By Faith or by Knowledge: 
Mystery of Creation in Rabbinic Literature

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During the last half of the 20th century many scholars have recognized the differences between Hebrew and Greek thinking. The problem of the origin of this world serves as the best example that illustrates the clash between the Hellenistic and Jewish mentalities. Greek natural philosophers were the first physicists that attempted to resolve the problem of the origins of the universe. They attempted to search for the beginning of every matter and substance. Using their sophisticated creative thinking Greeks produced multiple hypotheses trying to describe and explain the origins of the visible world.

For example Thales (ca. 624-547 BC) believed that the beginning of everything was water. He taught that all things arose from water and will turn into water. A century later Heraclitus (ca. 530-470 BC) taught that the fire represents a primeval substance, from which all other things arise through thickening and dilution of the fire. The fundamental advancement in the Greeks’ worldview arose with the introduction of the concept of ‘matter.’ The founding fathers of the Ancient Greek atomistic

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1 For a detailed discussion see Thorief Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960).
2 Ferdinand Rosenberger, Geschichte der Physik in Grundzugen (Braunschweig: Vieweg und Sohn, 1882), 3.
theory Democritus (ca. 460-370 BC) and his teacher Leucippus defined matter as something preexistent that cannot be created or destroyed.4

In one way or another all these ideas of the Ancient Greek natural philosophers were summarized and developed by Aristotle (384-322 BC), who was the teacher of Alexander the Great responsible for the spread of Hellenism throughout the Ancient world.5 Aristotelian teaching about the movement presented in his work Physica became the starting point of the predominant worldview for more then fifteen centuries.6 One of the foundation postulates of the Aristotelian physics was a fear of emptiness, ‘horror vacui.’7 This concept stemmed from the controversy between Aristotle and his teacher Plato.8 Aristotle was definitely influenced by the early atomists who established the concept of absolute matter, which became preserved and perfected during the following centuries.

On the contrary, Hebrew thinking as represented in the works of the Biblical authors was never concerned with the issues that preoccupied the minds of the ancient Greek thinkers. The Biblical picture of creation significantly differs from either Aristotelian or Platonic worldviews.9 It is evident that the opening section of Genesis is not a scientific account of the actual process through which the universe originated.10 Judaism was virtually the only culture that resisted the encroachment of Hellenism. Therefore, the power of this movement can be seen in the degree to which it permeated Judaism.11 While from the outset

4 Spasskiy, 46.
8 Plato presented his views about the origins of the world in the tractate Timaeus. Unlike his teacher, Aristotle ‘is treating from a physical point of view what Plato deals with metaphysically.’ See R. D. Archer-Hind, The Timaeus of Plato (Cambridge University Press), 118.
9 Boman, 172-175.
11 Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 956. For the Christianity that sprang out of the first century, Judaic Hellenistic philosophy presented an even bigger threat. Unlike Judaism, Christianity was by definition opened to embrace all people who seek eternal life promised
Hellenistic thought on the matter of the origins of the world appears to be armed with strong arguments based on observation and philosophical reasoning. Judaism was able to fight back using some unconventional methods.

The goal of this paper is to present some examples of Rabbinic arguments and views in regards to the issue of Creation. The issues of our human ability to know and comprehend the universe, its origins and its inner structure lie at the heart of the ancient debates that existed between Jews and Hellenists during the first ten centuries of the Christian Era. The objective of this research is to investigate several passages from ancient rabbinic homilies that expound on Genesis 1 found in Midrash Genesis Rabbah. These old sermons provide unique perspectives on the interpretation of the Creation Story.

**Genesis Rabbah:**
**An Example of Rabbinic Exegesis and Homily**

The entire corpus of Rabbinic literature can be subdivided into two distinct genres: *aggadic* and *halakhic*. While *halakhic* literature deals with the legal issues in the life of the Jewish community and often does not have direct references to Scripture, the *aggadic* genre contains a strong component that focuses on the exposition of the Bible.

Early Judaic scholars believed that Genesis (Bereshit) Rabbah represents a compilation attributed to Rabbi Oshayah Rabbah that belonged to the first generation of the Palestinian Amoraim who flourished in the third century. Present scholarship holds the view that this Midrash was finally completed in the middle of the fifth century in the Byzantine period.

Genesis Rabbah offers some simple explanations of words and sentences, as well as short or elaborate *haggadic* interpretations and

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by YHWH through the blood of Jesus. That is why when the ideas of Christianity began to spread throughout the Hellenistic Roman Empire they encountered stiff intellectual resistance from all schools of Hellenistic thought.

12 From the Hebrew *halakha* which literally means ‘the way of walking.’


expositions often loosely tied to the text which are frequently interlaced with maxims and parables. The work is particularly characterized by the proems, which often represent citations from the homilies of a particular rabbinic authority possibly spoken at the synagogue during the exposition of the weekly torah portion on Sabbath. These proems (or petikhtot) do not directly expound on the corresponding phrase from the book of Genesis. Instead, they often take the verse from the Ketubim (Writings) and tie it with the pericope phrase from Genesis. Proems that elaborate on the same biblical phrase represent a part of a larger structural unit of the Homiletical Midrash called parasha\textsuperscript{15} whose pericope phrase represents the first words of the Torah אֵין בְּרֵאשֵׁית ‘in the beginning God created.’

Each parasha of Genesis Rabbah has a standard literary structure. It starts with the set of homiletical proems. The proems are followed by an aggadic discourse, which includes a parable or another type of commentary that specifically interprets the pericope text. In this study, we will consider several examples of proems and comments that represent a part of the first parasha of Genesis Rabbah\textsuperscript{16} that illustrate the tension between the Hellenism\textsuperscript{17} of the early centuries CE, and Rabbinic Judaism in the areas of creation, the Creator, and the human ability to know.

Genesis Rabbah 1:1

R. Oshaya opened his exposition thus: ולָאָז אֲנִי הָיוֹתָא פְּרֵיצָה מִזָּה מִזְרָךְ (amon). Then I was by Him, as a (amon); and I was delight every day (Prov. VIII, 30). . . . Another interpretation: (amon) is really (uman), a craftsman. In other words the Torah declares: ‘I was the

\textsuperscript{15} From the Hebrew root חֵשָׁנָה meaning ‘to interpret or to comment.’ Printed edition of Genesis Rabbah has 100 parashiyot, whereas different manuscripts contain between 97 and 101.

\textsuperscript{16} According to Theodor’s critical edition based on the Codex Add. 27169 of the British Museum.

\textsuperscript{17} Besides the Aristotelian world view the Hellenism of the early centuries CE presented itself with Gnostic and Neo-Platonic schools. Both of these groups drew their cosmogonies from Plato. The creator of the visible Cosmos Demiurge became a key figure in Gnosticism whereas the Universal Logos was the major component of Neo-Platonism. For a detailed description of the Jewish-Gnostic controversies see Alan Segal Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 244-259.
working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He.’ In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED (I,1), BEGINNING referring to the Torah, as in the verse, The Lord made me as the beginning of His way (Prov. VIII, 22).

The author of this homily selects a difficult passage from Proverbs 8 upon which to expound. The entire chapter elaborates on wisdom and ascribes personal qualities to it. Jewish tradition interprets the term ‘wisdom’ as the Torah. The verse used by R. Oshaya contains a difficult word, פֶּטֶיקְתָה מַשָּׁל. Petikhta provides several possible meanings of this word. The last one seems to be favored by the darshan (presacher) as he expounds on it. Personalized Torah, the apex of God’s revelation that contains eternal principles of His character and governance represents the ultimate source for God’s inspiration in His works of Creation.

While it is unrealistic to expect from the Rabbis of the third century any Christological interpretation of Proverbs 8, the first words of the Gospel of John in the light of this homily could be viewed with a slightly different emphasis. Especially the ambiguous words of vs. 3 ‘πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδέ ἐν δὲ γέγονεν’ (all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made), where the pronoun αὐτοῦ refers back to λόγος from vs. 1.

Even though a detailed analysis and dating of the Jewish interpretative tradition is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to indicate that the rabbinic view of the personalized Torah as a foundation of the world definitely dates back much earlier than the words spoken by Oshaya Rabbah, who quotes it from an anonymous source. It is very plausible to suggest that the Johanite logos could well have come from the Jewish understanding of the personalized Torah, that became flesh in the person of Jesus from Nazareth, rather than the.

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18 Besides this passage it occurs only in Jeremiah 52:15. Many English translations such as the NIV and NASB adopted a traditional Jewish interpretation of this noun as found in Gen. Rabbah.
Platonic impersonal transcendent LOGOS that decided to personify itself by coming down from its inaccessible state of emanation.

The first proem of Genesis Rabbah 1 sets up the stage for the crucial debate between the Hellenistic and Hebraic trends of thought. From the very beginning of its commentary on the Creation story found in the Torah, the editors of Genesis Rabbah strive to instill within their readers an understanding of the Creator as a Person. This was definitely done in order to counteract the influence of the Hellenistic Neo-Platonic understanding of the Creator that the Jews of the Diaspora were exposed to in their every day interactions.

Genesis Rabbah 1:5
R. Huna in the name of Bar Kappara commenced with the words from Ps 31:19 "Let the lying lips (te’elamnah)." This means let them be bound, made dumb and silenced... Let them be silenced means “Which (‘tak) against the righteous” in a sense of the Righteous One, the Life of The Universe. Who (he’tik, concealed) from His creatures, so that they would not speak in their pride ‘I discourse on the issues of ma’aseh bereshith, Creation Story.’

The compiler of the Midrash presents a proem spoken by another rabbinic authority, who ties Gen.1:1 with the words of Ps. 31:19. Without a complete analysis of the complex exegetical technique involving both Hebrew and Aramaic word plays, it will suffice to note Bar Kappara, who represents an early generation of the Rabbis in his exposition, sharing a definite example of the Hebraic principle of silence. That is why he chose this passage which mentions lying lips. These lips misrepresent the Story of Creation by attempting to elaborate on what is hidden by God, Himself. In other words, rabbinic thought views Creation as a mystery that cannot be comprehended beyond what is written in divine revelation.

However, a position is also held by so-called classical Judaism. In his proem Bar Kappara mentions הפקת הamburger (ma’aseh bereshith). He does not mean just a creation story. In mystical Judaism הפקת הamburger

19 See J. Doukhan, Hebrew for Theologians (University of America Press, 1993).
(ma’aseh bereshith) represents a kabbalistic theme which is discussed only by the ones who were granted access to the hidden meaning of the Torah. Mystics of (ma’aseh bereshith) are systematically presented in the book Sefer Yetzirah. This short 2500 word work consists of six chapters and rarely quotes any texts from Scripture. The author of this book introduces ten sefirot (a derivative from Hebrew letters) that compose the foundation of the Universe. According to Gershom Sholem, Ten Sefirot and Thirty-two Mystical Paths of Wisdom mentioned in Sefer Yetzirah 1:1 represents nothing but a reworked and ‘Hebraized’ Neo-Platonist philosophical view of the triads.

It appears that the fascination with the usage of mystics in order to uncover the mystery of creation existed among the Jews even during the early rabbinic period. Unfortunately, these mystical esoteric trends slowly gained ground in Judaism during the Middle Ages. Fueled by the Hellenistic mentality they become a source of what is known today as kabbalah, which in essence represents the apostasy from the core principles and values outlined in the Torah. This is why in the body of the parashah a discourse about Hebrew letters presents an alternative position to the concept of sefirot.

**Genesis Rabbah 1:10**

Rabbi Yonah spoke in the name of R. Levi “Why is it the world was created with letter ב? Only because letter ב is closed from all sides and opened only from the front, so you do not have permission to speak about what is below and what is above; what is before or what is behind–only from the day, on which the world was created and onwards.

Bar Kappara having quoted from Deuteronomy 4:32 ‘Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that

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21 According to Saadia (Xth-century Jewish commentator), the book belongs to the Patriarch Abraham. Scholarship is divided on the matter of the dating of the book. While Lazarus Goldsmidt dates it to 100 BC, Leopold Zunz and Heinrich Graetz date it to 800-900 CE.

God created man on the earth’, said ‘about the days that were created you may enquire but you may not enquire on what was before.’ ‘And from one end of the heavens to the other’ you may enquire and investigate but you may not investigate what was before that.

Another interpretation.

Why is it the world was created with letter 2? Only because letter 2 has two projecting points, one is pointing upward and another is pointing backward. So when we ask who created you, it will point with its projecting point upward saying ‘from above He created me.’ And to the question ‘what is his name?’ it will point them with its other projecting point backward saying ‘His name is Adonai.’

Rabbi Eliezer bar Hanina in the name of R. Aha “Twenty six generations of א plead before the throne of the Holy One Blessed Be He and said to Him ‘Sovereign of the Universe I am the first letter of the alphabet but You did not create the world without me!’ Holy One Blessed Be He answered to her ‘The Universe and everything in it were not created without the merits of the Torah for the Scripture says ‘The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens’ (Prov. 3:19).

This discourse that contains rabbinic sermons and a parable definitely reflects the trend that already existed in early rabbinic Judaism. Jewish tradition has four levels of interpretation of the Torah: pshat, remez, drash and sod. While the first three levels deal with the text of the Scripture, the fourth one seeks the hidden meaning of the biblical text employing numerical values of the Hebrew letters. The agenda of the compiler of Genesis Rabbah is clear. There is no place for the secret meanings of the text beyond what is revealed by the Almighty, Himself. While the Rabbis quoted in the parable do not explicitly use the word ‘faith,’ it is definitely implied here. This is why the letter א with its rear projecting point does point back to the letter נ, which is the first letter in the word נָנייָהוּ.

The homilies presented in Genesis Rabbah 1 clearly indicate that the influence of Hellenism on the interpretation of the Torah was the main concern of the Rabbis. These homilies definitely were spoken in the synagogues of Palestine and throughout the Byzantine Empire. It appears that in spite of the emergence of Christianity, Greek philosophy presented a major threat to the Jewish mind. In fact, throughout the
entire collection of the aggadic midrashim only a few instances of the debates with the Christians are recorded, whereas debates between rabbis and philosophers occur in every single parasha.

Genesis Rabbah 1:9
One philosopher asked Rabban Gamliel, “God is a great artist but he surely found good materials, which assisted Him, such as Tohu Va-Bohu, darkness, wind and abyss.” Rabban Gamliel replied, “This man has decaying spirit. All these words refer to the Creation from nothing. About TOHU VA-BOHU the Scripture teaches “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing peace and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these” (Isa 45:7). About water the Bible teaches ‘Praise Him, highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens!’ (Ps 148:4); and about the wind ‘For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind’ (Amos 4:13); and about the abyss ‘When there were no depths I was brought forth’ (Prov 8:24).

It is definitely a staged debate between the Teacher of Paul and so called philosophers who attempted to interpret the Scripture using the philosophical categories. This philosopher here communicates to Rabban Gamliel the typical Hellenistic view of the world that can be traced back as far as Thales of Miletos, to whom Aristotel refers in his Metaphysics.

“That from which is everything that exists (ἐπίσταντα τὰ ὄντα) and from which it first becomes (ἐξ ὰ γίνεσθαι πρὸ τοῦ) and into which it is rendered at last (εἰς δὴ φθείρεται τέλευτα οὗ), its substance remaining under it (τὸς ὃς μὲν οὐσίας ὑπομενούσης), but transforming in qualities (τὸς δὲ πάθεις μεταβάλλοσθέν), that they say is the element (στοιχεῖον οὗ) and principle (ἀρχήν) of things that are. For it is necessary that there be some nature (φύσις), either one or more than one, from which become the other things of the object being saved.”

In other words, in the mind of Aristotle nothing comes out of nothing. It was Aristotle who authored the concept of ‘matter’ that until these days remains a fundamental component of every scientific discourse.
For the Rabbis cited in Genesis Rabbah, this concept was not acceptable. In spite of the Christianization of the Roman empire, Hellenism during the Byzantine period had been a source of significant concern for the Jewish community. The Jerusalem Talmud written during the 4th century in Byzantine Palestine cites an interesting statement of Rabbi Joshua who lived at the beginning of the second century. When R. Joshua was asked, ‘May a man teach his son Greek?’ he replied, ‘He may teach it to him at a time that is neither day nor night, for it is said, Though shalt meditate (on the Torah) day and night’ (Hosh 1:8), (Pea 1:1).

Philosophy was definitely viewed by the Rabbis as something that is not compatible with the study of the Torah. The philosopher in this story suggests to Rabban Gamaliel that he has found scriptural justification for the Hellenistic philosophical concept. God, in his words, also had some materials with which to work. In fact he sees tohu va-bohu as a pre-mieval chaos from which, according to the Greek view, everything has originated. Gamaliel, based on the Scripture, clearly points out to the philosopher that Judaism and Hellenism work in absolutely different frames of reference and therefore scriptural philosophical categories can never be reconciled with Hellenistic philosophical categories.

Conclusions

Current debates between creationists and evolutionists did not start with Darwin’s theory. The questions about our human ability to know and comprehend our world, its origins and its inner structure lie at the heart of the ancient debate that existed between the Rabbis and the Hellenists during the first ten centuries of the Christian Era. From Thales of Miletus and Aristotle with their concept of the original substance-matter, to Neo-Platonistic impersonal Logos, Hellenism has influenced human thinking with the idea that everything in the universe can be and should be understood. These Hellenistic ideas have been at the core of the Dialectical Materialism and Cartesianism that in turn served as a philosophical foundation for the conclusions and interpretations made by Darwin and his followers.

It is clear that philosophy represents the ultimate tool for the interpretation of scientific data. However, over the centuries philosophy became the tool that traditional Christianity also uses for the interpretation of the Scripture. For this reason traditional Christianity is
often unable to effectively defend its principles in the context of the faith-science debate. Having imposed Hellenistic philosophical concepts upon the Biblical principles, traditional Christianity considers faith as a vice rather than a virtue, thus surrendering to modern claims about the inferiority of the faith approach.

While the examples of the homilies presented above may look exegetically primitive, the agenda of rabbinic preachers during the Roman period is clear. They demonstrate an internal struggle within emerging rabbinic Judaism over the issue of the usage of philosophy in the interpretation of the Scripture. Genesis Rabbah definitely represents the anti-philosophical camp. In the minds of the rabbis cited by Genesis Rabbah there is no common ground between Hellenism and Scripture and there is no place for philosophical curiosity in the fundamental issues of creation. Humans must accept the revelation of God as is and avoid inquiries about what is not revealed. By making such statements rabbis make open admission that faith in divine revelation represents the core of their biblical interpretation.

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From the early days of the Second Advent Movement, Adventists were firm believers in the Creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3; this text provided a foundation for their conviction that Christians should observe the Sabbath day. As a matter of fact, Adventists regarded the Creation account as “the reason why God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, because ‘in it he had rested from all his work which GOD had created and made.’”

As the Second Advent Movement progressed and the brethren worked to spread the message by various means, one particular publication became the official publication of the movement: The Adventist Review and the Sabbath Herald. From August 15 to December 19 of 1854, despite concerns about not establishing any creed beyond the Bible, “a list of five leading doctrines was published in the masthead of the Review and Herald.”

Adventism grew and new biblical truths were uncovered. In 1872, a pamphlet was printed entitled A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists. It contained 25 unsigned

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propositions that provided a broader picture of what the church, as a body of believers, accepted as its doctrinal teachings. This was later published in the *Signs of the Times* on June 4, 1874, under the title “Fundamental Principles.”³ It placed more emphasis on God as the Creator of all things, but still made no explicit statement establishing the Creation doctrine as a fundamental principle of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁴ This particular list was never printed in the *Yearbook* or the *Church Manual*.

“In the 1889 *Yearbook* of the denomination, which was a larger volume than usual, containing general information about the church and its activities, these ‘Fundamental Principles’ were included in a slightly revised and expanded form in Twenty-eight sections (pp. 147–151). This was not continued in subsequent issues, but it was inserted again in the *Yearbook* in 1905 and continued to appear through 1914.”⁵ The same 28 statements appeared again in the *Review and Herald* in 1912 and remained as the official fundamental principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church until 1931.⁶ Notice, however, that even in this expanded list of fundamental principles, no specific statement related to the doctrine of Creation appears, but in the first fundamental principle, which deals with God’s attributes, God is referred to as the Creator of all things.

The title “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” appeared for the first time in the history of Adventism in the 1931 *Yearbook*, and in 1932 it was also printed in the *Church Manual*.⁷ That version contained 22 articles “prepared by a committee of four, including the General Conference president and the editor of the *Review and Herald*.”⁸ In this version, the statement on the observance of the Sabbath—the seventh fundamental belief—included the words “memorial of Creation,” making the concept of Creation more evident than its previous versions. Nevertheless, that was as far as it went, and despite much controversy around the world over the issue of origins, no specific statement
about Creation was added and this version remained the official statement of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs until 1980.9

27 Fundamental Beliefs and Their Origin

For almost 50 years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church endorsed those 22 articles of fundamental beliefs, publishing them in the *Yearbook* and *Church Manual* with only minor revisions. Then, on April 25, 1980, the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists in session took a vote on what became known as the Twenty-Seven Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, also referred to as “a summary of the principle features of Adventist beliefs.”10

This was the first formulated set of fundamental beliefs to include an explicit statement on Creation. It was inserted into the fundamental beliefs statement during major revisions that included the addition of seven new articles, including “paragraphs on angels, Creation and the fall, the church, unity in the body of Christ, the Lord’s supper, Christian marriage, and the Christian home and education.”11

Since the focus of this research is the development of the statement on Creation, it is crucial to be aware that the statement as it reads today on the General Conference website and in the *Church Manual* is the result of an extensive rewriting process that completely transformed the original statement proposed by B. E. Seton, which was approved by the General Conference Ad Hoc Committee and then sent to Andrews University for input from a group of theologians.12

The result of the work done by that group of theologians was published in an earlier version by the *Adventist Review* on February 21, 1980. There, the sixth fundamental belief reads:

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11 W. Duncan Eva, to X–1535 Church Manual Revision—“Fundamental Beliefs,” Members of ad hoc committee, August 10, 1979. W. Duncan Eva Collection, Office of Archives & Statistics, Silver Spring, MD. Note that an article on “Angels” was never voted as part of the final statement approved on the GC Session of 1980.
That God, through Christ and by the power of His Spirit, is creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the only authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made “the heavens and the earth” and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6-9; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16, 17.)

The statement published in the *Adventist Review* on February 21, 1980 was “the first revised draft of the statement [which] was circulated among a group of theologians for their input.” In light of this latter allegation, some important questions arise and must be addressed. First, why did the Seventh-day Adventist Church feel the need to include a statement on Creation in its fundamental beliefs? Second, who were the key Seventh-day Adventist authors, and how did they contribute to the formulation of the statement on Creation? Third, what was the process used by the General Conference to prepare the new statement on the fundamental beliefs, and who were the key individuals involved in that process? Fourth, did the original X-1535 statement on Creation proposed by the Ad Hoc Committee and sent to Andrews University differ from what was published in February 1980 in the *Adventist Review*? Fifth, what was the contribution by the Andrews’ scholars to the final statement on Creation? In the next section, I will elaborate on these questions; the complexity of these questions requires that they be approached carefully.

Why a Statement on Creation?

The period in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged was one of extreme importance. The year 1844 entered the annals of world history not only as the year of the Great Disappointment, but also as the year when Charles

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Darwin published *The Origin*, also known as the 1844 Sketch, which became *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859.\textsuperscript{15}

In order to gain a full understanding of the nuances of the Creation vs. evolution debate, one must take the Great Controversy as the most basic presupposition. When looked at through the frame of the Great Controversy, these two major historical events can be seen as portraying two opposite ideals: the first as the work of God in history seeking to bring the human race back to the study and understanding of the Bible by the use of Sola, Tota, and Prima Scriptura, and the second as the work of another entity seeking to lead the human race away from the Bible and toward a humanistic understanding of all things.\textsuperscript{16} This is not linked exclusively to the works of Charles Darwin, but also to the works throughout history that served as a foundation for the development of Darwin’s work on origins.\textsuperscript{17} Hence, the biblical teaching of Creation came


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under severe attack, leading many individuals and institutions to renounce their trust in the biblical chronicle of origins.18

During the 136 years from 1844 until 1980, the very foundation of the Bible was under worldwide attack. Seventh-day Adventists were well aware of the discussions taking place in other institutions around the world, especially those in the educational realm, and they stood up to defend the biblical teachings on origins through the writings of Ellen G. White and many books and articles published by other authors.19

Even more emphatic, perhaps, was the appeal of the retiring president of the General Conference, who was very familiar with the growing issues related to origins among Seventh-day Adventists. In his speech presented to the Annual Council on October 12, 1978, Pierson stressed:

Already, brethren and sisters, there are subtle forces that are beginning to stir. Regrettably there are those in the church who belittle the inspiration of the total Bible, who scorn the first 11 chapters of Genesis, who question the Spirit of Prophecy’s short chronology of the age of the earth, and who subtly and not so subtly attack the Spirit of Prophecy. There are some who point to the reformers and contemporary theologians as a source and the norm for Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. There are those who allegedly are tired of the hackneyed phrases of Adventism. There are those who wish to forget the standards of the church we love. There are those who covet and would court the favor of the evangelicals; those who would throw off the mantle of a peculiar people; and those who would go the way of the secular, materialistic world.

Fellow leaders, beloved brethren and sisters—don’t let it happen! I appeal to you as earnestly as I know how this morning—don’t let it happen! I appeal to Andrews University, to the Seminary, to Loma Linda University—

18 Schleiermacher and Lücke, On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke.
don’t let it happen! We are not Seventh-day Anglicans, not Seventh-day Lutherans—we are Seventh-day Adventists! This is God’s last church with God’s last message.  

Pierson’s statement complied with the history of Seventh-day Adventists and provided the ultimate reason for the formulation of a statement on Creation.

**Standing In Defense of God**

One of the first to raise his voice in defense of God’s Word in the matter was Elder W. H. Littlejohn, who in 1884 published a small but significant article in the *Review and Herald* complimenting the faculty of Battle Creek College for their transparent and solid position regarding origins. Littlejohn stressed that “[t]heoretically, all of the professors of the College are not only professors of religion themselves, but they are also firm believers in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and interpret them in harmony with their most literal and obvious sense.”

Littlejohn also emphasized the contrast between the recently formed Seventh-day Adventist college and other educational institutions, where it became “confessedly true that the leaven of evolutionism had entered largely into the theories of many of the college professors of [that] time, and that many of them openly avow and publicly teach doctrines in harmony with what is styled the ‘higher criticism.’”

Another record presenting Seventh-day Adventists as active participants in the Creation vs. evolution debate appeared in the *Review and Herald* in 1887. In that volume, an unsigned article quoted a “Prof. Virchow, of Germany, [speaking] before the congress of scientists at Wiesbaden,” who categorically expressed his disapproval of the Darwinian theory by affirming that

the Darwinian doctrine of the transmutation of species and of mechanical evolution, the theories upon which it is now sought to construct so much science and a great deal of morality, and which it has become very unpopular, if not a sign of dense ignorance, to doubt, are fundamentally false, unscientific, and impossible; and that science can no longer afford to move

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21 Littlejohn, “The Battle Creek College: What it is Not, and What it is,” 51.
22 Ibid.
along a line which seeks to construct its phenomena upon imaginary and impossible bases.\textsuperscript{23}

A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner wrote extensively on the issue of evolution, making significant contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist body of work on the subject.\textsuperscript{24} Other key figures from the early twentieth century include William W. Prescott, J. N. Andrews, and William H. Branson. None of them, however, despite their valuable contributions, would impact the Christian world as much as George McCready Price, recognized by some scholars as “the chief architect of the flood geology or scientific Creation.”\textsuperscript{25}

\section*{Who Was George McCready Price?}

To describe the life of a giant of the Christian faith in just a few paragraphs is an impossible task. Professor Price’s sixty-plus years of publication and teaching are certainly a subject to be analyzed in a much longer document; however, this paper will give a brief overview of his life and some of his published work, and discuss his theological ideas in an attempt to verify his claims in favor of the integrity of the biblical text regarding the Creation and flood.

Born in New Brunswick, Canada on August 26, 1870, the author and educator George McCready Price became a Seventh-day Adventist in his early years. Price was a dedicated member of the church, and served initially as a colporteur, but would later become the most important writer in Creationism until the mid-twentieth century. The author of many books and articles, Price dedicated his life to the literal interpretation of the Bible and the advancement of the so-called flood geology or scientific Creation. In the scholarly world, George McCready Price is seen and quoted with the highest respect. Henry M. Morris, in \textit{History of Modern Creationism}, stresses the importance of Price’s “tremendous breadth of knowledge in science and Scripture, his careful logic,
and his beautiful writing style [which] made a profound impression on me when I first began studying these great themes. . . .”

Although George McCready Price started his work without any formal education, he received a B.A. from Loma Linda College in 1912 and “carried membership in both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the California Academy of Science.”

During his long career as a professor at different Adventist colleges and an active advocate of scientific Creation, Price earned the respect of many scholars of his time and future generations. His 92 years of life were a major contribution to the cause of biblical literality and a clearer understanding of the Creation account and universal flood.

In his early twenties, Professor Price took charge of a school in the village of Tracadie, Canada and became acquainted with the evolutionary theory by reading many books on the subject, which were offered by “Dr. Smith, the medical superintendent of the [local] hospital.” After a few years of incessant reading, Price had collected enough information to allow for a first publication, which was the beginning of Price’s long crusade for Creationism. Price noted the impact of the work of Sir Charles Lyell, James Hutton, and Charles Darwin in the Christian academic world and how it caused Christians to try to harmonize the Bible with geological discoveries by adopting theories such as that God creates through the evolutionary process.

For George McCready Price, the biblical text was not to be modified or compromised to fit modern ideas. As Harold W. Clark puts it:

Price’s *Outlines of Modern Science*, in contrast with all this, was an effort, as he put it, to get back to primitive Christian principles without any compromise. He said: “A reform and a return to these primitive principles is the next thing in order for everyone who wishes to get his bearings toward the present day problems of either politics or science.”

29 Ibid., 17.
It is fair to suggest that “Price could well be called the father of the twentieth-century Creationist movement.” Such affirmation comes as a reward for Price’s loyalty to the Bible, added to his knowledge of geology, Scripture, and Spirit of Prophecy, which served as the foundation for his theology.

Appeal From a General Conference Official

When the stage was set and the Seventh-day Adventist Church was moving forward in preparing a statement on Creation to be incorporated into its fundamental beliefs, W. J. Hackett, vice president of the General Conference at that time, published a significant guest editorial in the Review stressing the importance of maintaining the course set for the church leaders by those who preceded them. Hackett was aware of the challenges faced by the church, and he advised:

Areas to be explored are those concerning the church’s positions that have been challenged. Some fall in the area of science and include topics such as a literal, seven-day Creation, a universal Flood, and the age of life on the earth. A clear definition here will enable teachers of science in our schools clearly to present to inquiring young minds the church’s position.

Although the process of formulating the statement on Creation was democratic and well documented, did the final result achieve the clarity suggested by Hackett and the Ad Hoc Committee?

Formulating a Statement on Creation

In the subsequent discussion, it should be noted that all the events presented in this section are documented in the archives of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, MD. It is my goal to present only facts that I have found in those historical documents and other documents found on the GC Archives website, in books, and in various magazine articles. Although my personal views may differ from some of those voiced during the events surrounding the 1980 statement on Creation, I have endeavored to be balanced in my portrayal of the historical record.

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30 Raoul Dederen, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Commentary reference series v. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 12:450.
Although some discussion may have taken place earlier, the concentrated effort to prepare a statement on Creation started officially on June 8, 1978, when the General Conference Committee voted to appoint an Ad Hoc Creation and Revelation Statements Editing Committee. The members of that committee were “W. Duncan Eva (Chairman); G. M. Hyde (Secretary), Milo Anderson, Roger Coon, Raoul Dederen, Richard Fearing, W. J. Hackett, Richard Hammill, Frank Holbrook, Warren H. Johns, Alf Lohne, James Londis, Robert W. Olson, Jack Provonsha, Ariel Roth, Cree Sandefur, William C. Jr. Scales, G. Ralph Thompson, Mervyn Warren, K. H. Wood, and E. E. Zinke.”

The work of the Ad Hoc Committee was done mainly by correspondence. In my research, I found that over the next 10 months—from June 1978 until August 1979—the members of the Ad Hoc Committee exchanged numerous letters as they sought to prepare a statement on Creation that accurately reflected the Seventh-day Adventist position on a recent, literal six-day Creation.

Based on denominational minutes dated September 8, 1978, it seems accurate to suggest that an initial document containing a tentative statement on Creation had been prepared and presented to the X-1535 Church Manual Committee prior to that date. On that occasion, “[t]he chairman shared copies of B. E. Seton’s comments and suggestions regarding the Fundamental Beliefs section of the Church Manual. Members of the committee were urged to give careful study to the suggested revisions and to make notes.” One of Seton’s comments pointed out the inadequacy of that very first statement on Creation. In February 1979, after about five months of work, “a tentative revision of the ‘Fundamental Beliefs’ as prepared by B. E. Seton” was brought to the X-1535 Committee, where the chairman of that committee “stressed the need for a clearer statement concerning Creation.”

As a result of the concerns raised by B. E. Seton, in a more concentrated effort to develop the statement on Creation, the X-1535 Committee voted “to ask

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32 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Committee, meeting of 8 June 1978.
33 Ibid.
34 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the (X-1535) Church Manual Committee, meeting of 8 September 1978.
35 Ibid.
36 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the (X-1535) Church Manual Committee, 14-15 February 1979, meeting of 14 February 1979.
W. J. Hackett, R. Hammill and B. E. Seton to form a subcommittee for the formulation of a statement on the doctrine of Creation; also voting to have B. E. Seton serving as the secretary of the full subcommittee. By the end of the next day, the X-1535 Church Manual Revision Committee—Fundamental Beliefs had approved a tentative statement on Creation. Document 1 shows the final paragraph of the minutes of that meeting.

Although no biblical references were provided at that stage, it is extremely important to note the appearance of some specific words in the statement, such as “reliable chronicle of the creation of the world,” “In six literal, consecutive days God created the world,” and finally “world-wide Noachian flood.” The reader can readily capture the concept of biblical literalism in this statement, and although the statement would later undergo massive revisions and editorial work, it reflected a response in the right direction to Hackett’s article inviting the church leaders of those days to “preserve the landmarks” of biblical historicity.

The subcommittee continued working to improve the statement on Creation so that it would be ready before the session of the General Conference in April of 1980. On March 4, 1979, B. E. Seton provided the X-1535 Committee with new revisions to the statement. Documents 2 and 3 show the full statement being

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37 Ibid.
38 Hackett, 2.
Some of the improvements in this last revision presented a more solid biblical foundation, as seen in the meeting of the X-1535 Committee on April 9 and 10 of 1979. They included an allusion to the Trinity, a specific reference to Satan as the originator of sin, and a reference to the Garden of Eden, indicating a literal interpretation of the Bible that was frequently observed by other Christian denominations.40

Satisfied with the progress achieved up to that point, on July 23, 1979, the X-1535 Church Manual Revision Committee–Fundamental Beliefs agreed that the chairman [W. Duncan Eva] should approach Andrews University with a view to arranging a meeting with solicited members of the Theological Faculty to obtain their input on the revised fundamental beliefs as prepared by this committee. It was therefore suggested that Elders W. D. Eva, W. J. Hackett and Dr. R. Hammill meet with theologians on a convenient date on the Andrews University campus.41


40 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the (X-1535) Church Manual Committee, 9-10 April 1979, meeting of 9April 1979.

41 Ibid. A brief reference to this event can be found at Encyclopedia.
Document 2-Full Suggestive Statement on Creation During Formulation Procedures

Suggestion for Statement of Belief on CREATION

That God, with Christ and the Holy Spirit, is the Creator of all things. He spoke into existence the world, and all living creatures upon it with their supporting environment in six literal consecutive days; then instituted the seventh-day Sabbath as the perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. Through Christ, God will eradicate sin and its results from the universe and restore the pristine perfection of His creation in a new heavens and a new earth at the close of human history. Gen. 1:1-26; Ps. 51:6,7.

L E Seton 3. 4. 79

Document 3-Alteration Suggested to the Portion Between the Brackets

Man was originally created in the image of God, but his fall into sin in response to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden, resulted in the progressive defacement of that image. It also resulted in the marring of God's handiwork in creation, particularly as a consequence of the worldwide Noahian flood in the days of Noah.
After all the work put into the formulation of a Seventh-day Adventist statement of Creation, this single move would soon take W. J. Hackett’s appeal to “preserve the landmarks” of biblical history and turn to its complete opposite, undermining all those landmarks.

With the important task ahead of having the final proposed statement of fundamental beliefs analyzed by the church’s top theologians, the X–1535 Committee prepared a three-column document to be mailed to reviewers of the statement. The first column included the 22 articles that had been printed in the *Church Manual* since 1932; the second column showed all the alterations to that version and the new articles; and finally, the third column showed the revised fundamental belief statement, although it did not include the articles being added to the statement. W. Duncan Eva mailed copies of this document to Andrews University and to a group of church leaders on August 10, 1979.42

For many years, researchers tried to locate this three-column document without success. Those interested in locating it believed that the statement on Creation originally prepared by the X–1535 Committee was more specific from a biblical point of view and more clearly reflected the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Creation. But the document would not be easy to locate.

**Searching for the Three-Column Document**

At the beginning of my research, I used all the sources readily available: the Internet, including the GC Archives website; the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University; and direct personal contact with professors at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Although these sources all contributed enormously in one way or another, the most fruitful step in this study was the research I conducted in person on March 15-17, 2010 at the Archives of the General Conference.

Mr. Bert Haloviak, Director of the Archives and Statistics of the General Conference, kindly granted me permission to access the Archives. Mr. Peter Chiomenti, Assisting Director of the Archives, separated all the material available on the history of the fundamental belief statement of 1980. Accompanied by my two young sons, Matheus and Gabriel, who were going to serve as my “research assistants” and run the scanner, I arrived in the office of

42 W. Duncan Eva, to X-1535 Church Manual Revision—“Fundamental Beliefs” Members of ad hoc committee, August 10, 1979. W. Duncan Eva Collection, Office of Archives & Statistics, Silver Springs, MD.
Archives and Statistics to find eight storage boxes filled with material on the fundamental beliefs, including the personal files of W. Duncan Eva.

On my second day of research I located the three-column document sent by the X–1535 Committee to Andrews University. As Dr. Lawrence Geraty correctly pointed out, the three-column document had a cover letter stating, “At this stage this document is confidential and intended only for those to whom it is sent. It may not be copied or duplicated in any way.”

The differences between the 1980 statement on Creation and the one originally prepared by the X-1535 Committee are significant. Document 4 shows the statement proposed by the X-1535 Committee that was sent to Andrews University on August 10, 1979.

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7. Creation and the Fall

That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the creation of the world, and that God, with Christ and the Holy Spirit, is Creator of all things. In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things upon it with their supporting environment. The Lord then established the seventh day as the Sabbath, a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. Man was originally created in the image of God, but his fall into sin in response to Satan’s temptation in the Garden of Eden resulted in the progressive defacement of that image. It also led to marred God’s handiwork in creation and to the worldwide flood in the days of Noah. Through Christ, God will eradicate sin and its results from the universe and at the close of human history restore the pristine perfection of His creation in a new heavens and a new earth. (Gen. 1:1-26; Ps. 33:6-9; Gen. 3:1-24; Ex. 20:8-11; Gen. 6:8; Rev. 21:1-2)
A parallel comparison of the Ad-hoc proposed X-1535 statement on Creation and the actual voted statement on Creation in the April 25, 1980 at General Conference session reveals that the X-1535 underwent complete revision by the “committee of twelve,” as Geraty acknowledges.45

<table>
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<tr>
<th>X-1535 Proposal Statement on Creation Sent to Andrews University46</th>
<th>Statement on Creation Returned From Andrews University47</th>
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<tr>
<td>That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world, and that God [the Father], with Christ and the Holy Spirit, is Creator of all things. In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things upon it with their supporting environment. The Lord then established the seventh day as the Sabbath, a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. Man was originally created in the image of God, but his fall into sin in response to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden resulted in the progressive defacement of that image. It also led to marred God's handiwork in Creation and to the worldwide flood in the days of Noah. Through Christ, God will eradicate sin and its results from the universe and at the close of human history restore the pristine perfection of His Creation in a new heavens and a new earth (Gen 1:1-26; Ps 33:6-9; Gen 3:1-24; Exo 20:8-11; Gen 6-8; Rev 21:1-7).</td>
<td>God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made &quot;the heaven and the earth&quot; and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was &quot;very good,&quot; declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1: 1; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)</td>
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45 Geraty, 5.
46 Eva, “Proposal for the 1980 Statement on Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.” See Appendix A and B.
47 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Church Manual (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 33.
According to Dr. Fritz Guy, who was also a member of the “committee of twelve” at Andrews University—who served as its secretary—Dr. Lawrence Geraty drafted the completely new statement on Creation. As can be observed, some important words that were serving as agents of specificity, were eliminated from the new formulated statement.

For instance, the clause “That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world” worked as an agent of specificity. The use of the term “chronicle” clarifies that Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as historically trustworthy. Another agent of specificity was the clause “In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things.” The term “literal” indicates that Seventh-day Adventists accept the concept that each day, evening and morning, found in the Mosaic account of Creation describes a period of 24 hours and therefore a historical day. This also provides solid support of their belief in the Sabbath day as the “perpetual memorial of His completed creative work.” Finally, of extreme significance were the words, “It also led to marring God’s handiwork in Creation and to the worldwide flood in the days of Noah,” which would ultimately testify to the world that Seventh-day Adventists endorse the biblical version of the Creation events, including that short chronology of the history of this planet and that a global flood necessarily links to these events. Understandably, the reader may now ask: Why were these agents of specificity left out of the new statement on Creation? Furthermore, is the current statement on Creation clearly representing mainline Seventh-day Adventists regarding origins? Since these questions are too important to simply be ignored, we shall turn to these important questions in the next section.

49 Definition of “chronicle”: “an historical account of events arranged in order of time usually without analysis or interpretation.” 11th ed. s.v. “Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.”
The Purpose of the Fundamental Belief Statement

It is crucial to understand the purpose of having a statement of fundamental beliefs. In the case of Seventh-day Adventists, the preamble reads: “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture.”51 This indicates that the statement of fundamental beliefs exists to reflect the teachings and beliefs of the church, which are to be represented by its members. Thus, it implies that church members are to abide by those principles, rather than the church abiding by the beliefs of its members.

Nevertheless, in the minds of some Adventists, “there is no single ‘Seventh-day Adventist Church position’ regarding the history of life on Earth. Individual Adventists—scientists, theologians, pastors, and others—hold widely differing views regarding the age of the universe, of the planet Earth, and of life on Earth.”52 Such a declaration reveals a subjective understanding of ecclesiology, in which the church and its doctrines must be subject to the views of its members, and not to Scripture.

In response to the claims stated in the previous paragraph, I have examined the reasons for the changes made to the original statement on Creation and why it was worded in such a way. Guy, the secretary of the “Committee of Twelve,” shares his assessment of the meaning of the newly worded Fundamental Belief #6 as follows: “The only ‘official position’ of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is stated in Fundamental Belief #6, where the language is deliberately Biblical, and broad enough to accommodate various views about Earth’s natural history.”53 This means that Fundamental Belief #6, as it reads today, can be used to support any approach to the biblical account of Creation, including progressive Creationism, theistic evolution, etc.

The next section considers the discussion related to Fundamental Belief #6 that took place in 1980 during the General Conference Session in Dallas, TX.

51 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Church Manual (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 31. Emphasis Supplied.
53 Ibid.
The Creation Statement on the Floor of the GC Session

The day started with Neal C. Wilson addressing the delegates, emphasizing the importance of leaders refusing to be content with the status quo just because it was comfortable. He stated: “An organization is developed to achieve an objective. Organization should not continue simply to maintain itself. Unless there are clear targets, organization is meaningless.” Unquestionably, revising the existing fundamental belief statement and inserting an official statement on Creation testifies to Seventh-day Adventist leaders’ strong desire to honor God’s Word and message. This researcher does not disagree with such intent; yet, after thirty years of controversies and concerns, it is important to reflect on the method used and in the observations made on the floor that evening, many of which were simply left behind.

After J. W. Bothe had read the proposed statement on Creation, Leroy Moore, with the support of A. A. Roth, manifested his concern regarding the wording of Belief #6, which he believed should leave some room for the Spirit of Prophecy to contribute to the biblical account. Another observation came from E. J. Humphrey, who inquired about the possibility of including the words “six literal days,” which would clearly distinguish Seventh-day Adventists from many other denominations.

In support of the latter, John V. Stevens stressed that one of the purposes for rewriting the fundamental beliefs and including a statement on Creation was to make what Seventh-day Adventists believe “more easily understood by those not of our faith”; thus, adding the words “six literal days” to that statement “would certainly let the world know what we believe.”

Others like Humberto R. Treiyer pointed out the importance of including “something in relation to our position about the earth’s chronology.” Neal C. Wilson responded with openness to these revisions; nevertheless, none of the attending delegates picked up on Wilson’s openness. At that point, Lawrence Geraty brought up the fact that “Creation is far more extensive than just
He further stated, “In a paragraph on Creation, I would like to testify to the world that God does not work, as deists believe, by getting things started and then allowing them to run their course. I would like to include creative activity that includes not only origins but much more.”

I certainly agree with Dr. Geraty if by “origins” he was referring to an absolute beginning, a time when “the earth was without form and void” (Gen 1:2), and if by “Creation” he was referring to God’s actions of giving form and bringing life to the planet He spoke into existence, and maintaining that life after its initial creation, which seems to be the case here. Unfortunately, Geraty’s words could also be interpreted to support theistic evolution in that the latter position also requires God’s continued “creative activity” after the initial creation by occasional divine intrusions into nature to help it overcome evolutionary “logjams.” The divine intrusions that theistic evolution requires are much more extensive and involved than the divine ongoing maintenance understood by more conservative Adventist creationists. Indeed, such intrusions would make void the significance and quality of God’s initial creation which is said to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). If one of the reasons for writing a statement on Creation is to “let the world know what we believe,” as John V. Stevens correctly stated, specificity and clarity are of major importance and are non-negotiable.

Despite the observations presented on the floor favoring a clearer wording for the statement on Creation, one that would reflect more accurately what mainline Seventh-day Adventists truly believe, the published discussion regarding the Creation statement ended shortly after Dr. Geraty’s statement quoted above. As mentioned elsewhere, the twenty-seven new fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were voted into effect on the morning of April 25, 1980. How the statement on Creation would affect the church, and why those involved in preparing the statement worded it the way they did, were things that only the future would clearly reveal.

In the next section, I analyze some of the consequences resulting from the lack of specificity of the current official statement on Creation.
The Fruits of the 1980 Statement on Creation

Despite the fact that the committee of twelve produced a statement of fundamental beliefs that raised many theological concerns and controversies among mainline Seventh-day Adventists, it is important to recognize their efforts and contributions. For instance, Larry Geraty expressed his concerns regarding the time allotted for such an important task, and the members of the committee suggested a more appropriate procedure for future revisions of the fundamental beliefs statement that would extend the time allocated for the process. They suggested that all “the results of [their] effort, if acceptable to Washington, D.C., be published in the *Adventist Review* with the invitation for comment and reaction by any concerned.”

On the other hand, Robert H. Pierson stressed the importance of Seventh-day Adventist leaders positioning themselves against “those in the church who belittle the inspiration of the total Bible, who scorn the first 11 chapters of Genesis, who question the Spirit of Prophecy’s short chronology of the age of the earth.” Pierson’s words supported Hackett’s appeal that providing “a clear definition” on these issues “will enable teachers of science in our schools clearly to present to inquiring young minds the church’s position.”

Nevertheless, somewhere during the task of “revising” the statement on Creation, the notion of producing a document to clearly represent what Seventh-day Adventists believe was lost—but not without consequences.

Among Seventh-day Adventists, a new discussion connected to the history of Fundamental Belief #6 is that over the teaching of evolutionary theory as a preferable model of origins at La Sierra University in Riverside, CA.

The La Sierra University in Focus

The first known objection to the teaching of evolutionary theory at La Sierra University was a letter sent to former General Conference President Jan Paulsen by Dr. Sean Pitman on March 16, 2009, informing the former president of the ongoing teaching of theistic evolution in the biology department of LSU. About

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62 Geraty, 3.
63 Pierson, 10, 11.
64 Hackett, 2.
SILVA: FUNDAMENTAL BELief #6: CREATION

six weeks later, David Asscherick sent an email to Pastors Jan Paulsen, Don C. Schneider, and Ricardo Graham regarding the same matter.66

Asscherick was conscious of the fact that our schools should allow space for the teaching of various theories of origins, and he stated, “It is a matter of incontestable fact that naturalistic evolution is being taught at La Sierra University. This is not in and of itself a bad thing. Evolution should be taught at our denominational universities.” He continued, “But it should be taught as a competing and inimical worldview to the biblical worldview.”67

On May 18, Randal Wisbey, president of LSU, wrote to the board of trustees and others in response to “a recent letter” that had been circulating on the Internet:

In particular, this letter charges that “naturalistic evolution” is taught at La Sierra University—even while suggesting that evolution should be taught at our Adventist colleges and universities so that our students can better understand the world in which they live. “Naturalistic evolution” is a phrase that either in code or direct definition implies a perspective of “atheistic evolution.”

We reject this implied atheistic charge. Every one of our science faculty share the goal of students experiencing a vibrant Adventist Christian faith while pursuing their education in the sciences.68

Wisbey’s declaration seems to employ the same line of argumentation used by other Adventist scholars who reject mainline Adventist thinking: they present their ideas through indirect declarations. For instance, in his letter Wisbey affirmed, “‘Naturalistic evolution’ is a phrase that either in code or direct definition implies a perspective of ‘atheistic evolution.’ We reject this implied atheistic charge.”69 Note, however, that Wisbey never denied the possibility that

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67 Ibid.
68 La Sierra University Board of Trustees, La Sierra University Faculty & Staff, and La Sierra University Church Leadership Team, by Randal Wisbey, May 18, 2009, President Randal Wisbey’s Response, EducateTruth.com. Riverside, CA.
69 Ibid.
members of the faculty of the Biology Department at LSU might believe or accept “theistic evolution.”

On November 11, 2009, the La Sierra University board of trustees released a statement of support for the Adventist view of Creation, which read:

The Board of Trustees is fully mindful of La Sierra University’s responsibilities and commitments as a Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher education. This includes whole-hearted support for the doctrines and teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as defined by the 28 Statements of Fundamental Beliefs, specifically fundamental belief #6.70

Fritz Guy has openly declared that the statement on Creation was worded broadly in order to account for those individuals who do not believe in a recent, literal Creation over six consecutive twenty-four-hour days. Given that, how much of the LSU board of trustees’ statement of support is meant to agree with the position of mainline Seventh-day Adventists? This question seems to portray the concerns of other members and Seventh-day organizations as concerns that would produce unexpected reactions.

From Substantial Response to Unexpected Action

After the initial letter was sent to the General Conference president on March 16, 2009, many presented their opinions regarding the issue at LSU.71 Three actions by those working to find a solution to the issue and restore the integrity of Seventh-day Adventist education at LSU must be mentioned here.

Jan Paulsen’s Appeal

The appearance of Jan Paulsen’s “An Appeal” on Adventist News Network on June 19, 2009 was an important action by the church organizational body. Paulsen, who was serving his second term as president of the General Conference, released this significant appeal expanding on the meaning of Fundamental Belief #6. He referred to the statement “A Reaffirmation of

70 La Sierra University Board of Trustees, Statement of Support for the Adventist View of Creation, ed. Larry Becker (Riverside, CA: EducatedTruth.com, 2009).
71 Hilde Shane has documented the ongoing discussion at LSU with significant accuracy. For additional information see: Shane Hilde, “The History,” EducateTruth.com http://www.educatetruth.com/the-history/ (accessed October 04, 2010).
“Silva: Fundamental Belief #6: Creation” voted on by the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council, and placed emphasis on various important aspects of that document. He quoted, “We strongly endorse the document’s affirmation of our historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation,” and added, “We reaffirm the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis 1-11: that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.” In his final remarks, Paulsen said, “I appeal to you that when you take your students out on the journey, you bring them safely back home before the day is over. And their home must always be in the world of faith.” The church as an organization had taken its first significant action toward solving the ongoing issue at LSU.

A Conference Response
Another substantial response to LSU was the resolution made by the Michigan Conference Executive Committee on May 25, 2010:

Whereas, the Adventist Review (in the article by Mark Kellner in April 15, 2010) has now publicly addressed the issue of evolution being taught at and supported by La Sierra University; and, whereas their board of trustees and constituency have collectively been unwilling to rectify this vital spiritual issue, the Michigan Conference Executive Committee has voted the following actions:

1. Effective June 1, 2010 the Michigan Conference has removed La Sierra University from its list of Adventist Colleges and Universities which qualify for employee subsidy. This means that no employee may expect tuition support if they have a dependent attending La Sierra.

2. With sorrow we feel it is our spiritual responsibility to notify Michigan Conference members that we do not believe that La Sierra can currently be trusted to be supportive of Seventh-day Adventist spiritual values.

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73 Ibid.
especially in reference to faith in the biblical understanding of Creation, and thus the authority of Scripture in the life and practice of the believer.  

Although, some have reacted strongly against these actions, this response and appeal would not go unheard.

General Conference 2010 Positive Action

Certainly unexpected by many was the motion brought to the floor by Dr. Ted N. C. Wilson, the newly elected president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On the one hand, Wilson’s motion was in part a response to various requests to clarify the Fundamental Belief #6 as requested by some voices in the International Faith & Science Conferences (2004), the Faith and Science Council, the Michigan and Northern California Conferences. On the other hand, his motion reflected his comprehensive vision for the church’s mission and his life of service to the church.

Wilson’s motion included a request to approve the statement “A Reaffirmation of Creation,” which more clearly stated the Adventist understanding regarding origins, based on the interpretation of Genesis 1-11. In addition, his motion included a request that the General Conference Administration initiate the process of integration of Fundamental Belief #6 and the statement “A Reaffirmation of Creation.” The motion was enthusiastically carried and strongly supported.

In summary, it is not an overstatement to say that Wilson’s motion voted on the floor of the General Conference in Atlanta, GA on June 30, 2010 is a remarkable development to be remembered in Seventh-day Adventist history as part of the great leap forward, leading us to a new reformation.

Conclusion

As recorded in the annals of history, the doctrine of Creation has been enormously influenced by different lines of thinking, especially Greek philosophy, an influence that can be observed within the work of theologians

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such as Philo of Alexandria, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and others. Consequentially, a great variety of approaches to the biblical Creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:3 have resulted from attempts to reconcile the Bible with the discoveries of science instead of submitting those discoveries to Scripture. Similarly the Age of Enlightenment brought many challenges to the interpretation of Scripture, with its emphasis on reason and the empirical method. One reaction in favor of a conservative interpretation of Scripture was a movement known as Fundamentalism, which came to America accompanied by evangelicalism. The former opposed the Enlightenment drastically, while the latter tended to accommodate it, providing an adequate environment for a multiplicity of approaches to the doctrine of Creation—something that should be avoided by Seventh-day Adventists.

It is a difficult task to cover in only a few pages all the implications of the abandonment of the theological concept of Sola Scriptura for the biblical account of Creation; as in matter of fact, this is not my primary purpose. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that from my perspective, if such was not explored in light of the Great Controversy theme, it would hardly make any difference for those claiming to be followers of God, but that is not the case in this research paper.

Thus, in light of the Great Controversy theme, it seems plausible to suggest that God’s response to these events was the providential rise of the movement that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Daniel 7, 8, 9; Rev 14:6-12). Interestingly, besides providing guidance through the writings of Ellen G. White, God has also impressed others to stand up in defense of the biblical account of Creation and the worldwide Flood. One such writer was George McCready Price, whose theological views firmly rested upon the literal truth and historicity of the Bible and its original text.

Seventh-day Adventists believe they have been chosen by God to lift up the truth of the Bible as his historical narrative of Creation, judgment, and salvation. Thus, the church’s understanding of Scripture has continued to grow since 1854, and its doctrinal statements have improved accordingly. In exploring these improvements, I find it odd that the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not release a statement on Creation until 1980, despite all the work done by theologians such as George McCready Price, the founder of scientific recent Creation studies. Thus, although in the early years of the Adventist movement, the Seventh-day Adventists did not establish a specific statement on Creation, the concept of Creation was always implicit in their fundamental principles, either
by their acceptance of God’s attributes—Creator, or their recognition of the validity of the fourth commandment—the Sabbath.

Adventists believe that just as the undesirable powers of evil are constantly working to confuse and distract the human race, God is actively and constantly working to execute his plan of redemption. By allowing his servants to establish the differences between Godlike institutions and more manlike ones, God led the Seventh-day Adventist Church to seek a public and explicit position on origins.

Much hard work was put into the formulation of a statement on Creation that would testify accurately to the Seventh-day Adventists’ high regard for the Bible. The statement initially produced by the X-1535 Ad Hoc Committee was a true attempt to preserve God’s landmarks as suggested by W. J. Hackett. Despite the need for minor editorial work, it clearly represented the belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, the Fundamental Belief #6 voted during the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, TX, because of its intended ambiguity as shown in this paper, has led to over thirty years of uncertainty of the meaning of Creation in our educational institutions. This current reality indicates that the uncertainty should not continue.

As mentioned earlier, the three landmarks present in the three-column document are as follows: (1) The word “literal” is used to describe the six days of Creation. (2) The term “chronicle” is employed to mean a historical account of Creation. Thus, the use of “chronicle” implies the historicity of the Genesis account, which is in accordance with the Adventist position on Creation. (3) The concept of a “world-wide flood” is used to describe the results of a Creation that was marred by sin.76

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the rewritten statement voted on at the April 25, 1980 General Conference session. First, this statement lacks specificity regarding the nature of the source of the account: is the source historical or not? Second, the words “the heaven and the earth” appear between quotes, leaving the biblical statement open to allegorical interpretation. Third, the statement ignores the Hebrew text by not clarifying whether the “days” (יוֹם) described in Genesis 1:1–2:3 are literal twenty-four-hour days or represent long periods of time. Fourth, it gives no indication of acceptance of the Garden of Eden as a historical place, or the belief that the worldwide Flood is a historical

76 Ibid.
In conclusion and in my opinion it would be appropriate for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to do the following:

1) Stand upon the theological concept of Sola, Tota, and Prima Scriptura and the conviction that the Bible is the revelation of God to humanity, containing “the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world.”

2) Respond kindly and winsomely to those accusing mainline Adventists of using a “misguided Baconianism toward the Bible.” While we should humbly admit that not all of the Bible’s content can be understood through empirical method, we can remind those who question the validity of the Bible that mega evolution also cannot be demonstrated by the same principles of empiricism.

It could be objected that theology and science cannot work together due to their incompatibilities. Nevertheless, while these fields serve different purposes, it is a matter of choice which field should govern the other. Thus, if science would consider the Bible to work as the starting point in matters of origins, both science and theology would have much to gain.

3) Proceed prayerfully in rewording the Fundamental Belief #6. Since the first positive action has already been taken, the administration must go forward
without losing focus on the Great Controversy, for this is the key to understanding Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Seventh-day Adventists must press forward, always remembering that “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”

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The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective

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I. Survey of Research

Hermann Gunkel, father of OT form criticism in the early 20th century, is also the first scholar to have isolated and analyzed the literary form of “prophetic lawsuit” (Gerichtsrede).1 He found the divine prophetic lawsuit in eight prophetic passages (Isa 1:18–20; 3:13–15; 41:1ff, 21ff; 43:9ff; Jer 2:4–9; Hos 2:4ff; and Mic 6:1ff.) as well as imitations of this form of speech in Ps 50:7–13 and Ps 82. For Gunkel the prophetic lawsuit contained the following basic structure:

I. Depiction of the trial
   II. The Prosecutor’s speech:
       A. Heaven and earth are summoned to appear as judges
       B. Exhortation to the accused—or to the judges—to listen
       C. Angry question phrased in the second person, directed at the defendant
       D. Dismissal of the defendant’s possible grounds for excuse
       E. The heart of the matter

III. The Judge’s speech:
A. Address to the accused
B. An accusatory presentation of the substance of the case
C. Declaration of the accused’s lack of defense—phrased in the third person
D. A declaration of the demonstrated guilt of the defendant
E. Pronouncement of judgment—second person.

According to Gunkel, the background (Sitz im Leben) of this form of address is the secular legal proceedings conducted in Israel at the city gates. This view was advanced by Gunkel’s pupil Joachim Begrich, who carried forward the work of classifying prophetic lawsuit forms, particularly in Deutero-Isaiah. A thorough analysis of the lawsuit literary form (Gattung) and historical setting (Sitz im Leben) was conducted by Hans Jochen Boecker in his dissertation, with the conclusion, like Gunkel and Begrich, that the Sitz im Leben of the lawsuit is in Israelite secular law conducted at the city gates. Boecker, like Begrich, subdivides the elements of the lawsuit into three major individual elements: (1) addresses given prior to the beginning of the trial; (2) addresses given during the trial before the assembled court; and (3) addresses given at the conclusion of the case, i.e., the verdicts.

Ernst Würthwein rejected Gunkel’s position that the Sitz im Leben of the lawsuit genre was the city gate, and instead proposed the cult as the proper background of this literary form. Würthwein compares the divine lawsuit passages in the prophets dealt with by Gunkel, Begrich, and Boecker, with a number of texts from the Psalms describing divine
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judgment taking place in the context of the cult (Ps 50, 75, 68, 82, and the enthronement psalms of 96:11–13; 97:1–6; and 98:7–9). Würthwein suggests that the lawsuit form of address (both in the Prophets and Psalms) must have been a part of the oral reading of the Law when the people assembled in the cult for covenant-renewal ceremonies, during which ceremonies he postulates that there must have been some kind of investigation of the people’s covenant-faithfulness to the Law. The cult thus provided both the formal and actual Sitz im Leben for the lawsuit genre. Würthwein rejects the old liberal theology position that the prophets were enlightened original moralistic personalities opposed to the cult, but rather dependent upon the cult.

Würthwein’s view was successfully challenged by, among others, Franz Hesse, who argues that the cult pronounced judgment, indeed, but upon Israel’s enemies, not upon Israel itself. According to Hesse, the one apparent example, Psalm 50, is to be seen as an imitation of the prophetic lawsuit. Hesse insists that the cultic pronouncements and the prophetic lawsuit must be distinguished: the cult always pronounces judgment on Israel’s enemies, while the prophet of judgment had a unique proclamation independent of the cult. For Hesse it was important to maintain the old liberal view that exalts the classical prophets above the cult.

Herbert B. Huffmon set forth a third proposal for the Sitz im Leben of the biblical divine lawsuit. Huffmon argues that the conception of Yahweh’s lawcourt must be found in relationship to the procedure of covenant-making, and he coins the term “covenant lawsuit.” Huffmon focuses upon five OT passages which employ the summoning of witnesses: Isa 1:2–3; Mic 6:1-8; Jer 2:4–13; Ps 50; and Deut 32. Huffmon examines various theories regarding the nature and of these witnesses—Gunkel’s suggestion that the elements of Nature are judges in the case, R.B.Y. Scott’s proposal that the background is the witnesses of the secular law court, and F. M. Cross’s theory that these are connected with the

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conceptions of Yahweh’s Heavenly Council assembled as a court. Although Huffmon finds the theory of Heavenly Council appealing and plausible, all of these proposals are seen to be ultimately unsatisfying. Huffmon suggests that the primary background for the biblical trials in which heaven and earth are witnesses is to be found in the Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaties, as proposed by George Mendenhall. Huffmon supports this position by pointing out that of the three passages in the Bible where there is an appealing to heaven and earth as witnesses, all three appear in the context of the establishing of a covenant (Deut 4:26; 30:19; and 31:28). He also point out the similarity between the covenant lawsuits of Scripture (see esp. Mic 6:4–5; Jer 2:6–7; and Deut 32:6b–14) and the Hittite international treaties in that both have reference to the suzerain’s former gracious deeds. Huffmon concludes that the formal Sitz im Leben of the prophetic lawsuit is to be found especially in the Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaties, along with traditions from the Heavenly Council, and also possible influence from secular law. Huffmon does not deal with the actual Sitz im Leben of the prophetic lawsuit, i.e., where the prophets actually gave their lawsuit addresses.

Julien Harvey extended the research of Huffmon by examining more closely the Hittite materials, focusing especially upon the procedures arising from a breach of covenant found in correspondence from suzerains to unfaithful vassals (in contrast with Huffmon who looked primarily at the covenanting formulas). Harvey developed this thesis further in a book published in 1967. Harvey shows that the suzerain’s letters to the faithless vassal are essentially mirror images of the covenant formulas to which the

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vassal had earlier assented. He finds that in the case of a vassal’s breach of covenant, the suzerain either sent an ultimatum or a declaration of war. Harvey points to striking parallels between the Hittite letters and the prophetic lawsuits of the OT. The OT materials include five examples of what he calls complete accusatory addresses (Deut 32:1–25; Isa 1:2–20; Mic 6:1–8; Jer 2:4–13, 29; Ps 50:1-23) and 14 instances of what he terms incomplete accusatory addresses (Isa 42:18–25; 48:12–19; 57:3–13; 58:1–14; 66:1–4; Jer 6:16–21; Mal 1:6—2:9; Jdg 2:1–5; 1 Sam 2:27–36; 2 Sam 12:7–12; 1 Kgs 14:7–11; 21:17–24; 2 Chron 12:5–8; 15:1–15). Based upon these passages, Harvey suggests the following structure for the divine lawsuit in Scripture (which he calls the Rib-Pattern):

1. Appeal to heaven and earth, and to everyone, to listen
2. Declaration of Yahweh’s right to act as He has done
3. Accusation against the people who have been disloyal to the Covenant
4. Rhetorical cross-examination, which does not expect any reply
5. Accusatory address, usually historically founded, which summarizes Yahweh’s gracious acts and the people’s ingratitude
6. Declaration of the powerlessness of the foreign gods, and of the impossibility of re-establishing the right relationship to Yahweh by means of rites
7. Declaration of Israel’s guilt
8. Type A: treats of destruction = declaration of war
   Type B: a positive specification of what is needed to rebuild the relationship = ultimatum.

Harvey distills these eight elements into five motifs which are normally found in the biblical Rib-Pattern (although he considers that one or two of these may be missing without compromising the integrity of the pattern):

1. Preparations for the trial
2. Cross-examination without expectation of reply
3. Accusatory Address
4. Official declaration of the guilt of the accused
5. Condemnation expressed in threats, but not in judgments (Type A) or positive instructions as to how the accused is to respond (Type B)

Harvey argues that the ultimate purpose of the covenant lawsuit form is to vindicate the juridical and moral correctness of Yahweh in the face of
disasters that Israel experienced. Within the lawsuit format there is also the paraenetic (warning) intention to awaken a positive response of repentance on the part of the audience, so that Yahweh can once more be gracious to His people.

Those who have rejected the thesis of Huffmon and Harvey have largely objected on the basis of the alleged great distance of time between the 2nd millennium B.C.E. Hittite suzerainty treaties and the alleged late date of biblical texts with which they are compared. However, if one does not radically re-date biblical materials on the basis of higher-critical presuppositions, but rather accepts the date and *Sitz im Leben* claimed by the biblical text, the first covenant lawsuit (found in Deuteronomy) comes at approximately the same time as the Hittite suzerainty treaties, and the subsequent biblical divine lawsuits follow this basic pattern established in the Torah. I have found the evidence and general conclusions presented by Huffmon and Harvey, building upon the work of Mendenhall, to be persuasive.  

Attempts have been made to mediate between the three proposals for the biblical lawsuit’s *Sitz im Leben*—secular law, cult, and international law. For example, Eberhard von Waldow’s *traditionsgeschichtliche* study combines the theories of Gunkel and Würthwein by proposing that the formal aspects of the biblical lawsuit may be traced to secular law while their content has roots in Yahweh’s covenant with Israel (although there is no evidence for an actual cultic trial).  

Another example of mediating views is that of James Limburg. Limburg examines in detail five passages employing the term ריב (rib) which are most frequently cited in discussion of the prophetic lawsuit (Isa 1:2–3; 1:18–20; 3:13–15; Hos 4:1–13; and Mic 6:1–8) and concludes that the formal *Sitz im Leben* of the prophetic lawsuit includes all three of the previously proposals: secular law, the cult, and international law (with special emphasis upon international law). Which *Sitz im Leben* is

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12 See also, E. B. Wilson, “Rib in Israel’s Historical and Legal Traditions” (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1970).
applicable to a given passage must be decided on a case-by-case basis (for Limburg, Isa 3:13–15 is dependent upon the cult, and the other four passages depend upon international law).\footnote{For another example of a mediating position on the \textit{Sitz im Leben} of the prophetic lawsuit, see the comments of H. Ringgren, cited below.}

Limburg discusses one aspect of the debate not yet treated in detail: the significance of the Hebrew root \textit{בָּרִיך} in the Hebrew Bible. Limburg concludes that the root-meaning of \textit{בָּרִיך} is “accuse” (as subject and verb), and derived meanings include “to quarrel,” “argument,” “to sue,” and “suit.” As we will see below, this suggestion of root-meaning is problematic, inasmuch as the vast majority of cases of the \textit{בָּרִיך} in Scripture have a positive and not negative function; the one who is arguing the legal case is defending the cause of the one before the court, and the result is vindication or deliverance. Thus I will suggest below that the root-meaning of the word \textit{בָּרִיך} is “to contend,” which in legal contexts can mean either “contend for” (i.e., legally defend or plead the case of someone) or “contend against” (i.e., legally accuse or bring indictments against someone).

An essay by B. Gemser\footnote{B. Gemser, “The \textit{Rib}- or Controversy-pattern in Hebew Mentality,” in \textit{Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East}, ed. Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas, \textit{VTSup} 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 120–37.} argues that what he calls the “\textit{Rib}-pattern” is part of the extensive use of forensic language in the OT. The \textit{Rib}- or controversy-pattern is not so much a literary form of expression or motif as it is a frame of mind among the people of Israel. Based upon a conviction of the “God-maintained moral order” of justice, the \textit{Rib} phraseology involving controversy between God and His people (either God’s controversy with men or men’s controversy with God) reveals that “there is something wrong in the relations of the entities involved.”\footnote{Ibid., 136.} Finally, for Gemser the \textit{Rib}-pattern reveals that

\begin{quote}
All is ultimately left to, lies in the hands of, the Supreme Judge and Ruler, whose judgement is righteous, but unpredictable, and inscrutable for human understanding, whose ways are not ours. He is a person, not a system or an order. But this implies that there is an appeal to Him, even an
irrational, undeserved, unjustifiable appeal to his heart, his compassion, his grace.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1978 Kirsten Nielsen published his translated licentiate thesis under the title \textit{Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)}.\textsuperscript{19} Nielsen provides a helpful review of literature,\textsuperscript{20} followed by a brief exegesis of five OT passages containing the basic four-fold prophetic lawsuit pattern outlined by Harvey: Isa 1:2–3; 3:13–15; Hos 2:4–17; 4:1–3; and Ps 50:1–23. Nielsen argues that the basic elements of the various prophetic lawsuits are the same, whatever the life-situation out of which they arise, and thus one cannot determine on a case-by-case basis the proper \textit{Sitz im Leben} of a given passage (contra Limburg). Nielsen’s particular interest is in determining the actual \textit{Sitz im Leben} of the prophetic lawsuit, based upon “Scandinavian lines” rather than “German, French, and American premisses,”\textsuperscript{21} and this leads in a predictable direction to the cult, and more specifically, following Sigmund Mowinckel, to the Israelite New Year’s Covenant-Renewal Festival (Feast of Booths). However, after examining the evidence, Nielsen concludes that there is insufficient evidence to support an actual cultic \textit{byr} in connection with the New Year’s festival. Rather the actual \textit{Sitz im Leben} of the prophetic \textit{byr} in general must be “the emergency situation in which the prophet sees it as his task to force the people to return to the covenant-relationship with Yahweh by forcing them to come to an awareness of what this relationship demands of them.”\textsuperscript{22} The exception to this are the Lawsuits of Deutero-Isaiah, which Nielsen sees as alluding to a different purpose for the trial procedure

the subject of which is not Yahweh’s prosecution and condemnation of Israel for breach of covenant. Where the prophetic lawsuit ordinarily proclaims Yahweh’s impending judgement, or at least threatens to do so, the lawsuits of Deutero-Isaiah attempt to bring evidence that Yahweh is

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 137.
\textsuperscript{19} Kirsten Nielsen, \textit{Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)}, JSOTSup, 9 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978).
\textsuperscript{20} The previous summary is heavily dependent upon Nielsen’s literature review.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 61.
the Lord of History, and to explain the disaster already experienced as Yahweh’s righteous punishment.  

Nielsen conducts an analysis of the role that Yahweh plays in the prophetic lawsuit, and concludes that He is both prosecutor and judge, and furthermore, that He has an ultimate salvific intent, in spite of His other legal roles. Yahweh can be both prosecutor and judge because in the Israelite judicial system, unlike the Western ones, the judge has the responsibility not only to give a ruling on the facts laid before him, but also to uphold the rights of the needy in society. Thus the psalmist’s prayer for Yahweh to “judge” him means “to uphold his rights” or “help” him. Nielsen explains:

There is for this reason a tension between the functions of prosecutor and judge which under ordinary conditions would make the fusion of their roles impossible. Thus, when the OT speaks of Yahweh as both prosecutor and judge, this tension is reflected as an element of the Israelite understanding of God: the righteousness of Yahweh demands that the people’s apostasy be made the object of condemnation, while His love for the Chosen People leads him to forgiveness and to the restoration of the original relationship. . . . Thus the most apposite metaphor for describing the conflict between Yahweh and Israel is one drawn from the language of the courtroom. Heaven and earth are called to act as witnesses; Yahweh-as-prosecutor presents his irrefutable accusations against Israel; and then Yahweh-as-judge can either choose to pronounce the verdict appropriate to such charges, or by omitting an actual sentence he can express his willingness to forgive his people—or some part of his people—if only they will repent.

After surveying the vigorous investigation of the covenant lawsuit in the first three-quarters of the 20th century, and encountering the wide consensus among OT scholarship by the 1970’s that the “prophetic lawsuit” was an accepted sub-genre, I was surprised to find that the discussion on this topic came to a virtual standstill in the 1980’s, in the wake of two

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23 Ibid., 71.
24 Ibid., 76–7.
25 In addition to the authors cited above, see, e.g., Claus Westermann, Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech, trans. Hugh C. White (Louisville: Westminster, 1991), 199.
influential journal articles which called into question the very existence of a “prophetic lawsuit” genre in Scripture.

Michael De Roche’s article discusses the so-called “prophetic lawsuit” genre of the pre-exilic Prophets in the light of the research by S. Roberts on legal anthropology. Roberts defines a “lawsuit” as a legal dispute involving three parties: the two disputing parties and a third party (usually the court) that adjudicates the dispute. De Roche argues that the prophetic רֵיבּ of the OT pre-exilic prophets cannot be called a “lawsuit” since it regularly involves only the two disputing parties and not a third party to adjudicate the dispute. According to De Roche, the word רֵיבּ does not mean “lawsuit” or “to bring suit” as often claimed, but rather more broadly means “contention” or “to contend” and refers to the pre-trial dispute or contention between two parties before such dispute is brought (if it is ever brought) to the court for adjudication. Because of what he regards as the pre-trial and bilateral (not trilateral) nature of the OT רֵיבּ, De Roche concludes that “the terms ‘prophetic lawsuit’ and ‘covenant lawsuit’ should be abandoned.”

The article by Dwight R. Daniels goes even further, and maintains that there is no such thing as a special genre of “רֵיבּ-oracles” in Scripture. In the texts commonly set forth as belonging to such a genre (Isa 1:2–3, 18–20; Jer 2:4–13;Mic 6:1–8; and Hos 4:1–3), Daniels finds no elements of structure or content that specially demarcates such a genre, and thus concludes that ‘not only should the term ‘prophetic lawsuit’ be abandoned but also the underlying conception that these texts belong to a single genre.”

With regard to the two aforementioned articles, I find it amazing that, at least as far as I have been able to ascertain, the presuppositions and lines of argument upon which the conclusions of these scholars are based have never been seriously re-examined, yet have been adopted so readily and so

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28 De Roche, 574.
30 Ibid., 360.
uncritically by many. Consider, for example, the author of the article on בְּרִיָּה in the NIDOTTE, who refers briefly to the suggestions that בְּרִיָּה can denote a lawsuit and that there is a technical ‘prophetic lawsuit’ genre in the OT, but fails to affirm these views because they are “now widely disputed (see De Roche [sic.]).” No evidence is given for the position taken.

In my response to the first article, I point out, as noted above, that De Roche builds upon Roberts’ study of legal anthropology, and insists that the biblical form of jurisprudence conform to the definition of “lawsuit” set forth by Roberts. A modern anthropological construct of the “lawsuit” is thus imposed upon the biblical text. It should be noted that even in the modern definition of “lawsuit,” there is no requirement of three parties being involved. A “lawsuit” may be defined broadly as “a case, action, or proceeding brought to a court of law for settlement.” Furthermore, in the cosmic courtroom setting, where God brings His case, it is absurd to think that in these legal proceedings God would subject His case to a third party for adjudication. God is both Prosecution/Defense Attorney and Judge. Because God is both attorney and judge, and thus there are only two parties in the legal proceedings, is no reason to deny that a lawsuit is present. Furthermore, contra De Roche, most of the various OT passages that have been commonly viewed as describing a lawsuit, clearly appear in a legal, courtroom setting, not just in a pre-court situation (see discussion below). Thus the term “lawsuit” is entirely appropriate for these passages.

This brings us to a critique of the article by Daniels. Daniels acknowledges that references to such items as the “heavens and earth” as witnesses clearly point to a legal setting in which the covenant with Israel was first contracted (Deut 4:26; 30:19; and 31:28), paralleling the witnesses in the Hittite suzerainty treaties. But Daniels, building upon his historical-critical presuppositions, carries out radical redaction-critical surgery on these passages, asserting that none of them “belongs to the postulated Proto-Deuteronomy…. The supportive evidence is thus relatively late, and this does not appear to be an accident of transmission.” Other features of the “prophetic lawsuit” passages that point to a legal setting are likewise

expunged from the text by redaction criticism as not belonging to the original text. Thus, Daniels excises textual evidence contrary to his thesis by applying the redactor’s knife. Daniels’ main arguments against the existence of a prophetic lawsuit genre fall to the ground if one recognizes the strong evidence that has been forthcoming in recent decades supporting the essential unity and antiquity of the book of Deuteronomy.

Other textual evidence for a legal setting is explained away by Daniels because in his view it does not precisely fit with Israelite legal procedures. For example, because in Mic 6:1–8 God seeks reconciliation with His people, Daniels argues that it must be a cultic liturgical background and not a legal context. There is no consideration given to Hittite correspondence from suzerains to unfaithful vassals containing just such seeking of reconciliation. Nor is attention given to the fact that this is a cosmic legal setting, where the courtroom and the cult come together, and where in the heart of divine legal proceedings occurs an offer of grace and a call to reconciliation (see our discussion below).

In sum, I do not find convincing the objections raised by scholars like De Roche and Daniels, regarding the existence of a prophetic lawsuit sub-genre in the OT. Thankfully, not all have jettisoned the concept of a prophetic lawsuit following the dissenting voices just mentioned. The standard lexicons and wordbooks published subsequent to the two articles just reviewed have not hesitated to identify the many instances of divine בָּרִי in the OT as “lawsuit.”

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33 So, e.g., Daniels denies the unity in Jer 2:4–13 by insisting that “v. 12–13 did not constitute an original part of the prophecy in v. 4–11 but have been assigned their present position to function as a redactional link between v. 4–11 and v. 14–19. . . . Certain, however, is that the connection between v. 4–11 and v. 12–13 is a secondary development, a point of significance since it means that for Jer 2,4–13 the connection between the root בָּרִי and an address to the heavens, often considered a sure sign of a ‘prophetic lawsuit’, is not original” (Daniels, 345). Likewise Hos 4:1–3 is seen to have a complicated history of literary development (ibid., 345–7, and the unity of Isa 1:10–20 is rejected (ibid., 348).


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Testament (2001) clearly places the many verbal references to divine בָּרִיב under the subheading of those occurrences “used in legal situations, in the context of a legal dispute” and situates the nominal references under the specific heading of “God’s lawsuit.”36 H. Ringgren, in his Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament article on בָּרִיב (published in German in 1990–2 and English in 2004), writes that “In most cases, rib involves litigation, literal or figurative; it can also refer to individual elements of legal proceedings.”37 As to the OT instances of divine בָּרִיב, Ringgren places the discussion of these under the heading of “prophetic lawsuit.” After examining the commonly-discussed passages (Isa 3:13–15; Mic 6:1–8; Hos 2:4–17; Jer 2:4–9; Isa 49:21–24; and 1:16–20), Ringgren summarizes: “That here the prophetic message is cloathed in legal terminology is clear and unambiguous.”38

Ringgren surveys the three major backgrounds that have been suggested (see survey of literature above) for this legal terminology—secular Israelite law, the cult, and international law—and concludes that “The solution of the problem probably lies in a combination of these theories. A cultic tribunal is hardly conceivable apart from secular legal proceedings. The forensic language must have its roots in secular law. Such language may well have been incorporated into the cult, undergoing transformation in the process.”39

In the recently-published dissertation by Alan Bandy on the prophetic lawsuit motif in the book of Revelation, an introductory chapter shows how the studies by such “dissenting voices” as De Roche and Daniels have provided needed corrective for some misunderstandings in previous scholarly discussion, but have not succeeded in discrediting the prophetic lawsuit passages individually or as a literary genre in Scripture.40 Bandy points out how these “dissenting voices” (1) have corrected the idea entertained by some previously that “the prophetic lawsuit is a literal trial in the same sense of two parties engaging in actual litigation;” (2) they have

36 HALOT, s.v. “בריב”.
37 Ringgren, 13:475.
38 Ibid., 477.
39 Ibid., 477-8.
caused us to recognize that “Attempts at isolating the exact juridical background are fraught with difficulty, due to the unique prophetic adaptation of these legal procedures;” and (3) they have called for “a careful delineation between a conflict and a lawsuit,” since the Hebrew root בֶּרֶב “conveys the basic sense of ‘contention’ and does not always imply juridical contexts or the need for arbitration,” and thus the immediate context of a passage (including specific juridical elements) can help to identify when an actual lawsuit speech is present. Despite these needed correctives to common scholarly misunderstandings, Bandy argues persuasively, contra the dissenting voices, for the existence of the lawsuit motif as a prophetic sub-genre in the OT (and, as we will see below, also in the book of Revelation).

Let us now move from the literature review to an overview of the biblical evidence. In this article I wish to focus specifically upon the divine lawsuit motif, not the broader range of human lawsuits. I will examine evidence for the existence of a divine lawsuit not only in the Prophets but throughout the OT (hence I prefer the term “covenant lawsuit” over “prophetic lawsuit”), and also give brief attention to this motif in the NT.

II. The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Scripture
A. Divine בֶּרֶב Passages and the Covenant Lawsuit Sub-Genre in the OT:

There are 68 occurrences of בֶּרֶב as a verb (Vb, 66 in the qal and 2 in the hifil ptcp.) and 62 occurrences of בֶּרֶב as a noun (N), for a total of 130 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, the noun בֶּרֶב, “adversary” appears twice, and as does the word הָבַר “strife,” which is also a toponym (“Meribah”). As mentioned above, the basic meaning of בֶּרֶב seems to be “contend (either for or against)” or “contention.” As noted in HALOT and TWOT, and confirmed by my own analysis of all 130 occurrences, the word

41 Ibid., 36.
42 Ibid., 24–58. Bandy’s brief overview of the relevant OT passages confirms many of the conclusions I have reached independently in research for this article; his book (and dissertation upon which the book is based) appeared subsequent to my primary research for this article. Bandy’s primary focus, however, is upon the lawsuit motif in the book of Revelation, which I only briefly mention in this study (see below).
43 Biblical citations are from the Updated NASB unless otherwise indicated.

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can simply mean “quarrel,” or “accuse,” but most frequently appears in a legal context. According to my own count, 84 of the 130 occurrences of ריב can simply mean “quarrel,” or “accuse,” but most frequently appears in a legal context. According to my own count, 84 of the 130 occurrences of ריב appear in a legal setting, and of these 84, 44 refer to God’s ריב (22 as a noun and 22 as a verb). The occurrences of the divine ריב are about equally divided between cases involving a single individual and cases involving a corporate group. The verses with these 44 occurrences of a divine ריב appear below, with an indication of whether Yahweh’s ריב is positive (P, i.e., for vindication/deliverance) or negative (N, i.e., for condemnation/punishment):

P 1 Sam 24:16 (ET 15): “Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead [ריב Vb] my case [ריב N], and deliver me out of your hand.” (NKJV)

P 1 Sam 25:39: “When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded [ריב Vb] the cause [ריב N] of my reproach from the hand of Nabal and has kept back His servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head.’ Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife.”

P 2 Sam 22:44: “You gave me victory over my accusers [ריב N, cf. HALOT]. You preserved me as the ruler over nations; people I don’t even know now serve me.” (NLT)

N Job 10:2: “I [Job] say to God, ‘Do not condemn me; Let me know what You charge [ריב Vb] me with.’” (JPS)

P Job 23:6: “Would he oppose [ריב Vb] me with great power? No, he would not press charges against me.” (NIV) (Cf. v. 4: “I would present my case [знаком] before Him And fill my mouth with arguments.”)

P Ps 18:44 (ET 43): “You gave me victory over my accusers [ריב N, cf. HALOT]. You appointed me as the ruler over nations; people I don’t even know now serve me.” (NLT)
Ps 31:21 (ET 20): “In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing [בְּרָע N, cf. HALOT] tongues.”

Ps 35:1: “Plead [בָּרִית Vb] my cause, O LORD, with those who strive [בָּרִית N] with me; Fight against those who fight against me.”

Ps 35:23: “Wake up! Rise to my defense! Take up my case [בָּרִית N], my God and my Lord.” (NLT)

Ps 43:1: “Vindicate me, O God, and plead [בָּרִית Vb] my case [בָּרִית N] against an ungodly nation; O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!”

Ps 74:22: “Arise, O God, and plead [בָּרִית Vb] Your own cause [בָּרִית N]; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You all day long.”

Ps 103:9: “He will not always accuse [בָּרִית Vb], nor will he harbor his anger forever” (NIV).

Ps 119:154: “Argue [בָּרִית Vb] my case [בָּרִית N]; take my side! Protect my life as you promised.” (NLT)

Prov 22:23: “For the LORD will plead [בָּרִית Vb] their case [בָּרִית N] And take the life of those who rob them.”

Prov 23:11: “For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead [בָּרִית Vb] their case [בָּרִית N] against you.”

Ps/N Isa 3:13: (Positive) “The LORD stands up to plead a cause [רָע Vb], He rises to champion peoples.” (JPS) “The LORD rises to argue his case [רָע Vb]; he stands to judge [יָרָע] the peoples.” (NRSV). (Or negative): “The LORD takes his place in court [רָע Vb]. He is the great prosecuting attorney, presenting his case against his people!” (NLT) (The following verses probably favor a negative context of judgment.)
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P  Isa 19:20: “It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior, and will defend [ִּ֝נְּדֵ֣כָּהּ וּבָּרָ֣ד] and deliver them.” (NRSV)

P  Isa 34:8: “For the LORD has a day of vengeance, A year of recompense for the cause [דָּעַ֖ר נּ] of Zion.” Cf. NJB: “For this will be Yahweh's day of vengeance, the year of retribution in Zion's lawsuit.”

P  Isa 49:25: “Surely, thus says the LORD, ‘Even the captives of the mighty man will be taken away, And the prey of the tyrant will be rescued; For I will contend [ִּ֝נְּדֵ֣כָּהּ וּבָּרָ֣ד, legally, HALOT] with the one who contends with you, And I will save your sons.’”

P  [Isa 50:8: “He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges [ִּ֝נְּדֵ֣כָּהּ וּבָּרָ֣ד] against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me!”] (NIV) (The נְדֵ֣כָּה here is not initiated by God, but He responds by vindication of the one who is accused.)

P  Isa 51:22: “Thus says your Sovereign, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause [ִּ֝נְּדֵ֣כָּהּ וּבָּרָ֣ד] of his people: See, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath.” (NRSV)

N  Isa 57:16: “I will not accuse [ִּ֝נְּדֵ֣כָּהּ וּבָּרָ֣ד] forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me-- the breath of man that I have created.” (NIV)

N  Jer 2:9 (bis): “‘Therefore I will yet bring charges [ִּ֝נְּדֵ֣כָּהּ וּבָּרָ֣ד] against you,’ says the LORD, ‘And against your children's children I will bring charges [ִּ֝נְּדֵ֣כָּהּ וּבָּרָ֣ד].’”

P  Jer 11:20: “O LORD of Hosts, O just Judge, Who test the thoughts and the mind, Let me see Your retribution upon them, For I lay my case [דָּעַ֖ר נּ] before You.” (JPS) (It is Jeremiah’s דָּעַ֖ר but Yahweh the Judge adjudicates positively in the case.)
Jer 20:12: “O LORD of Hosts, You who test the righteous, Who examine the heart and the mind, Let me see Your retribution upon them, For I lay my case [柟 N] before You.” (JPS)
(See comments on previous verse.)

Jer 25:31: “Tumult has reached the ends of the earth, For the LORD has a case [柟 N] against the nations, He contends with all flesh. He delivers the wicked to the sword–declares the LORD.”

Jer 50:34: “Their Redeemer is strong, the LORD of hosts is His name; He will vigorously plead [柟 Vb Vb] their case [柟 N] So that He may bring rest to the earth, But turmoil to the inhabitants of Babylon.”

Jer 51:36: “Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am going to plead [柟 Vb] your case [柟 N] And exact full vengeance for you; And I will dry up her sea And make her fountain dry.’”

Lam 3:58: “O Lord, You have pleaded [柟 Vb] the case [柟 N] for my soul; You have redeemed my life.”

Hos 4:1: “Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case [柟 N] against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land.”

Hos 12:3 (ET 2): “Now the LORD is bringing a lawsuit [柟 N] against Judah. He is about to punish Jacob for all his deceitful ways.” (NLT)

Mic 6:1–2: “Hear what the LORD is saying: Come, present My case [柟 Vb] before the mountains, And let the hills hear you pleading. Hear, you mountains, the case [柟 N] of the LORD–You firm foundations of the earth! For the LORD has a case [柟 N] against His people, He has a suit [מביצים] against Israel.”

Mic 7:9: “I will bear the indignation of the LORD Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads [柟 Vb] my case [柟 N] and
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executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, And I will see His righteousness."

The divine בֵּיתִי passages have been examined by several scholars (see review of literature above), and it is not necessary, nor is there space in this study, to repeat this research. I will limit my remarks to some of the salient points that have emerged from my own analysis of these and related passages in Scripture.

1. **Preponderance of positive lawsuits.** Among the list of 44 OT references to a divine בֵּיתִי, actually employing the term בֵּיתִי, at least 35 (and perhaps 36) of these divine lawsuits are positive, i.e., God’s legal proceedings lead to vindication or deliverance of His people! There are four times as many positive cases of divine בֵּיתִי as negative ones. Although the longer passages of the OT which contain the complete covenant lawsuit structure (as described below) focus upon faithless Israel, the preponderance of OT references to covenant lawsuit feature God as defending the cause of His people! This is in harmony with the dominant and overarching positive concept of judgment in the OT, as a time for the judge to uphold the rights of the oppressed and downtrodden.

2. **A distinct sub-genre.** I concur with the research that has isolated a distinct divine בֵּיתִי-oracle sub-genre, especially in the Pre-exilic Prophets, which has been labeled a “prophetic lawsuit.” A representative passage in this genre is Mic 6:1-8, where we find the word בֵּיתִי occurring three times in the first two verses. According to the consensus of those who have analyzed this genre, the “prophetic lawsuit” in its complete formal structure, includes at least four other prophetic passages: Isa 1:2–20; 3:13–15; Jer 2:4–13; and Hos 4:1–13.

3. **Covenant lawsuit.** I also agree with those who extend this genre beyond the Prophets to include other passages which call to “heaven and earth” as witnesses, in particular, Psalm 50 and Deut 32. Deut 32 is especially instructive because it provides explicit context for the בֵּיתִי

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pattern: the context is a breach of covenant. The appeal to “heaven and earth” as witnesses, found in Deut 32:1, occurs earlier in Deuteronomy referring to the establishment of the covenant (Deut 4:26; 30:19). In the chapter immediately preceding Deut 32 the same appeal is linked by Moses to Israel’s future breaking of the covenant, with “heaven and earth” serving as witnesses against them, clearly in a legal setting (Deut 31:28). This same breach of covenant is apparent in the contents of other extended \( \text{pattern} \) passages noted above. In view of the breadth of this genre that extends beyond the Prophets, and in view of the covenant context of the genre, it seem more appropriate to identify these passages as “covenant lawsuit” than “prophetic lawsuit.”

4. The covenant lawsuit structure. I concur with George Mendenhall and others who have followed him in showing that the “covenant lawsuit” structure forms a virtual mirror image of Israel’s covenant-making pattern, and that these Israelite patterns parallel the basic features of the Hittite suzerain treaties and/or letters to vassals who are guilty of breach of covenant. The basic structure of the Hittite international suzerainty treaties and Israelite covenant-making procedure, may be summarized as the following:

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46 Adapted from Mendenhall, Law and Covenant, 31–34. Scholars have demonstrated that the entire book of Deuteronomy is structured in this general covenant-making (or renewal) format (but with the order reversed in putting witnesses last). See, e.g., the outline of Deuteronomy by P. C. Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 24:
1. Preamble (Deut 1:1-5)
2. Historical Prologue (chs. 1:6—4:49)
3. General Stipulations (chs. 5–11)
4. Specific Stipulations (chs. 12–26)
5. Blessings and Curses (chs. 27–28)
6. Witnesses (see 30:19; 31:19; 32:1–43)
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1. Preamble (introduction of the suzerain)
2. Historical prologue (statement of previous benevolent acts of the suzerain toward the vassal, as motivation for the vassal’s grateful covenant loyalty)
3. Stipulations (General and specific)
4. List of witnesses
5. Blessings and curses

The Israelite covenant lawsuit pattern for breach of covenant is the mirror image of this pattern, except with the witnesses often placed at the beginning of the list, identifying the permanent features of Yahweh’s creation who have “witnessed” the vassal’s breach of covenant and the suzerain’s just actions toward the vassal:

1. List of witnesses (heaven and earth; mountains and hills): Deut 32:1; Isa 1:2a; Mic 6:1–2a; Ps 50:1, 4, 6; Jer 2:12.
2. Preamble (introduction of the suzerain and call to judgment): Deut 32:4–6; Isa 1:2b; Mic 6:1–2; Ps 50:1–7; Jer 2:4–5a.
3. Historical prologue (review of the suzerain’s benevolent acts toward the vassal): Deut 32:7–14; Isa 1:2c; Mic 6:3–5; Ps 50:8–15; Jer 2:5b–7a.

5. Other biblical examples of a covenant lawsuit. There are other passages in the Hebrew Bible where one finds such complete structure of a covenant lawsuit, that have not been widely explored. For example, Ezekiel 5–6 has all the aspects of the covenant lawsuit genre:

1. Preamble: “Thus says the Lord God” (Ezek 5:5a)
2. Historical prologue: “This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her.” (Ezek 5:5b)
3. Indictments: “She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations...” (Ezek 5:6–8)
4. Verdict: “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight
of the nations...” (Ezek 5:8–9). Sentence with the covenant
curses: “Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst...”
(Ezek 5:10–17).
5. Witnesses: “Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of
Israel, and prophesy against them” (Ezek 6:1–14). The mountains,
normally the lasting and faithful witnesses of Israel’s apostasy, in
this instance have also become corrupt (as the fertility cults have
been practiced on their heights).

In a 1980 JBL article, Henry Parunak also examines the pervasive
theme of covenant lawsuit in Ezekiel 8-11 (a passage largely overlooked by
previous studies). Parunak summarizes the basic elements of the classic rîb
or covenant lawsuit (convocation of trial, accusation by interrogation,
indictment, declaration of guilt, declaration of doom, and promise of
salvation for the faithful), and demonstrates how Ezekiel 8-11 contains all
of these basic elements, arranged in a chiastic structure.47

There needs to be more study given to examining other potential
biblical passages where the essential elements of the covenant lawsuit
structure are found although the word בֵּית may not occur. This should
involve, e.g., an examination of all passages where the synonym מָצוּת
“judgment” (as in Ezek 5:8) or the related verb פָּרַשׁ is found, or other
synonym such as מַעֲשָׂה “to judge” or מָשָׂא “to examine, [legally] investigate,”
or מָשְׂרָה “to investigate, examine,” in order to see if there are other extended
passages containing the essential elements of the covenant lawsuit genre.
My initial examination of passages containing these Hebrew terms has
uncovered at least 66 divine lawsuit passages which are not referred to
elsewhere in this paper in connection with other discussion.48 These call

47 Henry van Dyke Parunak, “The Literary Architecture of Ezekiel’s mar’ôt ’êlôhim,”
48 The root מַעֲשָׂה “to judge” is used at least 20 times with reference to a divine covenant
lawsuit, of which five passages are not mentioned in connection with words referred to
elsewhere in this paper: Job 19:29; 35:14; 36:31; Ps 68:6; 72:2. The root פָּרַשׁ “to examine,
investigate” appears at least 13 times in a setting of divine covenant lawsuit, of which five
passages are not mentioned elsewhere in this paper: 1 Chron 29:17; Job 17:18; Job 34:36;
Jer 12:3; 17:10. The root מָשָׂא is used at least four times referring to a divine lawsuit: Job
13:19 (the only passage not mentioned elsewhere in this paper); Ps 139:1, 23; and Jer 17:10.
The noun מְצוּת “judgment” is used in at least 54 passages in a setting of divine lawsuit, of
which at least 21 are not mentioned elsewhere in this paper: Deut 1:17; 1 Ki 8:45, 49, 59;
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for further examination in a future study to determine the extent of the lawsuit structures.

6. Incomplete lawsuit structures. One must also note the many passages where there is not a complete covenant lawsuit structure, but, in Harvey’s terminology, incomplete accusatory addresses. Harvey points to 14 instances of such incomplete lawsuit structure: Isa 42:18–25; 48:12–19; 57:3–13; 58:1–14; 66:1–4; Jer 6:16–21; Mal 1:6–2:9; Jdg 2:1–5; 1 Sam 2:27–36; 2 Sam 12:7–12; 1 Kgs 14:7–11; 21:17–24; 2 Chron 12:5–8; 15:1–15. To these we can note the additional passages mentioned by Gunkel: Isa 41:1ff., 21ff.; 43:9ff.; Hos 2:4ff.; Ps 50:7–13; and Ps 82. It is instructive to note that these examples include a covenant lawsuit against individuals as well as the corporate nation (Isa 1:18–20; 3:13–15; Jer 2:4–9; Hos 2:4ff.; and Mic 6:1ff.) as well as imitations of this form of speech in Ps 50:7–13 and Ps 82.

7. Divine lawsuits against the foreign nations. Among the divine passages (where the term יְרֵעַ occurs), it should be noted that there is at least one example (and perhaps two), where God’s lawsuit is directed toward the nations and not toward His people (individually or collectively): Jer 25:31 (negatively) and perhaps Isa 3:13 (positively). Such lawsuits may still be termed as “covenant lawsuit,” if one recognizes the universal covenant that God has made with the whole earth (Isa 24:5–6; cf. Gen 9:8–17). Various scholars have recognized that passages not employing the term יְרֵעַ but constituting divine oracles against the nations (esp. Isa 13–21; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Amos 1–2; and Zeph 2), should also be classified as divine lawsuits.49

1 Chron 16:12, 14; 2 Chron 6:35, 39; Job 13:18; Job 22:4; Ps 37:6; 105:5, 7; Eccl 11:19; 12:14; Isa 4:4; 49:4; Jer 1:16; Ezek 23:45; 39:21; Hos 5:1; 6:5; Hab 1:12; Zeph 3:5, 8, 15; Mal 3:5. The verb יְרֵעַ is used in at least 34 passages in a setting of divine lawsuit, which are not mentioned elsewhere in this study (too numerous to list here).

8. Provision for reconciliation/grace. As noted above in the review of literature, Harvey’s analysis of the Hittite materials indicates that upon breach of covenant the suzerain could either declare punishment upon the unfaithful vassal, or there could be a plan B: a positive specification of what is needed to rebuild the relationship. Such provision for reconciliation is regularly found in the biblical divine covenant lawsuit upon unfaithful Israel, alongside the indictments and threat of punishment. In the midst of the legal proceedings, God often announces the possibility, in fact, there is a divine plea, for reconciliation based upon God’s grace and the people’s response of repentance and return to covenant loyalty (see Deut 32:29–30; Isa 1:16–20; Mic 6:8; Ps 50:22-23; Jer 3:6–25; 4:14). As Harvey states it, within the lawsuit format there is the paraenetic intention to awaken a positive response of repentance on the part of the audience, so that Yahweh can once more be gracious to His people.

Even if punishment must be brought upon His people as a whole, there is nonetheless a promise of God’s grace upon the remnant who do respond favorably in repentance and reformation (Deut 32:36–43; Isa 1:25–26; Mic 7:7–20; Jer 4:27). This promise of salvation and deliverance is also part of God’s judgment, inasmuch as a primary function of the judge in Israel was to deliver (see, e.g., the book of Judges). So, e.g., Deut 32:26, 43 reads: “For the Lord will judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone . . . Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people.” Mic 7:9 states the prophet’s assurance: “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, Because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case (יָשָׁבְתִּי, my יָשָׁבְתִּי) and executes justice for me; He will bring me forth to the light, and I will see His righteousness.”

The provision for grace is also present in (or accompanying) many of the divine lawsuits against the foreign nations. For example, God’s message of warning to Nineveh in the book of Jonah carried an implicit offer of reprieve if the nation repented (Jon 3:4), which offer the nation accepted and was spared. God offered blessing and salvation for foreign nations who responded to His message and repented of their evil ways (see Jer 18:7–10). Those among the other nations who would accept the worship of Yahweh were to be welcomed into the covenant community (e.g., Isa 56:3-8; Ezek 47:21-23). A special work of the Messianic Servant
was to be a “light to the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6; 49:6), bringing Yahweh’s “salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6; cf. 42:1; 51:4-5; 60:1-3). A time was even envisioned when Israel’s notable enemies, Egypt and Assyria, would be regarded by God as “My people” and “the work of My hands” (Isa 19:25). Regarding some other foreign nations, even after the threat of coming disaster comes the promise of restoration. So, for example, while Amos 1-2 predicts destruction and/or captivity for the political powers surrounding Israel and Judah (Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab), Jeremiah indicates that, at least in the case of Ammon and Moab, God would eventually “bring back the captives” of these people (Jer 48:47; 49:6).

9. Ultimate purpose: theodicy. As Harvey correctly points out, the ultimate purpose of the divine covenant lawsuit directed toward Israel is to vindicate the juridical and moral correctness of Yahweh in the face of disasters that Israel experiences (see, e.g., Jer 30:11; 46:28; Ezek 5:13; Mic 6:3–5). The covenant lawsuit is a statement of theodicy! In the case of positive covenant lawsuits, the purpose is also to vindicate Yahweh as well as His people (see, e.g., Ps 79:9–10; Ezek 36:22–23; 39:27–28). God’s name is also vindicated in His lawsuits against the foreign nations (e.g., Isa 19:21–22; 24:5–6; Jer 50:28–29; Ezek 28:6–8; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4). This question of theodicy in the covenant lawsuits needs to be developed further in another study.

10. Sitz im Leben. The Sitz im Leben of the negative covenant lawsuits directed toward Israel consists of pivotal moments in salvation history when Israel has proven unfaithful to the covenant with Yahweh, and they are facing disaster and destruction. Deut 32 looks forward to the future when, in Moses’ prophetic vision such a moment was to arise. The eighth-century Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah set forth the divine covenant lawsuit in the last years of probation for the Northern Kingdom of Israel before its captivity, while Jeremiah’s covenant lawsuit comes in the final days before judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah at the turn of the 7th-6th cent BC. God’s procedure in these critical junctures of Israel’s history is to

50 Harvey, Le plaidoyer prophétique, 165–166.
51 See, e.g., passages involving the vindicating of God’s people: Deut 32:36; 1 Kgs 8:32; 2 Chr 6:23; Job 6:29; 13:18; 19:25; Ps 7:8; 17:2; 24:5; 26:1; 35:27; 37:6; 43:1; 54:1; 103:6; 135:14; Isa 50:8; 54:17; 62:1, 2; 63:1; Jer 51:10; Joel 2:23.
conduct a covenant lawsuit, legal proceedings, in order to reveal the justice of His actions in bringing judgment upon His unfaithful people, as well as to give opportunity for them to repent and receive His gracious forgiveness and salvation.

The Sitz im Leben of the positive covenant lawsuits directed toward individuals or the corporate nation of Israel consists of those moments in salvation history when the nation or individuals within the nation are in desperate straights, oppressed or falsely accused by enemies, in need of deliverance and/or vindication by Yahweh.

The Sitz im Leben of the covenant lawsuits against the foreign nations is twofold: either presented as a warning to these nations before they have filled up the cup of their iniquity (cf. Gen 15:16 and the case of Jonah’s message to Assyria), offering an implicit warning and call to repentance; or a pronouncement of imminent and irrevocable punishment when their cup of iniquity is full (as in the case of Nahum’s message to the same country a century later). It is not always possible to determine whether a given lawsuit against a foreign nation comes at a time when probation still lingers and thus the threat of judgment is conditional and an implicit call to repentance, or whether that nation has passed the bounds of divine forbearance and their fate has already been sealed.

B. The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Scripture

In the last section of this study, I suggest that the covenant lawsuit is not only a (sub)genre, with a specific literary form and/or technical terminology (such as בִּרְי or לְזֹאת or רִא), but constitutes a motif that suffuses the entire warp and woof of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. As Gemser states it, the בִּרְי pattern is part of the Hebrew mentality, part and parcel of the way that God is depicted in Scripture.52

1. Pentateuch. In the Pentateuch, various scholars have pointed out numerous examples of divine legal proceedings, beginning in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve’s Fall. According to Gen 3, God comes walking in the cool of the day, and initiates what Claus Westermann calls variously a “legal process,” a “trial,” a “court process.”53 Phyllis Trible

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52 Gemser, “Rib- or Controversy-pattern,”120–137.
comments on this scene: “God becomes the prosecutor in a court of law.”

Rick Marrs describes Gen 3:8–13 as a “trial” and “verdict” followed by a “judgment” in Gen 3:14–19. Aubrey Malphurs summarizes the scene of vv. 14–19 thus: “God as the prosecuting attorney probed the two defendants who reluctantly admitted some guilt but shifted the blame to others. Now God moves from the role of prosecutor to judge and pronounces final judgment.” Calum Carmichael even shows how the medieval canonists found in the divine legal proceedings of Gen 3 the basic principles of human justice and general rules of judicial procedure. In the Garden of Eden after the Fall, Adam and Eve are placed on the witness stand, as it were, and given opportunity to testify, and in their very testimony, they perjure themselves and reveal the truth of their guilt. God pronounces the verdict of guilty and sentence of judgment. But in the heart of that judgment is the first Gospel promise (Gen 3:15, the Protoevangelium)! God’s trial judgment is not to reveal whom He can damn, but to make a way of salvation for all who will respond to His grace!

We see this same procedure all the way through the book of Genesis. The same kind of divine investigative trial is apparent in the story of Cain (Gen 4:9–10): “Where is Abel your brother? . . . What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.” Victor Hamilton comments on this scene: “Following the crime, comes the divine investigation. . . . God now shifts from interrogator to that of prosecutor. .

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58 See Afolarin Ojewole, “The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2002).
Similarly, Kenneth A. Matthews remarks: “As in a criminal trial, God presents condemning testimony against Cain.”

God comes again for a legal trial investigation before he brings the flood (Gen 6:1–13; see esp. v. 5, 12, 13 [NRSV]): “The Lord saw . . . And God saw . . . I have determined . . .”. Nahum Sarna notes: “This phrase [“The Lord saw . . .”] has juridical overtones, implying both investigation of the facts and readiness for action.” Likewise, Umberto Cassuto recognizes the divine legal proceedings implied here: “[God, as it were, says:] sentence of destruction upon all flesh has been presented before My Court of Justice, and I have already to come to a decision concerning it, and I am about to execute it.”

The same procedure is described in God’s coming down for a judicial investigation of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:5): “The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.” Sarna remarks: “God does not react capriciously; he investigates man’s doings.” The same procedure is described in His coming down to investigate in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20-21). T. F. Mafico points out that “Yahweh came down to make a judicial investigation.” In each of these cases, scholars have recognized that a legal trial procedure is involved. God comes to investigate, not because He needs to know, but so that it can be seen that He is fair and just in all His dealings.

And in each case, there is at the heart of the judgment the element of grace, God’s desire to save those who are under judgment. The mark on Cain the murderer who deserved the death sentence, was an act of grace for his preservation, “lest anyone finding him should kill him” (Gen 4:15). In the Flood narrative, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8), and the chiastic heart of Gen 6–9 is not the destruction of the wicked but

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63 Sarna, *Genesis*, 82.
God’s grace: “Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark” (Gen 8:1). In the account of the Tower of Babel, after the sons of men rebelled against God and in bold defiance of God, after the divine legal investigation (Gen 11:5) the people were scattered throughout the earth, not destroyed. Likewise with regard to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, after the divine investigation (Gen 18:21) Yahweh, the “Judge of all the earth” (v. 25), was willing to save the cities if only ten righteous people were found there (v. 32), and Yahweh, “being merciful,” sent his angels to forcibly rescue the reluctant and lingering family of Lot (19:15–17).


The last four books of the Pentateuch are replete with references to divine judgment, often explicitly mentioning (or at least implying) legal proceedings. This goes beyond the normal situations where Moses or the appointed judges/priests act on behalf of God in administering justice through the Israelite legal system (Exod 18:13, 19–27; 21–23; Lev 19:15; Duet 1:16–17; 17:8–13; 19:15–21; 25:1–2; cf. Ezek 44:24) to specific moments and venues of God’s direct divine judgment: God’s “seeing/hearing” of Israel’s plight in Egypt, “visiting” them and “remembering” His covenant with them (Exod 3:7, 9; 4:31; 6:5); divine judgment against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt (Exod 7–11; 12:11; 18:11; Num 33:4); God’s “testing” of Israel (Exod 16:4); Massebah and Meribah (Exod 17); the high priest’s breastplate of judgment with the Urim and Thummim (Exod 28:15, 30; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8); Israel’s worshiping the golden calf (Exod 32:26–28; 33:4–5); Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10); the annual Yom Kippur or day of divine judgment (Lev 16; 23:26–32); the divine “trial of jealousy” in cases of suspected adultery (Num 5:11–31);

affirmative judgment of the 70 elders (Num 11:16–31); Miriam and Aaron’s contention against Moses and the resultant divine judgment (Num

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65 For discussion of this remarkable case in which God takes the trial and punishment into His own hands, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 349–354.
12); divine death sentence on the rebels at Kadesh Barnea (Num 14); Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16); the Aaron’s budding rod (Num 17); Moses’ disobedience in striking the rock (Num 20); Baal Peor (Num 25); favorable divine judgment regarding the daughters of Zelophehad and their request for inheritance (Num 27:1–11; 36:1–12); the many cases of divine kārēt (a person being “cut off”) in which God took direct responsibility for the divine judgment of the high-handed sinner;\textsuperscript{66} and the blessings and curses of the covenant (Lev 26; Deut 27–28).

2. Psalms. Bandy rightly remarks that “A large swath of the Psalms also invoke lawsuit motifs as appeals to Yahweh, who is the righteous judge that will render justice, exact vengeance, and vindicate the innocent.”\textsuperscript{67} Gemsler found some twenty-five psalms in which parts or expressions of the lawsuit pattern occur: Pss 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 17, 26, 27, 31, 35, 42–43, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 62, 64, 69, 70, 86, 109, 140, 142, 143.\textsuperscript{68} As a sample of the judicial language in these psalms, Gemsler offers the following:

Cf. Ps. vii, the oath of purgation, verses 4-6, the summoning of the tribunal, verses 7f., the appeal to the judge, verses 9-12, the announcement of punishment, verses 13 ff.; Ps. xvii, the declaration of a “just cause,” verses 6-9, the complaint, verses 10-12, the request for sentence and punishment, verses 13 f., and for his own justification, verse 15; Ps. xxvi, the supplication for a hearing and investigation, verses 1-3, the declaration of innocence, verse 4 f. negatively, verses 6-8 positively; Ps. xxxv, the request for a trial, verses 1 ff., the invoking of punishment, verses 4 ff., the complaint, verse 7ff.; renewed complaint and accusation, verses 11-16, for the third time complaint and accusation, verses 19-21, appeal to the judge, verses 22-24, invocation of punishment, verses 25 f. and of justification,

\textsuperscript{66} Donald J. Wold, “The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty Kareth” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1978), summarized in idem, Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 144–147. Wold’s research has shown that the kārēt penalty was “a conditional divine curse of extinction, obliterating the sinner (and progeny) from any role in the drama of Israel’s history” (ibid., 147). See ibid., 146, for a tabulation of the crimes in Scripture for which the kārēt penalty was imposed. The passages in the Pentateuch calling for the divine kārēt penalty include: Exod 12:15, 19; 30:33, 38; 31:14; Lev 7:20, 21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9, 10, 14; 18:29, 19:8; 20:3, 5, 6, 17, 18; 22:3; 23:29; Nu 9:15; 15:30, 31; 19:13, 20.

\textsuperscript{67} Bandy, Prophetic Lawsuit, 41.

\textsuperscript{68} Gemser, “Rib- or Controversy-pattern,”128, note 1.
verses 27f.; Ps. cix, the complaint of the defendant, verses 2-5, quotation of the accusation (the curse invoked against him), verses 6-19, invocation of God’s verdict, verse 20, and of his doing justice to the needy innocent, verses 21-31. 69

From my own cursory survey of the book of Psalms, I would add over sixty more verses from other psalms: Pss 9:4, 8, 16, 19; 10:18; 14:2; 33:13–15; 37:33; 51:6 (ET 4); 53:2–3; 54:1; 56:8–9; 58:11; 62:12; 66:10; 67:4; 73:17–20; 75:2, 7–8; 76:8–10; 80:14; 81:1–2; 82:1–4, 8; 87:6; 94:1–3; 96:10–13; 97:8; 98:9; 102:19–22; 110:5–6; 135:14; 137:7–9; 139:1–6, 23–24; 146:7; and 149:7–9. It is significant to notice how many times the judicial proceedings explicitly involve divine investigation of the evidence (e.g., Ps 7:9; 11:4; 14:2–3; 17:3; 26:2; 33:13; 51:6 [ET 4]; 53:2–3; 80:14; 87:6; 102:19; 139:1, 23–24), and how many times the judgment proceeds from God’s heavenly temple/throne (e.g., Ps 9:4; 11:4; 14:2; 33:13; 53:2–3; 68:5; 76:8–10; 80:14; 82:1–2; 102:19) or earthly sanctuary/temple (e.g., 73:17–20). It is also significant that the preponderance of instances of divine judicial activity in the Psalms involve God’s positive judgment: vindication/deliverance of His people and/or condemnation/punishment of His enemies (see, e.g., the many occurrences of verses employing the term בָּר, as listed in the previous section; plus most of the psalms listed above).

Beyond the above listing of individual Psalms, it has been noted that many, if not all, of the so-called psalms of lament have a covenant lawsuit background. The NIV Study Bible summarizes regarding these psalms:

On the whole they reflect the then-current conventions of a court trial, the psalmists presenting their cases before the heavenly King/Judge. When beset by wicked adversaries, the petitioners appeal to God for a hearing, describe their situation, plead their innocence (“righteousness”), lodge their accusations against their adversaries, and appeal for deliverance and judicial redress. When suffering at the hands of God (when God is their adversary), they confess their guilt and plead for mercy. Attention to these various speech functions and their role in the psalmists’ judicial appeals

69 Ibid., 128, note 2.
to the heavenly Judge will significantly aid reader’s understanding of these psalms.  

3. The Prophets. Moving to the Former and Latter Prophets, we have already referred to the twenty passages explicitly referring to a divine צֶר (see previous section), and the many examples of passages where there is not a complete covenant lawsuit structure, but, in Harvey’s terminology, incomplete accusatory addresses, indicating the presence of the covenant lawsuit motif (see point no. 6 above). We also noted above (point no. 7) the numerous passages involving a divine lawsuit against the nations. In addition to the extensive collections of this material, we encounter whole OT books devoted almost entirely to depicting divine judgment against foreign nations (Jonah, Nahum, and Obadiah), as well as several individual chapters not mentioned above: Joel 3, Mic 5, Zeph 2, and Zech 9. Furthermore, one might argue that much of the entire Latter Prophets consists of indictments against Israel for her apostasy, even when no explicit legal language is employed. For example, Ganoune Diop has argued that in several Isaianic passages “The juridical aspect of the word of God occurs in the setting of the covenant lawsuit as an indictment against covenant breakers (28:14; 32:9; 37:21–22).”  

(See also discussion on several entire books of the Prophets, below.)

4. Divine lawsuits conducted from the sanctuary/temple. William Shea examines various instances of divine legal judgments in the OT, focusing specifically upon occasions when these came from the Israelite sanctuary/temple. He isolates twenty-eight passages dealing with judgment from the sanctuary, divided among those conducted from the wilderness tabernacle (eight), those conducted from the heavenly temple (nine), and those set in the context of the earthly temple in Jerusalem (eleven). These break down into six different categories:

1. A favorable judgment upon the righteous (Ps 103, from the heavenly temple).

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70 Zondervan NIV Study Bible, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 779.
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2. A judgment distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked in Israel (Ps 14 (and 53—a duplicate of 14), from the heavenly temple; Mal 3, Ezek 10, and Ps 50 and 73 from the earthly temple.

3. A judgment given in favor of the righteous over against the wicked (Pss 11 and 102 from the heavenly temple; Joel 2–3 in the context of the earthly temple).

4. A judgment upon the sins of otherwise-righteous people (Ps 99, from the earthly temple).

5. An unfavorable judgment upon the wicked in Israel (1 Kgs 22 and Mic 1, from the heavenly temple).

6. Judgments upon foreign nations (Ps 29 and 76 from the heavenly temple; Pss 9 and 60, Isa 18, and Joel 3, from the earthly temple).

Shea points out that “God was concerned with three categories of persons in the world (rather than just two, as some would insist). These three larger categories consist of the righteous in Israel, the wicked in Israel, and the nations.”

Shea compares the portrayal of divine judgment from the sanctuary elsewhere in the OT with the apocalyptic portrayals of final divine judgment in the apocalyptic book of Daniel, and finds all of the essential elements in both. The cosmic covenant lawsuit scene in Daniel is graphically introduced in Dan 7:10–11:

I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.

The outcome and relative timing of this cosmic lawsuit is found in vss. 21–22: “I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when

73 Adapted from Shea, Selected Studies, 21–22.
74 Ibid., 22.
the saints took possession of the kingdom.” The cosmic lawsuit brings both vindication to the saints and condemnation to the little horn. The judgment convenes sometime prior to time when the saints take possession of the kingdom. Reference to the cosmic legal proceedings is made again in Daniel 12:2, when, after describing the great tribulation, Daniel writes, “At that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.”

Two significant differences between the cosmic lawsuit of Daniel and the other divine lawsuits in salvation history pertain to time and scope: the Daniel judgment is future, not contemporaneous, and cosmic, not local. The local, contemporary legal judgments from the sanctuary appear to be “a series of mini-judgments on the microcosmic scale, as it were. These lead up to, point to, and provide an earlier reflection of and parallel to the great final judgment on the macrocosmic scale as is described in Daniel (and the Revelation).”75 Shea finds in Ezek 1–10 the closest parallel to judgment in heaven described in Daniel 7.76

Shea also examines Acts 7 in the NT, and shows how this chapter sets forth “Stephen as a prophetic messenger of the heavenly court who brings God’s covenant lawsuit to His people (in continuity with the prophets of the OT)” in fulfillment of Daniel 9:24.77

5. Covenant lawsuit motif structuring or suffusing larger blocks of Scripture. In addition to individual passages and sections of books devoted to the covenant lawsuit pattern and/or motif, we conclude our discussion by pointing to even larger blocks of Scripture which have been regarded as structured around, or suffused with, the lawsuit genre/motif.

a. Job. One such possibility is the book of Job. We have seen above how various passages of Job contain explicit reference to the divine יִשְׁרֵי. Beyond this, numerous scholars have recognized the profusion of legal

75 Shea, Selected Studies, 24.
76 Ibid., 13–20.
terminology in the book, and several studies contend that the entire book of Job may be regarded as a cosmic covenant lawsuit.

b. Isaiah. John Watts, in his two-volume commentary on Isaiah, views the entire book as a twelve-act drama (which he entitles The Vision of Isaiah), and argues that “The entire Vision is, in a way, an extension of Yahweh’s [legal] complaint (chap. 1) against his people and his city.”

“The Vision of Isaiah is of a legal dispute, בֶּן... The adversaries have been summoned in the title verse. They are Judah and Jerusalem. The witnesses have been called. Yahweh is the plaintiff; his children are in rebellion against him.” Throughout his commentary Watts repeatedly points out (using different expressions) that a given act or scene of the dramatic Vision “continues the trial in the heavenly judgment hall.”

c. Ezekiel. In the Festschrift for William Shea, I have argued that the entire book of Ezekiel is structured around the motif of judgment, in particular, the covenant lawsuit. I concur with Shea that the covenant lawsuit against Judah in chs. 1–11 is set against a Day of Atonement

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81 Ibid., 1:21.

82 Ibid., 2:128 (re. Isa 42:13–43:21). For other examples, he calls Isa 3:13–15 “a prosecution speech before a court” (1:42), and 41:1–20 “the great trial scene” (2:108). These examples could be multiplied many times over throughout the two volumes.

background, and these chapters are placed in chiastic parallel with the final vision of Ezekiel (chs. 40–48), given to Ezekiel on the Day of Atonement (Ezek 40:1).84 Shea summarizes the movement of these two frames of the book:

Thus the visions of God and His glory given to Ezekiel . . . center on His temple and His relationship to it. In Eze 1 He is seen coming to His temple from the north to take up His work of judgment there. In Eze 10 He is seen leaving His temple to the east 14 months later, having completed that work of judgment. . . . Then He is finally seen by Ezekiel (40:1) on the day of atonement returning from the east to His temple, which ultimately was to be reconstructed.85

In the remaining parts of Ezekiel’s macrostructure, as I have analyzed it, the motif of lawsuit moves away from focusing on Judah after the close of her probation with the siege of the city, to the divine lawsuits against Israel’s neighboring nations (25–32), and the motif reaches its chiastic apex with the cosmic divine lawsuit upon the Fallen Cherub (Ezek 28:11–19) and the vindication of God in the restoration of His people (Ezek 28:20–26).

d. Daniel. The very name of the book, “Daniel,” meaning “God is my Judge,” belies the major theme of the book. Several scholars argue forcefully for “judgment” (including especially, the legal proceedings) as the dominant, overarching, theme of the book. See, e.g., the commentary on Daniel by Jacques Doukhan, who shows how “the motif of judgment can be traced everywhere throughout the book of Daniel.”86

e. Malachi. Several scholars have argued that the entire book of Malachi should be seen as a covenant lawsuit. Building upon Harvey’s analysis of Mal 1:6–2:9 as a covenant lawsuit, Julia O’Brien, in her published dissertation, makes the case that “the entire Book of Malachi. . . .

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85 Shea, Selected Studies, 20.
86 Jacques B. Doukhan, Daniel: The Vision of the End (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 11–13. See also the covenant lawsuit of Daniel 5, as analyzed by Ted Noel (personal correspondence, 2/15/08).
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. employs the form of the covenant lawsuit.” 87 A similar position is taken by Elizabeth Achtemeier in her commentary on Malachi. 88

f. Gospel of John. Moving briefly to the NT, a recent study by Andrew Lincoln has analyzed the development of the lawsuit motif in the Gospel of John, and concludes that God’s lawsuit with humanity characterizes the dominant way of seeing the rhetoric of the Fourth Gospel. 89 Lincoln summarizes regarding John’s gospel, “The lawsuit between God and the nations becomes a [lawsuit between] God and the world and provides the overarching framework within which Israel’s controversy with God is now seen to be a part.” 90

g. Pauline Epistles. While not arguing for the lawsuit motif to be the overarching structuring device of the Pauline Epistles, proponents of the “New Perspective” on Paul have shown the vital place of the lawcourt background in Paul’s theological argumentation. For example, N. T. Wright, in his book on justification in Paul, argues repeatedly that “Paul’s doctrine of justification is focused on the divine lawcourt. God, as judge, ‘finds in favor of,’” and hence acquits from their sin, those who believe in Jesus Christ.” 91 For Wright, the language of “righteousness” in Paul is based upon the OT usage of the term, where it “regularly refers to lawcourt, or quasi-lawcourt situations.” 92 Without recognizing and giving due place to the divine lawcourt background to Paul’s epistles, Wright insists, one can never understand the message of Paul.

h. Revelation. One cannot overlook the pervasiveness of the lawsuit motif in this apocalyptic finale to Scripture. From the introduction of Jesus as “the faithful witness” (1:5), to the series of covenant-renewal (and implied lawsuit) messages directed against the seven churches in chs. 2–3; 93 to the cry of the souls of the martyrs under the altar during the 5th seal:

87 Julia M. O’Brien, Priest and Levite in Malachi (SBLDS 121; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), citation at p. 63.
88 Elizabeth Achtemeier, Nahum–Malachi (INT; Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 172.
90 Ibid., 46.
91 N. T. Wright, Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 12 (italics original).
92 Ibid., 68.
“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood. . .” (Rev 6:10); on to the series of judgments announced by the seven trumpets (Rev 8–9); to the opening of the inner sanctum of the Temple (11:19) for the commencement of a cosmic Yom Kippur judgment, on to the judgment described in the First Angel’s message (Rev 14:6–7) coming before the reaping of the earth’s harvest at the Second Advent of Christ (Rev 14:14–20); to the seven bowl judgments of Rev 16 and the judgment of Babylon in Rev 17–18; to affirmation of theodicy from the multitude in heaven, “True and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot” (19:2); to the appearance of Christ on His white horse at the Second Coming, when “in righteousness He judges and makes war” (19:11); to the judgment given to the saints during the millennium (20:4), and finally, to the final cosmic divine lawsuit, the Great White Throne judgment, in which John “saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. . . and the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (20:12)—from beginning to end, the book of Revelation is suffused with the covenant judgment/lawsuit motif.

The recently-published dissertation by Alan Bandy builds upon numerous studies of lawsuits in the book of Revelation, and argues that the whole Apocalypse of John is actually structured around the prophetic lawsuit, modeled after the basic biblical pattern set forth in Deut 32.94

i. The entire OT (and NT) a covenant lawsuit? Walter Brueggemann, in his magisterial OT theology, boldly asserts that the entire OT should be read against the background of the lawsuit motif.95 He writes in his preface: “I have focused on the metaphor and imagery of the courtroom trial in order to regard the theological substance of the Old Testament as a series of claims asserted for Yahweh, the God of Israel.”96 Hence the subtitle of this OT theology: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy. For Brueggemann, the lawsuit motif in the Hebrew Bible has become ubiquitous. One wonders if Brueggemann wrote a theology of the NT, he would find the same ubiquity of the lawsuit there as well.

94 Bandy, Prophetic Lawsuit, passim (for other studies related to covenant lawsuit in the book of Revelation, see especially pp. 11–18).
96 Ibid., xvi.
III. Conclusion

Whether or not the entire OT or even the whole Bible should be regarded as a lawsuit, nevertheless we can safely conclude that the divine covenant lawsuit is pervasive in Scripture, both as a discrete sub-genre and as a prominent motif throughout the various parts of both OT and NT. Numerous legal terms converge to depict the divine lawsuit. I have isolated at least 320 different references to a divine covenant lawsuit in the OT, not to speak of the extensive use of the motif in the NT.

Although the divine lawsuit often is accusatory, it is surprising to find that the majority of the divine בִּר (rib) passages (explicitly using the Hebrew word בִּר) are not negative but positive, as God defends/vindicates the cause of His covenant people. Even when the divine lawsuit passages are accusatory, amidst the legal proceedings is frequently found the offer of grace/reconciliation to those who will respond in repentance. It is also remarkable how many of the divine lawsuits occur in the context of the sanctuary/temple (either earthly or heavenly) as Yahweh the Supreme Judge adjudicates justice in human affairs.

After surveying the profusion of biblical material regarding the divine covenant lawsuit, it becomes apparent that far from being a rare occurrence when God conducts legal proceedings involving the inhabitants of this earth, such investigative phase of judgment may be regarded as a regular procedure preceding divine executive judgment. Before God executes judgment (either positively or negatively) toward an individual or a people, He first conducts legal proceedings, not for Him to know the facts, but to reveal in open court, as it were, that He is just and fair in all of His dealings, and that He has done all that He can to save as many as He can. Such mini-lawsuits constitute a microcosm of the macrocosmic final “assize,” the apocalyptic cosmic divine lawsuit described in such passages as Daniel 7 and throughout the book of Revelation.

In this study we have only been able to briefly survey the rich tapestry of the divine covenant lawsuit in Scripture. The many strands of this significant motif invite much more attention in future studies.
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The Unifying Logic of Israelite Purification Offerings Within Their Ancient Near Eastern Context

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Introduction

According to biblical narratives, burnt and well-being offerings preceded construction of the wilderness sanctuary, with the former as the original expiatory sacrifice (see, e.g., Exod 24:5; Job 1:5; 42:7-9). Worship at the sanctuary, where the Lord’s Presence resided, called for addition of the more specialized purification (so-called “sin”) and reparation (so-called “guilt”) offerings. Purification offerings cleansed non-defiant moral faults and serious physical ritual impurities that could pollute the sanctuary. Reparation offerings remedied sacrilege against the divine Resident of the sanctuary by misuse of things that belonged to him, or of his holy name through a fraudulent oath.

The present paper focuses on the purification offering in its ancient Near Eastern context. This kind of sacrifice was unique both within the Israelite ritual system and outside it. However, it brought together elements that had a variety of ancient Near Eastern analogies.

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2 For the name “purification offering,” see Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16 (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 253–254.
3 Ibid., 345-356.
First I will identify elements of the Israelite sacrifice, then relate these to non-Israelite phenomena, drawing mainly from examples used in my “Leviticus” section of the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary. Finally, I will reflect on the significance of the unique combination of elements in the purification offering.

Elements of the Israelite Purification Offering

Leviticus 4:22-26 provides a sample of a prescription for a purification offering, in this case on behalf of an Israelite chieftain. Key elements are italicized:

4:22 If a chieftain sins by inadvertently doing something against any of the commands of the LORD his God concerning things that should not be done, and experiences guilt, or his sin that he has committed is made known to him, he will bring his offering: a male goat without flaw. 4:23 He will press his hand on the head of the male goat and slaughter it at the place where he would slaughter a burnt-up offering before the LORD. It is a purification offering. 4:24 The priest will take some of the blood of the purification offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt-up offering. But he will pour the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt-up offering. 4:25 He will turn all of its fat into smoke on the altar like the fat of the shared sacrifice of well-being. In this way the priest will purge for him from his sin, and he will be forgiven.

The occasion for the sacrifice is an inadvertent violation of a divine prohibitive commandment by an individual when he realizes that he has sinned. The overall function of the purification offering is to remove the sin from the person (“purge for him from his sin”; v. 26), prerequisite to divine forgiveness.

The ritual process involves the priest placing two components of the animal victim on the Lord’s altar: blood and fat. Application of blood, representing life, to the altar represents token ransom for life (Lev 17:11).

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5 My translation, informed by the process of rendering Leviticus (as primary translator) for the Common English Bible (2011).
6 Roy Gane, Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 106-143.
Prominence of the blood on the horns, the highest parts of the altar, emphasizes this aspect. Such application of sacrificial blood to the horns of an altar is unique to the Israelite purification offerings (cf. 4:7, 18). The fat is burned as a token “food” portion to God “like the fat of the shared sacrifice of well-being” (v. 26). Whereas such fat of a well-being offering is an ‘iššeh, “food gift” (3:3, 9, 14) this part of a purification offering is never an ‘iššeh; rather, it represents a token “debt” payment.\(^7\)

The purification offering removes an impediment to the divine-human relationship through token ransom and debt payment. It does not buy forgiveness, which is not automatic, and the price of which would be too high (Ps 49:7 [Heb. v. 8]). Rather, the Lord graciously accepts a token as an expression of repentance, if it is genuine (but see Isa 1 regarding hypocrisy), and completes the process of reconciliation by granting forgiveness.

The chieftain’s problem is sin = moral fault, for which he needs forgiveness. Elsewhere, purgation (kipper, traditionally rendered “atonement”) through purification offerings can remove residual physical ritual impurities from persons so that they become “pure,” rather than forgiven (e.g., Lev 12:7-8; 14:19). Their purity restores their normal level of access to sacred things (e.g., 7:20-21).

There is tremendous variety among rituals labeled “purification offering.” Depending on their offerers and the evils they remedy, they could involve blood applications at the outer altar or inside the sacred Tent (Lev

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\(^7\) The term ‘iššeh is usually rendered “offering (made) by fire,” assuming that the Hebrew term derives from the word for “fire.” Weakening this idea, ‘iššeh can refer to food portions that are eaten rather than burned (Deut 18:1), but it is not used of purification offerings, which are always burned. So scholars have found an alternative in an Ugaritic cognate that means “gift” (G. R. Driver, “Ugaritic and Hebrew Words,” Ugaritica 6 [1969]: 181–184). This concept fits the biblical contexts well: An offering is given to God, whether it is burned or not, and the purification offering is not a gift because it is a mandatory token payment of “debt” (Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16, 161–162, 253).

\(^8\) In Lev 12:6-8, a purification offering is paired with a burnt offering, which supplements the quantity of expiation to make what amounts to a larger purification offering (cf. 5:7-10; 9:7-14; 15:14-15, etc., with the purification offering actually performed first; Rolf Rendtorff, Leviticus [BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985-1992], 3:177; Baruch Levine, Leviticus [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 29; Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 304; Roy Gane, Ritual Dynamic Structure [Gorgias Dissertations 14, Religion 2; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004], 151-152).
4:3-21), lesser offerings of birds (paired with burnt offerings; 5:7-10), a substitute of grain for a poor person (vv. 11-13), or even performance outside the Israelite camp (Num 19:1-10).

Once a year on the Day of Atonement, blood of special purification offerings on behalf of the priests and the lay community was to purge the sanctuary of the impurities and sins that had accumulated there throughout the year (Lev 16). Except for rebellious sins (pl. of peša‘; v. 16), these evils had come to affect the sanctuary through its contact with purification offerings, which had removed sins and impurities from offerers (Lev 6:27-28 [Heb. vv. 20-21]). The Day of Atonement was Israel’s judgment day, when loyal Israelites were morally “cleansed”/vindicated as a result of the sanctuary’s purgation (Lev 16:30) and disloyal ones were condemned (23:29-30).

The common denominator unifying the “purification offering” category was the function to purge sins or physical ritual impurities from persons or sacred objects and precincts. Except for the grain substitute (Lev 5:11-13) and the red cow ritual outside the camp (Num 19:1-10), purification offerings included both application of blood to part of the sanctuary and offering a creature (quadruped animal or bird) as food for God.

Analogous Elements in Non-Israelite Rituals

The building blocks of the purification offering existed outside Israel, where ancient Near Eastern peoples employed ritual remedies for offenses against their gods and purified persons, objects, and places. They also offered food and other items to placate their deities. Some religious cultures attest ritual manipulation of blood for purification. The following subsections provide examples.

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9 See Gane, *Cult and Character*, 165-181.
10 Ibid., 305-323.
11 For the idea that the great variety of purification offerings constitute a ritual “super-paradigm,” see Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, 112-113. Azazel’s goat was a “purification ritual,” but not a “purification offering” because it was an elimination ritual rather than a sacrifice to YHWH (Gane, *Cult and Character*, 258-261).
Remedies for Offenses Against Gods

Ancient Near Easterners believed that their deities held them accountable to standards of conduct and could negatively affect their lives if they violated these. So those who knew they had committed wrongs, or whose suffering indicated that they were out of divine favor for some reason, could seek reconciliation through sacrifices or other means. For example, a Mesopotamian eloquently expressed his restoration as follows:

In the “Gate of Release from Guilt” I was released from my bond.  
In the “Gate of Praise(?)” my mouth made inquiry.  
In the “Gate of Release from Sighing” my sighs were released.  
In the “Gate of Pure Water” I was sprinkled with purifying water.  
In the “Gate of Conciliation” I appeared with Marduk,  
In the “Gate of Joy” I kissed the foot of Sarpani-tum.  
I was consistent in supplication and prayer before them,  
I placed fragrant incense before them,  
An offering, a gift, sundry donations I presented,  
Many fatted oxen I slaughtered, butchered many [sheep?].  
Honey-sweet beer and pure wine I repeatedly libated.  
The protecting genius, the guardian spirit, divine attendants of the fabric of Esagila,  
I made their feelings glow with libation,  
I made them exultant [with] lavish [meals].  
[To the threshold, the bolt] socket, the bolt, the doors  
[I offered] oil, butterfat, and choicest grain.  
[ ] the rites of the temple.  

12 Like Leviticus 16, the Sumerian Nanshe Hymn (c. 2100–2000 B.C.) expresses the concept that human beings would be annually judged by their deity. The Hymn describes a New Year celebration at which the goddess Nanshe is portrayed as holding a yearly review of persons economically dependent on her temple. Depending on whether they were faithful in observing her ritual and ethical standards throughout the year and in coming to her temple to participate at the New Year, she would renew or terminate their contracts.  
13 William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, eds., *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 1997-), 1.153: 491. Cf. prayers of the Hittite emperor Muršili II, who entreated the gods to forgive and to end the suffering of a deadly epidemic that ravaged his people. He refers to a number of expiatory and propitiatory rituals and gifts that the gods had received from him and his people, including offerings of bread and libations (ibid., 1.60: 157-159).
Restoring a divine-human relationship could involve acknowledgment of wrongdoing through confession (cf. Lev 5:5—before a purification offering). Thus, a prayer to Marduk includes the words:

I am surely responsible for some neglect of you,
I have surely trespassed the limits set by the god.
Forget what I did in my youth, whatever it was,
Let your heart not well up against me!
Absolve my guilt, remit my punishment,
Clear me of confusion, free me of uncertainty. . .

A just and merciful deity could forgive. However, divine expectations and reactions were not always clear and consistent, and there were many gods as well as demons. Consequently, sorting out the variables to identify a successful solution often required divination, which was not always successful.

For Israelites, divination was unnecessary because several factors greatly simplified reconciliation with the Lord, taking away uncertainty and fear:
1. With monotheism there was no need to determine which deity to approach.
2. Sin that required a ritual remedy was defined as violation of a command that the Lord had communicated to the Israelites.
3. Israelites who committed inadvertent wrongs were liable for offering purification offerings only when they came to know what they had done wrong (Lev 4:14, 23, 28; but see on 5:17).

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14 Ibid., 1.114: 416. A Sumerian poem of confession and reconciliation shows several important points of contact with biblical teaching regarding the sinful nature of the present human condition, need for recognition of sins, distinctions between sins in terms of whether they are recognized/visible or forgotten, and the value of sincere (rather than artful) confession and supplication in gaining reconciliation with the deity so that joy rather than punishment results (ibid., 1.179: 574–575; cf. Ps 51); cf. W. G. Lambert, “dingir.šà dib.ba Incantations,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 33 (1974): 275, 281, 283, 285, 287.
15 Hallo and Younger, Context of Scripture (hereafter COS), 1.153: 490; cf. 487.
16 COS, 1.78: 205; cf. 204.
17 Ibid., 1.60: 160; cf. 157.
4. A limited number of ritual types (burnt, purification, and reparation offerings) were prescribed to remedy a wide range of offenses.

Ritual Purification

Many cultures have treated genital discharges, including those involved in menstruation and childbirth, as causing impurity that requires ritual remedies (cf. Lev 15). For example, a Hittite birth ritual text requires a sacrifice on the seventh day after birth and says that a male infant is pure by the age of three months, but a female is pure at four months.

As in pentateuchal ritual law, physical ritual impurity could disqualify a non-Israelite from access to sacred things. Thus, the Hittite “Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials” prohibit cultic functionaries from defiling sancta (on pain of death for a kind of intentional violation; compare Lev 22:9) by approaching sacrificial loaves and libation vessels without bathing after sexual intercourse.

Like the Hittites, the Israelites also used ablutions to remedy minor physical ritual impurities (e.g., Lev 15) and sacrifice for major impurities. Israelite impurities resulted from human and some animal sources, but other peoples believed that their rituals could interact with dangerous demonic impurity. So a Hittite law warns: “If anyone performs a purification ritual on a person, he shall dispose of the remnants (of the ritual) in the

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18 Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16, 763–765; Gary Beckman, Hittite Birth Rituals, 2d ed. (StBoT 29; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), esp. 251.
19 Ibid., 135, 137, 143, 219. As in Lev 12, there is a week-long initial period of impurity, and purification of a girl takes longer (compare vv. 4–5). Regarding a plausible reason for this, see Jonathan Magonet, “‘But If It Is a Girl She Is Unclean for Twice Seven Days. . .’: The Riddle of Leviticus 12.5,” in Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas, ed. J. Sawyer (JSOTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 152. Whereas the Hittite process has to do with the baby’s impurity, Leviticus is concerned with that of the mother. The Hittite sacrifice is offered at the end of the first week, but Israelite sacrifices come after the entire period of purification.
incineration dumps. But if he disposes of them in someone’s house, it is sorcery (and) a case for the king.”

As the Israelites did on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16), other ancient Near Easterners periodically cleansed their sacred precincts and/or sacred objects contained in them. While some Anatolians purified a new temple with blood (see below), other substances were generally used. The Sumerian Nanshe Hymn mentions purification of the temple belonging to the goddess Nanshe: “[ ] her house Sirara where water is sprinkled. . . .” On the fourth day of the Hittite Ninth Year Festival of Telipinu, images of several deities (including the god Telipinu) and a cult pedestal were ceremonially transported on a cart from Telipinu’s temple to a river, in which they were washed.

Purgation of the god Marduk’s Esagila temple complex in Babylon was accomplished by sprinkling water, sounding a copper bell, and carrying around a censer and torch inside the temple. Then the Ezida guest cella of the god Nabû was purified in two stages. The first stage included not only sprinkling holy water and carrying a censer and torch, but also smearing the doors with cedar oil and wiping (Akkadian \textit{kuppuru}, cognate to Hebrew \textit{kipper}, “purge”) the cella with the decapitated carcass of a ram. The second purification of the Ezida involved setting up a kind of canopy called “the Golden Heaven” and reciting an incantation calling on the gods to exorcise demons from the temple.

Composed centuries before the Israelite Day of Atonement “judgment day” began (Lev 16), the Sumerian Nanshe Hymn similarly expresses the concept that human beings would be annually judged by their deity. The Hymn describes a New Year celebration at which the goddess Nanshe is portrayed as holding a yearly review of persons economically dependent on her temple. Depending on whether they were faithful in observing her ritual

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22 \textit{COS}, 2.19: 110.
23 \textit{COS}, 1.70: 176.
and ethical standards throughout the year and in coming to her temple to participate at the New Year, she would renew or terminate their contracts.  

**Food Offered to Deities**

Ancient Near Eastern peoples viewed deities as favorably disposed by the smell of incense and offerings of food, including meat. Sacrifices involving burning of food items were practiced by those living in Syro-Palestine, whose rituals were closest to those of the Israelites. For example, an Ugaritic epic describes a sacrifice by King Kirta:

He entered the shade of (his) tent,
took a sacrificial lamb in his hand,
a kid in both hands,
all his best food.
He took a fowl, a sacrificial bird,
poured wine into a silver cup
honey into a golden bowl.
He climbed to the summit of the tower,
mounted the top of the wall.
He raised his hands heavenward,
sacrificed to the Bull, his father ’Ilú.
He brought down [Ba’lu] with his sacrifice,
the Son of Dagan with his game.

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28 E.g., *COS*, 1.143: 474. Israel’s deity does not need human food (Ps. 50:12–13), but other gods are thought to be dependent upon such sustenance. For example, in the Babylonian epic Atra-hasis, the gods suffer from hunger and thirst during the great Flood because there are no humans to offer them sacrifices. So when Atra-hasis (the “Noah” figure) subsequently offers his sacrifice, the gods smell the offering (compare Gen 8:20–21) and crowd around like flies (W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, repr. 1999; orig. 1969], 98–99). Unlike YHWH, they enjoy the smell because it promises an end to their hunger.

29 *COS*, 1.102: 335.
Burned sacrifices were also performed in Anatolia, but apparently not in Egypt or Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{30} Burning food limits anthropomorphic conceptions of deities because humans do not consume food in the form of smoke.\textsuperscript{31}

**Ritual Manipulation of Blood**

In the Israelite ritual system that served the celestial deity YHWH, blood was intentionally and meaningfully applied in various ways (dashing, sprinkling, daubing) to objects, areas, and persons. By contrast, Mesopotamian and Ugaritic cults lacked such ritual use of blood.\textsuperscript{32} However, Hittites and Greeks used blood for libations to netherworld deities, conveyed to them by means of ritual holes in the ground.\textsuperscript{33}

Anatolians and Greeks manipulated blood for ritual purification. Just after a blood libation through slaughter of a sheep in a ritual pit, a ritual involved in establishing a new Anatolian temple for the “Goddess of the...
Night" purified the cultic infrastructure by bloodying the golden image, the wall, and all the implements of the deity.  

A Greek ritual for purification from homicide called for slaughtering a piglet over the head of the person undergoing purification and then rinsing off the blood. In another Greek purification ritual, officials carried a piglet around the city square in Athens, then slaughtered it, sprayed its blood over the seats, and discarded the carcass. These practices somewhat resembled aspects of Israelite purification offerings. Unlike the Greek procedures, the Israelite sacrifices applied blood to part of the sanctuary/temple of the deity, especially the altar.

**Significance of the Combination in the Purification Offering**

There were Ancient Near Eastern rituals that addressed sins or ritual purification, offered food to deities, and attributed significance to blood. Food could be used for propitiation or restitution to restore divine-human relationships, and blood could be an agent of purification, including from moral faults (homicide; see above). Only in Israel were blood and food elements combined in one sacrifice to a celestial deity in order to remedy sin or physical ritual impurity. Other Israelite expiatory sacrifices (burnt and reparation offerings) utilized blood and food elements, but the purification offering was unique in its emphasis on blood on altar horns and its function for removing ritual impurity.  

What is the meaning of the special combination of process and function in the purification offering? Unlike chthonic deities, for whom blood was the beverage of choice, YHWH did not require any libations of this liquid. Rather, purification and expiation with blood meant that the process had life and death consequences because blood represents life and God assigned it on the altar to ransom the lives of those on whose behalf it was applied (Lev 17:11). Indeed, those who failed to properly remedy impurity or control its contact with the sacred sphere could die (Lev 15:31; cf. 7:20-21; Num 19:13, 20), and one who had committed a moral fault bore his/her

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34 **COS**, 1.70: 176.  
35 See *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:1132. Homicide was not expiable by ritual within the Israelite ritual system (Num 35:31).  
36 It is true that burnt offerings could supplement purification offerings (see above).
culpability (Lev 5:1) until expiation was obtained through blood sacrifice (v. 6).

Offering fat as a token “debt payment” of “food” from the same sacrificial victim that provided the blood showed that purification related to a divine person, not merely to pollution. Sin or impurity created a “debt” to the Lord, whose law should be obeyed and whose people should be pure. It was their sins and impurities that metaphorically polluted his sanctuary/temple, representing his authority and reputation as ruler and judge, so that it had to be purged on the Day of Atonement.\(^{37}\) Human parties were indebted concerning physical ritual impurity because its source was human, not demonic.\(^{38}\)

The same kind of sacrifice—purification offering—could purge moral faults and also physical ritual impurities, which were symptomatic of “the birth-death cycle that comprises mortality.”\(^ {39}\) These evils were distinct: sins violated God’s law, but physical impurities by themselves (unless God’s law prohibited incurring them; e.g., Num 6:6-8) did not. However, there was a close relationship between sins and impurities because mortality, the state of sin, results from sinful action (Rom 5:12; 6:23).\(^ {40}\) Therefore, as expressed by Psalm 103:3, human beings need both “legal” forgiveness and physical healing.

According to the Bible, death is not the necessary corridor to the next phase of an immortal life, as in ancient Egypt. Rather, it is evil intruder, so impurity associated with it must be kept away from the immortal YHWH

\(^{37}\) On the dynamics and meaning of the two stages of atonement (throughout the year and on the Day of Atonement, the latter dealing with divine judicial responsibility), see Gane, *Cult and Character*, 267-333; idem, *Leviticus, Numbers* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 277-288.


\(^{40}\) On the relationship between sins and physical ritual impurities, see Gane, *Cult and Character*, 198-202; idem, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 225-227.
(cf. Deut 5:26), whose holiness is life and who will ultimately eradicate death as an enemy (cf. Rev 20:14).41

Combination of “legal” and “healing” approaches to sin in functions of the purification offering reflect the realization that sin is “something deeper than an offense at law, a breach of a regulation. . . . The sin and the sinner were identified, and must be separated. Much more drastic and positive remedies were required than legal process could supply. It was more than the ‘anger’ of an offended deity that sin involved, or the damage done his ‘honor’ that must be offset by placating words or deeds (as in mediaeval theology).”42

In Pentateuchal ritual law, the “legal” and “healing/biological” approaches to sin are inextricably interwoven together. “The ‘legal’ aspect has quasi-biological ramifications and the ‘biological’ is at the same time legal.”43

As A. Büchler observed, expressing the remedy for sin in terms of contamination and cleansing keeps its legal aspects from becoming “legalistic”: When Isaiah uses language of cleansing to urge for repentance and conversion (1:16-20), it “is no legalistic notion of release from penalty, or cancellation of guilt, but something vastly deeper in human experience, and far deeper in the history of the human race, namely cleansing within, the resolution to ‘sin no more,’ the power to cease from sinning and be accepted before the God of all Righteousness and Goodness.”44

**Conclusion**

Ancient Near Eastern peoples offered animals to their deities as food, performed rituals to purify persons or to remedy offenses against their gods,

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41 Cf. ibid., 227-230; 263-267.
43 Gane, *Cult and Character*, 160.
44 Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement*, xxx. Cf. Gane, *Cult and Character*, 162—“By bringing together the views of sin as legal wrong and sin as pollution, the Israelite ritual system addressed not only the legal standing of YHWH’s people, but also their moral state. It showed the way not only to freedom from condemnation, but also to development of healthy character. We will find the climax of this combination in observances on the Day of Atonement, which affirmed freedom from condemnation for those of loyal character (Lev 16:29-31). In the process, the great Day affirmed the just character of Israel’s divine King.”
used blood for purification, and annually purged sacred precincts or objects in connection with occasions of divine judgment. Remarkably, Israelite purification offerings combined all of these features in a single kind of animal sacrifice that provided for faulty human beings a unified way to come into harmony with God.

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“Does God Care About Oxen?":
Another Look at Paul’s Use of
Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:9

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Introduction

First Corinthians 9:8-10 is one of the more controversial of Paul’s Old Testament (OT) citations: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (Ὁ κημώσεις βοήν ἄλοιπτα). Many scholars see this quotation as OT civil law ripped from its context and applied allegorically, spiritually, fancifully, or even mystically. Even more radically, some follow A. Stanley in arguing that “the lesson which is regarded as subordinate is denied altogether.” In other words, Paul is accused of not

1 Compare Deut 25:4, which reads “Do not muzzle an ox while it is threshing” (לא תعناו לברד). Translations from the original languages are the author’s own unless otherwise noted.

2 For example, see R. N. Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). A. T. Hanson does argue that Paul used allegory here, but not consciously, only following other common analogical uses by the rabbis (Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974]). However, he seems to conflate analogy with allegory and even typology. In this paper, I use analogy as a comparison between two items for purposes of clarification, while allegory refers to the drawing out of a hidden significance beyond or in addition to the literal meaning of a text. For further discussion, see M. W. Bloomfield, “Allegory as Interpretation,” New Literary History 3(1971): 301–317; P. Jewett, “Concerning the Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture,” WJT 17(1954): 1–20.

3 Philo and Hellenistic Judaism often referred to the supposedly higher meaning of the text. M. D. Hooker argues that Paul follows their methods (“Beyond the Things That Are Written: St Paul’s Use of Scripture,” NTS 27 [1981]: 295–309).

4 A. P. Stanley, The Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians (4th ed.; London: John Murray, 1876), 142. See also C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Harper, 1968). H. Conzelmann argues that only the lofty matters are important, and all the details are to be allegorized (1 Corinthians [Hermeneia;
only ignoring and misapplying the original context of the command, but also audaciously declaring that it has nothing at all to do with the literal meaning of the words.⁵

In contrast, this paper contends that Paul wholly relies on the OT context of God’s care for animals to make his quotation of Deut 25:4 work in the logical flow of his argument. Thus, I will first consider the broader context within 1 Corinthians, before examining the interpretation of Deut 25:4 in its context. I will then return to 1 Corinthians 9 for a more detailed analysis of Paul’s argumentation and use of the OT, in light of the context of Deut 25:4.

**Broad New Testament Context**

Scholars debate many issues in the book of 1 Corinthians, including Paul’s motivation for writing. However, in this longest of Paul’s epistles, written to the largest city in Greece at that time, the apostle is almost certainly dealing with the difficulties of authority and leadership. Because Paul stayed longer in Corinth, he was better able to warn, admonish and speak the truth forcefully to the warring parties.⁶

Openly immoral members of the Corinthian church were apparently demanding the prerogative to exercise their individual rights, in accord with the then-current philosophy.⁷ The disunity of the church thus weighed heavily on Paul’s heart as he wrote 1 Corinthians. But the factions and other problems in the church also give a clearer glimpse of the struggles Paul faced in understanding how Christian freedom relates to societal tradition.⁸

A concise structure of the book is as follows. In chapters 1–6, Paul is responding to oral reports about the church: divisions, incest, lawsuits, and

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⁷ C. Blomberg notes the tensions between high levels of prostitution and asceticism (*1 Corinthians* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 17–27).

immorality (4:1–21 is about attitudes toward the apostles). In chapters 7-16, Paul addresses the issues raised in a letter from the Corinthians concerning marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship, resurrection, and the collection for Jerusalem. Within this second section, 1 Corinthians 8–11 discusses food offered to idols. Those who wanted to eat idol food asserted that their belief in monotheism allowed them to be free from irrelevant dietary restrictions. However, some were eating meat offered to idols in order to “flaunt their freedom,” a form of gluttony. Paul had to address the problem this freedom posed to those whose conscience was pricked by the eating of idol food.

Within this bigger picture, many scholars consider the abrupt switch to apostolic authority in chapter 9 to be out of place within the discussion, or even part of a separate letter. However, several recent works have shown that chapter 9 is actually key to understanding some of the main reasons Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Among those who see 1 Corinthians 9 as part of Paul’s original discourse, three main views emerge. The majority of scholars see chapter 9 as Paul’s defense against those who opposed him in Corinth. In other words, in order for his comments on idols to have any effect, he had to establish his authority over and against those who were questioning him. A second group views this supposed digression as the crucial part of a legitimate Greek epideictic argumentation, serving to strengthen what is already believed. Although the argument for profitability in regards to food and sexuality is not yet complete, chapter 9 helps to

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12 For a helpful summary of the arguments for the coherence of 1 Corinthians 8–10, see J. F. M. Smit, “About the Idol Offerings:” Rhetoric, Social Context, and Theology of Paul’s Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1–11:1 (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 27; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 8–10. Barrett suggests that v. 13 is referring to pagan practices in the temple, another connection with chapters 8 and 10 (*Epistle to the Corinthians*, 207). See also D. Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth* (JSNTSup 169; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 321.
prepare the Corinthians to judge wisely regarding idolatry (1 Cor 10:14–22). A third group finds that the issue is not Paul’s authority or whether or not he was allowed to accept financial support as an apostle, but that Paul refused to exercise his rights in order to set an example of giving up one’s rights for the sake of another. Personal sacrifice and commitment to the unity of the church are part of imitating the “model character of the apostle and his ways in Christ.” The freedom of the liberal Corinthians parallels the apostle’s freedom to accept support for his labors, but love often means giving up entitlements for the sake of others. Although Paul accepts the arguments of those who wished to eat idol food, he asks them not to use their rights for the sake of those weak in faith. Paul recommends his apostleship as a positive example of self-renunciation.

Others note that more than one of the above views could have been operating at the same time. Along these lines, arguments for one of these

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14 For instance, A. Eriksson finds that 1 Corinthians 8–11 is a rhetorical unit of deliberative but unobtrusive argumentation (Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians [Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998], 146, 173). See also J. Fotopoulos, who advocates that Paul is using traditional rhetorical strategy, but is also creatively and contextually shaping it for his epistolary needs (Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 [WUNT 2/151; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2003], 197–9). A. Thiselton makes a similar argument (The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 44–45).


16 Barrett, Epistle to the Corinthians, 16–17. See also Thiselton, who provides a thorough refutation of the view that 1 Corinthians 8–11 is not a rhetorical unit (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 608).

17 Newton, Deity and Diet, 317; R. Phua, Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 in the Light of the Jewish Diaspora (Library of New Testament Studies 299; London: T&T Clark, 2005); Butarbutar, Paul and Conflict Resolution, 108–110. Stanley sees two levels of rhetoric, but separates them in space and time throughout the chapter (Arguing with Scripture).
views that negate the other possibilities often create a false dichotomy between them. Indeed, Paul employs several rhetorical and logical strategies in 1 Corinthians 9, and appeals to both human and divine authorities.  

However, as I will argue in the more detailed analysis of 1 Corinthians 9, the third view seems most coherent and convincing in terms of Paul’s flow of logic. The apostle appears to be setting himself up as an example in unselfishly giving up his rights for the sake of others and the gospel.  

One of his rhetorical strategies is to list three similar examples in the realities of everyday life (9:7), and then to appeal to three authorities for even more persuasive corroboration: the Law of Moses (9:9), the temple service (9:13), and commands from the Lord (9:14). Thus, the Old Testament context of Paul’s quotation becomes crucial for the interpretation of his reasoning in 1 Corinthians 9. If Paul here uses Deut 25:4 out of context in applying it to human workers instead of oxen, the reader would no longer be able to follow or trust his logic and argumentation. In light of this, the original context of Deut 25:4 must be considered before returning to a closer examination of 1 Corinthians 9.

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18 Paul links freedom with ἐξουσία like Stoic philosophers, moving from freedom (9:1) to ἐξουσία (9:4–12) to freedom (9:19) concerning the gospel. The apostle also seems to follow the Cynics by accepting hardship in order to be an example. However, though Paul uses the vocabulary, ideas, and terminology of these philosophic traditions, he does not uncritically appropriate the borrowed symbols. For further discussion, see L. Galloway, Freedom in the Gospel: Paul’s Exemplum in 1 Cor 9 in Conversation with the Discourses of Epictetus and Philo (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 38; Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

19 While he may also be answering questions about his apostolic authority, this does not seem to be his main focus. In fact, Mitchell argues convincingly that a dual approach does not work rhetorically, because Paul could not use his example as such a strong motivation if he was also defending that very apostolic example (Rhetoric of Reconciliation, 244). She also perceptively notes that 1 Corinthians 9 is a digression of comparison or amplification, but as the term digression has been used to imply discontinuity, it should not be used unless carefully defined.

20 Frank Thielman, Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994). Most other commentators miss this connection between three human analogies and three religious examples. Butarbutar notes that the example of the soldier is particularly important because the government supported them at high cost (Paul and Conflict Resolution, 133). Smit characterizes the three authorities as the social rules (positive), the regulations of Moses (comparative), and the instructions of the Lord (superlative) (“About the Idol Offerings,” 110).
SCHAFFER: DOES GOD CARE ABOUT OXEN?

Old Testament Context

In spite of the lack of consensus concerning the date and authorship of Deuteronomy,²¹ many scholars do find a unity in the book itself as the book of the law, a series of sermons, or a treaty documenting the covenant between God and Israel.²² However, most still see Deuteronomy 25 (and indeed Deuteronomy 12–26) as a disparate collection of laws that have little connection to each other beyond their importance to the covenant.²³ Others find that each law is related to the previous not by a common topic, but by a similar word or grammatical pattern, as if the compiler was reminded of each succeeding law in a somewhat haphazard pattern.²⁴

A few scholars have ventured to analyze the structure of the multitudinous stipulations. Christenson has proposed a very broad concentric and chiastic structure for Deut 12–26, considering that even more broadly, Deut 21:10–25:19 contains laws concerning “human affairs in relation to others.”²⁵ C. Carmichael suggests that the arrangement of Deuteronomy reflects the order and structure of the Book of the Covenant.

²¹ Scholars interpret Deuteronomy in many ways, but most argue for its origin around the time of Josiah’s reforms, in order to ensure the keeping of certain laws by the people. However, some scholars have considered other alternatives, especially as the treaty form of Israel’s covenant book seems to match most closely that of the ancient Hittite treaties. For example, see E. H. Merrill, Deuteronomy (New American Commentary 4; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 27–32; P. C. Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 20–24; E. S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in Deuteronomy–2 Samuel (EBC 3; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 4; V. P. Hamilton, Handbook on the Pentateuch (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); K. A. Kitchen, On the Reliability of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 283–9.


²³ For discussion of this, see Hamilton, Handbook on the Pentateuch, 390.

in Exodus 21–23. In the Book of the Covenant, laws concerning social privileges are bookends around laws concerning the legal system and courtroom laws. Interestingly, Carmichael lists Exod 23:10–12, which also highlights a concern for animals, in the second section of social privilege laws. This pattern is paralleled, but with more complexity, in Deuteronomy 12–26, where Deut 25:4 is considered a law about privileges (interpolated among laws of the courtroom).\(^{27}\) Christenson’s analysis also places Deut 25:4 within the laws of humanitarian concerns and social ethics (Deut 25:1-16), paralleling Deut 24:6-16 and separated by the summary law protecting the disadvantaged (24:17-22).\(^{28}\)

Others have tried to find structure in Deuteronomy 12–26 based on the Decalogue as an organizing principle, with “the individual laws thus appear[ing] as concretizations of the Decalogue.”\(^{29}\) Braulik sees Deut 25:4 as part of the commentary on the eighth commandment, dealing generally

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\(^{28}\) Christenson, *Deuteronomy*, 615. Within Deuteronomy 25, Christenson suggests that the laws seem to be patterned after certain stories in Genesis, (e.g., Deut 25:1-3 parallels the likely flogging of Joseph as a slave). However, this leads him to contend that the literal meaning of Deut 25:4 is totally disregarded. Especially because it is such a strange law that seems out of place, Christenson connects it to the forgotten sheaf of Joseph and concludes that the law does not make sense in a literal fashion. If the ox is not muzzled, it will simply consume all the grain it is treading and any profit will be lost. Thus, a third party must be involved to help the unmuzzled ox produce seed. Christenson finds that this conclusion forms the transition to levirate marriage, where the brother of the widow’s husband must be involved to produce seed for the deceased.

Although this figurative interpretation is superficially coherent, the connections with Genesis are anything but clear, and it seems like a stretch to imagine the Israelites having all of this in mind when reading or hearing Deuteronomy. Even if they did, it could be both a transition to be taken figuratively, as well as a literal injunction to care for animals. The two propositions do not have to be mutually exclusive.

with matters of jurisprudence, especially regarding right actions in the face of judgment. McConnville argues that the commandment prohibiting a false witness entails fairness to all, even the dignity of animals. As Deuteronomy presents itself as Moses’ sermons or commentary on the Decalogue, this latter option seems more probable.

Thus, most commentators see Deut 25:4 within a section of surrounding laws concerning humane treatment of people, especially the poor and marginalized who are able to eat what is left in the field at the end of harvest (Deut 24:19–22). Some suggest that Deut 25:4 had already become a proverb by the time Deuteronomy was written, especially since every other verse in Deuteronomy 25 is about justice in human relationships. In this view, Deut 25:4 would function well as a proverb for justice in human working relationships.

However, although Deuteronomy 25:4 is addressed to humans, not oxen, the law engenders compassion for animals in the owner. The only other place this word for muzzle (םש) occurs is Ezek 39:11, where it is a participle, best translated “to block” or “obstruct.” This broader meaning could be paralleled in the rabbinic prohibitions regarding threshing oxen, which cover a wide variety of distractions or pain for the ox. The ox is working hard to thresh the grain, but if it is muzzled, it cannot eat on a regular basis, as cattle need to do. If the muzzle is removed, the ox may not work faster, and the owner will lose a bit of grain, but the animal will be much more satisfied. In addition, the act of threshing is part of a temporal clause (ם prep + infinitive construct), implying that the muzzle was never to be used during any part of the threshing process.

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30 J. G. McConnville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 367.


32 Indeed, some rabbinic sources consider this passage to refer only to animals and their care. The Talmud suggests that Deuteronomy refers to all animals when compassion is commanded (Scripture only mentions the most common animals), and even if an animal eats food that is for the priests, muzzling would be inappropriate and cruel (e.g., b. B. Qam. 54).

33 Von Rad sees this verse as exhibiting an “animal loving attitude” (*Deuteronomy*, 154). Craigie finds that it expresses “concern for the animal” (*Deuteronomy*, 313).
When considering the Hebrew word for threshing (פַּ齑), several other OT texts shed light on Deut 25:4. For instance, Jere 50:11 mentions the ox getting fat while threshing, perhaps because it is not muzzled. Indeed, Christenson suggests that the alternative to muzzling the ox would be to administer a whip to encourage it to work. However, Hosea 10:11 speaks of a trained heifer that “loves to thresh” (ננהל המדה את הבה להור), which seems to suggest that the whip might not have been necessary. It hardly seems possible that the ox could really eat enough grain to disadvantage the farmer, especially considering the biology of ruminants, where chewing the cud consumes large parts of the day.

Interestingly, this law is an anomaly in the ancient Near East, where laws about oxen do not mention any care for the ox itself, mostly discussing what must be done to repay the owner if the ox is lost or killed. Thus, any analysis of Deut 25:4 must take into consideration the basis for its injunction in the animal world.

**Immediate New Testament Context**

R. Hays reflects the comments of many scholars on 1 Cor 9:8–10 when he states that “there is no indication that Paul has wrestled seriously with the texts from which the citations are drawn.” However, he at least tries to justify Paul’s hermeneutic by calling it strategic and rhetorically intertextual, unlike others who find no connection between this command

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34 Many of the prophets use the imagery of threshing in terms of judgment, and it may then be translated “trample.” For instance, in Micah 4:13, God promises to give Israel iron horns and bronze hooves to thresh the mocking nations. However, this is not a threshing to refine the grain, but to break people into pieces. See also Isa 21:10; 2 Kgs 13:7; Amos 1:3; Hab 3:12. For more discussion, see M. D. Futato, “פַּ לכם,” in *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:932.

35 Christenson, *Deuteronomy*, 602.


37 See M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (2nd ed.; SBL Writings from the Ancient World Series 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).


Hays also argues that Paul is constrained in his interpretation by theology, not by hermeneutical method or original context. Interestingly, however, he states that Paul does not use allegory, and that this apparent instance is simply a result of reading the text as a “direct word of address” (*Echoes of Scripture*, 166).
to oxen and Paul’s application to clergy. J. Smit argues that Paul “widens the scope” of Deuteronomy 25, and uses the method of “Qumran pesharim,” changing the application from the original text. Thielman finds that Paul says God was “not concerned about oxen,” and argues that the law is relevant for Christians only as it is reinterpreted in light of the eschatological Christ event, and superceded by Jesus’ authority. Conzelmann even contends that Paul uses an allegorical approach like that of Philo. Thus, it is important to examine the flow of Paul’s argument in the first part of 1 Corinthians 9, before attempting to mediate between these positions, and consider whether God cares for animals.

**Exegetical and Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 9**

After Paul’s four introductory questions in v. 1 (“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ? Are you not my work in the Lord?”), he expands on the last question in v. 2 to remind the Corinthians that even if he is not an apostle to others, he is to them. Therefore, because he is an apostle, he has a defense for his examiners. Paul first mentions some specific apostolic rights through more questions in vv. 4–6 (“Do we have no right to eat or drink? Do we have no right to take a believing wife as do the other apostles? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?”).

Paul then shifts to the common-sense basic rights of all laborers with further questions in v. 7 (“Who goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and

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39 See Barrett, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 205. Stanley considers the possibility that Paul many have been quoting Deut 25:4 almost as a joke, not expecting the Corinthians to take it seriously (*Arguing with Scripture*, 183). J. Verbruggen lists many ways this quotation has been classified: *sensus plenior*, allegory, figurative, principalization, primary application, *qal wahomer* (“Of Muzzles and Oxen: Deuteronomy 25:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:9,” *JETS* 49 [2006]: 708).

40 J. F. M. Smit, “‘You Shall Not Muzzle a Threshing Ox’: Paul’s Use of the Law of Moses in 1 Cor 9.8–12,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 2(2000): 262. However, as Smit explains, although Paul extends the application beyond the Mishnah to figurative agricultural laborers, he is still considering laborers.


42 Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 154–155. He also states that Deut 25:4 is for the sake of oxen, so that Paul’s interpretation is completely contrary to the original meaning. Galloway also finds Paul’s approach to be similar to that of Philo, but argues that Paul does not attempt allegory (*Freedom in the Gospel*, 154–5). J. G. McConville finds that Paul does interpret Deut 25:4 allegorically (*Deuteronomy*, 369).
does not drink of the milk of the flock?”). In support of these above presuppositions, Paul appeals to the Pentateuch in v. 8 (“Do I say these things as a mere man, or does not the law also?”).43 Paul quotes the Law of Moses specifically in v. 9: “Do not muzzle an ox while it threshes.”44

Paul has already used many figures in his argument, but only the ox has previous Scriptural support. Indeed, examples and analogies are “only valid if they are understood literally in the first place.”45 Paul could have used a less controversial example, like that of the priests, from the beginning, but perhaps he wanted to help the Corinthians understand that they had been trying to “muzzle” Paul by calling into question his authority and trying to obligate him to them and their opinions.46 Chrysostom offers another interesting hypothesis: Paul wanted to “prove his case beyond any shadow

44 The present active participle reflects the continuous action in the Hebrew (“while it is treading out”). See Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 685.

Paul does not seem to paraphrase the LXX, as the differences are slight, confined to the word “muzzle.” The Greek κτιμόω in the NT means “to muzzle,” while φιμω in the LXX means “to gag or silence anything” (Matt 22:12, 34; Mark 1:25; 4:39; Luke 4:35). There are several options for the difference between the LXX and 1 Cor 9:9. The switch to κτιμόσεις could be an early gloss to explain the word for a more illiterate audience, or Paul himself could simply be using the more common, popular term. Of these two, the latter seems more probable, as copyists would be more likely to switch to the more precise and uncommon word. See B. M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 492; Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 685; A. Lindemann, Der Erste Korintherbrief (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 9/I; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2000), 204–5.

Paul also could have had a different Greek version or LXX variant (Hanson, Studies in Paul’s Technique, 162). The argument for this view is that Paul cannot alter the words of Scripture and still use it as proof. It is interesting, however, that 1 Tim 5:18 follows the LXX, but the author switches the clauses around, so as to emphasize the subject of care.

Or Paul may have realized that the LXX referred more to “putting to silence” and felt that he needed to use the more specific term “muzzle,” following the MT or Aramaic, or even quoting from memory. D. Instone Brewer came to a similar conclusion, and considers κτιμόσεις to be the original reading (“1 Cor 9:9–11: A Literal Interpretation of ‘Do Not Muzzle the Ox,’” NTS 38 [1992]: 563). See also Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 720.

However, since both words are uncommon, and the two terms seem to be used interchangeably for muzzling/silencing in Greek translations, the issue can remain unresolved and not affect the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 9. For example, see Orr and Walther, 1 Corinthians: A New Translation, 238.

45 Hanson, Studies in Paul’s Technique, 162.
46 Phua, Idolatry and Authority, 187.
of doubt. If God cares about oxen, how much more will he care about the labor of teachers?” 47 This “lesser to greater” argument is a rabbinical method (qal wahomer), but contrary to what many assume, Jewish exegesis should not be equated automatically with misuse of the text, or taking it out of context. 48

Paul then asks the question in verse 9, “Is it only oxen God is concerned about, or does He say it also for our sakes?” Figures of speech are used to give force, life, or intensity to an argument. Here Paul uses absolute ellipsis of connected words (e.g., “Is it [only] oxen God is concerned about, or does He say it also for our sakes?”). 49

The rhetorical force of μή often entails a question that is solely to elicit a resounding “NO!” (e.g., “you don’t suppose, do you?”). But here, in light of the dependence of Paul’s argument on the care for animals inherent in the Deuteronomic context, the phrase μή . . . θεοῦ could be a μή question that is more hesitant, rather than inviting an emphatically negative answer.

47 Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 21.5 (NPNF 1 12:121). See also Bray, 1–2 Corinthians, 82.

48 D. Cohn-Sherbok summarizes the similarities of Paul’s arguments to various rules of rabbinic interpretation (“Paul and Rabbinic Exegesis,” SJT 35 [1982]: 117–132). Although some sources in early Judaism may initially seem to interpret Deut 25:4 only in reference to humans, upon closer examination the literal meaning was not ignored. Instead, the law seems to be used more as an influence on the surrounding legal passages, or freely applied (through various comments) to humans in the proper contexts and analogous situations. Indeed, D. Instone Brewer finds that before 70 CE, there was little to no use of allegory in rabbinic exegesis (Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE [Tübingen: Mohr, 1992]). Thus Paul is simply arguing from what is accepted to what he wants to prove.

In light of this, pesher also must be defined carefully. See Moo’s response to Longenecker’s definitions of pesher as any “‘direct’ application” of an OT text (“The Problem of Sensus Plenior”). Longenecker states that since the “application pointedly subordinates the literal meaning,” it must be defined as allegory (Biblical Exegesis, 110). However, he does hint that if the law was not written “entirely” for our sakes, it might be simply considered qal wahomer argumentation. See also Orr and Walthers, 1 Corinthians, 241.

Nonetheless, it seems that for most rabbis, it was sufficient cause to obey because God had ordained it, whether or not God cared for animals. The law was written for man to obey, not the oxen (Brewer, “1 Cor 9:9–11,” 556–7). See also A. Linzey and D. Cohn-Sherbok, After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology (London: Mowbray, 1997), 30–34.

49 E. W. Bullinger notes that in some passages like this, “the omitted word or words are to be supplied from the nature of the subject” (Figures of Speech Used in the Bible [Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1968], 24).
When considering the context of Deut 25:4 in this way, I prefer G. M. Lee’s translation (he calls it a “cautious or deprecatory assertion”): “I expect God cares for oxen. Suppose, now, he says it in any case for us, too?”

Along the same lines, the Greek word πάντως in v. 10 can be translated many different ways, but is usually rendered here as “altogether” or “entirely.” This seems to be another one of the main reasons that Paul is accused of taking Deut 25:4 out of context. If God does not care about oxen, but entirely about humans, then the literal meaning of the law becomes void. However, some recent studies have shown that in this context, πάντως is better translated “certainly,” “undoubtedly,” or “assuredly.” In this way, Paul’s focus on humanity is maintained, in that humans are given the law, but humans are required by the law to care for oxen.

Thus, the foundational premise of animal care in Deuteronomy remains the basis for Paul’s argument concerning pay for laborers. Paul is arguing from the minor to the major, in that “on every account a provision made for the beasts. . . must hold good, a fortiori, for God’s proper servants.” In other words, all Scripture has an eschatological goal or purpose, and Scripture ultimately was written for those at the end of time, but this does not make other provisional interpretations irrelevant or no longer valid.

Paul then continues in verse 10 with a parallel-structured statement: “this was written for our sakes also, in order that:

he who plows should plow in hope; and

he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.”

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G. M. Lee, “Studies in Texts: I Cor 9:9-10,” Theology 71(1968): 123. Although this is an unusual view of the force of μη, the logic and rhetoric of Paul’s argumentation in 1 Corinthians 9 demand it.


Hodge, I Corinthians, 158. A negative with πάντως means “not at all” but there is no negative here.

G. G. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in Expositor’s Greek Testament (ed. W. R. Nicoll; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 2:848. Hays argues that δι’ ἡμᾶς is not synonymous with δι’ ἄνθρωπον because 1 Cor 9:11 has the same antecedent as 1 Cor 9:10 (Echoes of Scripture, 119). Paul seems to be referring specifically to the application to his own time, not necessarily to all mankind.

That this was written “also/certainly” for us makes even more sense now (in contrast to “altogether”), because of these further examples that Paul draws out. If Deut 25:4 was not actually written for the oxen originally, then the plower could not plow in hope, and the human who threshed could not be a partaker of the hope.  

The phrase “it was written that” (ἐγραφή ὁτι) in verse 10 also plays an important role that many scholars do not analyze fully. Most argue that it is ὁτι-recitativum (in that the next clause in 1 Cor 9:10b is a new quotation), or ὁτι-argumentativum (in which Paul continues to give the reason why Deut 25:4 was written for him). However, Smit argues thoroughly and convincingly based on grammatical, syntactical, and pragmatic evidence that it is ὁτι-explicativum (Paul is explaining the quotation from the law). Especially to be noted is the lack of γεγραπται (“it is written”), contra v. 9. The only other place in which ἐγραφή ὁτι occurs in Paul’s letters is Rom 4:23, where it is a link between a quotation and its further explanation. The plower is also a link between the quotation and its application, and thus I agree with Smit that here in v. 10, Paul is basically rewriting Deut 25:4.

Thus, the agricultural metaphors of sowing and plowing, and the close relationship between the worker and the product of the worker’s labor are key connections between these two passages. Brewer goes even farther and categorizes Paul’s statements on this passage as legal rulings, evidenced by his words, “as it is written in the law of Moses.” Extensive evidence illustrates that the ox could be substituted for any laborer in ancient customs, and Brewer even contends that Paul’s interpretation of Deut 25:4 is literal. Whether man (in Paul’s day) or animal (in

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55 Some have suggested that this poetic snippet is an “apostolic halakah according to which apostolic missionaries are understood to be spiritual laborers, sowers, and reapers” (Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 721). See also Matt 9:37, 38; 10:10; Luke 10:2, 7; John 4:36–38; Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 3:6–9; 9:11; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17–18. This could help to solve the problem of verse 10b as a justification for Paul’s interpretation of Deut 25:4. Since it is poetic in nature, it could be orally transmitted.

56 Smit, “About the Idol Offerings,” 99–120.

57 Ibid., 105.


59 Brewer, “1 Corinthians 9:9–11,” 564. Rabbinic sources also note a connection or even equivalence between human and animal workers. These scholars often connect Deut 25:4 with Deut 23:24–25 (25–26 MT), in that both human and animal workers are entitled
Deuteronomy), recompense for labor was the only morally acceptable course of action.

Indeed, in vv. 11–16, Paul continues to emphasize his rights for recompense, but then proceeds to emphasize how he has not used them. In a paraphrase and further analysis of the passage, I note parallels between rights (vv. 11-12a; 13-14) and renunciation (vv. 12b; 15-16) in Paul’s application of these examples to his own situation:

A—rights: we sow spiritual things, and should be able to reap material ones; others partake of this right, we should even more (vv. 11–12a)
B—renunciation: however, we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ (v. 12b)
A’—rights: those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar; thus, those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (vv.13–14)
B’—renunciation: but I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die! No one can make my boasting void, for if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of (vv. 15–16)

The overall outline that I see in this passage connects the dots between Paul’s rights, his refusal to take advantage of them for the sake of the gospel, and his subsequent service to all in the name of Christ.

to eat of their produce. The tractate b. B. Qam. 38 equates servants and oxen, and while the discussion in b. B. Mezi’a 88–90 ranges over many forbidden cruelties or discomforts for the threshing ox, it switches back and forth between ox and human laborers as if they are interchangeable. The transposition of the justice involved in Deut 25:4 assumes the rights of all agricultural laborers. For further discussion, see Brewer, “1 Cor 9:9–11,” 560–3.

60 For another outline of Paul’s pragmatic arguments, see Smit, “About the Idol Offerings,” 109.
Schaf er: Does God Care about Oxen?

A—the law (νόμος) allows remuneration (vv. 8–10)

B—but Paul avoids it for the sake of the gospel (εἰς αγγέλια καὶ εἰς αγγέλιον) (vv. 11–18)

C—he becomes a servant (δούλω) to all, though he is free (v. 19)

A’—Paul labors to reach all men, even those under the law (νόμος) (vv. 20–21)

B’—and he becomes like them as much as possible for the sake of the gospel (εἰς αγγέλιον) (vv. 22–23)

C’—he even puts his body under subjection (δούλαγωγέω) so he is not disqualified in preaching (vv. 24–27)

Paul has a right to be paid, like the ox (A), for his labor to all men (A’). However, the apostle chooses not to be remunerated for the sake of the gospel (B), and attempts to fit in with others to reach them (B’), even serving them, though a free man (C), and enduring bodily discomfort for the sake of the gospel (C’).

In summary, because he is an apostle, Paul has a right to be sustained by those for whom he labors, just as do the threshing ox, the vinekeeper, and the plower. But he has chosen not to take advantage of that right, in order that he may win more to Christ, present the gospel without charge, and not abuse his authority in the gospel. He would rather become a servant to all. Indeed, in his preaching “his reward is to render the gospel free of charge.”61 His argument depends on a continued application of the law, in order to make an even greater contrast between what he deserves as a laborer, and what he renounces for the sake of the gospel. In the end, it is not so much about care for oxen, for that is assumed in Paul’s logical argument. It is instead that Paul the ox (or laborer) chooses to forego his right to be unmuzzled, in order to reach more people with the gospel.

61 Newton, Deity and Diet, 322. He notes that verses 13–18 repeat verses 4–12 in form and content, using more examples but with more force (rhetorical questions and authority) to show that Paul has a right to material support.
God’s Care for Animals

Paul’s interpretive use of the OT in this passage can best be classified as analogical. This kind of usage makes a comparison between two things for the purpose of clarification. When the OT context is understood correctly, even OT proverbs and legal codes can be applied to current situations by the New Testament church and modern believers. Biblical commands, no matter the original time period or culture to which they were addressed, usually carry a universal and timeless principle. Analogy from human life is “supported further by parallel analogies or examples from scripture.”

However, Paul also uses the authority of the OT as part of his argument, so it is more than a simple argument from analogy. The context for Deut 25:4 includes a concern for all laborers, so, when considering the scope of the law, Paul draws out its significance for the present situation, determining that the principle could be applied to Christian ministers with validity. Paul thus reasons from the lesser to the greater (qal wahomer): because God is concerned for animals, he is therefore all the more concerned for humans.

When consideration is given to the larger context of Deuteronomy 24 and 25, it becomes apparent that Paul does not abandon the literal meaning or take any liberties with the law, but perceives the goal of engendering a sense of moral duty and gratefulness in all. The universal principles found in Deut 25:4 are that of fairness and generosity, and Paul understands that Moses was ultimately writing for humanity’s sake as much as for the

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62 Fee finds that this is an analogy because Paul was interested in the general standard it enunciates (First Epistle, 408).
63 Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 685. Newton also finds that Paul starts with the OT example of an ox, and then contextualizes it into current examples (Deity and Diet, 319).
64 Moo wonders if this may be a proverbial use as well (“The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” 186–190).
65 Indeed, in v. 11, Paul reverses qal wahomer, suggesting that his reasoning in vv. 8–9 was following that track already. See Brewer, “1 Cor 9:9–11,” 559. Ciampa and Rosner list other supports for an argument from lesser to greater: Jewish usage, the context of Deuteronomy being concern for humans, the question “does he not surely say it for our sake?” (contra Barrett), and no denial of animal care but greater assurance for humans (“1 Corinthians,” 721).
66 Verbruggen finds this passage in Deuteronomy to focus on “justice and fair economic compensation” (“Of Muzzles and Oxen,” 705). Brewer (“1 Corinthians 9:9–11,” 557) sees it as man’s duty to follow this law.
animals, especially because humans are to act for the sake of the oxen.\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, Brewer argues convincingly that the man who shows mercy has the higher benefit than the receiver of mercy,\textsuperscript{68} even when this kindness is an inconvenience. In this way, the law is for the sake of animals (receivers of compassion) and humans (givers of compassion), so that Paul’s application actually is more faithful to the context of Deut 25:4 than are many who accuse him of misapplying it.

In our eagerness to apply Biblical laws to our current situations, we must not forget that the applications lose their power when the original law is no longer valid. Deuteronomy 25:4 can now be viewed as a call to support Christian ministers,\textsuperscript{69} and was not originally written for oxen to obey (as far as we know, they cannot read!), but this application by analogy does not mean that humans can forget about the compassionate treatment of God’s creatures. God is not talking about animals just to show that he cares about humans. We must always keep both aspects in balance, as “the wholeness of the covenant community extends even to its livestock.”\textsuperscript{70}

\begin{flushright}
\textit{SCHAFER: DOES GOD CARE ABOUT OXEN?}
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\textsuperscript{67} See Bray, \textit{1–2 Corinthians}, 82. Thiselton states that the surrounding laws encourage “human sensitivity and humane compassion towards the suffering or defenseless” (\textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 686).

Philo and Josephus also seem to follow this pattern of applications to humans alone, but on the basis of the obvious association with the reality of animal treatment. Philo does state that Deut 25:4 is not on behalf of irrational creatures, but for humans who have minds and reason (\textit{Spec. Laws} 1:26), but elsewhere discusses various laws of Moses, and shows how they engender kindness and patience in human beings, even in regards to irrational animals (\textit{Virtues} 125-147). Thus, Philo notes that if we can treat animals right, we will more likely treat humans right as well. For further discussion of Philo’s use of Deuteronomy 25:4, see Smit, “About the Idol Offerings,” 111–113; Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 718.

Josephus paraphrases Deut 25:4, but still considers the literal sense of the reward of oxen. He believes this regulation helps to bring about the sharing of abundance by humanity, again linking humans with animals in regards to work and food (\textit{Ant.} 4.233).

\textsuperscript{68} Brewer, “1 Corinthians 9:9–11,” 560.

\textsuperscript{69} The main theological use of Deut 25:4 by Paul is ecclesiological, especially the support of pastors. Christian leaders have a right to be assisted in their ministries. This is especially important because the church really is an “independent community” with different governments, social groups, rituals, and rules (Smit, “About the Idol Offerings,” 156). Pastors rarely get support from non-Christians, so church members may need to sacrifice to make sure their leaders can survive financially.

\textsuperscript{70} McConville, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 369. The Scriptures are a guide for Christian conduct, and must be the foundation of our ethics. See S. C. Barton, “‘All Things to All People,’” 273.
true meaning of leadership is a Christ-like stance towards others. Scripture and analogy come together to inspire us to greater service towards all of God’s creatures, even when that may mean giving up what we deserve.

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71 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 668. It is also important to consider Paul’s solution to the conflict over idol food in order to address the disunity and factions within the church today. We must understand our rights, but willingly give them up for the sake of others who are weak or poor. See Butarbutar, *Paul and Conflict Resolution*, 214–34, for a contemporary application of Paul’s example in 1 Corinthians 9.

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1. Prologue

Articles do not normally have prologues. Yet, I am providing one to help readers understand why I am writing on the eclipse of Scripture and the protestantization of the Adventist mind. Early in January 2001, I received an invitation to participate in three International Conferences on Faith and Science organized by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2002-2004). Through the meetings, I realized the deep theological divisions presently operating in the Adventist church will not disappear by inertia or administrative pronunciation. Instead, their existence will secularize the mind set of younger generations transforming Adventism into a postmodern evangelical denomination. The only way to avoid this outcome is through the theological development of faithfulness to Scripture. To foster such growth in the life, unity, and mission of the Church, I published a series of articles entitled “From Vision to System”
about five years ago. In them, I outlined the contours of our theological divisions and suggested how Adventism may overcome them.

About four years ago, the Seminary Administration created a new course entitled “Theological Foundations of Spirituality and Discipleship.” I was one of the three instructors appointed to teach it. The assignment pushed me somewhat out of the area of my scholarly specialty, theology, into the unfamiliar waters, of the practice of ministry. Through my readings, I discovered that in order to keep and attract the young, Evangelical ministry and worship is becoming postmodern, ecumenical, progressively departing from Scripture, and drawing nearer to the Roman Catholic Church.

To my surprise, I realized biblical Adventists are following the same path. Most probably, Adventists borrowing freely and uncritically their theological thinking and ministerial practices from the wells of Evangelical sources are building on non-biblical philosophical ideas that we can trace back to the Roman Catholic theological tradition. For this reason, current changes (“innovations,” “best practices”) in ministerial and liturgical practices achieve much more than attracting and retaining the young. They introduce in the thinking and life of the church the practical consequences that would follow from accepting the doctrine of evolution. To critically reject the doctrine of evolution on one hand, and, uncritically accept postmodern liturgical “innovations” on the other is inconsistent because systematically both belong together and stem from the same non-biblical


2 Previously, I was aware that Evangelical and Biblical Adventist theological sectors were promoting these practices, Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part 1: Historical Review,” Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 15, no. 2 (2004), 29-33.

3 This explains why some Adventists are changing their view of the eschatological role of Roman Catholicism because it has changed from a persecuting power to a peace fostering institution. Loren Seibold, “Letting Roman Catholics Off the Hook,” Adventist Today, Winter 2010, 22-23. This view opens the way for joining into the ecumenical movement.
philosophical principles. Although these practices are incompatible with biblical thinking, Adventists are accepting and advancing them. The “unintended consequences” of this course of action are transforming Adventism into a secular non-biblical generic Charismatic denomination. The emergence of a new generation of Charismatic ecumenical Adventism is underway. Although using Scripture functionally, as a means to receive the Spirit, this generation will not think or act biblically.

Yet, I am convinced that most Adventists promoting innovations closely following the latest evangelical trends, are not aware they are changing the essence and nature of Adventism. Moreover, I believe that the immense majority of Adventist leaders and church members do not understand the assumptions and the unintended consequences of changes in the practice of ministry.

These brief reflections may help the reader to understand the context from which I am writing this article. One way to understand events and trends is by considering their causes. I will attempt to suggest that the situation we are facing in the ministry and liturgy of the Church involves the protestantization of the Adventist mind and the eclipse of Scripture. However, many and complex are the causes of any historical reality, more so when we attempt to understand current events. Consequently, my reflections will be partial and require further research.

My hope is to help start the conversation between Adventist theologians, ministers, and administrators to stimulate creative thinking in faithfulness to the sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle. To overcome the protestantization and secularization of Adventism we must reach the postmodern mind and keep the young in the church with a combination of a critical evaluation of our own experience, a systematic understanding of biblical truths, and the application of the biblical ministerial and liturgical paradigms. Perhaps in this way we can overcome the secularization of Adventism, foster the unity of the Church, and finish the final mission of restoring Christianity to its eternal basis.

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4 For an example of Adventists promoting Evangelical liturgy and the argumentation they follow, see for instance, Martin Weber, “Give Praise a Chance,” (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, 1995).
2. Introduction

Everything changes—so does Adventism. Not all changes have the same importance. Some are inconsequential other are momentous. Changes in foundations have far-reaching consequences for the entire community. Moreover, changes do not happen overnight. They take time and involve many and complex causes that, in turn, assume a ground or foundation from whence they came. Changes in the foundation of a building or community are momentous and have far-reaching consequences. The foundation from which Adventism came into existence and on which it stands is the Word of God present in Scripture. All positive changes come from understanding and following God’s Word.

However, the crisis of identity and doctrinal divisions Adventism is experiencing early in the twenty first century reveal that a macro change at the level of the foundation from which changes should come is taking place: Culture is eclipsing Scripture. The eclipse of Scripture is the blocking, covering, obscuring, hiding, concealing, veiling, shrouding, darkening of the role and understanding of Scripture’s contents in the life, worship, spirituality, thinking, and acting of Adventist believers. The eclipse of Scripture is always partial. It starts with the neglect of Bible study and proceeds to block the understanding of Scripture by the embrace of different cultural ways of thinking and interpreting Scripture.

For instance, the eclipse of Scripture and its impact in the thinking of Adventist leaders becomes apparent in recent liturgical changes centered in the use of popular and rock music for worship. The seismic proportions of the change in Adventist spirituality that recent liturgical changes reveal can be appreciated when one brings to mind that officially Adventists

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5 Provonsha perceived the crisis of identity. Jack W Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1993), 7. Provonsha testified to the self-understanding of Adventism in some sectors of the Church. Adventists used to believe that God entrusted them with His final message for the world. “As preposterous as this idea may seem to some of us today, it was a pivotal factor in the truly enormous explosion of energy that sent Adventists all around the world during the past century and a half, actually changing the world in many ways, but in turn being changed by it.” Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis*, 9.

maintain that “jazz, rock, or related hybrid forms” of music “will be shunned” in the home, in the social gathering, in the school, and in the church. The new liturgy, in turn, aids in the eclipse of Scripture in the spirituality and life of the church. Not surprisingly, the Sabbath School experience that is the “heart of the Church” becomes a casualty in the path of liturgical renewal. The eclipse of Scripture is also visible in the various reinterpretations of the Remnant Church’s nature in Adventism as it relates to Christian denominations and non-Christian religions.

My general purpose in this and the next article is to trace some signposts of the eclipse of Scripture in recent Adventist experience. Slowly, throughout time, the eclipse of Scripture has been taking place not in the official statements of the church but in the minds and actions of leaders and believers. In every day practice, Adventist leaders continue to affirm the sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle with their brains while Evangelical theologies and practices progressively shape their hearts and actions. This growing ambiguity represents a stark turnabout from the

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7 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Church Manual, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 180.
10 By “Adventist Leadership,” I mean thought leaders such as scholars, theologians, pastors, and administrators. I am not referring to the administration of the Church as a local or global community.
11 “The legacy of Adventist evangelicalism proved to be experiential rather than doctrinal. The attention drawn to justification by faith allowed many Adventists to follow the spirit rather than the letter of the law. In consequence, the legalistic style of argumentation and behavior that had characterized Adventist fundamentalism eventually came to be confined to the self-defined-historical Adventists. For others, as Adventism moved into a fourth stage, there was a greater sense of spiritual freedom, often accompanied by a considerable relaxation of Adventist taboos and a more expressive style of worship.” Malcolm Bull, and Keith Lockhart, Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream, 2 ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 106-07. The reader can observe the turnabout of the Adventist mind first hand by browsing through the last 20 years of the Adventist Review. As an example taken at random, check, for instance, Bobby Moore, “Making Space for God: Contemplation as Practice,” Ministry, August 2009, 6-9. In this article, we can see the presence of an incipient protestantization of the Adventist mind eclipsing Scripture. Authorities quoted approvingly are Roman Catholic mystics and
experience of early Adventist pioneers who, dissatisfied with traditional Protestant theologies, decided to devote themselves solely to a Biblical understanding of Christian truth and abandoned their evangelical denominations to become the emerging end time remnant anticipated in Biblical prophecy.12

The hypothesis explored in this series, is that the eclipse of Scripture results from the process of protestantization of the Adventist mind; which in turn, results from the generalized assumption that Evangelical theology is correct in every Christian doctrine but the Adventist distinctives. Finally, the conviction that Evangelical theology is correct assumes that it flows from the consistent application of the sola-tota-prima Scriptura (Scripture only, in all its parts, and first) principle.

What should Adventist leaders do? Should they continue to affirm and promote the protestantization of Adventism in spite of the eclipse of Scripture it produces? More specifically, should Adventist theological system and ministerial paradigm13 accommodate to Evangelical theologies and ministerial paradigms? Alternatively, should Adventist theology and ministerial paradigm stand alone over and against Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions?

My hope is that by becoming aware of the protestantization of the Adventist mind and the eclipse of Scripture, new generations of believers will be able to reject these trends by thinking in the light of the sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle.

Protestant pastors with the exception of one quotation from Ellen White. Some of the sources quoted, Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547), Thomas Merton a Trappist monk, (1915-1968), Kees Waaijman a Carmelite Friar, and Dallas Willard, advocate positions about Spirituality that are contrary to Scripture and Adventist views of theology and the Christian life. Quotations from Catholic sources result from the protestantization of Adventism because in recent times, Protestant Spirituality is merging with Roman Catholic spirituality. The eclipse of Scripture is also present when the author suggests pastors should use books written by Protestant authors for their devotional writings. Lastly, the author does not connect Bible study with experiencing the presence of God.


13 By “ministerial paradigm,” I name the general methodological patterns and methods of ministry, liturgy, and mission followed in any Christian denomination.
3. Goal and Procedure

In this first article of the series, I will deal with some Adventist texts and events that may shed some light into the Adventist theological mind and experience from the perspective of the “history of effect.” In other words, I will select and analyze some events in Adventist history and their effects in present Adventist history. Since the historical scope is broad, I will limit myself to gathering a few ideas to stir dialogue on the theological and ministerial tasks facing the Adventist Church.

My goal is to explore briefly the nature, cause, and reach of the protestantization of the Adventist mind as an “historically effected” consciousness event that leads to the eclipse of Scripture. This is a pivotal issue in the conversation about the future of Adventist theology and ministerial practice.

The method I will follow is the phenomenological and analytical description of selected texts and events in Adventist and Evangelical history as they relate to the Protestant/Evangelical theological and ministerial paradigm from the epistemological perspective of theological methodology.

To achieve the goal and test our working hypothesis, I will (1) explain briefly the concept of method; (2) advance a working definition of Protestantism; and (3) frame the “protestantization of the Adventist mind” phenomenon from the viewpoint of theological methodology. From this perspective, I will analyze briefly (4) the origins of Adventist consciousness as they came out of Protestantism by embracing the Biblical system of theology; and, (5) the tendency of following generations to neglect theology for the sake of mission. With this background in mind, I will examine a few statements of Questions on Doctrine (QOD) and

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14 Gadamer explains that according to the principle of the history of the effect (Wirkungsgeschichte) “historical interest is directed not only toward the historical phenomenon and the traditionary work but also, secondarily, toward their effect in history.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Second, revised ed. (New York, NY: Continuum, 1989), 300.

15 Ibid., 299-300.

Movement of Destiny\textsuperscript{17} (MOD). In these representative texts, I will reflect on Adventism’s move away from its early theological understanding of doctrinal statements, including (6) the evanescence of Adventist theology; (7) the abandonment of the hermeneutical role of the sanctuary doctrine; (8) the use of tradition as new hermeneutical key; and (9) the continuous affirmation of biblical ontology.

4. Method

Method is the activity we follow to reach a goal. Method requires a source of data to work with (cognitive condition), a pattern to process the data (hermeneutical condition), and an end to provide direction and purpose to the methodical activities (teleological condition). In theology, the cognitive condition of method corresponds to the issue of the sources of theology and the revelation-inspiration of Scripture. The hermeneutical condition of method corresponds to the presuppositions assumed in data processing. In addition, the teleological condition of method corresponds to the subject matter or goal theology and ministry seek to achieve. In short, from the perspective of Fundamental Theology there are three conditions of method: the cognitive, hermeneutical, and teleological conditions.\textsuperscript{18}

We will use the cognitive and hermeneutical conditions of theological method to test the assumed compatibility of Adventist theology and ministerial paradigm with Evangelicalism in general and the Emergent Church in particular. This methodological comparison will help us to answer the questions before us.\textsuperscript{19}


5. Working Definition of Protestantism

The number of Protestant Churches is hard to calculate. Some estimate there may be over 30,000 Protestant denominations, 7 major blocs, and 156 ecclesiastical traditions. Any attempt to describe such a multitude of faith confessions under the general labels “Protestantism” and Evangelicalism is incomplete. Recognizing the historical complexity of Protestant communities of faith, in these articles I will use the word “Protestantism” to name the theological system and ministerial paradigm of the segment of Christianity that since the sixteenth century broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. The issue under discussion is the doctrine of justification by faith based on the sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, and, Sola Fide principles. According to Luther, Protestantism centers on the doctrine of justification by faith, the article on which the Church stands or falls.
The way in which Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jacobus Arminius understood these principles and their theological center has produced a theological system that differs slightly from the theological system of Roman Catholicism. Yet, as Catholic leadership predicted, the Protestant system of theology spun a multiplicity of incompatible theological projects (Denominationalism). Within this general context, I use the word “Evangelicalism” to refer to the coalition of American denominations that in spite of their doctrinal dissonances agree on the principles and center of the Magisterial Reformation, and with the Roman Catholic interpretation of the ontological and metaphysical conditions of the hermeneutical principle of theological hermeneutics.
6. Protestantization of Adventism and Theological Method

The protestantization of Adventism is a phenomenon that springs from the theological methodology used by Adventist leaders. Theology seeks the “understanding of God.” Theological method is the process through which one seeks to understand God. Method “requires a material to work with, a pattern to process the material, and an end to provide it with direction and purpose. In theological parlance, the material condition of method corresponds to the issue of revelation-inspiration. The formal condition of method corresponds to hermeneutics. And the final condition of method corresponds to the subject-matter [objective] of theology.”

The material condition refers to the revealed sources of theology. The material principle of Protestant and American Evangelical theological methodology (classical, modernist and postmodern) is not the sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle but the multiplicity of revealed sources they uncritically received from the Roman Catholic theological system.

Emerging from the profound dissatisfaction of American believers with the conflicting doctrines of traditional Protestant denominations Seventh-day Adventist pioneers adopted the sola-tota-prima Scriptura

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26 Theology (Gk. θεολογία), is “the ‘science of God.’ Among the Greek Fathers, it comes to have two specific references: it can denote either the doctrine of the Trinity (i.e., of God’s being, as opposed to his dealings with the created order), or it can mean prayer (as it is only in prayer that God is truly known). Later, in the W. it came to mean the science of the divinely revealed religious truths. Its theme is the Being and Nature of God and His creatures and the whole complex of the Divine dispensation from the Fall of Adam to the Redemption through Christ and its mediation to men by His Church, including the so-called natural truths of God, the soul, the moral law, etc., which are accessible to mere reason. Its purpose is the investigation of the contents of belief by means of reason enlightened by faith (fides quaerens intellectum) and the promotion of its deeper understanding. In the course of time, theology has developed into several branches, among them dogmatic, historical, and practical theology. The methods of classification of the sub-disciplines, however, fluctuate in different theological systems.” F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1616.


principle\textsuperscript{29} as the material principle of their theological methodology. Consequently, they were critical of tradition (deconstruction) and thought doctrine from Scriptural foundations. We should note that they inherited this belief (SDA Fundamental Belief 1) not from the Magisterial Reformers but from the English Connection\textsuperscript{30}.

In theological methodology, the formal condition stands next and depends on the material condition. The formal condition consists of the macro hermeneutical principles necessary to interpret Scripture and construct the system of Christian theology (ontology [God and human beings], cosmology, and, metaphysics (the whole of the one and the many). Evangelicals never used Scripture to define their macro hermeneutical principles. Instead, they implicitly assumed the philosophical principles of Plato and Aristotle as retrieved by Augustine and Aquinas. Unbeknown to most Protestant and Evangelical believers, these ontological principles condition and permeate the Protestant-Evangelical system of theology. They determine the Evangelical understanding of the doctrines of justification, grace, and faith.\textsuperscript{31} For instance, analyzing the causes of the current Evangelical debate on justification, Brian McCormack, an

\textsuperscript{29} The theological and doctrinal systems of Protestant Reformation does not stand on the sola, tota, and prima Scriptura principles but on the multiplicities of theological sources of revelation. See for instance, Outler, \textit{The Wesleyan Theological Heritage}, 21-37. Adventists build on the rarely discussed sola, tota, and prima Scriptura principle. Sola (Scripture only) means that we recognize Scripture as the only specific cognitive revelation from God on which all our beliefs should be grounded and tested. Tota (Scripture as an indivisible whole) means Adventists see Old and New Testaments as an indivisible whole of divine revelation they need to understand God. Finally, Prima (Scripture first) means that the principles and doctrines we discover in the whole Scripture will be applied as hermeneutical presuppositions to judge human philosophy, science, politics, morals, worldviews, religions and actions.

\textsuperscript{30} As a denomination, the English Connection was “peculiar in that the members subscribe to no creed but the unqualified Word of God. They reckon human creeds and formal statements of faith as mischievous, and tending to bigotry and disunion among God’s people. But no people are more orthodox in their adherence to the Bible as the ‘only infallible rule of faith and practice.’” L. J. Aldrich, “Christians: Christian Connection,” in \textit{A Concise Cyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: Biblical, Biographical, Geographical, Historical, Practical and Theological}, ed. Elias Benjamin Sanford (Hartford, CT: The S. S. Scraeton Co., 1902).

\textsuperscript{31} For a rare example of a leading Evangelical theologian who openly recognizes the indebtedness of Evangelical Theology to classical philosophy see, Norman L. Geisler, \textit{Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991).
Evangelical theologian, recognizes that “the Reformers’ refusal to engage directly issues of theological ontology made them blind to the extent to which they continue to subscribe to ontological assumptions that could, logically, only fund a Catholic ordering of regeneration and justification.”\(^{32}\) The Evangelical conception of the Gospel, then, does not stand on biblical but philosophical Roman Catholic principles.

In the early formative years of Adventism (1844-1850),\(^{33}\) pioneers accepted the Bible—and the Bible only—as their rule of faith and duty; the law of God as immutable (including the binding obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath); the imminent personal Advent of Christ; the conditional immortality of the soul; and the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary after 1844 in the blotting out of sins. Furthermore, they gained impetus to spread these beliefs by reading the message of the third angel of Revelation 14 as descriptive of Sabbatarian Adventists to reestablish the Sabbath and prepare the remnant ready for Christ’s Second Coming.\(^{34}\)

Adventist leaders and Ellen White experienced the theological revolution of the early formative years in different ways. On the one side, although Adventist leadership felt they had “a harmonious system of truth to present,”\(^{35}\) they were probably unaware their theological discoveries necessarily implied a radical departure from the Evangelical interpretation of the macro hermeneutical principles of theological methodology. Besides, the harmonious system they discovered was theologically underdeveloped and left unexplained methodologically. Consequently, the theological revolution of the early formative years slowly disappeared as a way of doing theology and remained frozen as “brain” “distinctive” doctrines.

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., 41.
On the other side, Ellen White understood the initial doctrinal agreement of the early formative years hermeneutically, as “the pillars of the faith.” She thought that in various levels, and ways, the biblical pillars of the Adventist Faith should work as the hermeneutical conditions of Adventist theological methodology. More specifically, she understood the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary Doctrine and consistently applied it while interpreting Scripture and constructing Christian teachings. For her, the sanctuary was not only “the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844,” but also the key that “opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people.” More specifically, “The correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith.”

These simple observations on Evangelical and Adventist theological methodologies may help Adventists to understand two pivotal points:

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36 “The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God’s people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angels’ messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, ‘The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.’ One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God’s law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is all imaginary.” Ellen White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 30-31.

37 “As a people, we are to stand firm on the platform of eternal truth that has withstood test and trial. We are to hold to the sure pillars of our faith. The principles of truth that God has revealed to us are our only true foundation. They have made us what we are. The lapse of time has not lessened their value. It is the constant effort of the enemy to remove these truths from their setting, and to put in their place spurious theories. He will bring in everything that he possibly can to carry out his deceptive designs. But the Lord will raise up men of keen perception, who will give these truths their proper place in the plan of God.” Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols., Christian Home Library (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 1:201.


involved in their relations with Evangelicals. First, Luther’s revolutionary insights on justification, Calvin’s systematic construction, Arminius’ slight modifications to Calvin’s system (Divine foreknowledge and human free will), and (4) John Wesley’s inclusion of sanctification still stand on the basis of Roman Catholic interpretation of the material and hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology. Second, Protestant theologians have never applied the *sola Scriptura* principle to the hermeneutical principles of their theological method. Consequently, Protestantism has never produced a *sola Scriptura* Systematic Theology.

7. Coming Out of Protestantism: From Traditions to the Biblical Theological System

Adventism originated as an ecumenical movement unified through Bible study and theological discovery. They were disappointed with Protestant doctrines because they found them standing on traditions rather than Scripture. They realized denominational teachings divided Christians because the teachings stem from human traditions rather than from Biblical revelation. Coming out of various Protestant denominations Adventist pioneers united in the conviction that God’s revelation in Scripture does not contradict itself. They were not the first nor the only ones to arrive at this conviction. For instance, Luther valiantly defied Roman Catholic traditional teachings on salvation with biblical teachings.

However, Adventist pioneers were more consistent in their rejection of tradition and embracement of Scripture. As a result, early Adventists discovered the ontological and metaphysical keys to the inner logic of biblical thinking in the Sanctuary and the historicist interpretation of Daniel’s prophecies. We seldom realize that Adventism, as an ecumenical movement, came into existence because of this revolutionary hermeneutical discovery and its all-embracing theological and practical consequences.

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41 After the early formative years during the 1850’s, Sabbatarian Adventists who belonged to various Protestant denominations realized that because Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations followed the spirit and ideas of the world their doctrinal positions and spirit were corrupted. Ibid., 179-84. Consequently, they came to the conviction they no longer belonged to them.
On this basis, Adventists became God’s eschatological remnant. His visible church on earth was to be the theological center and missionary agency preparing the world for Christ’s second coming. The Adventist final warning message includes presenting the real Christ of Scripture to all Christians who belong to denominations that persist in constructing their understanding of Christ from tradition and culture.

For more than a century, Adventists understood that their God given mission (the teleological condition of theological method) included not only the world in general but also Christian believers in the Roman Catholic and Protestant /Evangelical Churches. The preaching of the gospel to the whole world in the context of the end time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation included helping other Christians to move from a tradition based understanding of Christianity to a fully Biblically grounded personal relation with Christ.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century a paradigm shift in Adventist theological methodology had already started. By overemphasizing the concrete achievement of the teleological condition of Adventist theology (the mission of the Church to the world), Adventist leaders unintentionally shifted from a theological to a practical mindset. As theological understanding became progressively less important, Adventists soon abandoned the critical deconstructive first methodological step early pioneers applied when reading theological materials. The conviction that

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42 Ellen White explains, “Babylon is said to be ‘the mother of harlots.’ By her daughters must be symbolized churches that cling to her doctrines and traditions, and follow her example of sacrificing the truth and the approval of God, in order to form an unlawful alliance with the world. The message of Revelation 14, announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt. Since this message follows the warning of the judgment, it must be given in the last days; therefore, it cannot refer to the Roman Church alone, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation God calls His people to come out of Babylon. According to this scripture, many of God’s people must still be in Babylon. And in what religious bodies are the greater part of the followers of Christ now to be found? . . . Many of the Protestant churches are following Rome’s example of iniquitous connection with ‘the kings of the earth’—the state churches, by their relation to secular governments; and other denominations, by seeking the favor of the world. And the term "Babylon"—confusion—may be appropriately applied to these bodies, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects, with widely conflicting creeds and theories.” White, The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, 382-83.
Evangelical theologians can be trusted simply because they claim they ground their doctrines firmly on Scripture replaced critical analysis of the Evangelical theological tradition.

We can trace the beginnings of this paradigm shift in theological methodology back, for instance, to Waggoner and Jones’ views on justification, sanctification, and perfection. They borrowed from Wesley’s theology probably unaware that Wesley’s thought stood on non-Biblical Roman Catholic ontological teachings, the result being that they propagated a Wesleyan-type perfection similar to the Holiness movement. Bull and Lockhart correctly point out that Ellen White did not share their assumed ontological presuppositions but worked from what they perceive to be “eschatological presuppositions.” The difference between Wesley and White, however, is not between ontology and eschatology as they suggest, but between different views of the ontology of God and human beings (hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology).

On one hand, by believing Wesley’s theological positions were correct, Waggoner and Jones’s views on salvation and perfection implicitly assumed Roman Catholic ontological views. On the other hand, by assuming that Scripture tells us the truth about reality (ontology) Ellen White’s views on salvation and perfection sprung from biblical ontological teachings.

This example lends credence to Bull and Lockhart’s affirmation that conservative evangelicalism has long been the “primary point of reference” for Adventism. If they are right, then, the protestantization of Adventism has shaped the thinking, spirituality, and mission of the church for over a century.

The nature of the protestantization of Adventism is theological. In other words, it refers to the way in which Adventists think. Accordingly, it

43 Bull and Lockhart, Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream, 91.
44 Ibid.
46 Bull and Lockhart consider the Adventist dependence upon Evangelical thinking to have existed throughout its entire existence. “Adventist theology has rather developed in parallel with that of the mainstream. It was at its most distinctive during a period of great diversity; it became fundamentalist in the era of fundamentalism, softened with the raise of evangelicalism, and affirmed up again as society became conservative once more.” Ibid., 108.
generates and exists in the mind and spirit of concrete Adventist believers who give speeches and write articles and books. We need to have in mind that the concrete ways in which Adventists think on theological issues stems from the way in which they explicitly or implicitly define the various components of theological method, specially, its material and hermeneutical conditions (see above on page 136).

The goal of the following three sections is to sketch briefly the existence and nature of the protestantization of Adventism in Doctrines, Biblical theology, and ministerial paradigm.

8. Neglecting Theological Understanding to Finish the Mission of the Church

Sometime after the early formative years of Adventism, passion for missions progressively replaced the original spiritual passion for understanding God from Scripture. Doctrines, as church theoretical statements, replaced the spiritual convictions that grew from studying the Bible as their creed. This subtle change did not happen overnight. Progressively, Adventists spent more time and money in theoretical exposition of their belief system to sharpen their chosen tool for Church growth (overemphasis on the teleological condition of theological methodology). They implicitly assumed that little Bible study was necessary for Church growth or Church unity. Gradually, they came to rely more on Ellen White’s writings and less on their own personal theological understanding of Scripture. A missionary doctrinarian tradition was in the making. Voided of a biblical theological understanding, Doctrines became empty shells that reached the brain but failed to touch and transform the

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47 Probably, this change of emphasis began to develop sometime during the formative years after the organization of Adventism as a Christian denomination (1863-1888). See, Schwarz, Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 130-45.

48 “By the late 1880s the Seventh-day Adventist leaders seemed to have forgotten the radical, biblical, sola scriptura roots of the founders of their message. After 40 years of denominational existence some of the leadership were more than willing to use sources of doctrinal authority that the founders of their message would have rejected.” (Knight explains this as reliance in inner Adventist traditions not to the traditions of Protestantism.) George Knight, A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Belief (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 93.
Adventists continue to experience doctrines as “brain knowledge” in the twenty-first century.

Adventists became convinced they possessed the truth or at least enough truth to fulfill their God-given eschatological mission. Leaders believed the mission of the church does not require theological research because it detracts from missionary action. Instead of using and further developing the theological vision and system early pioneers discovered in Scripture, new generations of pastors became superficial communicators more interested in winning a debate than understanding God through Scripture.

Thus, theological and spiritual understanding became ever more superficial or nonexistent. Doctrines had replaced theology and spirituality. A macro shift in the Adventist mind had taken place. Adventists were ready to live parallel lives. On one hand, they would continue to preach the “orthodox” doctrines of the early pioneers without understanding them theologically or receiving their spiritual power. On the other, they were ready to gain theological understanding by retrieving teachings from the evangelical tradition. The general conviction that missions does not require theology led to the vanishing of Adventist theology.

49 Consider the following honest confession of LeRoy Froom, the main leader behind *Questions on Doctrine*. “I had always been an ardent Adventist—unswerving in loyalty to our fundamental doctrines. I was fascinated with the sweep of Bible prophecy, and was always seeking to present the best possible case for Adventism before the world—but much, I fear, after the fashion of a lawyer presenting a case in the courtroom. I worked hard and profoundly believed in the certainty and soundness of the Advent Message and Movement. Theoretically, I believed in Righteousness by Faith—as a doctrine. Nevertheless, to me Adventism had been to a large degree allegiance to an impressive system of coordinated doctrinal truths. It was fidelity to a message. My Christianity was primarily a devoted mental assent to a beautiful, logical, Heaven-born body of abstract, largely detached Bible truths. To their proclamation I had given myself without reservation.” Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 396-97.

50 “The assumption behind the scholarly achievements of Adventist fundamentalism was that, if only a topic were examined thoroughly enough, the Adventist position would be vindicated. It was this assumption that underlay the dialogue with evangelicals that led to *Questions on Doctrine*. But it was here that the church finally overreached itself, for *Questions on Doctrine* raised uncertainties about what Adventists actually believed that made the evangelical era that followed the most destabilizing in the church’s history.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 106.
Nevertheless, where do we find evidence of this phenomenon? Bull and Lockhart are aware of how difficult it is to find “Adventist theology.” In the absence of theology, Adventist historian George Knight helps us to find doctrines. He explains that although *QOD* was written, “to help bring peace between Adventism and conservative Protestantism” . . . it became “the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history.” I am aware of the limitations involved in comparing doctrines in the absence of their philosophical basis, theological understandings and exegetical contents. With these limitations in mind, we will explore the way in which a small group of General Conference leaders headed by distinguished scholar LeRoy Froom understood the relation of Adventist and Evangelical doctrines.

The leaders who wrote *QOD* had experienced, probably in different ways and to differing degrees, the macro shift in theological methodology described above. As Adventists communicated Scripture but did not seek to understand its contents, theologically and spiritually, they lost the hermeneutical vision that the early pioneers and Ellen White had found in the Sanctuary Doctrine. Let us consider briefly how *Questions on Doctrine* (1957), and its sequel by LeRoy Froom in *Movement of Destiny* (1971) lost sight of the sanctuary doctrine as the hermeneutical key to the Adventist system of theology and doctrines.

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51 It is difficult “finding” Adventist Theology. “Is it composed of ideas preached from the pulpit, published by the press, or discussed among academic colleagues? Is it represented in authorized publication like *Questions on Doctrine* or the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*? Some beliefs such as the Sanctuary doctrine are officially promulgated but may be doubted by Adventists academics. Others, such as the complete inerrancy of the Scriptures, are probably believed by most church members but not officially endorsed. Many elements of the church’s eschatology are carefully taught to would-be converts but play no active part in the internal theological life of the church. There are, accordingly, discrepancies both between the beliefs emphasized in internal discussion and those expounded in outside evangelism, and between the ideas that circulate in various parts of the church’s organization.” Ibid., 99-100.

Contrary to the perceptions of many readers, the contents of *QOD* did not sell out Adventism to evangelical theology. George Knight correctly concludes that *QOD* “is almost entirely made up of clear restatements of traditional Adventist theology that are phrased in such a way that the book remained faithful to Adventist beliefs while at the same time speaking in the language that those outside of Adventism could understand more easily.”

However, we find traces of the ongoing protestantization of the Adventist mind in the answer to the first question: What doctrines do Adventists share with other Christians? The authors of *QOD* answered that, with the exception of few doctrinal points (the existence of the Heavenly Sanctuary, the Investigative Judgment, the Spirit of Prophecy, the Three Angel Messages, and the Seal of God and Mark of the Beast) Adventists believe Evangelical doctrines on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation. Later, Froom identified these doctrines as the “eternal

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54 Ibid., 23-24.

55 “LeRoy Edwin Froom was the first to acknowledge and interpret the theological changes that have taken place within Adventism.” According to Froom, explain Bull and Lockhart, “the Adventist Church had gradually been led toward a complete understanding of the Christian gospel after a century in which the important truths, such as the Sabbath, had been accompanied by the misapprehension of the doctrine of Christ and his saving work. This process, had, Froom argued, achieved the alignment of Adventism with evangelical Christianity.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 103.

56 The first question the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* answered inquires about the doctrines “Seventh-day Adventists hold in common with Christians in general, and in what aspects of Christian thought do they differ.” *Questions on Doctrine* affirms that Adventists hold in common with conservative Christians and the historical Protestant creeds twenty-one doctrinal points and differ in five. Adventists agree with Evangelicals in 19 doctrinal issues, such as the doctrines of God, the Trinity, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Revelation and Inspiration of Scripture, Atoning death of Christ, Justification, Regeneration, and Sanctification. Yet, because Evangelicals do not agree among themselves in all doctrinal points, Adventists can only agree with them by taking one side of 12 controversial doctrines like, for instance, Predestination and Free Will, The Decalogue as not changed or abolished, Baptism by immersion, Conditional Immortality, Annihilationism, The Seven-day Sabbath, Tithing, and
initial step in the protestantization of the Adventism had already taken place in the minds of Adventist leaders. From it, the far more advanced and explicit protestantization Adventism experiences at the beginning of the twenty-first century grew.

Because the answer superficially enumerates similarities in doctrinal issues neglecting to address the actual divergent theological positions, systems, and theological methods embraced by Adventists and Protestant denominations, contemporary readers may arrive at incorrect conclusions. They may infer that Adventists and Evangelicals share the same theological understanding in all Doctrinal points with the exception of a few minor eschatological issues. Moreover, they may also deduce that these minor divergences do not affect the understanding of the “eternal verities,” that

Creation in six Weeks. The five distinctive Adventist doctrinal points are the existence of the Heavenly Sanctuary, the Investigative Judgment, the Spirit of Prophecy, the Three Angel Messages, and the Seal of God and Mark of the Beast. Editors, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition*, 21-24.

57 “Verity means “truth”—in conformance with fact and reality. Eternal Verities are simply eternal truths, but of a specific character. They spring from God, not from man, in the context of this volume the expression refers to those ageless principles, provisions, and Divine Personalities that are the foundation and superstructure of the divine plan of redemption. They are the core and content of the Everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14:6.” Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 33.

58 “The Eternal Verities embrace the basic principles and provisions for the salvation of man, as springing from and centering in the three persons of the Godhead, or Trinity. They are eternal because God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternal. And eternal because the plan of redemption was devised back in eternity, before the creation of this world and the entrance of sin, with the Lamb of God slain in inviolable covenant, before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). The Eternal Verities embrace everything needful for carrying out that sacred compact—the Incarnation of the Son, His sinless life and vicarious, atoning death, triumphant resurrection and priestly mediation, and His glorious return to reclaim His own. Central in it all is His own spotless righteousness with which He clothes and transforms the repentant sinner…Component factors in the Eternal Verities embrace regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. And being filled, indwelt, kept, and enabled by the Holy Spirit. These are all rooted in God’s love, grace, compassion, and power. These are the conquering provisions and contravening measures to overcome sin, and ultimately to banish it from the universe. So the eternal Verities are simply the Everlasting Gospel in essence and operation.” Ibid., 34 (emphasis added).
is, most of the content of Evangelical systematic theology. From this simple answer to a complex question an increasing number of Adventists today assume their beliefs are Evangelical, notably, the central doctrines of Christianity. One can see why they feel free to use Evangelical books to learn their theology and ministerial paradigm.

In MOD, his sequel to QOD for Adventist readership, Froom explained that the “separative” doctrines were a “distinct handicap” of early Adventists (the “little flock” or Church of the Remnant). They made Adventists different from Evangelicals and kept them distant from them.


Bull and Lockhart correctly identify Froom as the pivotal thinker in the new Adventist evangelicalism, and the fact that the protestantization of Adventism springs from a new view on the Sanctuary. However, they incorrectly think that Adventism becomes evangelical because QOD abandoned Christ’s work of atonement in the Heavenly Sanctuary siding, thereby, with the Protestant Evangelical view of a completed atonement at the cross. They base their incorrect representation on QOD’s affirmation that the heavenly ministry of Christ is the application of the benefits of the

59 “While it is true that twenty-first-century differs from contemporary evangelicalism in only a few beliefs, such doctrine-by-doctrine comparison is not altogether helpful in establishing the character and historical position of Adventist theology. Within Christianity, otherwise diverse groups may share superficially similar theological positions for entirely fortuitous reasons, and many of the historical studies by Adventists have investigated parallels rather than connections.” Bull and Lockhart, Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream, 101.

60 “We started out as a ‘Little Flock,’ or Church of the Remnant, under a distinct handicap. In our formative stage we as a people were clear and united on our special separative doctrines—the ‘testing truths’ that made and have kept us distinct from all other Christian bodies. This was because of our special ‘Present Truth’ message for the world today. These specific doctrinal truths of the Message were sound and true, and have never had to be materially altered. They are sound and abiding as regards their intrinsic verity and latter-day application.” Froom, Movement of Destiny, 35 (emphasis added).

61 “Froom himself was the pivotal figure between the old fundamentalism and the new evangelicalism, the second and third stages of the church’s theological development.” Bull and Lockhart, Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream, 106.
atonement at the cross. Bull and Lockhart further argue this point by noting that QOD “scrupulously avoids reference for Christ’s atoning work in the sanctuary.” They are reflecting the view of later Adventist authors that reject the Sanctuary doctrine. However, on this point QOD is clear and concise.

Thus the atoning sacrifice, having been completed on Calvary, must now be applied and appropriated to those who are heirs of salvation. Our Lord’s ministry [which takes place in the heavenly sanctuary] is thus involved in the great work of atonement. So as we think of the mighty sweep of the atonement, in its provisions and its efficacy, it is seen to be vastly more comprehensive than many have thought.

Yet, in Movement of Destiny, Froom singles out the doctrine of the Sanctuary as the most separative Adventist doctrine. According to him, neither the early Church nor the Reformation taught this doctrine.

62 “In Questions on Doctrine, this belief is reinterpreted. The authors advise that ‘when, therefore, one hears an Adventist say, or reads in Adventist literature—even in the writings of Ellen G. White—that Christ is making atonement now, it should be understood that we mean simply that Christ is now making application of the benefits of the sacrificial atonement he made on the cross’ [Questions on Doctrine 354-355]. The distinction is subtle. First, the atonement is made, then its benefits are mediated. Both elements are part of the work of salvation, but only the first, according to Questions on Doctrine, is in itself and act of atonement. In Adventist theology, the difference was far from trivial, for the doctrine of the Sanctuary had been developed by O. R. L. Cosier on the understanding that Christ ‘did not begin the work of making the atonement, whatever the nature of that work may be, till after this ascension, when by his own blood he entered his heavenly sanctuary for us.’ In order to show that October 22, 1844, marked a second phase of Christ’s heavenly ministry, Crosier argued that there were exact parallels between Christ’s work and that of the Old Testament priesthood. Questions on Doctrine made the analogy a great deal less exact. For although it refers to the period since 1844 as “the antitypical day of Atonement,” it scrupulously avoids reference for Christ’s atoning work in the sanctuary “Ibid., 85.

63 Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, 351.

64 “All other major doctrines that we hold and teach—seventh-day Sabbath, Conditional Immortality, Second Advent, Spirit of Prophecy, prophetic interpretation, premillennialism, Righteousness by Faith, immersion, tithing, et cetera—have all been held by others, one group or more, in whole or in part, either in the past or the present. But neither in the early church (when and while the apostolic teachings were still intact), nor in the Reformation church (when a large portion of the apostolic positions had been recovered and restored), was the Heavenly Sanctuary truth taught, with its ministering Priest officiating in two distinct phases of that mediatorial service, with the second phase comprising God’s great present Judgment Hour activities.” Froom, Movement of Destiny, 541 (emphasis in the
 Nonetheless, he did not suggest Adventists should abandon their “separative” doctrine of the Sanctuary but sought to soften its divisiveness by ignoring its hermeneutical role. So, how did Froom deal with the separative doctrine of the Sanctuary?

He affirmed the doctrine but redefined its function. Froom believed that “any weakening or denial or submerging of the Sanctuary truth is not only a serious but a crucial matter. Any deviation or dereliction therefrom strikes at the heart of Adventism, and challenges its very integrity.” Thus, he believed in the doctrine of the Sanctuary but no longer as the macro hermeneutical principle, that leads to the discovery of the Biblical system of truth. Instead, he argued that the Sanctuary was the light that illumined the precarious position after the Great Disappointment, and is “the all-encompassing essence of Adventism, the doctrine that “embraces” or contains the complete system of Adventist beliefs, and, the broad outline of the great eschatological consummation.

In its new redefined role, the doctrine of the Sanctuary continues to have a “central place in our distinctive, identifying emphasis for this

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65 Ibid., 542.
66 According to Froom, the Sanctuary is the essence of Adventism. “It is consequently incumbent upon us clearly to understand and then to proclaim it [Sanctuary Doctrine] in and through our message to men. And for this very simple reason: It is the all-encompassing essence of Adventism.” Ibid., 542 (emphasis in the original).
67 According to Froom, Adventists “were raised up by God—and came into being in direct historical response—to emphasize this one all-embracing Present Truth, that in itself involves and constitutes ‘a complete system of truth’ (GC, 423). All other essential truths are actually embraced within it—the moral law, Sabbath, sacrificial Atonement, High-Priestly Mediation, Judgment, Justification and Sanctification, Righteousness by Faith, final rewards and punishments, Second Advent, and total destruction of the incorrigibly wicked.” Ibid., 542. Note that even when Froom quotes from Ellen White’s statement about the Sanctuary “opening to view a complete system of truth connected and harmonious,” in this passage he redefines Ellen White’s view of the complete system of truth by identifying it with his concept of “all-embracing Present truth.”
68 “As to the sanctuary light, this was clearly Bible truth that explained the very things that those who has passed through the Great Disappointment most needed to know. It revealed the nature of the mistake involved in their 1844 misconception. It likewise illuminated their current precarious position. And in bold strokes it outlined the destined future events—on to the Great Consummation.” Ibid., 80.
time,” and it continues to define our “uniqueness” by being the reason that justifies our existence as a Christian denomination. Consequently, we should proclaim the Investigative Judgment as “Present Truth.”

Following QOD’s lead, Froom’s subtle redefinition of the sanctuary doctrine’s role from “hermeneutical key” to “distinctive doctrine” had far-reaching consequences in theological method, system, teachings, and ministerial praxis. From it, the progressive protestantization of Adventism builds and nourishes.

Although they did not properly identify the cause of Adventist protestantization, Bull and Lockhart understood that “Questions on Doctrine left the doctrine of the Sanctuary intact, but it began to erode its foundations. What was intended to be merely a cosmetic change ended up disturbing the equilibrium of the entire Adventist theological system.” In reality, QOD did not erode the foundations of the doctrine of the Sanctuary but its hermeneutical role in the construction of the Adventist theological system.

11. The Evangelical “Gospel” as New Hermeneutical Key

How did Adventism replace the Sanctuary and its hermeneutical role? What is the new implicit hermeneutical key in Adventism after QOD?

Froom was convinced that the Sanctuary doctrine fits perfectly within Christian doctrinal tradition. The Sanctuary doctrine, he explains, “is not a departure from the historic Christian faith. It is, instead, the logical completion and inevitable consummation of that faith.” It seems that Froom was convinced that the Adventist system of Theology embraced in the

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69 According to Froom, the Sanctuary is the center of our identity. “It consequently behooves us not only truly to believe and teach the Sanctuary truth today but to give it central place in our distinctive, identifying emphasis of this time.” Ibid., 542.

70 Froom clarified this concept by saying that if there is no ministration of Christ in heaven “we have no justifiable place in the religious world, no distinctive denominational mission and message, no excuse for functioning as a separate church today.” Ibid.

71 Identifying the Sanctuary doctrine with the Pre Advent Investigative Judgment Froom declares: “We recognize and proclaim it [The Investigative Judgment in Heaven] not only as due for promulgation today but now as a present actuality, mandatory in today’s heralding of the Everlasting Gospel in its last-day setting and emphasis. We rightly consider it a tremendous Present Truth Imperative.” Ibid., 542.

72 Bull and Lockhart, Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream, 85.
Sanctuary is the logical and inevitable consummation of the historical Protestant Evangelical Faith.\textsuperscript{73}

Since historically Adventists understood the eternal verities of the Gospel in various ways, Froom called on them to accept Evangelical tradition and teachings on God, Christ, and the Gospel. In his own words, allegiance to the Eternal Verities of the gospel “... has been the heart of the true Church’s faith in all periods of its greatest purity. This was true of the early church, the Reformation times and the Wesleyan period. And it must be for us today.”\textsuperscript{74}

Thus, in many ways, Froom implicitly assumed the Gospel as the new hermeneutical principle in Adventism. As we have seen above, the sanctuary doctrine continues to be an important distinctive eschatological emphasis but leaders no longer conceived or used it as the hermeneutical key to understand all Christian doctrines including the Gospel. At least after \textit{QOD} the Gospel as understood by the Evangelical theological tradition became by default the implicit hermeneutical key to interpret all doctrines including eschatology and the sanctuary.

This change in the understanding of the hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology requires a change in the material condition. Since Evangelical theology does not build on Scripture alone, progressively Adventists no longer developed their theological understanding from Scripture alone but from the multiplicity of theological source patterns used by Evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians.

\textsuperscript{73} “Consequently, the Sanctuary truth is not a strange, peculiar, abnormal, distorted, indefensible doctrine—or simply and expedient to explain away the Disappointment episode of 1844, as some antagonists have contended. \textit{It [the Sanctuary truth] is not a departure from the historic Christian faith. It is, instead, the logical completion and inevitable consummation of that faith.}” Froom, \textit{Movement of Destiny}, 542-43 (emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{74} “We were not at first united on certain of the saving provisions and Divine Persons of the Everlasting Gospel, in relation to the Third Angel’s Message in its final phase and culminating witness. There were variant views of the Godhead, the Deity of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and on aspects of the Atonement, as well. Yet allegiance to these saving truths—the Eternal Verities—has been the heart of the true Church’s faith in all periods of its greatest purity. This was true of the early church, the Reformation times and the Wesleyan period. And it must be for us today.” Ibid., 35 (emphasis added).
12. Adventist Theology Facing the Ontological Divide

Yet, to their credit, Froom and some conservative Biblical Adventists did not surrender to Evangelical tradition all the way. They did not take their ontological assumptions from tradition but from Scripture. They rightly understood the reality of the Sanctuary from a biblical ontology. This means that they did not spiritualize the Sanctuary after the pattern of Platonic timelessness but affirmed the spatial-temporal reality of the Sanctuary and Christ’s ministry in heaven.75

Froom implicitly brings up the ontological foundations of Theology, “The conclusion is inescapable: Truly we have a real Christ, who made a real sacrifice, through a real death. In addition, after a real resurrection and ascension He became our real High Priest, ministering in a real Sanctuary (tabernacle, or temple), in a real heaven, effectuating a real redemption. And he is coming to gather us unto Himself in a real Second Advent. There is nothing more real in the universe than this inexorable sequence—every phase of it, including the Sanctuary.”76 Thus, we see Froom did not spiritualize the reality of God’s acts and the heavenly sanctuary according to the timeless ontology of Christian tradition but rather reaffirms the biblical historical ontology. This reveals an inner inconsistency and tension in Froom’s doctrinal view because the application of the Evangelical understanding of the Gospel as hermeneutical key requires the rejection of biblical ontology and the implicit or explicit adoption of ontological principles originating in Plato and interpreted by Augustine and Aquinas. When a Platonic ontology of God implicitly or explicitly replaces the biblical ontology of God, the protestantization of Adventism becomes complete and is ready to become modernist and ecumenical.

13. Conclusion of Part 1

In our quest to understand the progressive eclipse of Scripture in Adventist thinking and practice, we have discovered that the

75 “The testimony of the Word—explains Froom—is that the Temple in heaven is a supernal reality, a divinely revealed actuality—as real as God Himself, or the New Jerusalem, or the Lamb of God who now, as Heavenly Priest, ministers therein—and with all redemptive activities springing therefore. It is the established Command Center from whence all these sublime undertakings originate and are conducted.” Ibid., 544 (emphasis original).

76 Ibid., 559.
**Canale: The Eclipse of Scripture**

*sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle is the ground on which Christ’s Remnant Church stands or falls. The application of this principle requires that the Church should interpret Scripture from Scriptural presuppositions (Scripture interprets itself). Early Adventism stood on the *sola Scriptura* ground because they interpreted the whole of Scripture in the light of the Sanctuary doctrine. This marked the dawn of Scripture in the incipient discovery of an historical understanding of Christian theology, and led Adventists to come out of Protestantism.

Our brief review of some selected signposts in the Adventist experience half a century ago indicates that sometime along the way the eclipse of Scripture began. Froom’s views on Adventist doctrines reveal that by the middle of the twentieth century Adventist leadership at the General Conference had forgotten the hermeneutical methodological role that the Sanctuary Doctrine played in the minds of early Adventist pioneers. They no longer consistently used the doctrine of the Sanctuary as the hermeneutical “key” to biblical interpretation and theological reflection. Instead, the Evangelical interpretation of the “Gospel” became by default the operative hermeneutical principle of Adventist thinking. Few realize that the Evangelical interpretation of the Gospel as the new hermeneutical key (hermeneutical condition of theological method) stands on tradition and implies the rejection of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle thereby eclipsing Scripture with culture and tradition.

This unintentional and imperceptible macro hermeneutical shift lies behind the progressive eclipse of Scripture in twenty first century Adventism. Yet, Adventist leadership remained nonetheless “conservative,” “biblical” and “orthodox.” However, by looking at the conservative contents of Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, many readers may easily

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78 Dale Ratzlaff, editor of *Proclamation*, considers that the Adventist Church is recanting from the Evangelical position taken in *Questions on Doctrine*. According to Ratzlaff: “Most Evangelicals today have a very limited and often erroneous understanding of Adventist doctrine and practice. As you read this you may be thinking, ‘Aren’t Adventists just Evangelicals who worship on Saturday? Didn’t Walter Martin conclude that Adventism was not a cult?’ Few know that the documentation the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) leaders gave to Dr. Martin to convince him that Seventh-day Adventism was not a cult is now rejected by many in the SDA church. Many believe if Dr. Martin were alive today, his conclusion would be different.” Dale Ratzlaff, “Lam Publications, Llc,” [http://www.ratzlaf.com/](http://www.ratzlaf.com/).

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arrive at the same incorrect conclusion Bull and Lockhart advanced. According to them, at the beginning of the twenty first century the official affirmation of the doctrine of the Sanctuary is gradually undermining the evangelical influence of *QOD*. Unfortunately, Bull and Lockhart fail to recognize their own observation that “the legacy of Adventist evangelicalism is experiential rather than doctrinal.” (See, note 11 above). In fact, the official reaffirmation of the doctrine of the Sanctuary (Froom’s doctrinal reinterpretation) only reaches the brain of Adventist believers falling short from shaping their hermeneutics, spirituality (way of thinking and acting), or mission.

In turn, this paradigm shift in Adventist hermeneutics and thinking strengthens the longstanding conviction of many believers that Adventism agrees with the Evangelical understanding of Christian doctrines with the exception of the Sabbath and a few details in eschatology. Under the influence of these ideas, we can understand why several generations of Adventists have not been able to see in what sense they could claim to be the “remnant” church—the only true visible church on earth. The generalized view that Adventism and all Evangelical denominations make up the visible church of God in our times detracts from the missionary passion that moved earlier generations to bring the remnant message around the world. Thus, the underdevelopment of Adventist theology and the paradigm shift in its theological hermeneutics opens the way for Adventists to merge with the Emerging Church movement intensifying the eclipsing of Scripture in Adventism.

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79 “Just as *Questions on Doctrine* eventually unraveled the Sanctuary doctrine, so the reaffirmation of the Doctrine gradually undermined *Questions on Doctrine*.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-Day Adventism and the American Dream*, 97.


Canale: The Eclipse of Scripture


The Forensic and Transformational Aspects of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright and John Piper

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Introduction: N. T. Wright Versus John Piper on Justification

The noted British New Testament scholar Bishop N. T. Wright rejects the idea that justification includes spiritual transformation of the believer. Unless otherwise stated, the Bible passages quoted are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

“‘The point is that the word ‘justification’ does not itself denote the process whereby, or the event in which, a person is brought by grace from unbelief, idolatry and sin into faith, true worship and renewal of life. Paul, clearly, and unambiguously, uses a different word for that, the word ‘call’. The word ‘justification’, despite centuries of Christian misuse, is used by Paul to denote that which happens immediately after the ‘call’: ‘those God called, he also justified’ (Romans 8:30). In other words, those who hear the gospel and respond to it in faith are then declared by God to be his people, his elect, ‘the circumcision’, ‘the Jews’, ‘the Israel of God’. They are given the status dikaios, ‘righteous’, ‘within the covenant’.

But the word ‘call’ itself, and the fact that ‘justification’ is not about ‘how I get saved’ but ‘how I am declared to be a member of God’s people’, must always have an eye to the larger purposes of the covenant” (N. T. Wright, Paul in Fresh Perspective [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 121, 122).

“The doctrine of justification by faith, from Galatians through Philippians to Romans, was never about how people were to be converted, how someone might become a Christian, but about how one could tell, in the present, who God’s true people were—and hence who one’s family were, who were the people with whom one should, as a matter of family love and loyalty, sit down and eat. This question was central to much of Judaism of the time, with different groups defining themselves this way and that, in particular by various interpretations of the Torah” (Ibid., 159).

“It is ironic that some within the ‘old perspective’ on Paul, by continuing to promote the wrong view of justification as conversion, as the moment of personal salvation and coming
that justification is a change of status, by which the believer is now declared to be a true member of God’s covenant family.\(^3\) The covenant was and is God’s “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the world,” the Abrahamic covenant that meets its fulfillment in Christ, the faithful Jew who brought the hopes of the Jewish nation to fruition.\(^4\) Wright rejects as nonsense the idea that the judge in a law court could transfer moral uprightness to a defendant. “When the judge in the law court justifies someone, he does not give that person his own particular ‘righteousness.’” He creates the status the vindicated defendant now possesses, by an act of declaration, a ‘speech-act’ in our contemporary jargon.\(^5\)

Following to some extent the so-called new perspective on Paul, without agreeing with all its defenders,\(^6\) Wright rejects the view that Paul was reacting to the works-righteousness of contemporary Judaism. Rather, Paul was attempting to correct the exclusivist attitudes of the Jews, by which they denied to Gentiles inclusion in the covenant family. “God’s purpose in calling Abraham was to bless the whole world, to call out a people from Gentiles as well as Jews. This purpose has now been accomplished through the faithfulness of the Messiah, and all who believe in him constitute this fulfilled-family-of-Abraham.”\(^7\)

Wright writes eloquently of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.\(^8\) But he separates justification from the work of the Spirit, who enables believers to obey God’s law. In his view, the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with justification. The latter is a change of status for the believer; the work of the Spirit is a separate transforming work.

Without in any way detracting from the enormous importance of the everlasting covenant experience for the believer, and without depreciating the work of the Spirit as described by Wright, I wish to demonstrate that his definition of justification does not adequately do justice to Paul’s meaning. Despite Wright’s rejection of the basic to faith rather than God’s declaration about faith, have reinforced as well a polarization between Jesus and Paul which a more historically grounded and theologically astute reading can and must avoid” (Ibid, 159, 160).

\(^3\) N. T. Wright, Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 90, 91.

\(^4\) Ibid., 95-99.

\(^5\) Ibid., 69.

\(^6\) Ibid., 28.

\(^7\) Ibid., 118.

\(^8\) Ibid., 107; cf. Paul in Fresh Perspective, 97-101.
understanding of Luther and Calvin that justification includes both a legal transaction and also an aspect of spiritual transformation in the sense of God-given reorientation that makes sanctification possible, it is my contention that their understanding of justification was thoroughly biblical.

Before presenting my own interpretation, it is helpful to briefly consider John Piper’s critique of Wright. In his work, The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright, Piper debates with Wright by presenting the traditional Protestant view of imputed righteousness, which counts the believer to be morally righteous even though, in fact, he is not. Piper writes:

The omniscient Judge does not merely show clemency or forgiveness and assign us a status of ‘righteous’; he finds in our favor precisely because he counts us as having the moral righteousness that we in fact do not have in ourselves. When the charge against us is read (‘You do not have moral righteousness’) and the verdict of the Judge is rendered (‘I declare you are not guilty as charged but do indeed have moral righteousness’), the righteousness in view in this declaration is real moral righteousness. I will argue later that this is the righteousness of Christ imputed to the guilty through faith alone. The declaration of justification in the law-court of God is not merely forgiveness; it is not merely the status of acquitted; it is counting the defendant as morally righteous though in himself he is not.”

Piper’s definition of justification (imputation) seems to be no more satisfactory than Wright’s view of justification as merely a change in legal status. Ultimately, Piper’s view also boils down to justification merely as a legal change in status, a forensic declaration without any real moral transformation. Believers are counted to be that which they are really not. In an effort to avoid the Roman Catholic doctrine of infused righteousness, traditional Protestants such as Piper have denied the

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spiritually transformative reality of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).¹⁰

In the following sections of this paper, I will identify four overlapping aspects of spiritual transformation in Paul’s delineation of justification as (1) forgiveness, (2) imputation of righteousness, (3) the “new birth,” and (4) union with Christ. Then I will briefly show how Luther and Calvin departed from Catholic theology to agree with Paul.

Forgiveness

Paul speaks of justification as forgiveness in Acts 13:38-39, a literal translation of which reads as follows: “Therefore let it be known to you, men, brethren, that through this man to you forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed; from all things from which you were not able by the law of Moses to be justified, by this man all who believe are justified.”¹¹

Similarly, in Romans 4:1-8, Paul equates justification with imputation of righteousness and identifies it as forgiveness, as shown by the way he quotes Psalm 32:1, 2: “David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven’” (vv. 6, 7).

There is an important legal aspect to forgiveness: Sinners are acquitted when they seek God’s forgiveness by virtue of the fact that Christ suffered the punishment for their sins. But forgiveness is not only a forensic matter. Paul specifically refers to forgiveness as spiritual transformation: “And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses” (Col. 2:13; NRSV). Thus the NRSV translates the aorist, middle participle ῥανεύόμενος as a temporal, adverbial participle. Just as legitimately, it may be regarded as a causal participle to be translated: “because (or since) he forgave us all our

¹⁰ Speaking of the distinctive positions of Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy on justification, Alister McGrath writes: “Both confessions understand justification to be the forensic declaratory act of God . . . subsequent to vocation and prior to sanctification.” He speaks of “a corresponding weakness” in both systems “with justification tending to be treated as a legal fiction. . . . Justification is thus conceived analogically, as the remission of sins and imputation of righteousness by a purely verbal decree in foro divino, without any change in the sinner having taken place with reference to which this verdict could be supported” (Justitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2:44, 45. On the Tridentine view of justification, including the doctrine of infused righteousness, see McGrath, ibid., 68-86.

¹¹ My translation.
Either way the force of the passage is that God’s forgiveness made the Colossians alive with Christ from spiritual death. Not only did this forgiveness forensically erase the record of sin with its legal demands for punishment (v. 14); it also gave new life when the believer was spiritually circumcised “by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ” (v. 11), buried with him in baptism, and raised to new life with him “through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (v. 12; NRSV). This new life initially received from Christ at the time of conversion is not only new in the sense of forensic freedom from condemnation, as shown by the preceding context: In verses 6-7, Paul exhorts: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (NRSV). Spiritual transformation of life established by initially receiving Christ, when the experience of forgiveness occurred (v. 13), is to continue in spiritual life.

The use of δωρεάν in the New Testament underlines the concept that forgiveness involves spiritual transformation. According to Arndt and Gingrich, the word means “release from captivity” as well as “pardon, cancellation of an obligation, a punishment, or guilt. . . . The Forgiveness of Sins. . . . Forgiveness and Reconciliation.” Significantly, the word δωρεάν is used twice in Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

The context of Col 2:13 supports this conclusion. The Colossians “were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ” (v. 11). They were “buried with him in baptism” and “raised with him through faith in the power of God” (v. 12). This spiritual resurrection happened “when he forgave us all our trespasses.” The main verb in verse 13 is “made alive” (σώζω). The participle γινόμενος, “when he forgave,” provides the ground of the action of the main verb. Christ made this transformation by forgiveness possible by “erasing the record” of our guilt, “nailing it to the cross” (v. 14). We were not forgiven at the cross, but when we accepted Christ as Savior. At the cross, Christ rendered possible the transformation of forgiveness by “erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands” (v. 14).

H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey refer to “The Causal Participle. The participle may denote that which is the ground of the action of the main verb. Here it functions in the same general relation as a causal clause introduced by because or since.” They cite as examples the Greek of John 4:45, Matt. 3:6, and 1 Tim. 4:8 (A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament [New York: Macmillan, 1927, 1960], 227).

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me to proclaim release [ἀφέσειν] to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” [. . . ἀποστείλαι τεθραύσμενος ἐν ἀφέσει: literally, “to send forth the oppressed in release”]. Jesus did not go around liberating people from literal jails. Rather, he provided spiritual release, i.e., forgiveness, and freedom to people held captive and oppressed by sin and Satan (cf. Acts 10:38). This freedom is associated with “recovery of sight,” so Christ provided not only legal freedom from guilt, but also a change of spiritual perspective.

Paul was reiterating the teaching of the Old Testament. The Psalmist wrote of God, “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit” (Ps. 103:3, 4; ). That this forgiveness, healing, and redemption involves spiritual transformation is suggested by the following words: “. . . who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (vv. 4, 5).

When David sought forgiveness for his sin with Bathsheba he asked for spiritual cleansing: “Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin. . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:1, 2, 7, 10).

God’s legal act of abolishing the repentant sinner’s guilt involves the gift of spiritual cleansing that transforms the human attitude and relationship to him. Christ’s forgiveness brings us into loving fellowship with him that replaces guilt and condemnation, making long-term spiritual renewal possible.  

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15 Ellen White expressed it in harmony with the biblical evidence: “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within me’ (Psalm 51:10).” (Thoughts From The Mount of Blessing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1896, 1956), 114.

16 In the light of this discussion, the use of καθαρίζω in 1 John 1:9 may be regarded as epekegetical or an example of hendiadys, so that the verse may be translated: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins that is to say to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” On the New Testament uses of καθαρίζω, see F. Blass and A. Debrunner (transl. Robert W. Funk), A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 227-229.
Forgiveness is justification; forgiveness is both a forensic and a transforming divine act; therefore justification is both forensic and transformational.

**Imputation of Righteousness**

John Piper states the traditional post-Reformation view of imputation when he asserts that God “counts us as having the moral righteousness that we in fact do not have in ourselves.” It is my view that this conclusion is unwarranted by the biblical facts. Rather the evidence points to the conclusion that God’s imputation of righteousness to believers is a legal declaration of a simultaneous change of status and a change of spiritual orientation resulting from bestowal of righteousness upon them by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

To demonstrate that Abraham was justified by faith, not by works, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. “For what does the Scripture say? ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’” (Rom. 4:3). Abraham’s believing (Hebrew Hiph. of יאמ) was reckoned/counted/imputed (Qal of יאמ; LXX and NT λογίζομαι) to him as righteousness, which meant that through belief he gained possession of it as a gift. Samson Raphael Hirsch explains the verb יאמ, “believe”: “To respond to a spoken sentence with יאמ does not only mean to declare it to be true, but to give yourself up to the truth expressed in the sentence, to make it your own, and to vow to allow yourself to be guided by it.”

In the Old Testament, belief in God involves not merely acceptance of ideas, doctrines, or propositions, but acceptance of God into the life, resulting in practical commitment to a lifestyle that is stipulated by Yahweh as appropriate to the everlasting covenant relationship (cf. Ps. 31:23; 78:7, 8; Isa. 1:21, 26). Speaking of Abraham, Nehemiah wrote: “You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite” (Neh. 9:8). Faith is related to righteousness, obedience, and ethical goodness. We might say that belief (faith) is union with God that affects all of a person’s attitudes and actions. No wonder God considered (counted/reckoned/imputed) Abraham righteous (Gen. 15:6). He considered it so because, in view of

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Abraham’s faith, the patriarch shared the righteousness of God. His righteousness was God’s righteousness, but because of his faith union with God it was also his. Abraham experienced righteousness by faith and, insofar as he retained his faith union with God, his life demonstrated genuine faithfulness.

This interpretation of Abraham’s experience is supported by examination of the semantic range of the verb ἡσυγκόμισα in the Hebrew Old Testament, which is followed by that of λογιζόμα, its Greek equivalent in the Septuagint. These words cover a wide semantic range, depending on the contexts in which they occur:

1. At times they refer to things or persons that are regarded as what they are not. Rachel and Leah complained that Laban regarded (.prepareStatement > λογιζόμα) them as foreigners (Gen. 31:15), although they were not. Judah thought (PreparedStatement) Tamar to be a harlot even though she was not (Gen. 38:15). Leviticus 25:31 legislates: “But the houses of the villages which have no wall around them shall be reckoned (PreparedStatement) with [i.e., regarded as if they were, although they are really not] the fields of the country; they may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee.” Eli supposed (PreparedStatement) that Hannah was drunk, but she was sober (1 Sam. 1:13). Job thought (PreparedStatement) God counted him as his enemy, but he did not (Job 13:24; 19:11).

2. On the other hand, the verb ἡσυγκόμισα can refer to people or things being regarded as what they in fact are. The Emim were regarded (PreparedStatement > λογιζόμα) as giants because of their great size (Deut. 2:11, 20). Job regarded (PreparedStatement) his comforters as stupid because they were (Job 18:3). Phinehas was counted (PreparedStatement) as righteous because his actions revealed that he was (Ps. 106:30, 31; cf. Num 25:10-13). Nehemiah’s treasurers were “counted (PreparedStatement) faithful” because they were (Neh. 13:13). Joshua 13:3 mentions land “reckoned (.PreparedStatement) as Canaanite” because the Canaanites possessed it at the time.

Second Samuel 4:2 refers to the fact that the village of Beeroth was “reckoned (PreparedStatement) to Benjamin,” i.e., owned by Benjamin, the tribe to which it had been deeded in the distribution of the Promised Land at the time of Joshua (Josh. 9:17; 18:21-25). So in this context, PreparedStatement refers to the actual result of a transfer that was a gift from God. This real ownership was, of course, under God’s overall ownership of the land (Lev. 25). Therefore, it was conditional on maintenance of the covenant. If the people broke the covenant, they would lose the land and go into exile (Lev. 26). So, by analogy, the fact that we have the real gift of
justification doesn’t remove its conditionality. It’s not once-saved-always-saved.

The legislation of Numbers 18:26-31 establishes an actual transfer of agricultural tithes that were to be “imputed” (יוּדַע) to the Levites. The tithes constituted a tangible gift that was actually possessed by the Levites, as shown by the fact that they and members of their households were to eat of this food (v. 31).

The traditional post-Reformation understanding of imputation in Romans 4 acknowledges only one of the Old Testament connotations of וַיִּשּׂוֹן and λογίζομαι. Imputation of righteousness is said to be only God legally counting that which is not actually so in the lives of believers. But Paul’s use of λογίζομαι draws on another part of its semantic range. In Romans 4:4 he notes, “Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned [λογίζεται] as a gift but as something due.” Here a worker’s wages are reckoned as what they actually are: something due. Paul goes on to say: “But to the one who without works trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned [λογίζεται] as righteousness” (v. 5). The contrast in this passage is between one who works and one who does not work. In both cases, a transfer is reckoned/imputed: wages to a worker and righteousness to a believer. There is no indication that there is another contrast here between regarding something that actually belongs to a person (“wages”; v. 4; meaning 2. of וַיִּשּׂוֹן > λογίζομαι, above), and that which does not (“righteousness”; v. 5; meaning 1., above). Like payment of wages, the gift of righteousness is not only a legal accounting; it is an actual transfer. The difference is that righteousness is a gift; it is not earned.

Abraham received the gift of righteousness before he was given the “sign of circumcision” (Rom 4:10). Circumcision was “a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:11)19 Paul doesn’t say that the righteousness Abraham had by faith was only a legal declaration. Following his use of λογίζομαι in verses 4 and 5, the conclusion is warranted that God declared that which he simultaneously bestowed upon Abraham: the gift of His

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19 All translations fill in the ellipsis with the verb “to have.” For a discussion of ellipsis in the Greek NT, see Blass and Debrunner, A Greek Grammar, 253-255.
righteousness. According to Paul, this same gift may belong to all believers (Rom. 4:22-25).

The New Birth

Titus 3:5-7 literally reads:

Not by works in righteousness which we did but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of rebirth [παλιγγενεσίας] and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out [ἐξέχειν] upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified [δικαιωθέντες] by His grace we might be heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Here God saved us through the new birth experience by pouring his Spirit upon us (cf. Acts 2:17, 18, 33). In Titus 3:5-7, we are heirs as a result (ίνα) of God’s saving (ἔσωσεν), washing (λουτροῦ), pouring (ἐξέχειν), justifying (δικαιωθέντες) act. Elsewhere, Paul emphasizes that it is justification, the gift of righteousness, that makes us heirs (Rom. 4:13, 14; Gal. 3:29; 4:1, 6, 7). According to Romans 8:13-17, it is the Holy Spirit who conveys this heirship to us.

In Titus 3:7, the action of the first aorist, passive participle precedes the action of the main verb in the sentence. The main verb is γενηθούμεν, “we might become.” We were justified prior to becoming heirs, so that we might become heirs. God’s saving act in this passage is identified with his justifying act, and the result is that we are heirs. Since he saved us by pouring the Holy Spirit upon us, this is how he justified us. The wording of the passage supports the conclusion that salvation is

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20 Ellen White emphasized the two biblical concepts: “If you give yourself to Him [Christ], and accept Him as Your Savior, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.

More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith,” Steps to Christ (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), 62.

“Through faith in His name He imputes unto us His righteousness, and it becomes a living principle in our life,” That I May Know Him (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1964), 302.


“Let perfect obedience be rendered to God through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and we shall reveal to the world the fact that God loves us as he loves Jesus” (Signs of the Times, May 28, 1896).
justification, and that God accomplishes this for us by the washing of rebirth and the renewing by the Holy Spirit.

A similar emphasis appears in Galatians 2. Believers are justified by “faith in Christ Jesus,” “not by the works of the law” (v. 16). Paul “died to the law” that he “might live to God” (v.19). He has been “crucified with Christ” so that now Christ lives in Him (v. 20). Paul is talking about justification. He also asks the Galatians: “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” They began with justification (Gal. 2:16) and they began by the Spirit. This correlation indicates that the work of the Spirit is an essential aspect of justification. Paul again quotes Genesis 15:6 (Gal. 3:6) and speaks of the Gentiles being justified by faith (v. 7-9). He concludes by announcing that Christ died “in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (v. 14). Abraham’s blessing was justification by faith. It is ours when “we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” So justification is a transforming work of the Spirit. Galatians teaches the same message as Titus 3:5-7: Justification includes the new birth experience.

Union with Christ Through the Holy Spirit

Righteousness is revealed by the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches that the power in the gospel for believers in Christ results from “the righteousness of God” being “revealed” (ἀποκάλυπτεται) to them (Rom. 1:16-17). Elsewhere Paul uses the verb ἀποκάλύπτω to refer to the revelation of God’s gifts to believers by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-16). In Romans 1:16, 17, the revelation of the righteousness of God by the Spirit results in the believer becoming righteous. “The righteous person shall live by faith” (v. 17, my translation).

Justification by grace is the gift of spiritual power (righteousness) to the believer. In Romans 3, “the righteousness of God” is “through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (v. 22) Justification is “by grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24). In the writings of Paul, grace is the gift of unmerited spiritual power (1 Cor. 1:4-9; 15:10; 2 Cor. 9:8, 14; 2 Tim. 2:1). As in Ephesians 1:7, 8 Paul identifies forgiveness with redemption and the gift of grace, so here in Romans 3:24 he identifies justification as redemption and the gift of grace. What this gift entails, Paul proceeds to explain: 1. Christ’s atoning
sacrifice, “effective through faith” (v. 25); 2. “to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed” (v. 25, i.e. forgiveness for the believer); 3. “to show his righteousness (δικαιοσύνης) at the present time, so that he might be righteous (δίκαιος) and the one who “righteouses” (δικαιοῦντα, declares and makes righteous) the one by faith in Jesus” (v. 26, my translation). Justification “by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24) involves these three elements: his sacrifice and his forgiveness, which is his transforming gift of righteousness to the believer.

Justification involves peace through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Romans 5 tells us that “since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1), because “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (v. 5).

Justification is death to sin and new life in Christ. Romans 6:7 translates literally: “For he who has died has been justified from sin.” By justification, the “old man” (v. 6), the old manner of life, the old life of habitual sinning has died (cf. Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:3), and the new life in Christ has begun (cf. Rom. 6:4; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:1). Paul adds: “So you also must consider [λογίζομαι] yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). Once again, Paul uses λογίζομαι. Believers are to regard themselves dead to sin but alive to God. They are not merely recipients of a legal declaration; this transformation is a reality.

Justification results in sanctification (holiness). The Christian believers Paul was addressing had “once been slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:17). But when they responded to the gospel message they were “set free from sin” and had “become slaves of righteousness” (v. 18). This transformation occurred when they were justified. In the book of Romans, Paul speaks of justification as the gift of the righteousness of God (1:16, 17; 3:21-24; 4:22-25). For these believers the old life of sin had been crucified (6:6). They had died to sin when they were justified. “For he who has died has been justified from sin” (v. 7; my translation). Before they were justified, they presented their members “as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity” (v. 19). Now Paul urges that, since they have become willing slaves of righteousness (in justification), they should present their members “as slaves to righteousness for sanctification” (εἰς ἁγιάζων, v. 19; emphasis supplied). Paul adds, “Now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God
[in justification], the advantage you get is sanctification” (v. 22). Here the gift of Christ’s righteousness in justification is the divine act that makes the believer holy or sanctified. So justification results in sanctification.

The Greek word for “sanctification” (ἐγκαταστάσεως) used in Romans 6:19, 22 means “holiness.” The consistent teaching of Scripture is that the Holy Spirit makes us holy (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 15:16). Never does the Bible say that we sanctify ourselves or that our works make us holy. The gift of righteousness in justification sanctifies us or makes us holy because in justification the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts (Titus 3:5-7; Rom. 5:1, 2, 5; 8:9, 10; Gal. 3:3-14). This is why justification and sanctification are inseparable. Christ’s gift of himself to us by the Holy Spirit in justification makes us holy or sanctified. Justification is Christ bestowed; sanctification is Christ possessed. Justification is Christ coming into believers’ hearts every day as they surrender to him; sanctification is Christ dwelling in their hearts every day. They have the possession because they have received the bestowal.

Sanctification is often spoken of in Scripture as present holiness in Christ. Paul was sent to the Gentiles “so that they may receive forgiveness of sins [justification] and a place among those who have been sanctified [τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις] by faith in me” (Acts 26:17, 18).21 Paul speaks of himself as “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles . . . so that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been sanctified [ἡγιασμένη] by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16).22 To the Corinthian believers, Paul wrote: “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11). They had received the cleansing involved in the inseparable experiences of justification and sanctification, and Paul wanted them to retain the blessing.

21 My translation. ἡγιασμένοις is the perfect, passive participle of ἡγιάζω (the verb “to sanctify”). Τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις means “those who have been sanctified.” “The significance of the perfect tense in presenting action as having reached its termination and existing in its finished results lies at the basis of its uses. Emphasis, as indicated by the context or the meaning of the verb root, may be on either the completion of the action or on its finished results.”— Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar, 201.

22 My translation. The Greek reads ἡγιασμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἡγίαστο, having been sanctified (or “made holy”) by the Holy Spirit.” ἡγιασμένη is the perfect passive participle of ἡγιάζω.
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Paul also spoke of sanctification as progressive growth in holiness. “All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). The daily experience of justification (receiving Christ into the heart by the gift of the Holy Spirit) results in progressive growth in holiness. Paul emphasized this as a more-and-more experience in his first epistle to the Thessalonians. “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless. . . .” He urged them “to live and to please God . . . more and more. . . . For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Thess. 3:12-4:3).

Notice that the evidence presented above shows that both justification and sanctification involve the work of God both for and in the believer. The commonly cited distinction that “justification is what God does for you and sanctification is what God does in you” is a false dichotomy that fails to accurately reflect biblical teaching.

Justification involves the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the believer, providing union with Christ. Romans 7 emphasizes that justified believers enjoy “the new life of the Spirit” (v. 6). Romans 8:9, 10 further stresses the point: “But you are not in the flesh,” i.e., you are not unjustified, “You are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.” That is, you are justified believers. “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” So if justification does not involve the transforming work of the Spirit, so-called justified believers would not belong to Christ. “But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” Therefore, union with Christ by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit is the justifying gift of righteousness.
Luther and Calvin

The standard view in the Middle Ages was that, when God justifies a believer, the Holy Spirit injects into the soul a *habitus* or quality that makes the soul intrinsically righteous, having the capacity to perform works capable of earning merit with God. Influenced by Aristotle’s matter-form analysis, Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74) defined justification (salvation) as infusion of grace that repairs (re-forms, re-makes) the soul of man so that now it has the power to do meritorious works.

The Tridentine definition of justification closely followed that of Thomas Aquinas. The fathers of the Council of Trent (1545-63) taught that the sinner’s own will, cooperating with grace, projects him toward justification. Like Aquinas, Trent defined justification as an inner renewal of the soul. The justified person has the ability to do works that are meritorious in the sight of God and that will improve upon his level of justification.

The Roman Catholic position on justification, as defined by Aquinas and Trent, involved transformation, re-creation, re-forming of the immortal soul within man. This was not a reiteration of Jesus’ teaching of the new birth. Righteousness within, for Aquinas and Trent is a *habitus* or quality injected or infused into the souls of believers so that they are intrinsically or inherently righteous. Righteousness within is not Christ within by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The soul which is now righteous in nature has the capacity to perform works that are meritorious in God’s sight.

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23 What follows is a brief summary of my paper, “The Roman Catholic and Reformation Concepts of Justification.” An abbreviated version of this paper titled “Justification: Historic Journey from the Middle Ages through Now” was published in *Ministry* (December, 2009), 16-21.


28 Ibid., 94-99.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-64), by contrast with Aquinas and Trent, saw justification as involving two simultaneous, inseparable aspects: (1) The legal or forensic aspect involving God’s forgiveness of the believers’ sins and his crediting Christ’s righteousness to their account, and (2) a transformational aspect involving Christ’s gift of his righteousness to believers by the Holy Spirit. The soul is not reformed or re-created so that it becomes inherently righteous. The transformation is Christ, by the Holy Spirit, coming to dwell in the human heart, so that his righteousness becomes the believer’s righteousness by his righteous presence. Believers remain fallen, sinful human beings, but their fallen natures are now under the control and direction of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul Althaus establishes that Luther understood justification in the two senses described above, and Alister E. McGrath has underlined the point. Study of Luther’s works supports their interpretation. Luther often emphasized the legal aspect in justification. On the other hand, he often emphasized the transformational aspect in justification. He regarded justification as involving the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. For example, he wrote: “Then what does justify? Hearing the voice of the Bridegroom, hearing the proclamation of faith–when this is heard it justifies. Why? Because it brings the Holy Spirit who justifies.” In his lengthy comments on Galatians 2:16, contained in his 1535 Lectures on Galatians, Luther repeatedly presents justification as Christ bestowed upon the heart of the believer.

McGrath points out that, although John Calvin gave greater emphasis to the legal (forensic) aspect in justification than did Luther, “he nevertheless preserves an important aspect of Luther’s understanding of justification which Melanchthon abandoned—the personal union of Christ and the believer in justification. Calvin speaks of the believer being

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31 Alister E. McGrath, Justitia Dei, 2:14, 126.
34 Ibid., 26:208.
36 McGrath, 2:36-38.
‘grafted into Christ’, so that the concept of incorporation becomes central to his understanding of justification. The \textit{justitia Christi} [the righteousness of Christ], on the basis of which man is justified, is treated as if it were man’s within the context of the intimate personal relationship of Christ and the believer.” In Calvin’s \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, he identifies both the legal element and the transformational element in justification.

Calvin properly objected to Andreas Osiander’s (1498-1552) view that justification involves infusion of essential righteousness into the soul of the believer. In his answer, Calvin emphasized the importance of personal union with Christ. He wrote:

Moreover, lest by his cavils he deceive the unwary, I acknowledge that we are devoid of this incomparable gift [righteousness] until Christ becomes ours. Therefore, to that union of the head and members, the residence of Christ in our hearts, in fine, the mystical union, we assign the highest rank, Christ when he becomes ours making us partners with him in the gifts with which he was endued. Hence we do not view him as at a distance and without us, but as we have put him on, and been ingrafted into his body, he designs to make us one with himself, and, therefore, we glory in having a fellowship of righteousness with him.

McGrath summarizes later theological developments: “Luther’s concept of justification, his concept of the presence of Christ within the believer . . . all were rejected or radically modified by those who followed him.” In his later works, Melanchthon promoted legal-only justification, as Luther never had. The authors of the Lutheran Formula of Concord (1577), including Martin Chemnitz, followed Melanchthon,

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39 Ibid., III.XI.10.
40 Ibid.
41 McGrath, 2:32.
42 Ibid., 23-26.
\end{flushleft}
not Luther.\textsuperscript{43} The tendency within orthodox Lutheranism has been to treat justification as a “legal fiction.”\textsuperscript{44}

**Conclusion**

The biblical evidence indicates that justification as forgiveness and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is both forensic and transformational. It also establishes that justification includes the new birth experience for the believer.

Despite N. T. Wright’s assertions and John Piper’s counter-claim, Luther and Calvin closely and accurately followed Paul’s understanding of justification (or imputation of righteousness) as involving both a forensic and a spiritually transformational aspect.

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\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 44, 45.
1. Introduction

The recent debate within Protestantism over justification, spearheaded by N.T. Wright, has highlighted some of the core issues of the New Perspective on Paul. Paul would have known of the popular Jewish apocalypses, and indeed, many scholars identify them as a source of Paul’s eschatological thinking. The concept of “righteousness” is prominent in many of these apocalypses. Given the renewed interest in the apocalyptic background to Paul’s thought-world it is relevant to examine some of the issues in the current debate in this context.

What similarities are there between Paul’s understanding of “righteousness” and the understanding reflected in the Jewish apocalypses? More importantly, in what ways does Paul, in his epistles, significantly depart from the understanding of righteousness that was held by popular Judaism of his day? To attempt to glean some perspectives on these questions, this paper will compare and contrast the concepts of righteousness in 1 Enoch 1-36 (Book of Watchers) and Romans 1-3.

2. Background to the Debate

The current and ongoing debate within Protestantism over the issue of justification should be of keen interest to Seventh-day Adventists, given their historic focus on righteousness by faith. Indeed, the current polemic
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touches on issues of contention within Adventism in recent decades. However, Adventists appear to have been largely watching from the sidelines.

The current debate within Protestantism over the issue of justification is spearheaded by N. T. Wright, who argues that the verb, δικαιούω, “to justify,” “does not denote an action which transforms someone so much as a declaration which grants them a status. It is the status of the person which is transformed by the action of ‘justification,’ not the character.” In fact, he argues that Paul used the verb δικαιούω “precisely and exactly” in this sense, unlike those who since Augustine have tried to use it to refer to “the whole range of ‘becoming a Christian’ from first to last.” In parallel to this, Wright argues that God does not impute moral righteousness from somewhere else.

Wright argues that “God’s righteousness” in second-temple Judaism and in Paul’s writings means “faithfulness to the covenant.” Wright holds to Sanders’ concept of covenantal nomism; in other words, that “Judaism. . . was therefore not a religion of ‘legalistic works-righteousness’ such as generations of scholars, preachers. . . have imagined.” “Getting into” the

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2 N. T. Wright, Justification: God’s Plan and God’s Vision (Downer’s Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 91.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., MA (ECJS)

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.


8 Wright, Justification, 73-74; See also N. T. Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 18-19.
covenant is by God’s mercy, and “staying in” is by obedience. In terms of
the role of the law, the idea is that, “now that you’re in the covenant, here
is the law to keep.”

Wright maintains that, “the key question facing Judaism as a whole
was not about individual salvation, but about God’s purposes for Israel and
the world.” Within this scheme, he argues that righteousness in Romans
1:17 refers to God’s own righteousness. Furthermore, within the
argument of Romans, Wright maintains that, “it makes no sense whatever
to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise
transfers his righteousness.” Therefore, “[j]ustification is not how
someone becomes a Christian. It is the declaration that they have become
a Christian.”

This has proven to be a confronting challenge to traditional Protestant
understandings of righteousness and justification. At the forefront of recent
responses to Wright has been John Piper, who mounts a strong defense of
the traditional Protestant position. Wright, in turn, has responded that
Piper “fails to grapple with the larger context of Romans 3 and 4.”

A significant entrant into the broader debate has been Douglas
Campbell, with his monograph, The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic

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9 D. A. Carson, “Introduction,” in Justification and Variegated Nomism. The
Complexities of Second Temple Judaism (Vol.1; Ed. D.A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. A.
10 Wright, Justification, 72.
11 Wright, Justification, 75-76.
12 Wright, Justification, 180. Here, with specific reference to Rom 1:17, Wright states
that righteousness refers to God’s own covenant faithfulness.
13 Wright, Justification, 19.
14 Wright, Justification, 125.
15 John Piper, The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright (Wheaton:
Crossway Books, 2007.)
16 Piper, Future of Justification, 19-23, in particular defends a number of ideas contra
his understanding of Wright’s position; namely that, justification is how you become a
Christian, that justification is the gospel, that we are justified by believing in justification;
that the imputation of God’s righteousness does make sense, that first-century Judaism did
have self-righteousness and boastful legalism, and that God’s righteousness is not the same
as His covenant faithfulness.
17 Wright, Justification, 67.
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Rereading of Justification in Paul. In this work, Campbell argues passionately against the traditional Protestant understanding of justification by faith, which he calls, “justification theory,” maintaining that it is not at the heart of Paul’s theology, but that the heart is rather the “apocalyptic in breaking of the Christ event and the subsequent union of believers with Christ in His death and resurrection.” In doing so, Campbell aligns himself significantly with Wright. Campbell therefore defines salvation as “[t]he saving transformation through participation in Christ in the Spirit,” and he analogously states that, “Christians are saved through their participation [in] the cross.” The traditional Protestant understanding of righteousness is therefore under attack from a number of different quarters.

Francis Watson makes the valid critique of Campbell’s work that, “at no point is the alternative, participatory-apocalyptic position presented as anything other than the antagonist of Justification.” Is the apocalyptic position on “righteousness” as monolithic, on the other hand, as Campbell makes “justification theory” out to be on the other? Bauckham’s work certainly indicates that it is not. Therefore, may we grant that Paul’s position may be thoroughly apocalyptic, and yet not be entirely analogous with significant streams of apocalyptic thought in the first century? This present paper, in spite of its limited scope, suggests that we most certainly can.

Ultimately the issues of this debate turn on the broader and fundamental views of the New Perspective, as originally proposed by Sanders, regarding covenantal nomism. Some form of covenantal nomism

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19 Campbell, Deliverance of God, 9ff.
20 Campbell, Deliverance of God, 722, 748, 882; in this he follows the tradition of Schweitzer and Wrede.
21 E.g. Campbell, Deliverance of God, 695.
22 Campbell, Deliverance of God, 83.
23 Campbell, Deliverance of God, 89.
is seen by many scholars today as the underlying framework within which Second Temple Judaism should be understood. However, the basis on which Sanders’ work has been critiqued is summarized by Wright himself when he states that, “Sanders has offered a massive but, to many, deeply unconvincing reading of the ‘pattern of religion’ in second-temple Judaism: unconvincing because it is too uniform, unconvincing also because it is insufficiently theological.”

The most thorough evaluation of covenantal nomism in recent years has been the two multi-authored volumes edited by Don Carson. My reading of the papers in this volume is that in essence they argue that what is needed is a careful and nuanced reading of the texts dealing with Second Temple Judaism. In his introduction Carson observes that,

the literature of Second Temple Judaism reflects patterns of belief and religion too diverse to subsume under one label. The results are messy. But if they are allowed to stand, they may in turn prepare us for a more flexible approach to Paul. It is not that the new perspective has not taught us anything helpful or enduring. Rather, the straitjacket imposed on the apostle Paul by appealing to a highly unified vision of what the first-century “pattern of religion” was really like will begin to find itself unbuckled.

Regardless, reviewing the essays in Don Carson’s work, Wright justifiably comments that, “[t]he essays in large part support Sanders’s overall case more than (we may suppose) the editors had hoped when they commissioned them, and even Don Carson in his conclusion. has to admit that Sanders has a point even if he has overplayed it.”

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27 Wright, Justification, 73.
28 Carson’s introduction reflects a summary of this work.
29 Carson, Introduction, 5.
30 Wright, Justification, 74.
3. The Jewish Apocalyptic Context

This paper will compare the concepts of “righteousness” found in the Book of Watchers, a core Jewish apocalyptic text that was popular in the first century, with that found in Romans 1-3, a core section of the Pauline writings. Based on this analysis, some tentative implications will be suggested for the idea of righteousness in the Pauline texts and in contemporary first-century Jewish texts. Obviously, this analysis cannot hope to engage with the full spectrum and depth of the current debate. However, it is intended that the findings may at least be suggestive and illustrative of the issues involved.

What we know of the book of 1 Enoch is that it is not a single, unitary work, but it is rather “a major collection of apocalyptic writings.” It is well recognized that since quite early times, there were a number of small and originally independent books that circulated in Judaism, and that were attributed to Enoch. The discovery of significant parts of this corpus among the Qumran texts has added determinative weight to the arguments for the antiquity of this work.

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31 The Book of Watchers is found in 1 Enoch chs 1-36.
35 Aramaic fragments from eleven manuscripts of parts of the book of 1 Enoch have been found at Qumran, which comprises parts of all of the sections of the book except The Similitudes or Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71). See M. E. Stone, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus (Ed. M. Stone; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 397. Previously, 1 Enoch was only known in an Ethiopic translation, discovered in Ethiopia in 1769, and a number of Greek manuscripts that subsequently surfaced. David Syme Russell, Divine Disclosure: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic (London: SCM Press, 1992), 38.
There are a number of important, and indeed fascinating reasons why 1 Enoch, of which the Book of Watchers forms a part, may be profitably compared and contrasted with the Pauline texts in terms of its understanding of “righteousness.” The first reason is that the availability of several Enochic texts, and certainly 1 Enoch, was contemporary with the ministries of Jesus, Paul, and the development of the early church. As far as 1 Enoch is concerned, and in particular contrast, for example, with sections of the Rabbinic writings, no argument therefore needs to be made for its contemporaneity, in terms of usage, with the writings of Paul.

The second reason for the relevance of 1 Enoch in this context was its influence generally on the thought-world of the New Testament, and specifically, on several New Testament writers. We have the well-known direct quotation from 1 Enoch 1:9 in Jude 14. In Luke’s account of the transfiguration, the voice from heaven calls Jesus “My Elect One,” which is the title used for the Son of Man throughout 1 Enoch 37-51. Accordingly, Isaac notes not only that 1 Enoch was well known to many Jews, but that, “Enochic concepts are found in various New Testament books, including the Gospels and Revelation.”

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36 Martinez, Aramaic Enoch, 71-72, notes regarding the 3rd century dating for this work, that “[t]he dating of the work in the 3rd century B.C. is of decisive importance for the study of apocalyptic . . . it also implies that the text of the ideological elements reflected in the work must be placed in a period prior to the hellenisation of Palestine.” VanderKam dates the Book of Watchers to the third century BC. (Enochic Motifs, 33. See also Martinez, Aramaic Enoch, 46,71-72; and C. Rowland, The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity (London: SPCK, 1982), 266. VanderKam dates the Book of Watchers to the third century BC. (Enochic Motifs, 33. See also Martinez, Aramaic Enoch, 46,71-72; and C. Rowland, The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity (London: SPCK, 1982), 266.

37 The writings of Philo, as well as the Wisdom of Solomon, represent a more Hellenistic Judaism, which was contemporary with Paul. However, the impact of Philo’s works on first century Judaism is unknown, and the relative importance of the various sources of Paul’s thought-world still continues to be a much-debated question. This paper uses as a background some aspects of Paul’s clear affinity with Jewish apocalyptic literature, without denying of course, that other influences were also important to Paul.

38 ὁ ἐκλεκτός μοι; See for example, 1 Enoch 45:3,4; 49:2; 53:6; 55:4; 61:8-10. Charles notes that the Messianic designation of the “Elect One” seems to have its origin in Isaiah 42:1; cv. Luke 9:35. (R. H. Charles, tr., The Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch (Originally published 1912; Pomeroy: Health Research Books, 1964), 78.

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More broadly, the Enochic literature appears to have been highly influential in early Judaism. An important question that must be borne in mind is precisely how sectarian 1 Enoch was. Certainly, at Qumran, it would appear that 1 Enoch, “enjoyed a status no less hallowed and authoritative than that of the Bible in the circles to which the authors belonged; they were clearly held to be divinely inspired or revealed by angels.” The question must also be asked, to what extent were the “sectarian” views of the Qumran community reflected in Judaean Judaism more broadly?

In this vein, there can hardly be any doubt about the immense popularity of Jewish apocalyptic writings within Judaism in the Second Temple period. There is strong evidence to suggest that extant Jewish apocalyptic texts are merely a fraction of what must have existed. Although there appear to have been many sectarian groups within Second Temple Judaism, Russell notes that, “the composition of apocalyptic literature was not confined to any of these.” Furthermore, and regardless of the distribution of the texts, the ideas of Jewish apocalyptic exercised a wide influence upon Second Temple Judaism.


43 Russell, Method and Message, 28-29 notes that, “towards the close of the inter-testamental period, the writer of II Esdras can refer to no fewer than seventy secret books (presumably apocalyptic writings, to be delivered to the wise among the people (cf. 14.13, 26, 46), which were in circulation in his day and which he mentions in the same breath as the canonical Scriptures themselves (cf. 14.45-46).”
Within early Christianity, we know that *1 Enoch* enjoyed a privileged position of authority. Although it was ultimately deemed non-canonical by the church as a whole, it was certainly considered canonical by the Ethiopian church, through whom the text principally survived. Indeed, *1 Enoch* was certainly influential and “accepted as inspired and canonical in many Jewish and Christian circles” in the early centuries of Christianity. It is evident that, “the writings of seven authors from the first three centuries of Christian history . . . show familiarity with Enochic books and accord them authoritative standing (all use words such as scripture or prophet/prophesy in connection with them).”

As a work of early Judaism, Isaac considers that *1 Enoch* helps us to discern the “complexities of both intertestamental Jewish thought and early Christian theology.” In a historical sense, it straddles the Old and New Testament, since it depends on the Old Testament as much as “it is

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47 VanderKam, *Enochic Motifs*, 60,100, traces the central Enochic myth of the angels who married the daughters of men, and concludes that “[t]he booklets that comprise *1 Enoch*, especially the *Book of Watchers*, were apparently more popular among Christian readers than among their Jewish contemporaries, or at least the surviving literature suggests as much.”
influential upon the New Testament and later extracanonical literature. Barker tantalizingly observes that, “our failure to find a real place for the Enochic tradition in our picture of Christian origins is a good example of blinkered scholarship. The Old Testament is not the only ancient authority that New Testament writers recognize or cite, despite what we have been told.”

The important background issue for this paper is not whether Paul quotes or alludes to 1 Enoch at all, but rather, as has been long recognized, that Paul displays a clear affinity with Jewish apocalyptic literature at many levels of his writings. Jewish apocalyptic thought was a key element in Paul’s mental milieu, and many of its aspects are reflected in his work. Paul is not writing apocalypses, nevertheless, contemporary scholarship recognizes that, “Paul stands firmly within the Jewish apocalyptic-mystical tradition. His understanding of the end of time and the resurrection is firmly apocalyptic. He describes his own spiritual experiences in terms appropriate to a Jewish apocalyptic-mystagogue of the first century.”

Key passages that particularly highlight Paul’s apocalyptic heritage are 1 Cor 15, 1 Thess, and 2 Cor 12. In 1 Cor 15, both Paul’s notions of

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51 Ibid. See esp. p.10.
53 De Boer, Apocalyptic Eschatology, 182, comments that, “[a]s a former Pharisee, Paul’s deep familiarity with the perspectives and assumptions of forensic Jewish apocalyptic eschatology is thus readily explicable.”
55 On this, see Collins, Apocalyptic Imagination, 265. Indeed, as Collins, Apocalyptic Imagination, 265, notes, Paul considers himself to be a “steward of the mysteries” (1 Cor 4:1), which are not merely eschatological, but rather embrace the complete plan of God which was previously hidden but which has not been revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:6–8). See also S. M. Lewis, “The Apocalyptic Nature of 1 Cor 15,” in So That God May Be All In All: the Apocalyptic Message of 1 Corinthians 15, 12-34 (Roma: Ed. Pontificia Univ. Gregoriana, 1998,) 142.
56 Collins, Apocalyptic Imagination, 266, points to 1 Thessalonians as particularly exemplifying this apocalyptic expectation.
57 In 1 Cor 12, Paul feels the need to distance himself from the revelation through the quasi-pseudonymity of the phrase οἶδα ἐνθρόπον (“I know a man.” - v.2), which reflects the literary style of Jewish apocalyptic. See also Rowland, Open Heaven, 385.
eschatology and anthropological vocabulary\textsuperscript{58} are distinctly aligned with those of Jewish apocalyptic thought. The key point is not that Paul’s thought is dependent on \textit{1 Enoch}, let alone the broader Jewish apocalyptic texts, but rather that Paul was writing within an apocalyptic Jewish milieu,\textsuperscript{59} and within this milieu, \textit{1 Enoch} appears to have been a particularly authoritative text.\textsuperscript{60} As such, a comparison between the concepts of righteousness in \textit{1 Enoch}\textsuperscript{61} and the Pauline texts would appear to be a fruitful endeavor.

Roetzel notes that δικαιοσύνη is “a fundamental term for Jewish apocalyptic”\textsuperscript{62} In this regard, Watson’s comment is salient, “Schweitzer’s evaluation of the doctrine of righteousness by faith creates a sharp disjunction between the scriptural and the apocalyptic strands of Paul’s Jewish heritage. And yet the disjunction is untenable. A Hellenizing Paul

\textsuperscript{58} See Segal, \textit{Resurrection}, 417.

\textsuperscript{59} As Adler, “Introduction,” 2, observes, “there is a broad consensus that primitive Christianity took root on the same soil that produced the Jewish apocalyptic literature.”

\textsuperscript{60} De Boer, \textit{Apocalyptic Eschatology}, 180, notes that Schweitzer argued in the early part of the twentieth century that Paul, like Jesus, “stood closer to the world of thought represented by the Book of Enoch” than to that of “the Apocalypses of Baruch and Ezra.” On this, see Albert Schweitzer, \textit{The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle} (Tr. William Montgomery; Originally published in London: Adam & Charles Black, 1931; This edition published in Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 57. This was of course also the view of Käsemann, in polemical opposition to Bultmann.

\textsuperscript{61} Of course, this is not to say that \textit{1 Enoch} is representative of the emphasis of all Jewish apocalyptic in terms of “righteousness.” The Jewish apocalyptic texts indeed present a broad range of ideas. \textit{1 Enoch} is simply a text which we know was being circulated contemporarily with Paul, and whose ideas were highly influential.

\textsuperscript{62} C. J. Roetzel, \textit{Judgment in the Community: A Study of The Relationship Between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul} (Dissertation at Duke University; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 32, continues to explain his view that, “[w]hile the term. . . (diatheke) does not frequently appear in the apocalyptic literature it does occupy a more prominent place in apocalyptic than in rabbinic literature.” Viviano comments that, “[t]he technical term dikaiosyne theou occurs only once in the Old Testament; otherwise it occurs exclusively in late Jewish apocalyptic writings, e.g., in the \textit{Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs} (Dan 6:10 etc.) and in \textit{Qumran} (1 QS XI:12).” (B. T. Viviano, “The Righteousness of God in Paul: A Grammatical Note,” in \textit{Trinity-Kingdom-Church: Essays in Biblical Theology} (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquos 48; Freiburg: Schweiz Univ., 2001), 248.
could perhaps be detached from his Jewish scriptural heritage, but not a Jewish one.\textsuperscript{63}

However, we must proceed with care. Even if we grant influence and importance to Jewish apocalyptic literature, Collins notes that the early Enochic literature “cannot be regarded as normative for all apocalypses.”\textsuperscript{64} Additionally, Körtner reminds us that Jewish apocalyptic thought during the post-exilic period does not constitute thinking,

that remained unchanged through the various centuries, or any essentially unified system of ideas. In fact, the apocalyptic thinking of Judaism during the postexilic period remained constantly in flux and generated extremely disjunctive notions of judgment, the end time, and the salvific messianic age, and allowed such notions to exist beside one another.\textsuperscript{65}

However, one concept that is common to all types of Jewish apocalyptic is that of dualism. Importantly, this dualism manifests itself eschatologically;\textsuperscript{66} however, dualism in Jewish thought also presupposes an understanding of an ethnic dualism, “which finds its dividing point in the line between Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised.”\textsuperscript{67} Closely related to this is “ethical dualism,” which posits a distinction between two

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{64} Collins, \textit{Apocalyptic Imagination}, 11.
\textsuperscript{66} Körtner, \textit{End of the World}, 131, observes that, “[c]ommon to all types of Jewish apocalyptic is the notion that a catastrophic event will bring about a one-time, decisive turn from disaster and affliction to salvation. The thinking of Jewish apocalyptic is thus fundamentally dualistic at the outset. Cautiously formulated, the dualism of Jewish apocalyptic consists in the irreconcilable antithesis between a present condition of disaster and affliction on the one hand, and a future condition of salvation on the other. It frequently appears as the juxtaposition of two world periods of the aeons. The idea does interject itself that the future aeon constitutes a world completely different from the present world and history.”
\end{flushright}
classes of human beings, such as the “righteous” versus the “wicked,” the “godly” versus the “impious,” or the “holy” versus the “impure.”

With regard to this, Gammie tellingly notes that the extent to which ethical dualism predominates in Jewish apocalyptic and sapiential thought has been overlooked in recent scholarship. Within Jewish thought, the dividing line in terms of ethical dualism was a matter for considerable discussion. It was not a fixed boundary, and Ciampa notes that there was a latent understanding that the existing categories were unsatisfactory, and needed revision. Gammie observes that, “whereas the older traditions tend to see the contrast between two opposing groups without or within Israel, some of the later traditions are inclined to identify the sons of Israel with the ‘righteous’ and non-Israelites as the ‘ungodly’ (Wisdom of Solomon, Jubilees, War Scroll.)”

This latter group of traditions found in the apocalyptic and sapiential literature would appear to be the ones which were more prominent and contemporaneous with Paul’s epistles. It is therefore appropriate, that at least to some extent, the analysis undertaken for this paper presupposes a dualistic paradigm.

Of course, Sanders is aware of 1 Enoch. Sanders in fact classes 1 Enoch in particular as being a document that is “defective” in terms of the pattern that he seeks to demonstrate in the Jewish texts. However, 1 Enoch can hardly be classed as defective in terms of representing at least an influential stream of popular Jewish thought in the first century. Since one of Sanders’ great contributions has been, as Westerholm emphasizes, to remind us of “the need to portray the Judaism of Paul’s day in its own terms, and from other sources other than Paul’s writings,” it is relevant indeed to have another look at the Book of Watchers.

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69 Ciampa, Scripture, 136.
70 Gammie, Dualism, 384.
71 Indeed, Ciampa, Scripture, 137, comments that, “[t]his implied rejection of the Jew-Gentile distinction as the proper dividing line for ethical dualism also goes to the heart of Paul’s polemic in this letter.”
72 Sanders, quoted in Carson, Introduction, 2-3.
73 Westerholm, New Perspective, 37.

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In Bauckham’s review of the Jewish apocalyptic literature in terms of covenantal nomism, he notes that, “Sanders’s work depends on an earlier stage of scholarly study of 1 Enoch. . . unaffected by the Qumran evidence.” However, he concludes that this is not decisive for his assessment of the ideological stance of the major Enochic writings.\textsuperscript{74} This may be true for Sanders’ assessment of the ideological stance of the texts; however, the Qumran material is significant in terms of allowing a re-evaluation, not only of the dating, but also of the influence of the Enochic material in Second Temple Judaism.

Having reviewed the Jewish apocalyptic texts overall, Bauckham concludes that, “[b]roadly, our findings coincide with Sanders’s.” However, there are some differences. The texts tend to presuppose a rather narrower definition of the righteous or the true Israel compared with the broader definition that Sanders finds in the Rabbinic texts.\textsuperscript{75} More generally, Bauckham comments that it is not quite clear, “that Sanders does justice to these texts by claiming that they exhibit much the same pattern of religion as he finds in the Rabbis.”\textsuperscript{76}

In the analysis below, I will necessarily have to look at the words and the themes in the selected passages texts. Appendices 1 and 2 show the words and specific texts selected for comparison. I note that Wright has stated that, “[v]erbal statistics, and accidental occurrences of themes, are in any case a dangerous guide in ‘incidental’ writings like Paul’s.”\textsuperscript{77} The point being made by Wright must be appreciated; however it must also be balanced against one of his frequent expressions, which is that “the text is the text.” Accordingly, we must venture into the text, bearing in mind the broader contextual constraints.

4. Analysis

For the purpose of this analysis, every occurrence of words belonging to the “righteousness” word group was considered in the Book of Watchers\textsuperscript{78} and in Romans 1-3. Each reference was classified on the basis

\textsuperscript{74} Bauckham, \textit{Apocalypses}, 148.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 148, citing Sanders, \textit{Palestinian Judaism}, 361.
\textsuperscript{77} Wright, \textit{Justification}, 96.
\textsuperscript{78} I.e. 1 Enoch 1-36.
of whether it appeared to refer to either end of the polarity explicit in the analytical criteria.

The criteria selected for analysis are:

1. Is Righteousness Referring to God’s Righteousness or Human Righteousness?
2. Is Righteousness Presented as Moral Standing or as God's Saving Activity?
3. Is Righteousness Presented as Covenant Faithfulness?
4. Is Righteousness Associated With God’s Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness?

Some caveats are however required with regard to the methodology and outcomes of this analysis. Firstly, the different purposes of the two passages selected for comparison must be borne in mind. The Book of Watchers and Romans 1-3 have both been selected because they both deal centrally with notions of righteousness and unrighteousness, with notions of the commencement and progress of unrighteousness in the world, and fundamentally, with the question of theodicy. However, in spite of these similarities, the respective authors of these passages ultimately have different agendas and different contexts. This comparative analysis is not

79 Following a discussion of 4 Ezra 8:31-36, Piper comments that, “[i]t is fairly obvious from these texts as well as many in the Old Testament that the righteousness of God in Jewish literature does not always mean strict retributive justice: it embraces mercy. This view of righteousness as iustitia salutifera has come to be seen as the peculiarly Jewish-biblical view and thus functions for many scholars as an assumption in dealing with Pauline texts. More than a few scholars, however, have seen the hermeneutical pitfalls of such a use of the history of a concept. Käsemann and Stuhlmacher especially have come in for methodological criticism on this point. In reaction to the Käsemann-Stuhlmacher interpretation of God’s righteousness, Hans Conzelmann and Günther Klein have both stressed. . . [that] [d]ecisive is not the history of a concept but the pauline context.” (John Piper, “The Demonstration of the Righteousness of God in Romans 3:25-26,” in The Pauline Writings (Ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig E. Evans; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 190, quoting G. Klein, “Gottes Gerechtigkeit als Thema der neuesten paulus Forschung,” in Rekonstruktion und Interpretation (Munich: Chr. Kaiser verlag, 1969), 230.

80 It is significant to note here that Campbell, Deliverance of God, 528, marginalizes Rom 1-4 as not being indicative of the heart of Paul’s thought, whereas he considers that chs. 5ff, with their focus on participation with Christ, are. In Campbell’s view Rom 1-3 are
an attempt to force one or the other to say what they do not mean to say; rather, the intent is simply to consider the semantic fields in which they respectively used the “righteousness” word group.

Secondly, it should be noted that the two texts are not of equal size. Therefore it is not helpful to directly compare the frequencies with which words are used. Rather, the respective proportions of usage within each text is of more value as an indicator of the author’s focus.

Thirdly, a pragmatic approach has been used in how the instances of words from the “righteousness” word group have been clustered. In other words, in a given verse or passage, if relevant words are used more than once in the same sense, they have been counted only as one instance in most cases.

Finally, it must be said that although some attempt has been made for some rigor in this methodology, it is recognized that the methodology, the analysis, and the conclusions are of course debatable. Regardless, it has seemed preferable to at least adopt a methodology of some sort rather than just making blanket statements about how these words “appear” to be used in the relevant texts.

1. The Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36)

1a) Criterion 1 – God’s Righteousness or Human Righteousness?

Of the 18 references to righteousness, 3 referred to righteousness as pertaining to God, and 15 referred to righteousness pertaining to humans.81

1b) Criterion 2 – Righteousness as Moral Standing or as God’s Saving Activity?

merely a polemical response to an alternative gospel of conservative Jewish Christians in Rome; essentially a reductio ad absurdio. This seems to me to be highly unlikely and certainly most difficult to prove. However, even if this were granted, the selection of Rom 1-3 for a consideration of Paul’s use of the “righteousness” group of words would still remain appropriate and relevant.

81 One of these references, in The Book of the Watchers 10:16-18, although predominantly referring to human righteousness, may also possibly be a reference to God’s righteousness.
Of the 18 references to righteousness, 17 clearly referred to righteousness in terms of moral standing. This was most often in the form of a reference to “the righteous” as a group. In only one of these references did it appear that righteousness was work of God, with reference to God making righteousness appear in the eschaton. The adjective “righteous” is therefore most often used simply as a designation of a group in this text, e.g. “the righteous elect.” In this use, the concept of “righteous,” certainly appears to be much more static, and merely descriptive.

1c) Criterion 3 – Righteousness as Covenant Faithfulness?

In only one of the 18 references is it conceivable that there is an allusion to God’s covenant faithfulness although it is striking that there are no explicit references to the covenant at all in this text.

1d) Criterion 4 – Righteousness Associated With God’s Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness?

Of the 18 references to righteousness, there is only one in which righteousness is explicitly associated with God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness.

2. Romans 1-3

2a) Criterion 1 – God’s Righteousness or Human Righteousness?

There are 16 references to righteousness in Rom 1-3. Of these, 8 clearly refer to the righteousness of God, and 2 refer to righteousness as a “shared” or “parallel” concept for both God and humanity.

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83 Ibid.
84 The Book of the Watchers 27:3,4. This is a reference to God imparting mercy to the righteous in the judgment. Chapter 10:16-18, dealing with the restoration of righteousness in the eschaton, may also perhaps be seen to be associated with God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness; although these are not mentioned in the text.
85 The two references where righteousness appears to be a parallel or shared concept between God and humanity are found in Rom 1:16-17 and Rom 3:5.
2b) Criterion 2 – Righteousness as Moral Standing or as God’s Saving Activity?

Of the 16 references to righteousness, 11 refer to righteousness as moral standing, and 4 refer to righteousness as God’s Saving Activity. In the remaining reference, righteousness is mentioned in connection with both. (Rom 1:16-17.)

2c) Criterion 3 – Righteousness as Covenant Faithfulness?

Of the 16 references to righteousness, 3 occurrences are in connection with God’s covenant faithfulness.86

2d) Criterion 4 – Righteousness Associated With God’s Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness?

Of the 16 references to righteousness, 6 are explicitly associated with the grace, mercy, or forgiveness of God.

5. Findings

Criterion 1 – God’s Righteousness or Human Righteousness?

The focus in the Book of Watchers is, to a highly significant extent, on righteousness as an attribute of humans. Romans 1-3, however, presents righteousness as pertaining to both God and man.

Criterion 2 – Righteousness as Moral Standing or as God’s Saving Activity?

The Book of Watchers almost exclusively refers to righteousness in terms of moral standing. Righteousness is essentially presented as a static

86 These references are Rom 3:21, 22; Rom 3:22-23; and Rom 3:28, 30. The immediate context of vv. 28, 30 is explicitly covenantal. Note also that Rom 1:16-17 refers to the covenant by allusion.
quality and is most commonly used as an adjective; there is no question of becoming righteous, or of “transferral” of righteousness in any way. Bauckham notes that “the language of election... is closely associated with the language of righteousness” in this work, 87 and that “it is simply assumed that the elect are those who are loyal and obedient to God. This is generally true of the rest of the Enochic literature also.” 88

Romans 1-3 predominantly refers to righteousness as moral standing, although a significant number of references also refer to righteousness in terms of God’s saving activity. 89 The prominent adjectival use of “righteous” as a simple descriptor for a group in the Book of Watchers is almost completely absent from Rom 1-3.

Criterion 3 – Righteousness as Covenant Faithfulness?

The concept of righteousness is not presented in the Book of Watchers in connection with God’s covenant faithfulness. 90 There are in fact no explicit references to the covenant at all in this text. In Romans 1-3, several references to righteousness are clearly made in connection with God’s covenant faithfulness.

Criterion 4 – Righteousness Associated With God’s Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness?

In the Book of Watchers, righteousness is, with only one exception, not associated with the grace, mercy or forgiveness of God. In this regard, Bauckham comments that, “[i]n chs. 1-5 there is no exhortation to the wicked to repent or to the righteous to continue in obedience. There is

87 Bauckham, Apocalypses, 145.
88 Bauckham, Apocalypses, 144.
90 It should however be noted that Bauckham considers that Hartman has argued convincingly that chs. 1-5 of 1 Enoch evoke God’s covenant with Israel as their “referential background.” (Bauckham, Apocalypses, 142, citing Lars Hartmann, Asking for a Meaning: A Study of 1 Enoch 1-5 (Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1979.)
simply the announcement of judgment on the apostates and mercy and peace for the righteous. Presumably, there is no possibility of forgiveness for the wicked.591

By contrast, in Romans 1-3, a significant number of the references to righteousness are explicitly associated with the grace, mercy, or forgiveness of God.

6. Conclusions

In terms of the New Perspective generally, and bearing in mind the limitations of this brief exercise, it would appear that the Book of Watchers does not explicitly display the characteristics of Second Temple Judaism that the proponents of the New Perspective prefer to emphasize. Given the dating and influence of 1 Enoch, this should at least give us cause to consider again the breadth of diversity of first-century Judaism.

As far as the recent debate on righteousness is concerned, this analysis suggests that Paul’s usage of words from the “righteousness” group in Romans 1-3 is different to that in the Book of Watchers, and perhaps even significantly so. The Book of Watchers presents righteousness as primarily a descriptive human attribute, while Romans 1-3 has much more emphasis on righteousness as a quality that pertains to both God and man. The concept of righteousness as moral standing is apparent in both texts, although in Rom 1-3, the idea of righteousness as God’s saving activity comes more to the fore. The idea of righteousness as covenant faithfulness is not overtly present in the Book of Watchers; it comes to the fore much more in Rom 1-3. Finally, the association of righteousness with grace, mercy, and forgiveness is not made in the Book of Watchers, although it is clear in Rom 1-3. This analysis strongly suggests that in Rom 1-3, Paul’s use of the concept of righteousness is considerably more organic, multifaceted, and generally, more complex, than the contemporary use of the term in the Book of Watchers.

While, on the one hand “we are bound to read the New Testament in its own first-century context”592 it is also true that on the other hand, “[t]he

591 Bauckham, Apocalypses, 142.
592 Wright, Justification, 46.
evidence in Paul should be assessed on the basis of his own usage.”\textsuperscript{93} It is in the balancing of these two requirements that the crux of these issues lies. While Paul uses first century words and concepts, he is at the same time employing them to create something that is new. Furthermore, just as it would be wrong to assume the existence of a monolithic Judaism in the first century, it may well be similarly an error to try to circumscribe Paul’s use of particular concepts to a single dimension or focus, whether this be philosophically, or confessionally determined.

What this comparison between the \textit{Book of Watchers} and Rom 1-3 suggests is that there were streams of thought within Second Temple Judaism, and influential streams at that, which can be conceived of as having understood righteousness with a focus that appears to be different to that of Paul. These streams of thought do not necessarily reflect the views of the New Perspective well. However, these streams of thought were only that: some streams among many.

Second Temple Judaism appears to have been far more complex than many have previously considered. If this is the case, then perhaps we can acknowledge the existence, and indeed the value, of the emphases that N. T. Wright offers, while at the same time also appreciating that the value of some of the traditional Protestant perspectives on righteousness and justification. In the final analysis, this study also fundamentally suggests that even when all the contextual considerations have been taken into account, to understand “righteousness” in Paul, we must start with Paul. To adapt a line from N. T. Wright: “the Word is the Word.”

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Worldview Transformation and Mission: Narrative, Theology, and Ritual in John’s Apocalypse

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I. Worldview Warfare and the Gospel

Transforming Gospel

The role of worldview in the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan and how transformation of worldview is integral to biblical conversion is at the heart of the mission challenges the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces. Because worldview warfare is central in the cosmic conflict, worldview transformation on the personal level must be central as well in Adventist mission in leading people to experience biblical conversion (which includes belief, being, behavior, worship, and worldview).

Experience demonstrates, that where the gospel is either articulated or interpreted in terms of non-biblical worldviews (either wittingly or unwittingly), some form of syncretistic Christo-paganism is inevitable both theologically and experientially. This syncretistic Christianity is evidenced most everywhere in the world even in developed countries where New Age and elements of Emergent Church phenomenon blend world religions in varied expressions of non-biblical spirituality. Such versions of spirituality exhibit common characteristics (either some or all). They depersonalize God. They promote minimal thought and consciousness over that of thought, reason, and content. They diminish the importance of physical body and concrete behavior. They draw from a plurality of authoritative spiritual materials while downplaying or negating the priority of Scripture.
They enable a direct-connect with the divine without the need of Christ. They deny the reality of sin and the personal need for atonement. They individualize spirituality by asserting the superiority of being spiritual over being religious and or active in organized religion (the church or spiritual community). They devalue service as elemental to spirituality as well as apocalyptic/prophetic informed spirituality. And they espouse a non-temporal telos. In one form or another, each of these characteristics reflects a non-biblical worldview. In addition, syncretistic spirituality is out of sync with a host of distinctive Adventist worldview understandings of last things regarding the nature of man in death, the keeping of the commandments of God, the Sabbath-Sunday conflict, the resurrection, the second coming, etc.

These realities demand an understanding of how worldview factors in the proclamation of the gospel and its reception on the part of individuals to whom the Church is called to reach and serve. At bottom worldview transformation has to do with understanding the heart of the “eternal gospel” (Rev 14:6). Worldview transformation is at the heart of what it means to experience biblical conversion. The issue of worldview transformation on the personal level then is important in light of ongoing issues in mission: (1) the formation of a true people of God distinct from that of the world; (2) the retention of new members; (3) the continued syncretism on the part of old and new members alike (and many leaders); and (4) the effective witness of the church where the gospel maintains its disruptive qualities and brings radical change in both individual and community life from generation to generation.

Revelation’s worldview warfare in relation to the Church’s mission to the world provides an understanding of the true nature of and the motivation toward worldview transformation and the personal experience it engenders. In particular, “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17)—which forms the Remnant’s self-identity, to which they tenaciously cling, and which they passionately proclaim to the whole world—is a prophetic apocalyptic worldview which brings into being truly transformed lives, i.e., conversion. Why so? Because at bottom this apocalyptic prophetic
worldview entails owning Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior with all the existential moral and spiritual implications such owning of Christ entail.¹

Naugle suggests that “conceiving of Christianity as a worldview has been one of the most significant developments in the recent history of the church.”² I would assert that conceiving Seventh-day Adventism, as a unique expression of the biblically informed and biblically shaped Christian worldview, is one of the most significant developments we can nurture in our identity, mission, and message. Not only so, but to assert as well that The Three Angels Messages found in Revelation’s chiastic center (Rev 14:6-13) should both inform and critique the larger global Christian worldview.

Whether we understand it theologically or embrace it as an overall narrative, Revelation’s worldview offers a fresh perspective on the holistic nature, cosmic dimensions, and universal applications of biblical faith and present truth. Revelation’s worldview reminds us that the preaching of the gospel is not merely the transference of knowledge or the change of behavior, but bringing about personal conversion. In our contemporary world the most important distinctions and sources of conflict among human beings are no longer ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. At the heart of this current culture war is a clash of worldviews.³

Purpose of Study

And so the purpose of this study:

1) to raise the question of worldview in relation to the Great Controversy theme in our preaching of the gospel;

2) to explore the elements and themes of worldview and how they play in human self-identity and action as well as in the Great Controversy;

3) to show how Revelation both contains these worldview elements and themes and through them presents a distinct counter worldview in contrast to the worldview of the false trinity’s and those who dwell on the earth;

¹ See Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, The “Testimony of Jesus” in the Writings of Ellen G. White (ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez; Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), 234-235.
³ Ibid., xvii.
4) to underscore how our call to engage every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, calls for conscious stepping into their culture and worldview with the intent to understand where they are and lead them to the biblical view;

5) to assert how such engagement with the cultures of the world and their respective worldviews is in effect working to transform worldview;

6) to remind us that in keeping with the Gospel, the call to mission understands, engages, and challenges both culture and the worldview a given culture reflects;

7) to explore how the “testimony of Jesus” which the Remnant cling to and proclaim is a prophetic apocalyptic worldview that will effect truly transformed lives (conversion) as that worldview transforms the worldview of its hearers. Change of belief and behavior is not enough—one’s worldview itself must change as well;

8) to explore the role of worldview in the great controversy and how transformation of worldview is integral to biblical conversion and at the heart of mission challenges we face.

In accomplishing the above, this study will explore how a worldview is articulated. Hopefully we will learn better how worldview is formed within the individual or a given community. Most important, we will hope to catch a glimpse of how one’s functioning worldview can be shifted and transformed.

II. Worldview Warfare and Mission in Revelation

At its chiastic center Revelation envisions global mission where the Church engages the people of the entire world with the urgent end-time truths of the eternal gospel: “And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6). While the passage affirms the universal scope of God’s redemptive call in lieu of the beast’s destructive influence over the same worldwide audience (13:7; cf. 17:15), it at the same time assumes and envisions distinctive nations (ἕνως). There are distinguishable people groups within the nations (λαῶν) as well as unique tribes and languages within given people groups and nations (φυλήν καὶ γλώσσαν).

Revelation consistently summarizes humanity in this fourfold pattern—nation, tribe, tongue, and people (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). Seven times altogether, though none of the ordering within the
respective lists agrees precisely with the other. These words describe the
distribution, characteristics, and relationships of human beings in the
world. Worldwide human life is thus organized into societies.
Furthermore, Revelation envisions social status and roles within human
social order: the “rich and poor,” “slave and free,” “small and great,”
kings, nobleman, commanders, the strong (6:15; 11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18; cf.
Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Thus the global, the regional, the local, the varied
roles and standings within society, as well as the individual person are alike
in view. All spheres and all peoples are to hear the eternal gospel. All are
to be called to experience its hope, warning, and transforming power.

The imagery of nations, people groups, languages, tribes/clans, social
status and roles implies the existence of integrating cultures, which mirrors,
expresses, and fosters the unique characteristics of a given society. It
assumes too, worldview(s), which a given culture similarly mirrors,
expresses, and fosters within that particular society. The delineation of
roles and societal standing (“small and great,” “poor and rich,” “free and
slave,” kings, commanders, noblemen, etc.) further suggest the presence of
disparate worldviews on both the structural level and existential
perception/experience of individuals within society.

Those Who Dwell on the Earth
Throughout Revelation, the functioning worldview of those envisioned
in Revelation 14:6 is expressed more clearly elsewhere in the Greek phrase
οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς—“those who dwell on the earth.” The phrase
occurs often in the book of Revelation but nowhere else in the New
Testament (3:10; 6:10; 8:13, 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8). The phrase is not

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4 See chart Kendell H. Easley, Revelation (ed. Max Anders; Nashville, TN: Broadman
5 Mal Couch, ed. A Bible Handbook to Revelation (ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel
Publications, 2001), 134.
6 Of the 13 times κατοικεῖσθαι appears in Revelation, nine are in the present active
participial form followed by the phrase ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς—“upon the earth” (3:10; 6:10; 8:13,
11:10, 13:8; 13:14; 17:8). Two refer to those who dwell in the earth but either don’t include
the preposition ἐπὶ or separate those on the earth from those dwelling in it (13:12; 17:2).
In the message to Smyrna the people of God dwell where Satan dwells (2:13). The issues
of worldview and worldview influence are evident in each context. Revelation 14:6 uses the
terminology τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς where the verb κάθημαι is used rather than
κατοικεῖσθαι.
as neutral as might first appear. It does not refer merely to the entire mass of humanity or simply those who live on planet earth.\(^7\) It is a technical term, which always refers to unbelievers, the enemies of God.\(^8\) It designates the worldview of the dominant portion of humanity. It is a this-world-only perspective.

More specifically, “those who dwell on the earth” appear in association with idolatry (13:8, 12, 14; 14:6-13; 17:2, 8, cf. 8:13 with 9:20, 21),\(^9\) suggesting that they cannot look beyond this earth for their security. Rather, they trust in some part of the creation instead of the Creator for their ultimate meaning and welfare. The object of their trust and perhaps their very being, in that they have become part of the earthly system in which they find security, suggests that they have become like it—morally and spiritually.

The constitutive nature of worldview is reflected in the sixth trumpet where Revelation draws from Psalm 115:1-8 which enunciates the principle that we become what we worship (cf. 9:20, 21; Psalm 135:15-18; Jer 2:5).\(^10\)

\(^7\) Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 49. I suggest that the phrase “the whole world” (3:10; cf. 12:9; 16:14) means something different from the phrase “those who dwell on the earth.” The former refers to the entire mass of humanity, while the latter refers to those who have only an earthly perspective and thus ally themselves with the beast in rebellion against God. Revelation’s summary of “language of nations, tribes, tongues, and people” (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15) gives further example of language referring to humanity as a whole in contrast to “those who dwell on the earth.”

\(^8\) Easley, *Revelation*, 65; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (ed. Moisés Silva; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 193. “Those who dwell on the earth” are the ones who murder the martyrs (6:10), who reject the two witnesses’ call to repentance (11:10), who worship the beast (13:8, 12), who are deceived into making an image to the beast (13:14), and who get drunk on the harlot’s wine (17:2). They do not have their names written in the book of life (17:8), rather they are subject to the coming hour of trial (3:10; 8:13).


\(^10\) So powerful are the worldview forces of natural religion that people will not abandon its immoral values and dehumanizing practices even in the face of God’s terrible judgments. Idol worshipers shape their gods after their own view of reality, i.e., they are “the works of their hands” (9:20; cf. Isa 40:18-20; 44:9-20; 66:3; Jer 10:3-8; Hab 2:18, 19). Those who make idols and put their trust in them become like them—they can neither see nor hear nor walk, morally. It’s a moral principle. We resemble our ideals. We become like what we
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When human beings commit themselves to some aspect of the earth, they become earthly\(^\text{11}\) and thus come to be known as “those who dwell on the earth.” “Those who dwell on the earth” are self-defining in terms of their totally earthly perspective and how they relate to God, treat His people, and weigh eternal matters. They cannot trust in anything except what their eyes see and their physical senses perceive. They are permanently earthbound in their perspective. Their ultimate identity and perspective is in the world that they adore. That is why they are resistive of the Two Witnesses who threaten what they regard as ultimate value, meaning, and security (11:10).\(^\text{12}\)

**Those Who Hold the Testimony of Jesus**

In contrast to the worldview of “those who dwell on the earth” Revelation asserts the worldview of God’s covenant people who are depicted in Revelation’s chiastic center in the imagery of the woman and her seed (12:1-17). Here also (the chiastic center) and elsewhere throughout the book, God’s covenant people are referred to as the saints (13: 7, 10; 14:12; 5:8; 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7; 13:10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9). They are a tiny and powerless minority within a hostile world’s culture. They are persecuted and marginalized elements in society.\(^\text{13}\) They are an alternative community and worldview pitted in conflict with the powers that be and the dominating worldview such powers assert and compel.

More specifically, God’s covenant people are characterized as those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” (12:17, cf. 14:12). Much has been and can be said about the meaning of worship. Worldview as expressed in worship shapes character and action. See G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008); F. B. Meyer, *Gems from the Psalms* (Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1976), 188.

\(^{11}\) Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, 255.
the phrase “the testimony of Jesus” (τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ), but at bottom it has to do with worldview. Its content is the witness of Jesus. It unfolds the theodicy of God’s handling of the reality of evil in the person and work of Jesus within the cosmic conflict. It is the eternal gospel. More precisely as a product of the “spirit of prophecy” (19:10) “the testimony of Jesus” is the “eternal gospel” (14:7) set in an apocalyptic prophetic context. This apocalyptic prophetic setting of the gospel brings

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14 The phrase occurs in 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10 (twice). In 20:4 there is reference to the believer’s “testimony of Jesus” i.e., “their testimony of Jesus.” Larry L. Lichtenwalter, Revelation’s Great Love Story: More Than I Ever Imagined (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 2008), 119-124.
19 Revelation 19:10 asserts an organic link between “the testimony of Jesus” and “the spirit of prophecy” with the expression: “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” While the nominative case construction on both sides of the verb “to be” suggests equivalence/interchangeability (ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας), each side of the equation nevertheless nuances the same reality in distinct yet complimentary directions. There may be equivalence, but there is also differentiation. I suggest that this intended differentiation reveals the essential core of “the testimony of Jesus” to which the end-time people of God cling. In other words, the terminology “the spirit of prophecy” points to the essential prophetic apocalyptic nature or characteristic of the worldview, which “the testimony of Jesus” articulates. As a recurring motif in Revelation (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10x2; cf. 20:4) “the testimony of Jesus” as a worldview is broader than “the spirit of prophecy” but nevertheless ever encompasses and comprises it and all that it suggests. The larger context linking these two concepts suggests that “the testimony of Jesus” is the product of the “spirit of prophecy” in that it originates in the activity of holy prophets moved by God’s spirit (19:10; 22:6-9; cf. 1 Pet 2:20, 21.) As such it is both a witness from Jesus and about Jesus. The phrase “the God of the spirits of the prophets” together with “the words of the prophecy of this book” (i.e., Revelation) clearly links the activity of the Holy Spirit in the creation of Revelation itself as “the testimony of Jesus” (22:6-9). This suggests that “the testimony of Jesus” has an essential prophetic apocalyptic core and characteristic. Revelation refers to itself as a book of prophecy (1:3). It is a book of prophecy (22:10, 19). It is filled with words of prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10; 18) and as such it unfolds the prophetic apocalyptic testimony of Jesus—an example of what “the testimony of Jesus” is. This is Revelation’s worldview. This is the worldview which “the Spirit of Prophecy” engenders.
understanding, shapes moral life, outlines the future, as well as invites and compels decision in the context of its hope and warning. By its very nature biblical apocalyptic prophecy casts a moral vision—a worldview, which generates an ethic and life to go with it.

Thus, “the testimony of Jesus” re-imagines the present world in keeping with God’s sovereign purpose, action, and invitation through Revelation’s victorious Lamb (5:1-10). In doing so it constructs a world of vision—a worldview. It presents the vision of a new world. It is an apocalyptic vision, a prophetic vision. Its form and content underscore the fundamental prophetic apocalyptic nature of the biblically informed worldview. As the product of “the spirit of prophecy” (19:10; 22:9, 10) it unfolds genuine prophetic witness in contrast to the “spirits of demons” who go out to deceive the whole world with another worldview (16:14). This “testimony of Jesus” communicates values and conduct that run counter to the values and conduct of the old world and provide a structure of meaning which grounds lives in both God and the hope of God’s new world.20

Revelation’s alternative community of faith is said to have this “testimony of Jesus” (12:17). Within the book’s narrative imagery the simple Greek word to have (ἐχον) frequently refers to essential identity and being because of what one is possessing more than merely possessing something external to them. The biblical notion of having thus points to something one is because of what they have—i.e., identity, and nature, and character.21 In other words, one cannot separate what he or she has from


20 Biblical apocalyptic prophecy ever casts a moral vision. It generates an ethic to go along with it, or it fails to keep its promise of offering a unity of life and the possibility of total fulfillment. See Carl E. Braaten, Eschatology and Ethics: Essays on the Theology and Ethics of the Kingdom of God (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 20.

21 An example is how the inseparable oneness between the Lamb and the Spirit is portrayed in the description of the Lamb who has “seven horns and seven eyes.” According to John, these seven horns and seven eyes “are the seven Spirits of God.” Here the Greek word “to have” indicates an organic relationship where the seven horns and seven eyes are part of the Lamb’s essential identity and being. This is in keeping with other descriptions and caricatures in the Apocalypse, i.e., 4:8; 12:3; 13:1; 14:1; 17:3 as opposed to eternal objects like in 7:2; 14:6; 14:14; 17:4; 20:1. These horns and eyes are an organic part of who He is as the slain Lamb. When you see the Lamb, the Spirit is present and evident.
what they are. This is part of Revelation’s narrative characterization or caricature of its major actors in the unfolding story line, plot, and moral/spiritual point of view. For God’s covenant people (the loipos - the remnant) to have “the testimony of Jesus” points to this life framing worldview, which defines who they are in the world. As the meaning of the word ἐγώ also suggests that God’s covenant people “hold” to “the testimony of Jesus,” it implies their tenacious grip on this particular worldview no matter the encapsulating and coercive pressures of any other (14:12; 13:10; 2:10, 25; 1:9). The verb points both to self-defining realities as well as a tenacious grip on those self-defining realities as the only legitimate view of self in relation to reality as expressed in Jesus Christ.

Thus, Revelation knows only two kinds of human beings: those who dwell on the earth and those . . . who hold to the testimony of Jesus. There are those whose ultimate identity is with the old earth, which they adore. There are those who live with ultimate identity with the God of the coming new cosmos—the God in whom is their ultimate trust. Within Revelation’s unfolding narrative these two categories of human beings are at eternal odds with one another. The worldview articulated here (and throughout this study) is on the level of a moral spiritual frame of reference (lifeview) rather than that of everyday matters as per anthropology.

**Clash of Worldviews**

The significance of this brief survey of these two groups of human beings for our discussion on worldview transformation and mission in the Book of Revelation is the reality of the respective moral/spiritual orientation and perspective of these contrasted groups—their world of

Wherever the Lamb goes, whatever the Lamb does, the Spirit is present and at work. The Spirit qualifies essential features of the Lamb’s being and work. Likewise the Lamb qualifies essential features of the Spirit’s being and work. The “sevenfold Spirit” is so closely identified with Jesus that they are nearly one. One cannot remove the horns or the eyes, else the Lamb imagery and implications would not be complete. This does not diminish or blur the Spirit into the person of Christ or make them one in essence. Rather it accentuates the context in which the Spirit’s work is envisioned in the Apocalypse.


vision, their worldview. Worldview comes into play in how the universal scope of God’s redemptive call contrasts sharply with the beast’s destructive influence over the same worldwide audience (as per chapters 13, 17, and 18). Within this narrative the Everlasting Gospel in the context of the Three Angel’s messages asserts a worldview even as it engages the people of the world in their respective cultures and integrating worldviews. At bottom the Three Angel’s Messages asserts a clash of worldviews and resultant culture.

This clash of worldviews assumes “a crucial role in the hidden, spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan in which the very truth of things is at stake. Between these regimes a conflict of epic proportion rages for the minds and hearts, and thus the lives and destinies, of all men and women, all the time. Since nothing could be of greater final importance than the way human beings understand God, themselves, the cosmos, and their place in it, it is not surprising that a worldview warfare is at the heart of the conflict between the powers of good and evil.” 24 History is the record of spiritual warfare with competing worldviews as the center. 25

In the end, the matter of the shifting of worldview is significant as it integrates identity, theology, ethics, purpose (service and mission), and everyday life, etc. Revelation’s unfolds how everyone’s worldview is questioned and at stake—either shifted, abandoned, or held on to firmly.

At its core, the language of the First Angel’s Message asserts that we must take the worldviews of other people seriously, not because we agree with them, but because we want to understand the people we serve in order to effectively share with them the good news of the eternal gospel and the truths it proclaims about Jesus and end-time issues. 26 This is essential, required, and the fundamental beginning point of genuine compassionate concern for the people of the world.

However, taking the worldviews of our world’s varied people groups seriously in order to better understand them and serve them is only part of Revelation’s meaning. We are to understand their respective worldviews

24 Naugle, Worldview: The History of a Concept.
25 Ibid., 104.
in order to transform their worldview and thus transform them (as individuals and people) where such transformation is necessary for a genuine conversion experience and vital connection with the living God.  

While no culture needs to undergo total transformation in order to become Christian, worldview themes and cultural expressions that are contrary to biblical truths must be challenged and changed. While seated in culture, the gospel is both trans-cultural and countercultural. It has the power and intent on transforming where possible and necessary the very culture in which it is seated.

This does not mean Colonialization where missionaries or Christians from wherever promote the values and lifestyles of their own culture or sub-culture as superior to those they are evangelizing or serving—thus trying to squeeze everyone into their own mold of Christianity.

Nor does this mean contextualizing the gospel as if, because of genuine cultural sensitivity, one could divest the gospel of one cultural form and re-dress it in another. Nor does it mean divesting the gospel of its intrinsic nature and truths.

Rather the First Angels’ Message points to the universal scope and universal critique of the biblically informed and shaped worldview via the eternal gospel. This means recognizing how the biblically informed and biblically shaped worldview (“the testimony of Jesus”) rightly challenges all other worldviews as well as the cultures and the lifestyles each worldview engenders.

According to Revelation, the worldview of every human being is to be challenged and transformed via the proclamation of the eternal gospel. We are to remember that, even with careful packaging, the gospel eventually

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27 Ibid.

28 Cultures are not neutral. They all have good and evil that must be checked against biblical standards. And yet every culture is a valid way of living for members of its expressions of reality and must be seen as the context where mission happens, even where God has been active before the arrival of a missionary bearing the gospel message. Cultures are not to be replaced or rejected but embraced, critiqued, and shaped according to biblical values and truths. No culture should be viewed as the Christian default culture or as superior over other cultures. See Paulo De Oliveira, “Worldview: Vital for Mission and Ministry in the 21st Century,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 5, no. 1 (2009): 26.
becomes a disruptive force in the life of the people who accept it.\(^{29}\) The gospel renders every human being incapable of participating fully in his or her own given culture.\(^{30}\) Wherever the gospel is preached it disrupts local customs, religion, and economy. It disrupts every worldview. Thus the eternal gospel of the Three Angels Messages, and anyone, who accepts it and preaches it, is a change agent, which disrupts any native culture with the gospel. There is no other way.

III. Worldview as Narrative, Theology, and Ritual

The Concept of Worldview

There’s a fair bit of ambiguity about the fascinating concept of Worldview. On the one hand we can intuit what it is, yet on the other hand it is difficult to define clearly or adequately describe.\(^{31}\) Its usage in diverse fields including philosophy, philosophy of science, history, anthropology, sociology, ethics, and Christian thought,\(^{32}\) contributes to this ambiguity as each discipline comes to the discussion with a different set of glasses and purpose. After all, all human beings see things from aslant, Christians included. And so, any view of worldview is itself worldview dependent.\(^{33}\) Human beings are captive to their worldview. So much so that even when one comes to Scripture as their authority or to the Book of Revelation in particular they are already expressing a worldview. No single definition of worldview is agreed upon by all.\(^{34}\) Nevertheless, there are some important

\(^{29}\) P. Richard Choi, “‘All Things to All Men’: Paul Preaches to the World,” in *A Commentary on the Sabbath School Lesson for July 5-11, 2008* (Spectrummagazine.org, 2008).

\(^{30}\) Ibid.


\(^{32}\) “Since its inception in Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* in 1790, the notion of Weltanschauung has become one of the central intellectual conceptions in contemporary thought and culture” (Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept, 66.*

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 253.

\(^{34}\) The production and influence of multiple conceptual worldviews can be attributed to the rulers, the powers, the world forces of darkness, and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).
things we can understand about worldview and its important personal, cultural, and social functions.

Broadly put, worldview is the story we tell to answer existential questions: Why is there anything at all? How can we know for sure? How did we get here and why are we here? What does it mean to be a human being? Why have things gone so badly wrong? Is there any hope of things getting any better? What should I do with my life? Where will it all lead in the end? What about God? Is He there? If so what is He like? What difference does the existence of deity make in the scheme of things? Is there a dark side to reality, to spirituality? Does evil exist?

Beyond these basic questions, a worldview has to do with viewing the cosmos and all things within it through a particular set of lenses or from a specific point of view. Our worldview is our way of looking at life, our interpretation of the universe, the orientation of our inner world. A cosmic blueprint, so to speak. It is a well-reasoned framework of beliefs and convictions that gives a true and unified perspective on the meaning of human existence. Worldview provides the overarching perceptual categories (theological, philosophical, moral) through which we interpret reality. It is the structure of understanding that we use to make sense of our world. Our worldview is what we presuppose.

Revelation unfolds a worldview in which God, human existence, and the spiritual/moral conflict at play are both spiritually and morally framed. The reader is invited to enter this explicit world, assured that what the book says about God, human beings, the moral/spiritual issues, central characters, and moral/spiritual nature of the conflict, is in fact both true and God given (1:1; 21:5; 22:6, 18, 19). The foundational themes articulated


36 The apocalyptic medium establishes its own world in which one must enter in order to fully grasp. The modern reader enters a worldview vastly different from their natural perspective. The first task then is to understand Revelation’s outlook. Revelation is wrapped in a worldview and language quite alien to modern times. See Joseph R. Jeter, “Revelation-Based Preaching: Homiletical Approaches,” in Preaching Through the Apocalypse: Sermons from Revelation (ed. Cornish R. Rogers and Joseph R. Jetter; St.

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in Revelation’s worldview provide a broad conceptual canvas against which an understanding of the gospel and its call to life transformation unfolds.

**Revelation’s Narrative, Theology, Ritual**

Worldview is manifested in three basic and interrelated ways: through a narrative component, a rational component, and a ritual component. All worldviews tend to manifest themselves in these forms.\(^{37}\)

A worldview’s narrative component embodies the stories we tell to make sense of reality. Plato said it well when he asserted: “Those who tell stories rule society.” Stories have culture shaping power. Power to establish a context for life. Life-defining power. They stir the mind and imagination. Great stories freight world-sized ideas, ideas worthy of contemplation and conversation. Their weightiness and their plots develop and mold the human mind and consciousness.\(^{38}\) Such worldview narratives create a particular kind of “mind” and serve as “controlling stories.”

Revelation’s most basic literary structure has a narrative character. It is a story with an intriguing cast of characters and an engaging plot.\(^{39}\) It is

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\(^{39}\) Like any good story, there is an introduction (1:1-8) and a conclusion (22:6-21). The story in between these bookends however, is unique in that the narrative is told by three seemingly separate, vastly different, yet profoundly interrelated and corresponding stories about Jesus and moral/spiritual realities: (1) the story of why John was at Patmos, his vision of the eternal Christ and subsequent letters to the seven churches (1:9-3:22); (2) the opening of the sealed scroll in the middle of celestial worship with the subsequent unfolding of the seven seals and seven trumpets and resumption of worship (4:1-11:19); and (3) the cosmic dragon pursuing a cosmic woman who is eventually defeated by a cosmic warrior resulting in the establishment of a wholly new cosmic order (12:1-22:5).

\(^{40}\) One cannot but be amazed at the sheer number and diversity of characters encountered throughout the story as well as the interwoven story lines. There are characters belonging to different worlds, human and divine, as well as a menagerie of strange creatures, bestial and angelic. There are major and minor characters and cameo appearances by
a prophetic apocalyptic narrative, which asserts a specific point of view—a worldview. It places all other meta-narratives in context and assesses their credibility.

A worldview’s rational component reflects our attempt to give a logical or analytic formulation to our beliefs and commitments. Things need to make sense, line up logically, be explained, and have foundation in something other than a compelling story. And so we deal with information, facts, evidence, arguments, and logic/reason. We seek to understand systematically and logically. How do we best explain the origin and nature of the universe as well as the human condition and the facts of history? The rational component of a worldview engages foundational themes as: the existence and character of God, origins, human nature, the basis of authority and norms, theodicy and the problem of evil, time, space, self and the other, and hope (the final consummation of things). There is also the question of epistemology. How do we know what we know? How do we know what is truth? How do we know what is morally right or wrong? Stories only go so far.

On the surface Revelation’s rational component appears modest, and yet it is forcefully reflected in the book’s descriptions, explanations, self-interpretation, vivid contrasts and juxtapositions, hymns and outbursts of praise, interludes, transitional passages, rhetoric, verbal and thematic allusions from Old and New Testament Scripture, temporal focus of historical setting and sequences, and as well as its controlling point of view. Themes of creation/de-creation/re-creation, holiness, justice, covenant faithfulness, truth, judgment, sin, redemption, idolatry, and keeping God’s commandments, come into view for both consideration and moral/spiritual well-known figures. One sees bizarre and wonderful scenes, characters, creatures, and events (Revelation is a visual feast) as well as hears voices and noises.


42 Questions like, “Does God Exist?”

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orientation. Revelation puts the reader in a moral and spiritual context. It informs the reader who the players are. It tells what condition human life is in. It advises us where we are and where we are going. It informs us what questions need to be answered. It provides a philosophical map for the larger moral vision against which its various moral and spiritual themes are addressed. In doing so it bring understanding on the historical, theological, moral, spiritual, and interpretive levels. Twice there is exhortation for the understanding of the book’s mysteries (13:8; 17:9). The reader is to hear and keep what she learns from the book (1:3; 2:7; 22:7). Thus, the reader is addressed both rationally and emotionally.

Finally, the symbols we use and the customs/rituals we perform both embody and reinforce our worldview. This is the stuff of culture as worldview is the deepest level of culture and culture is the outward visible manifestations of worldview assumptions. Culture and customs are full of worldview reflecting symbols and rituals. Worldview via culture always expresses itself in tangible ways. Even the immaterial dynamics of worldview/culture are realized in temporal and material forms. Here we move into the realm of cultural ideas, feelings, and values as expressed in behavior and ritual. Here is envisioned our concrete engagement with the marketplace, celebrities, music, TV, fashion, sports, art, advertising, commerce, entertainment, theme parks, political correctness, social mores,

43 Revelation’s rational component asserts such things as: (1) a morality consistent with human existence and life; (2) divine creation of the world as the overarching worldview for ethics; (3) sin and “fallen” human nature as the underlying spiritual/moral reality within which ethical thought, choice, and action are both found and expressed; (4) the “warfare worldview” (Great Controversy) as backdrop for the existence and nature of evil, human choice and moral accountability, and divine character and action; and (5) divine grace and redemption as providing an “already and not yet” scope to ethics, as well as the ground of moral action and victory.


45 As H. Richard Niebuhr correctly notes: “Human effort presses on to employ in concrete, tangible, visible, and audible forms what has been imaginatively discerned. The harmony and proportion, the form, order and rhythm, the meaning and ideas that men intuit and trace out as they confront nature, social events, and the world of dreams, these by infinite labor they must paint on wall or canvas, print on paper as systems of philosophy and science, outline in carved stone or cast in bronze, sing in a ballad, ode or symphony. Visions of order and justice, hopes of glory, must at the cost of much suffering be embodied in written laws, dramatic rites, structures of government, empires, ascetic lives.” H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 36, 37.
societies, etc. which both reflect and reinforce what we believe and value.46 Here at births, initiations, marriages, funerals, harvest celebrations, and other rituals our worldview assumptions are most evident.47 These concrete behaviors buttress our fundamental beliefs with emotional reinforcements so that they are not easily destroyed. Whether the arts, music, architecture, customs and lifestyle, fashions, habits, values, beliefs, or ways of looking at things—each in their own way tell a story, both express and help create a worldview. They have an uncanny way of slipping past our conscious mind. Circumventing our defenses. Impacting us in subtle ways. Not all this is bad, of course. Much of any culture is neutral and even more is mundane. Yet evil is tragically present in both the societal and personal expressions. Culture’s symbolic and ritual expression of worldview is a very human and earthly endeavor that often distracts us from what is really important.

Revelation’s symbolic (ritual) component is evidenced in its rebuke and exhortations to the Seven Churches. There concrete actions and experiences were wrought with incredible meaning: i.e., calling oneself a Niccolatian or Jew, eating things sacrificed to idols, immorality, keeping, deeds, or the sixth trumpet where individuals refused to repent of idolatry and corresponding ethical failures. On the larger scale there is the mark of beast, the name of the beast, and the number of his name, there is the buying and selling, the image to the beast, the seal of God, etc. Revelation’s worship motif itself implies some kind of ritual and or appropriate behaviors (falling down at least, no angelology, etc.). There too, are the people of God who worship the Creator, keep the commandments, keep the testimony of Jesus, don’t soil their garments, etc. Each of these has


47 Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 29. They are reenactments of our view of reality, a ritualizing of our beliefs and moral commitments. For example, when a marriage is celebrated, we ritualize our beliefs and moral commitments about marriage, family, sexual intimacy, and children. And when we gather at a funeral we reenact and reinforce our beliefs and moral commitments regarding the meaning of life, death, eternity, and God.
tangible cultural/ritual dimensions in terms of ideas, feelings, values and actions as an outworking of Revelation’s worldview.

All three of these worldview components play a role in moral/spiritual formation and life. And because they are each present both in the Book of Revelation as a whole and in the Three Angels Messages in particular, each component must be kept in view as we would seek to better understand the link between worldview transformation and mission, as expressed within the book. Worldviews play an important role in ethics and are at the heart of moral reflection and action, there is always in interplay between worldview and ethics, or worldview and ethos.

**Revelation’s Worldview Themes**

What themes or issues do worldviews contain? We’ve already mentioned some of them above, but for our purposes here we can briefly list them as questions about: God, Origins, Human Nature, Norms/Authority, the Problem of Evil, Hope for the future.

A biblical informed worldview as per the Book of Revelation includes:

**God–**God exists as a heavenly trio–God, Son, Spirit (1:4-6). He is almighty, holy, righteous and just, gracious, covenant keeping (1:4, 8; 4:8; 15:3, 4; 19:1-6; 21:1-8). He is Creator and Judge, King (4:11; 14:7; 15:3). He is the living God who acts in keeping with His holy character and covenant relationship (1:4, 8). Revelation’s God is personal (4:11; 14:7).

**Creation and Human Nature–**Divine creation of the world is Revelation’s overarching worldview for ethics and spiritual life. It touches human reality expressing the value and nature of human beings. God is worshiped as a personal Creator (4:11). 48

**Ethics–**Revelation’s moral vision encompasses a morality consistent with genuine human existence and life. The “tree of life” motif and the Holy City’s “insiders and outsiders” posit moral/spiritual life in keeping with the created order and human nature (22:11-15; 12:17; 14:12; cf. 9:20, 21).

**The Genesis Fall and Human Nature–**Sin and “fallen” human nature are the underlying spiritual/moral reality within which ethical thought, choice,

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Warfare Worldview—The Great Controversy is the backdrop for the existence and nature of evil, human choice and moral accountability, as well as divine character and action (chapters 12-14). God has been in an age-long (but not eternal) battle against Satan and this conflict is the major dimension of the ultimate canvas against which everything within Revelation’s narrative is to be painted and understood.

Time and History—Time and history is the sphere in which human beings live life. History is the arena of God’s activity in human affairs. Thus Revelation assures us that: 1, earth matters—where we are (1:4; 2:1-3:22; 2:13; 14:6); 2, time matters—when things happen (1:1, 3, 19; 4:1; 12:1-17); and 3, history matters—the chronicle/story of what happens, the when and the why, i.e., the churches (2:1-3:22); the seals and trumpets (6:1-9:21); the open scroll and two witnesses (10:1-11:19); historic apocalyptic sequence of great controversy with the cross as history’s turning point, final conflict, and harvest of the earth (12:1-14:20).

Space and Proximity—Spatial realities are expressed in an organically linked three-tiered universe (heaven, earth, abyss). Sanctuary imagery highlights the link between heaven and earth—providing perceptions of reality, history, and proximity of the divine, demonic, and human interaction. Time and space (this earth) is the sphere in which we live life and in which God is able to act. Thus Revelation assures us that space matters (where things happen).

Atonement and Helping Grace—The Apocalypse provides the help it promises—grace (1:4-5; 22:21; 19:7, 8). Divine grace and redemption provide an “already and not yet” scope to human life, as well as the ground of moral action and victory (1:5, 6; 5:9-10; 6:9-11; 8:3-4; 12:17; 14:12; cf. 14:1-5; 7:9-15). Substitutionary atonement factors largely in the picture of redemption and release from sin and our fallen world (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:10, 11; 17:14; 22:14). God has set the redeemed into a new position, i.e., priest and kings. (1:6; 5:10). The problem of sin has been resolved via the blood of the Lamb (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11).


Revelation’s Overarching Narrative

While we can identify various themes and issues of Revelation’s worldview as per above, it can be pared down to bottom line narrative truths.49

Revelation’s worldview implies the objective existence of the triune God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe and whose character, Word, and commands define and govern all aspects of created existence.50

Revelation’s worldview implies that human beings as God’s image and likeness are anchored and integrated in the heart as the subjective sphere of consciousness which is decisive for shaping a vision of moral and spiritual life and fulfilling the function typically ascribed to the notion of worldview.51

Revelation’s worldview implies the catastrophic effects of sin on the human heart and mind, resulting in the fabrication of idolatrous belief systems in place of God and the engagement of the human race in cosmic spiritual warfare in which the truth about reality and the meaning life is at stake. This is the great controversy.52

Revelation’s worldview implies the gracious in-breaking of the kingdom of God in to human history in the person and work of the resurrected, exalted, glorified Jesus Christ, who atones for sin, defeats the principalities and powers, and enables those who believe in Him to obtain a knowledge of the true God and a proper understanding of the world as His creation.53

49 This has been adapted from Naugle in his Worldview: The History of a Concept. Naugle, Worldview: The History of a Concept, xix. Contemporary worldview theory reflects a sociological relativity while a biblical understanding of worldview connects it with a proper view of objectivity and subjectivity as well as the doctrines of sin and spiritual warfare, grace and redemption.

50 Ibid., 260-267.
51 Ibid., 267-274.
52 Ibid., 274-284.
53 Ibid., 284-289.
Revelation’s worldview affirms that Jesus loves us (1:5; cf. 3:9, 19). That Jesus has adequately cared for the sin problem through his substitutionary death (1:5; 5:9-10; 12:10-11; 7:14). That Jesus has set us in a new position in the world as kings and priests (1:6; 5:10). That Jesus is victor over all and determines the final outcome of human history (5:1-8:1). That Jesus will come again (1:7; 22:7, 12, 20). This in fact, is essentially Revelation’s worldview narrative. It communicates that the link between God and His people is close and decided.

Revelation’s worldview is one of creation, fall, gracious divine covenant faithfulness, redemption in context of final judgment and justice, and new-creation. It posits both the age-long (but not eternal) great controversy between Christ and Satan and the Lordship of Christ over the cosmos and the whole of human life. Revelation’s Lamb is Christus Victor.

IV. Revelations’ Transforming Worldview

The very heart of any discussion of worldview transformation and mission however, goes beyond matters of worldview components, themes, and narrative per se. It touches the possibility and need of worldview transformation itself, i.e., personal conversion, the changing character, thought, values, feelings, and conduct. It raises the questions of how one’s functioning worldview is actually challenged, shifted and transformed. Does is come because of fear, coercion, pragmatism, reason, cultural dominance, or deception? Or is there an element that captivates the inner self with hope, grace, and peace?

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54 In Revelation sin is seen as enslaving bondage (1:5); incalculable debt (5:9); moral/spiritual defilement (7:14); and guilt and condemnation (12:11). In each case the Lamb’s blood has incredible power. It release one from the bondage of sin (1:5). It purchases us for God—i.e., pays our debt of sin before God with merits beyond which we could ever imagine (5:9; 8:2-3). It cleanses one deep within from moral/spiritual defilement so as to stand before the throne of a holy God (7:9, 10, 14, 15). It justifies and releases us from all condemnation before God and the accusing voice of Satan and/or conscience (12:10, 11; cf. Rom 8:1, 31-34).

55 Ellen White notes that “One thing will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation—that the connection between God and His people is close and decided” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers, 114.)

56 Naugle, Worldview: The History of a Concept, xx.
\textit{Lichtenwalter: Worldview Transformation and Mission}

Any worldview has a profound existential nature.\footnote{Ibid., 105.} In order for a worldview to be transformed, whatever challenges it must become more than abstract ideas or compelling truths about reality. It must touch the inner self.

It is a truism that unless one completely rejects their worldview, they will never fully accept another. Only when one either questions or thoroughly rejects one worldview will they be able to be open to another. Syncretism implies a modifying of worldviews or merging of worldviews because they somehow can accommodate one another or the individual has some dissonance within them. Revelation does not allow such syncretism. And so the question regarding Revelation’s worldview vision: What causes someone to altogether reject one worldview for another? If Revelation posits worldviews in conflict and the eternal gospel’s worldview set in the context of “the testimony of Jesus” as the worldview of choice, how does it critique, challenge, and change an individual’s earthly worldview, and thus their life? What is it that would cause one to make a clean break with an earthly worldview in order to accept one forged by “the testimony of Jesus”?

\textbf{The Lamb’s Book of Life}

To answer this question there is need to return to our above discussion of “those who dwell on the earth.” The most significant statement in Revelation about “those who dwell on the earth” is not that they follow the beast and worship him, not that they shed the blood of saints and prophets, nor that they cannot see beyond the seen, but rather that their names have not been written in the Lamb’s Book of Life (13:8; 17:8; cf. 21:27; 20:15):\footnote{Osborne, \textit{Revelation}, 502.} “All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (13:8); “And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come” (17:8). Twice Revelation asserts this characteristic of “those who dwell on the earth.” Interestingly, the grammar switches from the plural “those that inhabit the earth” to the
singular relative pronoun ὁ (ὥ ὁ γέρται τὸ ἄνομον αὐτοῦ) to stress that “not one single person” among those who dwell on the earth is named in the Lamb’s Book of Life.59

Revelation’s Book of Life is specifically identified as “the Lamb’s book of life” (13:8; 21:27). Here the sacrificial death and substitutionary work of Christ on the Cross is clearly in view. As such the death of Jesus Christ on Cross has not only made the Book of Life possible but the entry of each name within that book as well. There is little doubt that the substitutionary death of Christ has something to do with the meaning of the Book of life. Why is this? What does it suggest?

While “those who dwell on the earth” do not have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, God’s Remnant people who hold to the testimony of Jesus do. This is evidenced in how they overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their personal testimony regarding His sacrifice on their behalf (12:11). It is also evidenced in Revelation’s intentional paralleling of the Remnant in 12:17 with the vision of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mt. Zion and the Three Angels Messages with its focus on the eternal Gospel, unmixed judgment of the lost in the presence of the Lamb, and dying in the Lord (14:1-13).60 It is here that the link between worldview transformation and conversion in Revelation is the clearest. In Revelation 14:1-5 John gives another glimpse of those spoken of in 12:17. We can only briefly relate some of the details here, but the overarching narrative is clear.61

59 Ibid. In 17:8 the relative pronoun is plural, i.e., ὧν ὁ γέρται τὸ ἄνομον yet the verb (been written) and the noun (name) are both singular.

60 As one follows the narrative and temporal zigzags and recapitulations of Revelation chapters 12-14 a parallel between the Remnant of the woman’s seed in 12:17 and the 144,000 and the Three Angels Messages of 14:1-13. These chapters include apocalyptic prophetic sequence textual markers which enable us to locate various parts of the narrative in history in relation to the Cross of Christ and end times. See Jon Paulien, “The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic--Part Two,” Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006).

61 Rev 13-14 as a unit: (A) I saw – 13:1-10, here is the patience 13:10; (B) I saw – 13:11-18, here is wisdom 13:18; (3) I saw – 14:1 . . . I saw – 14:6 . . . here is 14:12 . . . this pattern shows that 144,000 is part of the 3AM.
Renewed Minds and Transformation

Revelation 14:1 opens with a vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion and the 144,000 standing with him. That little preposition “with” speaks volumes (cf. 17:14). It speaks of relationship, identity, and moral/spiritual orientation. Then the writer asserts that this 144,000 have the Father’s name and the Lamb’s name in their forehead (14:1). Those acquainted with biblical imagery of both name and forehead understand that Revelation is again speaking of worldview—i.e., how the 144,000 think and feel, what they value and would do, what they are deep down within their inner private world of character and being. Here is it clear that the redeemed remnant have what the apostle Paul would term “the mind of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5-8). They have the mind of God. They are transformed by the renewing of their minds. The 144,000 both see, experience, and express what God values. This suggests radical worldview transformation in keeping with the biblical principle that one is “transformed by the renewing of their mind” (cf. Rom 12:2).

Furthermore, the text provides some incredible information about these 144,000 who are with the Lamb:
(1) twice it asserts that they are purchased from the earth (14:3, 4);
(2) they consciously disassociate themselves from religio/cultural elements inconsistent with their identity and calling, i.e., worldview, they understand who they are and who they are to be (14:4);
(3) they follow the Lamb wherever He goes (14:4), which in Revelation is the way of self-sacrificing death to self in order to have the moral spiritual authority to win souls for the kingdom of heaven;
(4) their moral life is in harmony with the moral realities of Revelation’s worldview, i.e., there is no lie in their mouth, they are blameless (14:5);
(5) as first-fruits of a larger harvest they personally experience the realities of the eternal gospel before they can proclaim it with saving influence and power (14:4).

There is little doubt here that worldview transformation and the personal experience of redemption overlap in the context of what it means to be with the Lamb (14:1; 17:14; cf. 1:5, 6; 5:9-10).

Washing One’s Robes

Revelation provides two complementary views of the 144,000. One is found in the context of the question of how one is able to stand when
Jesus returns, i.e., how is one saved, while the other is in the context of transformed character and life.

In chapter seven, John hears that the 144,000 are sealed in their forehead (7:1-4). But in chapter 14, He sees part, at least, of what that sealing entails— the names of the Father and Lamb, thinking like God and the Lamb, being like God and the Lamb, moral spiritual orientation rooted in God and the Lamb. Back in chapter 7 one learns how John hears 144,000 are sealed, and yet he sees an innumerable multitude who are clothed in white robes washed in the Lamb’s blood: “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14).

The interpretive principle of how what John sees in vision interprets and or complements what he hears in vision suggests that the seal of God on the forehead and the washing of one’s robes white in the blood of the Lamb are two ways of looking at the same moral spiritual reality. For sure, in chapter 7 washing one’s robes white in the blood of the Lamb interprets what it means to be sealed of God in the forehead. Together the two images answer the pregnant question of the sixth seal, “Who is able to stand?” (6:17). The only way one is able to stand when Jesus returns is to have washed one’s robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). This is what it means to be with the Lamb and share his victory (17:14; cf. 13:8; 12:11).

In chapter 14 such sealing is symbolized as having the Father’s name and the Lamb’s name in the forehead, which is linked twice to the existential

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62 The key to John’s vision of the 144,000 (7:1-4) is to recognize the contrast between what he hears (7:4) and what he sees (7:9, 10). In Revelation, John often hears things and then sees what he hears which most often is something radically different from what is heard. The pattern of hearing and seeing is a significant interpretive literary element within the book: “I John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and say, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things” (22:8). John hears a trumpet, but sees the living Christ (1:10-13). He hears that the Lion from the tribe of Judah overcame, but sees a slain Lamb instead (5:5, 6). He hears of a prostitute sitting on many waters, but sees her riding on a scarlet colored beast (17:1-5). He hears of the Lambs Bride and sees a holy city (19:6-9; 21:1-5). He hears that a 144,000 are sealed but sees an innumerable multitude (7:4, 9-10). What John sees interprets what he hears. What John both hears and sees are to angles of the same reality. Same entity, different angle, different insight. Together they bring fullness of perspective and understanding. See Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, 74; Beale, The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, 424-425; Resseguie, The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary, 136-140.
reality of Christ’s redemptive work of being purchased from the earth (14:3, 4)—via the blood of the Lamb according to Rev 5:9-10, cf. 1:5-6.63

This washing of one’s robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb is an incredible existential reality and speaks to the heart of Revelation’s worldview transformation (7:14, 15). As garments in Revelation symbolize character and one’s very self and inner private world, such imagery of washing one’s robes in the blood of the Lamb suggests the immersing of one’s very self into the substitutionary merits of Christ’s blood. Worldview is primarily the work of the heart in its essential operation, thereby defining the person, and supplying the fundamental assumptions upon which life is based.64 The biblical worldview “entails God’s gracious redemption that delivers the hearts of man and women from idolatry and false views of life engendered by satanic deception and the blindness of sin, and enables them through faith in Jesus Christ to come to a knowledge of God and the truth about his creation and all aspects of reality.”65

But how does that happen? What nudges one toward that kind of experience?

**The Lamb That Was Slain**

Revelation’s vision of worldview transformation suggests that it is experienced in response to the self-giving and self-sacrifice of the slain Lamb: “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth’” (5:9, 10; cf. 1:5, 6; 17:14). There is a new standing before

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63 The reader should note the distinction, yet correspondence and overlap, between the biblical reality of gospel sealing which is experienced at conversion when one receives Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord on the one hand (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; cf. John 3:16-21; 2 Timothy 2:19; Rev. 9:4), and on the other hand that of apocalyptic sealing which is an experience of eschatological preservation of gospel truth which is deepened both intellectually and experientially in the context of the end-time crisis (7:1-4; 17:14; 22:11-15; Cf. Ezek 9:3-11).


65 Ibid., 260.

Also, those who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are for that very reason of being washed, “before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple” (7:15). The nations are reconciled (purchased) to God and become a new reconciled people (a kingdom) with the Lamb’s blood (5:9, 10; 1:5, 6; cf. 17:14; 12:11). The Lamb’s blood is the only way to overcome (12:11). And some will sacrifice their lives because the love the Lamb who was slain for them even more than their own lives (12:11). This implies incredible worldview transformation—i.e., the adjustment of values, priorities, and the vision of one’s self in relation to them. The ultimate value is no longer the preservation of one’s life, it is in honoring and following the Lamb who was slain (5:12; 14:4; 17:14).

The slain, resurrected, exalted Lamb—who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, what He will do, what He can do—is central to the Three Angels’ Message in particular and Rev 12-14 as a whole. In chapter 12 there is the Lamb who overcomes and through whose blood the believer overcomes and no longer places priority on their own life here on earth (12:7-12). In chapter 13 there is the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (13:8). In chapter 14, the Lamb stands in midst of 144,000 and leads His redeemed whom He has purchased (14:1-5). Within the Three Angels’ Messages itself, one finds the Lamb presiding personally over the judgment of the lost who will experienced the unmixed wrath of God in the Lamb’s very presence (14:6-13). The Lamb is the center in chapter 12. The Lamb is center in chapter 13. The Lamb is center in chapter 14.

This eternal gospel thread unfolding the very heart of the testimony of Jesus runs through each of the Three Angels’ Messages. The Three Angels’ Message is the gospel—not just the first. We are told “The Third Angel’s Message must be presented as the only hope for the salvation of a perishing world.” In it Jesus is lifted up as center and as man’s only hope. Jesus promised, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). The cross of Christ alone can break through

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66 Ellen G. White, Evangelism, 196.
worldviews and bring worldview transformation resulting in one having “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:1-16).

Throughout the book, Revelation assumes a human response to this incredible hope—repent, come, receive, wash, keep. The biblical notion of repentance implies a change of direction. Coming implies one has been elsewhere. Receiving implies a welcoming and acceptance, etc. There are those who refuse to repent (2:21; 9:20; 16:9, 11). And there are those who strongly desire what God offers and willingly wash their robes in the Lamb’s blood and follow God’s new vision of life (22:17, 14; 7:14; 12:17; 14:12). Those who dwell on the earth both resist the witness of Scripture and refuse to atoning merits of the Lamb’s blood (11:10; 13:8; 17:8). In following their worldview, they earth drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (14:10).

Revelation tells of a moment when those who worship the beast and His image or receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand “will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (14:9, 10). One wonders what this imagery means: Why moral beings are to receive judgment and be tormented in full view of other moral beings—holy angels and the Lamb. Is this right? Just? Is this how a loving God does it? Will these holy angels and the Lamb take some kind of ghoulish delight on that dreadful day? Is this something they are looking forward to seeing? Or for some reason, “must” see?

We cannot help but wonder, is it the fire and brimstone that torments in the final phase of judgment, or will it be the presence of holy angels and the presence of the Lamb that torment? Could it be that it is the sense of love scorned (grace turned down) that torments most? Could it be that it is the soul shocking reality that one has been given every warning, every invitation, every opportunity, every provision to be saved, but they chose otherwise, kept putting it off, or just didn’t get around to knowing about Jesus and all He did for them? To die in the presence of holy angels who did everything possible to help you come to the Lamb (Heb. 2:14). To die in the presence of the Lamb who was slain in your behalf and whose own soul cried out in inconsolable abandonment in your stead (even as yours does now) must be the most dispiriting insight any soul could ever
experience. Even as the lost envisioned here drink the bitter dregs of final judgment and die the “second death” the Lamb is there to say, “This is not what I wanted, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love and have drawn you with lovingkindness’ but you have been ‘unwilling to come to me so that you may have life’ (Jn 5:40; Jer 31:3).” “You didn’t come to Me.” Even now as they die they do so knowing there was a slain Lamb whose blood could have released them from this very moment. Nothing will be more horrifying to the lost soul than to know they didn’t need to die. That the very source of life is even now before them, but it is too late.

This is the bottom line of Revelation’s worldview—the sense of (or the absence of the sense of) sin and personal inadequacy along with the need of a Savior from sin.

Earlier in Revelation John himself falls down before the glorified living Lamb of God (1:17). John is a microcosm of the Church and every human being who is confronted with self and their need in relation to God who reveals Himself. He is a brother of his hearers who shares with them a threefold treasure: “the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus” (1:9; cf. 14:12). He is on Patmos because of the “word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9, italics mine). His experience with Jesus whose eyes are like a flame of fire and face as the sun shining in its fullness is paradigmatic, suggesting that one can share John’s existential experience when beholding the eternal Christ (1:14, 16; 2:18). That when one sees the risen, majestic living Christ, they see within, they see themselves. For the radiance and the purity of Son of Man is overwhelming. Jesus radiates heat and light as the holy One of God who searches the mind and hearts (2:18, 23). That whenever we see God we see something about ourselves. That whenever God reveals Himself, He reveals something of ourselves. John’s response mirrors this internal worldview of heart (cf. Dan 10:9-16; Isa 6:1-5; Ezek 1:26-2:1; 3:22-23; Acts 9:4). John also experiences the incredible personal touch of Christ who sets him on his feet and sends him into the world to declare what he has seen and heart (1:17-19; cf. Ezek 2:1-3; 3:24; Isa 6:6, 7). This vision of self in relation to Christ is linked to revelation’s geography of the heart and transforming mission in the world.

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Revelation affirms how Christ’s self-giving and self-sacrifice has moral power to break down barriers between God and man and man and man. The death of Christ breaks down the wall of hostility that separates peoples. It enables an entirely new kingdom of people from every people group (5:9-10). In Christ we become one people—a new people (1:5, 6; 5:9-10; cf. Eph. 2:14-18). This is worldview transformation on both the individual and people-group levels.

The imagery of John commissioned to write or the 144,000 in relation to Three Angels’ Messages implies the reality that those proclaiming the eternal gospel must themselves taste of its hope, saving power, and be transformed (1:19; 14:1-5). And it is the patience of the saints amidst the worlds turmoil that gives holy power and evidence of such transforming power (14:12, 13; 11:11-13).

Again, what motivates one’s yielding to the transforming of worldview? “‘I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.’” (7:14, 15). While the imagery of Revelation 7 is proleptic of the redeemed rendering God willing obedience throughout eternity because of their redemption through Christ’s blood, the principle has temporal implications for today. It’s a worldview, which has to do with owning Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior with all the existential moral and spiritual implications such owning of Christ entail.68

These are the life transforming issues and implications that are communicated through the three elements of worldview evident in Revelation: the narrative component, the rational component, and the ritual component.69

As Revelation’s imagery of nations, people groups, languages, tribes/clans, social status and roles imply the reality of integrating culture, which mirrors, expresses, and fosters the unique characteristics of a given

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68 See Rodríguez, The “Testimony of Jesus” in the Writings of Ellen G. White, 234-235.
society. As they assume too, worldview(s), which a given culture likewise mirrors, expresses, and fosters within that particular society. As the delineation of roles and societal standing (“small and great,” “poor and rich,” “free and slave,” kings, commanders, noblemen, etc.) suggest the existence of disparate worldviews on both the structural level and existential perception/experience of individuals within society. So also Revelation asserts the power of the eternal gospel to critique, challenge, and change individuals within those very contexts (14:6; 5:9-10; 7:9-10).

The heart of the gospel’s scope and critique ultimately touches the geography of the heart—where worldview is both held and hoped in. The gospel’s appeal is for the heart to accept a vision not just of the world and culture, but of one’s own self—before God, before one’s own face, before others, and in relation to the world. This is the level on which the proclamation of the gospel must go forth.

As Naugle asserts, “Since nothing could be of greater final importance than the way human beings understand God, themselves, the cosmos, and their place in it, it is not surprising that a worldview warfare is at the heart of the conflict between the powers of good and evil.” 70 Nor should it be surprising that the eternal gospel in the context of the Three Angels Messages is integral to that conflict between the powers of good and evil as it asserts a biblically informed worldview even as it engages the people of the world in their respective cultures and integrating worldviews. At bottom Revelation posits a clash of worldviews and resultant culture—that of those who dwell on the earth and that of those who ... hold the testimony of Jesus. It is the Lamb whose dominance pervades the book Who wields the greatest power. A moral power rooted in his Cross and strong enough to break through serpentine presuppositions of heart and mind and transform any worldview and the cultural forms and behaviors it engenders within one’s heart (5:6-10; 12:10-11; cf. John 12:24, 32, 33; Rom 2:4)

V. Implications for Adventist Missions

This study has explored how a worldview (a life view) is formed, its encapsulating components, and to what extent its transformation toward a biblically informed vision is a process dependent upon the gracious activity

70 Naugle, Worldview: The History of a Concept.
of a sovereign God through the preaching of the eternal gospel.\textsuperscript{71} At bottom the gospel’s scope and critique ultimately touches the geography of the heart —where worldview is both held and hoped in—with the truth of Christ’s substitutionary death and the power of His blood to meet the soul’s deepest questions and need. It is evident that Revelation casts as worldview and envisions worldview engagement, critique, and transformation as fundamental issues in the age-long (but not eternal) great controversy between Christ and Satan. In doing so, Revelation speaks to genuine conversion as opposed to mere head knowledge (doctrinal or theological) and behavioral change. Worldview transformation is at the heart of its narrative, theology, and ritual.

The implications for Adventist mission are manifold:
1. There is need to understand the importance of worldview in mission—not just the behavioral or doctrinal matters.
2. There is need to take seriously the reality that those we serve live and think and move within a given worldview.
3. There is need to enter another’s worldview deep enough to understand its philosophical and existential underpinnings. Why do people cling to their worldview? What makes them tick? Where is the dissonance and pain?
4. There is need to articulate the biblical worldview in a positive non-judgmental way, and yet in a way which allows for its challenge and critique.
5. There is need to let the gospel via the Holy Spirit bring conviction on the deeper level of self and conscience.
6. There is need to articulate how culture reflects worldview and show how the ritual (cultural) components of worldview both expresses and influences worldview. This is key for a younger generation.
7. There is need to tell the biblical story in an understandable way using vocabulary and imagery familiar to individuals within their given culture. Worldview narrative casts moral vision if articulated properly.
8. There is need to understand the existential level of worldview and the realities of conversion within that perspective.
9. There is need for those proclaiming the gospel to envision conversion and to enable those to whom it is preached to envision conversion as well.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 105.
10. There is need for those proclaiming the gospel to be able to articulate the whole worldview phenomenon with the desired transformation—story, theology, ritual, and conversion.

11. There is need for a Theocentric/Christocentric reading of Scripture, which focuses on God and the person and work of His Son Jesus on the cross and how the fullness of the atoning death of Christ reaches us and is made available to every human being through history and within the individual life. We are to lift up the Lamb who alone transforms worldview.

12. There is need to understand how conversion is the true sign of worldview paradigm shift.

“And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people.”

–Revelation 14:6

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72 Rather than anthropocentric reading which often focuses on ideas and behavior rather than the realities of the heart in relation to God who alone is holy.
Many Christians are somewhat skeptical when it comes to the Book of Revelation. They have reservations against the last book of the Bible, because it is not important to them to deal with eschatological issues and the second coming of Christ or they are frightened by the “horror scenarios” of the Apocalypse. In addition, the impression may be prevalent that Revelation does not have much to do with Jesus, and it is concluded that, therefore, the book is not very crucial.

The Book of Revelation is a revelation that comes from Jesus (Rev 1:1). Jesus is the revealer, but by revealing prophecies about “the things which must soon take place” indirectly or even directly, Jesus also reveals God the Father’s and his own nature and functions. For instance, by introducing himself to the seven churches in Asia Minor, he makes known his character and some of his functions. Through the Book of Revelation, humanity gets a better picture of Jesus and God the Father, what the

Godhead is doing for them, and how the plan of salvation will succeed. Therefore, one would do well to read the book not only from the perspectives of Christian history or an end time scenario, but the focus should also be Christ-centered and God-centered.

This article attempts to gain some insights into the Christology of Revelation. Christology has been understood differently. While some take it as “the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ” or “the study of Jesus’ self-understanding and of the titles, concepts, and conceptual patterns in which the NT church expressed its faith in him,” others limit it to the church’s theological reflection on the nature of Christ in the centuries following the period of the early church. The following quotation may also point in this direction: “Christology. The study of the Person of Christ, and in particular of the union in Him of the divine and human natures, and of His significance for Christian faith.” This study follows the first definition, not limiting itself to systematic theology. Then the questions would be: What can be learned from John’s Apocalypse about Jesus Christ? How does the book challenge its readers and hearers to relate to Jesus and follow him? In spite of all the frightening events and developments today, and the evil powers portrayed in the Book of Revelation, one should not lose sight of the Lord.

This article is subdivided into three parts. The first part will take a look at designations and symbols used in Revelation to describe Jesus. It will proceed to an overview of Jesus in Revelation. Since the book highlights

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{ W. A. Elwell, and P. W. Comfort, Tyndale Bible Dictionary, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 201), 266.}\]


\[\text{\textsuperscript{4}}\text{ Allen C. Myers, The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 211, suggests: “Christology. The theological understanding of Jesus Christ, specifically concerning his personhood (as distinguished from the doctrine of the atonement which describes Christ’s work of redemption). Though the New Testament portrays Jesus Christ in various ways, and the apostolic preaching may be termed christocentric (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:2), neither Christ’s own self-revelation nor his followers’ preaching about him should be considered christological, for the Church’s reflection on the nature of the person of Jesus Christ did not arise until the first centuries of the early church.”}\]

Jesus as a divine being, the second part will discuss the issue of Christ’s divinity. The third part will focus on the Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse and will summarize important subject matters.

I. Designations and Symbols Used for Jesus in Revelation

1. The Different Names and Depictions of Jesus

The Book of Revelation contains a rich and distinctive Christology. In its various parts and visions Jesus is introduced with approximately thirty different names, titles, and images. The readers of the Apocalypse are not only informed about his character and nature but also about his work. Jesus is portrayed as: (1) Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1, 2, 5), (2) Jesus (Rev 1:9, 9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10,10; 20:4; 22:16), (3) Christ (Rev 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6), (4) the firstborn of the dead (Rev 1:5), (5) the faithful witness (Rev 1:5) / the faithful and true witness (Rev 3:14) / the Faithful and True (Rev 19:11), (6) the ruler of the kings on earth (Rev 1:5), (7) the one like a son of man (Rev 1:13; 14:14), (8) the first and the last (and the living one) (Rev 1:17-18; 2:8; 22:13), (9) the Son of God (Rev 2:18), (10) the holy and true one (Rev 3:7), (11) the Amen (Rev 3:14), (12) the beginning/ruler of God’s creation (Rev 3:14), (13) the Lion (Rev 5:5), (14) the root of David (from Judah) (Rev 5:5; 22:6), (15) the Lamb (Rev 5:6, 8, 12-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-11, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14, 14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22-23, 27; 22:1, 3), (16) the rider on the white horse (Rev 6:2; 19:11-16), (17) the (strong) angel (Rev 8, 3-5; 10:1-3), (18) the Lord (Rev 11:8), (19) the male child (Rev 12:5, 13), (20) Michael (Rev 12:7-9), (21) the first among the kings from the east (Rev 16:12), (22) the Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev 17:14; 19:16), (23) the Word of God (Rev 19:13), (24) the Alpha and Omega (Rev 22:13), (25) the beginning and the end (Rev 22:13), (26) the bright morning star (Rev 22:16), and (27) the Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20-21). Other images such as shepherd (Rev 7:17), thief (Rev 16:15), and bride groom (Rev 19:7) could be added. However, they seem to be secondary images only.

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6 The one like a son of man in Rev 1 wears a long garment with a golden sash which reminds one of the garments of priests. His head, hair, eyes, feet, and voice are described with majestic images. In his hand he holds the seven stars. A sharp, two-edged sword comes out of his mouth, and his face shines like the sun.

7 Either they are mentioned only indirectly, appear in verbal form and are dependent on other images, or they are found in a comparison being introduced with the term “like.”
This imagery and these designations used for Jesus describe his multifaceted nature and ministry, i.e., his various functions as a divine-human being. While John describes Jesus as both human and divine, he does not discuss how this is possible. It is enough for him to testify to this mystery and use many different designations to point to it.

It is not unique that the Apocalypse uses different descriptions and/or symbols for certain beings. God the Father is introduced by approximately twelve different titles. Satan appears, for instance, as the dragon, serpent, devil (Rev 12:9), fallen star, the angel of the abyss and Abaddon and Apollyon (Rev 9:1, 11). The beast coming out of the earth (Rev 13:11) appears later as the false prophet (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). However, the sheer number of designations applied to Jesus surpasses those of other beings. A reason for this phenomenon may be—as already pointed out—that Jesus has to be described as both, a human and a divine being. In Revelation he is also depicted as the one who has ransomed or purchased his people (Rev 5:9 and indirectly 14:3-4). Furthermore, he is quite active in the Apocalypse. Therefore, his ministry may demand more than one or two designations.

2. Disputed Images of Jesus

Most of the names, titles, and depictions of Jesus mentioned above clearly refer to Jesus. However, in the case of some of them opinions are divided. These include the rider on the white horse in Rev 6, the angel of Rev 8a, the angel of Rev 10a, Michael, and the kings from the east. This article assumes that they also describe Jesus.

(1) The Rider on the White Horse. This rider appears in Rev 6:2 and 19:11-16. The description of the rider in Rev 19 resembles the description of the one like a son of man in Rev 1b. His eyes, his head, his name, and his garment are depicted. A sharp sword
comes out of his mouth. In addition he rules with the iron rod and treads the wine press of the divine wrath (cf. Rev 12:5 and Ps 2:9). The term “word of God” creates associations with John 1:1-3, 14 and 1 John 1:1-3. The title “King of kings” refers back to Rev 17:14 and reminds the reader of Rev 1:5. The rider on the white horse in Rev 19 is without doubt Jesus. In spite of the similarity with Rev 1b the aspect of judgment is more articulate in Rev 19. The rider on the white horse in Rev 6 should also be Jesus. This rider receives positive marks only and is distinguished from the other riders. So Jesus is found at the beginning of the Christian era, throughout history, and at its end. He is victorious and so are those with him.

(2) The Angels in Rev 8 and 10. The angel in Rev 8:3-5 seems to be a kind of mediator, offering the prayers of the saints on the golden altar in heaven. This fact may point to Jesus (Rom 8:34; 1 John 2:1). Other expositors are opposed to such an identification. Oftentimes the reason is that they assume Jesus could not be identified with an angel. It is also suggested that angels in Revelation are inferior to Jesus Christ which is generally true, but John uses angels in various and creative ways—most likely also

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describing humans.\textsuperscript{13} We should not limit his multifaceted and innovative approach. However, it is quite possible that John refers back to the OT in which the angel of the Lord is a divine person (cf. Exod 3:2-4). Probably the strong angel of Rev 10 is also Jesus. He is clothed with a cloud. A rainbow surrounds his head. His face shines like the sun, and his feet resemble pillars of fire. The last two characteristics remind the audience of Jesus in Rev 1b. The cloud was mentioned in Rev 1:7 in connection with Jesus, while the rainbow in Rev 4:3 is linked to the throne of God. Furthermore, the angel resembles the heavenly being of Dan 10-12. Beale states that the angel has divine attributes and therefore is either Christ or the angel of the Lord,\textsuperscript{14} who again would be Jesus.\textsuperscript{15} Other scholars admit the similarity with Rev 1b, but avoid identifying the angel with Jesus.\textsuperscript{16}

(3) Michael. When investigating Michael in Scripture (Rev 12:7) the impression is created that this being is also Jesus. In Jude 1:9 Michael is called archangel. Another archangel is unknown to the NT. At his second coming, Jesus returns with the voice of the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{13} Cf. Kistemaker, 102-103. Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, \textit{The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation}, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 203 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 211, dealing especially with Rev 19 comes to the following conclusion: “The resulting contradiction between Christ’s equal status with (A) God and his superiority over angels and (B) his portrait which draws on angelic categories could be best explained on basis of a deliberately created model of Christology, defining Christ as a divine being who remains angelic solely in his description in order to appeal to a certain readership which held some respect for angelic beings. Nevertheless, the angelic features in Christology serve to enhance, and not detract from, Christ’s status.”

\footnote{14} Beale, 522: “If he is an angel, he is an extraordinary one, since he is described in a majestic way, unlike any other angel in the Book. He is given attributes that are given only to God in the OT or to God or Christ in Revelation. Therefore this heavenly being is either the divine Christ himself or the divine angel of Yahweh . . .” Beale discusses the angel extensively on pages 522-526. Cf. Doukhan, 91; and Nichol, 7:797.

\footnote{15} Cf. Beale, 525.

\footnote{16} So Kistemaker, 308-309; Mounce, 201-202; and Osborn, 393. Mounce admits: “The phrases by which he is described are elsewhere used of deity” (201).
\end{footnotes}
archangel (1 Thess 4:16). Jesus is also the arch-shepherd (1 Pet 5:4).\(^{17}\)

(4)  
*The Kings from the East.* The kings from the east (Rev 16:12) are understood differently. Preterists oftentimes suggest them to be the Parthians.\(^{18}\) Rissi understands the kings of the earth and the kings from the east as humans and as a growing opposition of the world powers against all that is divine.\(^{19}\) However, the drying up of the Euphrates River should not be connected to Egypt, as done by a number of interpreters, but to Babylon, because the Euphrates River is the river of Babylon. Morris thinks that John may have in mind the drying up of the Euphrates River by the Persian king Cyrus as reported by Herodotus.\(^{20}\) Nestle-Aland correctly notes an allusion to Isa 44:27 and Jer 50:38; 51:36.\(^{21}\) Therefore, we are not left with the historian Herodotus only when it comes to the drying up of the Euphrates River. Biblical prophecy had already pointed out such an event. In addition, scholars have stressed that Rev

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16:12-16 is described in more detail in Rev 17-19. The sixth plague contains (1) the different parts of Babylon, (2) the kings of the earth, and (3) the kings from the east. In Rev 17 we meet (1) harlot Babylon, (2) her allies, namely the beast and ten kings which will turn against her, and (3) Jesus, the King of kings, and his elect. In Rev 19b the prediction concerning Armageddon is being fulfilled. (1) Parts of Babylon as well as (2) the kings of the earth with their armies are mentioned. (3) Jesus as the rider on the white horse appears with his heavenly army. The many crowns on his head point to him as the King of kings. As such he is reintroduced in verse 16. In all three passages the same entities seem to occur and be paralleled. The kings from the east should, therefore, not be identified with the kings of the earth but with Jesus and those who belong to him.

In the sixth plague typology appears. As Cyrus, the type, followed by his army dried up the Euphrates river, conquered Babylon, and freed God’s people which were held in captivity, so Jesus, the antitype, will conquer end time Babylon and rescue his people (Isa 44:24-45:4). Both are called the anointed/Messiah. In Matt 24:27-31 Christ’s second coming is associated with the east. Therefore, it seems to be legitimate to connect the kings from the east with Jesus.

3. General Observations

After the short discussion of the disputed descriptions for Jesus, we return to all of them. A certain number of the designations used for Jesus

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emphasize more specifically his human nature such as “Lamb,” “male child,” and “firstborn of the dead.” Many other designations point to Christ’s divine nature. In Revelation some are used for both God the Father and Jesus. They also emphasize Jesus’ divine nature. Others describe Jesus’ authority and his functions.

We will now look at standard designations of Jesus as found in Revelation and the rest of the NT, continue with designations of Jesus found in Revelation but seldom in the NT, and finally discuss unique designations of Jesus in the Apocalypse.

a. Standard Designations for Jesus in the NT

Some designations of Jesus are of a more general nature and occur also in other parts of the NT. They include the names and titles “Jesus,” “Christ,” “Jesus Christ,” “Son of man,” “Son of God,” “Lord,” and “Lord Jesus.” Reymond notices that

one should not be surprised to find its Christology to be more “marvelous,” if not more “other-worldly,” than elsewhere in the New Testament. But this is not to suggest that its representation of Christ differs in any essential way from the Christology of Christ himself or of Paul, or of the Synoptic Evangelists, or of the writers of the General Epistles, or of that of the rest of the Johannine corpus. But it must be acknowledged that its Christology is more consistently “advanced,” to use Beasley-Murray’s term, in that it portrays Christ almost singularly from the perspective of his state of exaltation. The customary names and titles for Jesus are still present . . . .24

These standard designations are important for the audience. They allow people to relate to the Jesus that they know through these names and titles and prepare them to recognize him later in the unique designations.

(1) **Jesus Christ.** The title “Jesus Christ/Messiah/the anointed one” is found in the very first verses of Revelation. However, it occurs also at the end of the Gospel of John (John 20:30-31): “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may

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believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Revelation makes it clear from the beginning that Jesus is the Messiah, the incarnate, crucified, and risen Savior. His descent from David is stressed twice (the root of David and the descendant of David—Rev 5:5; 22:16). In the last place where the designation “Jesus Christ” is employed, namely in Rev 1:5, it appears in a Trinitarian formula: “Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ . . . .” Thus, from the beginning Revelation associates Jesus with God. Nevertheless, John does not abandon monotheism. It is God only who should be worshiped (Rev 19:10; 22:9).

The name “Jesus” alone is found in the first chapter of the Apocalypse (Rev 1:9), but occurs throughout the book. The name “Christ” is used in chapters 11, 12, and 20. In all texts an intimate relationship with God the Father is given. “Christ”—whether by itself or in connection with “Jesus”—occurs seven times in Revelation. This may not be a coincidence.

(2) Lord and King. In the NT the term “Lord,” kyrios, is normally used for Jesus. In OT quotations it replaces the divine name Yahweh. However in Revelation, the “Lord” is usually God the Father (e.g., Rev 1:8; 15:4). In some texts it is not easy to know whether the term refers to the Father or the Son (e.g., Rev 11:4; 14:13). Yet there are also texts in which it clearly points to Jesus (Rev 11:8). Revelation ends with calling Jesus “the Lord Jesus.” Therefore, in Revelation God the Father as well as Jesus are the Lord. Jesus is declared to be equal with the Father.

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25 Cf. Osborne, 52.
26 In Revelation the series of seven are obvious. However, in addition to the well-known series of the seven churches, seals, trumpets, and plagues others are found, for instance, the seven beatitudes. The sevenfold use of the title “Christ” and the 14 uses of the name “Jesus” (two times seven) may not be mere coincidence. They may point to fullness and completion and mark Revelation as a Christological work. The numbers of those two designations are surpassed by the image of the Lamb only.
In Rev 1:5 Jesus was already called “Lord/ruler/prince (archōn) of the kings of the earth.” Thereby John pointed out Jesus’ exalted position. Twice a similar title stresses Jesus’ grandeur and power, “Lord of lords (kyrios kyríōn) and “King of kings” (Rev 17:14; 19:16). The expressions “King of kings” and “Lord of lords” appear together only in the just mentioned texts. They may be synonymous to some extent. Interestingly, in Rev 17 “Lord of lords” comes first, while in chapter 19 “King of kings” is first. According to Revelation Jesus exercises universal power. He, who as the Lamb appears to be weak and bruised, is not only victorious; he is truly the Lord and King. All other kings including the Roman emperor are nothing if compared to him. All must bow their knees before him. Together with his army and the kings from the east he brings Babylon to an end. Jesus’ kingly function is clearly seen in the description of him as the male child and the rider on the white horse reigning with an iron scepter and defeating the enemies of God’s people.

(3) Son of Man and Son of God. In Revelation Jesus is one like a Son of Man (Rev 1:13; 14:14). During his life on earth Jesus used the title Son of Man repeatedly when talking about himself. The first time it is found is in Matt 8:20. The one like a Son of Man is the heavenly being of Dan 7:13, who in the context of the pre-advent judgment comes to the throne of God and receives power and an eternal kingdom over all nations. According to Matt 9:6 the Son of Man has power to forgive sins. In Rev 1, preexistence, death, resurrection, and eternal existence of the one like a Son of Man are described; yet also his appearance. His hair, white as wool, is the hair of the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:9. The dignity and highness of this being are emphasized. He possesses the characteristics of God. In Rev 14 the coming Lord is called “the One like a Son of Man.” He brings about the harvest of the world. The title Son of

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28 Dan Lioy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, Studies in Biblical Literature 58 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003), 166, writes: “While the description of the exalted Savior resembles supernatural epiphanes . . . , the Messiah is unveiled in the Apocalypse as the divine, eschatological Lord.”

Man points to Jesus’ divinity, as Smalley notes: “John’s Christology in the present passage . . . is consistently high. The Son of man figure seems to merge with God.”

The expression “Son of God” is found only once in Revelation (2:18). The eyes like flaming fire and the feet like burnished bronze, describing the Son of God, are characteristics of the Son of Man in Rev 1. The Son of Man and Son of God are the same person. Jesus is found in the Gospels not only as the Son of Man but also as the Son of God. This is also true for the Apocalypse. Again Jesus’ majesty is stressed, but especially his unique relationship with God.

b. Designations which Occur Seldom in the NT

In addition to the designations of Christ found frequently in the NT and in Revelation there are those which occur only seldom in the NT. They include the terms “firstborn of the dead” and “holy and true.”

(1) **The Firstborn of the Dead.** In the NT the term “firstborn” (prôtotokos) is used six times in connection with Jesus. He was Mary’s firstborn son (Luke 2:7), the firstborn among many brothers (Rom 8:29), the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15), the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5), and the firstborn who is worshiped by the angels (Heb 1:6). The firstborn has specific privileges and a specific position. The OT background is Ps 89:20,27. David as the last child of his parents became the firstborn, the highest of the kings on earth. The issue is not birth per se. Jesus was raised from the dead, not born from the dead in the literal sense. Chronologically he was not even the first. Others were raised before him. But he was the first in the sense that all resurrections whether past or future were and are dependent on his resurrection. Without his resurrection there are no other

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30 Smalley, 53.
resurrections. Jesus has primacy. Jesus as the firstborn is the absolute ruler and king of the universe.
However, it is also important to keep in mind that Jesus died as a witness for truth and as a martyr and rose from the dead. B. Kowalski stresses that a close connection exists between Jesus’ resurrection, his love for Christians, and their salvation from sins through his blood. The first text dealing with resurrection in Revelation is connected to salvation and provides the key to understand salvation as portrayed in the Apocalypse. This text paves the way for other texts dealing with and pointing first to Jesus’ resurrection and then to the resurrection of others. Christians are being persecuted and die as martyrs just as Jesus died as a martyr. But, as pointed out by L. Griffith, the resurrection is God’s terror against the terror of the evil powers. These are being robbed of the only power they have, namely the power of death. They are unable to keep the children of God in the realm of death and cannot hinder them to worship God instead of the satanic trinity. At the same time, they themselves are subject to resurrection and judgment.

(2) Holy and True. Jesus introduces himself in Rev 3:7 as the one who is holy and true. Truth is a specific characteristic of God. Isa 65:16 calls God the “God of truth.” In the Gospel of John the term “truth” is associated with Jesus repeatedly (John 1:9, 14; 14:6). In Revelation truth is also an important concept. Self-deception and deception through false teachers and the harlot Babylon are confronted by truth, Jesus, the true and faithful witness, the Amen,

34 Lee Griffith, The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 214, writes: “Indeed, it is resurrection that John identifies as the terror of God . . . arrayed against Beast and Empire . . . Resurrection deprives Empire of its only power, the power of death. Resurrection poses the terrifying possibility that people will give glory to God rather than to the Beast . . . Resurrection is the terror of God insofar as the ‘great and small’ alike awaken to judgment . . . Resurrection as the terror of God pervades the book of Revelation in the figure of the slaughtered Lamb. It is the slaughtered Lamb who conquers. It is this resurrection terror of God that marks the imminent demise of earthly terror.”

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the Holy and True One. Jesus is absolutely reliable and trustworthy, although others are not.

As the Holy One Jesus is not only found in the Apocalypse but also in John 6:69. According to Rev 4:8 God the Father is three times holy. So both, Father and Son, are holy. In Isa 6:3 we hear about God’s holiness. Isa 6:3 is applied to God the Father in Rev 4:8. Interestingly, Isa 6:3 refers also to Jesus, because according to the Gospel of John Isaiah saw Christ’s glory (John 12:41).

The title “Holy and True” does not only emphasize Jesus’ divinity but may also indicate that it is the nature of Christ to be authentic, straightforward, and reliable. Kistemaker points out that “holy” and “true” together appear only in Rev 3:7 and 6:10 and refer to Jesus and God the Father. The same attributes are used for both of them. This means that Jesus is of the same nature as the Father, and therefore he is God.

c. Unique Designations of Jesus in Revelation

Most of the designations of Jesus in Revelation are unique and are not or not directly applied to him in other biblical books. They include “witness,” “ruler,” “the first and the last,” “the lion from the tribe of Judah,” “the Lamb,” “the rider on the white horse,” “the angel,” “the male child,” “Michael,” “the kings from the east,” “the Lord of lords and King of kings,” “the Alpha and Omega,” “the beginning and the end,” and “the morning star.” Some of them have already been discussed. Others will be discussed later. Therefore, we will concentrate on a few of them here.

(1) The Faithful Witness. In the NT various witnesses appear. God is called upon as a witness (Phil 1:8). The believers are witnesses (Heb 12:1). Also Stephen (Acts 22:20) and Paul were witnesses (Acts 26:16). However, apart from Revelation Jesus is not called witness. In Rev 11 two witnesses are killed. They are raised again. Believers and especially Antipas are witnesses (Rev 17:6; 2:13). But most important, Jesus appears as the faithful and true witness (Rev 1:5; 3:14). The term “witness” (martus) has taken on the

35 Cf. Lioy, 129.
36 See Kistemaker, 157.
additional idea of martyrdom. Therefore, other witnesses follow Jesus and imitate his life being willing even to share in his death. Through his life Jesus bore witness to God. Consequently, faithful witness may not only lead to opposition but also to death. Johns states:

John suggests that Jesus’ own faithful witness led to his execution, but that that execution itself proved to be Jesus’ victory over the powers of death. . . the ‘witness’ envisioned in the Apocalypse is not just a ‘passive acceptance of suffering,’ as Adelo Yabro Collins has maintained, but rather the sort of nonviolent resistance to evil in which both Jesus and John engaged. . . Witness in the Apocalypse thus connects the work of the Lamb with the faithful response of the readers/hearers.

(2) The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth. The word “ruler” (archōn) occurs only once in Revelation (Rev 1:5). Outside of Revelation it refers to earthly authorities (Acts 23:5) or Satan, the ruler of this world (John 12:31). In Revelation Jesus is the sovereign Lord.

(3) The Word of God and the Bright Morning Star. The two terms “Word of God” and “bright morning star” are not found next to each other (Rev 19:13; 22:16). However, in 2 Pet 1:19 the prophetic word and the morning star appear in one verse. Yet the vocabulary is not the same as in Revelation, and the prophetic word does not refer to Jesus Christ. In Revelation both designations refer to Jesus. The expression “Word of God” reminds the readers of Revelation of the prologue of John’s Gospel

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37 Cf. Morris, 66.
38 Antipas is being honored by being called just as Jesus, his master, is, “my faithful witness.”
39 Richard Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 72, notes: “The title refers primarily to the witness which Jesus bore to God during his life on earth and to his faithfulness in maintaining his witness even at the cost of his life.” Johns, 173, notes: “Although the ‘witness of Jesus’ for which John was banished to Patmos (1:9) may eventually have been sealed with his martyrdom, it is not synonymous with his martyrdom.”
40 Johns, 172-175.
and the prologue of 1 John. In these texts Jesus is also the word. While in the Gospel of John the preexistence, divinity, and the activity of the word as creator are emphasized, in Rev 19 the word is connected to judgment on the enemies. The morning star may remind one of Jesus as the light in John’s Gospel (John 1:7-9; 8:12), the star of Balaam’s oracle (Num 24:17), and/or the light of Isa 60:1-3. “Jesus is being presented once more as the source of salvation for the nations . . .” Mounce notes: “The star was a familiar symbol in Jewish writings for the expected Davidic king (T. Levi 18:3; T. Judah 24:1). The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn.”

It is also interesting that Rev 22:16 contains one of the five “I am” sayings in the Apocalypse. Rev 1:8 and 21:6 refer to God the Father. Rev 1:17; 2:23, and 22:16 refer to Jesus. Rev 22:13 talks about Jesus and must be translated “I am,” but the copula eimi is not present. The phrase “I am” is a self-designation of God and Jesus (cf. Exod 3:14) and has been suggested to be the source of the divine name Yahweh.

(4) The Root of David. The phrase occurs twice in Revelation (5:5; 22:16). A similar designation is found in Rom 15:12. Paul quotes Isa 11:10 which talks about the root of Jesse, applying the phrase to Jesus. Root of David clearly points to the Messiah, “the ideal king of the line of David who will judge with righteousness and usher in an era of peace.” Fekkes comes to a similar conclusion:

... the title Root of David functions not only as a messianic identification, but emphasizes Christ’s royal authority as the legitimate Davidic heir. Its presence in a vision of Christ’s enthronement and reception of authority (Rev. 5) is not

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Footnotes:
41 For a discussion of the term “word” see Smalley, 492.
42 Smalley, 577.
43 Mounce, 409.
45 Mounce, 131. Johns, 168, talks about “the inset of the messianic redemption long awaited.”
 incidental but provides a foundation for later statements concerning Christ’s kingship, kingdom and rule (11:15; 17:14; 19:16; 20:4, 6; 1:5).  

At the same time, the Root of David alludes more to Jesus’ humanity than to his divinity.  

(5) *The Lion and the Lamb.* Jesus is Lion and Lamb. While the first term occurs only once in Revelation, the term “lamb” permeates Revelation as no other designation of Jesus does. In an audition Jesus is introduced as a lion (Rev 5:5) who has gained the victory and is able to open the scroll sealed with seven seals. However, as soon as John looks, he does not see a lion but a lamb. The lamb (*arnion*) appears 28 times in Revelation as a symbol for Jesus, however not before chapter 5 and not in chapters 9-11, 16, 18, 20, and 22b, the epilogue. The first three chapters of Revelation as well as its conclusion are written in a letter style, directed to seven churches. It is remarkable that the Lamb does not appear in these less symbolic parts of Revelation. However, the Lamb occurs in the apocalyptic section of Revelation (Rev 4-22a), although not in all chapters. Maybe this is due to the fact that in these chapters judgment scenes dominate. Seven times the Lamb is directly connected to God (Rev 5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 14:4; 21:22; 22:1, 3). It is true that the lamb is also found outside the Book of Revelation, for instance, in John 1:29, 36. There the term *amnos* is used, while in Revelation the lamb is the *arnion*. The latter term is also found once in the Gospel of John, namely in John 21:15.

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47 Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 87, talks about a “fully human yet divinely authorized agent.”

48 In addition, the term “lamb” is used with the beast coming out of the earth (13:11). Kowalski, 58, discussing 28 places in which the lamb represents Jesus suggests: “... these 28 quotations symbolically point toward the complete and worldwide victory of the Lamb.”

49 In these chapters Jesus is depicted with other designations.

50 This is not to deny that the wrath of the lamb is mentioned in Rev 6:16, but judgment may not be a very prominent idea linked to the concept of lamb.

51 See also Acts 8:32 and 1 Pet 1:19.
However, there it does not refer to Jesus but to his disciples. Although different terms for Jesus as the Lamb are used in the Johannine literature, the concept is still the same. The symbol “Lamb” stresses the idea of victory through suffering, adversity, and defenselessness. The number seven plays an important role in Revelation and expresses perfection and completion. Also the number four appears frequently and is the number of the earth. Seven times the nations of the earth in their fourfold designation as tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations are mentioned (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). The fact that the Lamb appears four times seven times may point to the worldwide extent of his complete victory through pain and suffering. We will return to the Lamb later.

II. Overview of Jesus in Revelation

The various designations for Jesus paint a very rich picture of the nature and the functions of Christ. Our next step will be to create an overview of Jesus in Revelation. This will enable readers to see how pervasive Christology is in the Apocalypse of John. Here are the chapters of Revelation in which Jesus appears:

1. Rev 1a - The revelation of Jesus Christ
2. Rev 1b-3 - Jesus as the one like a Son of Man and his messages to the seven churches
3. Rev 5-8:1 - Jesus as Lamb who opens the seven seals and shepherds his people
4. Rev 10 - Jesus as the strong angel
5. Rev 11:8, 15 - Jesus as the crucified Lord and as Christ to whom belongs the kingdom
6. Rev 12 - Jesus as male child and as Michael; the testimony of Jesus

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52 See the different series of seven such as the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven plagues, the seven beatitudes, or the seven direct promises of Jesus regarding his second advent.
53 See the four corners of the earth (Rev 7:1; 20:8) or the four parts of the earth (Rev 5:13; 14:7).
54 There are two exceptions: Rev 10:11 replaces “tribes” by “kings,” and Rev 17:15 substitutes “tribes” by “multitudes.”
(8) Rev 14 - Jesus as the Lamb with the 144,000; Jesus in the message of the three angels; Jesus as the one like a Son of Man and the harvest of the world
(9) Rev 15:3 - The song of the Lamb
(10) Rev 16:12, 15 - Jesus with his army as kings from the east; the promise of his second coming
(11) Rev 17:14 - Jesus as Lamb and Lord of lords and King of kings is victorious
(12) Rev 19 - The marriage supper of the Lamb and Jesus as the rider on the white horse
(13) Rev 20:6 - The redeemed believers as priests of Christ
(14) Rev 21-22a - Jesus as Lamb and the new Jerusalem
(15) Rev 22b - Christ’s coming

Lioy even proposes that the various introductory scenes to the visions of Revelation are Christological in nature.  Therefore, to claim that the Apocalypse has little to do with Jesus means to ignore the facts. Revelation is not only “the Revelation of Jesus Christ,” but also reveals his character and activity in almost every chapter.


In the beginning John states that Jesus himself has given the Book Revelation. At the same time, the book reveals his character and work (Rev 1:1-2). In the initial greeting it is stressed that
• Jesus loves us (Rev 1:5).
• He has redeemed us through his substitutionary death. The sin problem is resolved (Rev 1:5).
• Jesus sets us in a new position. We are a kingdom and priests (Rev 1:6).
• Jesus will come again (Rev 1:7).

Rev 1:5-6 “is the first doxology in the NT addressed only to Jesus.”

After the doxology his second coming is described. Verse 8 returns to God the Father. John changes his address from “to the seven churches that are in Asia” (verse 4) to “us” (verse 5) and thus gets more personal and more

56 Lioy, 58. He calls them “throne room scenes” (59).
57 Osborne, 63.
comprehensive. While the statement that Jesus loves us is found in the present tense emphasizing the continual and never ending love of Jesus toward us, salvation and the privilege to be a kingdom and priest have already been realized in the past and are a present reality. Obviously they are depending on Jesus’ death on the cross.

These verses can be understood as a summary of the message of Revelation. Revelation has to do with Jesus and salvation through him. Its aim is Christ’s second coming and God’s kingdom of glory thereafter. These themes are developed in other places. In Rev 3:9, 19 one hears again about Jesus’ love. Because Jesus loves his church, the church loves him (Rev 2:19; 12:11). Salvation is described in Rev 5:9; 7:14; 12:11; 14:3-4 and elsewhere with wonderful images. Priesthood and kingship are again mentioned in Rev 5:9 and 20:4, 6, where the audience is assured that the redeemed will reign with Jesus for a thousand years (Rev 20:4, 6). It is noteworthy that on one hand this reign is described as a present reality, while on the other hand it is still future. The second coming of Jesus permeates the entire Apocalypse and is depicted through the verb “to come” and various images at the end of major visions in Revelation. The content of the prologue reaches from the cross to the Second Coming.

2. Jesus and the Message to the Seven Churches (Rev 1:9-3:22)

The messages to the seven churches are ushered in by the introductory scene in Rev 1:9-20. In this introduction Jesus is found in majestic position among his churches. John sees him as one like a Son of Man. The

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58 Rev 1:3 calls those blessed who hear and read Revelation which does not limit the audience to the first century AD.
59 This term should be understood actively, i.e, in the sense of kingly rule.
60 John uses the aorist indicative. Cf. Beale, 194.
61 Osborne, 64, declares: “Here the ecclesiological aspect of Christ’s work is described . . . .
62 The question, what it means in practical terms to be a kingdom and priesthood, is discussed by Beale, 193: “Precisely how the church is to exercise these functions is yet not explicit, but it will not be surprising to find that the answer lies in understanding how Christ himself functioned in these two offices. . . . Believers spiritually fulfill the same offices in this age by following his model, especially by being faithful witnesses by mediating Christ’s priestly and royal authority to the world . . . .” Osborne, 66, mentions mission and direct access to God.
Apocalypse contains a number of theophanies (e.g., Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19). However, it begins with a Christophany. Some of Christ’s characteristics are also characteristics of God the Father. The Son of Man sends messages to each of the seven churches. Each message is personalized, specific, and reflects the situation in which the respective church finds herself in. Thus Revelation contains seven personal letters of Jesus to seven churches. The leaders of the churches are in Jesus’ hand. Jesus’ special interest in his church, his care and love—although paired with the announcement of judgment in the case of apostasy—becomes evident. S. Laws points out that Jesus walks among the stars, which is not in heaven but on earth according to the context. Initially, Jesus is not portrayed as a person in the heavenly realm to be expected at the end of days. Rather, as Son of Man he is present in his church. Nevertheless, Jesus is exalted because he came to earth and died innocently. He is present on earth through the Holy Spirit (Rev 2:7; 5:6). As rider on the white horse he will appear in the future as judge.

In the introductory scene (Rev 1:9-20) Jesus’ death and resurrection are referred to. Because he has the keys of death and hell, the resurrection of his children is guaranteed. The overcomers are permitted to take part in his rule (Rev 2:26-28). Jesus makes sure that their names remain in the book of life (Rev 3:5). He recognizes them as his own. He desires to have intimate fellowship with his church and asks her members to open their door and let him in (Rev 3:20). At the end of the seven churches the way is paved for the seven seals which form the second vision of Revelation (Rev 3:21). We hear about the throne of God which simultaneously is Jesus’ throne. The redeemed are allowed to sit with Jesus on his throne.

Jesus’ work in this first part of Revelation does not only reach from his cross to his kingly rule, but also contains a reference to creation. Jesus as the beginning of creation is the creator (Rev 3:14). As God works through

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63 These appearances of God are accompanied by certain phenomena and go back to Exod 19:16.
64 Cf. Bauckham, 54.
65 Cf. Lioy, 126.
66 Cf. Laws, 84. She continues: “That tension between realized hope and future expectation, the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ found in the preaching of Jesus and elsewhere in the New Testament is found here too.”
67 See the later discussion of the term “beginning of creation.”
Jesus to achieve final salvation and consummation, so he also has brought about creation through him.

3. Jesus and the Seven Seals

In the second vision, after God the Father is portrayed as sitting on the throne of heaven (Rev 4), Jesus appears as Lamb for the first time. Although the Lamb is victorious it still looks as if slain. This is not a lovely picture. Quite to the contrary! It is awful to see a slain lamb which is still alive. But the Lamb has purchased humans for God. Very clearly salvation through Jesus and his vicarious death are pointed out. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb, the Passover lamb. Through his death Jesus has freed and purchased people and has set them in the new position of kings and priests. Because Jesus has made possible salvation, he is worthy to open the sealed scroll. By doing this the plan of salvation can be realized and brought to a conclusion (Rev 5).

So Jesus opens the different seals. Almost all of them have to do with events on earth. The sixth seal takes the reader and hearer to the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb, the day of the Lord as known in the OT. Jesus’ ministry as Redeemer does not exclude judgment. Judgment is part of the final salvation of God’s children (Rev 6). Therefore, the way leads through sealing and tribulation to the throne of God where all negative things will be done away with. In a paradoxical picture John describes the Lamb as a shepherd who cares for those whom he has saved through his blood and supports them with all that is necessary.

Again the vision ranges from Calvary and especially Christ’s enthronement to the end of history. It begins with Jesus’ death on the

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68 Cf. Laws, 29; Bauckham, 70.
70 Cf. ibid., 66.
71 This conclusion is supported by the reception of the book from the right hand of God through the Lamb (Rev 5:7). Lioy, 134, summarizes the debate among NT scholars in the following way: “Beale has noted that Daniel 7:13 is ‘the only OT text in which a divine Messiah-like figure is portrayed as approaching God’s heavenly throne to receive authority.’ Beale surmises that the ‘reception of authority places Christ in a position together with his Father as Lord of all affairs in heaven and earth.’ Aune . . . convincingly argues that the primary focus is not on either the enthronement or commission of the Lamb, but rather on
cross and Pentecost whose meaning is explained in Acts 2:33 by Peter: Jesus’ exaltation to the right hand of God led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. John’s goal in this section of the Apocalypse seems to be to portray Jesus as Lamb in his majestic role as savior, ruler, and judge. Jesus controls all events of human history. This is strong comfort for suffering Christians.72

4. Jesus and the Seven Trumpets (Rev 8:2-11:18)

In the third vision, the trumpet vision, Jesus is found in the beginning and toward the end.73 He seems to be the angel at the golden altar involved in mediation and in meting out judgment. Since this altar is mentioned again in Rev 9:13, it can be assumed that the altar scene with Jesus forms the background of the entire trumpet vision. The emphasis of this vision is the judgment on those who dwell on earth, which is supposed to lead them to repentance. The term “those who dwell on earth” is a negative expression throughout the Apocalypse designating the enemies of God and his people. In this respect the trumpet vision sharply differs from the seal vision. The seal vision concentrates on God’s people and, therefore, may have a strong Christological orientation. This is different with the trumpet vision.

Rev 11:8 contains a reference to Jesus’ death on the cross. In “the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt” the “Lord was crucified.” The two witnesses suffer a similar fate as their Lord. However, as he was raised, so they also come back to life. In Rev 11:15 Jesus’ reign at the end of earth’s history is noted. Again the kingship motif is referred to. Although on the cross Jesus looked like a loser, in reality he is the victor. Christ’s kingly reign includes judgment on God’s enemies.74 The trumpet

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His investiture. Aune means by this ‘the act of establishing someone in office or the ratification of the office that someone already holds formally.’ He notes that John grounded the investiture ‘on the sacrificial death of Christ.’"

72 Cf. Lioy, 135.

73 Guthrie, 66, thinks that it is remarkable that in this vision Jesus does not appear as the Lamb at all. But because Guthrie connects the seven seals with the seven trumpets and because in the seventh seal the Lamb is mentioned indirectly, he assumes that the Lamb forms the background to the trumpet vision.

74 Bauckham, 67, writes: “The role of Christ in Revelation is to establish God’s kingdom on earth: in the words of 11:15, to turn ‘the kingdom of the world’ (currently ruled by evil) into the ‘kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah.” This includes salvation as well as
vision proceeds from the cross and reaches to the completion of the plan of salvation.

5. Jesus and the Satanic Trinity (Rev 11:19-14:20)

Rev 12 associates with Jesus a people faithful to him. As Jesus is the descendant of the woman (Rev 12:5) so are the remnant. The woman has brought forth Jesus, the Messiah; and the woman, God’s church, brings forth the remnant (Rev 12:17). The first and last parts of Rev 12 remind the audience of Gen 3:14-15. In both passages the woman, the serpent, seed/descendants, and animosity between the two parties is stressed.\(^{75}\) Rev 12 including its central part is a fulfillment of the divine promise of Gen 3:15. In Rev 12 the remnant are not only structurally found in a place parallel to Jesus, but also have a special relationship with him and belong to the Lord. They keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

Although the Lamb is not found at the beginning of Rev 13, it appears indirectly. The sea beast is an imitation of Jesus. We will return to this thought later. In Rev 13:8 the book of life of the Lamb occurs. Life is dependent on the Lamb. Whoever is found in the book of life of the Lamb has no reason to fear the second death (Rev 20:15). Initially the beast from the earth has lamblike traits, but is a tool in the hand of the dragon.

According to Rev 14 the Lamb together with the 144,000 stands on Mount Zion. They belong to him. Because they are purchased and therefore saved, they follow the Lamb wherever it goes. Salvation is followed by discipleship. According to Rev 14:12 this includes obedience and faith in Jesus/faith of Jesus. The others who have accepted the mark of the beast and have worshiped the beasts are being judged in the presence of the Lamb (Rev 14:9-10). Guthrie points out that after mentioning God the angels are referred to and only then the Lamb. He concludes that for unbelievers the worst part of judgment is to be able to see the Lamb against which they have waged war.\(^{76}\)

\(^{75}\) Nestle-Aland, 655-656, lists Gen 3:14 and 15 together with Rev 12.

\(^{76}\) Cf. Guthrie, 67.
At the end of chapter 14 the double harvest of the world takes place, a picture of final salvation and final judgment.77 The first fruits of the wheat harvest are the 144,000 of Rev 14:4. This harvest is dependent on the appearance of the one like a Son of Man. He sits on a white cloud and wears a golden crown of victory.

This central vision of Revelation encompasses the time from Jesus’ incarnation up to his second coming. In this vision the aspect of the great controversy between good and evil is more strongly pronounced than in any preceding vision.

6. Jesus and the Seven Plagues (Rev 15-16)

The introductory scene to this vision contains the song of the Lamb and the song of Moses. A motif not used in the previous vision is been utilized here, the motif of the exodus.78 Under Moses Israel left Egypt and entered the promised land. Under Jesus the overcomers, the 144,000, are involved in an exodus—which later will be connected to Babylon79—and have come to the sea of glass in front of God’s throne (Rev 15). They are finally saved.

The plagues, which initially remind the readers of the Egyptian plagues, have not affected the faithful followers of Christ. Jesus with his army, the kings from the east, have won the battle against Babylon (Rev 16:12-21 and its context). The conflict is clearly portrayed. However, these events are from our present perspective still in the future, although they are described with the aorist.

In Rev 16:15 Jesus predicts his soon return and through his beatitude admonishes people indirectly to stay awake.80

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77 Cf. Bauckham, 94-98. He states that the wheat harvest is concluded by one action, namely harvesting. The grape harvest consists of two actions, the gathering and the treading of the wine press (96). He suggests that the wheat harvest does not proceed to the process of judgment as is the case with the grape harvest (97).
78 Cf. Bauckham, 71.
80 Lioy, 169, explains: “Because the world’s unrepentant inhabitants reject the Messiah as their Savior, He comes again as their Judge. This warning, which suddenly appears in 16:15, is an important Christological theme in the Apocalypse (3:3).”
7. Jesus and the Judgment on Babylon (Rev 17-18)

Rev 17 and 18 are a more detailed description of the last plagues, the destruction of Babylon. One of the angels involved with the pouring out of the plagues explains the judgment on Babylon, mentioned in Rev 16, in more detail. In Rev 17:14 Jesus occurs. Ten kings fight against the Lamb. The number should be understood symbolically and include all political powers which will turn against God and Jesus. Nevertheless, the Lamb gains the victory because he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. With him are “the called and the chosen and the faithful.”

Guthrie describes the battle as one-sided, because the power of the beast and its supporters is easily surpassed by the power of the Lamb. The description of the complete destruction of Babylon in Rev 18 stands in stark contrast to the triumph of the Lamb, although the Lamb is not mentioned in this chapter. It is important to have in mind the broad picture of Revelation and to notice the contrasts found in the larger sections of the book.

The Lamb has not only suffered; it has not only brought about salvation; it has not only opened the seals; but the Lamb is the victorious King and Lord of all lords.

8. Jesus, His Marriage Supper, Armageddon, and the Millennium (Rev 19-20)

With Rev 19 the readers have arrived at the long anticipated marriage supper of the Lamb. His bride is ready. Again a strong contrast is created. While on one hand the marriage supper of the Lamb takes place, on the other hand the meal for the birds is depicted which affects those who in the battle of Armageddon were defeated by the rider on the white horse and his army. The message contained in this contrast is: Either you are a participant of the marriage supper of the Lamb or you become a meal for the birds.

The rider on the white horse is called Word of God. Through him God speaks to humanity. However, this rider is also envisioned as a king who leads his army into battle. There are also hints to Jesus’ function as a judge.
Although blood is shed when God’s people are liberated, this king fights with justice (Rev 19:11). Bauckham stresses that Jesus, the slaughtered Lamb, does not become a slaughterer himself. The “faithful and true witness” (Rev 3:14) is now called “Faithful and True” (Rev 19:11). His faithfulness toward truth makes him a judge for those who persist in lies.\(^85\)

In Rev 20:4 the testimony of Jesus is found again. Those who have been killed because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him during the Millennium (Rev 20:6). The book of life in Rev 20:12, 15 must be the book of life of the Lamb. In addition the people of the Lamb, the saints, and the bride of the Lamb, the beloved city, are referred to (Rev 20:9). Lioy seems to be correct when he claims that the focal point of the Apocalypse is Christ. His glorious presence, his ability to judge, and his sovereign rule are stressed by John.\(^86\)

The emphasis on salvation in the first part of Revelation is replaced with the description of the eschatological war in the second part of Revelation. The goal is to uproot evil and completely save Jesus’ people.


The extensive description of the New Jerusalem in Rev 21 and 22 includes many details and has Jesus as the background. He is the husband of the bride. Yet we do not just hear about the bride/wife of the Lamb (Rev 21:2, 9), the New Jerusalem, and about the apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:14) but also that in the new Jerusalem the temple will be replaced by God the Father and the Lamb (Rev 21:22). The sun will no longer be necessary. The glory of God and the Lamb enlighten the city (Rev 21:23). From the throne of God and the Lamb goes forth the river of life (Rev 22:1). Again the throne of God and the Lamb is mentioned (Rev 22:3). Four times God the Father and the Lamb are directly connected.

In addition to the theme “marriage of the Lamb” which begins in Rev 19 and is continued in Rev 21 the topic creation appears. Bauckham has called attention to the fact that the non-existence of the sea on the new earth indicates that creation will not again fall prey to chaos. The symbolic sea out of which the beast came has disappeared and cannot bring forth again

\(^85\) Bauckham, 105.
\(^86\) Lioy, 170.
a flood of disaster and evil. Father and Son as creators guarantee the fulfillment of the covenant promises.\(^{87}\)

Those whose names are found in the book of life of the Lamb (Rev 21:27) have the right to live in the New Jerusalem in which the throne of God and the Lamb is placed. They will serve him (Rev 22:3) and reign with him (Rev 22:5). The intimate relationship between Jesus and his people is emphasized. Guthrie notes that in this part of Revelation the Lamb occurs seven times which is more than in the other visions of Revelation. His importance for the church is undeniable. At the same time the mention of Jesus as Lamb stresses salvation more than judgment.\(^{88}\)

In this vision a direct reference to the cross is not noticeable. But the concept of Jesus’ sacrificial death is present through the strong emphasis on Jesus as the Lamb. The wonderful future is dependent on Jesus’ cross and his unique dedication to humanity.


In the prologue God the Father appeared as the Alpha and Omega. In the Epilogue this title is applied to Jesus. Jesus no longer appears as the Lamb, but is addressed with his name “Jesus” and the title “Lord Jesus.” In addition he is the bright morning star and the root and the descendant of David. The Apocalypse begins with an emphasis on Jesus and on what he has done and would do for humanity. It climaxes in Jesus’ Second Coming (Rev 1:7). In the epilogue the book ends with an emphasis on the work of Christ, in this case predominantly his soon coming (Rev 22:7, 12, 20).\(^{89}\) Jesus will come again and bring the respective reward, be it positive or negative. John, however, just prays: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” The grace of the Trinity in the prologue is followed by the grace of the Lord Jesus in the epilogue.

\(^{87}\) Bauckham, 53.

\(^{88}\) Guthrie, 69.

\(^{89}\) Liow, 156, states: “The Apocalypse began by stressing the certainty of the Lord’s return (Rev 1:7), the importance of remaining faithful to Him (vs. 3), and the genuineness of the prophecy John had received (vss. 1-2). These same Christocentric themes are emphasized in the conclusion of the book (22:12).” On page 171 he notes about the epilogue: “Also, these verses reveal that the Messiah is the starting point and end point for all of God’s plans.”
Conclusion and Implications

In this first part of the paper we took a brief look at the amazing number of designations of Jesus in Revelation which surpasses what we find in other NT books. They highlight Christ’s nature and his functions and invite the reader to try to better understand him and draw close to him. They also create certain emphases which have practical implications for persons who profess to be Christians, followers of the Lamb. These need to be further explored.

The overview over the Christology in the Apocalypse revealed that Jesus occurs in all parts of Revelation and repeatedly forms the background to major visions. The book should not be read and interpreted without a constant consideration of its Christology. The christological backgrounds contribute to the theological understanding of the Apocalypse. For instance, the seal vision portrays Jesus as the one who is actively involved in the unfolding of history and brings about the final consummation. The trumpet vision begins with Jesus mediating the prayers of the saints and reminds of this ongoing process during the sixth trumpet. While Jesus takes notice of the needs of his people and hears their cries for justice, he supports them and intervenes for them by allowing for the judgments to come on those who dwell on earth. His mediation is the natural consequence of his atoning death on the cross (Rev 11:8), or in other words, his death is the prerequisite for this heavenly ministry. He also assures his disciples of a final positive outcome of the great controversy between good and evil (Rev 11:15-18).

Again, instead of heavily focusing on the evil powers portrayed in the Apocalypse, its Christology invites readers and interpreters of the book to notice the larger background and understand Revelation as a book of hope which places the emphasis not on these powers and on terrifying events but on Jesus Christ and God the Father especially, or the Trinity in general. So this first part of the article would suggest the necessity of making a deliberate attempt to interpret the Apocalypse christologically.

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90 E.g., the Gospel of Mark has about sixteen: Jesus (1:14), Jesus Christ (1:1), Christ (8:29), Jesus of Nazareth (1:9), Lord (1:3), beloved Son (1:11), Son of Man (2:10), Son of God (3:11), Son of David (10:48), Teacher (4:38), Rabbi (9:5), Rabboni (10:51), The Holy One of God (1:24), King of the Jews (15:2), the Stone (12:10), and the Bridegroom (2:19).
The next part of this article will take a closer look at the divinity of Jesus as portrayed in John’s Apocalypse.

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