22] After providing evidence of guilt (v. 13) he follows it with an announcement of penalty. "The Lord himself will give you a sign" (v. 16). He is not too weary to prove himself! The sign of the virgin corresponds to the divine offer. It simultaneously links heaven and earth. Young captures the message:

> "A sign has been offered to you for your benefit, but you through your unbelief have refused to ask for such a sign and have consequently wearied my God. Therefore, since you have thus wearied God, he himself will give you a sign." The matter is thus taken out of Ahaz's hands.[23]

Since Ahaz refused to choose a sign, God choses. The subsequent verse 14 is both a word of judgment and salvation.

Will the sign be given in the present or the future?[24] The Septuagint's use of the future is confirmed by the quotation of verse 14 in Matthew 1:23 and the content of the prophecy: The birth will be a future event, in months or centuries.[25] Interpretation has to take seriously the responsibility the prophet lays upon the house of David with the promise and threat (vv. 14–25). Even if the time between the present and a prophecy's fulfillment gets longer, the prophecy is not rendered useless.

For Ahaz and his house, the sign consisted not only in the person of Immanuel and the virgin birth, but also in the events of the following verses. It is not necessary to differentiate between the son of verse 14 and the one of verse 15. Rather, the early period of the child becomes a limiting measure of Judah's affliction.[26] About twelve years go by until he reaches legal age ("refuse the evil," "choose the good," vv. 15–16; the time of pregnancy has to be added). The time includes the meeting of Isaiah 7, the conquest of Damascus (732 BC), and Samaria's exile (722 BC).

It is difficult to see a change of times between verse 14 and verses 15–16. For our prosaic Western mindset used to sorting precisely in categories of time and space, the difficulty is greater than for the Hebrew mindset. But why should the prophet not be allowed to point to a distant future in one verse and a nearer future in the next, even if both are linked with the same person? Is not the Immanuel, even though he is going to become man only later, the same person at any time?[27]

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[22] Cf. Young, *Studies*, 155.

[23] Ibid., 156–57.

[24] Cf. Hengstenberg and Dillmann.

[25] In the parallels in Judges and Genesis 17, procreation acts are clearly future.

[26] Young, *Isaiah*, 1:283, 291; Reymond, "Who Is the עלמה [*'lmh*] of Isaiah 7:14?," 12–13.

[27] Cf. Delitzsch, *Jesaja*, 112–24; Young, *Isaiah*, 1:293–94.

The mother of the child was visible only to prophetic eyes. Nevertheless, this does not free Ahaz from his responsibility to accept and believe God's word[28]—the only way he could have maintained a just kingdom was by doing this (Isa 7:9).

Who, then, is to be identified as the *'almah* (עַלְמָה)? Whose pregnancy was going to be part of the divine sign? A "virgin" or a "young woman"? A survey of the entries for *'almah* (used in Isa 7:14) and *bethulah* (בְּתוּלָה) in common Hebrew lexicons, from Wilhelm Gesenius (18th ed., 2013) to David Clines (1993–2016), shows how the authors try to avoid strict definitions of virginity in both cases.[29] In the earlier editions of Gesenius's lexicon (*Handwörterbuch*, 16th ed. [Leipzig: Vogel, 1915], 594), *'almah* designates a young girl, married or unmarried, not a virgin (*bethulah*). To indicate "virgin," *bethulah* is used.

For Isaiah 7:14, exegetes predominantly favor "young woman" as a translation.[30] At the same time, Young,[31] Walther Eichrodt,[32] and others stress that the word *'almah* is never used in Scripture to point to a married woman. Referring to Jerome, Martin Luther thought that Isaiah had used *'almah* because he wanted to point to youth, virginity included; in contrast, a *bethulah* could have reached 50 or 60 years or be barren.[33] Post-Christian Jews mostly identified the Immanuel with Hezekiah[34] and later Jewish Greek recensions preferred to translate *neanis* rather than *parthenos*. However, already Cyril of Alexandria declared correctly, "Whether *neanis* or *parthenos*, virginity is not excluded."[35]

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[28] Young, *Studies*, 163.

[29] For an overview of lexicon entries, see Carsten Ziegert, "Die unverheiratete Frau in Jes 7,14: Eine Anfrage an die hebräische Lexikographie," in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 93.2 (2017): 271–72. He summarizes the lexicographical problem: "The meaning of both lexemes, especially in contrasting each other, cannot be determined by the help of lexicons" (ibid., 272, my translation).

[30] E.g., Bratcher, "A Study of Isaiah 7:14," 101. At Isaiah 7:14, most translations using "virgin" employ a footnote to hint at the other meaning "young woman." In recent translations, such footnotes are increasingly frequent, and even "young woman" ends up in the main text. Maybe a new consensus emerges: One should, for lexical reasons, put "young woman," but actually render "virgin," considering the weight of Matthew, his use of the Septuagint, and not to let the Testaments get too far apart.

[31] Young, *Isaiah*, 1:287.

[32] Walther Eichrodt, *Der Heilige in Israel: Jesaja 1–12*, BAT 17.1 (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1960), 88.

[33] Martin Luther, *Daß Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei* (That Jesus Christ Be Born a Jew), (1523), quoted by Reiser, "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl," 309, cf. 298.

[34] Jerome argued against this: Hezekiah, at the time of the prophecy, was already nine years old (cf. 2 Chr 28:1 and 29:1). Cyril asks, "Who has ever named Hezekiah Immanuel?" And Origen: "Whoever, in Ahaz time, has been born, on whom the 'Immanuel' had been declared?" Thereto Reiser's poignant answer: "To these questions, until today, Old Testament scholars can answer only by vain conjectures" (Reiser, "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl," 299, my translation).

[35] Quoted by Reiser in "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl," 298.

In order to clarify the meaning, I reviewed the Old Testament occurrences. It is indeed conspicuous that there is no place where *'almah* indicates a married woman,[36] except perhaps Proverbs 30:19.[37] All relevant references have a young woman in view, but until proven otherwise, the combination of "young" and "unmarried" always entailed virginity. If not, she was under threat of stoning or social exclusion. John Motyer concludes,

> Thus, wherever the context allows a judgment, *'almâ* is not a general term meaning "young woman" but a specific one meaning "virgin." … There is no ground for the common assertion that had Isaiah intended *virgo intacta* he would have used *bᵉtûlâ*. In fact, this is its meaning in every explicit context. Isaiah thus used the word which, among those available to him, came nearest to expressing "virgin birth" and which, without linguistic impropriety, opens the door to such a meaning.[38]

This is exactly what Matthew understood when quoting Isaiah 7:14, and by his threefold emphasis on Mary's virginity: "before they came together" (Matt 1:18); "for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (v. 20); and "knew her not until she had given birth to a son" (v. 25).[39] Mary remained a virgin until she gave birth to her first child, as part of the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy.[40]

Matthew took Isaiah 7:14 as being appropriate to express the miracle sign of virgin birth by a young woman and, at the same time, to express the links within the Old Testament.[41] Matthew and Luke designed the childhood narratives of Jesus and John the Baptist after prophetic words. Hans-Olav Mørk notes,

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[36] The same applies to *glmt* (*'almah*) in Ras Shamra texts (Young, *Studies*, 166–70; Young, *Isaiah*, 1:285).

[37] Bade, more sharply: "*All* places mean a chaste virgin" (Bade, *Christologie des Alten Testaments*, 55). Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 66.

[38] John A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press: 1999), 85. Considering Hebrew alternative words for *'almah* (*yaldah* [יַלְדָּה] and *na'arah* [נַעֲרָה] for "girl", *bethulah* for "virgin"), it becomes clear, that none of them unambiguously conveys the idea of Immanuel's mother being unmarried and young. None of these terms seemed suitable for Isaiah to communicate the sign of a virgin birth.

[39] Reymond, "Who Is the עלמה [*ʿlmh*] of Isaiah 7:14?," 6.

[40] Ibid., 10. Thus, Isaiah 7:14 has no duplicate fulfillment.

[41] The Jewish scholar Cyrus Gordon considers that Matthew's view is based on early Jewish tradition, mainly the Septuagint (Cyrus H. Gordon, "'Almah in Isaiah 7:14," *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 21.2 [1953]: 106; see Young, *Studies*, 177, and Reymond, "Who Is the עלמה [*ʿlmh*] of Isaiah 7:14?," 5). Ugaritic texts (ca. 1400 BC) also use the root. The etymological equivalents of *bethulah* and *'almah* are to be found in exact parallelisms; see Donna Morley, "The Prophecy of Isaiah 7:12," *Faith and Reason Forum*, 2006, https://www.faithandreasonforum.com/index.asp?PageID=31&ArticleID=412.

The vocabulary of Lxx Gen 17 and 24 as well as Isa 7 reappears in Matthew's story of the annunciation to Joseph. In Luke's account of the annunciation to Mary the Rebekah motive is even clearer. There she is called *parthenos* twice (1:27) and responds to the angel's proclamation of motherhood with the words that she has "known no man" (v. 34), echoing the exact wording of Lxx Gen 24:16b. Finally, the angel blesses her with the blessing of Sarah: "For nothing is impossible with God" (v. 37; cf. Gen 18:14). But here, the birth oracle about the Messiah is transformed into a double statement of new, undefiled creation and epiphany. When seen in light of this background, the annunciation story in Luke become a "grand finale," combining a host of OT motifs in the single motif of Mary giving birth to the Messiah and thereby fulfilling the promises both to David and to Abraham and his *sperma* in a completely innovative way (Lk 1:32f., 55).[42]

It is permitted to make four conclusions on this subject:

Firstly, translating Hebrew *'almah* in Isaiah 7:14 by "virgin" remains without a valid alternative in light of semantics, exegesis, and the relationship between the Testaments. Reading "young woman" obscures not only this relationship but also distorts intertextual links within the Old Testament, and, not least, Isaiah's perspective.

Secondly, the *sign* for the house of David, whether present or timeless, consists of events in a distant miraculously emerging pregnancy *and* a near future removal of Judah's enemies. The unusual name is just one part of the sign.

Thirdly, the *name* Immanuel corresponds closely to the miracle of the virgin birth, revealing the supernatural characteristics of the child. The name is not just a name of trust[43] or a cry for help from a mother in her labor pains[44]—or some particular sign of consolation for eighth-century Judah. Immanuel is a title and not a name. Likewise, the titles in Isaiah 9:6 indicate divine nature and tasks directed at humans (save, judge, reign eternally). Isaiah 8:8 confirms this understanding: Immanuel is the owner of the holy land.

Finally, the portrait of Immanuel is developed in the subsequent chapters of Isaiah.[45] As the landlord, the virgin's son frustrates the plans of the nations (Isa 8:9, cf. Ps 2). He is the God-given child and son of the house of David (Isa 9:5). His royal titles point toward the divine realm (v. 6). Thus,

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[42] Hans-Olav Mørk, "The Interpretation of Old Greek Isaiah 7:14," in *Yearbook on the Science of Bible Translation*, ed. Gunnar Johnstad and Eberhard Werner (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie & Religionswissenschaften, 2017), 42–43.

[43] Kaiser, *Messiah*, 158.

[44] Bernhard Duhm compares the situation to the birth of Ichabod (see Young, *Studies*, 185–87).

[45] Childs, *Isaiah*, 68.

Isaiah continues the long-standing Davidic messianic tradition in which the divine sonship of the king,[46] if not his divinity,[47] is foundational. According to Motyer, "Heaven and earth will truly be moved. Isaiah foresaw the birth of the divine son of David and also laid the foundation for the understanding of the unique nature of his birth."[48]

IV. *The Battle for Translation of Isaiah 7:14 in Recent Times*

1. *The Introduction of the Revised Standard Version*

For many years, in rival translations, Isaiah 7:14 was one of the first places to be checked when new translations or revisions came on the market. Guided by Matthew, are we to translate "virgin," or is "young woman" enough? In 1952, when the popular Revised Standard Version was published, in the United States of America, about 3400 church celebrations took place. The first edition hit a record sales of one million. The media response was huge, and many commented on Isaiah 7:14, which read "young woman" (but not in Matthew 1:23). There was a public outcry in a Southern Baptist church in late 1952, when a pastor publicly ripped out and burned the page with this passage, and exclaimed: "This has been the dream of modernists for centuries, to make Jesus Christ the son of a bad woman."[49]

What inflamed passions only a few years ago nowadays does not cause us to bat an eyelid. The translators and theoreticians of the "dynamic equivalence" camp have made a substantial contribution to this shift. Let me give two examples.

2. *Modern Communication Theory Guiding Our Understanding of the Prophecy*

Two early representatives of communicative Bible translation are Robert Bratcher, who was influenced by Eugene Nida, who translated the New Testament entitled *Good News for Modern Man* (1966). Bratcher also supervised the Old Testament translation, and the full Bible was published in 1976 as the *Good News Bible*. Secondly, Nida himself, as the father of modern translation theory, with his writings and instruction to Bible translators, has

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[46] 2 Sam 7:14–16; Ps 2:7; 89; 132.
[47] Ps 45:7.
[48] Motyer, *Prophecy*, 86.
[49] See my book, Stefan Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung: Eugene A. Nida und sein Modell der dynamischen Äquivalenz*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2016), 112–13.

been hugely influential worldwide.[50] Both left comments on the Immanuel prophecy.

In the 1958 issue of the journal *The Bible Translator*, Bratcher wrote a lengthy study on the Immanuel prophecy, still remembered at his death.[51] His stance can be classified in our second paradigm above. He took the idea of a virgin birth to be absent from the Old Testament and later Jewish thought.[52] He does not discuss links within the Old Testament, for instance, to 2 Samuel 7. For Bratcher, the communicative setting in which prophecy works should inform our hermeneutics. He thinks that it is a "fact that the prophecy had an immediate historical purpose, being relevant to the contemporary situation."[53] He is aware of the distance between the New Testament and modern hermeneutic methods:

> It should be made clear that we are not here contesting or repudiating the truths which the New Testament authors proclaim in their use of the Old Testament Scriptures. We are simply demonstrating what is quite evident, namely, that the authors of the New Testament books, in accordance with the accepted *hermeneutical standards of their time*, were not bound by the text or context in the use which they made of the Scriptures quoted. In this, of course, they *differed from the modern interpreter* who ascertains first what is the exact text and, secondly, what is the original meaning of the text in its context, before further applying it. *Today's principles* of the grammatico-historical interpretation of Scriptures did not prevail at the time of the New Testament, and it is well we recognize the fact. *This means* that in determining the precise meaning of an Old Testament passage, in its historical and literary context, *we cannot adopt as ours the hermeneutical standards used by the New Testament writers*. And the primary task of the translator, inasmuch as he also is an interpreter of Scripture, is to interpret, that is, to translate, the text in such a way as to convey to the reader the precise meaning it had in its original setting. In doing this he will faithfully translate the Old Testament, in its context, and the New Testament in its context.[54]

Bratcher recognizes the difference between his perception of Scripture and the one held by the evangelists. For them it was common to identify "purpose and result," and for Matthew, a verbal or assigned parallel was important—"independent of meaning, in order that the passages meet his

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[50] For more, see ibid.

[51] Bob Allen, "Good News Translator Dies; Opposed Inerrantists: Robert Bratcher Supported Dynamic Equivalence," *The Christian Century*, August 3, 2010, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-08/good-news-bible-translator-dies-opposed-inerrantists; cf. "Dr. Robert G. Bratcher, " *Legacy.com*, July 2010, https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newsobserver/obituary.aspx?n=robert-g-bratcher&pid=144069874.

[52] Bratcher, "A Study of Isaiah 7:14," 109–12.

[53] Ibid., 111.

[54] Ibid., 117–18, emphasis added.

purposes."[55] For Bratcher, however, we cannot expect the evangelist to conform to modern standard, and, "by the same token," ancient standards cannot be required from a modern exegete.[56] Is that not patronizing? Bratcher closes his study:

> From what has been set forth it follows that the use of LXX Isa. 7:14 in Mt. 1:23 does not compel one to force upon Isaiah 7:14 in the Hebrew Bible the meaning that the Evangelist found in it, particularly in light of the fact that the crucial word in Hebrew, *'almah*, means one thing while *parthenos* in the LXX means another.
>
> All this means that we are not to translate the Hebrew passage Isa. 7:14 to make it conform to the way in which the Evangelist used the Greek Isa. 7:14 in his Gospel. One need only consider what a semantic and hermeneutical shambles would result from the attempt to translate, in the Old Testament, all passages which are cited in the New Testament, in accordance with the meaning attributed to them by the New Testament writers! So it is with Isaiah 7:14.
>
> The record of the virgin birth of our Lord does not depend upon Isaiah 7:14; it is narrated by two Evangelists, and stands as a part of the accounts, completely independent of the Old Testament passage. As David Smith says: "The history was not adapted to the prophecy; on the contrary, the prophecy was adapted to the history" (*The Days of His Flesh*, 8th ed., p. 528). Should the Gospel of Matthew not have quoted LXX Isa. 7:14, the virgin birth of Jesus would still remain a matter of record in his Gospel. To put it succinctly: *the virgin birth of Jesus does not at all depend upon the Old Testament, no more than do His divine Sonship, His resurrection, ascension and glorious session at the right hand of God; there [sic] are all part of the* Christian Gospel.[57]

Mary's virgin birth, according to Bratcher, is not based on a quotation. That seems logical, but it is an underdetermination, in light of not only Matthew 1:22 ("all this took place to fulfill …"), but also of 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 and similar biblical passages. The New Testament events of salvation *had to* happen just the way they did, in order to fulfill and to confirm the prophetic word of the Old Testament. Evangelists and apostles, even Jesus himself, did not just draw upon analogies and did not just compare events and texts. Rather, there is an *ontological connection* between them, grounded in God as the author of history and the inspiration of the prophets. God freely sent his Son to earth in such a way as to comply and fulfill every word of the Old Testament. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4).

As shown above, it is possible to translate *'almah* in Isaiah 7:14 without harming the context, and Matthew is a case in point. In my view, it is not feasible for a Christian translator to place his authority above Matthew's

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[55] Ibid., 123.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 124–25.

with the translation "young woman." For whatever a later exegete or translator identifies as "grammatico-historical meaning," for spiritual and historical reasons, he will never be able to understand the Old Testament better than evangelists and apostles.

Finally, Nida wrote in 1986,

> Since New Testament writers regarded the New Testament as simply the fulfilment of the Old Testament, there was a converse tendency to interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. In Isaiah 7:14 the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew *'almah* as *parthenos* led New Testament writers to see the relationship between this passage and the New Testament miracle of the virgin birth, but *reading a virgin birth back into Isaiah 7:14 would mean either that the text was completely irrelevant for Ahaz* (even though the context indicates clearly its immediate significance) *or it would be necessary to postulate two virgin births for the Scriptures.* In fact, in the Isaiah text both the Hebrew and its Greek equivalent mean "young woman," whereas Matthew 1:23 uses *parthenos* in a restricted sense.[58]

Here, too, the ontological connection is broken. The father of modern translation theory justifies "young woman" as a valid rendering. It is not surprising that in recent times the virgin birth itself has been discredited. If it was not revealed by Scripture beforehand—but Matthew maintains that it had to occur "because the Scripture had to be fulfilled"—the virgin birth sinks to faulty reasoning or a simple mistranslation.

V. *Conclusion: Decision in Translating with Biblical Responsibility*

Firstly, translating *'almah* "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 does not contradict the book of Isaiah or the Hebrew usage. Admittedly, "virgin" is a limitation of "young woman," but is linguistically legitimate, pre-given by Jewish tradition, sanctioned by Matthew.

Secondly, according to Matthew's claim, in Isaiah's prophecy virginity was *included*, and *therefore* he quoted Isaiah 7:14. He did not bend a semantic potential for his purposes or use an argument from a citation based on a tangential meaning. Rather, guided by the Spirit, he detected the sense intended by the same Spirit (cf. 1 Pet 1:10–12).

Thirdly, the guidance Matthew received to understand Scripture should be a guide and model for Christian understanding, regardless of minority or majority positions.

Fourthly, the translation and interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 are dependent on a proper understanding of the links between and within the Testaments

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[58] Eugene A. Nida and Jan de Waard, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville: Nelson, 1986), 23 (emphasis added).

and their theological relevance. Is New Testament hermeneutics normative for ours? Are we able, on the grounds of our linguistic level of knowledge, to establish a better understanding and thus criticize Matthew?

Fifthly, Bratcher argues it would create a "shambles" to translate the way the New Testament renders the Old.[59] This is, in my view, not a valid counterargument. Where the Hebrew text implies a reading other than what the New Testament quotes, then readers should have both readings at hand. In such cases, a good translation has to show awareness of the existing incoherence, and where the Hebrew is open for the sense given in the Greek, we should respect the coherence and seek to be faithful to both. This might be studied further in Galatians 3:16 and Hebrews 10:5–7.

Sixthly, it seems that the unity of the Bible is undermined by those who translate "young woman," not "virgin": the unity of its theology, and of the thought and being of God, its first Author.

Ireneaus sums it up well:

God, then, was made man, and the Lord did Himself save us, giving us the token of the Virgin. But not as some allege, among those now presuming to expound the Scripture, [thus:] "Behold, a young woman shall conceive, and bring forth a son" [Isa 7:14] …. The Ebionites, following these, assert that He was begotten by Joseph; thus destroying, as far as in them lies, such a marvellous dispensation of God, and setting aside the testimony of the prophets which proceeded from God. For truly this prediction was uttered before the removal of the people to Babylon …. But it was interpreted into Greek by the Jews themselves, much before the period of our Lord's advent, that there might remain no suspicion that perchance the Jews, complying with our humour, did put this interpretation upon these words. (Ireneaus, *Against Heresies* 3.21.1 [*ANF* 5:351–52])

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[59] Bratcher, "A Study of Isaiah 7:14," 125.

Divine Forgiveness in the Book of Jeremiah

H. G. L. (ERIC) PEELS

Abstract

The theme of forgiveness occurs more often in the book of Jeremiah than in any other prophetical book. This emphasis is remarkable given the book's overall message of impending doom. An exegetical and contextual analysis shows the development of this theme. The first stage presents the ultimate possibility of forgiveness on condition of Israel's repentance. In the second stage, the possibility of forgiveness disappears, since Israel refuses to repent; prophetic intercession is forbidden now, and judgment cannot be averted anymore. But in the third stage, in a wonderful and surprising turnaround, God promises forgiveness once again, not because of Israel's repentance, but because of his grace and love. Finally, forgiveness is an essential feature of the new covenant and the days of restoration.

Introduction

Both in personal and in social life, forgiveness is of fundamental importance. According to the Jewish philosopher Hanna Arendt, "the possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the

faculty of forgiving."[1] The Reformed ethicist Lewis Smedes formulates it thus: "Our history is an inevitable component of our being. One thing only can release us from the grip of our history. That one thing is forgiveness."[2] James Loader provides a useful working definition of forgiveness: "the inter-personal pardoning of guilt extended or offered by an offended party and accepted or dismissed by a guilty partner, by which the former party relinquishes any right or requital from the latter."[3] Amidst all inextricable questions of evil and guilt, hatred and broken relationships, forgiveness paves the way to restoration, purification, and renewal. Forgiveness opens closed doors and enables a new future to come, realizing desires of reconciliation.

Particularly in religions forgiveness plays a significant role as a foundational construct in the relationship between gods and men. Pivotal to the Christian faith is the conviction that God's forgiveness of human sin is by the atoning death of Jesus Christ, who on the cross of Golgotha prayed for his enemies. Forgiveness is an essential element of faith, prayer, and the commandments. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" is a statement in the Apostles' Creed. Likewise, the Lord's Prayer contains the request "and forgive us our debts." Forgiveness is also part and parcel of Christian ethics: "Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col 3:13 NRSV).

Understandably, handbooks on forgiveness and reconciliation especially pay attention to the message of the New Testament and its many texts about forgiveness. Nonetheless, it is also worth consulting the Old Testament to hear what it has to say on this theme. This part of the Bible tells a story spanning many centuries, which time and time again bears witness to evil and guilt, divisions among men, and between God and man. How does forgiveness fit into this? The conviction that Yhwh is a God of forgiveness is anchored deep in the Old Testament, in the credo of Exodus 34:7 "forgiving [*ns'*, נשא] iniquity and transgression and sin."[4] This credo reverberates throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 86:5; Neh 9:17; Dan 9:9). It is a particular aspect of the portrayal of Yhwh in the Old Testament that he

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[1] Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 237. In this study, she remarkably refers to Jesus of Nazareth as "the discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs" (239).

[2] "The World's Largest Quotation Site," https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lewis_b_smedes_668978. Smedes is author of the bestseller *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

[3] James A. Loader, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1:296.

[4] The immediate response to this confession is Moses's prayer for forgiveness (*slkh*, סלח) in verse 9. The same combination of revelation from God and corresponding prayer for forgiveness is present in Numbers 14:18–19.

is a God who yearns to forgive (cf. Isa 30:18). At the same time, this forgiveness is never a matter of *billige Gnade* (cheap grace), but it takes place in the field of tension between God's love and his holiness.[5]

Of all Old Testament books, Jeremiah especially exposes the polarity between guilt and forgiveness. Unparalleled in the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah is "a remarkable interpretive struggle concerning the continuity of Israel's life with Yhwh that is rooted in Yhwh's commitment and concerns the discontinuity in Israel's life with Yhwh that is caused by severe judgment."[6] However, we would not expect forgiveness to be a prominent notion in this book: Jeremiah is known as "the weeping prophet," notorious for his radical doom oracles,[7] and his book refers to the last days of the kingdom of Judah (late 7th–early 6th century BC), over which the shadow of total collapse falls. This era is characterized by unforgiveness: "Surely this came upon Judah at the command of Lord [Yhwh], to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he had committed … and *the Lord* [*Yhwh*] *was not willing to pardon*" (2 Kgs 24:3–4, emphasis added). Judgment is certain. The warning from the beginning of Israel's history in the land becomes a reality at the end of its history: "You cannot serve the Lord [Yhwh]; for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; *he will not forgive* your transgressions or your sins" (Josh 24:19, emphasis added). Remarkably, however, derivatives of the root word for "to forgive" (*slkh*, סלח) occur more often in Jeremiah than in all other prophetic books. In this article, I will trace the theme of forgiveness within the book of Jeremiah and provide a theological analysis of it.

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[5] This awareness is lacking in the famous quote from Heinrich Heine (German writer/poet in the 19th century), who, when his wife prayed to God to forgive him as he was lying on his deathbed, interrupted her and said: "N'en doute pas, ma chère, Il me pardonnera, car c'est son métier" (Do not doubt, my dear, he will forgive me, because it is his job); see https://fr.wikiquote.org/wiki/Heinrich_Heine.

[6] Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41. Cf. Jože Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 449: "Jeremiah occupies a unique position among the biblical books that deal with the polarity between guilt, punishment and forgiveness. Nowhere else are there so many words expressing the whole semantic range of this polarity as are found in all the major parts of this book."

[7] Note already in the Talmudic tract Baba Batra (14a), we find the following argument in reference to the order of the major prophets in the Tanak: after the book of Kings, which ends with a record of destruction, Jeremiah comes first "because he speaks throughout of destruction"; then Ezekiel, who starts with destruction and ends with consolation; finally, Isaiah who is full of consolation.

I. *The Word Group "Forgive"*

The Hebrew root *slkh* (סלח) is commonly defined as the technical term for "to forgive."[8] In addition, in the semantic field of "forgiveness," there are many related terms, as the following diagram shows.

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8   Cf. Johann Jakob Stamm, *Erlösen und Vergeben im Alten Testament: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Bern: Francke, 1940), 47; Daniël F. O'Kennedy, "Divine Forgiveness in the Major Prophets," *Old Testament Essays* 24.3 (2011): 731; Christa Göbel, "'Denn bei dir ist die Vergebung …'—*slḥ* im Alten Testament," *Theologische Versuche* 8 (1977): 27. In my article I follow the Masoretic text. In the Septuagint, the relevant passages are at different locations, but the content of the forgiveness references is the same. The Greek translator consistently rendered the root *slkh* as *hileōs esomai/genomai* (ἵλεως ἔσομαι/γένωμαι), "I will be/become gracious" and once (33:8) as *ou mē mnēsthēsomai* (οὐ μὴ μνησθήσομαι), "I will not remember."

Within the Old Testament, the root *slkh* occurs fifty times. There are forty–six occurrences of the verb, three of the noun *selikhah* (סְלִיחָה), and one of the adjective *sallakh* (סַלָּח). Significantly, the subject of *slkh* is always God;[9] the root is never used to describe forgiveness between men. *Slkh* is, therefore, pre–eminently a theological term.

The root is used in three different contexts, namely, cult (sacrifice), liturgy (psalms, prayers), and prophecy. In prophetic literature, however, *slkh* is relatively rare; it occurs once in Isaiah (55:3), once in Amos (7:2), and six times in Jeremiah (5:1, 7; 31:34; 33:8; 36:3; 50:20).

All occurrences of the root in Jeremiah are of this verb. In addition to *slkh*, the book uses only a few of the other words of the above diagram. The expression *l' zkhr* (לא זכר) "not remember" occurs in 31:34 and the root *thr* (טהר) "cleanse" in 33:8, both in direct relation to *slkh*. Furthermore, *rph'* (רפא) "heal" occurs in 3:22. Three additional roots are used in relation to *un*forgiveness: *mkhh* (מחה) "wipe out" and *kphr* (כפר) "atone" in 18:23, and *nqh* (נקה) "declare innocent" in 30:11 (= 46:28). A related theme is that of God's repentance (with *nkhm*, נחם).[10]

In the passages relevant to this study, three lines of thought are found: first, God's desire to forgive, with the question whether forgiveness is still possible (the door is still slightly open); second, God's refusal to forgive, with a ban on intercession (the door is closed); third, God's promise to forgive anyway, with a foreshadowing of a radical remission of guilt (the door is opened again). Afterward, we look at how to understand the development that becomes discernable in these three lines of thought. The study rounds out with our conclusions.

II. *Is Forgiveness Still Possible?*

The book of Jeremiah had a long and complex genesis, to which the divergence between the Hebrew (MT) and Greek (Lxx) texts already bears witness. There is an ongoing discussion about its composition, structure, and theological intentions. Many exegetes, however, hold the opinion that Jeremiah 2–6 belong to the oldest sections of the book.[11] These chapters

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[9] *Slkh* is one of the two roots in Hebrew which relate exclusively to God and God's actions; the other one is *br'* (ברא, to create); cf. Andreas Schüle, "At the Border of Sin and Forgiveness: *Salaḥ* in the Old Testament," in Andreas Schüle, *Theology from the Beginning: Essays on the Primeval History and Its Canonical Context*, FAT 113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 183.

[10] Jeremiah 4:28; 15:6; 18:8, 10; 20:16; 26:3, 13, 19; 31:19; 42:10.

[11] Cf. J. Gordon McConville, "Jeremiah: Theology of," in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997),

contain oracles of judgment, announcing "the foe from the north." In this earliest period of Jeremiah's preaching, conversion to Yhwh is loudly proclaimed, and traces of hope are found. Can the coming judgment still be averted?

The theme of Jeremiah 2–4 is God's accusation against his unfaithful people: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride …. What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me …?" (2:2, 4). Thus sounds the almost emotional complaint of the betrayed and disappointed spouse about his wife who has committed adultery (3:1–2). This preaching possibly refers to the situation in the aftermath of the reformation of King Josiah (622 BC), about which Jeremiah is otherwise remarkably silent (cf. 3:6). Apparently, the conversion of Judah had been so superficial that it was a return "only in pretense" (3:4–5, 10). God even gave adulterous Israel a certificate of divorce (3:8). But there is still hope. The prophet is ordered to proclaim to the people, "Return, faithless Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord; I will not be angry forever" (3:12).[12] "Return, O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness" (3:22). God longs to grant forgiveness—but then it needs to go deeper, with acknowledgment of sin and confession of guilt: "Only acknowledge your guilt, that you have rebelled against the Lord your God" (3:13). The call in Jeremiah 4:1–4 to circumcise the heart for God follows this same course.

The question is whether this hope is realistic: has evil not put its roots down too deep? Jeremiah 4 continues by announcing judgment: catastrophe is coming from the north (v. 6)! This is then followed by an explanation of the reasons for God's judgment (Jer 5:1–9), which takes the form of a dialogue between God and Jeremiah, reminiscent of Abraham's prayer for Sodom (Gen 18:23–33).[13] In this context, the prophet is given a curious task: "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth—*so that I may pardon* Jerusalem" (Jer 5:1, emphasis added). For the first time, *slkh* is used. Is the door still open? In verse 1, a call goes

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4:758; Jack R. Lundbom, "Jeremiah," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 3:686–87.

    [12] In the law of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 it is determined that once a man has given his wife a bill of divorce, he shall not take her back. That Yhwh, in Jeremiah 3:12, like a betrayed spouse and regardless of having given Israel a certificate of divorce, calls for a return and is prepared to bind his people to himself—contrary to the law of Deuteronomy 24—stresses his desire to forgive.

    [13] Although Sodom's ruin was inevitable (the two angels were on their way to that city), Yhwh still stood for Abraham (Gen 18:22). The reason is what seems like an almost desperate will to forgive, involving Abraham and provoking him to plead for forgiveness of Sodom. The Masoretic Text has a *tiqqun soferim* (scribal correction) here: "Abraham still stood for Yhwh."

out for a team of inspectors (including the prophet; see his report in vv. 3–4) to conduct a thorough investigation in Jerusalem.[14] The task is to judge the severity of the situation. Even though there is a reason for the judgment, possibly there is a way out: if there is just one righteous person in Jerusalem, Yhwh will pardon the city (v. 1)! One is the absolute minimum (cf. the ten righteous ones as the minimum in Abraham's plea in Gen 18)—if at all possible, God wants to forgive. The prophet must acknowledge, however, that there is not a single righteous person, neither among the ordinary people, who do not know Yhwh's law (v. 3), nor among the elite citizens who are supposed to know it (v. 4). The conclusion of the quest and the prophet's comment must be that judgment is fully deserved (v. 6).

This prophetic preaching, which calls for repentance even though judgment is unavoidable, resonates in Jeremiah until at least the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer 36:1). This year (605 BC) brought a great turnaround in the history of the ancient Near East, because the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar decisively defeated Egypt in the Battle of Carchemish. His armies swarmed over the territory that had previously belonged to the Assyrian empire, including Judah, resulting in Nebuchadnezzar's dominion in Syria–Palestine. Thus, "the foe from the north" was now actually coming; the ultimate downfall of Judah was drawing near. However, there was still a spark of hope. According to Jeremiah 36:1, it was exactly in this year that the prophet received the order to write down on a scroll all the words Yhwh had spoken to him since King Josiah's times (cf. Jer 1:2). It concerns the last-ditch attempt of Yhwh to turn the ship around:[15] "It may be that the house of Judah hears all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil way; *so that I may forgive* their iniquity and their sin" (Jer 36:3, emphasis added). It is strong evidence of God's willingness to forgive—he is willing to forgive but will not engage in cheap grace. At the behest of the prophet, Baruch writes everything on a scroll and reads these words aloud in public in the temple. The purpose of this is expressed in Jeremiah 36:7: "It may be that their plea will come before the Lord, and that all of them will turn from their evil ways, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people." These words echo the temple preaching of Jeremiah 26:

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[14] Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 72. For similar "search parties," see Amos 3:9–11, Zephaniah 1:12, Ezekiel 9—and much later the search of the cynic Diogenes, who lit a lamp in broad daylight and walked the streets of Athens "looking for a man." Cf. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 376.

[15] Georg Fischer, *Jeremia: Prophet über Völker und Königreiche* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 246.

> Thus says the Lord [Yhwh]: Stand in the court of the Lord's [Yhwh's] house, and speak to all the cities of Judah which come to worship in the house of the Lord [Yhwh]; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word. It may be they will listen, all of them, and I will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings. (vv. 2–3)

Still, the call to repentance rings out, so that Yhwh may grant forgiveness and avert judgment. The announced judgment is conditional and no *fatum*. Still, God wants to forgive. The word *'ulay* (אוּלַי), "perhaps, it may be" (elsewhere in the prophetic preaching also *mi yodea'* [מִי יוֹדֵעַ] "who knows"), does not assume that God is uncertain—as if he is unsure and sitting idly by—but stresses God's desire to forgive.[16]

III. *No More Forgiveness*

Hope for forgiveness, however, turns out to be futile. God's desire to forgive has always been paired with the call to Israel to repent, to confess guilt, and to turn away from evil (Jer 3:12; 4:1, 4, 14). This is a *conditio sine qua non*. However, God's people refuse to listen; evil is rooted too deeply; they have a stubborn and rebellious heart (*lev sorer umoreh*, לֵב סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֶה, Jer 5:23). Israel's unrighteousness and sin form a permanent barrier to God's forgiveness (Jer 5:25). From his side, Yhwh does everything to call his people back. Because of his desire to forgive he sends out the prophet Jeremiah on three occasions: first as an investigator (Jer 5:1); secondly, as a grape-gatherer who passes his hands over the branches (Jer 6:9); and, finally, as a metal assayer (tester, Jer 6:27). If there is but one righteous person (5:1), one good grape (6:9), or one piece of silver in the lead ore (6:29), then judgment will be averted. However, it proves to be hopeless; the prophet must acknowledge that evil is too entrenched. Time and time again it becomes clear that no transformation can be expected from Israel's side: "Can Ethiopians change their skin or leopards their spots?" (Jer 13:23). Israel breaks the covenant with their God—and thus God cannot but reject them.

After the negative result of Jeremiah's quest through Jerusalem's streets and plazas, the impossibility of Israel receiving forgiveness is expressed in the question Yhwh asks: "How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me" (Jer 5:7). As in verse 1, verse 7 uses the verb *slkh*, but the "maybe" of verse 1 (first person singular) is changed into an impossibility. Here Yhwh

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[16] Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Die Reue Gottes: Aspekte alttestamentlicher Gottesvorstellung*, Biblische Studien 65 (Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), 78; Eric Peels, *Shadow Sides: God in the Old Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 67–68.

asks "mother" Jerusalem on which grounds he could forgive her—because her children only go astray and commit adultery. Judgment is coming—not because God does not *want* to forgive, but because God *cannot* forgive and Israel perseveres in evil.

Within the section Jeremiah 5–9, which deals with the theme of covenant breaking, the unavoidability of the coming judgment is also asserted in the form of a refrain, which occurs three times (5:9, 29; 9:8): "Shall I not punish them for these things? says the Lord; and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?"[17] There is no more room for forgiveness. Like 5:7, this refrain is formulated as a question, which indicates that judgment is not something that God enacts to his heart's content. After all, this concerns his own heritage, "the beloved of my heart [soul]" (*yediduth naphshi*, יְדִדוּת נַפְשִׁי, 12:7).

There is yet another way in which Yhwh makes clear that a limit has been reached and that the coming judgment has become inescapable. He forbids his prophet twice to pray for the people: "As for you, do not pray for this people, or raise a cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you" (Jer 7:16).[18] "Then the Lord said to me: Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go!" (Jer 15:1).

The immediate context in Jeremiah 14 shows how radical this ban is. Emotional prayers of confession, intercession, and devotion are heard here (vv. 7–9, 20–22), and even a plea to the God of the covenant not to break his covenant (v. 22). But God has closed the door and refuses to listen to the people any longer.

Intercession is a feature of prophets in the line of Moses and perhaps belonged to the prophetic task.[19] The Old Testament mentions several instances in which God forgives the sins of his people in response to the intervention of a prophet who acts as an intercessor.[20] The prophet Jeremiah was also

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[17] Cf. Eric Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament*, Oudtestamentische Studiën 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 124–27.

[18] Similar formulations are found in Jeremiah 11:14, "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble," and 14:11, "The Lord said to me: Do not pray for the welfare of this people."

[19] Cf. Hetty Lalleman–de Winkel, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition: An Examination of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, Biblical Exegesis and Theology 26 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 209–24.

[20] For example, Moses in Exodus 32:11–13, 31–32; 34:9 (the first time in the Old Testament that God's forgiveness occurs) and in Numbers 11:2, 21:7; Samuel in 1 Samuel 7:5–9; 12:19; Amos in Amos 7:2; Daniel in Daniel 9:9, 19. Cf. Abraham in Genesis 18:23–33; Solomon in 1 Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50; Psalm 99:6; and Nehemiah 9:17.

known to perform this task (cf. Jer 18:20; 21:2; 37:3; 42:2). The intercessors/prophets are channels for forgiveness. According to Jeremiah 7:16 and 15:1, however, this pathway is now being cut off, and heaven is closed. No more intercession for the people means no more forgiveness for the people—not because God is not prepared to forgive, but because the people are not prepared to convert. Israel does not listen, so God shall not listen to them anymore.

The dire message that there is no more room for forgiveness is strongly highlighted in one of the so-called *confessiones* of Jeremiah: "Yet you, O Lᴏʀᴅ, know all their plotting to kill me. *Do not forgive their iniquity, do not blot out their sin from your sight*. Let them be tripped up before you; deal with them while you are angry" (18:23, emphasis added). This verse is the conclusion to an appeal by the prophet for divine intervention, in the penultimate *confessio* (18:18–23). These *confessiones* (scattered throughout Jer 10–20) should be interpreted not just as a biographical product of the agonizing soul struggles of the prophet himself, but also as reflections of the struggles of God with his people.[21] The prophet is rejected and attacked, which mirrors the people's rejection of the word of Yʜᴡʜ. In his imprecatory prayer, Jeremiah links up with God's announcement of judgment. In Jeremiah's appeal in Jeremiah 18:23 it becomes clear that a point of no return has been passed.[22] The line that God has drawn: no intercession, no more forgiveness: evil has gone too far.

IV. *But Yet, Forgiveness*

Jeremiah's preaching of judgment may be dark and threatening, but his message does not lack hopeful promises for the future. This positive dimension of his message is already indicated in Jeremiah 1, which denotes the prophet's ministry with not only the verbs "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy, and to overthrow," but also the verbs "to build and to plant" (v. 10). The promises for the future are especially found in the so-called Book of Comfort in the middle of Jeremiah (Jer 30–31 MT). This literary

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[21] Cf. Eric Peels, "Jeremiah, Prophet of Ultimate Ruin and New Hope," in Eric Peels and S. D. Snyman, eds., *The Lion Has Roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 111–14.

[22] Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, WBC 26 (Dallas: Word, 1991), 254, expound their translation ("Do not *continue to* cover … do not *continue to* wipe away") [emphasis added]) thus: "The translation of these verses suggests that Jeremiah again acknowledges the correctness and necessity of judgment. He recognizes that intercession for his people no longer has a place, he puts them in Yahweh's hands. The translation 'do not continue to' emphasizes the shift from intercession to an acceptance of judgment."

block picks up and amplifies the intimations of hope in previous chapters,[23] elaborating God's "thoughts of peace" concerning his people (29:11) and the "good" he will do to them (29:32). The main theme of the Book of Comfort is what Yhwh will bring about after the seventy years of exile (29:10), the wonderful reversal announced in Jeremiah 30:3: "For the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord."

The climax of the Book of Comfort is a series of five short oracles about Israel's new future,[24] with the well-known prophecy about the new covenant in the middle (31:31–34). This oracle emphasizes the discontinuity between God's past and future relationships with Israel, as it states that Yhwh's new covenant with his people will not be like the one he made with their fathers (v. 32).[25] It will be different in three respects: it will be internalized, extensive, and unconditional.

In the first place, the new covenant will be written on the human heart (v. 33). From now on, the Torah will be decisive across social, political, and religious life. The old covenant called upon the people to circumcise their heart (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4), but the new covenant implies a divine heart "surgery," which internalizes the covenant (Deut 30:6). The second distinctive feature of the new covenant is that knowledge of God will extend to everyone, all ages and classes, so that it will no longer be necessary that one person teach another to know God (v. 34a). The third distinctive feature— and the most important one—is that the new covenant will be unconditional. There is mention neither of the people's repentance nor of a call for return to God.

This unconditional character of the new covenant is revealed most clearly at the end of the oracle, which speaks about forgiveness. Unlike the text discussed above (in section II), forgiveness is promised here without any condition: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more" (31:34b). The message of this text is about total forgiveness. The words "iniquity" and "sin" are deliberately in the singular. They refer not so much to all sorts of moral and religious sins as to the all-encompassing sin

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[23] Leslie C. Allen, "Jeremiah: Book of," in Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 433. The theological message of Jeremiah 32 is elaborated on in chapter 33; both chapters are closely connected to (and sometimes interpreted as a part of) the Book of Comfort.

[24] Jeremiah 32:23–26, 27–30, 31–34, 35–37, 38–40.

[25] Despite several points of resemblance with the previous section (31:27–30), this prophecy should be taken as a separate textual unit. Cf. Jeremiah Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption: Jeremiah's Thought in Transition*, JSOTS 54 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 94–95.

of the breaking of the covenant. It is this sin that God will forgive; his forgiveness brings Israel the reestablishment of the "marriage" after the "divorce." What Yʜwʜ yearned to do before (cf. Jer 4–6), he will now be able to do.

As Jože Krašovec observes, "the declaration on forgiveness [Jer 31:24] is the pinnacle of the passage, explaining everything that is said about the new covenant."[26] In this text, the forgiveness of Israel is seen as both the source and the evidence of the renewed covenant. The particle *ki* (כִּי) is most often interpreted in a causal sense: the new covenant is possible *because* God will forgive iniquity.[27] The foundation of the new covenant is divine forgiveness without the precondition of human repentance, as was formerly the case (cf. Deut 30:2; Jer 4:1; 36:3; etc.). However, it is also possible to understand *ki* not as a conjunction but rather as an interjection "yes, verily." This is the interpretation of Andreas Schüle, who comments that "in the establishment of the new covenant … two things happen. God writes the Torah on the heart of Israel and forgives the guilt such that God no longer remembers the sins of Israel."[28] Setting no preconditions, the Book of Comfort continues a notion already present in Jeremiah 24:6–7 and 29:10–14,[29] but 31:34 also presents the opposite of the impossibility of forgiveness in 5:1, 7. Forgiveness is not impossible here but guaranteed. The motive behind this divine forgiveness is not to be found in any human action but in the heart of Yʜwʜ, who "is incapable of not having a relationship with Israel" (cf. 31:20).[30] God breaks the vicious cycle of sin, guilt, and punishment, and takes away the

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[26] Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 794; Cf. Jože Krašovec, "Vergebung und neuer Bund nach Jer 31,31–34," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 105 (1993): 437; O'Kennedy, "Divine Forgiveness," 739; Gobel, "Denn bei dir," 23. The promise of divine forgiveness gives the new covenant "eine bleibend tragende, nicht mehr zerstörbare Grundlage [a lasting supportive basis, no longer a fragile one]" (Georg Fischer, *Jeremia: Der Stand der theologischen Diskussion* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007], 157).

[27] Cf. Siegmund Böhmer, *Heimkehr und neuer Bund: Studien zu Jeremia 30–31* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 77: "Jahwes Sündenvergebung eröffnet den Weg in die Zukunft [Yʜwʜ's forgiveness of sins opens the way for the future]"; Allen, *Jeremiah*, 357: "Here is the precondition of the new covenant." Besides the widely held opinion that the causal *ki* clause is the presupposition or ground of the installation of the new covenant—thus the reason for all that has gone before—there is also the interpretation that verses 31–34 are presented as a realization or actualization of forgiveness of sins. Cf. William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 2:822.

[28] Schüle, "At the Border," 197.

[29] On these passages (and the interpretation of the causal *ki* clause in Jer 24:7), see Hermann-Josef Stipp, "Jeremia 24: Geschichtsbild und historischer Ort," in Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Text und Redaktion*, FAT 96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 358–63.

[30] Brueggemann, *Book of Jeremiah*, 157; cf. Georg Fischer, *Das Trostbüchlein: Text, Komposition und Theologie von Jer 30–31*, SBB 26 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1993), 276–77.

iniquity. He turns the "full stop" of judgment into the "comma" of grace.[31]

Closely connected to the Book of Comfort, and elaborating upon its themes, are the subsequent chapters, Jeremiah 32–33. Jeremiah's symbolic act of purchasing a field in Anathoth (ch. 32) conveys a strong message, especially because the story is situated during the siege of Jerusalem, when the Babylonian army was already devastating the land of Judah. Against this background, the promise of a new covenant is repeated. It will be "an everlasting covenant" (*berith ʿolam*, בְּרִית עוֹלָם); God will put the fear of Yнwн in the peoples' hearts, ending with God's rejoicing in doing good to them (32:40–41). In Jeremiah 33, the message of God's one-sided forgiveness receives particular emphasis: "I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me" (v. 8). In this verse, the three most familiar Hebrew terms for sin occur to enhance the impact of its message.[32] It is about *total forgiveness.* Verses 6–9 contain an accumulation of terms indicating the effects of forgiveness: Yнwн will "heal" his people (cf. Jer 3:22); he will "restore" their fortunes and "rebuild" them; he will "cleanse" them from all their guilt. As in Jeremiah 32, a bright future is envisioned, which is only due to God's unexpected and undeserved forgiveness: "And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth" (Jer 33:9).

Finally, the message of God's forgiveness, which paves the way for a new future, is taken up again in the oracle against Babylon, at the end of the book of Jeremiah. Even though an awareness of Israel's guilt does not lack in this oracle (see 51:5), the emphasis lies on God's revenge on Babylon, a revenge that will bring salvation to God's own people. According to Jeremiah 50:4–5, this salvation will apply to God's people as a whole, both the Israelites and the Judeans. It will include a reunification of the people, repentance, and an everlasting covenant (*berith ʿolam*, cf. 32:40):

> In those days and in that time, says the LORD, the people of Israel shall come, they and the people of Judah together; they shall come weeping as they seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, and they shall come and join themselves to the LORD by an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten. (Jer 50:4–5)

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[31] It is for this reason that the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:34 forms one of the strongest links between the Old and New Testament (Jesus's words of institution of the Holy Supper; 2 Cor 3; Heb 8:6–13; 10:15–18).

[32] "The density of terminology in this verse … expresses the breathtaking thoroughness of God's forgiveness" (Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, WBC 27 [Dallas: Word, 1995], 172).

The possibility of this restoration, together with the fact that God's covenant with Israel will be "everlasting," is closely connected to the reality of God's forgiveness, which is proclaimed in Jeremiah 50:19–20. It is not entirely clear how this connection is to be interpreted. Does God forgive because Israel seeks him, or does Israel seek him because God has made this possible through his forgiveness? A reading of the text in a wider context seems to favor the latter interpretation. God's graceful intervention is the foundation for the coming to Yʜwʜ and the return to Zion. He himself brings his people back (v. 19) and grants them his radical forgiveness (v. 20):

> In those days and at that time, says the Lᴏʀᴅ, iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon the remnant that I have spared.[33]

The same pair of verbs, "to search" (*bqsh*, בקש) and "to find" (*mts'*, מצא), was used in Jeremiah 5:1, but there is a significant contrast. While at the time of Jeremiah's quest in Jerusalem no righteous person could be found (5:1), the negative result of this new quest will be totally different: no sin shall be found (50:20). Here a glorious gospel is expressed against the backdrop of a land in ruin and a people filled with guilt and shame. The message of God's complete forgiveness opens the door, a gateway to the future.

V. *Development in the Book of Jeremiah*

The passages that explicitly address God's forgiveness (*slkh*, סלח) reveal three different ideas: a) the possibility of forgiveness, if Israel repents, b) no more forgiveness, because Israel does not repent, c) but yet, forgiveness, through God's initiative. The question to be answered here is whether this development can also be traced elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah.

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[33] On the relation between sections 50:4–7 and 50:19–20, cf. Christoph Levin, *Die Verheissung des Neuen Bundes in ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 193–94; O'Kennedy, "Divine Forgiveness," 741. The text does not explicate the relation between the people seeking Yʜwʜ (vv. 4–5) and God's forgiveness (vv. 19–20), but the context strongly suggests that the former is made possible by the latter (rather than the other way around). Cf. Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52*, HThKAT 39 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 580: "Es wäre ein Fehlschluss anzunehmen, das Volk begehe keine Fehler mehr und sei deswegen ohne Schuld. Der wahre Grund für den neuen, reinen Zustand der Gemeinschaft liegt *bei Gott*." (It would be a false conclusion to assume that the people would not commit a mistake anymore and would thus be without guilt. The true ground for this new, pure state of the community lay *in God*.).

Jeremiah Unterman argues that in the thoughts of the historical prophet on repentance and restoration three stages can be identified.[34] During the reign of Josiah, the young prophet still believed in the possibility of repentance, which he saw as a condition for forgiveness and redemption. In the second stage, in the period between the first and the second capture of Jerusalem, Jeremiah started to doubt whether the people were able to repent, and thus he put a growing emphasis on the sovereign mercy of God. The final stage came after Jerusalem's destruction, when the prophet was convinced that redemption would be solely the work of God, on the basis of his unconditional forgiveness. While in Unterman's view the period of King Jehoiakim plays no role, Hetty Lalleman–de Winkel assumes that it was precisely in this period that the decisive turning point in Jeremiah's preaching occurred. She argues that after Jehoiakim had burned the scroll with Jeremiah's prophecies (Jer 36), "a hopeful future could only be made possible by God."[35]

Such specific periodizations of Jeremiah's preaching are problematic, however, in view of the fact that many passages in the book are difficult to date and because of the book's complex structure and history of composition.[36] From the beginning of the book, judgment and salvation occur in tandem. It is impossible to identify with certainty the moment at which Yнwн forbade the prophet to intercede for the people or the moment at which Jeremiah came to understand that Israel's future would be based on God's undeserved forgiveness alone.

Even so, the views of Unterman and Lalleman contain a valid point. There is a widely held opinion that (the book of) Jeremiah shows a development with regard to the question of whether judgment can still be averted.[37] It seems quite clear that the prophet initially hoped that this was still possible if the people would just listen to the word of Yнwн. This hope was slowly but surely replaced by the conviction that judgment was irreversible, but

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[34] Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption*, 176–77.

[35] Lalleman–de Winkel, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition,* 161.

[36] Fischer, *Der Stand*, 101: "Bei diesen und allen ähnlichen Versuchen, den Wandel in der Botschaft an verschiedenen Zeitpunkten festzumachen, müssen hypothetische Zuordnungen einzelner Sprüche zu bestimmten Phasen des Propheten vorgenommen werden." (With these and all similar attempts to determine the evolution of the message at various times, the hypothetical assignment of individual sayings to specific phases of the prophet must be assumed.)

[37] Cf. Johann J. Stamm, "סלח *slḥ* vergeben," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971–1976), 2:157; Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Die Theologie der prophetischen Überlieferungen Israels* (Munich: Kaiser, 1961), 2:220–223; James McKeown, "Forgiveness," in Boda and McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, 255; Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

the prophet did not lose all hope. He gradually learned that, after judgment, a new future was possible because Yнwн would keep his covenant with Israel. Such a development is consistent with the passages on forgiveness discussed above. Those presenting the possibility of averting judgment (through God's forgiveness, in response to the people's repentance) probably date from the early period of Jeremiah's ministry (Jer 2–6, 36; see section II above). A later date may be attached to the passages that make clear that this way was closed due to Israel's stubbornness (Jer 8–20; see section III above). Finally, the passages proclaiming the wonderful turnaround due to God's forgiveness probably also come from a later period (Jer 30, 33, 50; see section IV above).

Conclusion

Although the root *slkh* does not occur very frequently in the Old Testament and a uniform notion of divine forgiveness is lacking, Hannes Olivier rightly argues that "nothing said about God is as important as that he forgives sins."[38] Forgiveness paves the way for the removal of sin and the restoration of the covenant, the communion between God and his people. The theme of divine forgiveness—apart from its use in cultic/liturgical contexts—occurs particularly in the literature of the late pre-exilic and exilic period.[39] During this time of crisis, a deepened sense of evil and iniquity arises, together with a stronger feeling of the necessity of forgiveness.

This becomes especially clear in the book of Jeremiah, which reveals a fundamental trait of the Old Testament image of God. Yнwн is the God who longs for the reestablishment of the relationship with his people. He gladly forgives, as is indicated by the question form of verses like Jeremiah 5:1, 9, 29, and 9:8, and by the use of the word *'ulai* (אוּלַי), "maybe" in Jeremiah 36:3–7. At the same time, the book makes clear that forgiveness is never easy or cheap. God is a gracious God who offers forgiveness, but in order to receive this forgiveness, Israel must meet certain conditions. Reconciliation

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[38] Hannes P. J. Olivier, "סלח," in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 3:260. *Pace* Ludwig Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 1936), 208: "Die alttestamentliche Offenbarung … spricht überhaupt nur gelegentlich und ganz ohne sie in den Mittelpunkt ihrer Aussagen des Heils zu nehmen von der Vergebung. So spielt bei den älteren Propheten die Vergebung überhaupt keine Rolle." (The Old Testament revelation …, on the whole, speaks about forgiveness only occasionally and without taking it as the mid-point of its statement about salvation. Thus, in the older prophets, forgiveness plays no role at all.)

[39] Horst D. Preuss, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Israels Weg mit JHWH* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), 2:197.

requires repentance and confession of sin. Forgiveness as the nullification of guilt and the relinquishment of punishment can only be given if God's people confess their guilt and repent from their evil ways. When these conditions are not fulfilled, God draws a line and forbids intercession. The possibility of forgiveness disappears, and judgment can no longer be averted, regardless of how much the people exhaust themselves in religious maneuvers. Heaven is closed. There is then, however, a wonderful turn-around, a breakthrough, based in God's own heart and in his compassion for his people (Jer 31:20). God does not forgive because of the repentance of his people, but he forgives because he is a gracious and loving God. YHWH himself paves the way for forgiveness, for the restoration. "Forgiveness is an essential feature of the new covenant and the days of restoration."[40] This forgiveness is not an abstract idea and is not restricted to spiritual blessings, but it pertains to the restoration of earthly blessings and the rebuilding of a community as well.[41]

Thus, we see in the book of Jeremiah, against the backdrop of a battle for life and death, the movement that is essentially the foundation of the biblical message and the Christian faith. In the first place, God longingly turns to his people to forgive them and restore the relationship. Secondly, man blocks the restoration through his lack of repentance and persistence in evil. But then again, in the third place, God sovereignly intervenes to make the impossible possible, a life with him, through his forgiveness. God's deepest being is moved for people and his creation, and he does not forsake the works of his hands. It is this movement—God who gladly forgives, God who can no longer forgive, and God who persists in his love and forgives completely—that was accomplished fully in Jesus Christ.

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[40] O'Kennedy, "Divine Forgiveness," 743.
[41] Preuss, *Theologie*, 197.

Reading Jonah Backwards: Reconsidering a Prophet's Repentance

STEPHEN COLEMAN

Abstract

The portrait of the angry, bitter prophet that concludes the book of Jonah has long proved difficult to reconcile with the seemingly repentant and obedient prophet who earlier had praised God from the belly of the great fish before fulfilling his divine commission to bring the word of God to Nineveh. This article considers the rhetorical purpose of these disparate portraits by interpreting Jonah's acts of piety through the lens of the concluding depiction of the prophet entrenched in his hardhearted rebellion. There is an irreducibly prophetic purpose to this ironic portrayal of a wayward Israelite prophet who gives praise to God with his lips only later to reveal that his heart is far from him.

Janet Howe Gaines captures something of the abiding appeal of the book of Jonah when she says, "The story of Jonah is simple enough to delight a child and complex enough to confound a scholar."[1] One of the many complexities of this short book that continues to confound scholars centers on the character of the prophet Jonah himself. Jonah, of course, is infamous for his rebellious flight from God and his divine commission to proclaim God's word to the

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[1] Janet Howe Gaines, *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah's Dilemma*, SBLSBL 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 8.

Ninevites. Jonah's dialogue with the Almighty that concludes the book reveals a similarly rebellious spirit, as the prophet stridently objects to God's extension of mercy to Ninevites, an objection which is even more reprehensible in light of the mercy Jonah himself had received in the form of a great fish.

In between these two acts of rebellion, Jonah's flight (ch. 1) and Jonah's dialogue with God (ch. 4), two episodes are often interpreted as somewhat mitigating this otherwise dim portrait of an Israelite prophet. In chapter 2, Jonah utters a prayer from the belly of the great fish, a prayer that is remarkable for both its theological profundity and its rhetorical force. This prayer is commonly understood as an expression of the prophet's repentance—which, whatever lingering issues he may have with God, is nevertheless genuine contrition. The prophet's obedience to his divine commission to preach to Nineveh recorded in chapter 3 is seen as confirmation of his repentance.[2] It stands in stark contrast with his earlier flight from the divine presence and is therefore understood by some as signaling a change of heart toward God, if not toward his commission.

These central episodes have led interpreters to treat Jonah as a somewhat more complex character, one who throughout the narrative repents and demonstrates the fruit of repentance in his obedience, yet one who continues to struggle with the mysteries of divine justice, mercy, and sovereignty. This reading essentially places the interpretive weight in the center of the narrative, chapters 2 and 3, and understands its conclusion, chapter 4, in light of its center.

However, this interpretation sits uneasily with the portrait of Jonah that closes the book. Is the embittered Jonah of chapter 4 noticeably improved from the fleeing Jonah of chapter 1? Is Jonah's anger with God defensible or even understandable, and, if so, on what grounds? Unsurprisingly, the two portraits of Jonah have proved difficult to reconcile.[3] At the risk of oversimplifying, one could say that the central chapters present a positive picture of a prophet humbled, grateful, and obedient, while the bookends

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[2]   This is a very old interpretation (see Cassiodorus below) and continues to have adherents today. Theodore Perry, for example, writes, "Since Jonah, this second time, does react differently—his acceptance of the Nineveh mission in fact indicates a complete about-face—we must seek to understand his change of attitude. … The point of adding *shenit*, 'a second time,' seems an important reminder of one of the book's major themes, that of repentance: God does give a second chance. Indeed, the theme stresses once again that repentance is grounded in God's generosity." Theodore A. Perry, *The Honeymoon Is Over: Jonah's Argument with God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 41.

[3]   James Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 77.

present a negative picture of a prophet entrenched in his opposition to God and preferring death over service to him.

This article revisits this question of the characterization of Jonah using insights from rhetorical criticism, especially the discipline's emphasis on exploring what one author calls "the practical persuasive power of the texts in influencing action."[4] Specifically, it revisits the question of the prophet's repentance. Is the main character portrayed as repentant, unrepentant, or something in between? One's answer to this question will, to a considerable degree, determine how one understands the book's fundamental message. In terms of method, the rhetorical function of Jonah's prayer from the depths and obedience will be examined in light of the concluding dialogue between Jonah and God, thereby reversing the common hermeneutical approach to the book, which reads the end in light of the middle. The concluding portrait, therefore, serves as the lens through which Jonah's words and actions will be evaluated.[5] Section one of this article sketches the portrait of the prophet found in the opening and closing chapters. Section two then examines his repentance in light of this emergent portrait.

A controlling assumption is that the author of Jonah deliberately juxtaposes these seemingly disparate portraits to better get his meaning across. Considered as a whole, the narrative portrays a prophet who delights in his own experience of mercy but is nevertheless so entrenched in his own notions of divine justice that he is unwilling to let God be God. What then is the reader to make of the prophet's prayer and obedience? The prophet's prayer, it will be argued, should be understood as a good prayer (with regards to its theological orthodoxy as well as its appropriateness to the situation) prayed in bad faith, and the prophet's recommissioning can be seen, on one level, as an expression of God's displeasure with Jonah and by implication his covenant people. The purpose of the narrative, therefore, was to serve as a prophetic warning to and condemnation of Israel. They, like the prophet, were quick to rejoice in their experience of God's merciful deliverances, yet slow to be changed by them in such a way that they would fulfill their calling to be a kingdom of priests and a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3; Exod 19:6).

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[4] Alison Lo, *Job 28 as Rhetoric: An Analysis of Job 28 in the Context of Job 22–30* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 17.

[5] This approach closely resembles other literary approaches to the book. Meir Sternberg, for example, argues that the surprise ending of chapter 4 unexpectedly reveals that Jonah's reticence to obey was not due to his softhearted compassion but to hardhearted hatred for the Ninevites. The reversal of expectations—Yahweh turns out to be the compassionate character and Jonah the judgmental—forces readers to reconsider their understanding of events that had transpired previously (Jonah's flight, self-sacrifice, prayer, etc.). Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 318–20.

I. *Portrait of a Rebellious Prophet*

In the opening verses of the book, the author gives a parodic tone to the narrative. While the divine command is fairly typical, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it" (1:2), the prophet's response is almost humorously atypical, "But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (1:3).[6] As many have pointed out, the author employs *yrd* (ירד, "to go down") as a leitmotif highlighting the nature of Jonah's flight "from the presence of the Lord." The verb is used to describe Jonah's geographical movement "*down* to Joppa" (1:3), "*down* into [the ship]" (1:3), "*down* into the inner part of the ship" (1:5), and "*down* to the land whose bars closed upon me forever" (2:6). Given the *terminus* of the prophet's downward journey, the prophet's geographical movement "away from the presence of the Lord" symbolizes a corresponding spiritual movement away from God and toward the place of death (2:6). In sum, the initial portrait of Jonah is that of a prophet so deeply averse to his calling to preach to the Ninevites and distrustful of the God who would call him to do so that he would rather die than fulfill this commission.

What about the concluding portrait? The author of Jonah employs a number of literary devices and strategies designed to connect the prophet of chapter 4 with the prophet in chapter 1. One such connection is the setting or movement of the prophet. In chapter 1, Jonah flees from the presence of the Lord, heading west first to Joppa, then toward Tarshish. In chapter 4, the prophet somewhat curiously travels east of the city and makes "a booth for himself there" (Jonah 4:5). Uriel Simon suggests that this

> unnecessary geographic precision is probably intended to present his waiting in the east as an antithetical sequel to his westward flight. The rebel who opted for exile in Tarshish in the far west, now restates his protest by going in the opposite direction: instead of return west and going home, he camps out east of Nineveh in a desperate endeavor to prove that he is right and God is wrong.[7]

As Jonah's flight was cast as a spiritual as well as physical descent to the realm of the dead, so Jonah's hut built east of the city takes on a similarly symbolic significance. It is from here that the prophet will take his stand against the Almighty, arguing his case that divine justice demands retributive punishment.

6　Unless otherwise indicated, translations and verse numbers are taken from the English Standard Version.

7　Uriel Simon, *Jonah*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm, JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 35.

Through the use of another leitmotif, *rʿh* (רעה, "evil, wickedness, disaster"), the author depicts wicked Nineveh turning from their "evil" (*rʿh*, 3:10), merciful Yahweh turning from his "evil" (*rʿh*, i.e., the "disaster" he threatened to bring upon Nineveh, 3:10), only to have the prophet Jonah inconsolably consumed by "evil" (*rʿh*, 4:1) at the conclusion of the narrative. The intensity of Jonah's displeasure with God is indicated by the grammar (the use of a cognate accusative): "it was *evil* to Jonah, a great *evil*" (*wayyeraʿ ʾel-yonah raʿah gedolah*, וַיֵּרַע אֶל־יוֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה, 4:1).[8] The prophet's success in his mission to avert evil becomes the source of the prophet's own evil.

In 4:6–11, Yahweh turns his attention from the evil of Nineveh (now remedied) to the evil that has taken root in the heart of his prophet and seeks to ameliorate Jonah's great evil through the object lesson involving the *qiqayon* plant (קִיקָיוֹן). Both the giving *and removing* of shade was designed to "deliver [Jonah] from *his evil* [*meraʿatho*, מֵרָעָתוֹ]" (4:6, author's translation). Tragically, and in contrast to Nineveh, Jonah responds with even greater anger toward God as he says, "It is good for me to be angry unto death" (4:9). The "evil" which began the story, as it were, finds its final resting place in the heart of Jonah.

Also at the lexical level, Jonah's appeal to "my word" (*devari*, דְּבָרִי) in 4:2 stands in stark contrast to "Yahweh's word" (*devar-yhwh*, דְּבַר־יְהוָה) in 1:1. Leslie Allen describes the implication of Jonah's expression well:

> "My word" was correct, claims Jonah, and God's was ill-advised. The egocentricity sets a keynote for the prayer as a whole: "I" or "my" occurs no fewer than nine times in the original. … Appointing himself theological advisor to the Almighty, Jonah pronounces himself completely out of sympathy with divine policy.[9]

In 4:2, the prophet appeals to his earlier word as the ultimate (and now vindicated) standard of justice, and in so doing sets his judgment over against the judgment or word of Yahweh which he was commissioned to deliver.

Moving from the lexical level to the conceptual or thematic level, continuity of character is also seen in the prophet's twofold death wish in chapter 4, which recapitulates his death wish of chapter 1. That the prophet is acting out a death wish in his flight from God is evident from his instructions to the sailors in 1:12, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest

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8 Translation taken in part from T. Desmond Alexander, "Jonah," in David Baker, Bruce Waltke, and T. Desmond Alexander, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 126, n. 1.

9 Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 229.

has come upon you." Jonah would rather die than fulfill his divine commission.[10] Twice in chapter 4, the prophet reiterates his desire to die: "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live" (v. 3) and "Jonah asked that he might die, and said 'It is better for me to die than to live'" (v. 8; cf. v. 9). If anything, the twofold expression of Jonah's death wish in chapter 4 signals a deeper entrenchment in his anger toward God and his resistance to God's sovereign will to extend mercy to the Ninevites.[11]

The prophet himself connects his complaint in chapter 4 with his earlier actions: "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish" (v. 2). Jonah's motivation for fleeing from the presence of God is deliberately left unstated for narrative or rhetorical effect. While the reader is left to surmise Jonah's rationale for his flight in chapters 1–3, in chapter 4 the prophet himself reveals that his true motivation is rooted in his knowledge of the character (and therefore the likely actions) of Yahweh. Phyllis Trible summarizes the rhetorical effect of the author's gapping Jonah's motivation until the conclusion:

> When in his prayer (4:2–3) hardhearted Jonah belatedly fills the gap, the reader is nevertheless appalled. Jonah accuses and condemns Yhwh for being Yhwh. He castigates divine mercy to justify himself. His anger attacks God's compassion. Thus he is far more "wrathful" than the reader suspected. His reason(s) for fleeing the command has to do, then, not with Nineveh itself, not with his views about foreigners, but with the very character of God.[12]

The revelation of Jonah's motivation for his earlier flight and its foundation for his complaint in chapter 4 provides a strong connection between these two chapters. This connection suggests that the basis for the prophet's flight in chapter 1 persists as the driving force in his complaint to God.

Finally, the author develops Jonah's character by means of allusion to other biblical texts. In Jonah 4:2, the prophet expresses the motive for his

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[10] George Landes's contention that the prophet did not have a death wish in chapter 1 because the lexeme for "death" or "to die" does not appear is unpersuasive. This is a classic example of the word-concept fallacy. George Landes, "The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah," *Interpretation* 21 (1967): 23. The view that Jonah's death wish in chapter 1 is a continuation of his rebellion and not the first glimmers of a change of heart is based on his twofold death wish in chapter 4, which is clearly a sign of the prophet's rebellion.

[11] To be sure, Jonah's death wish does waver as he recounts in his prayer from the belly of the fish that he had prayed for deliverance (Jonah 2:8).

[12] Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 204. Sternberg observes that the book of Jonah "is the only biblical instance where a surprise gap controls the reader's progress over a whole book." Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 318.

earlier flight and the basis for his present anger: "I knew that you are a gracious [*khannun*, חַנּוּן] God and merciful [*werakhum*, וְרַחוּם], slow to anger ['*erekh* '*appayim*, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם] and abounding in steadfast love [*werav-khesed*, וְרַב־חֶסֶד] and relenting from disaster." Jonah's creedal formula clearly invokes Yahweh's self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 34:6: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful [*rakhum*, רַחוּם] and gracious [*wekhannun*, וְחַנּוּן], slow to anger ['*erekh* '*appayim*, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם] and abounding in steadfast love [*werav-khesed*, וְרַב־חֶסֶד] and faithfulness." Throughout the Bible, the "name of the LORD" (Exod 34:5) revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai serves as the basis for prophetic intercession (e.g., Num 14:18) as well as the cause for Israel's worship (e.g., Ps 86:5). On Jonah's lips, however, the reader finds a dark parody of conventional usage. The prophet employs the creedal formula neither to stay God's hand of judgment nor to issue praise to God for his compassionate character. Rather, Jonah appeals to God's self-revelation as the basis for his complaint about God's actions. Here, the prophet reveals that the heart of his objection has to do not so much with Yahweh's forgiveness of Nineveh, but with Yahweh's character itself.

Furthermore, many interpreters have seen in Jonah's death wish an allusion to Moses in Numbers 11:10–15 or, more commonly, to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4–8.[13] Having become overwhelmed by the futility, burden, and seeming hopelessness of their God-given tasks, these two towering figures of Old Testament prophetism despair of their lives and ask the Lord to bring them to an end. It should be noted, however, that in neither case is the prophet's despair and subsequent death wish cast in a positive light. For both, it is the result of a profound sense of failure in their ministry. In all likelihood, the point of the allusion in Jonah 4 is not to justify or even mitigate the seriousness of the prophet's behavior, but to portray Jonah as a parody of his prophetic forbearers.[14] Instead of his failure, it is Jonah's success in his prophetic ministry that plunges him into a state of suicidal despair. If Elijah's and perhaps Moses's despair was, if not excusable, understandable, Jonah's is patently absurd.

Jonah stands in striking contrast to other prophets who enter into a dispute with God. Abraham memorably challenged the Lord in his intercession for

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[13] The allusion to Elijah is reflected in the Syriac Peshitta translation, which "obtrusively imports Elijah's explanation about not being equal to his fathers." Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah*, AB 24B (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 305. See also, Daniel Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah*, NSBT 26 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 124.

[14] According to Bruce Vawter, "Jonah's sullen death wish is surely a parody of Elijah's profound discouragement." Bruce Vawter, *Job and Jonah: Questioning the Hidden God* (New York: Paulist, 1983), 51.

Sodom when he asked, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?" (Gen 18:23b–24). Similarly, Moses, on multiple occasions, objects to Yahweh's stated intention to destroy Israel for her disobedience as he does, for example, in the golden calf episode in Exodus 32:10–11. Though ministering after Jonah, the prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk also dispute with Yahweh as they struggle to understand his dealings with his people and their enemies (e.g., Jer 12:1–13; Hab 1:12–2:5). The prophetic dispute with God in its classic form has in view staying God's hand of judgment, even, as with Abraham in Genesis 18, God's judgment against pagan cities. Furthermore, the prophetic dispute typically objects to God's revealed course of action *on the basis of* his revealed character or covenant promises. The prophet reasons that it is precisely because of who God is and what he has promised that he should heed the prophet's petition and turn from his announced course of action (e.g., Gen 18:25; Exod 32:13). In contrast, Jonah's objection is not the inconsistency of Yahweh's course of action with his revealed character, but the consistency of it, again portraying Jonah as a parody of a faithful Israelite prophet.

In sum, the author of Jonah employs an array of literary devices to draw a line of continuity between the prophet who fled from the presence of the Lord in chapter 1 and the prophet who confronts the Lord in chapter 4. What the reader learns about the prophet in chapter 4 fills out the character that was presented in chapter 1 but does not present a fundamental change in his character. If there is any development at all, it is in the direction of hardening and a deepening of the prophet's bitterness and anger. The portrait of Jonah in chapter 4, therefore, is of a prophet entrenched in his conviction that he is in the right and God is in the wrong. These connections force the reader to reconsider the nature of the prophet's words and actions in chapters 2 and 3.

II. *Jonah's Repentance Reconsidered*

If we had only Jonah chapters 1 and 4, the character of the prophet would evidence little by way of development or complexity. As argued above, the Jonah of chapter 4 is presented as an intensified version of the Jonah of chapter 1. Little has changed for the prophet, and nothing has changed for the better. Complexity, however, is introduced with the prophet's words (ch. 2) and actions (ch. 3). It is mostly on the basis of these two realities—the prophet's prayer and his obedience—that the notion of Jonah's repentance has emerged.

Central to the consideration of Jonah's repentance is the prophet's prayer from the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2:2–9). In this prayer, the narrative moves from prose to poetry, and the prophet rehearses his drowning ordeal and celebrates God's gracious deliverance. Formally, Jonah's prayer is an almost pristine example of a psalm of thanksgiving. In contrast to psalms of praise, psalms of thanksgiving commemorate, celebrate, and express gratitude for a *particular* act of divine deliverance.[15] Douglas Stuart notes the following correspondences between Jonah's prayer from the depths and the five-part structure of the prototypical thanksgiving psalm:[16]

Thanksgiving Psalm Structure	Jonah 2:2–9
Introduction to the psalm	Verse 2
Description of past distress	Verses 3–6a
Appeal to God for help	Verse 7
Reference to the rescue God provided	Verse 6b
Vow of praise or testimonial	Verses 8–9

In addition to these formal correspondences, Jonah's prayer is replete with traditional phraseology, images, and expressions. For example, Jonah 2:2 ("I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried and you heard my voice") echoes biblical language and imagery (see Pss 18:7 [= 2 Sam 22:7]; 120:1; 130:1–2a; Lam 3:55–56; Ps 116:3).[17] Similar lists have been compiled for every verse of Jonah's prayer from the depths.[18] Brevard Childs is certainly correct when he describes Jonah's prayer as "a veritable catena of traditional phrases from the Psalter."[19] The psalm is both appropriate to the particulars of its narrative context and

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[15] Tremper Longman notes that psalms of thanksgiving flow out of lamentation: "The desire to express gratitude to the Lord for answered prayer is frequently found in the psalter." Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 30. For the classic taxonomy of Psalm types, see Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, completed by Joachim Begrich, trans. James Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

[16] Taken from Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, WBC 31 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 472. Bernhard Anderson designates Jonah's prayer as "a good example to guide us in the study of [thanksgiving] psalms." Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 105.

[17] Sasson, *Jonah*, 168–69. Sasson notes that these are simply illustrative and that more passages could be marshalled.

[18] Sasson (*Jonah*, 168–99) offers illustrative passages under his discussion of each verse. See also R. Reed Lessing, *Jonah*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 210.

[19] Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 423.

recognizable as a conventional psalm of thanksgiving that would no doubt have been familiar to the original audience. The significance of this phenomenon will be developed below.

What follows is a summary of a few of the more common ways of relating Jonah's prayer to his character in the surrounding narrative. First, an approach with good pedigree has been to treat Jonah's prayer as an expression of genuine repentance.[20] Commenting on the prayer, the early church father Cassiodorus says, "What an outstandingly and wholly glorious repentance, a humility that experiences no fall, grief that rejoices people's hearts, tears that water the soul! Indeed this depth, which conveys us to heaven, has no inkling of hell."[21] Similarly, John Calvin's judgment is that Jonah's prayer "was a wonderful and incredible example of faith."[22] On this view, the prophet has peered into the abyss of Sheol and has as a consequence learned his lesson, humbled himself before Yahweh, and promised right worship and (by implication) obedience to the divine command in the future.[23]

Naturally, this interpretation requires a more positive evaluation of Jonah's dispute with God in chapter 4 than the one adopted here. One approach has been to interpret Jonah's anger as indicative of his zeal for God's honor and reputation. Jonah is angry that his prophecy in 3:4, "Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" would be regarded as a false prophecy and Jonah himself regarded a lying prophet.[24] In this view, the prophet's prayer from the depths is understood as essentially genuine and, as a consequence, the prophet's dispute with Yahweh is at some level an expression of piety (albeit misguided in some respects).

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[20] For a thorough treatment of the history of interpretation, see Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Thomas Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-examined*, JSOTSup 236 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997).

[21] Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, trans. Patrick G. Walsh, quoted in Alberto Ferreiro, *The Twelve Prophets*, ACCSOT 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 137.

[22] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 3:74. Calvin explicitly denies any hypocrisy in Jonah: "We hence see that Jonah prayed not at random, as hypocrites are wont to take God's name in their mouths when they are in distress, but he prayed in earnest; for he was persuaded that God would be propitious to him" (ibid., 3:75).

[23] More recently, Richard Patterson has adopted this view: "Jonah's repentance and faith would be revealed as the Lord plucked him out of the 'jaws of death.'" Richard Patterson, "Jonah," in Richard Patterson and Andrew Hill, *Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 269–70.

[24] This was a standard Rabbinic explanation for both Jonah's flight in chapter 1 and his anger in chapter 4. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 18, 24. This was also, in essence, Calvin's view. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets*, 3:117.

A second common approach to resolving the tension between the prayer and narrative is to attribute Jonah's prayer to a later editorial hand.[25] Speaking of the "insertion" of Jonah's prayer, Bernhard Anderson writes,

> We say "inserted" because the psalm is obviously out of place in its present context. In the belly of a "fish" a cry for help (i.e. a lament) would be appropriate, but not a thanksgiving for deliverance already experienced.[26]

In this view, an editor has inserted the pious prayer of chapter 2 in order to redeem an otherwise irredeemable character and provide a moral lesson for an otherwise morally questionable story. Hans Wolff, for example, describes the rhetorical force of the prayer as follows:

> Thus the interpolator shows readers of the book of Jonah the repulsive picture of the old Jonah over against a new picture—the picture of Jonah the man of prayer and the teacher, who recognizes the foolishness of his backsliding—not least in contrast with the counterpicture of the heathen in chaps. 1 and 3—and who allows the stubbornness of chap. 4 to be overcome by Yahweh's persistent goodness. But what taught him most of all was his rescue from the sea.[27]

The result is a final form of Jonah which offers no resolution to the disparate portraits of the main character. The prayer from the depths, on this view, essentially superimposes a veneer of piety onto the rebellious prophet that is designed to provide a moral lesson to a tale void of didactic value.

A third line of interpretation, and one that is closest to the view adopted here, is to understand Jonah's prayer as in some respect deficient and thus more or less in accord with the general characterization of the prophet as hardhearted throughout the entire narrative. The deficiency of the prayer is typically attributed to the absence of any explicit confession of sin.[28] While admirable in many respects, the prophet fails to get to the heart of the issue, namely his hubris and sinful rebellion. For example, Robert Chisholm says, "Jonah's prayer is surprising. We expect a penitential psalm in which the prophet confesses his sins, but, much to our surprise, he did not acknowledge his disobedience. He simply celebrated his deliverance, boasted of his

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[25] Beginning with Johannes G. A. Müller (1794), Bolin rehearses the history and development of the multiple source theory of Jonah. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 42–53.

[26] Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 105.

[27] Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 138.

[28] See, e.g., Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 52.

superiority to the pagans, and made promises."[29] In other words, Jonah's genre mistake is indicative of his hard and unrepentant heart. However, George Landes has astutely observed that Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving references an earlier unrecorded petition (presumably a lament) in verses 2, 4, and 7.[30] Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving is his response to God's answer to his earlier prayer. As such, Jonah's psalm is perfectly appropriate to the situation.

There is, however, another sense in which Jonah's prayer may be said to be deficient: that is, it may be deficient with respect to the petitioner. Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving may in and of itself be proper and yet Jonah, as the story unfolds, is revealed to have uttered it in bad faith.[31] Though Jonah appears perfectly sincere in his gratitude in chapter 2, the concluding dialogue in chapter 4 reveals that his earlier expression of faith and piety was the result of a great deal of self-deception. As Jonah rails against God, he reveals that he does not really believe his concluding words, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (v. 9).

This proposal essentially treats Jonah's prayer in the same way as his two other expressions of faith. The prophet responds to the sailors' queries into his identity saying, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). As mentioned above, in Jonah 4:2 the prophet rehearses the traditional "name of God" revealed to Moses in Exodus 34:6–7. In neither instance is there a problem with the theological orthodoxy of prophet's expression. In both instances, the clear problem resides in the heart of the expresser.

Jonah's prayer from the depths may be interpreted in the same manner. The problem with the psalm is not in its orthodoxy or even its propriety; the problem, rather, is with the singer of the psalm himself. In this view, the psalm's traditional phraseology serves to situate it firmly in the stream of orthodoxy, and its genre as a thanksgiving psalm makes it recognizably appropriate for the circumstance (God's prophet is mercifully and miraculously delivered from death). The rhetorical force comes from the irony created by the psalm being sung by this intractably rebellious and hardhearted prophet.

All three of the prophet's expressions of faith exhibit an ironic element, as Jonathan Magonet observes:

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[29] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 412.

[30] Landes, "The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah," 15.

[31] I use the term "bad faith" only in its general sense of someone being of two minds or two hearts, with its associations of intentional or unintentional self-deception and hypocrisy.

> [The author] puts into Jonah's mouth certain pious affirmations, that stem from his tradition, yet each comes out in a peculiarly ironic way in its context in the book. The description of God as He who "hath made the sea and the dry land" is ironic since Jonah has fled to the sea to escape his mission. The citing of the magnificent attributes of God, of patience and compassion and mercy, in Chapter 4, is ironic because Jonah hurls these at God in his anger. … So Jonah inside the fish recites his pious Psalm of Thanksgiving in anticipation of being restored to dry land, and in confession of his dependence upon God. Nevertheless we must expect this "psalm" also to have its ironic element to it.[32]

Irony, however, can serve a variety of rhetorical purposes. The primary purpose of the ironic portrayal of Jonah's piety is related to the book's irreducibly prophetic purpose. Specifically, the irony of the Jonah narrative, especially the prophet's prayer from the depths, was designed to expose the hypocrisy that was endemic to the covenant community and to invite that same community to a renewed relationship with Yahweh through repentance.

The traditional language of the prayer contributes, therefore, to its rhetorical force. Childs notes that "Jonah prays in the stereotypical language of the psalms which every faithful Jew had always used."[33] The prophet resembles the people whom he represents, and about whom God says, "This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men" (Isa 29:13). The rhetorical force, therefore, is found not in its deficiency, but in its sufficiency because its sufficiency or conventionality as a psalm of thanksgiving locates Jonah's problem (and Israel's problem) not at the level of external rites, but at the level of the heart. Jonah is uttering what are recognizably correct words, yet clearly, Jonah's heart remains far from God.

That all is not right with Jonah's prayer may be signaled as early as Jonah 2:11: "And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it *vomited* Jonah out upon the dry land" (2:11, emphasis mine). The verb translated "vomit" (*qy'*, קיא) is only used nine times in the Old Testament, three times in Leviticus with refer-ence to Israel's tenure in the promised land. For example, Yahweh says, "You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not *vomit* (*qy'*) you out" (Lev 20:22, emphasis mine; cf. Lev 18:25, 28). Unsurprisingly, vomiting in the Bible is never a positive thing, and it is almost exclusively used in the context of God's judgment on his people (e.g., Job 20:15; Jer 48:26; Isa 19:40). Jonah's climactic conclusion ("Salvation belongs to the Lord," 2:9) immediately

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[32] Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 52.
[33] Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 423.

precedes the notice of this divinely induced vomiting (v. 10) and may therefore stand in a causal relationship to it.

What then is to be made of Jonah's obedience to his divine commission in Jonah 3:1–5? Admittedly, it does seem promising when the text reads, "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lᴏʀᴅ" (3:3). The lexical parallels in 3:2, "arise, go" (Heb. *qum lekh*, קוּם לֵךְ, cf. 1:2) invite us to contrast Jonah's response to his second commission with that of his first. However, when read in light of the concluding portrait of the prophet, Jonah's obedience appears to be anything but indicative of a prophet chidden, humbled, and submissive to his covenant Lord.

From a biblical-theological perspective, the prophetic ministry to Gentiles under the Mosaic covenant is a complex phenomenon.[34] It is certainly true that the numerous examples of a prophet's extension of grace and mercy to Gentiles signal a partial fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that God's blessing would extend through Abraham to the nations: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3).[35] This aspect of the prophetic ministry also serves as a foreshadowing of the eventual inclusion of the Gentiles that would characterize the new covenant (Matt 8:10).

This positive message of the prophetic ministry to the Gentiles needs to be balanced with a corresponding negative message. During the Mosaic theocracy, God's extension of grace toward the Gentiles is, in many cases, also a sign of his displeasure with and impending judgment of his covenant people. John Stek observes,

> Still vivid in the memory of Jonah's generation were the dealings of God with Israel in the days of Elijah and Elisha when He had sternly disciplined His people, in part by the sword of surrounding nations, in part by the ministry of the prophets, *and in part by the bestowing special blessings on the neighboring Gentiles*."[36]

To illustrate this last category, Stek cites the following: Elijah's caring for the widow of Zarephath during a famine (1 Kgs 17:8–24), Elisha's healing the leprous Naaman, the Syrian officer (2 Kgs 5:1–14; cf. Luke 4:27), Elijah's

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[34] For a lucid discussion of the covenantal context and content of Jonah, see Bryan Estelle, *Salvation through Judgment and Mercy: The Gospel According to Jonah* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 15–27.

[35] I am following the widely accepted translation and interpretation that reads "shall be blessed" (*wenivrekhu*, וְנִבְרְכוּ) as a passive over the reflexive ("all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by you.") For a defense of this translation, see C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 113, n. 22.

[36] John H. Stek, "The Message of the Book of Jonah," *Calvin Theological Journal* 4 (1969): 25, emphasis mine.

anointing of Hazael, king of Damascus, thus giving Syria an even stronger king than Ben-hadad I and one who would prove an even greater threat to Israel (2 Kgs 8:9–15).[37] That God would bless the nations around Israel in order to judge his disobedient people is promised in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32: "They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation" (v. 21).[38]

This is almost certainly part of the complex of motivating factors that compelled Jonah to flee his calling to Nineveh in chapter 1. Simon says, "The Hebrew prophet's refusal to go to Nineveh is explained by his fear that the anticipated repentance of the gentile city will cast a heavy shadow on the stiff-necked Israelites."[39] God's potentially gracious word to the Ninevites was, at the same time, a word of judgment against Israel. When seen in this light, Yahweh's second commissioning of Jonah for the task of bringing his word to the Ninevites is a reaffirmation of his judgment upon Israel. Jonah's obedience, like his psalm, may be interpreted as an outward expression of piety void of the proper internal realities of faith and repentance.

From a rhetorical perspective, both the "vomiting" fish and the recommissioning of the prophet carry this dual meaning. On the one hand, both contain the positive message of God's unwavering commitment to fulfill his promise to Abraham to bless the nations through his offspring. Even Jonah's disobedience (or Israel's disobedience) could not thwart God's settled purposes in that regard. However, the same events carry a negative message for Israel, reminding them of the reality of God's covenant curses that will come upon them should they persist in faithlessness and disobedience. The repentance of the pagan sailors and the gentile Ninevites on the basis of so little by way of prophetic revelation serves to condemn Israel who, like Jonah, failed to repent though they had so much. The book of Jonah issues the prophetic warning that should Israel fail to respond to God's prophets with repentance, the land will vomit them out, and the surrounding nations will be blessed to the end that they might bring God's covenant curse upon them.

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[37] Stek notes, "All this left Syria in a position to subject Israel to the most humble circumstances in the early years of the Jehu dynasty." Stek, "The Message of the Book of Jonah," 25–26.

[38] Ibid., 26. Meredith Kline makes a similar point; see Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 142.

[39] Simon, *Jonah*, viii.

Conclusion

The book of Jonah is, by almost any measure, a literary masterpiece. Like every great work of literature, it employs a variety of features designed to draw readers into a deeper engagement with the text and its message. One such feature is the seemingly contradictory portrait of the prophet Jonah, who in short order moves from singing a heart-stirring psalm of thanksgiving to God to berating the Almighty in the most vitriolic tones. Against proposals which argue that the Jonah's psalm is a secondary addition to the text, and against proposals which seek to exonerate Jonah on the basis of the faith expressed in this earlier psalm, this article has argued that the prophet's prayer plays a critical rhetorical role of establishing an ironic contrast between the prophet's expressions of piety and his acts of rebellion.

This interpretation is based, in part, on the premise that the book of Jonah is irreducibly prophetic. That is to say that whatever else the story is doing (instructing, informing, entertaining, and so on), the narrative at its most basic level is designed to fulfill a uniquely prophetic function of prosecuting the terms of the Mosaic covenant vis-à-vis national Israel (Deut 18:15–22). This article has revisited the issue of Jonah's prayer from the depths with a view toward understanding its contribution to the larger prophetic message.

Jonah accomplishes its prophetic purpose by dramatically displaying in the recalcitrant prophet the rebellious spirit that characterized Israel both in Jonah's day and after. In Jonah's prayer from the depths, the reader witnesses the divinely appointed prophet honoring God with his lips, only to discover at the conclusion of the narrative that his heart is far from him. In this way, the prophet resembles the nation he represents. Like Israel, the prophet makes good confessions, sings majestic psalms, and even obeys the command of God, yet at the same time grows increasingly more resistant toward Yahweh's revealed purposes for his people and the nations.

Though, as I have argued above, the prophet is presented as fundamentally unrepentant, the rhetorical purpose of painting such a dim portrait was to induce repentance in the readers or hearers of this book. The Israelites were meant to see themselves in the character of Jonah, not allegorically, but representationally and symbolically. The biting irony of Yahweh's rebellious prophet performing acts of piety (confessions of faith, singing of psalms, and so on) is designed to expose the systemic hypocrisy that had taken root in Israel's culture and to move the nation to genuine repentance and proper worship. The central purpose of the narrative, therefore, is not

to rehearse Jonah's sin as a point of historical interest, nor even simply to rehearse God's mercy toward Nineveh (as important as that is to the message of the book), but rather to extend God's mercy to Israel as they hear of God's pursuit of his wayward and rebellious prophet.

Preaching Christ from Proverbs

IAIN DUGUID

Abstract

Most guidance for preaching Christ from the Old Testament focuses on narratives or prophetic books. This paper focuses on the specific challenges of preaching Christ from the proverbial literature of the Old Testament. It shows how to compare and contrast biblical wisdom with cultural wisdom (in both the wider culture and the Christian subculture). Since wisdom is often indirect law, it can function as other biblical law does: convicting us of sin and driving us to Christ, who is the wisdom of God and has thus lived with perfect wisdom in our place. It can also exhibit the third use of the law, which is as a guide to wise Christian behavior.

When we think about preaching Christ from the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs is not typically what first springs to mind. We usually think of narratives, like Moses nailing the bronze serpent to a pole in the wilderness (Num 21), or prophecies like the one in Isaiah 9:6: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given."[1] Once in class when I made the point that I thought Christ can and should be preached from every part of the Scriptures, a student immediately shot up his hand. "You don't really mean that we can preach Christ from *every* Scripture?" he said. I replied, "Yes, I do." His next question was "What about Proverbs 26:11:

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[1] Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version.

'As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool returns to his folly'?" I repeated that Christ can certainly be preached from every Scripture and asked for a couple of days to think about that specific passage. Later that week, I gave him my outline. I really do believe that the sufferings of Christ and the glories that will follow are the central theme of the Scriptures and therefore must be the theme of all true Christian preaching (Luke 24:25–27).[2] If that is correct, it should be true every bit as much for wisdom literature as it is for narrative and prophecy.

All of this I learned as a seminary student. What I did not learn in seminary, however, was *how* to see Christ appropriately in the different genres of the Old Testament. Since those days, there has been much useful foundational material produced: Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* is a good primer,[3] and Sidney Greidanus's *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* is very helpful.[4] Greidanus has gone further in producing materials that apply his method in practice to various Old Testament books.[5] However, if you look at Greidanus's *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes*, for example, it is quickly apparent that the seven categories for Christocentric interpretation that he developed in his earlier volume—redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, longitudinal themes, New Testament references, and contrast—do not all map equally comfortably onto wisdom texts. By its very nature, wisdom literature tends to be isolated from the flow of redemptive history (though the basic Old Testament–New Testament progression is, of course, important) and the category of promise-fulfillment is completely absent. Typology does not appear to be particularly relevant to the book of Proverbs, and there are few New Testament citations of the wisdom literature as a whole. It is not surprising, therefore, that we feel more comfortable preaching Christ from narratives and prophetic books than from wisdom literature.

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[2] For a brief defense of this idea, see Iain Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

[3] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

[4] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[5] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); *Preaching Christ from Daniel: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); and *Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

I. *The Relevance of the Book of Proverbs*

Few parts of the Bible are as obviously relevant to the lives of ordinary people as wisdom literature. People are naturally interested in guidance on sexuality, wealth, relationships, parenting, suffering, guidance, and a host of other practical topics that the book of Proverbs addresses. This is where the rubber meets the road of real life for all of us. For evidence of that, you simply need to go down to the local bookstore (or Amazon.com). Among recent bestsellers, you will find *Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life … and Maybe the World*,[6] *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*,[7] and, my personal favorite title: *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*.[8] The writers of these books are addressing the same issues as the collector of the biblical Proverbs. They are involved in the same process that we see in the book of Proverbs, a process of classification and analysis of the nature of the world in which we live, in order to teach others how to live "effectively"—whether at work, in their relationships, or in making sense of life.

The fundamental difference between many of these books and the Bible, of course, is that their counsel, their "wisdom," flows from idolatry rather than from the fear of the Lord. Foundational to the book of Proverbs is the key verse, Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This is the gateway through which you enter the book, the lens through which every statement in the book has to be viewed. Starting from that foundation, this book forms an intricate web of statements that together form an ordered worldview, or system of thinking, that we may call "biblical wisdom." In many cases, however, the people in your congregations are not ordering their lives on the basis of biblical wisdom but rather on the basis of the conventional wisdom that showers them on all sides.

Now, of course, not all of that conventional wisdom is bad! There is a substantial overlap between biblical wisdom and the wisdom of the ancient Near East,[9] and so too there is a natural overlap between contemporary

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[6] William H. McRaven, *Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life … and Maybe the World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017).

[7] The Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (New York: Avery, 2016).

[8] Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* (New York: Crown, 2013).

[9] One hundred years ago, scholars often regarded Proverbs as being under the influence of Greek philosophy and therefore a very late stage in Israel's theological development. However, that changed significantly with the discovery and publication in 1923 of *The Teaching of Amenope*, an Egyptian wisdom document from the late twenty-first dynasty (1000–950 BC).

conventional wisdom and the Bible. Many of those bestsellers became popular because they have grasped, however imperfectly, some truth about the nature of the world in which we live. Of course, they have necessarily twisted that truth in order to remain non-Christians in a world that shouts the reality of the living God in their ears (Rom 1:19–24). But within limited areas, the wisdom of these gurus of self-help may be quite effective. In some ways, that simply makes their influence all the worse because they are usually selling people a more effective idolatry than anything they could construct on their own.

Because they are built on different foundations, there will often be significant differences between a biblical understanding of the nature of the world in which we live and that of the bestsellers. For that reason, we need to address these areas of conventional wisdom on the basis of biblical revelation. Conventional wisdom does not just bombard us in extended treatises from the bestseller list: it also constantly presents itself in proverb-like form on billboards and bumper stickers, and in poetic form in the popular songs on the radio and in movies.[10] How better for your people to learn how to interact with the conventional wisdom that comes to expression in these forms than for them to be instructed from the pulpit? What more effective way of countering idolatrous proverbs than by teaching people how to understand and apply true biblical proverbs?

II. *Preaching Proverbs in Their Redemptive Historical Context*

But how to do we preach Proverbs? The first point to remember would be that even though wisdom makes relatively few references to its broader redemptive-historical context, it nonetheless comes to us in the context of a particular period of biblical history. Proverbs 3:9 ("Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine") has a particular context within the Sinai covenant in which the tithe and firstfruits formed an obligation on Israel, as tenants of a land that belonged to God, to honor him with specific parts of their agricultural produce (see Deut 14:22–29;

Since that time, scholars have recognized that the book of Proverbs fits closely with the wider background of ancient Near Eastern wisdom, especially Egyptian parallels.

[10] In addition to providing us with the book of Proverbs to critique conventional proverbial literature, God has provided us with the Song of Songs ("the Supreme Song") to counter the erroneous views of love and marriage that we regularly encounter. On preaching Christ from the Song of Songs, see Iain Duguid, *Song of Songs*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

18:4). As a result, these obligations also came with promises of blessing and threats of curse (see Deut 28). Those blessings and curses do not operate in the same way under the new covenant, nor are we under exactly the same obligations as they were. Of course, many proverbs are of universal import, just as many of the laws of Sinai have universal significance as moral laws. However, we always need to understand biblical proverbs within the particular redemptive-historical context of the old covenant.

III. *Preaching Proverbs as Proverbs*

Second, we need to remember the nature of the genre of wisdom as a whole. Proverbs are proverbs, not promises or statements of absolute fact. For example, Proverbs 15:6, "In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked" sounds as if godliness is the most certain way to prosperity and success. Yet in a fallen world, wise behavior itself carries no guarantee of maximal "success." Wise behavior is inevitably built on partial generalizations. It evaluates a range of the apparently unconnected experiences of life and generalizes them, forming principles of conduct from these experiences. It is wise to plan prudently for the future and to save rather than to trust your retirement to buying lottery tickets. Most people are more likely to prosper in that way. That does not mean that you will never meet people who have become rich through buying a lottery ticket. Wisdom deals with the ordinary, normal use of means rather than the unusual, unique distortions of circumstances. It provides you with an underlying analysis of the situation on which to make wise decisions. Wise behavior is still wise behavior, even when in a particular instance the outcome does not follow the regular pattern.

Moreover, what is wise behavior in one context is not necessarily wise behavior in another situation. That is why you can have entirely contradictory proverbs that are both true. For instance, within the biblical book of Proverbs there are two apparently contradictory proverbs side by side (Prov 26:4–5):

> Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Which is it? Should I answer the fool or not? It all depends. If I answer him, will I become embroiled in a useless controversy and so become like him? Or will I help him to see that he is not as smart as he thinks? It takes wisdom to know which proverb applies to a particular situation, and if you quote the

wrong proverb, it may encourage you in entirely the wrong direction. That is why only a few verses later we are warned that "like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of a fool" (Prov 26:9). The fool does not know how to apply the proverb appropriately to a variety of situations, and therefore it becomes a thorn in his flesh rather than a helpful guide. Proverbs need to be understood within the context of their own genre.

IV. *Preaching Proverbs as Law*

It is worth noticing that, in general, wisdom literature will often fit under the broader category of "law" rather than "gospel." The general motif of the book of Proverbs is "Do this and you shall live." Sometimes the law aspect of wisdom is very clear, in the form of specific commands. Proverbs 14:7 says, "Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge," while 16:3 commands, "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." Sometimes, wisdom gives you express "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots." Many times, however, wisdom intends to shape your behavior more indirectly by illustrating what wise (or unwise) behavior looks like. So, the writer of Proverbs tells an example story about the foolish young man who goes wandering in the evening and is drawn into his destruction by the adulterous woman (Prov 7:6–27). You are invited to draw your own conclusions. At times, wisdom can be quite enigmatic. Proverbs 11:22 says, "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." Yet even here, there is always some behavior or pattern of thinking that you are being led towards as you ponder this truth.

V. *Wisdom and Worldview*

Mention of patterns of thinking brings us to our third point, which is that wisdom literature functions as part of a system of wisdom, a worldview. It is not just about what you do; it is also about how you think. This is also true of the non-Christian wisdom literature on display all around us. "Proverb-like" statements in advertisements ("Around here, you have to love what you drive"), or on bumper stickers ("Attend the church or synagogue of your choice") express a particular worldview as well as inviting a behavior that logically flows from it. In some situations in any given culture, biblical wisdom and conventional wisdom may be relatively closely aligned. At others, they will be sharply opposed. In different cultures, of course, the points of alignment and opposition will be different. In some cases, biblical

and conventional wisdom may argue for the same behavior for entirely different reasons.

Notice also that you also have to deal with conventional cultural wisdom at large and what we might call "conventional Christian wisdom." Every subculture has its own characteristic ways of thinking, and Christian sub-cultures do not necessarily think biblically, or even alike. For example, when we lived in Oxford, England, it was always an interesting exercise in cultural dynamics to receive mission teams from a Presbyterian church in Jackson, Mississippi. To mix these brothers and sisters in Christ, some of whom were well to the right politically, together with our Scottish friends, for whom to be a Christian is to be a socialist, inevitably led to some interesting discussions. Both sides needed to have their culturally absorbed presuppositions, which they thought "obviously Christian," critiqued in the light of God's Word. You can read the worldview of your Christian subculture in exactly the same way you read broader cultural worldviews: you see it in Christian bumper stickers and slogans, such as "Angels are watching over me" or "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," as well as through other ways in which our default patterns of thinking come to expression.

To put it another way, proverbs, both secular and biblical, work either by creating order or subverting it. They are beams and bombs: just as thick wooden beams support a house, some proverbs support the basic premises and cultural axioms that govern the behavior of a given group of people, while other proverbs are bombs designed to subvert it. "A woman without a man is like a fish without water" expresses the traditionalist cultural axiom that women are inherently dependent upon men. "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle" subverts that traditional order by asserting that not only are men not necessary for women to thrive, they are irrelevant and useless. In order to understand the import of a particular biblical proverb, we need to grasp whether it expresses and seeks to reinforce the existing cultural axioms of this group of Christians, or seeks to subvert them with a new dynamic. Likewise, does it express the existing cultural axioms of the society in which we live, or does it seek to subvert them?

Proverbs that align with the cultural axioms of both your church and your society—the beams—will primarily be directed at the next generation in your preaching, as you seek to pass on the same worldview to your children. The book of Proverbs is deeply concerned for the next generation: there is no easy assumption that of course our children will grow up to understand wisdom. On the contrary, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child" (Prov 22:15). That is why it is important to "train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6).

These "beam" proverbs—the one that fit apparently naturally with conventional wisdom both of your society and church—are the proverbs that seem so obvious when you read them as to be hardly worth bothering about. For example, "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth" (Prov 10:4). These proverbs create little resistance when they are preached; after all, everyone agrees with them, at least in theory.

VI. *Preaching Models*

One strategy for preaching these "beam" proverbs is "the roving spotlight model."[11] Here we look for biblical or contemporary models of what this virtue or vice looks like in practice, so that we can get beyond generalities into the particulars in which wisdom consists. If "hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (Prov 13:12), what are some biblical or contemporary examples of hope deferred or fulfilled? What are you hoping for? How does your hope shape your life, positively or negatively? How does your hope demonstrably fall short of that which Jesus calls us to and lives for us?

A second approach is the "sometimes, but not always" model. This model explores the limits of the applicability of the proverb, asking where and when it is appropriate for us to use this proverb and where and when it would not be appropriate. Thus Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." How might this proverb appropriately shape your marriage relationship, or be inappropriately used to encourage submission in an abusive situation? Is it ever right to be harsh with our words? If so, when? This approach can be combined with the previous one: sometimes biblical characters give us good examples to follow or bad ones to avoid. Jesus himself shows us that a soft answer is not always the right path to follow.

The "double take" model explores proverbs that seem too good to be true, for example, Proverbs 16:17: "The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life." Of course, there are many situations where turning aside from evil endangers rather than preserves our lives, as the book of Daniel makes clear: Daniel and his friends endure the fiery furnace and the lion's den for their faithfulness (see Dan 3; 6). So why does the proverb exist, if it is not true to our experience of life? The answer is that what you see in this life is not always what you get. There are deeper realities behind the visible, an eschatological order in which this

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[11] The models in this section are drawn and adapted from Alyce McKenzie, *Preaching Proverbs: Wisdom for the Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

proverb is true, even where it does not match our present experience. Wisdom is a call to look to the unseen, not the seen, a call to faith: being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (cf. Heb 11:1). Wise behavior views the experiences of this world in light of eternity, not from the perspective of maximizing short-term pleasure.

Proverbs that express the cultural axioms of our church but are at variance with society at large call for a different approach. People first of all need to see the conflict between the two modes of thinking, which is often best achieved through a "dueling proverbs" approach, where the biblical proverb is placed side by side a contemporary proverb that expresses the opposite, such as "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:25) versus "He who dies with the most toys wins." These proverbs can be preached in a way that either challenges or advocates for our hearers. They challenge those (Christians or unbelievers) who have consciously or unconsciously adopted the worldview of contemporary culture rather than a biblical worldview. At the same time, they support believers who are feeling marginalized in society by showing them that their way of thinking, although despised by the world, is supported by a higher authority.

Proverbs that subvert the cultural axioms of the people in your church are the ones that will provoke the most resistance among your hearers. Here, like Jesus, you will be saying something like "You have heard that is was said …. But I say to you"—except, of course, you will be appealing not to your own authority but to a more accurate understanding of biblical teaching. Thus, you might preach on "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Matt 20:26–27) and challenge the hierarchical view of power that predominates in some of our churches.

VII. *Moralistic versus Christ-Centered Preaching*

With all of these models, the more clearly you explain and illustrate what true biblical wisdom looks like, the more people should feel exposed and condemned. Like all biblical law, there is a gap between our theory and our practice. The things that we know we should do, we do not, while the things that we know we should not do, we find ourselves doing. It is at this point that the difference between moralistic and Christ-centered preaching will emerge clearly.

Moralistic preaching takes two forms: either it *denies* the gospel altogether and affirms that our good behavior is enough to please God or, more

commonly in evangelical and Reformed churches, it *assumes* the gospel and focuses entirely on the law as a guide to the life of the believer. So, a moralistic sermon on Proverbs 10:4 ("A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich") might say, "You people need to stop being so lazy; get busy for Jesus and then our church will prosper. … And by the way, there are sign-up sheets for the nursery and the evangelism program on the back table." Such a sermon will tend to leave people either feeling proud that they are keeping the law, or guilty about their many failures. Instead of guilt, grace, and gratitude, the structure of the moralist's catechism tends to be guilt, guilt and more guilt.

Christ-centered preaching, however, does justice to the legal aspect of the law's demands within a guilt-grace-gratitude structure. It is true that many of us should feel appropriately guilty about the unbelief that finds expression in our self-centered and self-protective laziness. Our actions (or lack of them) reveal something that is true and significant about our hearts and our beliefs. Yet often our most diligent activity also reveals something equally toxic about our worldview. When we diligently serve, are we obeying out of the fear of the Lord and love for our neighbor, or is our frantic busyness actually equally rooted in our idolatry? Perhaps we need to feel every bit as guilty about the aspects of the law that we find ourselves keeping as we do about the ones we are so obviously breaking.

There is nothing wrong with guilt *per se*. Any serious consideration of God's holy law ought to condemn us as sinners. The key is what happens next. Guilt that leaves us paralyzed and turned in on ourselves and our own efforts is a problem. Guilt is supposed to drive us to Christ and call us to the grace that he offers us in the gospel. How does this proverb show us even more clearly our desperate need of Christ? How did Christ not only exemplify this virtue or avoid this vice, but do so in our place? How was he properly diligent? What specifically did that look like? How is his diligence different from our best diligence, and how is it good news for those of us who are so often undiligent? Here we are thinking not just about the passive obedience of Christ but his active obedience as well—not just his death that paid the penalty for my sins but his lifelong obedience that clothes me with precisely the righteousness that I need.

VIII. *The Law as a Blessing*

Having been brought to see my need of grace ("guilt"), and the grace that is mine in Christ, I am now prepared to move on to the aspect of "gratitude" and see the positive role of the law as a blessing in the life of the believer.

The law is not merely intended to crush my pride; it is also to be a lamp to my feet. Like God's old covenant people, Christians are also supposed to be strangers and aliens in this world, distinct and different from those around us (see 1 Pet 2:11). The Old Testament scholar Daniel Block recounts the story of a time when his family was engaged in a rather heated discussion around the dinner table, during which his teenage son burst out, "Why do I have to live in such a prehistoric family?" He comments, "While his motives left something to be desired, I took this as a compliment: at least he recognized that our household was run by counter-cultural norms."[12] Exactly!

IX. *Returning to the Gospel*

However, even having started with the gospel, there is still a real danger that if I end with a focus on the law, my hearers may confuse their Christian obedience with their Christian identity. In other words, they may think that they are Christians because they do Christian things, not that they are called to do Christian things because they are Christians. Because the law is written on our hearts, while the gospel is alien to us, it is so easy for us to find our functional acceptance before God in our performance. As a result, we often feel more justified if we are more obedient, and vice versa. Because of this, I often find it desirable to return in the conclusion of the sermon to the fact that the gospel is still true even when I do not live out its implications for wise living. God's love for me is never dependent upon how good a week I have had, or will have; instead, my standing before the Father is constantly dependent upon Christ's perfect, finished righteousness, not on any flawed and failing righteousness to which I can attain.

In other words, I do not start the Christian life as a sinner and then gradually progress through hard work and cooperating with grace to being a justified saint. I am always *simul justus et peccator*—at the very same time a desperately wicked sinner throughout my life, yet equally a fully justified and beloved saint. Any ways in which I begin to keep the law—as expressed in the book of Proverbs—are only the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in my life, as is my ability to repent of even one of my many daily sins. God's grace is sufficient for me in my weakest and darkest and least diligent hours, as well as in those few minutes when I may feel like an obedient follower of Christ.

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[12] Daniel I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians," *Hiphil* 3 (2006); online: http://www.see-j.net/hiphil/ojs-2.3.3-3/index.php/hiphil/article/view/27.

X. *The Sluggard (Prov 6:6–11; 26:13–16)*

In this case, I have combined a couple of passages that both deal with a single issue: the lazy sluggard. The only direct command in either passage is the instruction to consider and be wise. The rest is purely descriptive, but that description wants to shape your behavior so that you become wise and *not* like the sluggard. As soon as you read the passage, some people in your congregation will identify with the sluggard, while others will be like the Pharisee in the temple in Luke 18, saying, "God, I thank you that I am not like this sluggard." Your task is to speak to *both* groups and show how their wisdom falls short of biblical wisdom about work and leisure.

To begin with, though, what is a sluggard? Derek Kidner identifies four features of someone who is a sluggard.[13] First, a sluggard is someone who will not begin things. The questions, "How long will you lie there?" and "When will you arise from your sleep?" have no answer except "Not yet." A sluggard is in no rush to do things. Just a little longer. "A little [more] sleep, a little [more] slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest" (Prov 6:10). Second, a sluggard is someone who will not finish things. If he does by some chance or force of necessity actually get going on a project, it comes to nothing in the end. In the graphic image of chapter 26, he puts his hand in the dish, but he is too lazy to bring his hand to his own mouth (v. 15). Third, a sluggard is a person who will not face things. He has plenty of excuses to justify his lack of action: there may be a lion out there on the streets of the city (v. 13).[14] Better to stay inside, therefore. The result of all of these things the fourth feature of the sluggard: he is a person who is restless and unproductive. He tosses and turns in his bed like a door banging in the breeze (v. 14). His field is overgrown with weeds; his vineyard filled with nettles; the wall that would protect it from marauding animals broken down. Poverty comes upon him like a bandit. Kidner concludes,

> The wise man will learn while there is time. He knows that the sluggard is no freak, but, as often as not, an ordinary man who has made too many excuses, too many refusals and too many postponements. It has all been as imperceptible, and as pleasant, as falling asleep."[15]

It seems to me that conventional wisdom in our society generally divides sluggards into two groups: rich sluggards and poor sluggards. Rich sluggards

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[13] Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964) 42–43.

[14] There were lions in ancient Judah, just as there are bears in many North American states. But your chances of meeting one on your daily business were equally slim.

[15] Kidner, *Proverbs*, 43.

float around the Caribbean in their yachts or retire to their country club homes next to the golf course. Poor sluggards sit on their doorsteps in the inner-city ghettoes, living on welfare. Conventional wisdom regards poor sluggards as a problem: we need to *do* something about poor sluggards, because otherwise they will get into drugs, crime, or rioting and make a nuisance of themselves. Yet conventional wisdom rather envies the position of rich sluggards. Many people spend their whole lives slaving away at jobs with the career goal of retiring so that they can become such sluggards. Biblically, there is no difference between rich sluggards and poor sluggards: both are living worthless, empty lives.

It is not coincidental that fear is a central feature of the life of the sluggard. Fear often makes us reluctant to start things and slow to finish what we have started. For some, it is the fear of failure. If your idol is success, then to fail means your idol will curse you and call you worthless. To avoid that painful feeling, we may decide that it is better not even to start something. Or if we leave it half done, we can still believe we would have succeeded if we had finished, so we have not really failed. Alternatively, we may be driven by the fear of what others think of us. If we do something, we may offend someone; not doing anything means not offending people. Still, others may have an unspoken fear of what God thinks of us. We feel God is perpetually disappointed with us, so to avoid having to face up to that painful feeling, we hide in doing a thousand meaningless things that distract us from our feelings. It is not always mere laziness that makes us sluggards: often there is a way in which that behavior makes sense to us in terms of our desires and our idolatries. That is why we persist in it, even when its negative fruit in our lives is so clear and painful.

At this point, even while some are feeling convicted that they are sluggards, others may be feeling a little smug. No one in their right mind would ever accuse *you* of being a sluggard. You are the kind of man or woman who puts the busy ant to shame with your constant doing. You are not a sluggard, but an overachiever. Yet the very same fears and avoidance strategies that make some of us sluggards make others overachievers. Our behavior may be completely opposite, but our heart struggles are identical.

For example, some are driven by a success work ethic. We believe that if we are highly successful in our work, then our life is worthwhile. What we most fear is being useless. If that is our idol, every day we have to justify our existence and prove to ourselves that we are worthy of our breath by the things we do. This idolatry is tailor made to make a fear-driven overachiever out of you, as long as you are able to keep up with your idols' demands. Kids who struggle with this idolatry tend to perform well in academics and

sports. Adults are very committed to their careers or to raising a successful family. All of these are good things, but underneath it all is the engine of our idolatrous fear.

This idolatry is a particularly potent temptation for those of us with jobs in ministry because, after all, we are on a mission for God. As a result, it is easy for us to think that our value as people hangs on what we do for God. We may feel wonderful when our ministry is growing and going well, and inordinately depressed and frustrated if it shrinks or no one seems appreciative of our labors. But our elation or depression has nothing to do with God's approval and everything to do with whether our success idol is smiling on us or not.

What happens when all of that relentless effort does not lead to success, though? Perhaps you get to college and discover that many other people are smarter than you and better at sports, or music, or whatever you previously excelled in. Perhaps you get passed over for a promotion in your career or laid off, or health prevents you from being able to work. Perhaps your ministry gets little response, or you are criticized in spite of your hard work. Then your idol starts to curse you, telling you that you are a worthless person; that can easily begin a spiral down into the sluggard's path, as we seek to escape our idol's curses. We become discouraged and bitter, apathetic and lazy. Notice that our hearts are no different when we are active and prosperous than when we are sluggardly and slothful. The only difference is in our external circumstances: as long as we thought we could satisfy our idol we were overachievers, but when we become discouraged idolaters, we turn into sluggards.

In general, we may say that sluggards are often frustrated idolaters, while workaholics tend to be more successful idolaters. But the reality for all of us, whichever temptation we face, is that a fundamental fear of our idols drives us. That is why the remedy for our malady is not simply an admonition to just work harder. Working harder is not the goal. The goal is a balanced biblical understanding of work and rest that is rooted in the fear of the Lord rather than the fear of our idols. That is no surprise, of course, since "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7).

Why are we to work hard instead of dribbling our lives away in a life spent in "littles"? In the first place, we work because we serve a hardworking God. In the very beginning, God worked. Six days he labored in creating the universe. What is more, this God created us to work as he does. He made us in his image, and he placed man in the garden of Eden, a garden without weeds, to work it and keep it. It is not that there was no rest in the garden of Eden; on the contrary, they experienced delightful encounters with God

day after day, and a Sabbath on the seventh day. Yet paradise, as it was originally created, was not to be a place of eternal leisure.

But the fall came, and work has been forever affected. It is affected on the one hand by all the frustrating intrusions of chaos that now make work such a hassle. It is the fall that fills our lives with endless meaningless tasks that are never done. It is the fall that introduced the conflicts in relationships that so often cause chaos and pain in our work. It is the often frustrating and miserable nature of work—whether your work is regular employment, parenthood, being a student, or ministry—that explains the temptation to become a sluggard and check out of reality. Life is full of challenges, brokenness, and failure. Why not escape from all of that through laziness, sleep, or some other diversion? How do we resist that temptation without on the other hand becoming driven workaholics who do not know when to stop?

The answer is to fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord means remembering that my work is not first and foremost about me. My work is not who I am; it does not define me, nor is it primarily about my enjoyment, satisfaction, fulfillment, or success. Rather, I am called to work hard to glorify God and to serve those around me. If I fear the Lord, however, I will recognize that the frustrations of work are also a gift of God, an opportunity to glorify him and serve others. How would I grow in submissive patience and grace without trials and failures at work? When I fail at my work, my heart is exposed. If I respond with patience and grace, the world sees the gospel at work in my heart through the power of the Spirit. If I respond with anger and frustration, as I so often do, I come to recognize more clearly the grip that the idol of success still has upon me, which may cause me to treasure the gospel of God's enduring love to me all the more. It is not just when work is going well, when your gifts are being used, and when you are being respected and successful that you can feel God's pleasure. In the midst of intense frustrations and hassles, in work, or relationships, or ministry, you can give glory to God as you do it all for him.

We not only serve a hardworking God, but we also serve a resting God. On the seventh day, God rested, not because he was tired from creating the universe, but to set a pattern for us in our labor. He wanted to teach us that our work is a temporary reality, part of this world order, not for eternity. No matter how important or unimportant your work here and now is, you will not take it with you on that last journey. We do not have to work the garden and keep it in the new Jerusalem.

Even now, God gives us a foretaste of that final rest in the Sabbath, a rest which we celebrate each Sunday. Sunday by Sunday we are called to share in a rest that is re-creational in the fullest sense of that word. You have a

whole day given to you so that you can fill it with new creation blessings. You have an entire day in which you may fellowship with God and ponder his greatness. You have a day in which you can take the time to reorient your life in line with the values of eternity, putting aside the claims of your idols and seeing yourself in light of God's evaluation of who you are. Of course, an hour and a half in church on Sunday morning can never be enough "eternity time" to see you through the week. How can you cram your whole life of knowing and worshiping an infinite God and fellowshipping with his people into such a short span? That is why we seek out other opportunities during the week to study the Scriptures together and fellowship with one another.

Fearing God and living in light of eternity challenges both the sluggard and the workaholic. It shows us how we have all loved and feared the wrong things in our hearts, even though our outward behavior may demonstrate that in a variety of different ways. So where is there hope for people like us, who have neither worked as we ought, nor rested as we ought? I have not labored properly during the six days given to me to glorify God through my work, nor have I rested as I ought on my Sabbaths, and neither have you. Our hope rests in the one who left his seat at his Father's side to come down and labor perfectly in my place. Jesus was not merely beamed down to the cross to suffer in your place. He came first to live and labor as a carpenter perfectly in our place, neither lazily rocking his life away in a comfortable chair, nor overworking and placing his value in his carpentry. His faithful labor is credited to my account as if it were my own. His perfectly punched timecard now bears my name! Yet Jesus also rested perfectly. In the midst of a world-changing mission for God, he found the time regularly to retreat and to rest, spending his rest time not on trivial activities but fellowshipping with the disciples and with his heavenly Father. Jesus has now ascended into heaven and entered his heavenly rest. Because he rests there, so I too will rest, for I am united to him by faith.

If you are not a Christian, Jesus invites you to come and lay down the fears that are making you so burdened. You may be responding to those fears by laziness or overwork, but either way Jesus Christ invites you to come and lay down your heavy burden of laboring to win God's favor, to earn respect and justify your existence by your own efforts; come and enter the rest that he freely offers to all those who trust in him, resting in his work on your behalf.

Christian, Jesus invites you too to lay down the burdens and fears that make you a sluggard or a workaholic as well and to enter his true and perfect rest. We all face the same temptations, sluggard and overachiever alike. Entering his rest will not make you a sluggard; far from it, he invites you to

take up a new yoke, the yoke of serving him (cf. Matt 11:28–30). But equally, entering his rest will not make you a driven "doer," for his yoke is light and his burden easy. His yoke is easy because God has already prepared in advance the good works that he has for you to do (Eph 2:10). He has prepared both work for you to do and rest for you to enjoy in this world. And he will give you the strength by his Spirit to do every good work that he has prepared for you without growing faint or burning out. What is more, one day he will welcome you into your eternal rest, not because you have tried really hard and done well enough to earn it, but because Jesus Christ has worked and rested perfectly in your place. Jesus thus became the true savior of lazy sluggards and driven doers alike, who by faith come to find in him true rest for their souls. Come today and receive that rest.

Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971): A Reluctant Modernist's Approach to Wisdom Literature

CHARLES KELLY TELFER

Abstract

Gerhard von Rad defended the importance of the Old Testament for Christians in the face of Nazi pressure. Reacting to the sterility of a *Religionsgeschichte* approach, he was a part of the Biblical Theology Movement and sought to set forth the theological material of the Old Testament in roughly historical order as a summary of Israelite faith. Attempting to set forth the "saving acts of God," his equivocal use of the category "history" failed to bridge his modernist assumptions that reality is unbreachably divided into the phenomenal and the noumenal. Though a number of his assumptions about wisdom literature have since been discredited, von Rad strove to approach Old Testament wisdom on its own terms, with poetic sensitivity, respect, and deep appreciation.

Introduction

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of his death, it is a timely moment to reflect on the contribution of Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971), one of the twentieth century's most outstanding Old Testament scholars and theologians in the West. His is

a story of courage, integrity, and Christian commitment in the face of demonic political and intellectual challenges as serious and threatening as any ever faced by a theologian …. [He] provided a cogent and winsome example of a theologian and scholar who excelled in teaching and preaching the words of the living God.[1]

Von Rad has much to teach us: "Biblical exegesis understood as concentrated listening to the texts that reveal the mystery of God acting in history was his life-long passion," and he continues to receive scholarly and popular attention today, despite basing much of his work on questionable higher-critical assumptions that have since been seriously undermined.[2]

Gerhard von Rad was raised in a Protestant home in Germany and became a minister in the Lutheran *Landeskirche* in Bavaria in 1925. He completed his dissertation, *The People of God in Deuteronomy*, at Erlangen under Otto Procksch. The book of Deuteronomy, and especially the creedal formulations found in it, became a lifelong focus for von Rad, and he returned to examine it again and again.[3] He went on to study Semitics with Albrecht Alt at Leipzig and was invited to teach there in 1930. Von Rad definitively established his academic reputation with the publication in 1938 of *The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch*. He was known principally for his work as an insightful form-critic, heir of the tradition of Hermann Gunkel.

Von Rad took a professorate at the University of Jena in 1934 just as the university started to become a stronghold of National Socialism. Under Nazi influence, the teaching of Hebrew was made optional for theological students, Old Testament studies were undermined and perverted in a variety of ways, and von Rad fought a lonely battle for the importance of the Old Testament for Christians. That of the forty-five dissertations submitted to the Faculty of Theology during his teaching there, not one was directed by von Rad shows his academic isolation. Confessing church leaders sent candidates to work with von Rad at Jena so that he would have at least two or three students in his classes.[4]

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[1] James A. Brashler, "Editorial," *Interpretation* 62.3 (July 2008): 227, 229.

[2] Ibid., 227. James Brashler's article introduces an entire journal volume dedicated to von Rad. Cf. Bernard M. Levinson and Eckart Otto, eds., *Recht und Ethik im Alten Testament: Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne" anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901–1971) Heidelberg, 18.–21. Oktober 2001* (Münster: LIT, 2004).

[3] James L. Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), 39.

[4] Bernard M. Levinson, "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church," *Interpretation* 62.3 (July 2008): 238–54. Von Rad consciously addressed a good portion of his work to counter the influence of Nazism and was unafraid either in church or academy to address directly the importance of the Hebrew Bible for his country. He even produced a book entitled *Das Alte Testament—Gottes Wort für die Deutschen!* He seems to have been in very strong agreement with the Confessing Church's stance. Deeply concerned about the devolving state of the church in Germany, he lamented

At the tail end of the war, von Rad was conscripted and spent time in an Allied prisoner of war camp before returning to academia. In 1949, he settled into tenure at the University of Heidelberg, where he taught and wrote until 1967. A few of his more notable works are his *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (1951), *Genesis* (1956), *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols., 1957–1960), and *Deuteronomy* (1964). His *Wisdom in Israel* (1970), one of his final major works, will be the focus of this paper.

I. *The Biblical Theology Movement and History*

Von Rad's academic career spanned the years of the Biblical Theology Movement and was connected with it. Early-twentieth-century Old Testament scholarship was noted not only for a mounting skepticism regarding the historicity of the biblical materials but also for an increasing atomism. More and more layers were being discovered in the Pentateuchal materials, and more and more glosses were posited in prophetic texts. Commenting on the period following the 1878 publication of Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, Gerhard Hasel remarks,

> For over four decades OT theology was eclipsed by *Religionsgeschichte* [history of religions]. The full-fledged historicism of the "history-of-religions" approach had led to the final destruction of the unity of the OT, which was reduced to a collection of materials from detached periods and consisted simply of Israelite reflections of as many different pagan religions. This approach had a particularly destructive influence both on OT theology and on the understanding of the OT in every other aspect.[5]

However, in the 1930s there was a growing sense of the sterility of such an approach. The Biblical Theology Movement sought to preserve what many saw as the "assured results" of a historical-critical approach and yet to leave room for an effective speaking of God to his people through the biblical text.[6] Many hoped that one could accept a tradition-critical approach to the

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that "the connection between the communities [i.e., churches] and Old Testament scholarship has been almost completely broken for more than a generation." Von Rad as quoted in Henning G. Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 27. He pressed the relevance of the Hebrew Bible for the German church and insisted on retaining "the reference to Jesus Christ which the Christian claim to the Old Testament must make" (ibid.).

[5] Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 30.

[6] "In the decades following World War I several factors, aside from the changing *Zeitgeist*, brought about a revival of OT (and NT) theology. … (1) a general loss of faith in evolutionary naturalism; (2) a reaction against the conviction that historical truth can be attained by pure scientific 'objectivity' or that such objectivity is indeed attainable; and (3) the trend of a return

Bible and yet remain theologically orthodox.[7] In Old Testament studies, the history-of-religions approach dominated until the 1933 publication of Walther Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament*. The Biblical Theology Movement, which flourished well into the sixties, found inspiration in this work, which identified the centrality of the covenant concept and sought to systematically set forth a cross-section of the theological concepts of the Old Testament.

James Crenshaw, the doyen of von Rad scholars, described von Rad's point of view at one point as "skepticism bathed in evangelical fervor."[8] Von Rad embraced a critical skepticism as regards the historicity of many biblical traditions.[9] He sought to interpret the Old Testament in keeping with the history-of-religions approach, and yet he sought to carve out a significant place for the saving acts of God as confessed by Israel. His *Old Testament Theology*, therefore, was a presentation in roughly historical order of the theological material of the Old Testament as a summary of Israelite faith.

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to the idea of revelation in dialectical (neo-orthodox) theology. The historicism of liberalism was found to be totally inadequate and a new approach needed to be developed." Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 31.

[7]   The connections between the Biblical Theology Movement and neo-orthodoxy are well known. Cf. David G. Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies: A Comparative Evaluation of the Contributions of Eichrodt and von Rad to our Understanding of the Nature of Old Testament Theology*, SBT 2/30 (London: SCM, 1994), 2. Karl Barth's theology was a factor behind this movement and a strong influence on von Rad. We can say that various of von Rad's weaknesses and strengths correspond to similar ones in Barth, but this is outside the purview of this paper. Walter Brueggemann notes, "The legacy of Barth may be said to have dominated the field of biblical theology until about 1970. In the center of that period is the magisterial work of Walther Eichrodt who took covenant as his mode of normativeness, and the even more influential work of Gerhard von Rad, whose definitive essay of 1938 surely echoes the credo-orientation of Barmen. While the normativeness and constancy of Barth's perspective can take different forms, both Eichrodt and von Rad sought to provide a place of normativeness in which to stand in the face of the huge barbarisms of the twentieth century, for it was clear that the domestications of historical criticism provided no standing ground at all." Walter Brueggemann, "The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation," in Walter Brueggemann, *The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation,* ed. K. C. Hanson (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 4.

[8]   James L. Crenshaw, "Von Rad, Gerhard," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 527. He was referring in particular to von Rad's 1940 book on Moses, *Mose*.

[9]   Von Rad viewed "Moses, Abraham, Joseph, David, and Jeremiah" as "for the most part fictional descriptions" which "enabled Israelites to experience the agony and ecstasy of the centuries." Crenshaw, "Von Rad," 529. "Although he accepted history as the essential category of Old Testament revelation, von Rad refused to equate history and faith. His students (Rolf Rendtorff and Wolfhart Pannenberg) may have launched an attempt to establish faith historically, but von Rad never went that route. On the contrary, he moved much closer to a skeptical stance in regard to what scholars could actually know about historical events." Crenshaw, *Von Rad*, 167–68.

Von Rad believed that the historical credo, crystallized in texts such as Deuteronomy 26:5b–9, served as an outline for the entire Hexateuch.[10]

Many scholars have critiqued von Rad for his equivocation over the meaning of the term "history." On the one hand, he refuses to consider the history as presented in the Old Testament as historical in the modern historiographic sense.[11] On the other hand, he insisted, "The Old Testament is a history book."[12] Von Rad constantly refers to the history of redemption and the history of God's saving acts in history. What is the relationship between these two?[13]

Von Rad presents the theology of Israel along the lines of the history of Israel, but this is not the history of Israel as contemporary critical scholarship knows it. It is rather the history of God's saving acts as confessed by Israel itself. He writes a history of Israel's faith assertions.[14] In setting up this bifurcated sense of the history of Israel, von Rad was very much an heir of Kant. A typical modernist, he accepted Kant's division of reality into the phenomenal (the arena for "objective" historiography) and the noumenal (the history of Israel's faith). There is in von Rad's work a tension between these two understandings of reality. He seems to shift back and forth between the two as it suits his purpose at times. He never fully gets off the horns of the fact/meaning, history/theology, and *Geschichte*/*Historie* dilemmas. Setting aside the question of what really happened to Israel, we extract a history of Israelite religious traditions of faith and base our own faith there.[15] For von Rad our faith is based on the mighty acts of God in which Israel believed.[16] For orthodox Christian scholars, of course, it is a matter of great

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[10] Crenshaw, "Von Rad," 528.

[11] "This separation of the 'objective history' of scientific research and salvation history is fundamental to von Rad's *Theology* and it has far reaching repercussions." Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies*, 34.

[12] Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology*, 63.

[13] "Systematic theologians have bristled at his imprecise categories, especially his use of history in both senses, factual and mythic." Crenshaw, "Von Rad," 529.

[14] Crenshaw, *Von Rad*, 170.

[15] Cf. Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 42–43. This view enabled the extraction of a theological maximum from a historical minimum.

[16] Josef Greig deftly examines von Rad on history in Josef A. Greig, "Some Formative Aspects in the Development of Gerhard von Rad's Idea of History," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16.1 (Spring 1978): 313–31. Von Rad has pushed the assumptions of source, form, and tradition criticism as far as they will go, but under the influences of rationalism, pietism, and romanticism he assumes that the phenomenon of the faith cannot be explained in a rational or logical way. "Von Rad who, like his nineteenth century predecessors, thinks that theology should take the form of *Heilsgeschichte*, rejects the idea that the *Heilsgeschichte* should be subjected to historical criticism. Rather, he declares that Israel's faith is unrelated to the critical picture. This negative attitude is surely at least partially dependent upon his historical

concern whether the acts of salvation history took place in space-time history or not.[17] In short, von Rad wrote a phenomenology of Israelite religious beliefs, not an Old Testament theology in the traditional sense. So it comes as no surprise to us that virtually upon its release, von Rad's *Old Testament Theology* came under the sharpest criticism, including for its equivocal use of the category "history." While seeking to be theologically relevant, he sidesteps the question of truth.

Walter Brueggemann refers to the time when such tensions (or paradoxes) led to the discrediting of the broader theological movement:

> It is now common to cite 1970 as the break point of what came to be called pejoratively the "Biblical Theology Movement," that interpretative enterprise propelled by Barth and especially voiced by von Rad and Wright. The "ending" of that monopolistic interpretive effort was occasioned by many factors. It is conventional to cite the work of Brevard Childs and James Barr as the decisive voices of the ending.[18]

II. *Wisdom and History*

Now let us focus more narrowly: How much does von Rad's approach to wisdom literature suffer from this weakness of a bifurcated view of history? On the one hand, von Rad admits that the wisdom literature does not lend itself to historical categorization. In his *Old Testament Theology*, he places it in a separate heading, "Israel before Yahweh," since it does not fit nicely

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skepticism, a trait born largely out of his acceptance of the Alt-Noth school of historical research, and nourished by his own historical criticism utilizing the same methods of research" (ibid., 319).

[17] Walter Kaiser notes, "Thus the history of Israel was to be bifurcated from this time forward, consisting of an actual history and a 'kerygmatic' or confessional history (a word illustrating von Rad's dependence on dialectical theology)." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 34. "He believed the Old Testament laid the foundation for the New Testament by providing a religious language—that of confessional saving deeds." Crenshaw, "Von Rad," 529. "Revelation resides within these creedal expressions, not within the ongoing history of the nation." Perdue, *Reconstructing*, 42.

[18] Brueggemann, "The Role of Old Testament Theology," 5. James Barr critiques von Rad: "If God really acted in history, and if history is to be so very central, then the history involved must not be the history as the documents confess it but the history as it really happened; 'really' here means, 'as the modern historian states it' …. Thus it is a real difficulty in many views centred in a revelational history that, in spite of a primary assertion of God's actions in history, they come to have their actual centre in a historical emphasis, or a historical way of thinking, or a historical form of self-understanding or perception of life, rather than in an actual history. This embarrassment seems to rise from the antinomy …, namely that between history as the milieu of God's confessed action and history subject to human critical examination." James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 67, as quoted in Robert D. Bell, "An Examination of the Presuppositions and Methodology of Gerhard von Rad in His Old Testament Theology" (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1970), 212–13.

into his historical reconstruction. On the other hand, *Wisdom in Israel* is dependent on a specific historical reconstruction that forms the background to his entire understanding of wisdom.

For von Rad, wisdom as we know it developed during the period of the monarchy. This development can be spoken of as a Solomonic enlightenment, a "secularization … [a] discovering of man … a humanization … the beginning of a rational search for knowledge … a strong, intellectual movement [which] must have been preceded by an inner decline, the disintegration of an understanding of reality which we can describe in a felicitous expression of M. Buber's, as 'pan-sacralism.'"[19] Before the development of wisdom there was "a very old-fashioned faith which believed that every event was encompassed by rites and sacral ordinances, and for this reason, we can call it a pan-sacral faith."[20] Leo Perdue notes:

> Von Rad traced the development of wisdom through two stages. He characterized the first stage largely as "wisdom deriving from experience." This early wisdom represented "practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based upon experience." The goal of the wise person was to master life by the adherence to maxims that were an "art for living," or a "technique for life." …. Von Rad argues that the second stage is theological wisdom, which develops during the post exilic period. Now wisdom is God's call to people, the mediator of revelation, the teacher of nations, and a divine principle permeating the world since creation. Wisdom was a divine gift to humans and revealed to them the will and nature of God.[21]

Von Rad argued that

> wisdom's developing theological capacity, moving from human experience to cosmology and from anthropology to theology, paralleled the development of creation theology in Israel, which, in his judgment, did not gain full acceptance and mature formulation until the time of the exile in the sixth century B.C.E.[22]

Von Rad infers "that the concept that all wisdom comes from God is to be attributed to specific, theological considerations which came to the fore only at a fairly late stage."[23] Crenshaw summarizes: "In short, von Rad interprets

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[19] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 58.

[20] Ibid., 59.

[21] Perdue, *Reconstructing*, 24. Von Rad notes, "If we now turn to the older sentence wisdom as it is collected especially in Prov. 10–29, then there appears an enormous gulf between this and what we have just said, for there is absolutely no trace here of such a serious, theological motivation." Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 57. Such a view, as we will see below, is highly reductionistic.

[22] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 42.

[23] Ibid., 55.

wisdom literature against the evolutionary yardstick of pansacrality, modified secularism and religious devotion."[24]

III. *Weaknesses in von Rad's Approach to Wisdom Literature*

All three of these historical typifications have been questioned: The concept of pansacralism has been questioned, the hypothesis of a Solomonic enlightenment has been rejected by Old Testament scholarship, and the idea that the theological orientation of wisdom came mostly later has been seriously questioned. Crenshaw asserts, "A thorough examination of the evidence … has convinced me that no such enlightenment existed. Instead sacral and secular strains of thought coexisted throughout Israel's history."[25] On these points, von Rad has been hampered by his *Religionsgeschichte* assumptions.

Other serious weaknesses in von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel* include an overdependence on nonwisdom literature and postbiblical wisdom literature. The section on "Polemics against Idols" makes extensive use of Deuteronomy and Isaiah, as well as the postbiblical "Letter of Jeremiah," the additions to Daniel, and the Wisdom of Solomon. But it makes hardly any use of canonical wisdom literature itself.[26] This is telling because the protest against idols is hardly typical of biblical wisdom literature.

Another of von Rad's assertions that has been widely questioned is that apocalyptic is an outgrowth of wisdom literature and is not connected organically with prophetic literature.[27] His discussion here is mainly based upon the postbiblical Jewish wisdom tradition and on a dichotomy between an apocalyptic belief in "determinism" and the prophetic belief in the "freedom and sovereignty of Yahweh." At least within the biblical materials, this dichotomy seems forced and artificial.

Other areas where von Rad can be critiqued in his approach to wisdom are his assumption of a court-oriented, school-based origin of many proverbs, an overemphasis on the cult and wisdom, and an underemphasis on ethics and wisdom.[28] Also, his tripartite approach to Hebrew poetry does not

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[24] James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in Israel (Gerhard von Rad): A Review," in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 306.

[25] Ibid.

[26] One additional concern with his approach is that he makes almost no distinction between canonical and postcanonical wisdom literature. Von Rad is quite comfortable including Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon (and even the late Letter to Aristeas) in his treatment.

[27] Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies*, 42. "In fact, there seems little reason for following von Rad's claim that apocalyptic developed solely out of wisdom material and has no vital connections with prophecy." Ibid.

[28] Cf. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 15–23. "His basic assumption that the texts were composed

advance much beyond that of Robert Lowth's late-eighteenth-century analysis.[29] But perhaps to complain at this point is to demand of him the advances in poetics that have only happened during the last forty years.[30] In recent decades, currents in Old Testament scholarship have been moving away from von Rad in many ways.

> The shift away from form and tradition history, particularly outside Germany, has been so substantial that some interpreters envision a shift in paradigm from historical criticism to literary analysis, from diachronic to synchronic studies. Similarly, sociological theory, often using ethno-anthropological models, has emerged as another mode of reading ancient texts. This change has also witnessed the emergence of secular approaches, championed by faculty in religious studies, and increasing aversion to anything theological.[31]

The day of Gerhard von Rad's dominance, including his work in the field of wisdom literature, has passed.[32]

IV. *Strengths in von Rad's Approach to Wisdom Literature*

Despite these weaknesses, evangelical interpreters can find much of value in von Rad's approach to wisdom literature. The most outstanding strength that von Rad brings to his work of interpreting wisdom literature, in my view, is his profound respect for the ancient Israelite perspective and a correspondingly profound suspicion of imposing modern categories.

Von Rad is deeply interested in understanding and communicating to his readers a very different view of the world from what twentieth-century Europeans were accustomed to. "We must not transfer uncritically our accustomed ways of thinking to Israel. We must, rather, face the exacting demand of thinking ourselves into ideas, into a 'view of life,' which are unfamiliar to us."[33] He wants us to respect the ancient worldview and not subject its views to a narrow imposing of our own categories.

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in a school associated with the royal court fails to take into account the overwhelming evidence for the popular origin of Proverbs in small villages. … His preoccupation with the cult resulted in an overlooking of ethics." Crenshaw, "Von Rad," 530.

[29] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 24–34.

[30] Cf. Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, JSOTSup 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

[31] Crenshaw, "Von Rad," 530.

[32] See also Rudolf Smend, "Gerhard von Rad," in Rudolf Smend, *From Astruc to Zimmerli: Old Testament Scholarship in Three Centuries*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

[33] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 71.

The modern exegete is always tempted to read into the old texts the tensions with which he is all too familiar between faith and thought, between reason and revelation. Accordingly, there has been a tendency to infer too much from the preponderance of worldly sentences over religious ones. The conclusion has, for example, been drawn that this old proverbial wisdom was still scarcely touched by Yahwism. … Against this, it can be categorically stated that for Israel there was only one world of experience, and that this was perceived by means of a perceptive apparatus in which rational perceptions and religious perceptions were not differentiated. … The reality surrounding Israel was much more comprehensive than we would imagine, either in political or socio-ethical or any other kind of terms. … Just as real for them was the burden of guilt, the involvement in evil and in disobedience and the consequences of this; and as real as anything could be was Yahweh's word which thrust deep into Israel's life as both a destructive and a constructive force. All this lay on one and the same level of man's potential experience. One can, therefore, only warn against trying to see the specific factor in wisdom simply as the manifestation of a rationality which was independent of faith.[34]

Von Rad resolutely insisted that we not impose on wisdom literature our modern categories.[35] You can begin to feel his discontent with the modernistic *Weltanschauung* as he states,

It is demanded of us, however, that we abandon the rigidity of the modern, popular scientific understanding of reality and try to enter into that ancient biblical idea of reality which was aware that the world in which man lived was so much more favourably disposed towards him.[36]

Von Rad resisted, for example, any facile evolutionary imposition that the earlier wisdom traditions were thoroughly secular in orientation and that it was only later in wisdom literature when a Yahwistic point of view came to the fore.[37] He is critical of the hubris of a modernistic point of view:

Anyone who is of the opinion, then, that man's desire for knowledge can be validly expressed in the last resort only in the language of the so-called exact sciences, can, in view of their poetic form, rate Israel's perceptions, with which we are here concerned, only as the outcome of a "pre-scientific," "pre-critical" and still very naïve

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[34] Ibid., 61–62.

[35] It is ironic that he effectively did just this in his treatment of the historical materials of the Bible. One can only speculate whether he would have included this treatment in the "Retractions" he considered publishing at the end of his life. Cf. Manfred Oeming, "Gerhard von Rad as a Theologian of the Church," *Interpretation* 62.3 (July 2008): 236.

[36] Ibid., 78.

[37] "Gerhard von Rad also rightly chastised those like William McKane who would apply an evolutionary pattern to wisdom by suggesting that earlier wisdom was at first fundamentally secular and then it was 'baptized' and theologized into the Yahwistic religion." Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 174.

endeavour. There can be no question, however, that even in this poetic form a very discriminating power of intellectual distinction is at work.[38]

Von Rad "sought to expose the poverty of modern thought" and the weakness of some of its categories.[39]

V. *Epistemological Openness*

In contrast, von Rad deeply explored and was open to the epistemological perspective of the biblical authors. He had a great appreciation for it, even though it contradicted the modernistic, critical, secular German perspective of his background.[40] The following quote demonstrates not only a high regard for Israelite intellectual achievement but suggests a longing.

> There is no knowledge which does not, before long, throw the one who seeks the knowledge back upon the question of his self-knowledge and his self-understanding. Even Israel did not give herself uncritically to her drive for knowledge, but went on to ask the question about the possibility of and the authority for knowledge. She makes intellect itself the object of her knowledge. The thesis that all human knowledge comes back to the question about commitment to God is a statement of penetrating perspicacity. In the most concise phraseology it encompasses a wide range of intellectual content and can itself be understood only as the result of a long process of thought. It contains in a nutshell the whole Israelite theory of knowledge. … One becomes competent and expert as far as the orders in life are concerned only if one begins from knowledge about God. To this extent, Israel attributes to the fear of God, to belief in God, a highly important function in respect of human knowledge. She was, in all seriousness, of the opinion that effective knowledge about God is the only thing that puts a man into a right relationship with the objects of his perception, that it enables him to ask questions more pertinently, to take stock of relationships more effectively and generally to have a better awareness of circumstances. … Faith does not—as it is popularly believed today—hinder knowledge; on the contrary, it is what liberates knowledge, enables it really to come to the point and indicates to it its proper place in the sphere of varied, human activity. In Israel, the intellect never freed itself from or became independent of the foundation of its whole existence, that is its commitment to Yahweh.[41]

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[38] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 25.

[39] Pannenberg, as quoted in Crenshaw, *Von Rad*, 38.

[40] "Only the man who has allowed his senses to be dulled in his dealing with the materials or who does not know the real purpose of this poetic wisdom can be deceived as to the magnitude of the intellectual achievement of our wisdom teachers." Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 50. In this same paragraph, von Rad refers to the character of knowledge as a game and references Hans-Georg Gadamer. The interactions between von Rad and his contemporary Gadamer would be a fascinating study but beyond my present scope.

[41] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 67–68.

Not only is von Rad a deft interpreter of Israelite epistemology, but certain passages of his work suggest that he wishes he could adopt this integrated outlook himself. He can say wistfully, "Israel's understanding of the world was more comprehensive … [and] included many more realities than that of modern man."[42] Von Rad is impatient with modernist thinkers who are dismissive of precritical perspectives and their supposed naïveté and narrowness. Perhaps we can see von Rad as moving toward a postmodern point of view in such statements.

Many passages seem to express von Rad's neo-orthodox Christian point of view:

> The fear of God not only enabled a man to acquire knowledge, but also had a predominantly critical function in that it kept awake in the person acquiring the knowledge the awareness that his intellect was directed toward a world in which mystery predominated. This fear of God has trained him to openness, to readiness for an encounter even with the inscrutable and the imponderable.[43]

Von Rad admires the integration of thought and experience under God that the ancient sages enjoyed: "Did not Israel, in all her attempts to perceive the course of human experience, always come back to Yahweh who comprehended all things in his power?"[44] He said of passages such as Proverbs 16:7–12, where "experiences of the world" alternate with "experiences of Yahweh," "It would be madness to presuppose some kind of separation as if in the one case the man of objective perception were speaking and in the other the believer in Yahweh."[45] He found a beautifully circular and integrated epistemology in Israel:

> The statement that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom could even be turned round to the effect that knowledge and experience lead to the fear of God. My son, if you accept my words and keep by you what I command you … then you will understand the fear of Yahweh and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:1, 5). For Israel, there was no insight which did not imply trust, faith, but there was also no faith which did not rest on insights.[46]

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[42] Ibid., 70.

[43] Ibid., 109.

[44] Ibid., 72. "We hold fast to the fact that in the case of the wise men's search for knowledge, even when they expressed their results in a completely secular form, there was never any question of what we call absolute knowledge functioning independently of their faith in Yahweh. This is inconceivable for the very reason that the teachers were completely unaware of any reality not controlled by Yahweh." Ibid., 64. I imply no connection, but would not be surprised to read such a statement in a thinker like Abraham Kuyper.

[45] Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 174.

[46] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 194.

Von Rad waxes lyrical at times in describing the integration of faith and life that the Hebrew sages enjoyed. Combined with his sensitivity to how his tradition-historical presuppositions work clumsily with this literature, I believe he is struggling in this book on the wisdom of Israel to break free from some of the limitations and tensions he lived with for most of his intellectual career.[47] I think that von Rad is longing for the day when fact and meaning will not be dichotomized. He is enamored of the integrated worldview of the Israelites and seems to want to adopt it. Ah, for the day when there would be "no hard divorce between the secular and sacred, faith and knowledge, learning and believing, faith and culture"![48] He wants to transcend the limitations of his own inherited worldview.

VI. *Poetic Sensibilities*

Von Rad demonstrated remarkable poetic sensibilities both as an interpreter of the biblical writings and as a writer himself. His interpretative work helped paved the way for literary approaches that have become so dominant in Old Testament studies since his death.

> Von Rad taught us to read the Old Testament aesthetically. Entering a discipline that has lacked genuine literary analysis, for the most part, he did much in paving the way for an appreciation of the Old Testament as literature.[49]

He had a "propensity for poetics. His appreciation for aesthetics gave him a sense of the rich ambiguity of the biblical text. That background inherent to the sacred text yielded to his patient probe, opening up insights for those willing to hear."[50]

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[47] Von Rad wants to go beyond the interpretative limitations of his previous work. He is more in touch with the literary context of passages than form criticism tended to be, more willing to sit at the feet of the text and allow it to lead us toward the interpretative categories we should use to unfold its riches. He can be impatient with the form-critical approach: "Till now, too much prominence has been given in research to the various forms of the sentences. An examination of the didactic poems which spread over a wider extent is still lacking." Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 38. He even seeks to overcome the atomism that tended to dog form-critical efforts. "Here … we come … to the most difficult problem, namely the question of the general religious and ideological sphere, of the context from which any given sentence comes and on the basis of which it is to be understood." Ibid., 32.

[48] This is Kaiser's expression in reflecting on wisdom literature. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 174.

[49] Crenshaw, *Von Rad*, 169.

[50] Crenshaw, "Von Rad," 531.

His own engaging and persuasive ability to express himself contributed much to make him a popular preacher in Germany and a popular author throughout the world.

> His sensitive reading of the Old Testament enabled many other to span the vast chasm separating them from the ancient text. The sheer beauty of his prose captivated minds and the passion with which he explored such topics as knowledge and its limits, thrust and attack, and divine abandonment came through with enormous force.[51]

For example, in speaking of the "Doctrine of the Self-Revelation of Creation," he says,

> If there was, somewhere in Israel, a surrender, verging on the mystical, of man to the glory of existence, then it is to be found in these texts which can speak of such a sublime bond of love between man and the divine mystery of creation. Here man throws himself with delight on a meaning which rushes towards him; he uncovers a mystery which was already on its way to him in order to give itself to him.[52]

He can say, "[The composing of proverbs] involved also the production of a pattern of humane behaviour. In the fixing of each gnomic saying there also occurred a humanizing of man."[53] Alternatively, in a discussion on literary forms and with reference to 2 Kings 14: 9, he exclaims, "What a period, when kings, in diplomatic communications, wielded the intellectual weapon of the fable!"[54]

Summary

Von Rad can be considered both a product of and a revolutionary against what Perdue calls

> once traditional paradigms of biblical studies that produced theologies that largely reflected the philosophies and cultural products spawned by the Enlightenment, idealism, empiricism, and then positivism and the resulting historical method, then and now dominant, [which] have come under serious assault.[55]

A careful student of the biblical text, von Rad appreciated the powerful literary forms encountered in Scripture and the abiding relevance of the

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[51] Ibid., 530.

[52] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 169.

[53] Ibid., 43. How poignant a statement when we consider it against the background of a twentieth-century Germany that had largely turned its back on such humanizing Hebrew influences.

[54] Ibid., 43.

[55] Perdue, *Reconstructing*, 3.

messages encapsulated there for the Christian church today.[56] "Refusing to choose between the two ways of interpreting reality, the ancient and the modern, von Rad sought to bring about a dialogue between modern readers and the biblical text, which cast a question mark over our own understanding at any point in time."[57] As he attempted to engage faithfully with wisdom literature, von Rad struggled manfully against the limitations of the modernistic assumptions of his own time.

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[56] He was a churchman concerned to let the Bible speak powerfully today. "Certainly Gerhard von Rad provided a cogent and winsome example of a theologian and scholar who excelled in teaching and preaching the words of the living God." Brashler, "Editorial," 229.

[57] Crenshaw, *Von Rad*, 38.

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Interview with Bruce K. Waltke

PETER A. LILLBACK

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PETER LILLBACK: *Let me start with a word of prayer.*

Lord, thank you for the joy of meeting with Dr. Waltke, for the opportunity to have this conversation that we hope will be useful for your people globally as they think about Old Testament studies. Thank you for his faithful labors over many years and his impact on so many. We ask now that you will continue to bless him and his wife and the ministry that continues in his service. Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of now meeting with him. We give it all to you, and we pray we would glorify and edify your people as we seek to lift your name above all things. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

BRUCE WALTKE: Amen!

PL: *Please share with us about your academic career and personal testimony of coming to faith in Christ.*

BW: I will begin with my coming to faith as a child. I was fortunate to have godly parents who were dedicated to the church. My father, coming from Germany, originally Lutheran, had a strong understanding of justification. My mother, from a Wesleyan Methodist background, had a strong understanding of sanctification. I think my father thought my mother did not fully understand justification, and my mother thought my father did not fully understand sanctification; but in any case, I had the blessing of both sides.

PL: *You were destined for John Calvin's* duplex gratia.

BW: Yes. At any rate, I grew up in in a mission church; most of the pastors were apprentices who did not go to college, but maybe to Bible school while ministering—pious, godly people. In the tradition of altar calls, the climax of the service was making a decision, in contrast to my current tradition, where I am now an Anglican priest, in which the climax of the service is receiving the gift. One Sunday evening, when I was ten, I came under deep conviction of sin. I did not understand the gospel clearly but went forward, and all I knew was the sinner's prayer: "God be merciful to me a sinner." In that, there was genuine repentance, and whatever faith in God I knew, it was all there, and a real confession of the God of Scripture; and, to my mind, that certainly would have included Jesus Christ. Although all the attention that evening focused on the husband of a Christian woman, who also went forward—nobody paid much attention to me over in the corner—I knew something serious had happened between the Lord and me. My life was changed. As I look back, these were childish footsteps toward the Lord, but it was a decisive turning point for me.

After that, and even before, I had an inclination toward ministry, but I think probably it was more a childhood thing like being a firefighter; it was always in my mind. When I was twelve, I was baptized in the Hudson River.

PL: *Tell us about later …*

BW: After Houghton College, I went to seminary at Dallas. I began to understand better that my gifts were more in terms of teaching than pastoring. When I graduated, a significant church I had served as a summer intern in southwest Louisiana called me; however, Dr. John Walvoord encouraged me to stay on to be an educator. It was a turning point for me because it was a choice between taking this church or going on studying. That was in my heart; I decided to stay at Dallas and do my Masters in Hebrew and Old Testament and then my doctorate in Greek and New Testament under S. Lewis Johnson.

I remember distinctly that in the year I graduated from the doctoral program in 1958, after I received the degree, my mother and father and my wife Elaine were praying about my future. I was pastoring a Lutheran church but knew that it was not my future. When we finished praying, the phone rang. Dr. Walvoord was inviting me to join the faculty because Dwight Wayne Young had left precipitously to take a position at Brandeis University, and they were without a Hebrew instructor. It was to be a one-year term, a stopgap measure until they could get a full professor. God blessed it, and Walvoord decided to tailor me for Old Testament. I could study anywhere I

wanted, and I opted to go to Harvard, where they were very good and kind to me, also truly liberal—not progressive but open—and open to me. I did my work in ancient Near Eastern languages and literature.

Then I came back and taught at Dallas. Merrill Unger was the head of the department and told me to be patient, as he was going to retire in 1975 and I would become the head. I do not like administration—so I admire you, Peter, and I do not think I am very gifted at it—so I said, "I do not want you to retire. I just want to teach." It turned out he had a stroke, and the doctor advised him to retire; upon that, they laid hands on me as the head of the department.

When I became the head of the department, we had thirty students in Old Testament. I asked them to tell me what was wrong with it, and they were honest with me. "We are getting splendid biblical studies, but not Old Testament theology." Well, I had never had Old Testament theology, since at Dallas they did not teach biblical theology, at least nothing thought through methodically. I appealed to the administration to teach it, but they turned down my request. They argued it belongs to the department of theology. I knew, however, that it was not taught, so I wondered how to do this. I had just read a book by Robert Laurin on contemporary Old Testament theologians,[1] and so I came back, "Would it be possible to teach a course on Old Testament theologians?" That passed muster. Well, you can imagine how teaching all these different theologies formed my own. It is out of biblical theology that I came to realize that dispensational premillennialism did not accommodate the text or appropriately put the Testaments together. That is what led to my leaving Dallas and how I ended up an Old Testament professor.

PL: *At what institutions, then, have you taught Old Testament?*
BW: I taught at Dallas from 1962 until 1976. Then I went to Regent College from 1976 to 1985: from 1,200 students to 100, from overseeing doctoral work to teaching first-year Hebrew. Though nobody could make sense of it, I knew that this was the right context for me at that moment. Usually, one gets more and more specialized; at Regent, however, with its interdisciplinary emphasis, you know everything about nothing or nothing about everything. Anyhow, I realized I was losing my skills.

When Ray Dillard of Westminster had a heart attack in 1984, they asked me to teach a winter course in his place, and then asked me to consider

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[1]   Robert B. Laurin, ed., *Contemporary Old Testament Theologians* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1970).

teaching there. As I did not come out of a Reformed tradition, know the language, or grow up with the Westminster Confession, I was not sure whether I would fit. So, they asked me questions; I gave them honest answers, and they said that I was very Reformed. I came to these convictions through biblical studies and biblical theology; I was articulating the Westminster Confession in nontraditional ways. I think the students appreciated a fresh way of saying things. So, that is how I got to Westminster, and I stayed there until 1990.

However, I missed the context of Regent, and I candidly felt there was a divorce at Westminster between the faculty's understanding of inspiration and the board's understanding of inspiration. I felt there was a lack of integrity and that bothered me. Prompted by the board, we discussed George Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*.[2] It documents the change at Fuller Seminary toward New Evangelicalism. I remember that Gleason Archer said that it was a very accurate picture of the debate at Fuller between Charles Fuller's son, Daniel Fuller, and Wilbur Smith, who eventually left for Trinity Evangelical Seminary. I found myself resonating more with David Hubbard, Fuller's president, than anybody else. So I asked the board, "Well, what do you think about David Hubbard's position?" And they laughed it out of court. Then I realized that we were not thinking on the same wavelength. That is partly why I went back to Regent. At Regent you had to retire at seventy, but I did not feel at all ready to retire. So, when Luder Whitlock invited me to teach at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and gave me carte blanche with the option to continue until I felt I could no longer teach, I announced my resignation at Regent. They were shocked because they did not expect me to retire, but no one had told me that! So, Regent immediately appointed me professor emeritus, and I served both schools for a while. Then came the BioLogos controversy and the unfortunate way I first handled it. However, when I saw the YouTube videos, I knew it was wrong and would hurt the school and handed in my resignation. Ric Cannada, then in charge, did not want to accept it, but a week later, they all saw its wisdom.

PL: *You made the evening news.*
BW: Yes. Not the publicity I wanted. They wanted me to appear on ABC with Diane Sawyer, but I refused, as I knew it was not going to help the church.

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2   George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

PL: *Whitlock then invited you down to Knox Theological Seminary?*

BW: That is the irony of it. I think the board was at first reluctant until they heard me teach. Then I could not continue going down to Florida with Elaine, and that is when I stopped professional teaching around 2014.

PL: *What do you believe to be the most significant biblical theologies of the Old Testament from the Reformation to the present?*

BW: Going back to when I proposed a course on Old Testament theology, I used the first book mentioned in Laurin's volume by Walther Eichrodt. I think he is the first self-consciously to write a biblical theology in the 1930s.[3] Biblical theology is thought to begin with Johann Philipp Gabler's inaugural address, "The Distinction Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," in 1787, but it was a call back to a historical interpretation. John Owen proposes a biblical theology, but it was a matter of using Scripture solely over against natural theology and philosophy and other disciplines that would come into systematics.[4]

A proper definition of biblical theology is crucial, with two distinctives.[5] First of all, there is the way you organize theological reflections. Systematic theology organizes by logical categories to present the Christian faith to the church. It is essential that biblical theology and systematics work together and that one feeds the other. Biblical theology can inform the content of systematic; systematics provides guidelines and controls for biblical theology. It follows that both are necessary but organized differently. In biblical theology, each book has its own theology, and you can talk about Matthean theology, Lukan theology, Petrine theology, Johannine theology, and also the theology of Isaiah. Geerhardus Vos presents the Mosaic material, then Prophetic material, and finally the New Testament. In this way, he is thinking as a biblical theologian. So, for me, biblical theology's task is to expound the theology of Genesis, Exodus, and so forth. Then, one needs to categorize

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[3] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1967). In subsequent years, we read the following volumes: Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 1965); Theodorus C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971); and Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper, 1958). These were almost all neo-Orthodox theologians, but they were the ones that were influencing the field.

[4] John Owen, *Biblical Theology, or, The Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth, In Six Books* (1661), trans. Stephen P. Westcott (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994).

[5] A helpful book that clarifies the issue is Gerhard Hasel's *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 1991), especially the basis, task, and method of biblical theology.

the materials. Eichrodt was the first to do that, as he organized Old Testament theology around the concept of covenant, whereas much biblical theology before that was organized around God, man, and soteriology, systematic categories which to me are not part of biblical theology.

The second thing is that biblical theology is more diachronic than synchronic. In my biblical theology work, I identify the blocks of writings and find each dominant theme. The text is like a pearl or an opal with all kind of colors, but there is a dominant theme or color in a given block of writing. Diachronically, you trace the development of that theme or that doctrine, and once you understand that, you see how it fits within the canon and relates to the New Testament. Thus, you can authentically preach the New Testament from the Old, because you are developing the same theme. These two notions are still influential in the field even after Brevard Childs came along with his view of biblical theology[6] and of the Bible as Scripture,[7] and contributed to reading the Bible holistically.

PL: *Who do you think set the stage for conservative, orthodox, Reformed Old Testament biblical theology?*

BW: As I was getting into the Reformed tradition—in my dispensational background there was no thought of this kind—the one who influenced me was Vos. I thought that his unveiling of the mind of God and his insights into the text were great. He is therefore a foundation in my thinking.

Gerhard Hasel's way of thinking about the whole discipline helped shape my Old Testament theology.[8] However, there is no one theology that influenced my work, and I did not consciously imitate anybody. Reformed theology certainly influenced it, but my whole methodological stance on higher criticism makes all the difference in the world. Whether you begin with the JEDP hypothesis or not is going to seriously influence the way you are going to do things diachronically. For instance, if the Priestly document is written last, you turn the whole Bible on its head. Thus, a high view of inspiration is crucial to me for doing biblical theology.

Another element of my method is how to articulate poetics and narrative analysis with theology so you can speak dogmatically from story. Because the storyteller does not tell you his theology abstractly, you have to extrapolate it. However, to do that, you need to have a sound method. The contribution of

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[6]   Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

[7]   Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

[8]   See Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

my theology is that I have clearly thought through my basis, task, and method in the first six chapters and then carry it out in the rest of the book. James I. Packer appreciated that because my method of taking a block of writing, finding its primary theme, and developing it guards against arbitrary selection of themes. He thinks it is the only theology to attempt this.

PL: *You once wrote an article distinguishing an exegesis of power from an exegesis of wonder.*[9] *Would you describe what you had in mind, and do you continue to believe that this is a critical issue to be addressed by biblical interpreters in the Reformed tradition?*

BW: Very much so. The problem is that as an exegete you have to control the text and decide what it means, what the words and the figures of speech mean. In a certain sense, the exegete and theologian have to stand above the text in determining what it is and what it means. That is what I mean by power; you are mastering the text. This form of power is very dangerous to me.

So, for example, I will be preaching, a week from Sunday, on Isaiah 6 and will read, "And the train of his robe filled the temple" (v. 1). Almost all the translations say that too, but the word does not mean "train." When I think of a train, I think of Queen Elizabeth's wedding and her eighteen-foot train of purple velvet silk trimmed in five inches of vermin and six ladies of honor carrying it. Well, they did not have trains in the ancient Near East; no art shows a king or a queen with a train. Further, the Hebrew word means "hem." It can be used for a skirt or the hem of Aaron's garment. So a hem that fills the entire temple. That is a very different picture. If the hem fills the entire temple, how big is your God?

Then you get to the seraphs. You discover that outside of Isaiah 6 the word only occurs four times, in Numbers 21:6 and 8, and in Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6. In these passages, it clearly refers to a kind of a snake, and the English Standard Version translates it, as most do, by fiery serpent. But what do we mean by a fiery serpent? Maybe it is a red spitting cobra, or maybe the point is it is poisonous. As I studied, I read Jerome and discovered that he uses *basilisk* in the Isaiah passage, which is the king of serpents. That is the idea. Most venomous is the king of serpents. Then you get the point that the kings of serpents, the deadliest, are covering their faces before the glory of God. They are aware of their creatureliness, cover their feet, and do

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9   Bruce K. Waltke, "Exegesis and the Spiritual Life: Theology as Spiritual Formation," *Crux* 30.3 (September 1994): 28–35; cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Dance Between God and Humanity: Reading the Bible Today as the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 9–11.

his bidding—a whole new way of looking at this passage. Now this is where the wonder comes in, because you can be satisfied with that: "I see it!" And that is power, and that is wrong. You have to take the next step of wonder. Only God and the Spirit can make you stand in awe and wonder at the whole thing.

PL: *What would you describe as your most significant contributions and insights into Old Testament theology, as reflected by your academic lectures and publications?*
BW: My contribution is heavily exegetical. I have tried to ground everything in Scripture. That must dominate my writing, in addition to in-depth research for the exegesis. I get excited about words, grammar, and going into the text. When I began thinking about teaching, I was thinking about teaching systematic theology, because that was what I knew; but then I realized, in line with the Reformed tradition, that what I knew mostly about God was by words, language. That is what set me off into majoring in Greek and Hebrew. That is why I became an exegetical theologian. God enables my heart to do this with wonder and worship and awe.

PL: *An exegetical theologian of wonder—that is an excellent summary! What trends do you see emerging in Old Testament scholarship that are promising or may cause concern?*
BW: As I consider my work on the New International Version and the new contributors, I realized that I am the only one left from the original committee responsible for the New International Version. Honestly, there are outstanding and godly scholars coming up. I am thankful to think of Richard Hess at Denver Seminary, Mark Boda at McMaster Divinity College, and Daniel Block at Wheaton College. Block was not on our committee, but the other two were. I am impressed and thankful for the integrity of their work.

At my age what you appreciate is the baton being handed on to even more competent hands. For example, in the field of Hebrew poetics, one can mention Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*,[10] works by Adele Berlin, and Robert Alter,[11] and Raymond Van Leeuwen at Eastern University.[12] And Richard Hess's writings on religions of Israel and

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[10] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, 1987).

[11] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985) and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985).

[12] See, e.g., Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 256–67.

archeology,[13] which are scholarly and clear. He argues, for instance, in a convincing way that a text from Emar dating from around 1300 BC has many similarities to the priestly document. It is subtle support for the Mosaic date of the "P" document.

There is also a consciousness among many younger scholars of the need for spirituality in exegesis. When you are in the academia, you have to accept systematic atheism, naturalism, skepticism, and analogy; you cannot be bold about miracles and the resurrection. The danger is to try to satisfy the academic community and compromise to have its acceptance. I am very disturbed by what I read about Andy Stanley dropping the Old Testament from his preaching; but that is partly due to a caricature of dispensational-ism and goes back ultimately to Marcionism. People do not want an angry God—neither did Darwin—but the God of the Bible is a holy God and a God of justice, and it is because of his mercy for his own that he shows justice toward the offender. However, justice is always tempered with mercy. In my studies on Proverbs, I read that one Proverb says, "Lady wisdom re-joices when righteousness triumphs" (cf. Prov 11:10; 28:12),[14] while another says, "Do not gloat when the enemy falls" (Prov 24:17). You have to hold the two together. A Christian knows what that means and that to fear God includes loving God.

PL: *For the average pastor preaching on the Old Testament, what would be a few essential studies that you would highly recommend for the understanding of Old Testament theology?*

BW: I think William Dumbrell's book *Covenant and Creation*,[15] as it deals with two major themes is good. Stephen Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty* is another good book.[16] Although Peter John Gentry pushes the Baptist issue too much in *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*,[17] it is still an excellent introduction to biblical covenants. One could add T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land*.[18] I

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[13] Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

[14] See also Proverbs 1:26 and Waltke's comments; Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 2005), 1:207.

[15] William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (1984; repr., Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

[16] Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

[17] Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crosssway, 2018).

[18] T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

thought that Elmer Martens's *God's Design*[19] was beneficial for my understanding of land, as was William Davies's *The Gospel and the Land*.[20]

PL: *In your study of Proverbs, what general, practical, pastoral works have offered you insight into the broad topic of biblical theology?*

BW: I think questions of introduction are critical for developing Old Testament theology. I make a stout defense of Solomonic authorship depending on Kenneth Kitchen's work.[21] I once did a series at Dallas on preaching Proverbs but was not happy with it. There are blocks of Proverbs, and I focus on that now. I have studied every word in Proverbs along with every use in the Old Testament. So, when I say a word means something, it is based on a concordance, not on a lexicon. One can have full confidence in that work because I have done it thoroughly. At the level of poetics, the way it is organized, I think it is just a solid piece of work and probably my best piece of scholarship overall.[22]

PL: *You developed a definition of what you thought a righteous man and an unrighteous man is according to Proverbs.*

BW: When I tried to take particulars and abstract from them, I came away with a very simple idea: righteousness is that you disadvantage yourself in order to advantage the other person.[23] In contrast, wickedness is when you disadvantage the other person to advantage yourself. This definition is not that much different from "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39), but it is a fresh way of saying it. It has also revolutionized my behavior. It has changed my driving, my relationship with people, my priorities. Further, in my life, I have to allow God to define what I mean by what is advantageous to the other person, because they may not think it is advantageous for me to say you need a Savior. I need an authority to define what I mean by advantageous, the values or teachings of Scripture, and within that frame of reference, by God's grace, it has helped me to live. We lived in a condominium in Vancouver in a complex with 140 owners, and I was chosen to be the chair of the council overseeing the condominium association. When we

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[19] Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

[20] William. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

[21] Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: The Factual History of a Literary Form," *Tyndale Bulletin* 28 (1977): 69–114.

[22] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*.

[23] Cf. ibid., 1:97–99.

moved, the council had a dinner in my honor, and it came out that they chose me because of my wisdom in putting other people first.

PL: *How do you assess the abiding significance of Old Testament theologians in the broader Westminster tradition such as Geerhardus Vos, Meredith Kline, Edward J. Young, and perhaps others?*

BW: Vos's contribution is certainly going to abide. Kline is artistic and intuitive, and he sees connections many people do not see, and his work is going to endure. I do not know about Young. He was a stalwart in his day, but I do not know what his legacy is going to be. I have appreciated his material, but what remains, I am not sure. Tremper Longman is coming out with a new book on contemporary issues confronting the church,[24] in which he takes up the question of genocide, homosexuality, and other controversial issues related to the Old Testament. I was delighted with this work, as it is based on the authority of Scripture without compromise and expounds its plain sense in Calvin's vein. He confronts the issues honestly without doing a lot of gymnastics trying to get around them. Although I disagree with some of his work on wisdom literature, I think this book is going be useful to the church.

PL: *As you consider the climax of what many of us believe is a remarkable academic career and church-based ministry, what do you hope will be your lasting legacy and what advice would you leave for budding Old Testament scholars?*

BW: I hope that I will leave behind confidence in the Bible as being the Word of God without compromising it. I hope that another abiding contribution will be that our faith is defensible, not based on reason but on the Spirit. I hope and pray that the Spirit of God will continue and may be pleased to use my writings to reinforce trust in Scripture as the Word of God. I also hope to leave a legacy of integrity and honesty in scholarship. I value the confessions, but sometimes they can be corrected; in this context, evangelicals have made the mistake of not being more open to academia. I hope in that connection for a prophetic scholarship that is willing to confront academia when it is against Scripture. I want to promote orthodox scholarship, scholarship with integrity, and prophetic scholarship. So, I hope that whatever I have written will model what I have just outlined.

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[24] Tremper Longman III, *Confronting Old Testament Controversies: Pressing Questions about Evolution, Sexuality, History, and Violence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019).

PL: *At the end of an interview, I always love to say, is there anything further you would like to share that comes to mind or is on your heart?*
BW: I guess, the grace of God is better. You know, I will end there.

PL: *Thank God for amazing grace. Would you like to give us a sense of why you ultimately allowed your credentials to enter into the Anglican tradition at the end of your career?*
BW: I think most of the differences within the believing community are all too often based on where the New Testament is silent. If the New Testament were perfectly clear, there would be no debate between Episcopalians and Presbyterians and Congregationalists. I do not see myself identified with a particular tradition. It happens that at this moment the church where I am and serve is Anglican. Of course, I appreciate many things in Anglicanism. It is part of the vineyard, yet not the whole vineyard. I carry with me the Thirty-Nine Articles, which present Reformed doctrines. I do like the sense of history, of tradition. However, I do not believe you can add to Scripture.

PL: *Thank you for your friendship and theological leadership over the years. I have looked to you as a spiritual guide and father, and your kindness has been a great blessing. Would you be so kind as to give an Aaronic prayer blessing?*
BW:

> Father, we ended by commenting on your grace to us, and we are gentiles—more than that, we are sinners, apart from your original people, yet always in your heart, elected from all eternity, out of sheer mercy and grace. Father, we thank you for the privilege of being part of your people for all eternity, knowing Jesus, being able to say to you, "Abba, Father," confessing him as Lord, believing in our hearts that he was raised from the dead. It is not natural; it is your grace. Thank you for schools like Westminster, and others where I have been privileged to teach, that hold fast to the authority of your Word without compromise and with honest and sound scholarship. Thank you, Lord, that you have been faithful to build your church and that you continue to raise so many gifted pastors and teachers. Oh God, thank you that the wheat will continue to the end despite the tares. Lord, give us the grace to bear good fruit. In Christ's name, Amen.

PL: *Amen. Thank you, sir.*

Book Reviews

INFLUENTIAL OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGIES

Recently, on Facebook, an editor asked some biblical scholars to share what books got us interested in biblical studies. As I look back, what really got me excited were books that invited me into knowing God more through the Old Testament in light of the bigger story of Scripture. In this reflection, I will share about three such books. None of these books would qualify as "Old Testament theologies," yet I reckon that they have had a far greater theological impact upon me than anything I have read in the field of Old Testament theology.

Early in my seminary experience, a professor required us to read T. Desmond Alexander's *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). As I recall, it was a chore to read the first ninety-four pages! As I finished wading through the slough of critical approaches, the final sentence brought a spark to my glazed-over eyes: "While the 'how' question [of the Pentateuch's composition] is never likely to be answered with complete certainty, the 'why' question directs us to the one who is the source of all true knowledge" (94). Boom. A paradigm shift began. The question of "why" was a direction of inquiry I could be excited about; it was an approach that might help the church grasp what God wanted to say through Old Testament books. So, even if uncertainty regarding the "how" might persist, a focus upon "why" a book exists and "why" it is arranged as it is helped release me from the paralyzing effect of many critical studies.

In the final two-thirds of *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, Alexander offers his perspective on the "why" of the Pentateuch by examining the most prominent themes within each book as part of the Pentateuch's storyline. For example, in his four chapters on Genesis, he traces "Royal Lineage,"

"Blessing of the Nations," "Paradise Lost," and "By Faith Abraham." He develops these themes in light of their literary context within the book, and at the end of every chapter offers a glimpse into how a given motif connects with the New Testament. Alexander's chapters brilliantly draw one into a Pentateuch that is part of a much larger story revolving around the offspring of Eve and Abraham. The best books on Old Testament theology equip us to read the Scriptures more profitably. Alexander's *From Paradise to the Promised Land* is exemplary in this regard.

Although I resonated with Alexander's work in my early seminary days, I still was not sure how to read the Old Testament as bearing witness to Christ. Most of my influencers in Old Testament studies saw it as their mission to recover the value of understanding a passage within its original, historical context. I recall one of my professors saying, "If you are preaching Jonah, just preach the text in front of you! Don't jump to the New Testament." Although hyperbolic, the result of such instruction was a growing suspicion about the validity of making any connections between the Old and New Testaments. That was until I had Willem A. VanGemeren as a professor and we read his *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). Providentially, that summer of 2005 became a turning point where I began to develop a vision for reading the prophets, indeed all of the Old Testament, as bearing witness to Christ.

The first section of VanGemeren's book is not an expected array of introductory materials. It was anything but boring; it was more like an explosion of interpretive vision. As he situates prophecy within the broader development of Old Testament prophets, he provided powerful categories. For instance, *Realpolitik* and *vox populi* became a part of daily conversation among fellow students, not merely due to the novelty of expression but because of the potency of these categories for capturing how the prophets spoke against manipulative power structures and the values of their times. Most significantly, my heart burned as VanGemeren offered a vision for intertwining historical-cultural, literary, canonical, and redemptive-historical considerations in the reading of the prophets. I could value what God was saying through Hosea to eighth-century Israel, yet also legitimately consider how God preserved the book of Hosea for future generations along redemptive history. Indeed, even though the church is in an AD era (*Anno Domini*, the year of the Lord), the church like Israel is still living BC, before the coming of Christ. Although prophecy might find a level of fulfillment in Christ's first coming, we can see layers of fulfillment before Christ in the exilic and post-exilic eras and after Christ during the age of the church

and ultimately in the new heavens and the new earth. The remainder of *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* is icing on the cake, as VanGemeren offers a survey of each book in light of its major themes. In my opinion, no other book is comparable in its ability to offer such a robust vision for reading the prophets. Here was a vision of interpretation that allowed Old Testament texts to have their say from the beginning to the final act of the progress of redemption.

The third book that has had a profound impact on my engagement with the Old Testament's theology is Christopher J. H. Wright's *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). While a PhD student, I was asked to teach an Old Testament Theology class for seminary students at an extension site on the south side of Chicago. As I designed the class, I had to select a textbook. I did not think Gerhard von Rad, Walther Eichrodt, Elmer Martens, Paul House, or even Bruce Waltke would work in the context where I would be teaching. I needed something that did not divorce biblical theology from contemporary reflection. I decided to give *The Mission of God* a chance. When I had a student stand up in class during a discussion of the book and start preaching about God's desire for the church to be a blessing in light of God's call for Israel to be a blessing, I knew I had selected the right book.

The first sixty pages of *The Mission of God* make a case for reading the Old Testament and the entire Bible through the lens of God's mission. Wright uses the triangle of God, people, and place to capture God's mission. He begins with the God of mission, where he emphasizes God's desire to make himself known as greater than other rivals via displays of grace and judgment within Israel's history and in Jesus Christ. Next, Wright considers the mission of the people of God. Wright beautifully intertwines the spiritual (evangelism) and the social dimensions (justice) of the holistic mission of God's people in light of God's choice of Abraham, the exodus event, and the ethics of Israel. In the final section of the book, Wright argues that the "arena" of God's mission through his people spans across all nations, all segments of society (nations, states, cities, etc.), and realms of creation (including the environment). Since Wright is an Old Testament scholar, the vast majority of the book leans heavily upon the Old Testament, yet he also connects this with the mission of God as it continues in the New Testament. *The Mission of God* is remarkable in its ability to help us the church find its place in God's mission as presented in Scripture.

Although there are many good works in the area of Old Testament theology, God in his providence used these three books to draw me into better knowing him through the Pentateuch and prophets and to enable me to live

more faithfully in light of God's mission. I will close with a quote from Willem VanGemeren that captures much of what I appreciate about the works noted above: "I am … concerned that the *whole of Scripture* be heard and that the individual parts be related to each other. Further, I am concerned that the people of God be rooted in the *progress of redemption*—a redemption that involves all God's people from creation to the new creation —and that they, too, involve themselves in advancing redemption to the ends of the earth" (VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 355).

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Richard P. Belcher Jr. *Finding Favour in the Sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature*. NSBT 46. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.

Richard Belcher Jr. is Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Belcher engages in scholarly discussions while he demonstrates the Christocentric nature of wisdom literature, providing pastoral and practical insight and implications. The book has a brief "Series Preface" by D. A. Carson (xi-xii) and an "Author's Preface" (xiii-xiv). It starts with a journey and a question about "the problem of wisdom literature in Old Testament theology" in chapter 1 and is followed by ten chapters. The author ends the book with a bibliography, which is a valuable resource for the study of wisdom literature, and an index of authors and an index of Scripture (213–42).

The author explores "The Message of Proverbs 1–9," "The Hermeneutics of Proverbs," and "The Theology of Proverbs" in chapters 2 to 4 (17–73). Evaluating diverse scholarly opinions of the authorship of Proverbs, Belcher takes a conservative approach, stating that "Solomon had a major role in either writing or collecting most of the proverbial sayings in Proverbs 1–29" (18). Also, he pays special attention to "the personification of wisdom," which he identifies as "Lady Wisdom's Teaching," especially in Proverbs 1:20–33; 8; and 9 (29–37). In particular, he makes an insightful contrast between Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly in his analysis of Proverbs 9: "Lady Wisdom is also personified in Proverbs 9 as a banquet hostess. The significance of Proverbs 9 is that Lady Wisdom is contrasted with Lady Folly in order to highlight the choice between them" (34).

The author's analysis of the "Christological implication of Lady Wisdom" deserves close attention (37–38). He explores various scholarly opinions

of "the personification of Lady Wisdom" in Proverbs 8. For example, he summarizes Andrew Steinmann's view: "Steinmann argues that Proverbs 8:22–26 refers unambiguously to the preexistence of divine Wisdom as a hypostasis of the eternal Trinity. More specifically, this passage speaks of Christ's eternal divine nature and his eternal generation from the Father" (37–38). Disagreeing with Steinmann's approach to the identification of Lady Wisdom, Belcher provides a biblical-theological comparison between the type and anti-type:

> It is difficult from an OT standpoint to argue that Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is a divine hypostasis of Christ's eternal divine nature. Lady Wisdom is constantly presented in Proverbs 1–9 as a personification of wisdom. There are too many differences between Lady Wisdom and Christ to identify them, but the similarities are significant for later connections to Christ. … And yet the personification of Wisdom lays a foundation for a typological relationship with Christ, where the differences are not a problem because the anti-type is always a greater fulfillment than the type. Connections to Christ can be made not just with Proverbs 8, but with how Wisdom is personified as a street preacher and a banquet hostess. … But Christ is greater than Wisdom because he is specifically identified as the Son (John 1:18), equal with God his father (John 10:30), the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), the one who will reconcile all things to himself (Col. 1:20). (38)

The author moves on to deal with "Theological Issues in Job 1–3," "Divine Retribution, Suffering and God's Justice" in Job 4–26, and "Where Is Wisdom to Be found?" in Job 27–42 in, respectively, chapters 5, 6, and 7 (75–132). Briefly exploring divergent scholarly opinions about the date of the book of Job, he adopts the opinion of Franz Delitzsch and Edward Young that "a date during the era of Solomon fits with the flowering of wisdom literature during this period," as we read the culmination of wisdom literature during the reign of Solomon in 1 Kings 4:31–34 (76). Reflecting on Job's suffering as a blameless and righteous man, the author connects it with the suffering of Christ and believers' suffering in Christ in the present life:

> The life and death of Jesus confirms the message of the book of Job and brings clarity to the issues raised in the book …. Jesus demonstrates in his life and death the limitations of a narrow view of divine retribution. … He exemplified in his life the tension with which the friends of Job wrestled how one can suffer and still be righteous before God. … Following Jesus may include hardship, difficulties, persecution and even death. The believer does not look for the fullness of salvation in this life and so is willing to sacrifice for the sake of Christ. This kingdom perspective understands that suffering is not necessarily a direct result of sin, but is a result of living in a fallen world and many times is a consequence of following Jesus. (131–32)

Afterward, the author discusses the book of Ecclesiastes, concentrating on "Key Questions Concerning the Book of Ecclesiastes," "The Message of Qohelet," and "The Theology of Ecclesiastes" in chapters 8, 9, and 10 (133–87). Exploring the diverse opinions of the authorship of the book of Ecclesiastes, Belcher—like Gleason Archer, Walter Kaiser, Duane Garrett, James Bollhagen, and O. Palmer Robertson—adopts Solomonic authorship, insisting that "although Solomonic authorship can make a difference in the interpretation of the book, it is not integral to the message of the book" (134). He identifies one of the major themes of Qohelet as "futility" under the sun. In doing so, he provides a Christological solution to the problem of futility. He argues that "Qohelet's dark 'under the sun' view" is a reality of the broken world apart from God's saving grace in Christ. It is a visible picture of the hopelessness of the present world, which is "fallen and cursed." Here is how he sums it up:

> Futility, however, will not have the last word because Jesus has taken upon himself our sin and the futility of life. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), so that our lives change from frustrating futility to having a purpose (Rom. 8:28). … The frustration of life that Qohelet documents so well is still part of what believers struggle with because we live in a fallen world, but even in the darkness of this life the light of Christ shines. (182)

In the final chapter, the author explores "the relationship between Jesus and wisdom" from several perspectives (189–212). Exploring Jesus Christ's teaching ministry, he considers Jesus "as a wisdom teacher" and identifies Jesus as "a sage" or "a person of wisdom," as he uses "parables and proverbs" while exercising the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. Comparing "Jesus' teaching and the teaching of Proverbs," the author summarizes a believer's relationship to the wisdom of God: "The one who feared Yahweh sought God's wisdom in Proverbs, but the one who is poor in spirit will seek Jesus as the wisdom of God. The kingdom of God established by Jesus has an impact on his use of proverbs" (195).

Belcher as an Old Testament scholar demonstrates sound scholarship, interacting with divergent scholarly opinions in the areas of authorship, genre, literary structure, and theology in the wisdom literature of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Moreover, he does pastors and laypeople a great service by providing valuable pastoral and practical insight. Besides, he has Christological consciousness in his analysis and interpretation of the wisdom literature. Nevertheless, one significant element is conspicuously absent: a covenantal analysis of and outlook on wisdom literature. Indeed, since the Old Testament canon is a covenantal canon, covenant is essential to the

interpretation of the entire Old Testament. Yahweh granted the Old Testament canon to the covenant community of Israel, who were the recipients of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants while they were waiting for the coming Messiah as the mediator of the new covenant under the Davidic kingdom. In that regard, if we overlook the covenantal nature of the wisdom literature, then it is similar to bypassing something of great value. Despite this reservation, I strongly recommend Belcher's valuable book to missionaries, pastors, seminarians, and students of the Bible for God's wisdom for their lives and ministries in the present world.

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Henri Blocher. *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*. NSBT 5. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Nottingham: Apollos, 1997.

In *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, Henri Blocher proposes to illuminate the riddle the doctrine of original sin presents. The introduction points out that the phenomenon of human evil raises three questions: "First, why is the perception of human evil generally accompanied by feelings of indignation, guilt or shame?" "Secondly, if humans are capable of so much evil, how is it that they also reach heights of heroism, performing admirable deeds of selfless service and devotion to the truth?" "Thirdly," if the world owes its origin to a holy and wise Creator, "how can we face the apparent contradiction" resulting from "the presence and power of evil in human life?" (11–12).

The Christian doctrine of original sin responds to these questions raised by what Blocher labels elsewhere the "opaque" mystery of evil.[1] We need the light that this doctrine brings in order to understand the world in which we live—even though it has been put "under a bushel" for a few decades. *Original Sin* was written to remedy this lack, collecting from Scripture, recognized as the ruling norm (*norma normans*), the light we need. While sitting "on the shoulders of giants," Blocher does not cultivate a "servile adherence" to the various traditions of which they are the representatives but seeks the "grace to see even further and ever more clearly" (13).[2] We

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[1] Henri Blocher, *Doctrine du péché et de la rédemption* (Vaux-sur-Seine: Edifac, 2000), 25: "The enigma of evil is the only 'opaque' mystery of Scripture."

[2] "This enquiry … draws on the work of many predecessors, among whom … Augustine, François Turretin, Blaise Pascal, Jonathan Edwards, Soren Kierkegaard, John Murray and Paul Ricoeur, to whom I am indebted in various regards."

will examine the results of this approach from the perspective of Reformed theology.

As an evangelical theologian, Blocher's first concern is to know what the Bible teaches about original sin. He therefore devotes his first chapter to synthesizing the data of Scripture and shows, in broad terms, against ancient Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, the classical Augustinian doctrine of original sin to be valid. First, all humanity is affected by a sinful propensity, traditionally called "originated original sin," which is the root of actual sin, which is also itself sinful and makes man guilty before God (19–25). Second, man's propensity to sin "since his youth" (Gen 6:5) is "a corruption which is natural (and native) to us" without proceeding "authentically from nature" (25–30). It is the "dark paradox of unnatural nature,"[3] of our "quasi-nature" that at the same time "remains truly our anti-nature" (30). Third, this natural propensity to sin is inherited (30–32). Because we are children of our parents, we are born sinners. Fourth, this inherited propensity to sin is a consequence of the fall of our first father Adam (32–35).

In his second chapter (37–62), Blocher enters into dialogue with modernist theologians who have abandoned the idea of a historical Adamic event that would be the initial root of our propensity to sin. He argues for "the affirmation of disobedience in Eden as a real event or occurrence at a specific moment in time" (37), which he calls in his French writings the "fundamental historicity"[4] of Adam's transgression (traditionally called "originating original sin").

To that end he develops the following propositions. The arguments from current scientific theories are not insurmountable (39–48). Further, the conclusions of critical literary studies reducing the account of the fall of Adam to an etiological myth are not sufficiently well founded (48–56). Finally, the theological interpretations that seek to preserve the symbolic meaning of the Adamic event while denying that it actually occurred leads to the dead ends of "as if" theologies: by making evil an aspect of human nature, they throw a shadow on the divine goodness (56–62). As with *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*,[5] Blocher defends a nuanced interpretation of Genesis 2–3: "The real issue when we try to interpret Genesis 2–3 is not whether we have a historical account of the fall, but whether or not we may read it as an account of a historical fall" (50).

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[3] Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 78.
[4] Ibid., 67–73: "historicité foncière."
[5] Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

In his third chapter, Blocher seeks to determine the nature of the link between Adam's fault and our propensity to sin. That is why he proceeds to examine the key text of Romans 5 (63–81). Not surprisingly, he dismisses from the outset interpretations that give Paul a mythological understanding of Adam's fault and its connection to our sinfulness: it is clear that Paul is referring here to a historical Adam. There are also interpretations that loosen the bond between Adam and Christ (which tend towards the position of Pelagius) and those that tighten this bond (which tend towards that of Augustine). The "looser interpretations of Romans 5" (65–70) that simply make Adam the source of our corruption are not satisfactory. Indeed, they do not explain Paul's emphasis in this passage on Adam's *one* transgression, do not show how Adam was the *type* of the one who was to come, and fail to explain how those who did not sin according to the similarity of Adam's transgression nevertheless died like him. As for the "tighter interpretations of Romans 5" (70–76) in the Augustinian lineage, they impute Adam's sin to men in the same way as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the elect. We must then choose between the realistic and the federal theses: either to strictly follow Augustine and admit that we were seminally in Adam when he sinned, or to accept the opinion of Protestant scholastic theologians, such as Francis Turretin, that Adam's sin was attributed to us because he was our covenant head and, as such, our representative. Blocher acknowledges that Augustinian interpretations, especially the Reformed federal interpretation, surpass other competing traditional interpretations. However, like G. C. Berkouwer,[6] he finds neither realism nor federalism adequate, and the idea of alien culpability is a problem for him, as it does not seem to be well established biblically.[7] The exegesis given by (federal) Reformed theologians, for instance, John Murray, on verses 13–14 is deemed rather unconvincing. According to Blocher, a new interpretation may be necessary.

The reason why these two approaches are not satisfactory is that the interpreters of the two tendencies have locked themselves into a dilemma: "either we are condemned for our own sins (and Adam's role is reduced to that of a remote fountainhead, losing much of its significance) *or* we are condemned for his sin (and the equity of that transfer is hard to see)" (77).

What if there were a third way? Blocher formulates the following hypothesis, which he acknowledges elsewhere as "paradoxical for a modern man": "the role of Adam and of his sin in Romans 5 is *to make possible the*

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[6] G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 461.
[7] "It cannot be denied that the concept sits uneasily with our sense of personal responsibility" (74).

imputation, the judicial treatment, of human sins."[8] The role of Adam and his sin would, therefore, be to make it possible to impute our own sins to us (77–79)! With this hypothesis, Blocher thinks he is able both to take into account verses 13–14 (with the mention of the period from Adam to Moses) and to account for the whole pericope. The Apostle Paul's purpose in comparing Adam and Christ becomes allegedly even clearer with this proposal: it is neither a question of giving the *modus operandi* of justification (*contra* Turretin and Murray), nor of showing the universal extent of the benefits obtained by Christ (*contra* Charles E. B. Cranfield), but of giving believers the assurance of salvation. Quoting approvingly Douglas Moo's proposal (79), Blocher includes Romans 5:12–21 in a section that begins in Romans 5:12 and ends at the end of chapter 8: neither death (Rom 5:12–21), nor sin (Rom 6), nor the law (Rom 7), nor anything else can separate us from the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ our Savior (Rom 8:38–39). It is therefore not the doctrine of justification that is explained in this passage: that has already taken place in Romans 3–4. With this hypothesis, it is no longer necessary to maintain a strict parallel between the imputation of Adam's sin to all human beings (which he rejects entirely) and the imputation of Christ's justice to all chosen ones (which he defends). Blocher can thus abandon the idea of a *peccatum alienatum* (alien sin) for which we would be found guilty (but it would remain the original guilt of our sinful propensity discussed above) while maintaining the classical doctrine of justification by faith alone. The parallelism between Adam and Christ as heads of humanity is therefore not as complete as in Charles Hodge's or Murray's interpretation, but this does not seem to Blocher to be a disadvantage: Paul's reasoning is argument *a fortiori* and not a symmetrically perfect reasoning, and the apostle Paul himself warns of the difference between Adam and Christ (80).[9]

Without conceding to Pelagian tendencies, Blocher in fact alters the federal thesis on three points (130). First, he abandons the idea of an alien fault transferred to us, considering such an idea repugnant and foreign to Scripture. Second, he emphasizes that the propensity to sin that is itself sinful and makes us sinners from conception is therefore not the penal consequence of Adam's fault attributed to us, but a simple "fact" that is part of our relationship with Adam. Third, he argues that this last "fact" is because Adam is our covenant head and as such our representative, with

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   8   Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 91: "It is because of Adam's sin (or through it) that we are punished for ours! This thought (a paradox for the modern) allows [us] to read verses 13 and 14 without difficulty."

   9   Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 90.

whom we are in solidarity and without whom there is no room for our individuality.[10]

What about Blocher's thesis? On the "shoulders of giants," does his new interpretation reach more biblical conclusions, better informed by Genesis 3 and Romans 5? Readers who claim to be part of the Reformed tradition will certainly have doubts, perhaps because of what Blocher might call their "servile adherence" to their beautiful tradition. As Reformed theologians, it is something good to be able to re-examine long-established interpretations, especially when new creative interpretations attempt to shed light on biblical texts, claiming to reflect them better, while not challenging nonnegotiable doctrines (such as that of God's sovereignty, penal substitution and justification by faith alone, by virtue of Christ's justice imputed to us). I thank Blocher for this, because, while proposing his "new interpretation" and altering the federal thesis, he does not fall into any new form of Pelagianism.

After examining our Reformed tradition in light of Blocher's criticisms and his "new interpretation," am I incited to join him? I think not. I acknowledge the particular difficulty presented by the text of Romans 5:12–21, and following Blocher's express request,[11] I will explain with charity why I finally cannot accept his interpretation.

I admit that Blocher's criticism of the federal position in the traditional treatment of Romans 5:13–14, represented by Murray, is entirely justified. His interpretation of these two verses seems *more* satisfactory than Murray's. The Reformed interpretation of these verses may need to be reworked in order to be more convincing. I believe, however, that Meredith Kline has already done this in his 1991 article "Gospel until the Law."[12] Like Blocher, Kline criticizes Murray's exegesis for not doing justice to the limitations mentioned in verse 13 ("until the Law") and 14 ("from Adam to Moses").[13] Kline points out that these boundaries are not primarily temporal but point to turning points in the administration of the divine-human covenant. "Adam" stands for the end of the original order (the covenant of works) and the inauguration of the redemptive covenant. "Moses" stands for the end of the patriarchal period, during which the Abrahamic covenant was established, and for the inauguration of the old (i.e., Mosaic) covenant. Kline, therefore, agrees with Blocher to take these limits into account; but

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[10] Ibid., 94.

[11] "Theologians and exegetes, then, should not incur too severe a reprimand if they grope somewhat awkwardly for Paul's mind in Romans 5 (and indeed I myself beg for charity on the part of the reader)" (64).

[12] Meredith G. Kline, "Gospel until the Law: Rom 5:13–14 and the Old Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34.4 (1991): 433–46.

[13] Ibid., 436.

his criticism goes further than Blocher's in affirming that commentators of all tendencies have interpreted this passage as describing a phenomenon affecting all of humanity (or at least pointing to an international reality). In doing so, they miss the inevitable consequence of the Mosaic law being considered by Paul as the *terminus ad quem* (endpoint) of this period: the subjects of verses 13–14 are specifically members of the covenant community. In these verses, as elsewhere in Romans, Paul contrasts the period of the Abrahamic covenant with that of the Adamic and Mosaic covenants.[14] In light of these considerations, the idea that death reigned "even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam" must be understood to refer to people who did not live under the same type of covenant. Death reigned both over those who lived under the administration of the covenant of works that could be broken—and in which there was no provision for the forgiveness of sins—and over those who lived under the administration of the covenant of grace under which sins could be forgiven. Kline's assertion also clarifies the Pauline expression "sin is not imputed when there is no law." This is not, as Blocher understands, a statement of a legal principle. The expression has a technical meaning: to speak of "non-imputation of sin" is to speak of sins as forgiven. The translation of the Pauline phrase "sin is not imputed when there is no law" into the language of covenant theology is therefore this: "under the covenant of grace, the forgiveness of sins is granted." This translation renders the expression in Romans 4:15 better in a section that uses precisely the language of nonimputation as a synonym for the forgiveness of sins (cf. vv. 7–8). This is also found in 2 Corinthians 5:19 in a context that introduces a discussion on covenant administrations (2 Cor 3–5). The reference to the law in Romans 5:13–14 therefore does not refer to a commandment or set of precepts but a covenant governed at some point by the principle of works.[15]

I am aware that such an interpretation presents its share of difficulties.[16]

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[14] Ibid., 437–38.

[15] Ibid., 438–44.

[16] For instance, Thomas Schreiner criticizes Kline's thesis as follows: "Kline provides a creative and ingenious defense for traditional covenant theology in his interpretation of Rom. 5.13–14. Nonetheless, there is paltry evidence in vv. 13–14 to support the idea that Paul is restricting his focus to the covenant community. Nowhere does he even mention the Abrahamic covenant. The interval is broadly designated as that between Adam and Moses (v. 13). The covenant of grace figures large in Kline's interpretation, but one looks in vain for any reference to such a covenant in the text. Also, it is hardly clear that Paul focuses upon those who received grace; he says they died (v. 14). Death is the consequence of sin (Rom. 6:23). Thus, the fact that sin was not reckoned does not mean these people experienced grace. Finally, the most natural way to understand the time interval is to see a reference to all people who lived between Adam and Moses." Thomas Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law*

However, it is the most convincing one I have encountered so far. It is the best way to take into account the chronological limits set by Paul and the intention of the text. In Romans 5:12–21, Paul first states a principle concerning the propagation of sin and death (v. 12), then makes a first digression to refine the contrast between the principle of the law and that of grace (vv. 13–14) before making a second digression that contrasts the consequences of Adam's work with that of Christ (vv. 15–17), to finally fully establish the comparison between Adam's transgression and Christ's obedience (vv. 18–21). This competing interpretation leads us to make the following remarks concerning the substance of Blocher's thesis.

A first significant remark concerns his understanding of the Apostle Paul's way of reasoning in Romans 5. In his *In the Beginning*, Blocher expressed himself for the first time in this way: "While Adam provokes the de facto sanction (*krima, katakrima*), Christ's grace reverses the situation (from *paraptōma* to *dikaiōma*): one can exclaim: *pollō mallon* [much more]!"[17] (cf. Rom 5:16–17). Like Michel Johner, I am not convinced that such a reading really reflects Paul's thinking.[18] In particular, I have the impression that Blocher sees in this passage more of an *a contrario* (a "reversal of situation") than an *a fortiori* reasoning as suggested by the key expression *pollō mallon*, which appears four times in the passage.

Moreover, I consider that Blocher's thesis does not sufficiently account for the apostle's insistence on Adam's *one transgression*. For his thesis to work ("we are punished for our own sins because of our link with Adam under the Covenant of Creation"), the mere fact that we are a participant in the Adamic covenant and that Adam is our covenant head would be enough to make us responsible for our own sins in the covenant of works. I fail to see the precise role of Adam's transgression in allowing the imputation to us of our own sins: the legal instrument that allows the imputation of our sins is not Adam's fault, but our relationship to him. For this reason, the parallelism between Adam's transgression and Christ's obedience seems to us to be better highlighted if the classical thesis of imputation of Adam's sin is maintained, and the typology is thus better preserved.

As far as form is concerned, I regret that Blocher gives little space in his book (6 pages) to explaining and defending his new interpretation. In

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(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 248–49. I think, however, that Kline anticipated and responded in his article to all of Schreiner's objections.

[17] Henri Blocher, *Révélation des origines: Le début de la Genèse*, 2nd ed. (Lausanne: Presses bibliques universitaires; Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Diffusion Ouverture, 1988), 105.

[18] Michel Johner, "Imputation du péché originel et responsabilité personnelle: Perspectives bibliques et théologiques," (MTh thesis, Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée, Aix-en-Provence, 1986), 141–43.

essence, he does not go into more detail than in his dogmatics manual on the doctrine of sin and redemption.[19] This brevity makes it more difficult to understand his thesis.[20]

That said, I recommend reading Blocher's work with particular attention to the wise and very relevant dogmatic consequences he draws in chapter 4 from the doctrine of original sin to explain human experience (83–103). His knowledge of Scripture and way of treating it with the respect it deserves can be set as a standard to be imitated, even when we disagree on a particular theological point.

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Gregory A. Boyd. *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017.

Gregory Boyd is a theologian and senior pastor in the Twin Cities. This book follows up on his epic two-volume *Crucifixion and the Warrior God*. While more accessible than the major work, its more concise presentation of the subject will be enough to satisfy most readers. As one might expect, the subject arises out of theological and hermeneutical engagement with the Old Testament narrative and pastoral concerns.

The scandal of the victims of human behavior has become a preoccupation of postmodernism. The question of religious violence is at the forefront because of the friction between different religious groups in a shrinking world. It is therefore hardly surprising that this work is another drop in an ocean of publications, both Christian and other, on the problem of violence. Add to this the rivers of literature on the question of hospitality and the gift from the stable of Marcel Maus and Georges Bataille and the ocean is overflowing.

The book is divided into four main sections. The issue is the old question of liberal theology as to how the violent tribal God of the Old Testament can be reconciled with the loving God of Jesus and the cross. In spite of the efforts of many Christian writers to address the problem, this is still the

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[19] Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 88–94.
[20] Cf. Daniel J. Treier, "Original Sin (NSBT)—Henri Blocher (Apollos, 1997): Review by Dr. Daniel J. Treier," *Trinity Journal NS* 21.2 (Fall 2000), reproduced at http://beginningwithmoses.org/books/102/original-sin-nsbt/review: "Competent theological associates and this reviewer took hours of verbal and written discussion to ferret out Blocher's claims and their exact significance compared to the tradition."

commonly held view in the subconscious of many Christians and a major reason why unbelievers reject the biblical message as a whole. Boyd wishes to tackle this issue and provides a solution that will be attractive to many, as it fits in with the basic postmodern narrative about violence.

In the first section, the problem and solution are presented with the cross as a lens for looking at the Old Testament stories that are the big issue. Boyd does not want to duck the problem of divine violence by reneging on the inspiration of the texts and wishes to make Christ and the cross central in interpreting them (22–24). Jesus has "a weightier authority than the OT" and "only when we grasp why the cross is the centerpiece to everything Jesus was about will we be able to see what else is going on in the OT's violent portraits of God and discern how this something else points us to the cross" (31). If we believe that Jesus reveals what God is like, when God appears to be acting violently in the Old Testament problem texts, we must be challenged to imagine that something else is going on. "Something else must be going on" could well be seen as the refrain of the book. This fits in nicely with postmodern propensities for suspicion and finding solutions in a narrative under the narrative. One might say that the facts are there and are undeniable, but do we attach to them the value that is apparent?

The second section looks at the way God comes into the world in the pagan ancient Near Eastern setting. The Old Testament at once conforms to the surrounding background by depicting Yahweh as a violent warrior God, and at the same time, in contrast with the native culture, it depicts God in Christlike ways. The difference can be seen through the lens of the cross. God enters history as a "heavenly missionary." The author's "conservative hermeneutical principle" will not let him deny either the reality of the violence or the cross-centered lens. The cross was itself a divine judgment, and Boyd wishes to see how God "justly judges sin while denying that God ever acts violently in the process" (132). This is a tall order.

The third section, comprising three chapters, is the core of Boyd's thesis; he seeks to demonstrate, in three ways, the true nature of divine judgment.

Firstly, he has a new explanation—"divine aikido"—a way of saying that God steps back in judgment and abandons evil in line with the model of the fourth word from the cross. God allows evil (Satan, demons, rebel powers, and the kingdom of darkness) to self-destruct and so uses evil itself to destroy evil. It is surprising that Boyd does not use Karl Barth's excluded "nihil" or Jürgen Moltmann's ideas about the Jewish mystical "tsimtsum" here. Equally surprising is the absence of references to the ground-breaking and popular theses about religious violence proposed by René Girard. Although Boyd maintains substitutionary atonement, his position involves a negation

of penal substitution (138) for specious reasons that have been debunked many times in the Reformed tradition.

Secondly, he asserts that sin is self-punishing, since violence is carried out by those who were already bent on it (160). Thirdly, he makes the distinction between doing and allowing. Here again, the cross allows us to see that God is not doing but allowing sin to punish sin and evil to vanquish evil. This distinction runs into all the problems John Frame has pointed out with regard to the classic use of the notion of divine permission (John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002], 177–79).

The fourth and final section is about the "what else that was going on," as seen through the lens of the cross. When violence is attributed to God in Scripture, it must really be human agents—or, when not, spiritual agents—acting in a cosmic war against God. To his way of thinking, the Genesis flood story shows how God withdrew and the forces of chaos were released; the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea is a conflict-with-chaos narrative: it was the sea monster, not God, who devoured Pharaoh's army, and "dragon eats dragon." Other Old Testament texts that reference God directly, such as Elijah calling down fire, Elisha calling down a bear curse on forty-two youths, and Samson's acts of violence, are cases of misuse of divine power. Finally, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac shows that a paradigm shift was necessary for the patriarch to see that God provides a nonviolent way out for human beings.

Boyd's argument throughout is based on the presupposition that God is totally nonviolent, that Jesus taught and practiced nonviolence, and the cross is God's lens for making us see that the biblical narratives of divine violence do not mean what they say. These texts are "literary crucifixes" in miniature, inviting readers to go beyond the surface meaning. God allowed himself to be seen as a warrior god, but in the final revelation of Christ the loving God appears.

In conclusion, Boyd's proposal is based exclusively on the presupposition that God must be nonviolent. Scriptures that depict divine violence must be reinterpreted. Readers have to go beyond the surface meaning. God allowed himself to be viewed as a pagan deity or warrior god, but the cross-revelation of Christ shatters that violent perception of God. The author keeps his Anabaptist cards pretty close to his chest, but he finally comes clean in the "Acknowledgments" section (an exception being a passing reference on page 77). So, what I suspected all along is the case, in spite of the surprising lack of references to major players in this game like John Yoder and J. Denny Weaver. Transparency from the start would have been gentlemanly, but maybe I just missed the references. That apart, Boyd is

pleasant to read and convincingly makes his case. He will push many who are evangelical in the way they want to fall. His thesis rubs us up in the right way because we want to think that God is not violent and judgmental, or that all that is over and done with through the lens of the cross. It is a boon, as Brian McLaren says on the dust jacket, for those who want to "detoxify their understanding of God and rediscover God as most fully and beautifully imaged in a nonviolent man who loved all, hated none, and brought healing rather than harm wherever he went"(!)

Three final comments. Firstly, Boyd doth protest too much, methinks. The texts that he reinterprets are so numerous, so categorical, and so obvious that to try and explain them as referring to a "nonviolent" God demands flights of imagination that are just too much. Secondly, the idea of God allowing himself to be seen as a "warrior god" flies in the face of divine kingship and lordly control. It leaves us with the nasty taste that before Christ appeared to set the record straight, God was involved in some duplicity about his real nature. This approach does not do much for the trustworthiness or the faithfulness of God to himself. Finally, Boyd claims his hermeneutic to be a conservative evangelical one, even if it more specifically Anabaptist. This raises the question as to whether "the lens of the cross" is appropriate for reading the Old Testament. If Christ is the center of Scripture and the history of salvation in an Oscar Cullmann sense flows to Christ and from Christ, is this in and of itself a hermeneutical key? Is it not the New Testament that interprets the Old and Scripture that interprets Scripture, and not a "cross lens" abstracted from Scripture itself?

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Brent A. Strawn. *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

Any book that seeks to keep the Old Testament from dying and to revive its use among God's people is to be encouraged simply because it raises the issue. People tend to view the Old Testament as distant in time and culture and therefore irrelevant to modern-day life. In fact, taking the Old Testament seriously could lead to problems because of its many difficult texts. This book seeks to solve some of the difficulties related to the Old Testament by treating it like a dead language that needs to be recovered. It gives a diagnosis of the problem, evidence of the signs of the Old Testament's demise, and

then offers a path to recovery with four specific positive recommendations. The general argument of the book will be given, followed by an evaluation of the prescription to fix the problem of a dying Old Testament.

The author argues that the Old Testament is dying because too many individuals and churches do not regard it as highly as the New Testament, do not understand it, and for all practical purposes neglect it in private devotion and public worship. The issue is not that the Old Testament is never read or preached, but the way it is read and preached. Chapter 2 provides initial tests related to the thesis and presents four pieces of hard evidence. First, the United States Religious Knowledge Survey confirms that Christians of various ethnic and denominational backgrounds are uninformed, or ill-informed, concerning the rudimentary details of their beliefs. Second, a series of books entitled *Best Sermons* collected in several volumes throughout the twentieth century show that only twenty-one percent of the sermons are taken from the Old Testament alone whereas forty-nine percent of the sermons are taken from the New Testament alone. Third, hymnals show a selective use of psalms with a neglect of the lament psalms. This represents a death of sorts because Christians never sing the full language of the psalms. Finally, the book examines the Revised Common Lectionary. It appears balanced with an Old Testament lesson, a psalm or hymnic response, a Gospel lesson, and an epistle lesson. Strawn, however, points out that many times the Old Testament lesson gets dropped for a reading from Acts and there is no guarantee that if there is an Old Testament lesson, it will be used. These four initial tests are evidence that the Old Testament is dying because of selectivity and lack of use.

In chapter 3 Strawn goes into great detail to explain the linguistic analogy in order to know more about the pathologies from which the Old Testament is suffering. He compares the death of the Old Testament to the death of a language. To explain this, he describes the processes of pidginization and creolization. A pidgin is a simplified version of a language that develops when two groups of people with their own native languages need to communicate. If a pidgin becomes the dominant language of a people group, it is no longer a pidgin but becomes a creole: the latter takes on a life of its own in its growth and development in grammar, syntax, and meaning of words. Strawn also discusses how and why languages die, and what is lost when they do. Because the Old Testament is like a language, it can be learned and forgotten, but it can also be "revived."

Armed with the diagnostic tools of chapter 3, Strawn examines in chapters 4–6 three areas that confirm the demise of the Old Testament. He focuses on "The New Atheism," "Marcionites Old and New," and "The New Plastic

Gospel of the 'Happiologists'" (the health and wealth gospel). Each of these operate with profound misunderstandings of the Old Testament and are evidence that it is dying in considerable and public ways.

Before analyzing Strawn's diagnosis of the problem, it is helpful to examine his recommendations for its recovery because the diagnosis and the remedy are related. In chapters 7–9 Strawn lays out a path to restoring the Old Testament. This is important because once a language dies, it is virtually impossible to bring it back. In chapter 7 ("Recommended Treatment"), he turns again to the linguistic analogy to discuss strategies linguists adopt to save dying languages. He highlights the success story of the Hebrew language. Four factors led to its successful rebirth: (1) Israel was newly constituted as a nation, (2) there was a massive influx of Jews into Israel from all over the world, (3) Hebrew had been preserved in written form, and (4) there was a strong religious impulse to revive Hebrew. Strawn also discusses the importance of early language learning among children and second-language acquisition by adults. For a language to recover, there must be a strong impulse among the people for its recovery, and there must be a commitment to learning the language, including willingness to practice and use it.

The Old Testament is in a critical condition because of disuse, misuse, and abandonment. While not very hopeful that the Old Testament can be revived to a full language, Strawn gives further evidence of the problem in chapter 8 ("Saving the OT") and then turns to strategies to help revive it. Professional biblical scholarship is part of the problem because academic study has not been concerned to teach the church how to understand the Old Testament. Even the best scholarship is insufficient for language preservation as long as it lacks language practice, and biblical scholarship will revive the Old Testament for the church only if it is followed by practice. He also looks at how the book of Deuteronomy is a model for second-language acquisition. In Deuteronomy, the content is being passed on to the next generation; repetition allows the material to be mastered and put into practice, and the teaching is embedded in Israel's history. All of these help keep Deuteronomy a full language for future generations.

Finally, in chapter 9 ("Ways Forward and Not") Strawn offers concrete recommendations on how to save the Old Testament. The most obvious recommendation is to use the Old Testament in formative moments of Christian practice extensively and regularly. It must be seen as a speaking presence that exercises beneficial influence on our lives. This recommendation puts great responsibility on those who preach, teach, and lead worship. Part of the problem is that pastors, who are the resident language experts, seem less and less fluent in the language. Pastors need to know the full

language of Scripture. The second recommendation fits the first well because if a pastor is to be a resident language expert, there is the need for adequate language training. Formal education is part of the answer, but immersion in the Old Testament and regular use of it is also needed. The third recommendation is that the language of the Old Testament must be communicated intentionally and in keeping with the ability of those who are taught. The fourth recommendation is that a person needs to be able to switch between the languages and know when to do so (one must be bilingual). This ability must become a way of life. The fifth recommendation is that both the Old Testament and New Testament can contribute to the solution because they are intertwined. If the next generation is not taught the language of the Old Testament, then the future looks bleak for saving it.

Several things can be said in response to Strawn's diagnosis of the death of the Old Testament and his recommendations to save it. Recognizing that there is a problem and that the Old Testament should be saved is positive. He does a good job of showing the problems of New Testament–only Christianity. His diagnosis of the problem, however, uses very general examples. Do we expect atheists, or even the health-and-wealth proponents, to understand the Old Testament? The lack of the use of the Old Testament in the lectionary and the hymnal provides evidence that supports his case. Information from a survey of lay people that attend church would give more concrete evidence. Strawn's linguistic analogy is a bit tedious. A person has to wade through a lot of information and terminology, like pidgins and creoles, to understand the death of a language just to get to the discussion of the death of the Old Testament. One wonders if the payoff is worth the effort.

The foundational issue to be addressed to fix the problem is only hinted at or mentioned in passing. The recovery of the Old Testament will not be achieved through a linguistic analysis that compares the Old Testament to a language. The problem goes much deeper because it is theological. There is little theological discussion about the importance of the Old Testament or its character as the living word of God. The author shifts gears in one paragraph from speaking linguistically to speaking theologically in answering the question of who would want to preach the entirety of the Old Testament. The answer is those for whom the Old Testament functions as authoritative Scripture (38). Instead of explaining why this is so, the author drops back into the linguistic analysis. Later, in chapter 8, he again raises the issue that the professionals in the fields of theology and the Bible are part of the problem because these fields of study have become too academic with little relevance to human society. He describes the inefficiency of professional biblical scholarship committed to historical criticism that has moved further away

from the text by "filleting the biblical materials into ever smaller and more disparate layers" (191). He also muses that it is a small miracle that so many people go to church given the smallness of the vision that they receive. Instead, they need to be exposed to something bigger and grander. He hints at the necessity for a robust worldview where ultimate commitments are more crucial than the choice of study method. Strawn touches on the problem but does not discuss the real issue: the character of Scripture. Many churches view Scripture as a purely human document, not the inspired, revealed word of God. If the Bible is only a human document, it loses its character as the living word of God through which God still speaks to his people. If Scripture is a limited human product that is historically conditioned, it is hard to see its relevance to God's people today. If the Bible can be used along with other, more contemporary sources to instruct God's people, it is no wonder that the Old Testament loses influence. The Bible itself is relegated to a subordinate position, or at least it is not given the priority it deserves, leaving little hope that people will take the Old Testament seriously.

The solution to the problem of the death of the Old Testament is to accept Scripture as the Word of God. When seminaries have a low view of the authority of Scripture, pastors are sent into churches without great confidence in the Word of God. This impacts all levels of a church's life, from preaching to the choice of the Sunday School material to teach the next generation. In such an environment there is no great impetus to learn the language of the Old Testament. There is no great vision related to the supremacy of Christ and the glory of God. Seminaries and churches with a high view of the authority Scripture are in a better position to see the importance of the Old Testament as the living word of God that is written for God's people today (1 Cor 10:6; Heb 4:12). A high view of the Old Testament does not solve every problem because people have to be taught how to understand it, but it gives pastors the boldness to preach and the people the impetus to understand and to pass it on to their children.

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Pierre Courthial. *A New Day of Small Beginnings*. Tallahassee, FL; Lausanne: Zurich Publishing, 2018).

It has been one of the privileges of my life, not only to know Pierre Courthial and to share his friendship, but also to participate actively in the

publication of his three major works.[1] For Courthial, God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the first author of the whole Bible (*tota Scriptura*), the *ex nihilo* Creator of the universe who, as sovereign redeemer of his people, manifests his providence over every event in the history to all mankind. Spiritual intimacy with God gave Courthial the grace of generous and serviceable authority.

Courthial was born in August 1914 in Saint Cyr-au-Mont-d'Or, Lyon, of a Roman Catholic mother and a Protestant father.[2] He left us for his heavenly home in the evening of April 22, 2009. He was brought up with Reformed convictions. This dual family heritage may well have played a role in the development of his vocation; the strengthening of his confessional Reformed convictions, constantly called upon to do battle against the seductions of Rome; and the openness of his mind to horizons other than those of his own Protestant heritage. From this spiritual conjunction, under the normative authority of the Bible, at the age of thirteen, he began gleaning in the Scriptures and, somewhat later, in the vast heritage of Christian theology. This, no doubt, is the source of his Christian intelligence marked first by the confessional Reformed faith, then watered from various faithful Christian streams: the fathers, Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Evangelicalism. Also, from summer 1931 to autumn 1932 Courthial devoted himself to assiduously studying John Calvin's *Institutes* (1559) and Pierre Viret's *Christian Instruction* (1564), two works that had a lasting influence on his long ministry.

From November 1932 to June 1936 Courthial undertook theological training in the liberal Protestant Theological Faculty in Paris. There his convictions were greatly strengthened by the Reformed teaching of Auguste Lecerf (1872–1943), as well as by his lifelong friendship with his slightly older colleague and Calvinist theologian, Pierre-Charles Marcel (1910–1992). On April 20, 1939, Courthial and Hélène Jouve married, and they were blessed with five children. From 1937 on Courthial served as pastor in the French Reformed Church, a largely liberal and Barthian denomination. There he confessed the faith of the Reformation with theological acumen, courage, and force, sometimes like a latter-day Athanasius: "One against all"! The strength of Courthial's catholic orthodox Reformed faith, which marks

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1   Pierre Courthial, *Fondements pour l'avenir* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 1982); *Le jour des petits recommencements* (1996; revised edition, Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2019); *De Bible en Bible* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme; Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 2003).

2   Sources: "La vie et les temps de Pierre Courthial (1914–2009)," *La Revue réformée* 61.1–2 (Janvier 2010): 6–26; and Matthew Miller, "Pierre Courthial: A Brief Biography, " in Courthial, *A New Day of Small Beginnings*, xxvii–xxxiii.

his ministry and writings, arises, no doubt, from his persistently uncompromising ecclesiastical faithfulness against opposition to the teaching of the Bible. This led him, with Henri Blocher and Marie de Védrines, to found the monthly review *Ichthus*, which served to introduce the Reformed heritage to French evangelicals. In October of 1974, Courthial joined those who established the Free Reformed Theological Faculty of Aix-en-Provence (today Faculté Jean Calvin), from which he retired in 1984. His last years were spent, together with his wife, in the fifteenth arrondissement of Paris, not far from their children.

A New Day of Small Beginnings, the fruit of Courthial's Christian meditation, was written when he had passed his eightieth year as the *summa* of his lifelong reflection. The act of writing was always a source of suffering for Courthial, so great was his zeal to arrive at the synthetic precision of Scripture. His aim was to obtain a true *catholic* expression—complete "according to the whole of Scripture," in keeping with the ancient creeds, confessions, and formulations of Christian liturgy. He sought to recover the precision, clarity, balance, and beauty of Reformed and orthodox catholicity, proper to the biblical thought of the church of Jesus Christ. For him the task was always to gather, in a harmonious whole, the fullness of the conceptual meaning the acts of God's annals. This task encompassed creation and God's relation to mankind from the beginning to the end in the fulfillment of the kingdom of God: the new Jerusalem. For Courthial this was the subject matter of the whole Bible and of all history.

To compose such a synthetic narrative is in itself difficult, but Courthial seeks to go further. Every aspect of the Christian faith coheres. In his worship of God and his meditation on Scripture, the theologian must show the divine acts in their mutual complementarity. This is the reality of the faith as depicted by the Bible, advancing through the phases of the history of the world's salvation towards summits progressively more exalted. These successive mountains of God (following the Syrian poet-theologian Ephraim), first culminate in the cross established on the mountain of Zion, that earthly Jerusalem, where the prophets of old were killed and where the victory of Jesus Christ over evil and death and their first author, the devil, was accomplished.

This victory leads to the manifestation of the ultimate consequences of Christ's triumph on the cross, through the prophetic work of Jesus Christ —that of the law and the gospel—by the militant and triumphant witness of his faithful church to all peoples and nations of the earth. This is the church's manifestation of the victory of her Lord: her obedience of faith to all the law-word of God. Thus, the disciples of Jesus Christ were sent out by

the Holy Spirit in the world's providential history to gather in Christ's people. The Law-Gospel's prophetic witness of the church will put under the feet of our Lord—that is under the feet of the church, his body—all his enemies, this until the consummation of the age, the glorious manifestation of Jesus Christ accompanied by his saints. It is then, in a renewed heaven and earth where justice dwells, that his victorious people will dwell eternally in the very presence of God.

Courthial's purpose in *A New Day of Small Beginnings* is to gather together, as in a short theological and doctrinal *Summa*, written with the *symbolic* precision of the language of liturgy, the lines of the Bible's history of the world. We thus find ourselves in the presence of a truly *catholic* vision, that of the whole of Scripture, *tota Scriptura*, which includes in its vision the whole creation of the world and every aspect of the history of the church— both painful and victorious—in its pilgrimage. Thus, the divine purpose of God for his church culminates in the glorious transfiguration of all things in the heavenly Jerusalem that comes down from above. It is thus from the *catholicity*[3] of such a vision of God's work and his people's response that Courthial, faithful to the meaningful content of Scripture, seeks to gather it into the language of men; from the temporal and eternal majesty of God's victory over all the forces of evil stems the immense hope that animates Courthial's labors and thinking and life itself. God, in his immense grace and faithfulness, has given a doctor of the faith to his church to encourage his people to persevere in faith, hope, and love! What a wonderful gift this is in these times of generalized despair. For men, by their revolt against both gospel and law—and now also against the very order of God's creation

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[3]   Richard Paquier (1905–1985) here comes close to Courthial's vision of *catholicity*. "To have the spirit of *catholicity* is to desire to be complete and not unilateral, to live an integral and not truncated Christianity, universal and not sectarian. To be *catholic* is to affirm the fullness of God, the entirety of Scripture, the whole church and every aspect of the 'cosmos.' It is to believe in a transcendent *and* immanent God, Principle *and* Energy, in a God Three *and* One, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is to confess Christ as both God *and* Man and not merely the prophet, or the priest, the man or the God, the moral Model or the mystical Host of the soul, the Savior or the Judge. It is to acknowledge the Old Testament *and* the New Testament, the latter in its entirety: the Synoptics and John, Paul, and James. It is to be in communion with the church of every century, and not to make the history of the church begin with the Reformation, nor, on the contrary, causes the life of the church to cease at its medieval stage. It is to be in communion with the church on earth *and* with the church in heaven, with the church triumphant just as with the church militant. It is to realize in the sacraments and in the worship of the church the harmonious union of spirituality *and* corporeity, of the order of nature *and* that of the spirit, of this world here *and* of the next. *Catholicity is the attribute of a complete, total, integral Christianity.*" Richard Paquier, *Vers la catholicité évangélique*, Cahier 6 (Lausanne: Église et liturgie, 1935): 8. Pierre Courthial was a frequent speaker at the meetings of *Église et liturgie* in the canton of Vaud.

—persist by the hardening of both heart and mind in a relentless obstinacy to do evil and turn, in the wicked progress of their folly, against the merciful gospel of our Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

According to Courthial, the biblical theologian must gather together God's design, both multiple and one, into a single dogmatic sheaf. This explains the vital importance he assigns to the central dogma of *catholicity* that affirms that all things hold together in Jesus Christ in his Word alone. The attentive reader will discover how Courthial holds together the creeds of the ancient church, the confessions of the faith of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformation, the heritage of the church throughout history, and the prophetic perception of the present condition of the people of God under the overarching vault of the *catholicity* of holy Scripture. For Courthial, *catholicity* and *tota Scriptura* are joined in the doctrine of God's sovereign covenant of grace, by which heaven is joined to earth, and biblical revelation to the natural revelation of the created order to the providential history of mankind, a revelation at whose heart is found the redemption of the elect.

The compact and complex nature of *A New Day of Small Beginnings* makes the reading of this book, as Courthial well recognizes, a challenge. The writing seeks—and often achieves—the aim of standing so close to the content of the Bible's meaning that when one pulls a thread the others follow. One is constantly before truly *magisterial* exegesis of the biblical texts examined. It is Courthial's ardent and constant aim thus to obtain a complete and exact reading of Scripture that imposes on his writing a rigor at times both unbearable and exhilarating in its truth.

The first and second parts of *A New Day of Small Beginnings*, "The Ancient Order of the World" (the old covenant) and "The Turning of the Ages" (the first seventy years of our era), consist in what we call a biblical theology of an astonishing exegetical sureness. The third part, "The New Order of the World" (from the end of the apostolic period to the return of Christ in glory), presents us with an extraordinary summary of the covenantal history[4] of the church in the world. This is accompanied by a thorough presentation of what should be a contemporary defense of the faith, containing both the law and the gospel. Courthial here manifests clarity of perception and forceful expression. The titles of these three sections are in themselves very eloquent:

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[4]   On the universally valid principles of the biblical covenant.

1. The Genuinely Catholic Ecclesial Tradition (151)[5]
2. The Church Sick with Humanism (216)[6]
3. Humanism Defeated by the Law of God (251)[7]

This last section consists in a robust defense of the faith, whereby the Law-Word of Christ—"the testimony of Jesus [which] is the Spirit of Prophecy" (Rev 19:10)—confounds the errors of a world that calls itself "modern" while being the mere resurgence, on a worldwide scale, of those ancient heresies a thousand times refuted and that now are summed up by a new slogan: the cult of man by man.

This book, in a very dense and concentrated way, consists in three *Summae*: theological, historical, and apologetic: first a *Summa* of biblical theology according to the covenant of grace; next a *Summa* of the history of the church in light of this divine covenant; finally, a *Summa* of apologetics showing us how to apply the law-gospel of God both to the evils and to the challenges of our time.

We have an extraordinary expression of the classical Christian faith, orthodox, catholic: balanced, biblical, and complete.

This structure implies the careful scrutiny of the whole of Scripture read in the context both of the fullness of the created order and in that of all the providential history of mankind up to and including the present. Each of these aspects is held in a careful balance with the others, this always under the sovereign ordering authority of all Scripture. Thus,

— its symbolism balances the Bible's intrinsically doctrinal character;

— the fully historical character of the Bible cannot be separated from its intrinsically doctrinal aspect;

— the prior literal nature of the divine revelation cannot be opposed to its necessarily symbolic, typological, and prophetic character;

— the fully legal aspect of all Scripture is associated with the fullness of that grace of God that fills its every page.

For Courthial a proper catholic (that is complete) reading of Scripture holds these aspects to be fully complementary. This approach implies the application to the reading of the Bible and to the theology that issues from it, the conjugal principle: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mark 10:9). Each of the aspects of biblical reality we have just mentioned are presented in the framework of their universal

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[5]   From the fathers of the church to the fathers of the Reformation.

[6]   From the end of the age of faith to the tyranny of the Enlightenment.

[7]   The law-word of God, that is to say the covenant: the gospel and law, instruments of God for the victory of the church over all her enemies.

application, that of the covenant of both God's grace and his just judgments, the covenant that runs from the creation to the final advent when, on that last day, the old creation will be fully renewed. Such a vision enlightens for Courthial the entirely providential character of the biblical history of the world, a divine history that encompasses all the aspects of man's existence up to our present time and to what is still to come.

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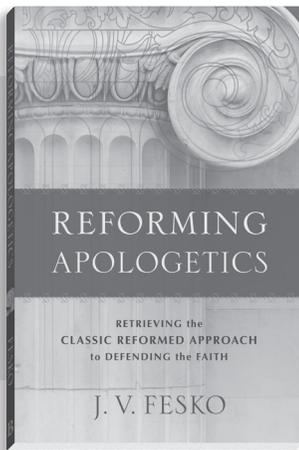
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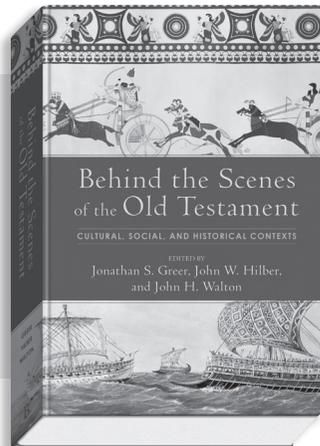
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Nida and the Model of Dynamic Equivalence, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2016), and *Wilhelm Vischer als Ausleger der Heiligen Schrift: Eine Untersuchung zum Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments* (*Wilhelm Vischer as Expositor of Holy Scripture: On the Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

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An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach (Zondervan, 2007); and *The Book of Proverbs*, NICOT, 2 vols. (Eerdmans, 2004, 2005).

Torah Scroll at the Westminster Library

Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and the editors of *Unio cum Christo* are delighted that Westminster's library has been blessed with the gift of a historic Torah scroll from the Larson family in Bonita Springs, Florida. The scroll is centuries old and was used in the worship of a Jewish synagogue for generations. After its long use, it was considered to be no longer kosher for worship, and it became available for collectors and non-Jewish people.

The story of how such a Torah scroll became available to Christian seminaries worldwide is remarkable indeed. Ken and Barbie Larson, a Christian business couple, realized some years ago as they traveled with accomplished theologians that most Christian scholars have never had the opportunity to see an actual Torah scroll. Thus, they had the vision of providing these classic texts of Jewish worship for Christian seminaries that teach Hebrew.

In God's providence, Westminster Seminary was selected and received the scroll just a year ago. It was dedicated along with teaching and preaching by our Old Testament faculty in the presence of a rabbinical authority and a Torah scholar who works with the Larson family.

The Larsons requested that the scroll be on public display to be used as a scholarly tool in the seminary. They also provided a seed grant for the creation of an appropriate display. With our librarians we determined that the main library was the most suitable place for this, and a designer was found for the display case. The seminary library is pleased to place this extraordinary gift of God's Word preserved on permanent display for scholarly use.

Display of the Torah scroll at the Westminster library.

Professors Jonathan Gibson (left) and Stephen Coleman (right) studying the Torah scroll.

Unio cum Christo, published jointly by Westminster and the International Reformed Evangelical Seminary of Jakarta, Indonesia, provided the rest of the funds needed to create the display. We include some pictures of the Torah scroll in this issue on Old Testament theology.

We are grateful to God for his providence in preserving the scroll, for his greater gift of the revelation of his Word, and for the generosity of the Larson family, as well as of the editorial staff of this journal. May God use it for generations to come to teach people of the great redeeming Lord of history, the I AM THAT I AM.

In his service,
Dr. Peter A. Lillback
President and senior editor of *Unio cum Christo*

CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR *UNIO CUM CHRISTO*

The editorial committee invites the submission of articles (7,000 words maximum including footnotes) for future issues of the journal. Articles should be rooted in the Reformed faith and its confessional texts, and aim to be informative, edifying, missional in perspective, and relevant to current challenges facing the Christian faith worldwide.

We would like to encourage theologians (including research students) and pastor-theologians, particularly from countries in the developing world, to submit articles on issues relevant to the role of Reformed theology in their national and cultural contexts, and also book reviews.

We would also be pleased to consider texts translated into English that have already been published in journals in other languages.

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Before submitting an article, contact Bernard Aubert (baubert@wts.edu) with a proposition of subject and an abstract (less than 200 words). Details concerning formal presentation will then be communicated to the author together with approval of the proposition (Guidelines of Style are available at uniocc.com/journal/guidelines).

Paul Wells
Editor in Chief

Subscription to *Unio cum Christo* can be done through the website **uniocc.com**. Older issues of the journal are archived and available on the site. Contributions are invited.