

## Azazel in the Pseudepigrapha

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The name “Azazel” appears in only one biblical passage, Lev 16. There a male goat was selected for Azazel, just as one was selected for Yahweh (vv. 8–10). The goat for Yahweh was sacrificed and its blood taken into the sanctuary for ministration there (vv. 15–19), but the goat for Azazel was not sacrificed. Instead, the symbolic record of sins taken out of the sanctuary was placed upon the head of Azazel’s goat, and it was taken to the wilderness and released “to Azazel” (v. 22, RSV).

By parallelism with the goat selected for Yahweh, the goat selected for Azazel is seen as being selected for another personal being of another type, the antithesis of Yahweh. The fact that this goat was not slain and its blood was not shed indicates that this goat served as part of a removal rite. It did not serve for the forgiveness of sins.

Seventh-day Interpreters<sup>1</sup> have applied the Lord’s goat to Jesus Christ and seen his death on the cross as the antitype of this goat’s death, while Azazel’s goat is taken as symbolizing a demonic figure, i.e., Satan, to whom the responsibility for the sin problem is ultimately attributed. The wandering in the wilderness of the live goat is then applied to the fate of Satan during the millennium (Rev 20:1–3) before he is thrown into the lake of fire at the end of that period (v. 10).

Some evangelical writers see both the Lord’s goat and Azazel’s goat as types of Christ, but others see Azazel’s goat as a demonic figure. Representing this latter view is the statement, “Since verse 8 identifies one goat as ‘for Ya-

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<sup>1</sup> F. D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1953), 1: 775; S. H. Horn, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1960), 97; A. M. Rodriguez, “The Sanctuary” in R. Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theological Commentary Reference Series* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2000), 12:387

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hewh' and the other goat as 'for Azazel,' it is most consistent to consider Azazel a proper name, probably of a demon."<sup>2</sup>

### **I Enoch**

Some of the writers noted previously have noted that the pseudepigraphical work of I Enoch uses the name Azazel for one of the evil angels. In support of the demonic interpretation of Azazel, it may be useful to review the occurrences of this name in this pre-Christian work to see just how that source makes use of this name.

There are eight references to Azazel in I Enoch. These references are distributed through two or three of the major sections of this book. Four references occur in The Book of the Watchers, chapters 1–10 (8:1; 9:6; 10:4, 8). The Book of Enoch's Heavenly Journeys, chapters 11–36, is sometimes included with The Book of the Watchers and sometimes divided from it. There is one reference to Azazel in this section: 13:1–3. These chapters, 1–36, are commonly dated to the first half of the second century B.C. on the basis of the finding of fragments from five different manuscripts of this section among the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>3</sup>

Book III ( or II depending on how one divides the text) is known as the Parables of Enoch. It includes chapters 37–71. There are three references to Azazel in this section: 54:5; 55:5; and 69:3. This section is commonly dated to the last half of the first century B.C.<sup>4</sup>

These references will be studied in the order in which they occur in I Enoch.

8:1 And Azazel taught men to make swords, and daggers, and shields and breastplates. And he showed them the things after these, and the art of making them: bracelets, and ornaments, and the art of making up the eyes and beautifying the eyelids, and the most precious and choice stones, and all kinds of coloured dyes. And the world was changed. And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt.<sup>5</sup>

In this passage Azazel belongs to a class of evil angels known as the Watchers, a long list of whom are named in chapter 6. Here Azazel exercises his talent in two directions, towards men and towards women. For the men he has instructed them in the production of weapons of war so that they might fight with each other.

The women he has taught to beautify themselves so that they might seduce men. The result of the latter is given as "much fornication." The result of both taken together is that they produced much impiety and corrupted human ways.

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<sup>2</sup> J. H. Walton, V. H. Matthews and M. W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 131.

<sup>3</sup> H.F.D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 174.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 190–191. Translation by M. A. Knibb. This is the translation used for the rest of the quotes from passages from I Enoch.

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This work of Azazel is also the work of Satan from the biblical point of view, though the Bible is less explicit.

9:6 See then what Azazel has done, how he has taught all iniquity on the earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were made in heaven.

This statement is more comprehensive than the first, though less specific. The preceding case states that Azazel worked in two special ways to corrupt mankind. Here it is stated that he “taught all iniquity on the earth.” This takes in not just the two aspects of evil taught previously, but includes all others. The reference to the “secrets in heaven” is not clear, but what is clear is that Azazel was not supposed to reveal them on earth, but he went ahead and did it anyway.

10:4 And further the Lord said to Raphael, Bind Azazel by his hands and feet and throw him into the darkness. And split open the desert which is in Dudael, and throw him there. And throw on him jagged and sharp stones and cover him with darkness and let him stay there for ever, and cover his face that he might not see light, and that on the great day of judgment he may be hurled into the fire.

Here the results of the work of Azazel, i.e., the work of Satan, come down upon him. This is his judgment for the works cited earlier in 8:1 and 9:6. This Azazel suffers the same fate as his goat does in Lev 16, but that fate is now elaborated in the antitype. He is cast out into a wilderness or desert, but now that desert splits open to accommodate him to a world of darkness, i.e., the abyss. There he is to be covered up “for ever.” This is an extrabiblical case where “for ever” does not mean “for ever and ever and ever.” It simply refers to the time allotted to it. For after this comes the second phase of judgment. He is cast into the fire on the great day of judgment.

Thus there are two phases to the judgment of Azazel. First he is cast into the abyss of the split desert, and after that he is thrown into the fire. This provides a close parallel to the fate of Satan during and at the end of the millennium, according to Rev 20. There he is imprisoned in the abyss at the beginning of the millennium, and at the end of the millennium he is cast into the lake of fire during the great white throne judgment. I Enoch continues parallel to Revelation in this case, for the next statement, in 10:7, is that the earth, which had been ruined by evil angels, will be restored by God.

10:8 And the whole earth has been ruined by the teaching of the works of Azazel, and against him write down all sin.

This statement is an antitypical extension of Lev 16:21, which says Aaron was to confess, over Azazel’s goat, “all the iniquities of the people of Israel, all their transgression, all their sins.” That case was localized to the people of God, Israel. This case is more comprehensive, as it is not limited to the people of God. Now it is all the sins of the whole earth that are in view, and they are to be written down, recorded against, the account of Azazel. As the one ultimately respon-

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sible for the whole sin problem, Azazel/Satan's fate for this activity is what has been stated earlier: the abyss, followed by the fire.

13:1–3 And Enoch went and said to Azazel, You will not have peace. A severe sentence came out against you that you should be bound. And you will have neither rest, nor mercy, nor the granting of any petition because of the wrong that you have taught and because of all the works of blasphemy and wrong and sins which you have shown to the sons of men.

In his travels Enoch goes to Azazel and tells him what his fate will be and why. In this case only the first phase of Azazel's punishment is revealed, his being bound and his being without mercy and rest. The second phase of his punishment—the lake of fire—is not mentioned here. The reason for his punishment is clear: because of the wrong he has taught the sons of men, not just the Israelites. That wrong is elaborated into all blasphemy and wrong and sin. The use of these multiple words to describe the evil that Azazel has done emphasizes his comprehensive program for the wickedness of mankind.

54:5 These [instruments of chains] are being prepared for the hosts of Azazel, that they may take them and throw them into the lowest part of Hell; and they will cover their jaws with the rough stones as the Lord of Spirits commanded. And Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel—these will take hold of them on that great day, and throw them on that day into the furnace of burning fire, that the Lord of Spirits may take vengeance on them for their iniquity, in that they became servants of Satan and led astray those who dwell upon the dry ground.

Before the beginning of this quotation, this passage begins with the kings of the earth and the great men who are thrown into a burning valley (vv. 1–2). Then the evil angels are sentenced to join them. As the “hosts of Azazel,” they join Azazel in the judgments that are to fall upon him. First they are thrown into the abyss, the lowest level of Hell, and then subsequently they are thrown into the fire on the great day of judgment. Again, as in 10:4 and Rev 20, there are two phases of judgment for both Azazel and his servants the evil angels. The identification of Azazel with Satan is clear in this passage. The evil angels are first identified as the hosts of Azazel, and then it is said that they do the works of Satan.

55:5 You powerful kings, who dwell upon the dry ground, will be obliged to watch my Chosen One sit down on the throne of my glory, and judge, in the name of the Lord of Spirits, Azazel and all his associates and all his hosts.

This chapter opens with reference to the “Head of Days”—equivalent to the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:9 and 13. The Chosen One, i.e., the Son of Man of Dan 7:13–14, sits down on the throne of glory of the Ancient of Days. He sits there especially to judge Azazel or Satan and his associates and his hosts. The dual reference at the end of this passage may refer to the evil angels as belong-

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ing to one group, and the wicked of mankind in the other. Thus all the wicked will be judged by the Head of Days/Ancient of Days and the Chosen One/Son of Man in this final sitting of the judgment.

The final reference to Azazel in I Enoch is in 69:3. This finds him in the list of evil angels or Watchers. They are named, just as they are named in chapter 6, preceding the first reference to the works of Azazel in 8:1. Here they are also numbered, and Azazel is number twenty-one, the final number in this list. After this the text goes on to identify the various evil angels who direct various sub-groups of evil angels. The fact that Azazel is named and numbered last may lend importance to his position in this scheme of things.

#### **Summary of Azazel in I Enoch**

The last reference to Azazel, in 69:3, simply lists him among the Watchers or evil angels. That places him in his appropriate category and probably places emphasis upon his importance there. This parallels the first reference to him, in 8:1, which follows after a similar list of Watchers in chapter six. Thus these two lists place a bracket around Azazel within which his works and fate are described.

From that point on two aspects of his existence are spelled out. The first is his work of introducing the human race to evil. The second is his fate as a consequence of that work. In some passages these two features are joined together, but in others they appear singly.

His works of evil are identified in five passages. In 9:6 he is held responsible for teaching all iniquity. In 10:8 all iniquity is written down or recorded against him. The same thought is echoed in 13:1–2, where all wrongs—identified as all blasphemy and wrong and sin—are attributed to him. I Enoch 8:1 gives two special aspects of this work of evil, telling how he taught men to make the weapons of war and how he taught women how to use the weapons of seduction. Finally, 54:6 indicates that his hosts, the Watchers or fallen angels, have followed Azazel in leading those on earth astray.

The judgment of Azazel is indicated in four passages. In 10:4 the two-fold judgment of Azazel is given for his teaching evil, as indicated in 9:6 and 10:8. The judgment of 10:4 involves first of all his imprisonment in the abyss and then casting him into the fire on the great day of final judgment. His judgment in 13:2 involves only the first of these two phases of judgment, but in 54:5 those same two phases of judgment are visited upon his hosts. In 55:5, all of this is placed in the context of the judgment of Dan 7:9–14.

The equivalence of Azazel with Satan is clear in I Enoch. He is identified as the instigator of all evil, and he has employed his host of fallen angels in that pursuit. He will suffer judgment for what he has brought upon the human race in this way. First he is to suffer in the realms of darkness, and then he is to be thrown into the fire in the great final day of judgment. This two-phased judgment outlined in I Enoch fits well with the fate of Satan as outlined at the begin-

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ning and at the end of Rev 20. There is one passage in which the two names of Azazel and Satan are equated in terms of the host of evil angels that is led by the being who bears both of those names (54:5).

**The Apocalypse of Abraham**

This pseudepigraphical work appears to be a Jewish apocalypse with Christian interpolations. The Jewish portions are estimated to come from a time after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, referred to in chapter 27.<sup>6</sup> Thus it may be a work of the second century A.D. with interpolations coming some time after that.<sup>7</sup> The first eight chapters of the work tell how Abraham was instructed to give up idolatry. Then the more apocalyptic chapters begin. Azazel is mentioned in six passages in the text, all of them coming from the second half of the book.

13:7–11 He [the angel] said, This is Wickedness, Azazil, for Abraham's lot is in the heavens, but yours on earth. He said to him, Shame upon you Zazal; for you have chosen and have loved to live in your uncleanness here. That is why the Eternal Ruler, the Mighty One, has appointed you to be a dweller upon earth. And through you the evil and deceitful spirit works among men, and through you retribution and misfortunes fall on the generations of the unrighteous.

The setting here is the scene of Gen 15 where Abraham offered the animal sacrifices by dividing their parts and laying those parts in opposite directions. The bird used here becomes a symbol for Azazel. He is synonymous with Wickedness and is condemned to dwell on the earth in the bird's uncleanness. Under the modified name of Zazal he has brought retribution and misfortune upon the wicked through the evil and deceit he has introduced among them, another evidence that Azazel's work is the work of Satan.

Chapter 14 The angel said to Abraham, Say to him, May you be a burning coal of the earthly furnace. Azazil went into the inaccessible parts of the earth.

In this case the angel gives to Abraham the words of a curse to speak to Azazel. He is to burn like a coal in the furnace and go to an inaccessible place, just as the Azazel goat was to do in Lev 16. Immediately after this the angel tells Abraham not to talk to Azazel. Azazel tries to get Abraham to talk to him (for the purpose of temptation?), but Abraham, following the angel's instructions, will not speak to him.

20:5–7 . . . so I will appoint for your descendants a race of people—a people set apart for me in my heritage with Azazil. And I said, . . . Behold, before thou didst raise me up here, Azazil reviled me: so how now, when he is not before thee, hast thou joined thyself to him.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 366. The translation of the Apocalypse of Abraham I am quoting was done by A. Pennington.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 378.

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The setting here is Abraham going out to count the stars in the night sky to number his descendants. The Lord tells him that some of the people of Azazel will belong to his [Abraham's] descendants; they will be subservient to them. (This sounds like the ingathering of the formerly wicked gentiles.) Abraham cannot understand this because Azazel reviled Abraham, so how can Azazel's people come to be related to Abraham's people? Here again Azazel's work is seen in relation to Abraham and his people, but Azazel is foiled because some of Azazel's former servants will come to belong to the people of Abraham.

22:5-7 Those on the left side are the many peoples which have existed in the past, and after you are appointed, some for judgment and restoration, some for vengeance and perdition, until the end of the age. And those on the right side of the picture, they are the people set apart for me from the people of Azazel. These are the people who are going to spring from you and will be called my people.

The picture here is that of the final judgment. Instead of the righteous on the right hand and the wicked on the left, the people on the left are divided between the righteous and the wicked. Then the people on the right are some of the people who once belonged to Azazel but have now come to belong to the descendants of Abraham. Azazel is going to lose some of his servants to the tribe of Abraham. This sounds like the conversion of the gentiles or the reconversion of some Jews. In either case Azazel loses and Abraham gains. This sounds very much like the picture found in the preceding passage that deals with Azazel, 20:5-7.

22:9-12 And he said, This is the human world. This is Adam, and this is their desire upon the earth: this is Eve. And what is between them is the wicked path they started on towards perdition, namely Azazel.

In this case the work of Azazel is taken back to the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was Azazel who came between them when first Eve and then Adam fell to his temptations. This set them on the road to perdition from which, graciously, God rescued them. Once again there is a clear connection between Azazel and the work of the serpent-devil-Satan in causing the fall of mankind, as recorded in Gen 3.

29:5-8 . . . and some of them mocked that man, and some assaulted him, but some of them worshipped him. I saw them worshipping him; and Azazel ran up and worshipped, and, after kissing his face turned and stood behind him. And I said, Eternal Mighty One, who is this man who has been mocked and assaulted, but yet is worshipped by the heathen and Azazel.

The person referred to here has a messianic character, that of God's suffering servant. From a Christian point of view one might think of Azazel acting through Judas, and that raises the question whether this might be one of the interpolations. The setting here, however, is eschatological. Abraham's question is

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answered by stating that he is “the respite granted by the heathen to the people who will come from you in the last days, in the twelfth year of the ungodly age” (v. 8). Following this come the ten last plagues (ch. 30) and the establishment of God’s kingdom with a Second Coming type of scene (ch. 31). In that setting this scene with Azazel may represent his final subservience to the Messiah and the kingdom of God.

#### **Summary of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham**

The picture of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham is similar to that in I Enoch, but it is more complicated. Like I Enoch, the Apocalypse of Abraham sees Azazel as the instigator of evil in the world. It goes beyond I Enoch in tracing that problem back to the time of Adam and Eve (22:9–10). This idea is also stated in more general terms in 13:7–11. Azazel’s personal attacks upon Abraham are described in terms of tempting (ch. 14) and reviling him (20:5–7). Azazel does not win, however, as he loses subjects to Abraham’s descendants (20:5–7; 22:5–7). Finally, Azazel will be subject to the Messiah at the end of time (29:5–8). The only other fate of Azazel described here appears in the curse that Abraham pronounced upon him. There he was told to depart into the fire and to the uttermost parts of the earth (ch. 14).

#### **Conclusion**

Azazel is known as a Satan-like figure in Jewish apocryphal literature of the second century B.C. (I Enoch’s Book of Watchers), from the first century B.C. (I Enoch’s Parables) and from the second century A.D. (the Apocalypse of Abraham). This gives a spread of about four centuries during which Azazel was identified with Satan in this type of literature.

I Enoch was known to early Christian sources such as the Epistle of Barnabas, Origen, Tertullian, Jerome, and Augustine.<sup>8</sup> So this interpretation of Azazel would also have been known to them. Christian hands even went so far as to write interpolations into the Jewish work known as the Apocalypse of Abraham, so this source was also known to them, along with its interpretation of Azazel as a Satanic figure. Thus Azazel was firmly identified with Satan in Jewish apocryphal sources, and these same sources were known to early Christians. This provides a useful background for the modern interpretation of the figure of Azazel in Lev 16. The very earliest extrabiblical interpretation of this figure known saw him as a figure for Satan.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 169–170.



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## **The Heavenly Books of Life and of Human Deeds**

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The Bible mentions several heavenly books in which the experiences and acts of human beings are recorded. Here we will explore the significance of those records and their particular function. It will become clear that human practices of record keeping employed in Israel and in other ancient Near Eastern countries are being used in the Bible to illustrate heavenly practices or to communicate some specific information concerning them. At the same time it will also become clear that the purpose of the heavenly records far exceeds the social role of their earthly counterparts in Israelite society. The study of this subject raises interesting questions with respect to the biblical use of cultural practices to describe heavenly ones. These we should briefly address in this paper.

### **I. The Book of Life**

#### **I.A. Social Background of the Book of Life**

It seems to have been common among Israelites to keep records of the names of those who dwelt in their cities. Those records or registers not only served to identify the citizens of a particular city, but were also used as genealogical records (Neh 7:5; 12:23). In fact, the term “register”<sup>1</sup> in the Old Testament could designate genealogical records usually kept by families and/or by the city (Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64).<sup>2</sup> It appears that those who had no children were

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<sup>1</sup> Two main Hebrew terms are used to refer to registers. One is *sēper*, which designates a written record (Deut 17:18), e.g. a letter (1 Kings 21:9) or a genealogical record (Neh 7:5; 12:23). The other is *k’tāb*, from a verbal root whose basic meaning is “incise, inscribe.” It designates a “writing” or “document” (Est 3:14; 8:13) or a “register” (Ezek 13:9; Neh 7:64; Ezra 2:62).

<sup>2</sup> There is another type of register in Israel, a type of census taken for two main purposes: namely, to levy taxes and for military purposes (e.g. 2 Sam 24:1–9). This list of names does not seem to be significant in defining the background for the study of the heavenly books (Leo Koep, *Das himmlische Buch in Antike und Christentum* [Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1952], 38).

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identified in the city's register as "childless" (Jer 22:30).<sup>3</sup> Genealogies were important to determine legal rights and social and religious functions. For instance, the descendants of Aaron had a right to the priesthood, and genealogical records identified those who belonged to his family. In the absence of that evidence, some were excluded from the priesthood (Ezra 2:62). The deletion of the name of a criminal from those registers would have been a severe legal punishment. This is precisely what the Lord announced against the false prophets: "They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel" (Ezek 13:9). False prophets would not be part of the people of Israel.

Mention should be made here of the "book of the generations of Adam" in Gen 5:1, which could be called a "book of life and death" in the sense that it included information about the birth of Adam's descendants and the time when each one died.<sup>4</sup> It is basically a genealogical record of Adam's descendants. The book also includes an important exception to the fatal "birth-death" nexus in the person of Enoch (5:24), who did not experience death.<sup>5</sup>

Isaiah gives to the practice of keeping records of the inhabitants of a city an eschatological significance when he announces that in the Messianic kingdom "he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem" (Isa 4:3). According to him there is an eschatological register containing the names of those who will be citizens of the renewed Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> One could conclude that the register of a city could be called a "book of life" in the sense that those inscribed there had the right to live in that particular city and to enjoy the privileges and responsibilities associated

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<sup>3</sup> See, H. Haag, "כְּתָבִים *kāṭab*," *TDOT*, 7:376–377. For other suggestions on the meaning of the verse consult, Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 322.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Koep considers the "book of the generations of Adam" to provide the "Ansatzpunkte"—"starting point"—for the origin of the metaphor of the book of life (*Das himmlische*, 38–39). But he also considers the list of citizens to be significant in the search for the backgrounds of the concept of the heavenly book of life (pp. 31–35).

<sup>5</sup> Richard S. Hess refers to Enoch as "the first biblical character to forgo death" ("Enoch," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:508). Nahum Sarna disagrees. He has argued that the phrase "then he was no more" describes how Enoch died, i.e., a sudden or unexpected death, and that the other phrase, "for God took him," is "a euphemism for death" (e.g. Ezek 24:16, 18) designating here a premature death (*The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* [Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 43). It is true that the phrase "he was not" is sometimes used to refer to death (e.g., Ps 39:14). But in Gen 5 "it stands in contrast to the usual phrase 'then he died,' which shows that Enoch did not experience a normal death. This is confirmed by the final remark, 'because God took him,' a phrase used of Elijah's translation to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2:1, 5, 9, 10)" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* [Waco, TX: Word, 1987], 128). It has been suggested that the absolute usage of the verb "to take" (Heb. *laqah*) in Gen 5:24 and 2 Kgs 2:3, 5, should be interpreted "in the sense of 'to rapture'" (H. H. Schmid, "לָקַח *lqh* to take," *TLOT*, 2:651).

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 3:4 is related to judgment in a form similar to that in Dan 12:1. Only those whose names are recorded in the book of life will be preserved after the judgment. The emphasis is juridical and not predestinarian; see Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 86–87.

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with their being part of it. The birth-lists found in the OT in the form of genealogies seem to provide a proper background for the interpretation of the book of life.<sup>7</sup>

### **I.B. The Heavenly Book of Life**

The Bible refers quite often to the existence of a heavenly register in which the names of those who belong to the Lord are recorded. This book is located in heaven (Luke 10:20) and is called “Your [God’s] book, which you have written” (Exod 32:32), the “book of life” (Ps 69:28; Phil 4:3), and the “book of the Lamb” (Rev 17:8). It is also referred to as “the book” (Dan 12:1).

It has been suggested that the idea of a heavenly book of life was not exclusively Israelite. The Sumerian goddess Nungal possessed a “tablet of life” (*in-nam-ti-la*). In a hymn to the god Haia we read, “Grant to prince Rim-Sin a reign all joyous and length of days! On a tablet of life never to be altered place its (the reign’s) names(s)!”<sup>8</sup> The few Sumerian texts where the “tablet of life” is mentioned do not provide enough information to determine its nature and function. After reading them I concur with those who have argued that the “tablet of life” in those texts is “a tablet where the deeds of an individual are recorded”<sup>9</sup> or a tablet of destiny, and therefore do not provide a good parallel for the book of life in the OT. There is also an Akkadian text from the time of Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), the Neo-Assyrian empire, that mentions a tablet of life: “To the king, my Lord . . . . May all be very very well with the king, my lord. May Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord . . . . On the seventh day is the making of the reckoning of Nabu. In his *tablet of life* [may he make] the reckoning of the king, my lord (and) of the sons of my lord forever.”<sup>10</sup> Again, the text seems to describe a tablet of fates rather than a book of life. What seems to be requested is that the dynasty of the king be firmly established for ever in the heavenly records. At the present time we do not seem to have a good ancient Near Eastern parallel for the Old Testament heavenly book of life.

#### **I.B.1. Recording Names in the Book of Life**

Based on the Old Testament background discussed above, we should readily acknowledge that the heavenly book of life contains a particular list of names. The question is, whose names are recorded there? Psalm 69:28 states, “May they [my enemies] be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous.” Since in this Psalm the enemies of the psalmist

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<sup>7</sup> L. Kaiser, “Book of Life,” *ISBE* (1939), 1:503; L. Keop, “Buck IV (himmlisch),” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1954), 2:col. 727; W. Hermann, “Das Buch des Lebens,” *Altertum* 20 (1974): 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> Shalmon M. Paul, “Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1973): 345.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 345 n. 2, where Shalmon M. Paul quotes W. Heimpel.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

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appear to be Israelites,<sup>11</sup> the text implies that only the names of the righteous, those who are part of the people of God, are recorded in His book of life.<sup>12</sup> Particularly important is Ps 87:6, where God is described as registering in the book the names of people who serve Him in non-Israelite lands: “The Lord will count when He registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there.’” This appears to be a register of foreigners who worship the Lord and includes the place where the person was actually born. The reference is most probably to the book of life in which the names of non-Israelites are included as citizens among the people of God.<sup>13</sup>

The New Testament indicates that the book of life contains only the names of those who are citizens of the New Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> Hebrews identifies those whose names are written in heaven as “the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Heb 12:23). John writes, “Nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it [the city], but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27; cf. 13:8). More explicit is Rev 17:8, where a follower of the beast is defined as one “whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” On the other hand, Jesus encouraged his disciples to rejoice because their “names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:20), and Paul refers to his fellow workers as those “whose names are in the book of life” (Phil 4:3). We could conclude that only the names of the righteous are inscribed in the book of life.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See, James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 231.

<sup>12</sup> Hans-Joachim Krauss, *Psalms 60–151: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 188. The phrase “book of life/of the living” (*sēper hayyīm*) is used in the OT only in Ps 69:28. Some have suggested that the Hebrew phrase should be rendered “book of the living” and not “book of life.” That is linguistically possible, but the parallel expression in Isa 4:3—“written for life in Jerusalem”—supports the translation “book of life” (cf. Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 169).

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Weiser writes that in Ps 87:6, “the particular nations and human beings who worship Yahweh are recorded in the celestial book like a roll of citizens, classifying them according to their native country. God counts those who profess him. It is an imposing number of people from all over the world. Those who were once the enemies of Israel and so also of Yahweh now belong among his worshippers!” (*Psalms: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962], 582). One cannot totally exclude the possibility that the persons mentioned in the Psalm whose names are inscribed in heaven are the names of Israelites born in exile, in a foreign land (Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 187–188). Mays writes, “Exiles from Judah and the Jews among the dispersion could know that by the grace of God they were ‘born there.’ The psalm can be read as a dramatic portrayal of the Old Testament hope that all nations would be drawn to the kingship of the Lord (e.g., Isa. 2:2–4; 45:22; Zech. 2:10–11; Pss. 22:27; 48:8–9)” (*Psalms*, 281–282).

<sup>14</sup> Leo Koep writes, “We understand the expression Book of Life, especially if we equate it with the expression Book of the Living, as a proper designation for the heavenly register of citizens in which the names of the citizens of the kingdom of God are written” (*Das himmlische Buch*, 36).

<sup>15</sup> Based on Exod 32:32, some scholars have suggested that the book of life contains the names of all living on the earth, and that only those who sin are blotted out of it (J. Kühlwein, “סֵפֶר *sēfer* book,” *TLOT*, 2:813; H. Haag, “כְּתָב *kātab*,” *TDOT*, 7:380). Such an idea is not explicitly stated in the text or required by the context. What is certain is that Moses’ name is written in that book and

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Scripture does not describe the process by which names are recorded in the heavenly book of life. Some have found Rev 17:8 useful when dealing with this particular concern. As mentioned above, there a follower of the beast is defined as one “whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” The implication appears to be that only the names of the servants of God have been written in that book from the foundation of the world. Obviously the text describes divine foreknowledge—God knows in advance the names of those who will respond positively to the work of the Spirit in their lives and has written their names in the book—but not predestination in the sense of an arbitrary decision fixing the eternal destiny of every human being. The language of divine foreknowledge serves to emphasize the assurance of salvation.<sup>16</sup> Within the arena of history, the inclusion of names in the book of life is based on the event of the cross (Rev 13:8) and appears to take place when the individual surrenders his or her life to the Lord. This is suggested by the fact that the name of a righteous person could be removed from the divine ledger because of unfaithfulness and sin. That awful possibility excludes the idea of predestination, as defined above.<sup>17</sup> In fact, “the divine foreordination is thus linked with the human readiness to carry the conflict to victory.”<sup>18</sup>

### I.B.2. Deleting Names from the Book of Life

The possibility of removing a name from the heavenly book of life is very real. Moses asked the Lord to remove his name from “Your book which You have written” (Exod 32:32). He was asking the Lord to exclude him from being part of His plan if that would make it possible for the Israelites, who had sinned against Him, to be part of it.<sup>19</sup> God’s answer came back: “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book ” (32:33). Only on account of rebellious sin would a name be removed from that divine register. The psalmist prayed with respect to the enemies, “May they be blotted out of the book of life

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that only the names of sinners will be blotted out of it. The text implies that the names of the Israelites are written on that book because Moses, as I will suggest below, seems to be asking that his name be blotted out in order to preserve the names of the Israelites in it. As we have seen, other passages from the Bible indicate that only the names of the righteous have been written in the book of life.

<sup>16</sup> Gottlob Schrenk, “*Biblion*,” in *TDNT*, 1:620, comments, “In the NT the image is freed from fatalism and becomes an expression of the assurance of salvation of the Christian community, which knows that it is elected on the impregnable basis of the divine counsel of grace (2 Tim. 2:19).”

<sup>17</sup> H. Balz, “*Biblion* scroll; writing; document,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the NT*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:218, writes, “According to Rev 3:5, the baptized are also threatened with the danger of being blotted out of the book . . . if they do not remain loyal and conquer in the battle of the end time. Also in other places the idea is not predestinarian; believers show by their own lives that they are in the Book of Life.”

<sup>18</sup> Schrenk, “*Biblion*,” 1:620.

<sup>19</sup> Moses was attempting to atone for the sin of the people with his own life; see John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 432; Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 290.

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and may they not be recorded with the righteous” (Ps 69:28). As already indicated, the enemies appear to have been among the righteous, but the way they dealt with the psalmist indicated that they were no longer righteous, and consequently the psalmist asked that their names be blotted out of the book of life. Revelation 3:5 reaffirms the regrettable possibility of a righteous person falling from grace and having his or her name removed from the book.

**I.B.3. Judgment, Grace, and the Book of Life**

It is through a divine act of judgment that names are removed from the book of life. Daniel 7:9-10 describes a scene of judgment during which heavenly books were opened. Toward the end of the book of Daniel the eternal verdict is announced: “Everyone who is found in the book, will be rescued,” and will enjoy “everlasting life,” but the others will experience disgrace and “eternal contempt” (12:1, 2). Notice that in Dan 7 the reference is to “books,” in the plural, but in Dan 12 we have the singular, “the book.”<sup>20</sup> As a result of the judgment names are preserved in the book of life or removed from it. Interestingly, the first reference to the book of life is found precisely in the context of God’s judicial activity against the sin of Israel (Exod 32:32). Moses argues his case before the Lord based on the understanding that God’s verdict against a person results in the removal of his or her name from the book of life.<sup>21</sup>

John states that “he who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (Rev 3:5). In the judgment, where Christ represents his people and speaks on their behalf, those who overcome will be dressed in white garments and their names will be retained in the book of life. They are acknowledged to be true citizens of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem (21:27). The implication is that it is possible for believers to fall from grace and consequently to have their names blotted out from the book of life. The book of life is also opened during the judgment of the wicked, after the millennium (20:12). Since their names were “not found in the book of life” (20:15), they are not recognized as citizens of the kingdom of God.

If the reason for removing a name from the book of life is sin, then natural human sinfulness would make it simply impossible to retain any name on that book (Rom 3:22). However, Moses was very much aware of the fact that the only way to keep the name of a sinner in the book of life was through God’s atoning work (Exod 32:31). Revelation 13:8 correlates the writing of names in the book of life with the atoning death of the Lamb of God. We could conclude

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<sup>20</sup> John J. Collins writes, “The book in question is undoubtedly the book of life, as distinct from, though related to, the ‘books’ of judgment in Dan 7:10 and the ‘book of truth’ of 10:21” (*A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 391).

<sup>21</sup> F. L. Hossfeld and E. Reuter have suggested that Exod 32:32 “associates it [the book] with the theme of the relationship between the righteous and the unrighteous at God’s judgment” (“סֵפֶר *sēper*,” *TDOT*, 10:339, 340).

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that writing down and retaining the names of the righteous in that book is an act of divine forgiving grace. That grace initiates the process and accompanies believers in their journey of faith and commitment to Christ. It is through their constant dependence on it that their names will be preserved in the book of life of the Lamb.<sup>22</sup> They will be acknowledged as loyal citizens of the kingdom of God.

### I.B.4. The Nature of “Life” in the Book of Life

The nature of the “life” mentioned in the name of the book of *life* is debated. The references to that book in the New Testament clearly indicate that the noun “life” designates eschatological life, i.e., eternal life in the kingdom of God. It is debatable whether the same meaning or a similar one can be assigned to the references to the book of life in the Old Testament. The tendency among scholars has been to interpret the name of the book as referring to a book in which are inscribed either the names of all living persons<sup>23</sup> or only that of the righteous.<sup>24</sup> Removing the name of a person from that register would then mean that the person’s life will be shortened.<sup>25</sup> This interpretation is possible but very

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<sup>22</sup> C. Becker, “Biblion, Book,” in *NIDONTT*, 1:244.

<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce, “Book of Life,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. J. D. Douglas, F. F. Bruce, N. Hilyer, D. Guthrie, R. Miller, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), p.146; J. Kühlewein, “סֵפֶר סְפָרִים *sēfer* book,” *TLOT*, 2:813.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Schrenk, “Biblion,” *TDNT*, 1:619.

<sup>25</sup> See Edgar W. Smith, Jr., “Book of Life,” *ISBE*, 1:534, who writes, “To be blotted out of this book means an (untimely) end of life.” Hans Wildberger comments, “Those who are written into the book are not simply the living, but rather those designated to live a full life” (*Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 169). This position is partially based on the idea that supposedly the Old Testament has little to say about eternal life. But the fact is that the idea of eternal life is known in the Old Testament; cf. Helmer Ringgren, “חַיָּה *chāyāh*,” *TDOT*, 4:340; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 101–150* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), XLI–LII; Valentino Cottini, *La vita futura nel libro dei Proverbi: contributo alla storia dell’esegesi* (Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1984), 363–389; and Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Neukirchenvluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 258–269, 283–346. Traditionally scholars have argued that it was after the exile that the Jews accepted the Persian ideas of resurrection and judgment after death. Others have sought the origin of the Israelite idea of the resurrection in the Canaanite myth of the death and return to life of Baal. A third group has suggested an inner-biblical origin based on the biblical conviction that God is the Creator and that as such He also have the power to recreate, to bring back to life (for a brief summary of these views see P. S. Johnston, “Death and Resurrection,” *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 446; Johnston himself argues for a sociological explanation: “It was the threat and then the reality of exile which led to the prophetic development of the motif, perhaps one already known from Canaanite religion(s). But the development was a distinctly Israelite one – not of a dying and rising deity, but initially of a moribund and revived nation, and then of dead and resurrected individuals”). B. C. Ollenburger, “The Old Testament and Resurrection,” *Ex Auditu* 9 (1993): 29–24, has argued for the inner-biblical development. Concerning the influence of Persian ideas on the biblical concept of the afterlife, Edwin Yamauchi, “Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East,” *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,



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unlikely. It weakens the significance of Moses' request to have his name blotted out of God's book. Why would he make that petition if sooner or later, after all, his name was going to be blotted out of the book—that is to say, he would die? Was he simply asking the Lord to shorten his life, to kill him?<sup>26</sup> What would be the significance of that request? As we have already suggested, He seemed to have had something more significant in mind. The blotting out of a name from the book is a divine act of judgment that alienates sinners from God once and for all and totally and permanently obliterates the person from the world of the living; it is a divine act of destruction (Deut 9:14).

According to Ps 69:28, blotting out a name from the book of life does not mean the person will simply die. It means the person will not be able to enjoy life in the company of the righteous. This same idea is contained in Ps 87:6. The life mentioned in those passages is not available to the wicked. In fact they are excluded from it. Therefore the reference is not to a natural life that at some point will come to an end for both the wicked and the righteous. The name of the book of life seems to express an eschatological hope in the Old Testament.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to observe that “the book of the generations of Adam” (Gen 5:1) deals with life in the here and now, but at the same time points to a hope that transcends the present world of life and death. It points to a life that overcomes the power of death and that is enjoyed in the presence of God. The experience of Enoch appears to illustrate what would be the experience of those whose names are recorded in the heavenly book of life. For Enoch the “book of the generations of Adam”—the book of life and death—was in fact a book of life;

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1998), writes, “There are also fundamental differences in how the Jews and the Persians conceived of the resurrection. The Jewish dead, who are buried, rise from the dust of the earth, whereas the Persian dead, who are exposed, must be recreated from the elements. Furthermore, in Zoroastrianism the resurrection is linked with the Fiery Ordeal and the Renewal, whereas in Judaism resurrection hope means life beyond the grave with Yahweh. The case for reliance of Judaism on Zoroastrianism, therefore, is highly speculative at best . . . It is, therefore, best to hold that belief in a resurrection was an inner-Jewish development and to abandon the appeal to a retrojection from very late Persian sources” (48–49). For a similar view, see Richard Bauckham, “Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Second Temple Judaism,” *Life in the Face of Death*, 80–86.

<sup>26</sup> This is suggested by Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 210.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell Dahood finds in the expression “book of life” (Ps 69:28) a reference to eternal life. In fact he renders the Hebrew as “the scroll of life eternal” and adds, “Since the context is eschatological, *ḥayyim* here . . . refers to everlasting life” (*Psalms II: 51–100* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1968], 164). See also Charles A. Briggs and Emilie G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), 2:120, which states that the book of life in Ps 69:28 designates “the book recording the names of those who share in everlasting life, cf. Ex. 32<sup>32,33</sup> Dn. 12<sup>1</sup> also Hb. 2<sup>4</sup>.” Marvin E. Tate tries to combine two different positions when he writes, “The reference is primarily to ordinary earthly human existence, but an eschatological dimension in the sense of eternal life should not be excluded entirely” (*Psalms 51–100* [Dallas: Word, 1990], 200). He does not explain how the two views are valid at the same time.

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a life beyond the grasp of death.<sup>28</sup> There is at least one passage in the Old Testament where the eschatological significance of the book of life is clearly indicated. Daniel 12:1 states that retaining the name in the book of God means enjoying eternal life, that is to say, a life in union with God after the resurrection.<sup>29</sup>

This discussion has some important implications for the nature of eschatological hope in the Old Testament. The references to the book of life in the Old Testament witness to the fact that there was in the Israelite faith an expectation of a life that will overcome death and be enjoyed in the company of God and the righteous.

**I.C. Significance of the Book of Life**

The biblical information concerning the book of life leads us to several important conclusions. *First*, the nature of the heavenly book of life is unknown to us, but that should not lead us to question its reality. It is obvious that the Bible is using a social practice—keeping record of the names of those who were citizens of a particular city or group—to help us understand heavenly realities. The social practice illustrated and pointed to something more significant in the heavenly realm. Something happens at the administrative center of the universal government of God when a person becomes a citizen of His kingdom. The liberation of souls from the kingdom of darkness and their incorporation into the kingdom of God is not only celebrated in heaven but recorded in the book of life.

*Second*, the reality of the book of life underscores for the people of God the fact that those who belong to Christ are already members of the heavenly city, of the kingdom of God. Their names are already written in the heavenly ledger and they are considered to be citizens of that kingdom with all the privileges, prerogatives, and responsibilities that entails. The certainty of their heavenly citizenship is so unquestionable that Jesus encourages them to rejoice because their names are already in the book of life. The certainty of that act is also emphasized by insisting that it is God Himself who writes the names in the book and that this takes place in heaven, out of the reach of human envy and evil powers. Whatever may happen to the name recorded in heaven will be the result of the decision of a loving God.

*Third*, the decision to record the names of believers in the book of life is not arbitrary or accidental. From the divine perspective, and based on God's foreknowledge, He inscribed in His book, even before the foundation of the world, the names of those who will believe. This decision was hidden in the divine

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<sup>28</sup> Koep is right when he argues that the book of Adam contained the name of the living and the dead, but the book of life contains the name of those who will not die, who belong among the living ones in the kingdom of God, enjoying eternal life (38–40). See also Pronk, *Afterlife*, 267–268.

<sup>29</sup> John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 391, comments, "The 'book' inevitably recalls the books of judgment that are opened in Dan 7:10, and the fact that the account of the resurrection follows immediately suggests that it is the book of eternal life."

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counsel. What this means is that writing the names of believers in the book of life was not a divine after-thought but part of the divine intention, even before they actually and willingly decided to be members of the city of God. Divine foreknowledge and human freedom do not cancel out each other.<sup>30</sup>

*Fourth*, it is possible for the name of a person to be removed from the heavenly book of life. This is obviously based on the fact that God respects human freedom. But believers are fully persuaded that what makes possible the inclusion of their name in that book is at the same time what makes it possible to retain it there, namely, the forgiving grace of God. The names recorded there are those of repentant sinners, and as long as they persevere in faith, retaining a spirit of dependence on and submission to God through Christ's atoning work, their names will not be blotted out during the judgment. They are indeed citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

## **II. Book of Good and Bad Deeds**

Besides the book of life, there are biblical references to other heavenly "books" in which are recorded the deeds of human beings. Daniel mentions "books" that are opened during the eschatological judgment (7:10), and Revelation refers to these same "books" (20:12). There is little in Scripture about the nature of these books, but what is available will be useful in an attempt to explore their significance and function.

### **II.A. Social Background of the Books of Deeds**

Probably the best parallel for the heavenly books of good and bad deeds is found in the ancient practice of keeping a record of the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah. For instance, there was a book called the "Book of the Deeds of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:41), containing "the acts of Solomon and whatever he did, and his wisdom." This book may have been used by the composer of the biblical book of Kings to gather information about the king. There are also references to the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" (1 Kgs 14:19; 15:31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:39; 2 Kgs 1:18; 10:34; 13:8, 12; 14:15, 28; 15:11, 15, 21, 26, 31), and the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" (e.g. 1 Kgs 14:29; 15:7, 23; 22:46; 2 Kgs 12:22; 14:18; 15:6, 36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17, 25; 23:28; 24:5).<sup>31</sup> These books contained information similar to what we find in the

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<sup>30</sup> The obvious question is, if God also foreknew those who will fall from grace, why did He include their names in the book of life knowing He would blot them out later? Possibly because God also determined in advance that the blotting out of the names of apostates will take place during the final judgment in order to show to all intelligent creatures throughout the universe the justice of His decisions. God is more interested in saving people than in condemning them; in writing down their names for salvation than in blotting them out of the book of life.

<sup>31</sup> The name has been translated from the Hebrew as "Book of the Words of the Days of the Kings of Israel/Judah," but the Hebrew term *dābār* means not only "word" but "affair" or "thing," and in the context of the name of those books it expresses the idea of "events [of the days]," that is to say, "[current/daily] events." A book of daily events is tantamount to "Book of the Chronicles of . . .

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biblical book of Kings. They probably were a record of the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah, or the royal annals.<sup>32</sup> In the biblical books of Chronicles several books of the deeds of the kings of Judah are mentioned, but the most common one is the “Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel” (e.g., 2 Chr 25:26; 28:26).<sup>33</sup> Those royal annals contained the good and bad deeds of the kings of Israel and Judah.

The practice of preserving the activities of the kings in chronological records was very common throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>34</sup> In Ezra there is a reference to “the record books” of the fathers of Artaxerxes (4:15), and in Esther “the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia” is mentioned (10:2; cf. 2:23). That book appears to have contained information concerning the activities of individuals who had come into contact with the king (Esther 6:1).

### II.B The Heavenly Books of Deeds

The belief in heavenly records of human deeds was widely spread throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>35</sup> We have already mentioned several texts where that belief was expressed. Other ancient texts mention “the tablets of his misdeeds, errors, crimes, oaths” and also “the tablets of his good deeds.”<sup>36</sup> These references are not common, making it difficult for us to know the exact nature of those books in the ancient world and their purpose.

#### II.B.1. Content of the Books

In Scripture the heavenly books of human deeds are simply designated “books” (Dan 7:10; Rev 20:12) or “book” (Ps 56:8). There is only one passage where we find what appears to be a specific name for it, “the Book of Remem-

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<sup>32</sup> Hossfeld and Reuter, “סֵפֶר: *sēper*,” *TDOT*, 10:331.

<sup>33</sup> Some times the name of the two kingdoms are inverted and instead of “Judah and Israel” we find “Israel and Judah” (2 Chr 27:7; 35:27; 36:8); in one case it simply reads, “Deeds/Acts of the Kings of Israel” (2 Chr 33:18). Several other books used by the biblical writer are “the Chronicles of Samuel,” “the Chronicles of Nathan,” “the Chronicles of Gad” (1 Chr 29:29), “the Prophecy of Ahijah,” “the Visions of Iddo” (2 Chr 9:29), “the Records of Shemaiah” (12:15), “the Midrash [Treatise] of the Prophet Iddo” (13:22), “the Annals of Jehu the Son of Hanani” (20:34), “the Vision of the Prophet Isaiah” (32:32; cf. 26:22), and “the Records of the Hozai [Seers]” (33:19). These books contained information concerning the performance of the kings. Some of them may have been official royal annals.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, John A. Wilson, “Egyptian Historical Texts: The Asiatic Campaigns of Thut-mose III,” *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1969), 234–241; A. Leo Oppenheim, “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts: Text From Hammurabi to the Downfall of the Assyrian Empire,” *ibid.*, 269–301; and Albrecht Goetze, “Hittite Historical Texts,” *ibid.*, 318–319.

<sup>35</sup> Koepf, 14–18; Paul, 346.

<sup>36</sup> Paul, 346.

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brance” (Mal 3:16).<sup>37</sup> In some cases there is some information with respect to what is written in the books. For instance, they contain the painful experiences of God’s servants (Ps 56:8), the acts of love performed on behalf of others (Neh 13:14), the conversations of those who fear the Lord (Mal 3:16), and the evil acts of the wicked (Isa 65:6). It is difficult to establish whether there are two different records, one for evil deeds and another for good deeds, or one record of all human deeds. The plural “books” suggests the possibility of at least two books, or several volumes. The fact that the Book of Remembrance “contains the names and an ongoing account of the words and deeds of the God fearers”<sup>38</sup> suggests that only good deeds are recorded there. Jewish traditions distinguish between a book recording the deeds of the righteous and a second one recording the deeds of the wicked.<sup>39</sup> A similar distinction is made by E. G. White.<sup>40</sup>

**II.B.2. Function of the Books**

The primary function of those records is judiciary.<sup>41</sup> That is to say they preserve evidence that will be used in the divine tribunal to determine the nature of the commitment of the individual to the Lord. This is not clearly present in all the passages dealing with the books of human deeds, but it is clear enough in most of the passages to allow us to assign to it a central importance. Besides, the book of deeds of the kings of Israel and Judah were unambiguously used by the biblical writers to judge the commitment or lack of commitment of the kings to the Lord.

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<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew name of the book is *sēper zikkārôn*. A book with a similar name is mentioned in Esther 6:1, the “Book of Remembrances” (*sēper hazzikkrônôt*) further defined as “the Chronicles” of the Medo-Persian king. The activities of Mordecai on behalf of the king were recorded in it.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 340.

<sup>39</sup> See David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1102. *Jubilees* 30:21–23 reads: “All of these words I have written for you, and I have commanded you to speak to the children of Israel that they might not commit sin or transgress the ordinances or break the covenant which was ordained for them so that they might do it and be written down as friends. But if they transgress and act in all the ways of defilement, they will be recorded in the heavenly tablets as enemies. And they will be blotted out of the book of life and written in the book of those who will be destroyed and with those who will be rooted out from the land. And on the day that the children of Jacob killed Shechem he wrote (on high) for them a book in heaven that they did righteousness and uprightness and vengeance against the sinners and it was written down for a blessing.” In the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 9:21–23 the prophet describes his experience while in vision in the seventh heaven: “And I say to him [the angel] what I had asked him in the third heaven, [‘Show me how everything] which is done in that world is known here.’ And while I was still speaking to him, behold one of the angels who were standing by, more glorious than that angel who had brought me up from the world, showed me (some) books, but not like the books of this world; and he opened them and the books had writing in them, but not like the books of this world. And they were given to me, and I read them, and behold the deeds of the children of Israel were written there, their deeds which you know, my son Josab. And I said, ‘truly, nothing which is done in this world is hidden in the seventh heaven.’”

<sup>40</sup> *Great Controversy*, 481–484.

<sup>41</sup> Koep, 28–29.

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Usually, when a king is introduced in the book of Kings, a judgment formula is employed, a verdict is stated with respect to his relationship with the Lord. The experience of king Abijam illustrates the point: “Abijam became king over Judah. . . . He walked in all the sins of his father . . . ; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, like the heart of his father David” (1 Kgs 15:3). In another case we read, “Jehoash became king . . . . He did right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kgs 12:1-2). This judicial pronouncement was followed by an exposition of the evidence that supported it, taken from the chronicles of the kingdom, the record of the good and bad deeds performed by the king. Clearly, “the reign of each king is evaluated in terms of whether he *did what was right in the eyes of the Lord* (e.g., 1 Kgs 15:11) or whether *he did evil in the eyes of the Lord* (e.g., 2 Kgs 13:2).”<sup>42</sup> This is judgment by works. The concluding formula, “the rest of the acts of . . . , are written in the Book of the Chronicles of Israel/Judah,” alerts the reader to the fact that more evidence is available, if needed, to support the judgment passed on the king. In other words, the biblical writer is arguing that there is enough objective evidence recorded in the books of the deeds of the king to demonstrate beyond any doubt that the verdict for or against the particular king is legally justifiable.<sup>43</sup> A similar phenomenon is to some extent found in 1 and 2 Chronicles.<sup>44</sup>

The use of the heavenly records of human deeds in the divine judicial proceedings is already present in Isa 65:6—“Behold, it is written before Me, I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will even repay into their bosom.” There is some ambiguity concerning the meaning of the expression “it is written before Me.” It could refer to the record of the sins of the people or it could designate a written decree of judgment that is immutable.<sup>45</sup> The context suggests that the reference is to the heavenly record of the sins of the people which God, at the moment of making a legal decision, has in front of Him.<sup>46</sup> After examining it He determines not to keep silence, that is to say, not to appear to be indifferent, but to act against sin. Verse 7 indicates that what provokes this divine legal reaction

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<sup>42</sup> I. W. Proven, “Kings (1 and 2): Theology of,” *NIDOTTE*, 4:848 (italics in the original).

<sup>43</sup> The same procedure is applied to Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:33; 14:19), Asa (15:3; 15:23), Nadab (15:26, 31), Baasha (15:34; 16:5), Elah (16:13, 14), Zimri (16:19, 20), Omri (16:25, 27), Ahab (16:30–34; 22:39), Jehoshaphat (22:43, 46), Ahaziah (22:52; 2 Kgs 1:18), Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 13:2, 8), Jehoash (13:11; 14:15), Amaziah (14:3, 18), Jeroboam (14:24, 28), Azariah (15:3, 6), Zechariah (15:9, 11), Menahem (15:18, 21), Pekahiah (15:24, 26), Gotham (15:34, 36), Ahaz (16:2, 19), Hezekiah (18:3; 20:20), Manasseh (21:2, 17), Josiah (22:2; 23:28), and Jehoiakim (23:37; 24:5). The book of Kings seems to be taking all the kings of Israel and Judah to the divine tribunal to evaluate them based on their acts in history.

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, the experience of Amaziah (2 Chr 25:2, 26), Jotham (27:2, 7), Ahaz (28:2, 26), Hezekiah (29:2; 32:32), Josiah (34:2; 35:27).

<sup>45</sup> See John N. Oswald, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 640, who leans towards the second possibility but concludes that “in either case, the point is that judgment is sure and inescapable.”

<sup>46</sup> See Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:504; and R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 270.

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is the sin of God's people, implying that what is written before the Lord is exactly that sin.

The books of good and evil deeds are opened particularly during the eschatological judgment, before the kingdom of God is established on earth. The scene of judgment in Dan 7:9-10 describes the divine tribunal in session and the use of books during the proceedings. A similar scene is described in Rev 20:12, during the judgment of the wicked. It is explicitly stated that the final and immutable verdict is based on what has been written in the books. All are judged according to their deeds, as recorded in the heavenly books.

### **II.B.3. Blotting out Recorded Deeds from the Books**

Nehemiah 13:14 suggests an intriguing idea with respect to the books of deeds. Nehemiah requests that his loyal deeds not be blotted out from the heavenly records. The possibility of deleting good deeds from those records suggests that evil deeds could be also blotted out from them. That idea is found in one ancient Near Eastern text, in a collection of Sumerian and Akkadian incantations. It reads, "May his sin be shed today, may it be wiped off him, averted from him. May the record of his misdeeds, his errors, his crimes, his oaths, (all) that is sworn, be thrown into the water."<sup>47</sup> In Scripture misdeeds are eliminated or blotted out from the heavenly registers not through incantations, but through repentance and divine grace (Ps 51:1; Isa 43:25; 44:22; Acts 3:19; cf. Ezek 18:21-22).<sup>48</sup> Sins that are not blotted out of the heavenly books are unforgiven sins (Ps 109:14).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Erica Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* (Graz: Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1958), 27.

<sup>48</sup> Koep has correctly argued that biblical passages where the blotting out of sins is mentioned presuppose the existence of heavenly records where evil deeds are inscribed (27–28). L. Alonso-Schökel, "מָחָה *māḥā*," *TDOT*, 8:229, also writes, with respect to the context in which the verb *māḥa* [to blot out] is used, "Although the verb *kātab* [to write] and the noun *sēper* [book] are not frequently mentioned in the same context, they are presupposed in many instances."

<sup>49</sup> L. Alonso-Schökel, 8:230. We should make a few comments here concerning Col 2:14, where the Greek verb *exaleiphō* ("wipe off, erase, cancel, remove") is used in connection with the *cheirographon* ("handwritten document, certificate of debt"). The verb *exaleiph* is the one used in other places to refer to the blotting out of sins (Acts 3:19) and for the erasing of a name from the book of life (Rev 3:5). This has led some scholars to conclude that the reference is to the heavenly record of human sin which was blotted out, removed by Christ (e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 164–165). Support for this view is often found in documents of Jewish origin in which the term *cheirographon* is used to designate the document in which the good works of the righteous and the sins of all are recorded (see Eduard Lohse, "*Cheirographon*," *TDNT*, 9:435). In that case *cheirographon* simply designates a document or bill of indictment. If we accept that possibility, Paul would not be necessarily discussing the blotting out of sin from the heavenly records but explaining that "any kind of indictment against us on the basis of regulations is meaningless right from the start because of the cross of Christ" (Markus Barth and Helmut Blanket, *Colossians: New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [New York: Doubleday, 1994], 372). But the noun *cheirographon* was used in common Greek literature as a technical term to designate "a receipt signed by a

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Perhaps Nehemiah's statement implies that during the final judgment, the few good deeds performed by the wicked, or by those who turned from righteousness to wickedness, will not make any difference with respect to their final destiny. Their evil deeds will reveal that they did not remain in a permanent covenant relationship with the Lord. The idea is well expressed in the book of Ezekiel: "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for he will die" (18:24). Instead of the verb "blot out," we have here the verb "remember," preceded by a negation ("will not be remembered"). Not to remember deeds is the equivalent of blotting them out from the heavenly books. This is explicitly stated in Isa 43:23: "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (cf. Neh 13:14; Ps 109:14).<sup>50</sup> Guilt or virtue can under certain circumstances be removed from the divine registers.<sup>51</sup>

### II.C. Significance of the Books of Human Deeds

An omniscient God does not need to keep records of the life of human beings, but they could be very useful to all intelligent creatures, including human beings. Heavenly creatures seem to be involved in the procedures of the final judgment (Dan 7:10; cf. 1 Cor 6:2; Rev 20:4). Since the Bible does not discuss the nature of those records, they remain shrouded in mystery. However, the significance of those records for us is important and very relevant.

*First, those records indicate that God is interested in every one of us as individuals.* In the Old Testament the books of chronicles were mainly a record of the activities of the kings and the impact of their actions on other persons. They were the most important leaders among the people of God, and their actions were preserved in the records for future generations. In the heavenly records no

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debtor, who acknowledges that he owes a certain sum and undertakes to repay it" (Cestas Spicq, *TLNT*, 3:508). It could be translated "certificate of indebtedness" (N. Walter, "Cheirographon handwritten document," *EDNT*, 3:464). Outside the Jewish documents mentioned above, *cheirographon* does not refer to heavenly records, and that meaning is not required in Col 2:14. The image Paul is using is not the one of heavenly books in which sins are inscribed, but that of a debt that needs to be paid. "According to Paul, humans are in debt to God because of their sins (*ta paratōmata*) and are insolvent. Christ came to lift this mortgage, and through his blood he paid for them, annulling the debt" (Spicq, 509–510). The debt is probably the penalty for sin the Colossians acknowledged when they heard the gospel and which Christ paid or canceled for them on the cross (N. Walter, 3:464). Other suggestions have been offered, but it would be better not to press the metaphor of the *cheirographon* beyond what seems to be its intended purpose. Paul was using a metaphor taken from the world of business transactions to illustrate the significance of the work Christ has done for us.

<sup>50</sup> See W. Schottroff, *TLOT*, 1:383.

<sup>51</sup> Alonso-Schökel, "מַחָה *māhâ*," *TDOT*, 8:229.



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distinction is made among human beings. We are all equally important before the Lord, and what we do, say, and experience is recorded there. Each one of us plays a significant role in the conflict between good and evil, and our actions reveal that particular function. We were not born to exist for a short period of time and then return to eternal oblivion without leaving traces of our presence on this planet. God created us and allowed us to become what we are through our experiences, decisions, and actions. The history of our lives is preserved by God in the heavenly records as a witness to the fact that He considers our presence here of significant value.

*Second, the record is not only about our actions, but about God's involvement in the lives of humans.* Humans may at times feel that they are facing life by themselves without the supporting and guiding presence of God. But the heavenly records will reveal that God was always present with them leading, guiding, and trying to influence their lives. The record of our lives is at the same time a record of the involvement of the King of the universe in every facet of our experiences in a world of sin. In other words, the books of human deeds are in fact the Books of the Chronicles of God in which are recorded His activities on behalf of every sinner on this rebellious planet. Every one of our actions are recorded there because He was always present in every one of them seeking us out, extending to us His loving hand of salvation. In the records are preserved God's providential care and guidance as we were confronted by challenges and choices that forced us to make decisions for or against Him.

*Third, the fact that human deeds are recorded in heaven in some form implies that they are accessible to others for objective analysis.* Those records play a valuable role during the final judgment in the heavenly realm in that they testify concerning God's impartial judgment. He has established that the faith-commitment of every individual to Him and to His Son is revealed through human actions, and that becomes a defining concept during the judgment. The examination of those records will once and for all unveil before God's intelligent creatures the justice of God's judicial decisions and will lead to the extermination of sin and sinners from God's creation. The examination of the books of deeds will close with a universal doxology in which God and the Lamb will be praised by all creation for their love and justice in all their actions (e.g., Rev 19:1-2).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Our study of the heavenly books suggests that heavenly things, in this case the heavenly records, are being patterned after earthly practices. That is to say, the social practice of keeping records of people in the form of birth-lists, genealogies, and chronicles appear to be projected into the operations of the heavenly realm. The question is whether the earthly practices are being used in the Bible as metaphors to help us understand theological concepts and ideas but are not intended to describe similar procedures in heaven. It is difficult to provide an

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answer to that question. It is clear that the biblical writers were persuaded of the reality of the heavenly books. Hence, we must ask, should we feel free to dispose of their convictions in order to appropriate only abstract ideas from the language and images they used? That may not be necessarily wrong. However, the question we are raising probably would have never occurred to an Israelite. Hebrew thinking does not seem to allow for the argument that earthly patterns are simply being used to convey heavenly concepts for which there is not at some level a concrete correspondence in heaven itself. This does not necessarily mean that the heavenly things have to correspond in every respect to the earthly ones. The biblical writers are clearly using human language and images to allude to a heavenly reality that cannot be fully contained in the language or in the social practices they employed to communicate their message.

The phenomenon we are describing is very similar to the biblical tendency to pattern human things on earth after the heavenly ones. For instance, the earthly sanctuary was patterned after the divine (Exod 25:8). Evidently that should not be interpreted to mean that the earthly is an exact replica of the heavenly. The biblical writers were aware of the superiority of the heavenly temple vis-a-vis the earthly. Another example comes from the sphere of human behavior. In the Old Testament the religious and social behavior of the Israelites was to be patterned after the heavenly one. The Israelite society was expected to reflect the heavenly model: "Be holy, for I am Holy" (Lev 11:44; cf. 19:2; 20:7, 26). But the holiness of the people was a pallid reflection of the unique and magnificent holiness of God; in fact, it was a limited participation in the holiness of God. Therefore, one should not press the discontinuity between the earthly and the heavenly or the heavenly and the earthly to the point of denying the reality of the heavenly. The specific nature of the heavenly is not accessible to us, but inaccessibility should not be equated with nonexistence.

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## Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns of Revelation

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The literary arrangement of the book of Revelation is very complex. Although it has been generally recognized that the structural composition of Revelation adds to the understanding of its messages, there has not been scholarly consensus with regard to its basic structure. Commentators and expositors have offered a variety of proposals as to what the structural organization of Revelation was intended to mean; few expositors share exactly the same view.

This paper explores some of the most representative proposals with regard to the structural organization of the last book of the Bible. These proposals should not be viewed as mutually exclusive and determinative. Although some offer more promising insights into the structural arrangement of Revelation than others, the variety of proposals express a broad spectrum of the book's design and composition, and also its overall theme. When brought together, they unpack the intention of the author of Revelation much more than otherwise possible.

### Significance of Springboard Passages

Revelation is characterized by a particular literary feature. It has been observed that the key to the larger significance of major sections of the book is often located in the concluding statement of the preceding section. Such a statement functions as the springboard passage concluding what precedes and introducing what follows. For instance, the section of the seven messages to the churches (chaps. 2-3) is preceded by the concluding statement of Rev 1:20 of the vision of the glorified Christ (1:9-20). This concluding statement functions at the same time as the introduction to Rev 2-3. The vision of the sealed hundred and

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forty-four thousand (chap. 7) elaborates and explains the concluding statement of Rev 6:16-17 in the form of a question regarding who will stand before the great wrath of the Lamb. The concluding statement of Rev 12:17, referring to the war against “the remaining ones of her offspring,” is developed in chapters 13-14. Rev 15:2-4 serves both as the conclusion of Rev 12-14 and the introduction to the seven last plagues.

Several springboard passages seem to provide the clue for the larger portions of the book. For instance, Rev 3:21 seems to provide the interpretive outline for chaps 4-7, and 11:18 for the entire second half of the book (Rev 12-22:5). Likewise Rev 6:9-10—finding its fullest confirmation in 8:2-6 and 13—gives the clue for the understanding of the nature and purpose of both the seven seals and the seven trumpet plagues.

The springboard principle enables the interpreter to find information that is imbedded in various passages of Revelation. It suggests that the inspired author has clearly defined his intention regarding the understanding of the text, a fact that rules out one’s search outside the book for creative interpretation. To ignore this principle would limit the understanding of the author’s own intention for the book.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Identification-Description Pattern**

Another important literary strategy of Revelation can aid the interpreter in more clearly understanding some difficult texts of the book. Whenever a new key player in the book is introduced, he/she is first identified in terms of his/her personal description or historical role and activities. Once the player is identified, John moves into the description of the player’s function and activities that are especially important to the vision. This literary strategy is first evident with reference to Rev 1:9-3:22. The identification of the resurrected Christ is provided in 1:9-20 in the list of his various characteristics. The messages to the seven churches follow in Rev 2-3. The various characteristics of Christ portray different aspects of his ministry to the needs and situations of the churches.

The same can be observed with reference to the vision of the seven seals. Before describing Christ’s opening one after another of the seven seals (Rev 6:1-8:1), John describes in chapter 5 Christ’s unique qualifications for the task of the unsealing of the seals of the sealed scroll. In Rev 11, the identification of the two witnesses (11:4) is followed by an account of their activities and experiences that are important to the vision. Also, before referring to Satan’s anger and his determination to engage in the final conflict (Rev 12:17), John provides his identification and the reason for his anger and fury (Rev 12:3-16).

This literary strategy seems to be especially helpful for the clear understanding of Rev 13 and 17. Although the focus of Rev 13 is on the final battle of

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<sup>1</sup> Paulien, "Interpreting Revelation's Symbolism," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 83.

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this world’s history, not all the things pertaining to the sea beast in the chapter relate to the end-time. Before describing the role and activities of the sea beast during the “forty-two months” of the Christian age (13:5-7), John first in 13:1-4 identifies the beast in general terms. Then, with 13:8, he moves to describe the role and function of the beast in the final crisis. The same might be applied to Rev 17. Before describing the role and function of end-time Babylon and the resurrected beast in the final crisis (17:14-18), John describes their historical roles and function. As might be seen, the principle of the identification/description literary strategy will enable the interpreter to find the sound information that the inspired author imbedded in the text.

**Approaches to the Structure of Revelation**

As one looks at Revelation, he/she will discover something more than just the basic structure of the book. This section provides a glimpse into several peculiar structural features of Revelation pointed out by some contemporary scholars.

**Recapitulative or Repetitive Structure.** A number of repetitive structures can be observed in Revelation that fall into the groups of seven: the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowl plagues. A critical problem for the interpreters is the question whether these three septenaries should be understood as parallel or recapitulatory accounts of the same events, or as a continuous or progressive chronological sequence of the end-time events in which the trumpets follow on from the seals, and the bowl plagues from the trumpets. It was Victorinus of Pettau (d. ca. 304) who introduced the principle of recapitulation in Revelation that has been followed with some modification by subsequent interpreters.<sup>2</sup>

The recapitulative parallels between the seals and trumpets series appear to be evident. A comparison between the two series shows their parallel structures:

<b>The Seven Seals</b>	<b>The Seven Trumpets</b>
The four horsemen	The first four trumpets
The fifth and sixth seals	The first and second trumpet woes
The interlude (chapter 7): The sealing of God’s people	The interlude (chapters 10-11): the little scroll, the measuring of the temple, and the two witnesses
The seventh seal: silence in heaven before the final judgment to be given to God’s servants	The third trumpet woe (the seventh trumpet): the time has arrived for the judgment of the wicked

It can be observed that both the trumpets and the seals are arranged in groups of four, two, and one. Also, both the series are interrupted by interludes

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<sup>2</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52a (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1997), xci-xcii.

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between the sixth and the seventh seal and trumpet respectively. It also becomes evident that both begin with the first century and conclude with the time of the end, something not noticeable in the seven bowl plagues series. In addition, as the “Introductory Sanctuary Scenes” structure below indicates, the seals and the trumpets presumably cover the entire Christian age. On the other hand, the seven last plagues are evidently set at the conclusion of this earth’s history.

The application of the recapitulative principle can be very helpful to the interpreter of Revelation. The information and insight obtained from clear passages may unlock the theological meaning of the parallel difficult ones. For instance, Rev 7 itself might be the clue for the understanding of chapters 10-11, particularly with regard to the identity of the two witnesses. Also, one can notice that the seven trumpets and the seven bowl plagues series are deliberately paralleled in terms of their language and content:

	<b>The Seven Trumpets</b>	<b>The Seven Bowl Plagues</b>
1st	Earth (8:7)	Earth (16:2)
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sea (8:8-9)	Sea (16:3)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Rivers and fountains (8:10-11)	Rivers and fountains (16:4)
4 <sup>th</sup>	Sun, moon, and stars (8:12)	Sun (16:8-9)
5 <sup>th</sup>	Darkness from the abyss, locusts (9:1-11)	Darkness over the throne of the beast (16:10-11)
6 <sup>th</sup>	River Euphrates (9:14-21)	River Euphrates (16:12-16)
7th	Loud voices: the kingdom has come and Christ reigns (11:15-16)	A loud voice: It is done (16:17-21)

Although the two series are evidently not the same, the examination of their structural parallels can help the reader gain the deeper theological meaning that the inspired author intended in writing the book of Revelation.

**Theories of the Structure of Revelation.** A number of scholars assume that the number seven plays an important part in the structural design of Revelation. The proposals, however, range from a fourfold to eightfold structure, each of which is based on the number seven. In order to acquaint the audience with the complexity of the question of the structure of Revelation, it will suffice to list some of the major views. However, care is taken to present the full spectrum of these views on the subject. Since enough criticism is offered in different commentaries, the various views are explored without a detailed criticism.

Eugenio Corsini, for instance, argues that Revelation falls into four groups of seven events (the seven letters, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls) which determine the whole structure and message of the book.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Jacques Ellul finds five septenaries—the churches, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls, and a group of visions introduced with the formula: “Then I

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<sup>3</sup> Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, Good News Studies 5 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 62-63.

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saw.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars divide the book into six sections, each of which is based on the number seven. For Merrill C. Tenney the six divisions are the churches, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls, the seven personages (the woman, the dragon, the child, Michael, the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth, and the Lamb), and the seven new things (the new heaven, the new earth, the new peoples, the new Jerusalem, the new temple, the new light, the new paradise).<sup>5</sup> Austin M. Farrer also sees Revelation divided into six sections, each of which containing seven subdivisions.<sup>6</sup>

Farrer's scheme was adopted with some minor modifications by A. Yarbro Collins, who suggests an eightfold structure, including the prologue and epilogue: (1) prologue (1:1-8); (2) the seven messages (1:9-3:22); (3) the seven seals (4:1-8:1); (4) the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19); (5) seven unnumbered visions (12:1-15:4); (6) the seven bowls (15:1-16:21) with Babylon appendix (17:1-19:10); (7) seven unnumbered visions (19:11-21:8) with Jerusalem appendix (21:9-22:5); and (8) epilogue (22:6-21).<sup>7</sup> This structure with the "unnumbered" sections and two appendices appears arbitrary and is problematic. In addition, more than just a few scholars argue for the sevenfold structure and see septets in each of the seven main visions.<sup>8</sup> At this point the comment of Gerhard Krodel is very instructive: "We should not construct cycles of sevens where John did not number his visions."<sup>9</sup>

No doubt some element of truth exists in many of these various proposals. The very proliferation of all such theories and the lack of consensus on the structure of the book caution us against accepting any one approach as definitive.<sup>10</sup> More recently, David Aune argues, on the basis of Rev 1:19, for a two-fold structure: (1) 1:9-3:22, which centers on the theophany of the exalted

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 36-37.

<sup>5</sup> Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Austin M. Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images* (Glasgow: University Press, 1949; reprint, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 45.

<sup>7</sup> A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 9 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 13-39; idem, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message 22 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), xii-xiv; so also Alan Johnson, "Revelation," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 411; on the criticism of this structure see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 17; and Aune, xciv.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 16 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926), 181-185; J. W. Bowman, "Revelation, Book of," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), 4:64-70. For other representative sevenfold outlines see Bowman, 66-67.

<sup>9</sup> Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 60.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 46; for an extensive appraisal on the various approaches to the structure of Revelation see Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 108-151.

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Christ, and (2) 4:1-22:9, a series of episodic vision narratives introduced with a heavenly journey. Aune's simple structure is very persuasive, and it is clearly suggested by John (cf. Rev 1:19; 4:1).<sup>11</sup> However, despite its attractiveness, this avenue of interpretation overlooks the fact that Rev 12 begins a new (eschatological) division of the book; this clearly sets the book into three distinctive divisions.

### Introductory Sanctuary Scenes

Kenneth A. Strand divided Revelation into eight basic visions, with a prologue and an epilogue. He found each of the visions to be preceded by a "victorious-introduction scene with temple setting."<sup>12</sup> Building on Strand's research, Richard M. Davidson and Jon Paulien argue for a sevenfold structure of the book of Revelation, with the prologue and epilogue, based on the temple setting.<sup>13</sup> They have convincingly shown that each of the seven major divisions is introduced by a sanctuary scene. It would thus appear that the entire book is set up on the sanctuary system typology:

Prologue (1:1-8)

1. Introductory sanctuary scene (1:9-20)  
The messages to the seven churches (chapters 2-3)
2. Introductory sanctuary scene (chapters 4-5)  
The opening of the seven seals (6:1-8:1)
3. Introductory sanctuary scene (8:2-5)  
The blowing of the seven trumpets (8:6-11:18)
4. Introductory sanctuary scene (11:19)  
The wrath of the nations (12:1-15:4)
5. Introductory sanctuary scene (15:5-8)  
The seven last plagues (chapters 16-18)
6. Introductory sanctuary scene (19:1-10)  
The eschatological consummation (19:11-21:1)
7. Introductory sanctuary scene (21:2-8)  
The New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)

Epilogue (22:6-21)

These seven introductory sanctuary scenes seem to form the skeleton of the book of Revelation. They indicate that the heavenly temple in Revelation is seen

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<sup>11</sup> Aune, c-cv.

<sup>12</sup> Rev 1:10b-20; 4:1-5:14; 8:2-6; 11:19; 15:1-16:1; 16:18-17:3a; 19:1-10; 21:5-11a; see Kenneth A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation" (107-121), and "The 'Victorious-Introduction Scenes' in the Visions in the Book of Revelation" (267-288), in *AUSS*, 25 (1987). Both were reprinted with some modification in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, 35-72.

<sup>13</sup> Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology" (112-115), and Jon Paulien, "Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions" (187-188) in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*; Jon Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *AUSS*, 33.2 (1995): 247-255; Aune also notes these introductory temple scenes (see *Revelation 1-5*, xcvi-xcviii). The point of departure between Davidson and Paulien and Strand is Rev 16:18-17, which Strand treats as an introductory vision with temple setting that sets chaps. 17-18 as a separate vision. Paulien sees chaps. 17-18 as an elaboration of the seven-bowls vision of chaps. 15-16.



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as the center of all divine activities. In fact, the entire Revelation-vision (4:1-22:5) is apparently perceived from the vantage point of the heavenly temple.<sup>14</sup> This can be observed from the fact that, besides constant reference either to the temple or features found there, all the divine actions that take place upon the earth are described as preceded by scenes of divine activities in the heavenly temple.

The structure based on the introductory sanctuary scenes indicates two definite lines of progression: first, there is a complete circle moving from earth to heaven and then back to earth again. Then, there is a definite progression from the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary to intercession, to judgment, then to the cessation of the sanctuary function, and finally to its absence. The following table reflects a chiasmic structure of the book:

- |                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| (1) Rev 1:12-20              | EARTH  |
| (2) Rev 4-5 (Inauguration)   | HEAVEN |
| (3) Rev 8:3-5 (Intercession) | HEAVEN |
| (4) Rev 11:19 (Judgment)     | HEAVEN |
| (5) Rev 15:5-8 (Cessation)   | HEAVEN |
| (6) Rev 19:1-10 (Absence)    | HEAVEN |
| (7) Rev 21:1-22:5            | EARTH  |

It can be observed that the first and the seventh parallel segments are set on the earth, while the second through the sixth are set in heaven. The second and the sixth describe a sanctuary worship scene: they refer to the throne, worship, the Lamb, the twenty-four elders, and praise to God Almighty. However, while in the second there is the largest quantity of sanctuary allusions, in the sixth sanctuary scene any "explicit sanctuary images are absent. The heavenly sanctuary has faded from view."<sup>15</sup> Also, while the third scene portrays the continual services of intercession in the temple, involving the burning of incense, the fifth scene points to the cessation of intercession in the temple. It is filled with smoke from the glory of God, and no one can approach to the throne of grace to receive mercy and forgiveness. The fourth sanctuary scene is set in the center. In this literary arrangement chapters 12-14 form the central portion of the book, where the church standing on the threshold of the great end-time conflict is the focal point of the entire book of Revelation.

A definite progression also moves from the continual daily (*tamid*) to the yearly services of the Old Testament sanctuary services. It appears actually that the structure of Revelation is based on the daily and yearly sanctuary services pattern. Recent studies have drawn striking parallels between the first half of the

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<sup>14</sup> Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John," *Biblical Research*, 28 (1983): 7.

<sup>15</sup> Paulien, "Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, 187-188.

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book and the order of the daily service (*tamid*) in the temple in the first century when John wrote.<sup>16</sup>

The basic description of the daily order of the *tamid* service is found in the tractate *Tamid* in the Mishnah, a second century AD collection of Jewish laws, traditions, and practices based on earlier tradition.<sup>17</sup> The *tamid* service began when a selected priest entered the first department of the temple, where he trimmed the lampstand and refilled them with a fresh supply of oil (*Tamid* 3:7, 9; cf. Rev 1:12-20). The great door of the Temple remained open (*Tamid* 3:7; cf. Rev 4:1; the Greek text indicates that the door had been opened before John saw it in the vision). Both the Mishnah and Revelation refer to the slaying of a lamb (*Tamid* 4:1-3; cf. Rev 5:6). The lamb's blood was poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering in the outer court of the Temple (*Tamid* 4:1; cf. Rev 6:9). After the pouring out of the blood, the priest offered incense at the golden altar in the Holy Place (*Tamid* 5:4; Luke 1:8-11; cf. Rev 8:3-4). While the priest ministered the incense on the golden altar, the audience kept silence for a short period of time (*Tamid* 7:3; cf. Rev 8:1). At the end, trumpets were blown announcing the conclusion of the service (*Tamid* 7:3; cf. Rev 8:2, 6).

This shows clearly that the progression of the first half of the book follows the same order as did the daily of the sanctuary. At this points Jon Paulien remarks:

Not only does this portion of the Apocalypse contain potential allusions to all the major details of the *tamid* liturgy, it alludes to them in essentially the same order. Thus, the material making up the septets of the churches, seals, and trumpets would be subtly associated with the activities in the temple related to the continual or *tamid* service. If the introductory scenes to the seals and the trumpets septets signify inauguration and intercession, reference also to the *tamid* service would be appropriate.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, the second half of Revelation is evidently based on the annual service of Yom Kippur. As Strand demonstrates, already Rev 11:1-2 contains explicit allusions to the Day of Atonement.<sup>19</sup> Yom Kippur was the day of judgment; the central activities of this festival took place in the most holy place. In Rev 11:19 is the first reference to the *naos* (the inner sanctuary of the

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<sup>16</sup> Paulien summarizes the parallels in "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus," 225-256; Daniel T. Niles (As *Seeing the Invisible* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961], 112-114) was the first who noted the connection between Rev 1-8 and the Mishnah, but as Paulien notes, he unsuccessfully attempts to pursue the parallels throughout the book. See Alberto R. Treiyer's criticism of the comparison (*The Day of Atonement and the Heavenly Judgment* [Siloam Springs, AR: Creation Enterprises International, 1992], 669-672).

<sup>17</sup> The following parallels reflect Paulien's study (cf. *The Mishnah "Tamid" 1-7*, trans. Herbert Danby [London: Oxford UP, 1974], 582-589).

<sup>18</sup> Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus," 256.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, "An Overlooked Old-Testament Background to Revelation 11:1," *AUSS*, 22 (1984): 322-325.

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temple). From these points in Revelation there is repeated focus on the *naos*, where the central activities of Yom Kippur took place (Rev 11:19; 14:15; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17). “Judgment language and activity, a central theme of Yom Kippur, is also a major concern of the second half of the Apocalypse” (cf. Rev 14:7; 16:5, 7; 17:1; 18:8, 10, 20; 19:2, 11; 20:4, 12-13).<sup>20</sup>

The introductory sanctuary scenes structure renders a number of implications for the literary understanding of the book of Revelation. First of all, it shows that Rev 11:19 must be taken as the dividing line between the historical and eschatological parts of Revelation, rather than Rev 14:20, as suggested by Strand. It means that Rev 1-11—the seven churches, seals, and trumpets—focuses on the entire Christian age, and Rev 12-22 on the final events of this earth’s history. The structure affirms, for instance, the view that the vision of Rev 4-5 does not refer to the investigative judgment scene, but rather the enthronement of Christ that occurred at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:32–36). It also indicates that the seals and the trumpets have to be understood to cover the broad sweep of Christian history, while the seven last plagues are set in the time of the end.

#### Annual Cycle of Festivals

A number of scholars have suggested that the structure of Revelation is also modelled on the annual feasts of the Hebrew cultic calendar established by Moses on Mount Sinai: Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feasts of Tabernacles (cf. Lev 23).<sup>21</sup> The life of ancient Israel revolved around these festivals; no wonder that one would discover their eschatological implication in the book of Revelation, since, as we have seen, the book draws heavily on the Old Testament imagery. While such assertions are easily overdrawn, the evidence seems to support the view that the general outline of Revelation follows in sequence the Jewish annual feasts.

**Passover.** The introductory vision to the messages to the seven churches appears to reflect the paschal concept and theme (Rev 1:5, 17-18). Nowhere else in the book is there such a concentrated emphasis on Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ is referred to as “the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead,” the one “who loves us and released us from our sins by his blood” (Rev 1:5). “I am the first and the last, and the living one, and I was dead and behold, I am living for ever and ever, and I have the keys of the death and the hades” (Rev 1:17-18). Jon Paulien suggests that Christ’s intense scrutiny of the churches is reminiscent of the Jewish household’s search for leaven in the house to remove

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<sup>20</sup> Paulien, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus,” 256-257.

<sup>21</sup> Including Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*; M. D. Goulder, “The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies,” *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 342-367; Niles, *As seeing the Invisible*; Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” 119-125; Paulien, “Seals and Trumpets,” 190-192; idem, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus,” 257-261. This section reflects Davidson’s and Paulien’s research.

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it just before Passover (cf. Exod 12:19; 13:7).<sup>22</sup> Also, M. D. Goulder sees strong parallels to “an ancient tradition for each church to have a paschal candle burning in worship from Easter to Pentecost.”<sup>23</sup> The call for a meal of mutual fellowship (Rev 3:20) is reminiscent of the paschal meal. Since Passover was the only festival that the first-century Christians considered fulfilled in the earthly Christ (cf. John 19:35-37; 1Cor 5:7), “it is fitting that it would be associated with that portion of the book where He is portrayed in His ministry to the churches on earth.”<sup>24</sup>

**Pentecost.** Rev 4-5 is fittingly associated with Pentecost. The inauguration/enthronement ceremony of Christ in the heavenly temple took place during the ten days following his ascension, reaching its climax on the day of Pentecost. It is then that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the earth (cf. Rev 5:6). The song of the twenty-four elders as representatives of the redeemed humanity in Rev 5:9-10 recalls Exod 19:5-6, and the “lightnings and sounds and thunders” proceeding from the throne (Rev 4:4; cf. Exod 19:16), the sound of the trumpet (Rev 4:1; cf. Exod 19:16-19), and the summons to “come up” (Rev 4:1; cf. Exod 19:20, 24) recall the Mount Sinai event.<sup>25</sup> The giving of the law to Moses parallels to the taking of the book of the covenant by Christ in Rev 5. It should be noted that Exod 19:1-20:23 and Ezek 1—another major literary background to the throne vision of Rev 4—were the traditional Jewish lectionary readings for the Feast of Pentecost.

**Feast of Trumpets.** The series of the blowing of the seven trumpets of Rev 8-9 echoes the seven monthly new-moon festivals that covered the span between the spring and fall festivals that climaxed in the Feast of Trumpets (cf. Num 10:10). The Feast of Trumpets summoned the people of Israel to prepare for the coming day of judgment, known as the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. This leads to a conclusion that the seven trumpets in Revelation “represent the ongoing sequence of seven months with the seventh trumpet representing the Feast of Trumpets itself. It is, interestingly, within the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:18) that we find the first explicit use of judgment terminology in Revelation. In Jewish thought the seventh-month Feast of Trumpets ushered in the time of judgment that led up to the Day of Atonement (cf. 11:18-19). Correspondingly, from Rev 11:19 to near the end of the book there is an increasing focus on judgment.”<sup>26</sup>

**Day of Atonement.** While the first half of Revelation appears to be modelled on the *tamid* or daily service of the Hebrew cultic system, Rev 12-22 reflects the annual service of Yom Kippur. We have seen earlier that, starting with Rev 11:1-2, the elements of Yom Kippur are alluded to throughout the second half of the book.

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<sup>22</sup> Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus," 258.

<sup>23</sup> Goulder, "The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies," 355.

<sup>24</sup> Paulien, "The Seals and Trumpets," 190.

<sup>25</sup> Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," 122-123.

<sup>26</sup> Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus," 259-260.

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**Feast of Tabernacles.** The last in the sequence of the five main Jewish festivals was the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkoth that followed Yom Kippur. This feast, known also as the Feast of Ingathering, came after the gathering of the harvest into the granary. Its purpose was to keep afresh, in the minds of the people, Israel's wilderness wandering to the promised land. The feast was an occasion for a special celebration and rejoicing before the Lord (Lev 23:40) filled with palm-branches waving, singing and music, and a great feast.<sup>27</sup> The final section of Revelation contains many allusions to the Feast of Tabernacles. The harvest is over and the wilderness wandering of God's people is over (Rev 14-20). God's people are ingathered into the New Jerusalem where God is now "tabernacling" with them (Rev 21:3). There is much celebration accompanied with singing (Rev 7:9-10; 14:3; 15:2-4; 19:1-10), the playing of harps (14:2), and the waving of palm branches (Rev 7:9). In addition, the primary features of the Feast of Tabernacles —water and light commemorating the water from the rock and the pillar of fire during the wilderness wandering—have their ultimate fulfillment in Rev 22:1-5.

#### Chiastic Structure

An increasing number of contemporary authors observe a chiasmic structure in the book of Revelation. Some recent studies argue for the sevenfold chiasmic structure. Such a structure has been proposed by E. Schüssler Fiorenza:<sup>28</sup>

- A. 1:1-8
- B. 1:9-3:22
- C. 4:1-9:21; 11:15-19
- D. 10:1-15:4
- C'. 15:5-19:10
- B'. 19:11-22:9
- A'. 22:10-21

Despite the attractiveness of this structure, the parallels between the corresponding parts are not easy to demonstrate.

Kenneth A. Strand noted that the book falls naturally into two parts, historical and eschatological, with a dividing line in chapter 14.<sup>29</sup> While Strand's twofold division into the historical and eschatological is undeniably evident in Revelation, the context does not support the dividing lines he suggested for chapter 14. The context suggests the dividing line between the historical and

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<sup>27</sup> For the second-temple practice of the Feast of Tabernacles see the Mishnah *Sukkah* 1-5 (Danby, 172-181).

<sup>28</sup> See E. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Apocalypse," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968): 344-356; idem, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 35-36; Beale (131) proposes a ninefold structure.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1976), 43-59; C. Mervyn Maxwell follows the same division ("The Message of Revelation," *God Cares* 2, [Boise: Pacific Press, 1985], 60-61).

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eschatological division to be rather in Rev 11:19. A careful study indicates that the first half of Revelation focuses on the realities of the whole Christian age, the focus of the entire second half of the book—rather than just chapters 15-22—is set into the eschatological framework focusing on the events surrounding the Second Coming.<sup>30</sup>

This article suggests the following outline of Revelation that seems to synchronize more precisely the chiasmic parallel segments:

- A. Prologue (1:1-8)
- B. Promises to the overcomer (1:9-3:22)
- C. God's work for man's salvation (4:1-8:1)
- D. God's wrath mixed with mercy (8:2-9:21)
- E. Commissioning John to prophecy (10:1-11:18)
- F. Great controversy between Christ and Satan (11:19-13:18)
- E'. Church proclaims the end-time gospel (14:1-20)
- D'. God's final wrath unmixed with mercy (15:1-18:24)
- C'. God's work for man's salvation completed (19:1-21:4)
- B'. Fulfillment of the promises to the overcomer (21:5-22:5)
- A'. Epilogue (22:6-21)

It must be noted that the first half in this chiasm focuses on the entire history of the Christian age, while its chiasmic counterparts focus exclusively on the time of the end. The segment at the center points to the central theological theme of the book.

By comparing the prologue and the epilogue, the parallels become self-evident:

- 1:1-----"to show to his servants" ----- 22:6
- 1:1 ----- "the things which must soon take place" ----- 22:6
- 1:1 ----- Jesus sends his angel ----- 22:6, 16
- 1:3 ----- "blessed is the one . . . who keeps . . ." ----- 22:7
- 1:3----- "the words of the prophecy" ----- 22:7
- 1:3 ----- "the time is near" ----- 22:10
- 1:4 ----- "the seven churches" ----- 22:16
- 1:8 ----- "the Alpha and the Omega" ----- 21:13

The parallels clearly indicate that the themes and concepts that begin the book are drawn to their conclusion. Their obvious purpose appears to be to take readers back to the beginning, to prevent them from resting in a kind of self-sufficient utopia dream, and to motivate them to endurance in the midst of oppression and persecution until the time of the very end.

Likewise the contents of the messages to the seven churches parallel the material regarding the new Jerusalem. The last two chapters of the book might rightly be titled: "The overcomer will inherit these things" (Rev 21:7), because

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<sup>30</sup> A constructive criticism of Strand's view is offered by Norman R. Gulley, "Revelation 4-5: Judgment or Inauguration?" *JATS*, 8/1-2 (1997): 64-65; see also Paulien, "The Seals and Trumpets," 192.

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many promises given to the overcomers in chapters 2-3—to eat of the tree of life, to escape from the second death, to receive a new name, to have authority over the nations, to be dressed in the white, not to have their names blotted out of the book of life, to be acknowledged before the Father, to be pillars in the temple and to never leave it, to have the name of God written on them, and to sit with Jesus on his throne—find their fulfillment in 21:6-22:5.

Segment C shows that Rev 4:1-8:1 is paralleled to 19:1-21:4. Both begin with heavenly-worship scenes. Chapters 4-5 and 19 contain the throne, the twenty-four elders, the four living beings, worship with exclamations of praise.<sup>31</sup> All these elements are found in a group only in these two chapters. However, while Rev 4:1-8:1 focuses on the realities of the entire Christian age, its chiasmic counterpart is clearly an end-time passage. While in chapters 4-5 God is praised as the Creator, and Christ as the Redeemer, the reason for the praise in chapter 19 is the destruction of Babylon. Further parallels are found between the seven seals and 19:11-21, including the white horse and the rider with the crown(s). The statement: “And behold a white horse, and the one sitting upon it (6:2)” is repeated verbatim in Rev 19:11. However, while in 6:2 the rider on the white horse wears a garland, the victory crown, in 19:12 the rider wears the diadem, the royal crown. It is not until the eschatological conclusion that Jesus wears the royal crown and reigns among his people on earth.

There are many other parallels. For instance, chapter 6 also raises the question: “How long, O Lord, holy and truly, will you not judge and avenge our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?” Rev 19:2 states that God has judged and “avenged the blood of his servants.” Also the scene of the breaking of the sixth seal refers to kings, magistrates, military commanders, the rich, the strong, slaves, and free men running in terror trying to hide themselves at the coming of Christ. On the other hand, Rev 19:18 refers to kings, military commanders, the strong, slaves, and free men found among the slain at the coming of Christ. Parallels are also found between Rev 7:9, 13-14 and the invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb in 19:7-10; both texts portray God’s redeemed people dressed in white robes. Also, both 7:15-17 and 21:3-4 speak of God’s tabernacle with his people, and that God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Finally, the silence “for about half an hour” of the seventh seal (8:1) might correspond to the “silence” of the millennium in Rev 20.

The parallels in segment D are also interesting. Both passages have visions introduced with sanctuary scenes. However, while in 8:2-6 there is the continual service of intercession in the heavenly temple, 15:8 points to the cessation of intercession in the temple. This suggests that the seven trumpets are God’s judgments mixed with mercy, while the seven bowl plagues are the execution of

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<sup>31</sup> For structural parallels between the two texts see William H. Shea, “Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals” *AUSS*, 22 (1984), 251-257.

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God’s final wrath unmixed with mercy. Further comparison shows evident parallels between the two series:

	<b>The Seven Trumpets</b>	<b>The Seven Bowls</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Earth (8:7)	Earth (16:2)
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sea turns into blood (8:8-9)	Sea turns into blood (16:3)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Rivers and fountains (8:10-11)	Rivers and fountains (16:4)
4 <sup>th</sup>	Sun, moon, and stars (8:12)	Sun (16:8-9)
5 <sup>th</sup>	Darkness from the abyss, locusts (9:1-11)	Darkness over the throne of the beast (16:10-11)
6 <sup>th</sup>	River Euphrates (9:14-21)	River Euphrates (16:12-16)
7 <sup>th</sup>	Loud voices: the kingdom has come and Christ reigns (11:15-16)	A loud voice: It is done (16:17-21)

This chiasmic outline sets the seven trumpet plagues in the historical section, while the execution of the bowl plagues comes at the time of the end. This structure suggests that the trumpet and bowl plagues are deliberately parallel in terms of language and content; the trumpet plagues are intended to be the foretaste and forewarning of the future execution of God’s judgments in their fullness in the seven final plagues.

Finally, segment E parallels Rev 10:1-11:18 with 14:1-20. In the first, John is, first, commissioned to “prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings” (10:11); then there are two witnesses prophesying to “those who dwell on the earth” (11:1-14). Chapter 14 describes first God’s faithful people (14:1-5), and then the proclamation of the everlasting gospel “to those who dwell on the earth, and every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (14:6-13). Both sections refer to the giving of glory to God (11:13; 14:7) and fear (11:18; 14:7). Furthermore, Rev 11:18 states that the time has come to give the reward to God’s servants and to “destroy the destroyers of the earth.” Rev 14 first describes the gathering of God’s faithful people in term of the wheat harvest (14:14-16), and, then, the judgment of the wicked in terms of the trampling of the winepress (14:17-20).

This brings us to the central segment of the structure (Rev 12-13), indicating that the great controversy between Christ and the counterfeit trinity—Satan and his two associates, the sea and earth beasts—is the focal point of the entire book. This section defines the framework of the material in the book from the perspective of the great controversy with a special emphasis on the final conflict at the conclusion of the history of this world.

**Threefold Structure of Revelation**

While recognizing the potentials in the various options with regard to the structural organization of the book, it appears that the threefold structure of the book of Revelation, with a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21), is the most obvious. Such a structure is self-evident on the basis of Rev 1:19, and



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11:19 introduces a completely new division, most probably describing the content of the little scroll of Rev 10. The first main division comprises the messages to the seven churches (1:9-3:22); the focus of the second major division is on the opening of the seven-sealed scroll (chapters 4-11); and the third one deals with the eschatological consummation of this earth's history and the ultimate establishment of God's kingdom (12-22:5).

Interestingly, each of these three major divisions opens with an introductory vision of Christ. Rev 1:9-20 introduces the messages of the seven churches (chapter 2-3); chapters 4-5 begin the section of the opening of the seven-sealed scroll (chapters 6-11); and 12:1-12 begins the eschatological division of the book (chapters 12:13-22:5). Each introductory vision portrays Christ in a unique role. The portrayal of Christ in the introductory sections seems to be the key to the understanding of the remaining part of each division, defining its respective theme and content.

**1. Messages to the Seven Churches (Rev 1:9-3:22):**

**Christ as the High Priest**

The first major division of Revelation opens with the vision of the glorified Christ walking among the seven lampstands as the High Priest (Rev 1:9-20). He is here pictured fulfilling the covenant promise given to ancient Israel: "I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Lev 26:12). In walking among the churches, Christ is present with the churches serving them individually. He knows everything about each one of them. Much more than that, he has the solution to their problems and needs. This is why he commissions John to write the things revealed to him and pass them on to the churches (Rev 1:11). Each of the messages to the churches begins and concludes alike, introducing Christ and concluding with an appeal to listen to the Spirit. What is found in between is Christ's special message suited to the actual situation, condition, and needs of the church to which the respective message is addressed, together with the particular historical situation of the city in which the church was located. Christ visits each church to help her to be ready to meet the coming crisis. If the churches want to know how to live and make a decisive "turn around" in their religion, they need only listen to the messages of the one who knows them.

This suggests that the first three chapters of Revelation, together with the special introduction of Christ, provide the foundation upon which the prophetic portion of the book (chapters 4-22) builds. These chapters define the nature and purpose of the entire book of Revelation: to reassure the church throughout history of Christ's perennial promise: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).

**2. Opening of the Sealed Scroll (Rev 4-11):  
Christ as the Eschatological Ruler**

The second major division of Revelation is introduced with the vision of Christ as the promised king of Davidic lineage (chapters 4-5). This introductory scene depicts in figurative language the enthronement of the resurrected Christ on the throne of the universe and the inauguration into his universal dominion and lordship over the world. With his taking the seven-sealed scroll—as the token of the transference of all authority and sovereignty to him—Christ is enthroned on the throne of the universe at the right hand of the Father. Now, he is the preordained eschatological ruler of the Davidic lineage (cf. Rev 5:5) “who, on the basis of the saving work completed by him, is called to discharge with authority God’s plan for the end of history.”<sup>32</sup>

Rev 4-5 is thus the starting point for the interpretation of what chapters 6-11 describe. These chapters provide the panoramic survey of history in the scene of the opening of the seven seals and the blowing of the seven trumpets from Christ’ ascension to heaven until his return to earth. The section describes events and conditions within historical time which are preparatory to the opening of the sealed scroll in the eschatological consummation.<sup>33</sup> It provides the biblical philosophy of history, providing God’s people with the assurance of God’s ultimate control of events and different movements and activities occurring on earth in relation to the church. Although God’s faithful people might experience oppression and hardship in the hostile world, they are provided with the certainty that their Lord and King who rules on the throne of the universe is in ultimate control. He will bring the history of this world to its ultimate end and deal definitely with the problem of evil.

**3. Contents of the Sealed Scroll (Rev 12:1-22:5):  
Christ as Apocalyptic Michael**

The last of the three major divisions of the book of Revelation (chaps. 12-22:5) appears to be the disclosure of a part of the sealed scroll of Rev 5. This section brings us to the conclusion of the history of the great conflict between Christ and Satan. This great conflict is introduced in 12:1-12, where Christ is portrayed in his role as the apocalyptic warrior Michael. As the commander of the heavenly armies, Christ is a constant victor over Satan. He has defeated Satan by his death on the cross, his ascension, and throwing him from heaven down to earth, and also during the entire period of the Christian era. Satan is frustrated by constant defeat and becomes furious against the “remaining ones of the woman’s offspring.” With a firm determination to win the final battle, he associates himself with two allies, the sea beast and the earth beast. By forming

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<sup>32</sup> Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, The Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 76.

<sup>33</sup> Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 57.

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the counterfeit trinity, he uses every available means to prevent the accomplishment of God's plans for the world. What follows in the rest of the book (chaps. 13-22) is the description of the events leading to the conclusion of the cosmic drama and the ultimate establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

Rev 12 is intended to provide God's people with the certainty that they are not left on their own in the closing events of this world's history. The saints are clearly in the front line of the final battle. As Christ defeated Satan before and has fought the battle on behalf of his people during the history of Satan's attempt to destroy them, so he will be with his end-time people in the final crisis. The future might at times look gloomy, and the eschatological events threatening and frightening; yet the believers must keep in mind that Satan has already lost the battle. Christ the Victor will wage war for his followers until the forces of darkness are finally defeated. The satanic triumvirate and the oppressors of God's people will find their definite end in the lake of fire (Rev 19:20-20:15), while God's people will triumphantly find their rest in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5).

The foregoing brief analysis of the three introductory visions to the major divisions of the book of Revelation defines the main theme of the book as intended by the inspired author and explains the book's theological perspective. It demonstrates that the real purpose of the last book of the Bible is not just to inform about the events in the world (whether historical or eschatological), but to help the faithful understand God's plan and purpose for them as history approaches its end. It is not to let them understand the future, but to acquaint them with the God of Revelation who holds the future and to provide them with the certainty of Christ's presence with his faithful people throughout history in general, as well as during the time of the end in particular (cf. Matt 28:20).

In conclusion, it appears that the rich structural design of the book of Revelation was well planned by the inspired author. This design is, thus, very significant for understanding the sweeping thematic progression of the book. It warns the reader against studying and interpreting a passage or section in isolation from the rest of the book. Any interpretation of the text must be in agreement with the general purpose of the book as a whole.

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## Linguistic and Thematic Parallels Between Genesis 1 and 3

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### Introduction

A superficial glance may give the impression that there are no points of correspondence between Genesis 1 and 3. However, a deeper and more exhaustive analysis from linguistic, literary, and thematic perspectives reveals that there are indeed significant similarities between these two chapters. Generally, scholars have attributed Genesis 1 and 3 to two different literary sources: the Priestly (P) source for the redaction of Genesis 1 and the Jahvist (J) source for the redaction of Genesis 3. The immense majority of the studies on Genesis 1 and 3 sustain this view.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars have analyzed the linguistic and thematic parallels between Genesis 1 and 2, but there are no systematic and deep studies of the linguistic, literary, and thematic correspondences between Genesis 1 and 3.<sup>2</sup> This article will establish that such linguistic and thematic parallels between Genesis 1 and 3 do indeed exist.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 74-76, 80-93, 178-81, 186-97; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 1-2, 41-44; Ch. Cohen, "Jewish Medieval Commentary on the Book of Genesis and Modern Biblical Philology. Part I: Gen 1-18," *JQR* 81 (1991): 1-11; J. Kselman, "The Book of Genesis: A Decade of Scholarly Research," *Int* 45 (1991): 38-92.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, J. B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1978); W. H. Shea, "The Unity of the Creation Account," *Origins* 5 (1978): 9-38; idem., "Literary Structural Parallels between Genesis 1 and 2," *Origins* 16 (1989): 49-68; H. P. Santmire, "The Genesis Creation Narratives Revisited: Themes for a Global Age," *Int* 45 (1991): 366-79.

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed study of Genesis 2-3 and its linguistic relationship with Genesis 1, see R. Ouro, *The Garden of Eden Account: The Literary Structure of Genesis 2-3 and its Linguistic Relationship with Genesis 1* (Entre Rios, Argentina: River Plate Adventist UP, 1997) (Spanish); idem., "The Garden of Eden Account: The Chiastic Structure of Genesis 2-3," *AUSS* 40 (2002) (forthcoming).

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The thesis of this article is that there are nine texts within these two narratives that are parallel in form and content.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that both accounts were written by the same author, resulting in a similar linguistic, literary, and thematic model and establishing a common literary design.

We will analyze what it is objectively fixed and observed (the current Masoretic Text [MT]), rather than what is subjectively supposed and proposed (the Documentary hypothesis). As D. W. Baker urges, we should study the text as a literary unity to find where it is divided into smaller sections, using the mechanisms used to mark the divisions to indicate the unity.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, as M. Kessler points out, each passage must be studied in its objective context, its *Sitz im Text* (“text setting”) before it can fairly be studied in its vague and subjective *Sitz im Leben* (“vital setting”).<sup>6</sup>

Using these considerations and positions, our investigation will proceed as follows. We will analyze the Masoretic Text in its objective *Sitz im Text*, which is the fundamental principle for a sound and rigorous scientific methodology of exegesis. We will observe the linguistic and literary dependence of Genesis 3 on Genesis 1, noticing how different antithetical and synonymous parallels correlate both accounts. We will observe the thematic dependence of Genesis 3 on Genesis 1 at certain levels, based on the linguistic and literary dependence noted in the previous point. Finally, the presence of coherences, consistencies, correspondences, and intertextual parallels between the two accounts will allow us to verify the homogeneity and internal unity of both accounts. This will falsify the presupposition of heterogeneity and internal incoherence based on the subjectivity of *Sitz im Leben* studies.

Taking into account all of the above, we begin our analysis of the correspondences and parallels between Genesis 1 and 3.

### 1. Gen 1:10 || Gen 3:17: Antithetical Parallelism

**Gen 1:10** wayyiqrāʾ ʾlōhîm layyabāšâ ʾereš ûlʾmiqʾwēh hammayim qārāʾ yammîm wayyarʾ ʾlohîm kî-ṭob. And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called seas. And God saw that it was good.

**Gen 3:17** ʾa-rûrâ hâʾdāmâ baʾbûrekâ bʾiṣṣābôn tōʾkʾlennâ kōl yʾmē ḥayyeykā. “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>For a study of biblical parallelism, see, for instance, A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1985), 31-102.

<sup>5</sup>D. W. Baker, “Diversity and Unity in the Literary Structure of Genesis,” in A. R. Millard & D. J. Wiseman (eds.) *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 197.

<sup>6</sup>M. Kessler, “A Methodological Setting for Rhetorical Criticism,” *Semitics* 4 (1974), 22-36.

<sup>7</sup>Scriptural texts are taken from the NKJV.

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In this first antithetical parallelism<sup>8</sup> between Genesis 1 and 3, we can see that “the dry land (ground)” [*layyabāšā*]<sup>9</sup> appears in Gen 1:10. This Hebrew term is a noun feminine singular. God called “the dry land (ground)” “earth” [*ʔereš*] and saw “that it was good.”<sup>10</sup> In Gen 3:17, an antithetical linguistic and thematic parallelism appears with the curse of “the ground” [*hā<sup>ʔ</sup>dāma*]<sup>11</sup> on account of the man. Where before God, seeing the land/ground, thought “How good!” [*kî-ṭob*], He now said it would be “cursed” [*ʔrûrâ*]. The Hebrew word *hā<sup>ʔ</sup>dāma* is also a noun feminine singular, like *layyabāšā*. There is a synonymous parallelism between *layyabāšā* [“the dry land (ground)”] (Gen 1:10) and *hā<sup>ʔ</sup>dāma* [“the ground”] (Gen 3:17).

### 2. Gen 1:12 || Gen 3:18: Antithetical Parallelism

**Gen 1:12** *watôšēʔ hāʔāreš dešeʔ ʕēseb mazʔrîaʕ zeraʕ lʔmînēhû weʕēš ʕōsheh-pʔrî ʔšer zarʕô-bô lʔmînēhû wayyarʕʔ ʔlōhîm kî-ṭôb.* And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its

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<sup>8</sup>As Watson points out when referring to the parallel types of words: “*antonymic word-pairs* are made up of words opposite in meaning and are normally used in antithetic parallelism” see W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOT Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 131.

<sup>9</sup>The Hebrew term *yabāšā* means “the dry land,” “the dry ground.” It appears in Exod 4:9 to refer to “dry land/ground” (close to water): “And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the *dry land*. And the water which you take from the river will become blood on the *dry land* (NKJV).” Exodus 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19 refer to the crossing of Israel on the “dry land/ground” of the Red Sea: “But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on *dry ground* through the midst of the sea. . . . So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the *dry ground*, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. . . . But the children of Israel had walked on *dry land* in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. . . . For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on *dry land* in the midst of the sea (NKJV).” In Josh 4:22 the word refers to crossing of Israel on the “dry land/ground” of the Jordan River: “Then you shall let your children know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on *dry land* (NKJV).’” See also Neh 9:11; Ps 66:6 (F. Brown, S. R. Driver & C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951], 387; cf. W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971], 127).

<sup>10</sup>Literally, in Hebrew *kî-ṭob* is a preposition + adjective in exclamative form, giving God’s thought on “seeing” the excellence of His work and its fidelity to his intentions, perhaps most adequately translated in Spanish as “Que bueno!” and in English as “How good!” though the formula “and God said” does not occur, so the thought was unspoken.

<sup>11</sup>The “ground” *hā<sup>ʔ</sup>dāma* is the area of the arable ground/land that one can work for food production (E. Jenni and C. Westermann (eds.) *Diccionario Teológico del Antiguo Testamento* [Madrid: Cristiandad, 1978], 1:110-15). Originally this word meant the arable red ground/land. Starting from this meaning, it ended up denoting any ground to plant or cultivate and/or goods (R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer and B. K. Waltke (eds.) *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* [TWOT] [Chicago: Moody, 1980], 1:10).

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kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Gen 3:18** *w<sup>e</sup>qôš w<sup>e</sup>dardar tašmîḥa*. “Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.”<sup>12</sup>

In this second antithetical parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3, we can see that “grass” *dešeʿ* (noun masculine singular) and “herb” *ʿešeb* (noun masculine singular) appear in Gen 1:12. God looked at them and thought, as we have previously indicated “How good!” [*kî-ṭob*]. Then, in Gen 3:18, God saw that to these “good” things would be added harmful “plants,” such as “thorns and thistles” [*w<sup>e</sup>qôš w<sup>e</sup>dardar*] (noun masculine singular + noun masculine singular), harmful to those now doomed to cultivate the land/ground and to the other plants God found to be “good” in the Creation account. This is an antithetical thematic parallelism, because it pertains to the same topic, but with consequences opposite to what had been intended.

### 3. Gen 1:25 || Gen 3:14: Antithetical Parallelism

**Gen 1:25** *wayyaʿas ʾlōhîm ʾet-ḥayyat hāʾāreš l<sup>e</sup>mînāh w<sup>e</sup>ʿet-hab<sup>e</sup>hēmā l<sup>e</sup>mînāh w<sup>e</sup>ʿet kol-remeš hāʾdāmā l<sup>e</sup>mînēhū wayyar<sup>e</sup> ʾlōhîm kî-ṭob*. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Gen 3:14** *wayyōʾmer yhwḥ ʾlōhîm ʾel-hannāḥāš kî ʿāsītā zzōʾt ʾārūr ʾatā mikol-hab<sup>e</sup>hēmā ūmikōl ḥayyat haššādeh*. So the Lord God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field.”<sup>13</sup>

In this third antithetical parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3, God again saw “How good!” [*kî-ṭob*] as He viewed “the beast of the earth” [*ʾet-ḥayyat hāʾāreš*], “the cattle” [*hab<sup>e</sup>hēmā*], and especially “everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind” [*kol-remeš hāʾdāmā l<sup>e</sup>mînēhū*] that He made in Gen 1:25. Look at the use of the noun masculine singular in the construct state—“everything that creeps” [*kol-remeš*]—referring to all the reptiles in absolute terms.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, in Gen 3:14, God curses one reptile, “the serpent” [*hannāḥāš*], saying to it: “you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field” [*ʾārūr ʾatā mikol-hab<sup>e</sup>hēmā ūmikōl ḥayyat haššādeh*]. This is linguistic and thematic parallelism between these texts of Genesis 1 and 3. (There is also reverse parallelism in the order of presentation: beast, cattle, creepers in 1:25, then serpent, cattle, beast in 3:14.) These texts constitute the narrative nucleus of the antithetical parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3.

<sup>12</sup>NKJV.

<sup>13</sup>NKJV.

<sup>14</sup> There is debate over whether *kol-remeš* means reptiles or might include small animals or insects, but the parallel between these two verses suggests at the least that the serpent was among *kol-remeš*, and may even mean that the author understood *kol-remeš* to mean serpent-like reptiles.

**4. Gen 1:12 || Gen 3:6: Synonymous Parallelism**

**Gen 1:12** *watôṣēḇ hā'āreṣ deše' ešeb maz'ria' zera' l'minēhū we'eš* 'ōseh-p'ri 'šer zar'ō-bō l'minēhū wayyar' lōhīm kī-ṭob. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Gen 3:6** *watēre' hāiššā kī ṭōb hā'eš l'ma'kol w'kī ta'wā-hū* lā'ēnayim w'neh'mād hā'eš l'haš'kīl watiqqah mipiryō watō'kal watitēn gam-l'šāh 'immāh wayyō'kal. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.<sup>15</sup>

Another linguistic and thematic parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3 appears in these texts.<sup>16</sup> In Gen 1:12 we find the Hebrew formula “How good!” [*kī-ṭob*].<sup>17</sup> The phrase “and God saw that it was good” [*wayyar' lōhīm kī-ṭob*] refers here to all the vegetation He has created. This same formula appears in Gen 3:6, used by the woman to refer to “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good [lit. ‘How good!’—*watēre' hāiššā kī ṭōb*] for food.” The woman saw “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” as good, beautiful, pleasant, and desirable much as “God saw that it was good” when He viewed in Gen 1:12 the grass, plants, and trees He had created.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the woman was in effect pronouncing her judgment on the quality of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” just as God had judged the quality of the vegetation He had made.

**5. Gen 1:25 || Gen 3:1: Synonymous Parallelism**

**Gen 1:25** *wayya'aš lōhīm et-hayyat hā'āreṣ l'mināh w'et-hab'hēmā l'mināh w'ēt kol-remeš hā'dāmā l'minēhū wayyar' lōhīm kī-ṭōb*. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Gen 3:1** *w'hannāhāš hāyā arūm mikōl hayyat haššādeh šer ašā yhwh lōhīm*. Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.<sup>19</sup>

Again we consider Gen 1:25, but this time in synonymous parallel with another verse, Gen 3:1. This parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3 is highly signifi-

<sup>15</sup>NKJV.

<sup>16</sup>“Synonymous word-pairs comprise a large class with a broad spectrum . . . Its components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable in character” (Watson, 131).

<sup>17</sup>Preposition + adjective masculine singular.

<sup>18</sup>“And God saw that it was good” [*wayyar' lōhīm kī-ṭob*] || “So when the woman saw that [it] was good” [*watēre' hāiššā kī ṭōb*]

<sup>19</sup>NKJV.



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cant because of the verb used in both passages. In Gen 1:25, the verb “to do (make)” [*‘āśā*] appears in the Qal imperfect form *wayya‘as*. The same verb appears in Gen 3:1 in the same Qal form, but in the perfect, pointing toward an action concluded. This linguistic parallelism (and as we will also see it is also thematic) is very important, because when the Documentary theory distinguishes between Genesis 1 and 2-3 as being from two separate literary sources (P for the redaction of Genesis 1 and J for the redaction of Genesis 2-3), one of the fundamental arguments is the difference between the two verbs used to describe the divine activity. This difference has been based on the use of the verb *bārā* [“to create”] in Genesis 1 and the verb *‘āśā* [“to do (make)”] in Genesis 2-3. But here it is evident that there is a linguistic unity, for the same verb is used in both passages and so in both accounts. There is also a thematic unity marked by the use of the same Hebrew terminology and expressions:

A *wayya‘as* <sup>ʔ</sup>*lōhîm* [God made]

B <sup>ʔ</sup>*et-hayyat hā‘āreṣ l‘mînāh w<sup>ʔ</sup>et-hab<sup>ʔ</sup>hēmā l‘mînāh w<sup>ʔ</sup>et kol-remes hā<sup>ʔ</sup>dāmā l‘mînēhū* [the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind.] (1:25)

B’ *w<sup>ʔ</sup>hannāhāš hāyâ ‘ārûm mikōl hayyat haššādeh* [Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field]

A’ <sup>ʔ</sup>*ser ‘āśā yhwh* <sup>ʔ</sup>*lōhîm*. [which the Lord God had made.] (3:1)

Besides the linguistic relationship already signaled, B||B’ establishes a literary and thematic correspondence by means of the use in B of “beast of the earth” [*hayyat hā‘āreṣ*], “cattle” [*hab<sup>ʔ</sup>hēmā*], and “everything that creeps on the earth” [*kol-remes hā<sup>ʔ</sup>dāmā*] and in B’ of “the serpent” [*hannāhāš*], as representative of the reptiles of the land/ground, and “any beast of the field” [*kōl hayyat haššādeh*]. By means of the use of the Hebrew term *kōl* [“all/everything”] the author includes both “beast of the earth” and “cattle.” Remember that for these animals B does not use the word *kōl*. This way, a precise correspondence and parallelism on all levels between both accounts is established.

### 6. Gen 1:26-27 || Gen 3:8-9, 12, 17, 20-22, 24: Synonymous Parallelism

**Gen 1:26-27** *wayyō<sup>ʔ</sup>mer* <sup>ʔ</sup>*lōhîm na<sup>ʔ</sup>seh ʔādām b<sup>ʔ</sup>sal<sup>ʔ</sup>mēnū* . . . *wayyib<sup>ʔ</sup>rā* <sup>ʔ</sup>*lōhîm ʔet-hāʔādām b<sup>ʔ</sup>sal<sup>ʔ</sup>mō*. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image” . . . So God created man in His own image.

**Gen 3:8-9, 12, 17, 20-22, 24** *wayyithabē<sup>ʔ</sup> hāʔādām w<sup>ʔ</sup>ʔštō*. And Adam and his wife hid themselves . . . *wayyiqrā<sup>ʔ</sup> yhwh* <sup>ʔ</sup>*lōhîm ʔel-hāʔādām*. Then the Lord God called to Adam . . . *wayyō<sup>ʔ</sup>mer hāʔādām*. Then the man said . . . *ūl<sup>ʔ</sup>ādām ʔamar*. Then to Adam He said . . . *wayyiqrā<sup>ʔ</sup> hāʔādām*. And Adam called . . . *wayya‘as yhwh* <sup>ʔ</sup>*lōhîm l<sup>ʔ</sup>ādām ūl<sup>ʔ</sup>ʔštō*. Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made . . . *wayyō<sup>ʔ</sup>mer yhwh* <sup>ʔ</sup>*lōhîm hēn hāʔādām*. Then the Lord God

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said, “behold, the man . . . waygāreš ’et-hā’ādām. So He drove out the man.<sup>20</sup>

In this correspondence and parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3, the noun masculine singular “man” [’ādām] is often used.<sup>21</sup> The same term is used both in Genesis 1 to refer to God’s creation of the man (male and female), and in Genesis 3 to refer, in many verses, to the “man” in relationship to God or to the action of “individual man.”

### 7. Gen 1:28 || Gen 3:16: Synonymous Parallelism

**Gen 1:28** way<sup>e</sup>bārek ’ōtām <sup>e</sup>lōhīm wayyō’mer lāhem <sup>e</sup>lōhīm p<sup>e</sup>rū ūr<sup>e</sup>bū ūmil’ā ’et-hā’āreš w<sup>e</sup>kibšuhā ūr<sup>e</sup>dū bidgat hayyām ūb<sup>e</sup>’ōp haššāmayim ūb<sup>e</sup>’kol-ḥayyā hārōmešet ‘al-hā’āreš. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

**Gen 3:16** ’el-hā’iššā ’āmar harbā ’arbeh ‘iṣṣbônēk w<sup>e</sup>hērōnēk b<sup>e</sup>’eṣeb tēldī bānīm w<sup>e</sup>’el-’iššēk t<sup>e</sup>šūqātek w<sup>e</sup>hū’ yimšāl-bāk. To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”<sup>22</sup>

These texts reveal another very significant synonymous parallel between Genesis 1 and 3. In Gen 1:28 the verb *rābā* [“to multiply, increase”]<sup>23</sup> appears in Qal imperative form, while in Gen 3:16 it appears in Hiphil infinitive absolute—Hiphil imperfect *harbā*, in a very characteristic form found in Genesis 2-3.<sup>24</sup> But, while in Genesis 1 it is a simple Qal action in imperative form, in Genesis 3 it is a causative verbal form expressing the simple action caused by another.

Consequently, in Genesis 1, God blesses the couple and tells them by means of three Qal imperatives “be fruitful; multiply; fill the earth.” Therefore, they have children in abundance. However, in Genesis 3, He tells the woman He

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<sup>20</sup>NKJV.

<sup>21</sup>The Hebrew word ’ādām appears 554 times in the OT. It has the collective meaning of man (as gender), mankind, and men, and it is only used in singular and absolute state, and never with suffixes. The “individual man” is expressed with *ben ’ādām*, and the plural “men” with *b<sup>e</sup>ne/b<sup>e</sup>not (ha) ’ādām*. The meaning of the word continues unchanged throughout the OT (Jenni and Westermann, 1:92).

<sup>22</sup>NKJV.

<sup>23</sup>This is a very common form in northwestern Semitic, similar to the Ugaritic *rb* and the Akkadian *rabū*. This is the common suffix of many Assyrian-Babylonian names, e.g. “Hammurabi”: “the god Ham (maybe ’ammu) is big.” The root appears about 200 times in the OT. Two more important differences with relationship to the meaning are related with the appearance in Qal form (60 times) and in Hiphil form (155 times). The first time it appears is in Gen 1:22, where it translates as “to multiply,” but other varied translations appear in later texts. In Hiphil, the most common translation is “multiply,” but many other translations are also given (TWOT, 2:828).

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Gen 2:16-17 (Qal verbal form) and Gen 3:16.

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“will greatly multiply” not only her conception but her sorrow, and He reiterates it when He tells her “in pain you shall bring forth children.” Thus, these verses directly correspond linguistically and thematically with Genesis 1, showing that at the beginning it was not this way. That is to say, bearing children was not meant to be painful (the expression “in pain you shall bring forth children” implies that this had not been so in the past).

### 8. Gen 1:29-30 || Gen 3:2-3, 6: Synonymous Parallelism

**Gen 1:29-30** wayyō<sup>mer</sup> ʾlōhîm hinnēh nātātî lākem ʾet-hol-ʿēšeb zōrēʿa zeraʿ ʾšer ʿal-p<sup>nē</sup> kol-hāʾāreš ʾšer-bō p<sup>rî</sup>ʿēš zōrēʿa zāraʿ lākem yihyeh l<sup>ʾ</sup>āk<sup>lā</sup>. Ul<sup>e</sup> kol-hayyat hāʾāreš ūl<sup>ʾ</sup>kol-ʿōp haššāmayim ūl<sup>ʾ</sup>kōl rōmēs ʿal-hāʾāreš ʾšer-bō nepeš ḥayyā ʾet-kol-yereq ʿēšeb l<sup>ʾ</sup>āk<sup>lā</sup> way<sup>hî</sup>-kēn. And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food.” And it was so.

**Gen 3:2-3, 6** watō<sup>mer</sup> hāʾiššā ʾel-hannāḥāš miprî ʿēs-hagān nō<sup>kēl</sup> ūmiprî hāʿēs ʾšer b<sup>tōk</sup>-hagān ʾāmar ʾlōhîm lōʾ tō<sup>k</sup>ʾlū mimmennū w<sup>lōʾ</sup> tinn<sup>ʾ</sup>ū bō pen-t<sup>ʾ</sup>mutūn . . . watēreʾ hāʾiššā kî tōb hāʿēs l<sup>ʾ</sup>ma<sup>ʾ</sup>kol w<sup>ʾ</sup>kî ta<sup>ʾ</sup>wā-hūʾ lāʿenayim w<sup>ʾ</sup>neḥ<sup>ʾ</sup>mād hāʿēs l<sup>ʾ</sup>has<sup>ʾ</sup>kîl watiqqāḥ mipiryō watō<sup>kal</sup> watitēn gam-l<sup>ʾ</sup>ʾišāh ʿimmāh wayyō<sup>kal</sup>. And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” . . . So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.<sup>25</sup>

In these passages, we have several linguistic, literary, and thematic correspondences. The most significant parallels between Genesis 1 and 3 are the use of three similar Hebrew words: “tree” [ʿēš], “fruit” [p<sup>rî</sup>], and “to eat” [ʾāk<sup>lā</sup>] (the antecedent of Gen 1:29-30 is found in Gen 1:11-12, where the terms “tree” and “fruit” appear twice). These are repeated several times in Gen 3:2-3, 6: “We may ‘eat’ [nō<sup>kēl</sup>] the ‘fruit’ [miprî] of the ‘trees’ [ʿēs] of the garden; but of the ‘fruit’ [ūmiprî] of the ‘tree’ [ʿēs] which is in the midst of the garden, God has said “‘You shall not ‘eat’ [tō<sup>k</sup>ʾlū] it” . . . So when the woman saw that the ‘tree’ [ʿēs] was good for ‘food’ [ma<sup>ʾ</sup>kol], . . . and a ‘tree’ [ʿēs] desirable to make one wise, she took of its ‘fruit’ [mipiryō] and ‘ate’ [tō<sup>kal</sup>]. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ‘ate’ [yō<sup>kal</sup>].” Therefore, we can see that there is a linguistic, literary, and thematic unity, because both chapters take into account

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<sup>25</sup>NKJV.

vegetation, food/diet, and human attitude regarding the divine command of not eating of the fruit of a tree.

### 9. Gen 1:29-30 || Gen 3:18: Synonymous Parallelism

**Gen 1:29-30** wayyō<sup>mer</sup> ʾlōhîm hinnēh nātātî lākem ʾet-hol-ʿēšeb zōrēʿa zeraʿ ʾšer ʿal-p<sup>nē</sup> kol-hāʾāreš ʾšer-bō p<sup>rī</sup>ʿēš zōrēʿa zāraʿ lākem yihyeh l<sup>ʾ</sup>āk<sup>lā</sup>. U<sup>l</sup> kol-hayyat hāʾāreš ū<sup>l</sup>kol-ʿōp haššāmayim ū<sup>l</sup>kōl rōmēš ʿal-hāʾāreš ʾšer-bō nepeš hayyā ʾet-kol-yereq ʿēšeb l<sup>ʾ</sup>āk<sup>lā</sup> way<sup>hī</sup>-kēn. And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food.” And it was so.

**Gen 3:18** w<sup>ʿ</sup>qōš w<sup>ʿ</sup>dardar tašmīḥa lāk w<sup>ʿ</sup>ākaltā ʾet-ʿēšeb haššādeh. “Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.”<sup>26</sup>

In this synonymous parallelism, we find both linguistic and thematic levels, marked by the appearance of the Hebrew words “herb” [ʿēšeb; twice] and “for ‘food’” [ʾāk<sup>lā</sup>; twice] in Gen 1:29-30. We find the same Hebrew words in Gen 3:18: “you shall ‘eat’ the ‘herb’” [ʾākaltā ʿēšeb], with the added term “of the ‘field’” [haššādeh]. This points to an alteration of the diet specified in Gen 1:29, adding the “[wild and cultivated] herb of the field” for the man as a consequence of his disobeying the divine command to not eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Now “the ground” [hā<sup>ʾ</sup>dāmā; Gen 3:17] will provide him with other plants God had not included in his original diet, establishing a precise and exact correspondence between Genesis 1 and 3.

### Summary

A detailed outline of the linguistic and thematic parallels between Genesis 1 and 3 may now be presented:

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<sup>26</sup>NKJV.

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<i>LINGUISTIC AND THEMATIC PARALLELS BETWEEN GENESIS 1 AND 3 (I)</i>		
<p><b>1. Gen 1:10</b>                      - “the dry land (ground)” <i>layya-bāšā</i>                      - “that it was good” <i>kî-tôb</i></p>	<b>Antithetical Parallelism</b>	<p><b>1. Gen 3:17</b>                      - “the ground” <i>hā<sup>w</sup>dāmā</i>                      - “cursed” <i>ʾarûrâ</i></p>
<p><b>2. Gen 1:12</b>                      - “grass” <i>dešeʿ</i>                      - “herb” <i>ʿešeb</i>                      - “that it was good” <i>kî-tôb</i></p>	<b>Antithetical Parallelism</b>	<p><b>2. Gen 3:18</b>                      - “thorns” <i>w<sup>e</sup>qôš</i>                      - “thistles” <i>w<sup>e</sup>dardar</i></p>
<p><b>3. Gen 1:25</b>                      - “everything that creeps” <i>kol-remeš</i>                      - “the beast of the earth” <i>ḥayyat hāʾāreš</i>                      - “cattle” <i>hab<sup>h</sup>hēmâ</i>                      - “that it was good” <i>kî-tôb</i></p>	<b>Antithetical Parallelism</b>	<p><b>3. Gen 3:14</b>                      - “the serpent” <i>hannāḥāš</i>                      - “beast of the field” <i>ḥayyat haššādeh</i>                      - “cattle” <i>hab<sup>h</sup>hēmâ</i>                      - “cursed” <i>ʾarûr</i></p>
<p><b>4. Gen 1:12</b>                      - “the tree” <i>weʿēš</i>                      - “fruit” <i>p<sup>r</sup>î</i>                      - “And God saw that it was good” <i>wayyar<sup>e</sup> ʾelôhîm kî-tôb</i></p>	<b>Synonymous Parallelism</b>	<p><b>4. Gen 3:6</b>                      - “the tree” <i>hāʿēš</i>                      - “fruit” <i>piryô</i>                      - “So the woman saw that [it] was good” <i>watēreʿ hāʾiššâ kî tôb</i></p>
<p><b>5. Gen 1:25</b>                      - “made” <i>wayyaʿas</i>                      - “beast of the earth” <i>ḥayyat hāʾāreš</i>                      - “everything that creeps” <i>kol-remeš</i></p>	<b>Synonymous Parallelism</b>	<p><b>5. Gen 3:1</b>                      - “had made” <i>ʿasâ</i>                      - “beast of the field” <i>ḥayyat haššādeh</i>                      - “the serpent” <i>hannāḥāš</i></p>
<p><b>6. Gen 1:26-27</b>                      - “man” <i>ʾādām</i></p>	<b>Synonymous Parallelism</b>	<p><b>6. Gen 3:8-9, 12, 17, 20-22, 24</b>                      - “man” <i>ʾādām</i></p>
<p><b>7. Gen 1:28</b>                      - “multiply” <i>ûr<sup>e</sup>bû</i></p>	<b>Synonymous Parallelism</b>	<p><b>7. Gen 3:16</b>                      - “multiply” <i>harbâ</i></p>

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<i>LINGUISTIC AND THEMATIC PARALLELS BETWEEN GENESIS 1 AND 3 (II)</i>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>8. Gen 1:29-30</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “tree” <i>‘ēṣ</i></li> <li>- “fruit” <i>p’rî</i></li> <li>- “eat” <i>’āk’lâ</i></li> </ul>	<b>Synonymous Parallelism</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>8. Gen 3:2-3, 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “tree” <i>‘ēṣ</i> (4 times)</li> <li>- “fruit” <i>miprî, ûmiprî, mipiryô</i></li> <li>- “eat” <i>nô’kêl, tô’k’lû, ma’kol, tô’kal, yô’kal</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>9. Gen 1:29-30</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “herb” <i>‘ēšeb</i></li> <li>- “eat” <i>’āk’lâ</i></li> </ul>	<b>Synonymous Parallelism</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>9. Gen 3:18</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “herb” <i>‘ēšeb</i></li> <li>- “eat” <i>’ākaltâ</i></li> </ul>

**Conclusion**

This analysis, we think, has shown clearly that there are linguistic, literary, and thematic similarities between Genesis 1 and 3. Baker claims that nothing in the structure of the book of Genesis indicates that it was *originally a heterogeneous amalgam of separate sources* as has been announced, apart from the evidence of rough unions some have proposed. In support of the ideas discussed in his article, this article shows that Genesis [or at the least, Genesis 1 and 3] seems to be a well-structured literary document.<sup>27</sup>

At least nine fundamental Hebrew texts of contact exist between the two narratives. These texts present very similar linguistic, literary, and thematic forms in many aspects. These contact points suggest that Genesis 3 was modeled after Genesis 1. The comparison of linguistic and thematic parallels provides strong evidence of intentional design in the forms found in the passages analyzed previously and suggests that both accounts were written by the same hand, for the same author, following a similar linguistic, literary, and thematic model, and establishing a common literary design. It is difficult to exclude the possibility that there could have been two authors, with the second author deliberately paralleling the first, but it seems unlikely that P would try to parallel J in these ways, or vice versa. There are enough details in common between Genesis 1 and 3 to point toward both chapters being written by the same author.

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<sup>27</sup>Baker, 214.

## The Sabbath in the First Creation Account

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The seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, plays a dominant role in the first Creation story (Gen 1:1–2:4a),<sup>1</sup> and the purpose of this article is to clarify major issues related to that fact. The first Genesis Creation account is written in a very beautiful literary structure naturally falling into seven parts, according to the seven days of creation. This literary structure is built around the two Hebrew nouns תֹהוּ *tohû* (“without form,” “formlessness”) and בֹהוּ *bohû* (“void,” “empty,” “emptiness”) which are found in the second verse of Genesis 1: “The earth was formless [תֹהוּ] and empty [בֹהוּ]” (NIV). Each of these two crucial expressions draws to itself a cluster of three creation days. The “forming” idea of the term תֹהוּ is closely linked with the first three days, when God created light and various spaces, and in my table is represented by the left column. The “filling” process of the key expression בֹהוּ forms the right column in my chart

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<sup>1</sup> Bible scholars are divided over whether Gen 2:4a belongs to the first Creation story or if it is an introductory formula to the second Creation account (2:4b–25). Among those exegetes who takes the first Creation story as Gen 1:1–Gen 2:4a are Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 78, 178, 197; Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 59, 78–79; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., The Anchor Bible, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 3–13. To the second group belongs Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 5, 36, 49; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 150–153; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 35–36, 39–41, 65, 163; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 14–17; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 79, 83–84. For the discussion for and contra, see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, Part One, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnus, 1961), 96–100; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 150–153; and Wenham, 5–10. Our arguments about the role of the seventh day in the first Creation account does not depend on either position. I concur with U. Cassuto, and it may well be that Gen 2:4 belongs to both stories as a transitory statement.

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and involves the next three creation days. Thus, three pairs of days are formed—first and fourth, second and fifth, and third and sixth—which correspond to each other and parallel each other. The first, second, and third days are related to the concept of הַיְהוֹרָה and represent the forming activity of God, while the fourth, fifth, and sixth days are related to the concept of בְּהוֹרָה and describe the filling activity of God. This literary structure demonstrates the beauty, balance, and unity of the biblical text.

God first created space, and then He filled it with the inhabitants. On the first day God created light, and on the fourth day He put lights or luminaries (sun and moon)<sup>2</sup> in their place as “inhabitants” of the light element. The second day He separated water from water by creating an expanse and on the fifth day filled the waters with fish and the sky with birds. On the third day God formed dry land and the vegetation on it, and on the sixth day God filled the land with the inhabitants he created—first a variety of land animals and creatures, and finally humans. He then gave humans and animals vegetation for food.

As a final and climactic act of His creation, God made the seventh day<sup>3</sup>—separating it from the other days of His creation and making it holy. Sabbath is a palace in time.<sup>4</sup> God created/formed a very significant temporal space, but much more than that, He also filled the time with His holiness. Thus, in the creation of the Sabbath, both columns or parts of the chart meet and find their culmination point—forming and filling kiss each other. The Sabbath is the only day where forming and filling are put together.

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<sup>2</sup> The biblical text does not state that God created the sun or the moon, but only a greater light and a lesser light. This is done on purpose because the account is anti-mythological. If the author of the first Creation story had written that God created the sun or the moon, it would mean that He created a god שֶׁמֶשׁ (*šemeš* “sun”) and a god יָרֵחַ (*yārēah* “moon”) which were worshiped by people of ancient times. In order to demonstrate that God is a mighty Creator, the author speaks about the basic function of sun and moon: they are only luminaries; they are here to divide time and seasons. See Wenham, 21–23; Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10 (1972): 12–15; Westermann, 126–134.

<sup>3</sup> The first Creation account speaks three times (Gen 2:2, 3) about the seventh day הַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי (*hayyôm haššebîm*) and not explicitly about the Sabbath, but the verb שָׁבַת (*šābat*) is used twice (Gen 2:2, 3). It is important to notice that the noun “Sabbath” (in Hebrew שַׁבָּת) is most probably derived from this root. For the discussion on this topic, see Westermann, 173. About the relationship between Creation and the Sabbath, see Martin Buber, *Moïse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 119–127.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 12. This is a unique concept and feature of the biblical Creation account. God’s revelation starts with a special presentation of God—He dwells in time. In mythological stories of creation, gods are making places for their dwellings. In the Pentateuch there are close parallels between the creation of the world and the building of the Tabernacle (compare Gen 1:31–2:3 with Exod 39:32, 43; 40:33). For further study, see Michael A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 12; Walton, 149; Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 298: “The Temple is to space what the Sabbath is to time.”



MOSKALA: THE SABBATH IN THE FIRST CREATION ACCOUNT

The whole literary structure of the first Creation story may be captured as follows:

THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE FIRST CREATION ACCOUNT<sup>5</sup>

Forming The Unformed [תֹהוּ, <i>tohû</i> ] Is Formed Space	Filling The Unfilled [בֹהוּ, <i>bohû</i> ] Is Filled Inhabitants (Content)
1 <sup>st</sup> Day: Light—Division Day Night	4 <sup>th</sup> Day: Luminaries Sun Moon
2 <sup>nd</sup> Day: Firmament—Division Water Sky	5 <sup>th</sup> Day: Inhabitants of Water and Sky Fish Birds
3 <sup>rd</sup> Day: Dry Land—Separated from the Sea Earth Vegetation	6 <sup>th</sup> Day: Inhabitants of Land Animals; Humans (Man / Wife) Food for Humans and Animals
7 <sup>th</sup> Day: Sabbath—God in Relationship with Man A Day of Rest Is Formed and Filled with <i>Holiness</i>	

From the literary structure of the first Creation story, it is evident that the creation of the Sabbath is highlighted; humans are not the ultimate point of this account.<sup>6</sup> Humans are the pinnacle of Creation,<sup>7</sup> but the seventh day is the climactic apex of the whole story. It is significant to note that each day of creation

<sup>5</sup> Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 4 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000 [published Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1998]), 203. I developed the literary structure of the first Creation story on suggestions stated by Ronald F. Youngblood, “Genesis,” *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 6. See also Wenham, 6–7.

Jacques Doukhan presents a parallel literary structure of both Creation accounts (Gen 1–2). He also points out that the Sabbath is the culmination of the first Creation account. See his *Genesis Creation Story*, 44–48, 78–79. Also see Jacques B. Doukhan, “Loving the Sabbath as a Christian: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective,” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Askenasi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 158–159.

<sup>6</sup> This conclusion is further supported and confirmed by the literary genre of the Creation account. According to the biblical text, the Creation story is a genealogy (Gen 2:4), in Hebrew תולדות *“tôl’ dôr.”* The whole book of Genesis can be structured according to this crucial word. There are ten genealogies mentioned in the book (Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1 [repeated in 10:32]; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1 [repeated in 36:9]; and 37:2). In genealogy, the most important pieces of a chain are usually the first and last elements, and they are tied together by these parts. The last part of the Creation genealogy, i.e., its climax, is the Sabbath.

See also Oswald Loretz, *Schöpfung und Mythos: Mensch und Welt nach den Anfangskapiteln der Genesis* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968), 70: “The goal of the whole creation and of man is God’s Sabbath. The creation of the world reaches its completion only through the Sabbath, the seventh day.” See also Walton, 65, who supports this view.

<sup>7</sup> Sarna, 14.

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is mentioned only once in the Genesis account (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), but the term seventh day is used three times, and these three occurrences happen approximately in the middle of each of three consecutive sentences. Each sentence consists of seven words in Hebrew (2:2a, 2b, 3a). It is purposely designed in this magnificent way. The Sabbath not only has a unique place in the biblical Creation account, but “as an institution is unparalleled in the ancient world.”<sup>8</sup> Nichola Nigretti points out that the seventh day “concludes, brings to perfection and overcomes the preceding six days.”<sup>9</sup> This is a great surprise, maybe for some even a disturbing fact, because one would expect to have the creation of humans as a culmination point of this Creation account. Why is it not so?

Theologians stress that humans are the crown of creation. Nevertheless, the creation of human beings is not at the peak of the Genesis story, even though man and woman are perceived as the crowning act of God’s creative activity.<sup>10</sup> Why is the Sabbath and not humans the crux of God’s creation activity? Humans were the last of the physical tangible objects God created during the Creation week. God first made the physical world, formed space and filled it with different physical inhabitants like fish, birds, and animals, and finally He created man and woman. They came to the fully prepared natural world as a final masterpiece. Wenham emphasizes that the creation of humans in the image of God is “the climax of the six days’ work. But it is not its conclusion.”<sup>11</sup>

The creation of the Sabbath is of another kind. You cannot see or touch the Sabbath, because time cannot be seen or touched, but only experienced. It’s of a different character than the physical; the Sabbath is a spiritual and temporal reality, spiritual in nature but nevertheless reality. The Sabbath is a time for fellowship within the context of rest.

Humans were created in the image of God,<sup>12</sup> but needed to maintain this image. Man and wife were made to the glory of God and for fellowship with

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<sup>8</sup> Sarna, 15. “Remarkably, the Israelite week has no such linkage [to the phases of the moon or to the movement of the sun] and is entirely independent of the movement of celestial bodies.”

<sup>9</sup> Nicola Nigretti, *Il Settimo Giorno* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel correctly states, “The conclusion of the Genesis creation story indicates that just as man is the crown of Creation, so the seventh day, the Sabbath, is the final goal of Creation” (“The Sabbath in the Pentateuch,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982], 23).

<sup>11</sup> Wenham, 37.

<sup>12</sup> To be created in the image of God means that:

- A. Humans can relate to God as a Person; they can communicate with Him.
- B. Man and woman should rule over God’s creation as His representatives. They will exercise a delegated authority. They are responsible to Him.
- C. Humans should reflect His character themselves as human beings; they should cultivate loving and kind-hearted relationships together as living beings.
- D. Humans are all created as unique persons with unique faculties and abilities as God is also unique. They need to cultivate this individual uniqueness in order to be a blessing to each other, to bring an irreplaceable personal contribution.

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God and other humans. They were created in total dependency upon God. They will always be creatures—for eternity; they will never become God. Only in maintaining this status can they fully develop their humanity, flourish, live bountifully happy and satisfying lives, and fully grow in all their capacities and potentials. The Lord not only made humans (on the 6<sup>th</sup> day), but He also put them into a special relationship with Himself (on the 7<sup>th</sup> day). The whole creation story is thus theocentric and not anthropocentric.<sup>13</sup> Without Him, human beings degrade and are doomed to perdition and death. Humans without a relationship with God will stay only on the level of animals (they were created on the 6<sup>th</sup> day together with them). Every time humans try to become gods, they behave like wild beasts.

God made a special provision so that humans may stay really human and humane: He created the Sabbath and set it apart as a special and irreplaceable gift for the first couple and for all following generations so they might stay in a right relationship with Him and thus live honestly and nobly. The Sabbath is a gift of God to humanity, allowing humanity to maintain its true human value. Sabbath is in essence God in relationship with man.<sup>14</sup> God is offering Himself for fellowship. This personal involvement is perceived as an act of His genuine unselfish love, because He is a God of relationship. If man will live in dependence on God, everything will be all right. Should he start to act autonomously, he will become a tyrant and behave very strangely. He will lose the sense of sacredness, then nothing will be sacred to him—he will think he can do anything. Sabbath is therefore a safeguard for humanity and a wall against idolatry.<sup>15</sup>

The climax of the first Creation story is thus not the creation of humans but putting man in close intimate fellowship with God! In other words, the culmination point of God's creative activity is not the sixth day (humans as a crown of

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For the discussion about the meaning of the image of God, see Wenham, 29–32; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–1985), 495–517; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 423–425; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan House), 442–450; and Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1985), 110–118.

<sup>13</sup> See Karl Barth: “The holy day does not belong to man, but to God” (*Church Dogmatics, Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961], III.4:67). God is the focus and center of the whole creation account. His activities are stressed. He speaks, acts, and is in control. He is a Sovereign Creator. Eleven times God directly speaks in the first creation story: ten times with a specific formula *וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה* (*wayyomer yehohim*, “and God said”) is used (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29), and only once the term *לֵאמֹר* (*le'mor*, “saying”) is employed (Gen 1:22).

God (*יְהוָה*, *yehohim*) is explicitly mentioned thirty-five times in thirty-four verses of the first Creation story. There is no doubt that God is presented as the Center and the sole Creator in this Creation account.

<sup>14</sup> Sakae Kubo expresses this well: “Thus the Sabbath is first of all a memorial of God's friendship to man, a monument of God's presence with him” (*God Meets Man: A Theology of the Sabbath and Second Advent* [Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1978], 16).

<sup>15</sup> See Heschel, 94–101.

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God's physical creation), but the seventh-day Sabbath (humans in a vivid mutual relationship with their Holy Creator, worshipping Him). This climax is teaching us that the Sabbath is the most important, i.e., not man per se, but only man in relationship with God; this is what counts. Sabbath is first of all about a relationship, a relationship of beauty and splendor, of God with humans and humans with God. In a palace, the most important being is the king. But a king needs his people as well as the people need their king. In that sense, when we rupture our relationship with God, we break the Sabbath.<sup>16</sup>

Gerhard Hasel argues that four activities are associated with the seventh day in Genesis 2: "(1) God 'had finished' His creative work on that day; (2) God 'rested' from all His creative work on that day; (3) God 'blessed' that day; and (4) God 'made it holy.'" <sup>17</sup> The Creation Sabbath passage (Gen 2:2, 3) is written in a chiasmic structure. Kenneth Strand draws it in the following way:

- A God finished His work (verse 2)
- B And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done (verse 2)
- C So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it (verse 3)
- B' Because on it God rested from all His work which He has done (verse 3)
- A' In creation (verse 3).<sup>18</sup>

This means that in the center of the Genesis account about the Sabbath is God's blessing and God's act of making it holy. "This day alone he sanctified."<sup>19</sup>

When God is the subject of blessing (the verb בָּרַךְ *bārak* is used), it means He is giving His presence; He grants prosperity, well-being, and future. His favor extends to every aspect of life, and His gracious blessings are even warranted by covenant (Gen 1:28; 5:2; 9:1; 12:1–3; 39:5; Deut 28:3–6; etc.).<sup>20</sup> God also made the Sabbath holy.<sup>21</sup> The root קָדַשׁ (*qdš*) was used for the first time in connection with the creation of the Sabbath.<sup>22</sup> "The first thing God con-

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<sup>16</sup> Scott J Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 61.

<sup>17</sup> Hasel, "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch," 23.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, et al (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 495.

<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> A. C. Myers, "Bless," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:525; D. C. Davis, "Bless, Blessing," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 1976), 1:625.

<sup>21</sup> See Heschel, 78–82. Niels-Erik A. Andreasen argues in his published dissertation: "The Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, was a time in which holiness was concentrated" (*The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation* [Missoula, MT: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1972], 204).

<sup>22</sup> For the second time, the root קָדַשׁ (*qdš*) appears in Exod 3:5 (there are two previous occurrences of this root referring to a "holy woman," i.e., a prostitute, most probably designating a cult or

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secrates in this world is not a thing or a place, but a moment in time.”<sup>23</sup> This unique recognition of sanctifying time and not a specific physical Temple strongly suggests that humans can have fellowship with God at any place. This universal aspect of the relationship with God is in focus; it is a crucial function of the Sabbath. Gerhard von Rad stresses this aspect by saying that the author of the Creation account does not consider the seventh-day rest “as something for God alone but as a concern of the world.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, at creation God’s presence and blessing is not concentrated on a special chosen place (this visible manifestation of God’s presence among His people will come later with the inauguration of the Tabernacle in the wilderness [Exod 25:8]).

What is God’s holiness performing? Holy means to set apart, to separate, but it also means to have the experience of awe. The Holy Creator is an awesome God. His holiness, first of all, means His presence.<sup>25</sup> The Sabbath rest is uniquely a work of God. Sabbath was formed and filled with the holy presence of God. Sabbath is only lived correctly if the Person of God is worshiped through maintaining on that day of rest a living relationship with God. Sarna comments, “The day derives its special character solely from God.”<sup>26</sup> God not only made the Sabbath holy, but He also wants humans to keep it holy (Exod 20:8; Deut 5:12).<sup>27</sup>

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shrine prostitute; see Gen 38:21). The land is holy only because of the presence of the Holy God. The third appearance is in the story of the Exodus (Exod 12:16, 23); the fourth passage relates to God’s establishing His people and making a covenant with them (Exod 19:6, 10, 14, 22, 23), and the fifth one appears in the Ten Commandments, again in relation to the Sabbath (Exod 20:8, 11).

<sup>23</sup> Rachel S. Mikva, “The Fourth Commandment,” in *Broken Tablets: Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves*, ed. Rachel S. Mikva (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 43. The first creation story puts stress on time. Each day is counted, and the time element is highlighted on the fourth and seventh days.

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 1972), 62.

<sup>25</sup> See especially Exod 3:5: the place is holy because of God’s presence. It is important to stress that God is the only source of holiness. It is His very essence, His nature. God is the Other One. His “otherness,” His transcendence, His splendor, and glory call for utter awe on the part of His creatures. There is no holiness apart from Him. A person, a thing, time, and place can be holy, but only in relation to God. He is the Holy One. Without this relationship nothing can be holy. His presence makes persons, things, time, and places holy (Exod 3:5). For example, any item connected with the sanctuary service is rendered holy, such as the altars (Exod 29:37; 40:10), the food of the sacrifices (Lev 21:22; Num 5:9), the vessels (1 Kgs 8:4), the incense (Exod 30:35, 37), the table (Exod 30:27), and the clothing of the priests (Exod 28:2; 29:29; 31:10).

<sup>26</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1978, reprint), 21.

<sup>27</sup> To keep the Sabbath holy means to be holy as a person. Rachel S. Mikva stresses: “To sanctify the Sabbath, we must make it the essence of our being, the soul of our time. We seek in each moment to draw closer to God, and discover the powerful spirit of the day. Then we will know the true celebration of holiness. There is no greater thrill.” See her article, “The Fourth Commandment,” 44. Holiness is a command. God commanded His people to be holy (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26). The new quality of life is always the result of a genuine connection with God. Growth is one of the fundamental signs of life. Life without growth is impossible and pathetic. It is an anomaly. Holiness

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The Sabbath without God is missing its target and its goal. The reason lies in the Hebrew understanding of time. The biblical concept of time is always closely tied to or even identified with its content.<sup>28</sup> The same is true with the concept of holiness, because there is no holiness apart from God. Richard Davidson articulately expresses this idea: “The Sabbath is holy because God fills it with His presence; therefore, the Sabbath is not just a day; but a Person!”<sup>29</sup>

The Creation week is about separation and division, and this principle is deeply rooted also in the Sabbath—the wonder of God’s creative activity and His offer to humanity. Creation is a process of separation, division, and distinction.<sup>30</sup> The word בָּדַל<sup>31</sup> (*bādal*—separate or distinct) is used five times in the Creation story itself (Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18).<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon is very important when we take into consideration that in the Pentateuch itself this expression is used only twenty times. This means that one fourth of these occurrences are related directly to God’s creation activity. It reflects intentionality and design. God separated light from darkness, day from night, the heavens from the waters (sea), land from water, the Sabbath from the other six days. The same separating activity must be involved in the decision-making process when we separate/distinguish between holy and work days. Westermann correctly emphasizes,

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is the quality of life that results from trusting and obeying God. Holiness is intimately connected with God’s will. To be holy means to obey God’s will, to live according to His laws.

Holiness is also an eschatological notion. Someday God’s holiness will rule. God will clean the whole earth and universe and create a new heaven and a new earth with a new order and without sin. Holiness has an immense future and is thus closely connected with hope. Without protology there is no eschatology.

God is not only calling humankind to be holy, but He also provides all that is necessary to be holy. To miss this call means, in essence, to miss the purpose of life. The call of a holy life is made possible only by Him who is holy. This is not a capricious command. God calls us to the quality of life He Himself is and lives: “I am holy, therefore be holy” (1 Pet 1:16).

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Jenni, “Time,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:646: “The abstraction ‘time’ belongs among the accomplishments of Greek culture. If, however, time (as a dimension) is not abstracted from the abundance of individual events, then, naturally, the events and their time constitute, to a large extent, a unit in OT thinking. It has been observed again and again how closely the Hebrew conception of time is bound up with its content, or even identified with it.” See also a chapter about the Hebrew concept of time in Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 200–207. A more cautious approach to the issue of time is presented by C. N. Pinnock, “Time,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:852–853. For the latest discussion see William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); Gregory E. Ganssle, ed. *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *A Love Song for the Sabbath: How to Experience the Joy that God Intended When He Gave Us the Sabbath* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1988), 29.

<sup>30</sup> See Paul Beauchamp, *Création et Séparation: Etude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse*, Bibliothèque de Sciences Religieuses (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969).

<sup>31</sup> It is significant to note that all these occurrences of the verb בָּדַל (*bādal*) are in the *hiphil*, i.e., causative form, stressing that it is God’s activity of separation.

<sup>32</sup> Outside of Genesis 1, this word is used 37 times in the Hebrew Bible.

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“The sanctification of the Sabbath constitutes an order for humankind according to which time is divided into time and holy time, time to work and time for rest.”<sup>33</sup>

When humans participate in the observance of the Sabbath, they are participating in God’s creative activity, and they are demonstrating their respect for their Holy Creator. This observance helps them to develop abilities to choose in everyday matters of life what is right and reject what is wrong, and helps them to make right decisions. Walton eloquently points out that “God’s Sabbath is not a withdrawal from the world and its operations (e.g., ‘My work is done, it’s all yours now; good luck!’); instead, it represents his taking his place at the helm.”<sup>34</sup>

Creation is about the establishment of order. God sets boundaries, and living creatures of different species and different kinds are expected to keep them. The Sabbath preserves that creation order and respects those boundaries.

The best commentary on the first Creation account is given by Jesus Christ in Mark 2:28–29; it contributes to our understanding of the Creation story and shows that our interpretation is correct. There Jesus confirms that the Sabbath was created as a special gift for all humanity. This crucial gift serves humans as a safeguard, helping them live in dependency upon God. Its original intent was joy and benefit. Jesus states, “The Sabbath was made for man [notice an all inclusive, universal language of Creation, i.e., the whole humanity is in view],<sup>35</sup> not man for the Sabbath,” and further comments, “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Only when we worship the Lord of the Sabbath can we enjoy a fulfilling life of abundance. Trying to keep Sabbath without Christ leads to a misunderstanding of the true purpose, meaning, and intention of the Sabbath; it is like eating spaghetti without sauce.<sup>36</sup> Only Sabbath lived with Christ can bring genuine joy, peace, and satisfaction.

The religious leaders at the time of the first coming of Jesus failed to understand this vital concept, leading to a great tragedy: the killing of Jesus on Friday in order to keep the Sabbath holy (John 19:6–16, 31–42). We need to live the

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<sup>33</sup> Westermann, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Walton, 153.

<sup>35</sup> The concept of universality is clearly present in the linguistics of Genesis 1 and in the larger context of the Pentateuch. Human beings, Adam and Eve, were created long before Abraham existed or the Jewish nation was established. Also, Exod 20:10 points to this fact by connecting the observance of the Sabbath with the Creation week.

<sup>36</sup> This metaphor is used very often by Samuele Bacchiocchi (who is Italian) in his sermons about the Sabbath. He has written very significant books about the Sabbath. See his *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian UP, 1977); idem, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1988); idem, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998).

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Sabbath and not only keep it. We need to learn to celebrate it.<sup>37</sup> To lay down in bed and do nothing but sleep is not a proper observance of the Sabbath, even though there would be no transgression of the law. The seventh day is first of all about fellowship, fellowship with God and then fellowship with other human beings. The Sabbath has this irrefutable implicit social dimension. Even though the Sabbath was not given for entertainment, it's not all about worship but also about spending meaningful time with others. The seventh day is about the very presence of God; it is about His holiness in action.<sup>38</sup> It is possible to experience an empty time, to live time without a content, selfishly. Such time is not holy but a ruin, a loss.

The time of the seventh day is sacred. By our behavior we should maintain its content. Wayne Muller convincingly argues that we should “become Sabbath for one another.”<sup>39</sup> Being Sabbath means to be and live in a close relationship with God, to grow in love, care, responsibility, and friendship. These qualities of life can only grow in time. We need therefore to rediscover and restore, according to Muller, the sacred rhythm of life, of rest; i.e., to establish the correct rhythm between work and rest.<sup>40</sup>

The Sabbath is teaching us to stop, to finish our work as God finished His and paused (Gen 2:1–3). The idea about finishing is stressed four times in the biblical text (two verbs are used, *כָּלָה* *kālāh* and *שָׁבַת* *šābat*, and each is employed twice in this short passage). Sabbath is about ceasing;<sup>41</sup> work needs to be

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<sup>37</sup> We are greatly indebted to Judaism for this aspect of the Sabbath. Rachel S. Mikva excellently explains: “A great pianist was once asked by an ardent admirer: ‘How do you handle the notes as well as you do?’ The artist answered: ‘The notes I handle no better than many pianists, but the pauses between the notes—ah! that is where the art resides.’ In great living, as in great music, the art may be in the pauses. Surely one of the enduring contributions that Judaism made to the art of living was Shabbat, ‘the pause between the notes.’ And it is to Shabbat that we must look if we are to restore to our lives the sense of serenity and sanctity that Shabbat offers in such joyous abundance.” See her article “The Fourth Commandment,” 46.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan rightly stresses, “The Sabbath will not be holy without human beings; holiness of the Sabbath implies the holiness of men and women” (“Loving the Sabbath as a Christian,” 156).

<sup>39</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 183. Muller uncovers deep and meaningful dimensions and aspects of the observance of the Sabbath. He convincingly explains in clear language what the Sabbath is really all about and what is the true spirit of living the Sabbath. He pertinently points out how the Sabbath can become a delight and a joy.

Muller is very right in stressing the spirit of the Sabbath (Sabbath for him can be any day or moment in the week), but this Sabbath attitude in every-day life does not deny or stand against observance of a specific time—the biblical seventh day Sabbath, a God-ordained safeguard keeping humanity from forgetting to live in a true and loving attitude each day, and to cultivate a sacred life in God and in connection with others.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–11.

<sup>41</sup> This is the most probable original meaning and intent of the Hebrew verb *šābat*. God ceased His work and thus he rested. The idea of rest is further elaborated in the fourth commandment, where it is explicitly stated that God rested (Exod 20:10). See Victor P. Hamilton, “שָׁבַת (*šābat*)



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stopped. Dietrich Bonhoeffer eloquently explains, “In the Bible ‘rest’ really means more than ‘having a rest.’ It means rest after the work is accomplished, it means completion, it means the perfection and peace in which the world rests, it means transfiguration, it means turning our eyes absolutely upon God’s being God and toward worshiping him.”<sup>42</sup> God is entering into His rest, and He makes it possible for humans to rest. Walton correctly states, “The divine Sabbath is seen as the cause of the human Sabbath.”<sup>43</sup> When we pause, we participate in divine rest; we rest in Him. “God does the work, human beings enjoy the results.”<sup>44</sup> Karl Barth explains it precisely by pointing out that God’s rest day is man’s first day, that man rests before he works—man’s life therefore begins with the gospel, grace and not the law, in freedom to celebrate with joy the seventh day and not with an obligation to work.<sup>45</sup>

The Sabbath is thus also a wall against workaholism; it has an anti-stress dimension. Sabbath is a divine protection for our tendency to work without stopping. We need to learn to enjoy fellowship and not performance. Relationship is what matters and not achievements. Sabbath is a deep lesson that we as humans need to be God-oriented and people-oriented beings and not thing-oriented or work-oriented. Sabbath helps us start every week refreshed, start anew.

There is a creation power in holiness.<sup>46</sup> Those who observe the Sabbath participate in God’s holiness; i.e., they are strengthened and transformed so they

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cease, desist, rest,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), II:902; J. C. McCann, Jr., “Sabbath,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), IV:247; Westermann, 173; Walton, 146.

<sup>42</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 40. See also Barth, III.4:47–72.

<sup>43</sup> Walton, 153.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory P. Nelson, *A Touch of Heaven: Finding New Meaning in Sabbath Rest* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 30. Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, 69: “Thus on and through the Sabbath, God invites us to view our work in the light of His accomplishments.”

<sup>45</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.4:52: “It is only by participation in God’s celebrating that he [man] can and may and shall also celebrate on this seventh day, which is his first day. But this is just what he is commanded to do. Hence his history under the command of God really begins with the Gospel and not with the Law, with an accorded celebration and not a required task, with a prepared rejoicing and not with care and toil, with a freedom given to him and not an imposed obligation, with a rest and not with an activity.”

<sup>46</sup> The Creator made the Sabbath holy. God’s creative power not only set the Sabbath apart for a special purpose, but also separated many other things during Creation week and set the order and boundaries for everything. The Holy God also by His holy creative power elected and separated Israel for service. Holiness is also seen in connection with the Exodus, another great event in which the creative power of God is fully manifested. God not only created heaven and earth, but also life. He acts in history. His holiness and judgment are closely connected in the Flood. He elected His people, intervened in the Exodus, gave His laws, all by His creative power. Redemption and salvation is built on the concept of creation; it’s nothing else than re-creation, giving back the original

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can bring God's presence into real life and perform creative work as well. This is the meaning of God's blessing of the seventh day. By living Sabbath, believers are showing total devotion and respect to the Holy Creator.<sup>47</sup>

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intent; and is only possible because of the first Creation. The word "create" (אָפֶּן) is used exclusively to describe God's solemn unique activity (Gen 1:1; Ps 51:12).

<sup>47</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 114–115: "The believer enters into a life of Sabbath rest from works and embarks on a life of holiness in that rest. . . . Obedience to his powerful Word, either the written Word or the living Word, our Savior, will transform believers into his glorious image."

## Gnostic Roots of Sunday-Keeping

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Though in some respects Sunday observance became the obvious successor to the biblical Sabbath during the first centuries of the Christian era, this transition was not a simple, straightforward, dead-king-to-new-king type of phenomenon. There was a diversity of doctrine and practice in this matter among Christian bodies, in both a diachronic and synchronic sense. Accounting for this diversity is a complex matter, because sundry causes have often contributed to one effect.

A favorite (but by no means the only) avenue of research into this transition is to follow the “Lord’s day” references in the early Christian literature. The contention of the following pages is that the role of Gnostic Christianity in the rise of Sunday as the “Lord’s day” has been much overlooked in this quest.

### Lord’s Day Passages

The evidence for the use of the term “Lord’s day” (*kyriakē hēmera*) in second-century Christian literature has been summarized by R. J. Bauckham, in an often-quoted chapter,<sup>1</sup> as follows:

1. *Didache* 14:1
2. Ignatius, *Magn.* 9:1
3. *Gospel of Peter* 35, 50
4. Dionysius of Corinth, *ap.* Eusebius, HE 4:23:11
5. *Epistula Apostolorum* 18 (Hennecke-Wilson I, 201)
6. *Acts of Peter* (Act. Verc. 29f.)
7. *Acts of Paul* (Hennecke-Wilson II, 371)
8. Melito of Sardis, *ap.* Eusebius, HE 4:23:12 [sic]<sup>2</sup>
9. Irenaeus, Fragment 7
10. A Valentinian, *ap.* Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. ex Theod.* 63.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Lord’s Day,” in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 223.

<sup>2</sup> There is no mention of Melito in 4:23:12. The correct reference is 4:26.

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Bauckham explains that *Acts of John* 106 (Hennecke-Wilson 2:254) was excluded because “it cannot certainly be dated before the third century.”<sup>3</sup> By the same token, however, one should exclude the *Acts of Peter*.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, both should be included. This seems preferable, since the main purpose of the list is not to assign documents to particular centuries, but to gather early Christian materials to investigate the “Lord’s day” concept. For this reason the *Acts of John* reference is reinstated below in the list.

Bauckham means to list all occurrences of either the entire phrase *kyriakē hēmera*, or just of *kyriakē* (“Lord’s”) with the sense “Lord’s **day**” (rather than, e.g., “Lord’s **supper**”), whether those occurrences are associated with Sunday or not. The phrase “the Lord’s day” was applied in early Christian literature not only to a weekday, but also an annual feast (Easter day),<sup>5</sup> an age of the world,<sup>6</sup> a spatial realm (see below), and perhaps other uses.

If we now analyze the list of occurrences, aided by Bauckham’s discussion in the same chapter, with a view to establishing their eventual relationship with Sunday, we find the following facts:

1. The text of *Didache* 14:1 is problematic. It does not contain the word “day,” even though Bauckham thinks that supplying it explains the apparently redundant or corrupt text (“at the Lord’s [. . .] of the Lord gather together,” etc.) better than other suggestions, such as “according to the Lord’s [doctrine]” or “as the lordly (or sovereign) [assembly] of the Lord, gather together.”<sup>7</sup> If it did refer to a day, it could just as well mean Easter as Sunday.

2. The only Greek manuscript of *Magnesians* 9:1 explicitly says “living according to the Lord’s **life**” (*kata kyriakēn zōēn zōntes*), not “Lord’s day,” so this reference should be removed.<sup>8</sup>

3. Dionysius of Corinth mentions no day of the week in HE 4:23:11; Bauckham admits that a reference to Sunday here is “not certain,”<sup>9</sup> and indeed the circumstances suggest rather Easter.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 246 n. 6.

<sup>4</sup> This has been dated 200-220 A.D. in E. J. Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, rev. R. M. Grant (University of Chicago, 1966), 74; Bauckham’s dating is based on a reference in Tertullian (*De Baptismo* 17) to the *Acts of Paul*, said to depend on *Acts of Peter* (247 n. 38). However, the date of *De Baptismo* is “uncertain” (Hennecke-Wilson 2:323), and the start of the literary career of Tertullian (converted c. 198) falls well within the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> See the evidence in K.A. Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1982), 346 f., supported by C. W. Dugmore, “Lord’s Day and Easter” in *Neotestamentica et Patristica supplements to Novum Testamentum* (Leiden, 1962) 6: 272-281.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* 22.30.

<sup>7</sup> The term *kyriakē* is the source, by direct phonetic derivation, of the Old English *kirike* (cf. Scottish *kirk*, German *Kirche*), i.e., **church**, the Lord’s sovereign assembly (Matt 18:18-20).

<sup>8</sup> Bauckham follows an ancient Latin translation, *secundum dominicam*, “according to the Lord’s,” and supplies “day.” However, even this Latin version seems to imply *vitam*, i.e. “life,” in this context; “day” would normally require the text “*secundum dominicum [diem]*.”

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4. “We can infer nothing from the title of Melito of Sardis’ work *Peri kyriakēs*, since only its title survives.”<sup>11</sup> This reference, therefore, should also be excluded from the list.

5. Irenaeus, Fragment 7, has been diversely interpreted as Sunday or Easter; “the fragmentary nature of this text makes it difficult.”<sup>12</sup>

Since one should not interpret *obscurum per obscurum*, prudence advises to start researching the clearer texts and then, if possible, proceed to explain the rest. This implies that we should concentrate, for the purposes of throwing light on the rise of Sunday, on the remaining items of the list:

1. *Gospel of Peter* 35, 50
2. *Epistula Apostolorum* 18 (Hennecke-Wilson I, 201)
3. *Acts of Peter* (*Act. Verc.* 29f.)
4. *Acts of Paul* (Hennecke-Wilson II, 371)
5. A Valentinian, *ap.* Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. ex Theod.* 63
6. *Acts of John* 106 (Hennecke-Wilson 2:254)

#### Sectarian Character of the List

Once so revised, a mere glance at the list proves startling to anybody conversant with the history of post-apostolic literature: without exception, all these references lead to heterodox, Docetic, and even blatantly Gnostic sources or concepts, as will be presently shown. They are also quite late in the second century.<sup>13</sup>

Insufficient stock has been taken of the sectarian character of these references.<sup>14</sup> However, previous researchers should be commended because their confessional stance towards Sabbath or Sunday has not been a factor in this undervaluation. Those who could have jumped at the opportunity of highlighting such heretical associations for the “Lord’s day” concept have not done so, while on the other side of the confessional divide, Bauckham seems quite willing to take in stride the fact that “cross-fertilization of Gnostic and Catholic theology

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<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., 229. Dionysius states only that on the “holy day of the Lord” (*kyriakēn hagian hēmeran*) a letter from bishop Soter of Rome was publicly read in his church.

<sup>10</sup> The usage of the times for bishops points to a paschal letter, hence one read at Easter.

<sup>11</sup> Bauckham, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>13</sup> The *Gospel of Peter* and the *Epistula Apostolorum* have been dated about the middle of the century; Valentinus formed his system about the same date. The other items are still later; some of them may belong to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century (see note 4 above).

<sup>14</sup> In Strand, ed., *Sabbath in Scripture and History*, C. Mervyn Maxwell dismisses in a single sentence, as “unwise,” the 1912 suggestion by L. R. Conradi, that Gnosticism was “a major factor in the change of the day” (361). There are no other mentions of Gnosticism in this multi-author, 391 page long volume. S. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome: Gregorian UP, 1977) 286 f., notes the Gnostic anti-Sabbath positions, but following J. Danielou, considers them derived mainly from the catholic Sunday. The works of L. R. Conradi had emphasized the rejection of the OT by the Marcionite type of Gnosticism. This could hardly explain the rise of Sunday, however, since such a rejection was obviously not followed by the Catholic church.

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continued throughout the bitter struggles of the second century.”<sup>15</sup> The research on the topic should continue in this dispassionate way, wherever the evidence leads.

At this junction, it seems to lead in the direction of Gnostic sects and related ideas, whatever other influences were at work in the rise of Sunday-keeping. Both the *Epistula Apostolorum* (*Epistle of the Apostles*)<sup>16</sup> and the Valentinian follower *ap. Clement of Alexandria* in the list above<sup>17</sup> link the Lord’s day with the spatial “Ogdoad.” In the Valentinian system, the Sacred Ogdoad (i.e., octet) consisted of the first four syzygies (male-female couples) which resulted from the divine essence splitting itself into different aspects. The spatial ogdoad, i.e., the eighth celestial realm,<sup>18</sup> was above the seven celestial spheres of the moon, sun, and planets known in antiquity. In all Gnostic, proto-Gnostic, and associated systems, these spheres, together with the enclosed Earth, were in the power of fallen angelic powers, led by the “prince of this world,” who resided on the seventh and controlled the physical and visible universe. The eighth realm was, of course, the abode of members of the Sacred Ogdoad,<sup>19</sup> and thus spatial and ontological ogdoads were intimately related.

The *Acts of John* also celebrates the Ogdoad. In the famous “Jesus’ dance” passage (94 f.), we read that Jesus

. . . bade us therefore make as it were a ring, holding one another's hands, and himself standing in the midst, he said: Answer Amen unto me. He began, then, to sing an hymn and to say:  
“Glory be to thee, Father.”  
And we, going about in a ring, answered him: Amen.  
“Glory be to thee, Word: Glory be to thee, Grace.” Amen.  
“Glory be to thee, Spirit: Glory be to thee, Holy One: Glory be to thy Glory.” Amen.  
“We praise thee, O Father; we give thanks to thee, O Light, wherein darkness dwelleth not.” Amen.  
[95] Now whereas [or wherefore] we give thanks, I say:  
“I would be saved, and I would save.” Amen.  
“I would be loosed, and I would loose.” Amen. . .  
“I would eat, and I would be eaten.” Amen.  
“I would be thought, being wholly thought.” Amen. . .  
“Grace danceth. I would pipe; dance ye all.” Amen.  
“I would mourn: lament ye all.” Amen.

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<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.* 255.

<sup>16</sup> After His resurrection, Jesus tells the disciples, “I am the perfect thought (idea?) in the type. I came into being on the eighth day, which is the day of the Lord, but the whole completion of the completion you will see . . . while I go to heaven to my Father who is in heaven.” The words (translated from the Coptic) “I came into being on . . . the day of the Lord” sound like an allusion to Rev 1:10, *egenomēn . . . en tē kyriakē hēmera*.

<sup>17</sup> “The rest of the spiritual men is in the *kyriakē*, in the ogdoad which is called *kyriakē*, with the Mother [=Holy Spirit], wearing their souls like garments until the consummation.”

<sup>18</sup> So Bauckham, 230, 274, 276.

<sup>19</sup> See above, note 17.

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“The number Eight [lit. the one ogdoad]<sup>20</sup>  
singeth praise with us.” Amen.  
“The number Twelve danceth on high.” Amen.  
“The Whole on high hath part in our dancing.” Amen.  
“Whoso danceth not, knoweth not what cometh to pass.” Amen.  
“I would flee, and I would stay.” Amen. . .  
“A lamp am I to thee that beholdest me.” Amen.  
“A mirror am I to thee that perceivest me.” Amen. . .

The cross of light shown by Jesus (*Ac. Jn.* 98), which is “. . . sometimes called Word by me for your sakes, sometimes mind, . . . sometimes resurrection, sometimes Son, sometimes Father, sometimes Spirit, sometimes life, sometimes truth, sometimes faith, sometimes grace. . .” is a well-known Gnostic symbol, specifically Valentinian.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to this intoxicating “Jesus’ dance,” *Acts of Peter* is rather sober. It contains the earliest explicit identification of the “Lord’s day” with the first day of the week in Christian literature. As such, it demands our immediate attention. We will consider the treatment of “Lord’s day” in *Acts of Peter* and then in the other five works listed.

#### Lord’s Day in *Acts of Peter*

The identification of the “Lord’s day” with a weekly observance on Sunday in this source is not only clear, but also formal. The first (Coptic) extant fragment of the work states in the very first line: “**On the first day of the week, that is, on the Lord’s day,** a multitude gathered together, and they brought unto Peter many sick . . .” The same didactic clarity appears in the sections preserved in the *Acta Vercelli*, such as 29, where “the Lord’s day” arrives “on the next day after the Sabbath.” The doctrine of the Sabbath in *Ac. Pet.* is equally clear: Paul is represented as contending in Rome with “the doctors of the Jews” and affirming that “Christ, upon whom your fathers laid hands,<sup>22</sup> **abolished their Sabbaths** and fasts and holy days and circumcision, and the doctrines of men **and the rest of the traditions he did abolish.**”<sup>23</sup>

Sunday and Sabbath are carefully contrasted in the narrative. Sunday is the day in which the believers gather together with the apostles (*Act Verc* 29) and present their offerings, as does sinful Chryse (30).<sup>24</sup> Even backsliders are con-

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<sup>20</sup> This is the note of M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924) whose translation is reproduced here.

<sup>21</sup> See the introduction to the *Ac. Jn.* in Hennecke-Wilson.

<sup>22</sup> *Sic.* The *Acts of Peter* places this incident (*Act Verc* 1) within twelve years after the resurrection of Christ, hardly the time necessary for even one generation to elapse.

<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the canonical Paul, who circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) and asked everyone to remain within his or her native identity, Jewish or otherwise, after conversion (1 Cor 7:18), here Paul makes renouncing these “traditions” a condition for justification (*Act Verc* 2).

<sup>24</sup> Laughing at the scruples of church members, “Peter” takes in the money, even though women of her kind are excluded from the Eucharist (*Act Verc* 2).

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vened on a Sunday (6 f.). In contrast, Sabbath is the day for meeting those outside the Christian community. On Sabbath the heretical Simon Magus is forced to meet Peter in public (15 f., 18, 22). Other unbelievers “brought unto him also the sick on the Sabbath” (31) and were healed, as well as converted, by Peter. This apostle and the Christians in Rome had no qualms about fasting on the Sabbath (22), a practice controversial even today in Christendom. This elaborate presentation of the topic suggests that Sunday-keeping still needed explanation at the time: the identification of the Lord’s day with Sunday is not assumed or taken for granted.

Though the work has been called “catholic” and a part of the “movement” that considered Peter the first bishop of Rome, at the same time its heretical leanings are recognized.<sup>25</sup> This work has a firm stance against marriage, contradicting Paul (1 Cor 7:2).<sup>26</sup> It represents the apostles cursing the heavenly powers (cf. Jude 8 f.).<sup>27</sup> It employs an abnormal Eucharist, with bread and water only.<sup>28</sup> These traits point to a sectarian background,<sup>29</sup> such as the Encratite sect led by Tatian, a former disciple of Justin Martyr.<sup>30</sup> They are known to have made use of NT Apocrypha, including the blatantly gnostic Acts of John.<sup>31</sup>

More importantly, *Ac. Pet.* is Docetic in its doctrine of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Docetism and the traits mentioned above are present in many heretical sects, but the use of

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<sup>25</sup> Goodspeed, 8 3, 78, 76.

<sup>26</sup> In the Coptic fragment, Peter had a daughter who at ten years of age had become “a stumbling block” for many because of her beauty: i.e., men wanted to marry her. Ptolemaeus, an obviously excellent prospect for a husband (he was a believer and “exceedingly rich”) “sent unto her to take her to wife.” But Peter would not hear of it and prayed for God to protect her from the “evil” of marriage. Stricken with palsy on one side of her body, she received healing publicly, but was immediately returned to a palsied state to remove temptation. Since Ptolemaeus still desired her, God struck him with blindness, telling him that his “vessels [sc. bodily organs]” were not intended “for corruption and shame” but at all rates, if he was willing to become “one spirit” with the girl, he could treat her as his sister. He was cured when placing himself at the disposal of Peter, and bequeathed a piece of land to the girl.

<sup>27</sup> *Act Verc* 8: “Thou wicked one, enemy of all men, be thou accursed from the Church of him the son of the Holy God.”

<sup>28</sup> *Act Verc* 2: “Now they brought unto Paul **bread and water** for the sacrifice, that he might make prayer and distribute it to every one. Among whom it befell that a woman named Rufina desired, she also, to receive **the Eucharist** at the hands of Paul.” Cf. *Act Verc* 5, where “Peter **took bread and gave thanks** unto the Lord. . . . Therefore in thy name do I impart unto him thine **eucharist**, that he may be thy perfect servant without blame for ever” (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> Hennecke-Wilson’s introduction, 2:275; J. Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, ML: Christian Classics, 1990), 1:134.

<sup>30</sup> Their usual name, based on *engkrateia*, “continence,” reflects their prohibition of marriage, while alternative names, “Aquarians” or “Hydroparastates,” referred to using bread and water in the Eucharist.

<sup>31</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 47.1.5.

<sup>32</sup> In *Act Verc* 20, “Peter” enters a house and sees that the Gospel was being read. He then explains “in what manner the holy Scripture of our Lord ought to be declared,” since it only contains “that which can be endured to be borne by human flesh.” On the mount of transfiguration he had finally understood that Jesus “did eat and did drink for our sakes, himself being neither an-hungered



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Scripture in this work shows it does not reject the OT completely,<sup>33</sup> in the Marcionite style, though its author could no doubt have taken liberties with those books at least as much as with the canonical NT.<sup>34</sup>

#### Lord's Day in the Other References

*Ac. Pet.* seems related to another forgery, *Acts of Paul*. Though it is customary today to frown at the mention of forgery in connection with pseudonymity in the NT Apocrypha, in this case it is a simple fact. The perpetrator, Leucius Charinus, was deposed from his office in the church of Asia Minor on precisely this account.<sup>35</sup> His work counters Gnostic positions, especially in the “3<sup>rd</sup> Corinthians” epistle embedded in the narrative. This is not to say that the work is free from heretical influence. Its aversion to marital relationships is, if possible, greater than in the *Ac. Pet.*<sup>36</sup> This, too, implies a form of dualism, though perhaps not taken to its logical conclusions as in Gnosticism.

As it is to be expected from this background, the concerns of the work differ from those of *Ac. Pet.* The identification of the Lord's day with Sunday is clear, but not emphasized: Paul prays “on the Sabbath as the Lord's day drew near” because he is to confront the wild beasts in the Ephesus theater the next day.

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nor athirst.” Though God “was moved by his mercy to show himself in another form and in the **likeness** of man,” this was perceived in different ways, “for every one of us, according as he could contain the sight, saw, as he was able.” To some blind women who were cured by an apparition, “Peter said: tell us what ye saw. And they said: we saw an old man. . . but others said: We saw a young man; and others, We saw a boy. . . . Peter therefore magnified the Lord, saying . . . God that is constant [immutable] is greater than our thoughts, even as we have learned of these aged widows, **how that they beheld the Lord in divers forms**” (emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> “Peter” expounded the “prophets” together with the gospel facts (Act Verc 13) and cursed Satan for being the one who “did inflame Pharaoh and compel him to fight against Moses the holy servant of God” (8).

<sup>34</sup> In addition to the radical reinterpretation of the Gospels just discussed, and the incompatible presentation of Paul's doctrine, see also *Act Verc 7*, where 1 Tim 6: 16 is modified to “God the Father, . . . whom no man hath seen at any time, neither can see, **save he who hath believed in him**”; of the Gnostic claim attested in 1 Jn 3:6.

<sup>35</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 17.

<sup>36</sup> This is obvious from the Thecla stories. Also, “Paul” preaches, “Blessed are they that keep the flesh chaste, for they shall become the temple of God. Blessed are they that abstain [or: the continent], for unto them shall God speak.” “Blessed are they that possess their wives as though they had them not, for they shall inherit God” (5). “Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well-pleasing unto God and shall not lose the reward of their continence, for the word of the Father shall be unto them a work of salvation in the day of his Son, and they shall have rest, world without end” (6). “Paul” had to withstand the charges of being “he that . . . maketh the souls of young men and maidens to err, deceiving them that there may be no marriages but they should live as they are” (11); and that “he defraudeth the young men of wives and the maidens of husbands, saying: ye have no resurrection otherwise, except ye continue chaste, and defile not the flesh but keep it pure,” (12) as well as the charge of being he “who alloweth not maidens to marry.” “Paul” does not contradict these charges, but explains that “the God that hath need of nothing, but desireth the salvation of men, hath sent me, that I may sever them from corruption and uncleanness **and all pleasure** and death, that they may sin no more” (17; emphasis added).

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There is no elaborate Sabbath and Sunday theology in the extant parts (about 70 percent of the original work).<sup>37</sup>

There is more emphasis on the significance of Sunday in *Acts of John*. The Lord's day is when Christians are expected to meet and celebrate the Eucharist.<sup>38</sup> As seen above, *Ac. Jn.* is blatantly Gnostic, rather than merely tinged by Encratism or Docetism.

The *Gospel of Peter* references constitute the earliest (c. 150 A.D.) occurrences of *kyriakē* with an undoubted sense of "Lord's day" in the extant post-Apostolic literature, though its identification with weekly Sunday is not explicit in the text. Bauckham cautions that "the nature of the context makes impossible a final decision between Sunday and Easter,"<sup>39</sup> but the fact is that the phrase appears repeatedly at points in the narrative where the canonical Gospels (after which *Gos. Pet.* is obviously patterned) have "the first day of the week."<sup>40</sup> The author, then, probably considered those expressions as more or less equivalent. Since the only extant fragment is confined to the events between the trial of Jesus and his appearance to the disciples on the Sea of Tiberias, we cannot determine the author's attitude toward the Sabbath.<sup>41</sup> What is clear is his Docetism,<sup>42</sup> already denounced by Serapion of Antioch in 191 A.D.<sup>43</sup>

Besides the NT apocrypha, we have in the list the *Ep. Apost.* and the Valentinian references already mentioned. They deal with a spatial, not temporal, concept, so there is no obvious identification with any day of the week as such.

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<sup>37</sup> Introductions to NT Apocrypha sometimes caution against deriving a "theology" from them, since they aim to entertain rather than to teach. But one can counter that authors of entertainment do not expect to be really believed, or be charged with forgery, as Leucius was.

<sup>38</sup> The parting discourse of the apostle is introduced by the words, "John therefore continued with the brethren, rejoicing in the Lord. And on the morrow, being the Lord's day, and all the brethren being gathered together, he began to say . . ." (106). Afterwards he celebrates the Eucharist, orders a grave to be dug out, and steps down into it.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Gos. Pet.* 35 ff. has the supernatural rolling of the tomb-stone "on the night whereon the **Lord's day dawned**," to be compared with Mt 28:1, "**at dawn** on the first day of the week." *Gos. Pet.* 50 ff. has the appearance of Christ to the Magdalene "**early** on the Lord's day," an incident introduced in Lk 24:1 by the words "on the first day of the week, **very early**" (emphasis added).

<sup>41</sup> In the last extant lines, the discouraged apostles did not take up their nets to resume their life as fishermen until the Sabbath drew to a close, "the last day of unleavened bread" (58), but this could be an inference derived from the canonical report that their fishing took place by night (Jn 21:3 ff.).

<sup>42</sup> On the cross Jesus "kept silence, as one feeling no pain" (10). The ethereal cross that followed Jesus and the angels as they came out of the tomb (39), and which spoke for Jesus (42), is a Gnostic symbol. See above on the sectarian character of *Ac. Jn.*; cf. also *Epist. Apost.* 16.

<sup>43</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History* 6:12. Evidence for Docetism in the extant fragment is disputed in Hennecke-Wilson 1:220, on the basis of a highly refined definition, but the next page acknowledges that "Serapion of Antioch established, probably correctly, the presence side by side of 'correct doctrine' and views which deviated from it." The *Ac. Pet.* was probably meant as a sequel to this *Gospel* following the pattern of the canonical NT.

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In sum, all the documents in the list show the influence of dualistic concepts and practices, and the emphasis on Sunday as the Lord's day is especially strong in the documents with Docetic-Encratite emphasis.

#### **Intrinsic Probabilities for Gnostic Roots**

In view of the heretical, and mainly Docetic, associations in all these references, we must ponder the intrinsic probabilities of the concept of Sunday as the Lord's day arising in dualistic, matter-despising, and therefore Gnostic, circles.<sup>44</sup>

The relaxation, and eventual abandonment, of Sabbath observance in the early Christian church has been explained as a result of a number of factors, acting singly or in combination.<sup>45</sup> They might be adequate to explain the abandonment of the seventh-day, but in the absence of any act of institution of a Sunday celebration in the NT, these factors are not equally adequate to explain the rise of the latter.<sup>46</sup> The Resurrection, for example, by itself can no more support a weekly commemoration (Sunday) than a Nisan 16<sup>th</sup> festival (which actually has been kept), or a (conceivable) monthly celebration on the day following the full moon. Factors invoked to account for a weekly celebration do not seem easily applicable to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century,<sup>47</sup> nor do they explain why it completely substituted for the seventh-day Sabbath in parts of the ancient world.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The definition of Gnosticism today considered standard in scholarship is "a mythology . . . to convince oneself that the phenomenal [i.e. physical] world is essentially evil, while the true self, the divine spark or seed entrapped in matter, is essentially divine," as opposed to the orthodox Christian view, "that the phenomenal world is essentially good, although disrupted by evil, and that the true self is existentially evil, and only becomes divine by adoption." C. C. Richardson, "The Gospel of Thomas: Gnostic or Encratite?" in D. Neiman and M. Schatkin, eds., *The Heritage of the Early Church* (Rome: Pontif. Instit. Stud. Orient., 1973), 68.

<sup>45</sup> These factors include anti-Judaism, the conviction that the Christian, though still owing a general allegiance to the Decalogue, is freed in Christ from specific external observances, or the idea that we should sanctify every day of the week.

<sup>46</sup> Identical objections could be made (and were, in fact, made in antiquity; see Bauckham, 277 ff.), from the viewpoint of convictions inimical to the seventh-day Sabbath, against Sunday as the Lord's day, which resembles the former in its hebdomadary rhythm and in honoring a specific day of the week above other days. While anti-Judaism may help to explain why an already existent practice of Sunday worship was preferred and substituted for Sabbath observance, it cannot adequately explain the inception of such a new practice in view of its obvious resemblance to the Jewish Sabbath.

<sup>47</sup> Such as, e.g., the need for Christians to meet among themselves, in addition to meeting during the Sabbath with the Jews in their synagogues (as implied in the *Birkath-ha-Minim* decision in the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century), or the influence of pagan sun worship. On the latter point, see S. Bacchiocchi, "The Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity," in Strand, 132-150, and in his own *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 157-159. The need for intra-Christian meetings in addition to synagogue attendance did not survive long after the close of the apostolic age, while the influence of sun-worship corresponds better to the Christo-paganism of the 4<sup>th</sup> century than to the intellectual climate of the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> In many areas Christians kept both observances for a long time. See Strand, 323-332. The fact that in other areas they did not demands an explanation.

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Gnostic influence upon Christianity can help to account for both the rise of Sunday and its radical substitution for the biblical Sabbath. Not all forms of Gnosticism were necessarily anti-Jewish or totally anti-OT, but their matter-despising dualism always implied an alteration of the biblical doctrines of man, of Christ, and especially of creation.<sup>49</sup> As a consequence, in these Gnostic circles, honoring the seventh day of creation week became not merely an option that might be dispensed with in the spirit of Christian freedom (as often held today), but one that must necessarily be set aside. The seventh-day Sabbath was for them a celebration of the despised material world, created by inferior and fallen powers,<sup>50</sup> or at any rate intimately connected with them.

The few proto-Gnostics who apparently tried to preserve a seventh-day Sabbath, such as the sects opposed by Paul,<sup>51</sup> and the Elkesaites at the end of the first century,<sup>52</sup> found it impossible to relate the Sabbath to the will of the highest God, to maintain the original scope of works to be avoided, or to observe it in the spirit of a celebration: it was, instead, a burdensome tribute, carried far beyond the biblical commandment and unwillingly paid, out of fear, to the *stoicheia*, the fallen supernatural “powers and authorities” of the universe (reasons for which their Sabbath theology is denounced in Col 2:16).<sup>53</sup> As an extreme case, these sectarians confirm the absolute impossibility of maintaining a true Sabbath together with a doctrine of Creation altered by dualism.

Most dualistic circles, however, would not bow in fear to the powers controlling the material world, but boldly curse them, as seen above in the *Ac. Pet.* Since these circles freely adapted biblical institutions to their own peculiar theology, as their abnormal Eucharist testifies, they would naturally tend to reshape

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<sup>49</sup> Gnostic cosmology and Docetic Christology were intimately related, as summarized in “3<sup>rd</sup> Corinthians” (*Acts of Paul*): “There is no resurrection of the flesh, but that of the spirit only: and that the body of man is not the creation of God; and also concerning the world, that God did not create it, and that God knoweth not the world, and that Jesus Christ was not crucified, but it was an appearance [i.e., but only in appearance], and that he was not born of Mary, nor of the seed of David.”

<sup>50</sup> The early Gnostics spoke of angels or “powers”; later of a Demiurge identified with the God of the O. T. See W. Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 34ff.

<sup>51</sup> Those in Colossae seem to have denied the divine creation of visible things (1:16), dissected the divine essence into separate members (1:19 f., 2:9), worshiped angels (2:18), and erected themselves as judges of permissible acts on the Sabbath (2:16).

<sup>52</sup> They had Essenian roots, and so observed the Sabbath strictly, forbidding actions allowed not only by other Christians, but also by the Pharisees. They forbade, for instance, baptizing (which they performed repeatedly on other days) on the Sabbath; see Hippolytus, *Ref. All Heresies* 9.11, 2 0. They had also assimilated proto-Gnostic angelological-astrological conceptions, and Encratite-like practices.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Col 2:8, 20; Gal 4:3, 9. The rigorous Sabbath observance of the Elkesaites, also, was based on fear of the fallen celestial powers: “. . . for *Elchasai* speaks thus: **There exist wicked stars of impiety.** This declaration has been now made by us, *O ye pious ones* and disciples: beware of the power of the days of the sovereignty of these *stars*, and engage not in the commencement of any undertaking during the *ruling* days of these. . . . But, moreover, honour the day of the Sabbath, **since that day is one of those during which prevails (the power) of these stars’.**” (*Ref. All Heresies* 9.11; bold emphasis added).

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the Sabbath into a new feast, celebrating a more ethereal creation performed by the highest God, not by lesser powers. A reshaping of the OT institution, rather than a complete dismissal of the same, might be expected especially from these circles, since they did not completely reject the OT but altered it.<sup>54</sup> This could easily have led to a rival celebration, i.e., Sunday, in conscious opposition to the seventh-day Sabbath.

The act of the highest God so celebrated was the production of light, which we tend to place into the same mental slot as physical matter, while the ancient mind saw it as its opposite. Light signified, for all Gnostic and related systems, the essential nature of the true God—not just His ethical character, as in 1 John 1:5-10.<sup>55</sup> Matter is the opaque substance that plunges the world into darkness as Earth is interposed in front of the Sun at dusk, and that which everywhere resists light: it is the madness of the powers of darkness.<sup>56</sup>

It is not, then, surprising to read in the Gnostic treatise *On the Origin of the World*, included in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Nag Hammadi collection (117:35-118:1), that “the first Adam, (Adam) of light . . . appeared on the first day.” In contrast to the “Adam of light,” the Adam created on the sixth day by angelic “rulers” was merely “*psykhikos*,” a term borrowed from the Greek in the Coptic text, and in the NT often translated “animal” in anthropological contexts. There is also a “third Adam” who “is a creature of the earth (*khoikos*), that is, the man of the law, and he appeared on the eighth day.”<sup>57</sup> After an intriguing lacuna, the passage mentions a rest, “(*anapausis*) which is called Sunday (*hēmera Hēliou*).”<sup>58</sup> This rest on Sunday apparently left no room for a rival seventh-day rest; in another Nag Hammadi document, the *Gospel of Truth*, we read that Jesus (32:19-30):

Even on the Sabbath, he labored for the sheep . . . in order that you may know interiorly—you, the sons of interior knowledge—what is the Sabbath, on which **it is not fitting for salvation to be idle**, in order that you may speak from the day from above, which has no night, and from the light which does not sink because it is perfect.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See above on *Ac. Pet.* In a closely related literature, the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* (2.38 f., 51), “Peter” explicitly states that the OT, while inspired by the true God, contains devilish interpolations, so that the Christian must be like a wise money-changer, telling and separating the fake from the true (ANF 8:236-38; cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 44.2.6).

<sup>55</sup> This is why in the “Jesus’ dance” of *Ac. Jn.* quoted above, He describes himself in terms of lighting and enlightening devices such as “lamp” and “mirror,” while the divine essence is summed up as Light at the end of the opening doxology.

<sup>56</sup> *Ac. Jn.* 84.

<sup>57</sup> Sunday, as the Lord’s day, is often called “the eighth day” in early Christian literature.

<sup>58</sup> B. Layton, ed. *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, The Coptic Gnostic Library (J. M. Robinson, ed.) XXI, Leiden: Brill, 1989, 71.

<sup>59</sup> H. W. Attridge, ed. *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, The Coptic Gnostic Library [J. M. Robinson, ed.], XXIII, Leiden: Brill, 1989), 103; emphasis added.

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Similar conceptions appear as the earliest known rationale for Sunday worship, Justin Martyr's.<sup>60</sup> This rationale is grounded, not in the first place on a commemoration of the Resurrection, but on a celebration of God's creation of the light: "Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world."<sup>61</sup> The orthodoxy or Gnostic character of Justin's doctrine of creation has been debated in the past, with modern opinion pronouncing for the former. It is only fair, however, to observe that, from this isolated passage, one could conclude otherwise.

Matter is here almost identified with darkness, a reality which is not commanded to exist in Gen 1, and was "changed," according to Justin, not by transformation, but by substituting its opposite. Actually, his term *trepasas* may mean something far less vague than "having wrought a change": it denotes also "having overturned, upset."<sup>62</sup> No doubt it would have been so translated if it applied to darkness alone, but the text includes also matter (*hyle*). This presentation of God's creative act as reversing both darkness and matter might have eyed the pagan presuppositions of his addressees, for whom the idea of a divine creation of matter was foreign, and especially Platonic dualism, which despised matter just as much as Gnosticism did.<sup>63</sup> But Justin wrote as a representative of the community that later used and treasured this *Apology*, so his phrase probably reflects the understanding of the Sunday celebration then current in the Roman church.

Selecting Sunday for celebration as being the first day of creation, in preference over the seventh day, suggests that the act of originating fleshly creatures (so abhorrent to Gnostics, who fought reproduction)<sup>64</sup> during Creation week was also disliked within Justin's community. It seems to acquiesce in the idea that during Creation the production of earthly creatures was a regrettable decline from the introduction of pure and unsullied light into the world on the first day.<sup>65</sup> A deliberate contrast of this weekly celebration with the biblical Sabbath

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<sup>60</sup> The often-cited Barnabas 15 admits a different explanation; see my "Sabbath and Covenant in the Epistle of Barnabas," AUSS 39 (Spring 2001).

<sup>61</sup> *Apology* I, 67 (ANF 1:186).

<sup>62</sup> See Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*.

<sup>63</sup> Justin quotes Plato (for a different purpose) in the next paragraph (68).

<sup>64</sup> Hence the prohibition of marriage and foods such as milk and eggs, connected with reproduction (1 Tim 4:3). Gnostic sects either demanded total sexual abstinence (Encratites) or allowed licentious practices cum birth control (Carpocratians, Borborites). Licentious Gnostics practiced "free love" and turned their love-feasts into orgies, but always with *coitus interruptus*, aborting and ritually cannibalizing the product of unintended conceptions. These practices were the excuse for the well-known pagan accusations against, and persecution of, all Christians.

<sup>65</sup> These living forms are conspicuously absent from Peter's description of creation in the pseudo-Clementine *Homily* 2, 4 5 (ANF 8:237).

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is also evident in the way Friday and Sunday are alluded in this passage,<sup>66</sup> as if remarking the difference with the seventh-day observance.

Justin, like the Gnostics, believed in fallen celestial powers controlling the *ourania stoicheia*,<sup>67</sup> but differed with Gnosticism regarding the role of these powers. In Justin, they seem to have only the care (*pronoia*) of the world; a role in its creation is not attributed to them. This proximity to a sectarian concept (the fallen powers controlling the material universe),<sup>68</sup> coupled with mainstream concepts, is not limited to this issue in Justin. His phraseology often shows the imprint of either the *Gospel of Peter* or a literary tradition common to both.<sup>69</sup>

This sectarian tradition is likely to have contained a Lord's day theology, judging from the extant remains discussed above. After freely re-creating a weekly feast according to their own theology, by the same road used by Justin, and naming it *kyriakē hēmera* in order to prop the concept with an allusion to the Resurrection,<sup>70</sup> Gnostic sectarians could have spread a Lord's day theology, with varying degrees of success, in this and other Christian circles as part of the "cross-fertilization" mentioned by Bauckham.

The heretical appearance of this Sunday<sup>71</sup> theology as presented by Justin may be explained by assuming that his community had been previously subjected to some Gnostic influence, later corrected (perhaps with the intervention of Justin himself).<sup>72</sup> Vestiges of the influence, however, would inevitably cling to some of the phraseology and practices in the community,<sup>73</sup> more than in other sections of the church to which this Lord's day theology spread later.

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<sup>66</sup> The day in which Jesus was crucified is not designated Friday as such (*Aphroditēs*), but "the day before the day of Saturday (*kronikē*), and after Saturday, that is, on the day of the Sun, after appearing to his apostles and disciples, He taught us these things." *Kronikē*, besides "[day] of Saturn," also connotes "old fashioned, antiquated [day]."

<sup>67</sup> *Apology II*, 4.2; Greek text from D. R. Bueno, *Padres Apologistas Griegos* (Madrid: B.A.C., 1954), 265.

<sup>68</sup> The NT speaks of Satan as the prince of this age (*aiōn*, 2 Cor 4:4), who holds authority (*exousia*, Eph 2:2) over the kingdoms of the human world (*oikoumenē*, Lk 4:4), a world-system now coming to an end (*kosmos*, John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He does not, therefore, control the physical universe as such.

<sup>69</sup> Goodspeed, 50.

<sup>70</sup> This could have been an allusion to the yearly Easter festival which was at the time becoming fixed, in spite of the Quartodecimans, also on Sunday in all Christendom, or to the ogdoad in which they thought Christ had entered at resurrection (as in the *Epistula Apostolorum*), and which they thought alluded in Rev 1:10 to the place where John the Revelator was taken in vision, or it could have other origins.

<sup>71</sup> Justin does not use "Lord's day" in his extant writings, but he could hardly be expected to, even if it was customary for him, in an apology addressed to the pagan emperor or in a disputation with a Jewish teacher.

<sup>72</sup> A similar situation occurred early in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century when Monarchianism gained a footing in the Roman church, bishops included, as Hippolytus informs us. Incidentally, Monarchian pronouncements appear in *Ac. Pet.* (Hennecke-Wilson 2:275).

<sup>73</sup> See differences between the custom observed in Rome and Alexandria, on one hand, and in the rest of Christendom, on the other, regarding Sabbath and Sunday worship, in Strand, 323-332.

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We must therefore conclude that there are no intrinsic improbabilities in the idea that Gnostic dualism had a seminal, though not necessarily leading, role in the development of a Lord's day theology in opposition to the seventh-day Sabbath. On the other hand, mentions of Sunday as the Lord's day in mainstream Christianity during the first two centuries are questionable or ambiguous. In contrast, the earliest occurrences of the phrase "Lord's day" and the clearest instances of its application to Sunday point in the direction of Gnostic Christianity. The sectarian contribution to the concept, therefore, may be an important piece in the puzzle of the early history of Sunday as the Lord's day.

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## “Sabbath Is a Happy Day!” What Does Isaiah 58:13–14 Mean?

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As a Seventh-day Adventist who worships on the Sabbath and considers the fourth commandment God’s will for us, God’s call in Isa 58:13–14 for us to avoid “doing your pleasure” on the Sabbath resonates, but what does it mean? I want to do what God asks, but what does He mean by what He asks? Many denominations over the centuries have at times had strict rules against “Sabbath-breaking,” though they’ve defined it in various ways, whether carrying a purse, attending plays, purchasing liquor, or mowing the lawn.<sup>1</sup> Have they been correct in this? Generations of young people have found the Sabbath a burden and moaned about the many pleasures forbidden them on that day.<sup>2</sup> Just how happy a day should Sabbath be?

The fourth commandment does not forbid pleasure on Sabbath, but only work. The Hebrew word translated “you shall labor,” *ta<sup>ʿ</sup>bōd* (תַּעֲבֹד), is “sweat of your brow” work, like that done by an *ʿebed*, a servant or slave. The Hebrew word translated “your work,” *m<sup>ʿ</sup>la<sup>ʿ</sup>ktekā* (מְלַאכְתֶּכָּא), especially suggests occupations, such as shopkeeper or craftsman, the work of commerce, though it also means all work.<sup>3</sup>

The Old Testament says very little about Sabbath worship, but it strongly emphasizes Sabbath rest. The Hebrew word for Sabbath, *šabbat* (שַׁבָּת) is a noun. The verb it is derived from, *šabat* (שָׁבַת), means “to cease,” primarily from work.

While liberal and secular scholars tend to doubt that Isaiah had anything to do with Isa 58, I do not find their arguments convincing, and it seems irrelevant

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the tractate *Shabbat* in the Mishnah.

<sup>2</sup> I dedicate this article to my thirteen-year-old son Paul, whose frequent question, “What’s wrong with doing it on Sabbath?” encouraged me to search the Scriptures.

<sup>3</sup> F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson [1906], 1996), 521-522.

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to this discussion, in any case. Isaiah 58 is part of a block of chapters dealing with the covenant curses against Israel, the redemption of Israel, the coming Messiah, and the Day of the Lord and what follows. That is to say, there is a strong eschatological emphasis. The relation of the Sabbath to this eschatology is suggested by Isa 66:22–23, which read:

For as the new heavens and the new earth,  
which I will make,  
shall remain before me, says the LORD;  
so shall your descendants and your name remain.  
From new moon to new moon,  
and from sabbath to sabbath,  
all flesh shall come to worship before me,  
says the LORD. (NRSV)

While one must always allow for metaphorical language in the words of the prophets, this passage seems to indicate that for all eternity on the new earth God will prepare for us, God's people will come to the new Jerusalem every Sabbath to worship Him. While Isa 58 is not eschatological, it seems to involve the behavior God wants to see among His people.

The majority of Isa 58 deals with fasting as practiced, versus fasting as God wishes it do be practiced.<sup>4</sup> In v. 3 God mocks the people for wondering why He doesn't seem to see them fasting, but He has seen them serving their own interests by oppressing their workers on their fast days. Verse 4 says, "Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high." I see 4a, "Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist," as parallel to 3b: "Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers." Thus, the quarrelling and fighting and striking "with a wicked fist" should be seen as actions *against the oppressed workers*, not against, say, neighbors. Serving "your own interest" is closely connected here with this oppression of workers, so we should see it as having something to do with employment, not with pleasure or entertainment.

In v. 5 God asks, rhetorically, if being humble and bowing down on sackcloth and ashes is what He has in mind when He calls for a fast. In vs. 6–7 He answers the question: God's concept of true fasting involves something radically different from what we mean by the word: He means stopping injustice, freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, sheltering the widow, clothing the naked. This, of course, reminds us of the words of Jesus in Matt 26:35–40. Jesus does

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<sup>4</sup> The only fast day required by the Torah, of course, is on the Day of Atonement. On this basis, Roy Gane suggests that the fast day in question may actually be the Day of Atonement (personal e-mail). On this day, one recalls, it is not only fasting that is forbidden, but work. By this light, the Sabbath in vs. 13–14 is not the weekly Sabbath but the ceremonial Sabbath of the Day of Atonement. Actually, this would tie the chapter together very effectively. The problem is that it would suggest that it is only on the Day of Atonement that God desires service to those in need.

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not mention fasting in this context. It seems that fasting is being replaced with true, humble service to those in need. In 3a the people ask why God doesn't see them when they fast. In 9a God responds that if they do these things, He will answer and say "Here I am." In v. 8 God promises light, healing, righteousness, and divine protection to those who do these things. In vs. 9b–12, God again reviews what He asks of his people, then restates His promises of great blessings if they do what He asks.

**The Sabbath Promise**

Often Sabbath pleasures are denied on the basis of one of the loveliest promises in the Bible, Isaiah 58:13-14, which reads, in the New King James Version,

"If you turn away your foot  
from the Sabbath,  
From doing your pleasure  
on My holy day,  
And call the Sabbath a delight,  
The holy *day* of the LORD  
honorable,  
And shall honor Him,  
not doing your own ways,  
Nor finding your own pleasure,  
Nor speaking *your own* words,  
Then you shall delight yourself  
in the LORD;  
And I will cause you to ride on  
the high hills of the earth,  
And feed you with the heritage  
of Jacob your father.  
The mouth of the LORD has  
spoken.

This is quite a literal translation, but when I read it some questions come to mind. Answering those questions will help us understand what God is really saying through His prophet. If we let it, the Bible will be its own interpreter.

**The Literary Structure as Context**

Determining the literary structure of a passage often begins with looking at it in context. There are, of course, sometimes several literary structures at work at the same time. A chiasm with its own central focus may in turn be only a part of a larger chiasm with its own different focus. Other structures may become apparent when the passage is examined more closely. This is what we find with this passage. David Dorsey, in his important book *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi*, lays out one chiasm for Isa 55–66, which he calls "Final invitation to return to Yahweh" (its center being the "glorious future restoration of Israel" in Isa 60:1–22), and another one for Isa

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58–59, which he calls “Hypocrisy of Israel’s religious activity” (its center being the “blessings of obedience” in Isa 58:8–12).<sup>5</sup> The latter is more important for understanding the passage under consideration, so it will be given in full.

- a **Yahweh does not see** (*rāʾā*) or respond to their fasting because of their transgressions (*pešaʿ*) and lack of righteousness (*sědāqā*) (58:1–3a)
- b **social injustice and violence** is the cause of Yahweh’s unresponsiveness (58:3b–5)
- c **true fast** (not “pursuing your own business”) (58:6–7)
- d CENTER: blessings of obedience (58:8–12)
- c’ **true Sabbath** (not “pursuing your own business”) (58:13–14)
- b’ **social injustice and violence** is the cause of Yahweh’s unresponsiveness (59:1–15a)
- a’ **Yahweh does see** (*rāʾā*) their injustice; he will respond to those who turn from transgression (*pešaʿ*); he clothes himself in righteousness (*sědāqā*) (59:15b–21)

This is quite an impressive chiasm, with its three repeated words in A and A’, but the importance of the passage under consideration, regarding the Sabbath, is downplayed by this structure.

There is another structure worth examining. Isaiah 58:6–14 has a non-chiastic structure that helps illuminate the ideas being presented. There is a three part cause and effect parallelism, emphasized by “if/then” (ʾim/ʾāz) wording (the first “if” is only implied in the first section, but “if” and “then” are explicit in the five sections that follow. (I have used bold type to emphasize the “if/then” aspect of the passage and other type faces to emphasize other parallels that are worth noting in support of the parallelisms, though as they are not significant to the passage being studied in this paper, they will not be mentioned further.)

A1 6 “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: [**Implied “if you”**] To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you *break every yoke?* 7 Is it not to SHARE YOUR BREAD WITH THE HUNGRY, and THAT YOU BRING TO YOUR HOUSE THE POOR WHO ARE CAST OUT; WHEN YOU SEE THE NAKED, THAT YOU COVER HIM, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?

B1 8 **Then your light shall break forth like the morning**, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall **go before you**; the glory of the LORD shall **be your rear guard**. 9 **Then you** shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’

A2 “**If you take away the yoke** from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 if [this “if” is not in the Hebrew] you **EXTEND YOUR SOUL TO THE HUNGRY** and **SATISFY THE AFFLICTED SOUL**,

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<sup>5</sup> (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 226–228, especially figs. 22.17 and 22.19.

*CHRISTIAN: "SABBATH IS A HAPPY DAY!"*

B2 **Then your** light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. 11 The LORD will **guide you** continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. 12 Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. (NKJV)

A3 13 **If you** turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words,

B3 14 **then you** shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

We may speculate from this parallelism that the "trampling" of the Sabbath mentioned in v. 13 will have something to do with oppressing those who are hungry, poor, naked, and afflicted. We will find that these oppressed people are probably not jobless, but oppressed workers being forced to work on the Sabbath. This Sabbath work is only a part of their oppression.

### **The Delight of Sabbath**

Let's move now to our text. God asks us to call the Sabbath a delight. I assume that when we say that, we should be telling the truth. That means learning to find it delightful, or doing on it what is delightful.

The Hebrew word translated "delight," found twice in verses 13–14, is *oneg* (נֶגַע), which means "exquisite delight," "dainty," "soft," and "delicate."<sup>6</sup> It sometimes refers to luxury, what is rich and delicious, like Sabbath dinner. That's God's intention for the Sabbath! It should be the most exquisite, luxuriously delightful day of the week! Isn't that better than "your own pleasure"? But if the Sabbath is an "exquisite delight" for us, are we not taking pleasure in it?

In verse 14, *oneg* is in the Hithpael form, *tit'annag* (נִתְאַנַּג). Words in the Hithpael form are usually reflexive, meaning what one does to oneself. "Delight yourself" is a good translation. The BDB translates the word as "take exquisite delight."

However, the same word is found in Isaiah 57:4, and the BDB says that usage means to "make merry over." Does this suggest it's okay to make merry on the Sabbath, to be lighthearted, to laugh? Perhaps, even though the context is quite different.

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<sup>6</sup> BDB 772.

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Can you imagine Jesus laughing on Sabbath? I can. A merry heart can heal the spirit, after all (Prov 17:22), and Jesus approves of healing on the Sabbath (Matt 12:10–12).

**Textual Questions:  
“From the Sabbath”**

Let’s look now at some of the questions raised by the text. The first question stems from the faulty parallelism introduced by the translators: “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, . . . and call the Sabbath a delight . . .” If we turn away our feet from the Sabbath, why would we call the Sabbath a delight? As translated, this makes no sense.

However, the answer to this question is easy. In Hebrew, the phrase “from the Sabbath” is one word, *mishabbat* (מִשַּׁבָּת). That *mi* is short for *min*, which is usually translated “from.” Several dozen times, however, it means not “from,” but “on account of,” or “because of.” That’s the correct translation here, as well.<sup>7</sup> For example, in Isaiah 53:5, *min* is usually translated “for,” meaning “on account of.” The first phrase can be translated, “He was pierced because of our transgressions.” That’s *min*!

So the text is talking about turning away from something “on account of” the Sabbath, because observing the Sabbath requires this turning away. It doesn’t mean turning away “from” the Sabbath.<sup>8</sup>

**“Turn Away”**

Second, what does it mean to “turn away your foot”? Does it mean to stop trampling on the Sabbath? No, it doesn’t. It’s an idiomatic expression. “Turning away the foot” means stopping whatever one is doing and returning to where one came from. The Hebrew word translated “turn away” is related to the Hebrew word *shūv*, “return.” This is God’s Old Testament word for repentance. (The New Living Translation uses the wonderful phrase “turn away from sin and toward God” when it translates the New Testament word usually translated as “repent.”) It’s interesting, though, that the Hebrew word is in the Hiphil form. Words in the Hiphil form usually refer to causing something. The BDB translates this word as “cause to return.”<sup>9</sup> It might also mean “bring back” or “draw back.”

The important thing to note, though, is what the Hiphil form used here tells us. Turning away from our daily activities and returning to Sabbath-keeping is

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<sup>7</sup> Green’s Literal Translation renders the clause, “If you turn your feet away *because of* the Sabbath.”

<sup>8</sup> The Jewish Publication Society translation called *Tanakh* renders the clause, “If you refrain from trampling the sabbath.” The Israelites were indeed trampling the Sabbath, but this translation neglects the idiomatic expression “turn your foot away,” which is not related to trampling.

<sup>9</sup> BDB 998.

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our own choice. It's not automatic, it's not a forced decision, and it's not an accident. God asks us to make that choice.

#### Sabbath Pleasures?

Third, what is meant by "your own pleasure"? What does that include? If we take delight in the Sabbath, isn't that pleasure? Studying the passage in Hebrew has led me to believe that "pleasure" and "idle words" are not what Isaiah meant when he delivered his message from God. There is another valid way of translating the verses that better fits the fourth commandment's prohibition of work on the seventh day.

"Pleasure" is the most common meaning of the Hebrew noun *hepes*, but not the only meaning. A form of *hepes* is used twice in verse 13. It also appears in verse 3, where it is tied to the exploitation of employees. I think the English translators chose "finding your own pleasure" because it contrasted nicely with the true "delight" we should find in the Sabbath. They thought the verse was saying, "Don't do what pleases you, but what pleases God." Such parallels often exist in the Hebrew text, but not here, I think.

So what else might the noun *hepes* mean besides "pleasure"? The word also means "business," "affair," and "matter." It occurs in Eccl 3:1 and 17, in the phrase "a time for every purpose," which we never translate as "a time for every pleasure." Indeed, the *BDB* even gives "doing thy affairs" as the preferred translation in Isa 58:13, rather than "doing your pleasure."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, God is not speaking against pleasure here, but against working, doing business on Sabbath. "Finding your own pleasure" should actually be translated "finding business," or "looking for customers."

#### Silence on Sabbath?

Fourth, in the NKJV italicized words are not in the original. "Nor speaking *your own* words" reads, literally, not "speaking words." Are we to remain silent on the Sabbath? The New International Version changes this to not "speaking idle words," which makes sense, but it's not what the Hebrew says.

In Hebrew, the expression is *davēr dāvār* (דָּבָר דְּבָר) "the speaking of a word." Is God asking for silence on Sabbath? No, He's not. The noun *dāvār* is usually translated "word," as in "the word of the LORD," but it seldom means an actual word. It's more likely to mean a "statement," a "message," a "speech," a "report," an "edict," or even a "thing."

However, more significantly, *dāvār* sometimes means a "matter," or "affair," or "business," or "occupation."<sup>11</sup> In 1 Sam 21:8 it's translated "business." In 2 Sam 19:29 we also find the words *davēr*. . . *dāvār*. There they are translated "speak . . . of your matters," as in "business matters."

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<sup>10</sup> BDB 343.

<sup>11</sup> BDB 183.

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We find, thus, that God is asking us to refrain not only from “finding business,” but from “talking business” or making deals on Sabbath. Does this mean that if I invite people over for lunch on Sabbath, I shouldn’t ask them how their work is going? I don’t think so. But spending the afternoon discussing work does not fill us with delight. It isn’t refreshing. Does this mean it’s now okay to “speak idle words,” to talk about nothing? I don’t think it’s a good idea. But that’s not what this passage is actually prohibiting.

### “Doing Your Own Ways”

Fifth, we’re familiar with the phrase “going your own way,” but both the Hebrew and the NKJV read “*doing* your own ways.” This is peculiar (so far as I’ve been able to ascertain using Accordance, it is a unique usage).

The Hebrew word *derek* usually means “road” or “way.” When Enoch walked with God, he walked on God’s road, going God’s way, because that’s where God walks. If we go our own way, we are not on God’s road. But the verb here is not “*going* your own way,” but “*doing* your own ways.”

“Doing” your way or road doesn’t make sense, so we should look for another meaning of *derek*. We find the word also means what is “customary,” our usual “undertaking” or way of doing business.<sup>12</sup> So, again the text speaks against working on Sabbath, this time not against “finding” or “talking,” but against “doing.”

### What Does This Mean?

“Finding your own pleasure” actually means “finding business,” looking for potential customers. “Speaking words” actually means “talking business.” “Doing your own ways” actually means “doing business as usual.”

Translating these phrases this way fits nicely with the fourth commandment, as well, which forbids both field labor and commerce.

But was working on Sabbath a serious problem for the Israelites? Wasn’t the Sabbath always precious to them? Nehemiah writes, in Neh 13:15, “In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day” [NIV].

Was this happening in Isaiah’s time, as well? In verse 18 Nehemiah says, ““Didn’t your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city?”” In Isaiah 58, God is trying to get those forefathers to avoid the coming catastrophe by putting aside their daily work and not treating the Sabbath as a normal business day.

This helps us understand the relationship between Isa 58:13–14 and the rest of the chapter (and Isa 59, as well). Who was treading the winepresses on the

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<sup>12</sup> BDB 203.



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Sabbath? Who was bringing in the grain? Who was loading it onto donkeys? Who was transporting it into Jerusalem and selling it on the Sabbath? In Isaiah God has relatively little to say against the small farmer who works with his family on his own land. God speaks primarily against the rich, the large landowners, those who have servants and slaves to do their work, those who pay so little or provide so little that their workers are starving, naked, homeless. These landowners and businesspeople oppress their workers not only during the week, which is bad enough, but also on the Sabbath, which is even worse, because on that day God requires even the "manservant" and the "alien" to cease from work. That command is, of course, for their own good, because God is requiring them to take fifty-two holidays a year, for their own good and their own delight! Yet God does not merely ask landowners to let their workers cease from work on the Sabbath, but He asks the landowners themselves to cease and promises them rich blessings if they will do so.

Are there any Bible versions that have realized this passage is speaking against doing business on Sabbath? Yes, there are several: the New Revised Standard Version, Goodspeed, the Berkeley Version, the New English Bible, the JPS Tanakh, and the Jerusalem Bible. I was pleased to find, after doing this word study, that I wasn't alone in this understanding of the text.

**A Revised Version**

There's a lot more to discover in these verses, but I think I can now propose a very literal translation from the Hebrew that more accurately expresses both God's will and the meaning of the text.

I've repeated one implied word ("day") for the sake of clarity. Other than that, though the reading may seem a bit stilted, every word is a literal translation of the Hebrew original. The word order is as close to the original as possible.

If you turn back, on account of the Sabbath,  
Your foot's doing of your affairs  
On My holy day,  
And you call to the Sabbath, "Exquisite delight!"  
To the holy *day* of Yahweh, "Honored!"  
And if you make it honorable,  
Without<sup>13</sup> doing your customary undertaking,  
Without finding your business  
And talking of business,  
Then you will take exquisite delight in Yahweh,  
And I will make you ride over the high places of the land,  
And I will make you eat of the inheritance of Jacob your father,  
Because the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

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<sup>13</sup> "Without" is one of many possible translations of the Hebrew word *min*. The main idea of *min* is *separation*. In Job 11:15, "without spot," and Prov 1:33, "without fear," the Hebrew word translated "without" is *min*. BDB 577-578, especially 1.b.

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What does this passage mean for us today? It doesn't mean, "Don't do what you please on Sabbath." It means "Don't do what you please if what pleases you is working." Remember, too, that the Sabbath is not only a deliverance from work, but a symbol of deliverance from our own works.

This doesn't mean Sabbath is for doing whatever we feel like doing. But *pleasure* is not forbidden. Luxurious delight and a merry heart are not forbidden. If it is not our ordinary work, if it delights us, and if we can share that delight with God without rationalizing our behavior, then God smiles on us.

Conversely, if what we do makes the Sabbath a misery to us or to our children, if it makes us hate Sabbath, if it makes us long for Sabbath to be over, we're going the wrong way. In a sense, whatever we do on Sabbath that is not delightful in a God-honoring way breaks the Sabbath.

Now that we realize it is not pleasure God prohibits on Sabbath but business, perhaps more of us will experience its "delicate delight." I remember singing, as a child, "Sabbath is a happy day!" It should be.

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## **Hermeneutics, Culture, and the Father of the Faithful**

Lael Caesar  
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Biblical hermeneutics and human socialization are a significantly uncomfortable pair. Indeed, it is only natural for culture and hermeneutics to be in constant contention, and yet they are forever in each other's company. They seem to claim the same level of authority for determining human behavior, so that while the believer may hold that God and His Word are everything, that very believer, as anthropologist or sociologist, knows that culture is everything. This is because, despite our faith in the Holy Scriptures as authoritative, infallible, and prescriptive of conduct, no one has ever experienced Scripture outside of a human social context. Nor do we here propose how that might be accomplished. Neither do we explore that ample specialty known as cultural hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> Rather, this paper examines the relationship between sound biblical hermeneutics and societal norms of conduct in the hope of demonstrating how salvific outcomes are possible from the interaction of the two. It attempts to show how a valid interpretation of God's Word may be accessed and effectively transmitted across cultures.

### *Defining Culture*

When we speak of biblical hermeneutics, we refer to the science, such as it is, of interpretation of Scripture. But what do we mean when we speak of "culture"? What does the idea of culture embrace? One may retort with a somewhat different question: What does the idea not embrace? For culture

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<sup>1</sup> "The study of people's beliefs about the meaning of life and about what it means to be human." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The World Well Staged?", in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1-30; 7.

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is the world of human meaning, the sum total of a people's works that express in objective form their highest beliefs, values, and hopes—in short, their vision of what it is to be fully human.<sup>2</sup>

Culture is everything. It is “the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.”<sup>3</sup> Culture may also be described as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, culture as concept embraces what we believe, how we behave, and what we possess.

#### **Scope of the Problem**

Because of distinctive practices demarcating the global phenomenon of Seventh-day Adventism (worship, diet, and even dress), this particular denomination provides a particularly intriguing context for the present discussion. Everything a “conventional” Seventh-day Adventist does seems to be dictated by some fundamental belief of the church, all of which, it is claimed, are founded on Scripture. And yet, despite the all-encompassing nature of this theology, any one of the foregoing definitions helps to show that our faith in Scripture's transcendence is itself only part of our total social milieu.

Our spiritual instincts may not take kindly to such an acknowledgment. We may object on the conviction that God's Word should be more, rather than less, than something else so human as culture. So we wonder aloud: Could Scripture, as a part, be greater than the whole called culture? Is there a single scriptural interpretation that may be determinative for all behavior, when interpreters and ‘behavers’ come from and operate in cultural contexts as varied as Australia and Afghanistan, New Delhi, New Guinea, and New South Wales? The question seems legitimate even within Adventism's unified church body. Given its compass of hundreds of cultures, whose criteria should define the social forms that are truly typical of Seventh-day Adventism? Whose theorizing unifies and harmonizes the distinct philosophical outlooks born of this plurality of mental sets?

These several questions are all varieties of a single, urgent query. Stated in just three words it asks: Whose biblical hermeneutics? In an earlier time theological open-mindedness signified sensitivity to the existence of Latin American, African-American, South Korean, Indian, and other theologies, national, ethnic, or gender based. But the question is much more open today. Neither the misguided but resilient idea of race nor the notion of distinct denominational identity can now protect us from the issue raised in these three words: Whose biblical hermeneutics?

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<sup>2</sup> Vanhoozer, *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.yourdictionary.com/cgi-bin/mw.cgi> (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

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Why? Because, as C. Ellis Nelson accurately labels it, the individual congregation is “the primary society of Christians.”<sup>5</sup> As Wade Clark Roof & William McKinney similarly observe, “Individuals sharing a common outlook or behavioral style increasingly cluster around those institutions . . . of which they approve.”<sup>6</sup> Not a few itinerant denominational leaders have already confirmed, by personal observation, what many contemporary believers know by continuous experience, that the local congregation, at least as much as national or international church headquarters, is the true theology-defining, perception-shaping, conscience-educating, identity-giving, culture-establishing agent in their lives. Thus, as “conservatives” cluster together to reinforce their “culture of reverence,” their psychological or chronological opposites, labeled perhaps as “more enlightened liberals,” assemble elsewhere to establish and affirm their own worship code. Through this on-going process, the faith and practice of two SDA congregations of similar ethnic or racial composition within North America may now differ as widely as between one congregation from North America and another from West Africa. John Naisbitt & Patricia Aburdene’s paradoxical vision in *Megatrends 2000*, in letter if not in spirit, is now reality, as crowds seek religion while, simultaneously, the individual self finds fuller vindication than ever.<sup>7</sup>

### Cultural and Interpretive Fragmentation: Other Reasons

#### *Changes in History*

The chance or choice of psychological makeup is hardly the only factor influencing trends toward theological fragmentation and cultural pluralism.<sup>8</sup> Changes in history, alterations of time and place, matter a great deal. So much so that it is at least probable that the same individual, if he or she were to live at different times or places, like some Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s court,

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<sup>5</sup> C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1967), 183.

<sup>6</sup> Wade Clark Roof, William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1987), 69.

<sup>7</sup> John Naisbitt, Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000*, (New York: William Morrow, 1990): Naisbitt and Aburdene’s ten major expectations for the dawning millennium included a major religious revival (chap. 9, 270-97), and the “Triumph of the Individual” (chap. 10, 299-309). The authors do comment on the growth of non-traditional religion as an avenue for personal spirituality (see 277). However, their prediction of individualist triumph relates not to custom designed religion, but to the entrepreneurial empowerment of information and communications access [fax machines, cell phones, etc.], *contra* George Orwell’s dystopian vision articulated in the novel *1984*, where pervasive technology equates to Big Brother’s omnipresence.

<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, “Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism,” in Carson and Woodbridge, *ibid.*, 31-66, identifies three usages of the term “pluralism”: a) Western culture’s increasing diversity; b) general tolerance, or, the desirability of such, for this diversity; c) a philosophical stance that “insists that tolerance is mandated on the ground that no current in the sea of diversity has the right to take precedence over other currents. In the religious sphere, no religion has the right to pronounce itself true and the others false. The only absolute creed is the creed of pluralism (in this third sense) itself” (32, 33).

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would have different reactions to, and beliefs about, the world around him or her.

*Difficulty of Objectivity*

Besides the protean nature of the factors of time and place, the objectivity of the subject, as observer, is perpetually open to question. As Huston Smith puts it,

Perception is a two-way process. The world comes to us, and we go to it—with inbuilt sensors, concepts, beliefs, and desires that filter its incoming signals in ways that differ in every species, every social class, and every individual.<sup>9</sup>

As he goes on to state, Smith is here concerned with how “our concepts, beliefs, and desires affect worldviews.”<sup>10</sup> Note the suggestion in Smith’s words that worldviews are *modified by* concepts, beliefs, and desires—that it is ideas we already hold that decide, in the end, what we will believe about the world. In this sense, worldviews are the *result* of our preconceptions. On this, Stephen B. Bevans is categorical: “reality is mediated by . . . a *meaning we give it* in the context of our culture or our historical period, interpreted from our own particular horizon and in our own particular thought forms.”<sup>11</sup>

*Presuppositions*

The positions of Smith and Bevans signal the existence of a mental *status quo*, a belief-determining disposition, which anticipates the interplay between our eyes and what they will see, between our ears and what they will hear, between our faculties of observation and what they will interpret. Because of that mental *status quo* or mind set, a person’s observations lead him or her to either believe or not believe something. Particularly among biblicists, the end result of that interplay between observing faculties and the realities of the biblical text is spoken of as *truth*. Whether among biblicists or otherwise, components of the *mental status quo* which conditions the observations that lead to *truth* (conclusions about reality) are called *presuppositions*. Presuppositions have been described as

the columns which support the chosen platform from which the individual launches [her] independent interpretation of data. They are the

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<sup>9</sup> Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 205.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1992), 2. The italics in this paragraph are supplied.

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foundation of [our] philosophy of fact, the support for the world view which governs . . . values and . . . determines possibility.<sup>12</sup>

Because presuppositions are the basis for our observations and conclusions, Robert L. Reymond notes that disagreements between believer and unbeliever about “biblical facts” are not a discussion about facts. Truth is, the unbeliever is often so labeled precisely because she rejects the Bible as a reliable source of facts.<sup>13</sup>

### Presuppositions and Biblical Hermeneutics

In relation to biblical interpretation, the role of presuppositions must not be taken for granted. Indeed, the importance of presuppositions in this field can hardly be exaggerated. By way of example, famous 20<sup>th</sup> century NT scholar Rudolf Bultmann made clear that his biblical studies depended upon a specific and indispensable presupposition. He maintained that “the one presupposition that cannot be dismissed is the historical method of interrogating the text.”<sup>14</sup> Though Bultmann’s use of the term “presupposition” deserves further examination,<sup>15</sup> his message is clear: To judge by his categorical language, biblical hermeneutics does require, or, at any rate, does involve some convictions on the part of the interpreter. These convictions range from a conservative faith that the message of the text’s historical author can be recovered, to a deconstructionist insistence that this is impossible; from the belief that this is necessary, to a postmodern affirmation that it is irrelevant, since the reader’s response is the meaning, or, at any rate, the meaning that matters.

This skepticism about historicity in the Bible and other literary texts (particularly ancient texts) may be referred to as an ahistoricist hermeneutic. The words of Hollywood filmmaker John Ford open a window on the reasoning behind this hermeneutic that characterizes so much of our modern literary culture. “Ford . . . always said that when faced with the fact or the legend, print the legend.”<sup>16</sup> Not that myth and legend are inherently immoral. Within reasonable

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<sup>12</sup> See Lael Caesar, “Examining Validity: The Bible As Text of History,” in Humberto Rasi, ed., *Christ in the Classroom: Adventist Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning* (General Conference of SDA, 1996), 1-20, 5.

<sup>13</sup> See Robert L. Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge: An Introductory Study in Christian Apologetic Methodology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), 71.

<sup>14</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Meridian, 1960), 290-91.

<sup>15</sup> Bultmann’s usage of the term “presupposition” may not be as rigorous as desirable. A presupposition is not so much a system of study, a method of textual analysis, as it is one thread of our mental filter. Bultmann’s historical method of interrogating the text was in fact based on a whole network of presuppositions, notably, that history is a closed continuum of cause and effect, thus ruling out the idea of divine participation, supernatural activity, and miraculous occurrences as valid explanations of the events of human history.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Ammeson, “The Lens of Time,” *WorldTraveler* (34:1) 38-43; 43, quoting the words of Ken Burns, award-winning documentarian, who, by contrast with Ford, states: “I’m honor bound,

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boundaries, expressions of fantasy honor the God who endowed human beings with powers of imagination. But applied to the Bible, ahistoricist preunderstandings disallow the possibility that in Scripture we have access to propositional truth, given to humanity by God.

The influence of ahistoricist presuppositions in the recent world of hermeneutics is easily documented. Their proponents include some who dismiss the discovery of authorial intention as impossible,<sup>17</sup> as well as others who think we can do no better than focus attention “on the final form of the text itself.”<sup>18</sup> For this reason, it seems appropriate, both from a hermeneutical and a cultural perspective, to discuss the role of historicism and its proper relation to our subject.

### Importance of Historicism in Biblical Hermeneutics

“An essential aspect of hermeneutics,” Grant Osborne states, “is the effect of cultural heritage and world view on interpretation.”<sup>19</sup> Earlier comments on the prevalence of an ahistoricist mindset in the field of literary criticism permit us to acknowledge ahistoricism as not only an influential factor with literary theorists, but an important element of the culture of our times. Francis Schaeffer’s practical proposal confronts the ahistoricist mindset on its own ground. According to Schaeffer, human beings contradict their own claim that life is irrational by attempting to live in an organized manner, follow programs, and rely on public transportation schedules.<sup>20</sup> And Osborne shows how this respect for comprehensibility may be applied to reading, specifically, to understanding the message and intention of an author through his text, however distant the author himself may be from the reader. The breadth of its implications for our study leads me to quote at length:

You, the reader, do not know me, the author. The text of this book does not truly reflect my personality. That is, of course, obvious; the question, however, is whether it adequately reflects my thoughts on the possibility of meaning. Can you as reader understand my opposition to polyvalence, or is this text autonomous from my views? At

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duty bound by working with facts to try to tell a dramatic and entertaining, but still fact based narrative, fact based story”(ibid.).

<sup>17</sup> Following W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, eds., (New York, London: Longmans, 1989), 44-53.

<sup>18</sup> Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 73. Childs’ sees his method of “Canon Criticism” as necessary because of four problems with previous hermeneutical approaches. These include 1) identifying literal with historical meaning; 2) the great speculation required to satisfy the preoccupation with origins; 3) the disappearance of the community which originally gave the traditions; and 4) the unbridgeable gap “between historical reference and modern relevance,” given the text’s grounding in an inaccessible past. Cited by Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 390.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, *ibid.*, 401.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1968), 126-30.



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this moment I am writing in the library of the theology faculty of the University of Marburg. Certainly many of the professors here, schooled in the existential or historical-critical approaches and having grown up in the German culture, will read these arguments from a quite different perspective. The question is not whether they will agree but whether they can understand my arguments. I will not be around to clarify my points, so certainly this written communication lacks the dynamic of oral speech. Moreover, those readers without the necessary philosophical background will definitely struggle with the concepts herein.

However, does this mean that no amount of clarification can impart the meaning that I seek to communicate in these paragraphs? I think not?<sup>21</sup>

I would submit that Osborne's tongue-in-cheek not only settles the argument of intentionality and confirms the reasonableness of historicist hermeneutics, but also demonstrates the effectiveness of communication across cultural lines. A multiplicity of nuances divide and subdivide even among cultural units and subunits of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Acknowledging this once more, we may also derive instruction from Osborne's persuasive words as we reflect on the intersection between hermeneutics and culture. Neither the polar opposition between his and the German views, nor the very different academic and religious cultures that they represent, prevents him and his detractors from understanding each other, however much they might disagree with one another. The fact of their disagreement, of the detractors' rejection of his views, argues strongly in favor of their ability to understand what he means.<sup>22</sup> For Osborne, this is the first question in play: Can we know "what another person meant in a written account?"<sup>23</sup> There is little if any reasonable doubt that both friend and foe can grasp what Osborne means in the preceding quotation.

A second question then follows: "Is it important to know that original intended meaning?"<sup>24</sup> In relation to the issue of Holy Scripture as God's Word, the response must be an unequivocal "Yes!"

#### **Transcultural Truth: The Bible As Textbook**

This paper accepts rather than critiques biblical inspiration or authority. Given its historicist hermeneutic, it deals with truth's comprehensibility and proper interpretation and explanation across cultures. The Bible itself has much to say about these. And we should listen attentively. For the better our hermeneutics can relate to the culture of Scripture, the better we may apply our bibli-

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<sup>21</sup> Osborne, *ibid.*, 376-77.

<sup>22</sup> One may choose to quibble that at the point of Osborne's writing the quoted paragraph, he is still anticipating disagreement with a yet to be published work. But this is possible precisely because Osborne and his referents are already, before this latest work, in disagreement with each other's views.

<sup>23</sup> Osborne, *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

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cal hermeneutics to today's cultures. What does the Bible have to say about transcultural truth?

To begin with, Bible stories of human beings who successfully access, comprehend, accept, practice, and transmit divine truth are a testimony to the most dramatic transcultural communication of all. However axiomatic, it bears restating that the distance between the culture of heaven and any human culture since the fall is infinitely greater than that between any two human cultures. Analysis of these stories bears instruction for those who seek to understand the 'how' of sound interpretation and effective transmission of God's Word. They are divinely documented narratives of just such a process, preserved for our study, for our extraction of principles, for our encouragement toward success in the divine program of which both they and we are a part.

The work of Eugene Nida and William Reyburn affords us a valuable complement to this recommendation on the Bible as a textbook of stories guiding us in the method of gospel interpretation and transmission. These celebrated Bible translators contend that the many striking differences between biblical culture and that of other societies has led to a misguided exaggeration of the "diversities."<sup>25</sup> In listing a number of "cultural universals" of constant biblical recurrence,<sup>26</sup> they make the following compelling statement:

In a sense the Bible is the most translatable religious book that has ever been written, for it comes from a particular time and place (the western end of the Fertile Crescent) through which passed more cultural patterns and out from which radiated more distinctive features and values than has been the case with any other place in the history of the world.<sup>27</sup>

A comparison of the culture traits of the Bible with some 2,000 significantly different people groups in 1981 would have shown, claim Nida and Reyburn, "that in certain respects the Bible is surprisingly closer to many of them than to the technological culture of the western world."<sup>28</sup>

A decade and a half after the publication of Nida and Reyburn's claim, Thom and Marcia Hopler were still using the Bible as paradigmatic for advancing their work as crosscultural specialists with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.<sup>29</sup> Their success emphasizes the fact that the Bible is a scarcely mined

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<sup>25</sup> Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures* (New York: Orbis, 1981), 28.

<sup>26</sup> Including "the recognition of reciprocity and equity in interpersonal relations, response to human kindness and love, the desire for meaning in life, the acknowledgment of human nature's inordinate capacity for evil and self-deception (or rationalization of sin), and its need for something greater and more important than itself" (*ibid.*).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> See Thom and Marcia Hopler, *Reaching the World Next Door: How to Spread the Gospel in the Midst of Many Cultures*, rev. ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993). Pages 21-93 feature "A Cultural Survey of the Bible," which interprets biblical stories as exemplary for intercultural

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treasure of case studies on valid interpretation and transcultural communication of God's Word. It may yet be the best source of insights into how a proper interpretation of God's message is accessed and transmitted from culture to culture.

Besides its revelation of "the culture of heaven," the Bible's value in such study relates to its remarkable closeness to so much in so many of the cultures of earth. Particularly, in relation to the times of its own composition, it is forever wedded to local culture. The languages of Scripture reflect the language of daily life in Bible lands during the biblical epoch. Biblical Hebrew belongs to the Canaanite branch of the Northwest Semitic language family, instead of to some alien speech form standing aloof from the Canaanite culture it so negatively portrays. Aramaic passages first report imperial business in Daniel because of the popularity of the language among Nebuchadnezzar's tribespeople. The prophet's continued use of the language (beyond Dan 2) either signals his own royal home training,<sup>30</sup> the discipline of Nebuchadnezzar's court school,<sup>31</sup> or a combination of both. Ezra's usages occur because at the time of his writing Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire. Beyond his readiness as Jewish priest and scholar of the Torah, Ezra was versed in the language of his society. New Testament Greek is the language of 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. love letters, bills of payment, receipts, and other everyday transactions of the heart and marketplace.

Indeed, this basic linguistic commonality with its local environment represents only one stair of a multileveled affinity between the Bible's ancient authors and their cultural associates and neighbors. Below and above the level of language were common geography, clothing, housing, social organization, modes of travel, and a multitude of mores and folkways which are reflected in surviving law codes, literary conventions, wise sayings, etc.

At the same time, divine revelation is clearly hostile to much of the culture to which it is wedded and in which it is embedded. Despite its entanglement with local culture, the saving truths of revelation differ unmistakably from many of the ideas prevailing at the time of its biblical revelation and in our time. And yet for all this, human beings, grounded in the cultures of their times, were able to access and understand, accept and transmit Scripture's message,<sup>32</sup> providing

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gospel communication. Stories include the book of Genesis (chap. 2), the life of Daniel (chap. 3), Jesus (chap. 4), John 4 (chap. 5), and the book of Acts (chaps. 6, 7). First published the same year as Nida and Reyburn, as *A World of Difference* (IVP, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> By Daniel's time (7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) Judean courtiers had long been competent in this tongue, as evidenced by the request of Hezekiah's diplomats to Rabshakeh (2 Kgs 18:26) at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

<sup>31</sup> Language training was part of his course of education (Dan 1:4).

<sup>32</sup> Note the following categorical statement of the opposing view, viz., that such access, comprehension, and reliable transmission is impossible: "Such a God as Scripture speaks of simply does not exist . . . . In the second place, if such a God did exist he could not manifest Himself in the world that we know . . . . In the third place, even if such a God did reveal Himself . . . . no man could receive such a revelation without falsifying it. In the fourth place, if in spite of these three points a

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us with an opportunity to study not only the truths of Scripture, but the contexts of their disclosure. By scrutinizing these intersections between God and ancient people, we may see them for what they are—documented interconnections between human culture and divine revelation. Our scrutiny may well improve our response to the question of sound biblical interpretation as it relates to culture, specifically as sound interpretation relates to cross-cultural access to saving truth.

Pursuing this possibility, I reflect, in the following section, on how familiar ideas, settings, and actions in Ancient Near Eastern [ANE] life yield results quite out of keeping with societal norms or even the expectations dictated by the narratives' human participants. I suggest that analyses of *sitz-im-leben* need not be out of place. More often than not, recognizable local culture sets the stage for biblical narrative, and local color casts its hue on that narrative. However, recovery and understanding of settings in local life, sensitivity to the nuances of local color—these do not explain resultant revelation, which, more often than not, contradicts their expectations.

We do well to acknowledge the fact that Bible truth may, for a while, have constituted something of a *non sequitur* to some of the participants in the Bible narratives. And yet, in the end, both Osborne's questions are unequivocally answered: It is clearly possible to know what God means. Equally, Abraham's response, as described below, clearly shows that for some it is not only possible, but important to know what God means. As we study Abraham's stories and extract the principles enabling others to access and accept new truth in their time, we should be better prepared to address the issue of truth's transcultural interpretation in our own time.

### Israel in the ANE: Cultural Grounding, Supernatural Difference

We choose Abraham because he is "the father of all who believe" (Rom 4:11). Also, because more explicitly than Ruth the Moabitess turning to the God of Naomi, or Peter, Paul, and other New Testament gospel preachers persuading Gentiles to become Christian, Abraham the south Mesopotamian seems to present to history a case study on God's specific and successful invasion of a human culture.

One way or another, both Noah's son Shem and Esau's twin brother Jacob, later called Israel, hold some claim to the title of eponymous ancestor of the people the Bible calls God's special people. Remembering them as Semites, we credit Shem. If as Israel, we acknowledge Jacob. But it is with Abraham, not with any other of these, that the story of salvation seems to resume after the

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revelation had been received in the past it could not be transmitted to men of the present time without their again falsifying it. In the fifth place, if in spite of everything such a revelation as the Bible speaks of came to man today he in turn could not receive it without falsifying it." Cornelius van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1955), 160. Van Til himself rejects the thinking he here describes.

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flood. Our review of two common ANE stories turned to uncommon endings by God's active participation finds its historical setting in the call of Abraham. Through our study of this first story and this primary character in salvation history we again receive affirmative answers to both of Osborne's key questions: It is possible to know what God means. And it is important to know. God is equally committed to reveal Himself to all cultures, and His Word is comprehensible in, transmissible to, and useful for any culture.

### *Abraham's Call From God*<sup>33</sup>

"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living" (Acts 7:2-4, NASB Update).

When, in answer to God's call, Abraham left Chaldean Ur,<sup>34</sup> he did not travel alone. Nor did he journey directly to his stated destination. Nor was he recognized as the leader of his caravan. The Bible reports that "Terah [Abraham's father] took Abram his son, and Lot . . . his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law . . . ; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans . . ." (Gen 11:31).

When Terah led the exodus from Ur of the Chaldeans toward Haran in the north, he could hardly have acted from the same pure motivations as did his son Abraham. For one thing, Joshua names Terah as an example of Israel's heathen ancestry (Josh 24:2). Also, the accounts of Abraham's call involve a separation between son and father, through the death of the latter, before Abraham moves on to Canaan in accomplishment of his original assignment. We need not doubt the influence of Abraham's spiritual commitment on his father's life. At a minimum, Abraham's wishes were initially acknowledged. For the record shows that "they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan" (Gen 11:31). The text cites God's specified destination as the caravan's stated objective. But whatever the importance Terah may have attached to his son's supernatural summons, the biblical account shows Abraham as settling in Haran (v. 31; Acts 7:4). Whether journeying or settling, Abraham lived under his father's aegis.

Detailed chronological reconstruction is outside the scope of this monograph. And there is no unanimity on the biblical chronology, even among those

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<sup>33</sup> I use the names Abraham and Sarah except in case of quotation.

<sup>34</sup> The epithet Chaldean distinguishes Abraham's south Mesopotamian Ur from other cities of similar name in northern Mesopotamia and, possibly, Cilicia. For discussion, see Siegfried H. Horn, ed., *SDA Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1979), s.v. Ur; and Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 59. The label explains that Terah and Abraham's Ur is the city/region later occupied by Nebuchadnezzar's Chaldean tribespeople.

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who fully trust the Bible's historicity. Paradoxically, one reason for this uncertainty is the appropriateness of the patriarchal narratives to a specific ANE social setting that prevailed for several centuries.<sup>35</sup> The present discussion situates Abraham's life story within the times of Mesopotamia's Isin-Larsa period, at the collapse of UR III in 2004 B. C. At that time, diminished political order at the level of the city-state fueled increased political and economic independence among the populace, who could now own land and cattle instead of themselves being owned by temple and king. A desire to escape the political confusion in his homeland<sup>36</sup> and the negative impact of salinization on wheat and barley crops<sup>37</sup> both offer natural explanations for Terah's exit from Ur at the head of the caravan bearing Abraham, his wife, and others toward the land God had assigned.

Their stopover in Haran may also have been motivated by material considerations. Haran was an important caravan city in the north, in a valley of fertile pastureland, likely of sparse population, and offering "fine possibilities for increasing the wealth of the family before they proceeded on to Canaan."<sup>38</sup> Socio-economic considerations, along with his advancing age, may have played their part in Terah's move: "Terah took Abram his son . . . ; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans . . . ; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there" (Gen 11:31). The factors of 1) Terah's leadership of the clan, including Abraham, 2) Haran's economic importance as a caravan city, 3) its greater political stability relative to Ur, and 4) Terah's advancing age, combined together to detain Abraham in the land of his earthly father's choice, while his heavenly Father's call waited for final answer.

Information derived from Mari, a city south of Haran, but still part of the northern Mesopotamian region, allows us to expand our commentary on the context of Terah's immigration.<sup>39</sup> The city of Mari prospered during the patriarchal period until its destruction in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century B. C. From excavations there, we learn of a "social structure and daily manners of the time, which are reminiscent of a number of phenomena described in the book of

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<sup>35</sup> Hoerth, *ibid.*, 57, presents a graph of representative evangelical viewpoints on the patriarchal period. Options for Abraham's birth range from 2166 B.C. (Carl Rasmussen's *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*), through 2000 B.C. (Kenneth Kitchen & T. C. Mitchell, "Chronology of the OT," in J. D. Douglas, ed., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*), to 1952 B.C. (Barry Beitzel, *Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*), a difference of more than two centuries.

<sup>36</sup> Chaldean Ur, in southern Mesopotamia, where Isin unsuccessfully contended with Larsa, and Amorites further complicated the matter for these south Mesopotamian cities by becoming a threat to both of them. See Hoerth, *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.33, 62-63.

<sup>38</sup> F. D. Nichol, ed., *SDA Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1978), 1:291. Gen 12:5 shows that Abraham did prosper economically while in Haran.

<sup>39</sup> The king of Mari is known to have controlled the city of Haran in the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C., some time after the days of Terah and Abraham. See Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1991), 9.

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Genesis.”<sup>40</sup> Both Genesis and the Mari documents attest the presence of royalty, on the one hand, and, by contrast, semi-nomadic agriculturists and livestock rearers. The semi-nomadic society “seems to have been subdivided, organized into households (compare Hebrew *bēyt-ʿab*), clans . . . and tribes, where the traditional authorities, the elders . . . played an important role.”<sup>41</sup> Consistent with this picture from Mari, Terah, in Gen 11, wields his own authority over son Abraham, daughter-in-law Sarai, and grandson Lot, leading his clan out of their homeland, and settling them, even against the best wishes of his adult son, in the spreading pasturelands of Haran.<sup>42</sup> Only after his father’s death does Abraham begin to function as head of his own independent family unit. At this time, in obedience to God’s original and now repeated call, he takes “Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they [have] accumulated, and the persons . . . acquired in Haran,” and sets out for and arrives in the land of Canaan” (12:5), in fulfilment of his first commission.

### *Further Implications of Abraham’s Call*

Given the economic decline in southern Mesopotamia, contrasting prosperity in the north, and familiar religious rituals, Terah’s migration to the north may well have made more sense to relatives and acquaintances than Abraham’s subsequent travel from Haran to Palestine. Haran’s principal god, Sin, was the same moon god Terah would have worshiped in Ur.<sup>43</sup> Also, Haran was at the border of northern Mesopotamia. Due west was Anatolia, to the southwest, Syria and Palestine. Continued migration would take Terah beyond his comfort zone. And because he is said to have “settled” in Haran (Gen 11:31—*yašab*; Acts 7:4—*katoikeō*) it is tempting to believe it was an act of choice rather than of coincidence. For the rest of his family, if not for the aging Terah, Haran was a choice for the *status quo* instead of the new, for comfort instead of for sacrifice, for self instead of for God.

Our discussion of Abraham’s call has noted but a few of the multiple economic, political, sociological, and other elements basic to the historical reality of Abraham’s time. Much more might be mentioned. Abraham’s polytheistic father would have lived in fear of a world swarming with menacing supernatural

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<sup>40</sup> Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology and the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 225. Some caution is advised with regard to linkages between Mari and the Bible. See André Lemaire, “Mari, the Bible, and the Northwest Semitic World” *BA* 47 (1984)101-108; and Dennis Pardee, “Literary Sources for the History of Palestine and Syria: The Mari Archives,” updated and revised by Jonathan T. Glass, *ibid.*, 88-99; first published in *AUSS* 15 (1977) 189-204. The concern of these scholars relates to doubts about patriarchal historicity rather than about echoes of the Bible in Mari or other extrabiblical material.

<sup>41</sup> Lemaire, *ibid.*, 103.

<sup>42</sup> Terah headed his clan for 86 years. Apparently, he was Nahor’s firstborn, and was 119 years old at the death of his father, at which time he would have assumed clan leadership. Terah himself died at the age of 205 (Gen 11:24, 25, 32).

<sup>43</sup> Hoerth, *ibid.*, 72.

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agents, demons that could attack on the incitement of his own neighbors' witchcraft. To the extent he reflected the norm, his house would have been protected and his property secured by figurines such as Rachel later stole from Laban (Gen 31:19). He may or may not have emulated his neighbors in offering daily food to his household god, visiting the temple prostitutes to ensure fertility, and giving attention to the messages of dreams and omens.<sup>44</sup> Abraham's message from Yahweh would likely have occurred to him as one more such message. Whatever the means Yahweh employed to speak to Abraham, for Terah it would be neither the first nor the last sign or omen from the gods. Later attitudes on the part of the clan which followed Terah out of Chaldean Ur make clear how counter-cultural was Abraham's choice to be Yahweh's vassal. Nothing in the preceding genealogy (Gen 11:27ff) predicts Abraham's acceptance of a way so different from and hostile to prevailing practice, the customs of his tribe.

*Learning From Abraham's Call*

Our review of Abraham's call has exposed both the considerable challenge and the promise of boundless success inescapably attending transcultural communication between God and lost humanity. To repeat what is obvious, the distance between all human cultures and the culture of heaven is infinitely greater than that between any two human cultures. For this reason, a model featuring God as communicator most clearly demonstrates the potential success of transcultural gospel communication. Added to this, God as model confronts us with the unimprovable ideal.

The case before us, Abraham's call, exemplifies both ideal and non-ideal responses to the presentation of the divine Word. It illustrates the potential for failure even as it teaches principles for success in the peculiar enterprise of hermeneutical sharing. My reference to potential failure should not be read as defeatist. It does not allude to some inevitable rejection of truth by the perverted many who would seek the broad way. Success in this sharing distinguishes between comprehensibility and persuasion. Quoting Osborne again, the question is not of agreement, but of understanding.<sup>45</sup> And Paul Tillich would agree:

The question *cannot* be: How do we communicate the Gospel so that others will accept it? For this there is no method. To communicate the Gospel means putting it before the people so that they are able to decide for or against it. The Christian Gospel is a matter of decision. It is to be accepted or rejected. All that we who communicate this Gospel can do is to make possible a genuine decision . . . based on understanding . . .<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hoerth, *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>45</sup> Osborne, *ibid.*, 376.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 201 [emphasis original].



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Failure, then, would be failure of the exegete to properly understand, or of the communicator to properly transmit such valid understanding. We study to avoid such failure.

### **Analyzing the Story**

In the story of Abraham's call, at least three different groups of individuals remain within the cultural fold, while two groups violate those norms and their own natural expectations to become a part of a new, separated group of God's followers. First, some relatives of Abraham probably choose to remain in Ur. Nahor, for example, is not mentioned as journeying with Terah's caravan, though he is later named in that locale.<sup>47</sup> A second group migrates to Haran but goes no further. A third group is exposed to Abraham's teaching while he lives in Haran, but finds it unacceptable. Over against these three groups are 1) the group that leaves Ur and persists until it reaches Canaan in obedience to a divine order; 2) the persons from Haran who learn of God's command through Abraham and Sarah's witness during their sojourn in Haran and join them in their southern pilgrimage after Terah's death.

The variety of attitudes reflected in these individuals and groups again brings to the fore Osborne's questions on understanding: Is it possible to know what God means? Is it important to know what God means? They also demonstrate that not everyone responds to revelation in an identical manner. As with the study of interpretation, human nature complicates predictability in the study of response to truth. To accept the difference between truth and human nature is to be open to the miraculous as we seek ways of sharing truth with humanity. To ignore this natural incompatibility between saving truth and human nature is to make shipwreck of the gospel out of anxiety to be relevant or appreciated.

Those who seek to breach the barriers culture raises against gospel communication must beware of judging success by apparent acceptance. Human acceptability, lists of converts, establishment of Christian beachheads—these are no guarantee that saving truth has been communicated and comprehended. There may be higher principles governing such a conclusion. Before we discuss a number of the principles suggested by our study, we shall examine two more stories from Abraham's life that include recognizable ANE features and humanly unimaginable climaxes.

### *Abraham's Covenant With God*

Excavations at Nuzi, in northern Mesopotamia, from 1925-31, have produced even more enlightening insights into patriarchal times, despite the fact that its tablets date to the Late Bronze period [15<sup>th</sup> century B.C.], three hundred

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<sup>47</sup> Jacob inquires for "Laban son of Nahor" (29:5) though he is actually the grandson of Nahor and son of Bethuel (24:15, 29). The appellation "Laban son of Nahor" suggests that even if Nahor is now dead [it is 162 years since Abraham traveled to Canaan], he may have lived as head of the clan in Haran.

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years after Abraham's death. In the world of the Bible custom dies hard. Dated political realities suggest the time of Abraham's movement across the Fertile Crescent, but the normal behaviors encoded in society's laws persist for centuries and millennia. On the one hand, 21<sup>st</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century B.C. political disruptions point to the particular temporal context for Abraham's migration. On the other, legal norms of long-continuing duration point to the thinking behind his specific social behaviors in a number of areas.

Expressed to God in Gen 15:2, 3, his longing that his servant Eliezer be his heir illustrates how closely the patriarch's thinking followed prevailing norms. His thoughts are not readily followed by 21<sup>st</sup> century societies where some couples choose childlessness. But in Abraham's time, continuing the family's name and wealth were imperatives, to be accomplished, if necessary, through adoption. The one adopted would inherit the parents' possessions, in exchange for which he would care for them until the end of their lives and be responsible for their burial when they died.<sup>48</sup>

"You have given me no heir," grieves Abraham. "What of Eliezer of Damascus?" "Not so," says God. Whereupon, Abraham's thoughts are redirected, his thinking is educated, and he learns a crucial spiritual lesson on the choice to rest all of his future in the guarantee of God's promise: "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (v. 6). Through the biblical documentation of this dialogue between God and a man, we hear, for the first time in Scripture, explicit mention of the saving truth of imputed righteousness, our only source of hope for virtue or salvation. It may be ventured that the dialogue's chief instruction for us lies, perhaps, in its evidence of how God discloses Himself to humanity within the awkward framework of our culture-bound thinking.

A second incident from Gen 15 (vv. 7–21) complements and expands the first episode's instruction, once again, within the context of the interaction between familiar local culture and the phenomenological exception that is divine revelation. The account features God as suzerain, engaged in a treaty-making action with His vassal people in the person of Abraham. In the ritual that normally established the treaty, a number of animals were slaughtered, cut in pieces, and the portions arranged in two rows with an aisle between. Parties to the treaty or covenant passed down the aisle between the rows "while taking an oath invoking similar dismemberment on each other should they not keep their part of the covenant."<sup>49</sup> The biblical account differs from all known accounts in that God alone passes between the pieces, pledging His own dismemberment should the covenant be breached.

The story of "the binding of Isaac" (Gen 22) typifies God's offer of a substitute for the doomed Isaac. We do not wish to diminish the horror of that expe-

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<sup>48</sup> Hoerth, *ibid.*, 102, 103.

<sup>49</sup> Hoerth, *ibid.*, 103.

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rience for Abraham. Nor do we gainsay the awful force of its experience as a spiritual lesson for him, for us, and for unfallen angels who would have beheld, in awe, his unimaginable faith and sacrifice. But it is appropriate to state that prophecy nowhere more dramatically explicates God's becoming a curse for us and paying the price it demands, than when God Himself passes alone between the pieces of those slaughtered animals and invokes His own dismemberment for the violation of a covenant we know He never breached.

### Principles and Application

#### *Principles for the Interpreter and Communicator*

In the current paradigm, God is simultaneously text and communicator, comprehensible message and competent messenger. Humans who accept the gospel commission are simultaneously exegete and missionary. The roles of interpreter and communicator, while distinct, both involve the same agent and an identical set of operating rules. We derive these rules from observing the divine self-revelation in call and covenant. In Gen 12 and 15, God is the text's explication as well as its communicator. Similarly, the biblical exegete cannot distinguish between some theoretical communication of ideas and an experience of shared life. Whether in the most cerebral or the most affective of cultures, communication is self-sharing. However well or otherwise conceived an interpretation, one must of necessity interact with another culture if that understanding is ever to be communicated to that culture.<sup>50</sup> The principles that follow are to be read as exemplified by God, and applicable to the process of interpretation as well as to the experience of sharing.

First principle: Mutuality—"The Lord said to Abram" (Gen 12:1): The first unmistakable principle our Abraham story conveys is the principle of *mutuality*. Nothing in salvation is possible without this principle. Apart from coercion, mutuality is a presumption of participation. And whereas coercion is alien to the nature of the God who is love, participation in the salvific enterprise, whether in interpretation or in transmission, requires mutuality, a mutuality to which God Himself is committed, and which His initiative is perpetually making possible. In the phrase "the Lord said to Abram" (Gen 12:1), the Lord as speaker hints not only at His interest in a shared undertaking, viz., communication, but also the value placed on Abraham as object of His initiative, respect for his intellectual faculties, and assumption of Abraham's interest. When Stephen Bevans speaks of "contextual theology,"<sup>51</sup> he is referring to this mutuality which takes both

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<sup>50</sup> Isolation from or avoidance of the other will not work apart from the exceptional circumstance in which isolation and/or avoidance are features of the other. In such a case avoidance will itself constitute participation in the culture of the other and sharing with that culture.

<sup>51</sup> Bevans' book offers translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, and transcendental models of contextual theology, then asks: "Is one model . . . better than the others? Is there one way of taking account of Bible tradition, culture, and social change that is more adequate than another?"

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speaker and hearer, preacher and audience, missionary and “native,” into responsible and respectful consideration. So is Leonora Tubbs Tisdale when she speaks of preaching that not only exegetes texts, but gives “equally serious attention to the interpretation of congregations and their sociocultural contexts. . . .”<sup>52</sup> Preachers who disregard the sociocultural realities of their congregations are not practicing the principle of mutuality. They are not listening. And preachers who cannot listen ought themselves to be kept silent.

Nida and Reyburn’s warning against “noise” in translation also addresses this principle.<sup>53</sup> The biblical exegete, as much as the gospel communicator, must believe in mutuality. As exegetes, students respect both God’s mind and their own, both their scholarly inclinations and the divine initiative of revelation. As communicators, preachers and teachers equally value their message and their congregation, their culture and that of their audience, their experience and the experiences of those with whom they wish to share that which to them is precious. Divine incarnation and human adaptability, physical relocation and every other evidence of sensitivity, are expressions of this mutuality whose counterproductive antithesis is encountered in inflexibility and the arrogance of judgmentalism.<sup>54</sup>

Second principle: Authority—“The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go . . . !’” (Gen 12:1): More than mutuality, however, given the command which follows, God’s speech gives expression to the principle of *authority*. As the historical nature of the critical method has undermined authority in biblical interpretation, so cultural anthropology has dealt some painful blows to the concept of missiological authority. Darwinian evolutionary thinking led to a theory of Scripture as

a collection of historical documents whose truth could not be understood apart from such matters as authorship, dating, circumstance of writing, and relationship with previous oral and written material.<sup>55</sup>

Much of biblical scholarship came to see the collection as expounding a variety of ideas not necessarily consistent or compatible with each other. As Bevans

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And he concludes, “The answer to these questions might be both yes and no,” since all are both valid and limited. See Bevans, *ibid.*, 111.

<sup>52</sup> Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching As Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 32, 33.

<sup>53</sup> Nida and Reyburn, *ibid.*, 11. “Noise” may be psychological, interfering with the message because of preconceptions [we have already spoken of presuppositions and preunderstandings] about what someone thinks should be said.

<sup>54</sup> Bevans, *ibid.*, 3: “While we can say that the doing of theology by taking culture and social change in culture into account is a departure from the traditional or classical way of doing theology, a study of the history of theology will reveal that every authentic theology has been very much rooted in a particular context in some implicit or real way.”

<sup>55</sup> Edgar V. McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), xiv.

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explains, “The Bible literally means ‘books’ (*biblia*), and the Bible is a library, a collection of books and consequently of theologies.”<sup>56</sup> The Bible cannot be a source of much authority for those who see in it such a confused plurality.

A similar decline of authority is observable in gospel communication. Commenting on this phenomenon, Robert J. Priest traces the influence of such celebrated authors as Herman Melville (*Typee*, *Omoo*), Somerset Maugham (“Miss Thompson,” later called “Rain”), and James Michener (*Hawaii*) upon current popular attitudes to biblical authority. The cited works contrast tolerance for the “social other” (South Sea Island innocents), with images of life-denying missionaries, “pinned like butterflies to the frame of their own morality.”<sup>57</sup> Similar sentiment dominates the discipline of cultural anthropology, sentiment clearly expressed in the words of Walter Goldschmidt’s presidential address to the 1975 American Anthropology Association: “Missionaries are in many ways our opposites; they believe in original sin.”<sup>58</sup>

The work of their professional colleagues is not lost on evangelical anthropologists. Priest, himself a Christian anthropologist, explains:

We are culturally ethnocentric. We do judge in terms of our own cultural norms. Crossing cultural lines with a gospel implying judgment and condemnation makes it all too easy for the missionary to confuse his or her own culture with the gospel. As a result of anthropological warnings about ethnocentrism, the missionary now feels nervous, and rightly so, when using sin language to speak to people of another culture.<sup>59</sup>

Lest Priest’s references to “another culture” mingle with traditional concepts of the missionary to lead us too far afield, we must remind ourselves that to experience cultural pluralism no longer requires passports and border crossings. Specifically, Carson’s third definition of pluralism, with its mandated relativism, brings another culture home to all our doorsteps, producing a new kind of missionary steeped in “respect,” the primary lesson of cultural anthropology. As Priest puts it, we now have two kinds of missionary:

One kind has learned the anthropological lesson well, that we must respect culture and try to understand it, but feels uneasy using the biblical language of condemnation and a call for repentance from sin. . . . And then there are those who reject the anthropological lesson, who unflinchingly speak with the concepts of Scripture, but whose

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<sup>56</sup> Bevens, *ibid.* “These theologies are all different, sometimes even contradictory of one another” (*ibid.*).

<sup>57</sup> Peter Matthiessen, *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (New York: Random House, 1965), 312; quoted in Kevin J. Priest, “Cultural Anthropology, Sin, and the Missionary,” in Carson and Woodbridge, *ibid.*, 85-105; 90

<sup>58</sup> Walter Goldschmidt, “Anthropology and the Coming Crisis: an Autoethnographic Appraisal,” *American Anthropologist* 79 (1979): 26; quoted in Priest, *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>59</sup> Priest, *ibid.*, 101.

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insensitivity and refusal to seek cultural understanding are destructive of genuine moral and spiritual change.<sup>60</sup>

Priest is unequivocal. Evangelical anthropologists must “give the concept of sin back to the missionary . . . .”<sup>61</sup> When the concept of sin is returned to the missionary, then the biblical exegete has returned to God His rightful authority, the supernatural is accorded its rightful transcendence, and miracle is legitimized over the finitude of natural logic. Working such miracles, the Spirit of God is free to bring conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Scripture’s interpreters and transmitters must never forget that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual (2 Cor 10:4), that the strongholds we seek to pull down are not the differences between our culture and any other human culture, but the obstacles that separate humanity from God. Our confidence is that the humility of mutuality notwithstanding, those who speak for God speak within a context of supernatural authority.

Third principle: Integrity—“And I will make you a great nation”; “I am a shield to you”; “And behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces” (Gen 12:2; 15:1, 17): Even in combination, a commitment to mutuality, along with a position of authority, is inadequate to effect the change transforming sinners into saints and children of darkness into children of the Light. The God who speaks in Gen 12 and 15 does not hedge or skimp on his investment in Abraham. In promising as He does, He makes His integrity the condition for his command and invitation. The God of Abraham’s call and covenant is demonstrably falsifiable. Those who are privileged to transmit God’s message to their own and other cultures need an equal commitment to integrity.

Priest reminds us of the importance of this ingredient with his critique of well known recruitment strategies focusing more often than not on situations of need in the mission field. Preferable, according to Priest, would be “regular intellectual discourses . . . designed to inform, instruct, and stimulate the minds of colleagues or others.”<sup>62</sup>

Exegetes who are God’s messengers speak as falsifiable witnesses. Their integrity is open to suspicion and subject to criticism equivalent to that which Abraham, Terah, and their relatives might have entertained or directed against God’s command and invitation. Modified self-giving, charades of sacrifice, flippancy about unfulfilled promises, and the cautions of convenient commitment decidedly militate against the credibility of both God and witness, for they ignore or undermine the principle of integrity. They also counteract the previous

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<sup>60</sup> Priest, *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

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principle of authority. For all such proofs of our natural selfishness mock our claims to supernatural authority, converting them to pathetic posturing.

### *Principles for the Respondent*

The call of Abraham teaches lessons both about God and about humanity. Its lessons on interpretation and communication benefit those who must play a part for God in the study and dissemination of the Word. Its lessons on humanity may teach us how to respond to God. They may also suggest the kind of individual who is more positively disposed toward the gospel. Alternatively, the actions of Abraham and others around him suggest what we might expect from those we hope to lead toward an affirmative response to the gospel.

First principle: Mutuality: Mutuality accomplishes little if its spirit is not shared. All of God's sharing with fallen humanity is an expression of undeserved grace. It is nevertheless true that God's call to Abraham produced results because, in Abraham, God found one who would be His friend (James 2:23). The openmindedness of mutuality permits Abraham to be the friend of God and of strangers everywhere. It permits him to settle with his father in Haran, far north of his original homeland (Gen 11:31), and later to uproot again and move beyond his cultural comfort zone, to sojourn in the land of Canaan (12:5).<sup>63</sup> It is the kind of relocation that may require adaptations in dress, hairstyle, diet, and even some aspects of social order.<sup>64</sup> Mutuality enables him to share his home with individuals from a variety of cultures and to see nothing but good in bequeathing his riches to the Syrian Eliezer (15:2). It endows him with the grace that gives the best of his land to Lot, his nephew and junior (13:5-11).

Second principle: Respect—"Terah took Abram his son, . . . and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; . . ." (Gen 11:31). Despite the material blessings to which he was privy in the region, Abraham's days in Haran could not have been entirely serene. God had ordered him to move to Canaan. Subsequent action suggests a continuing intention on his part to carry out that order. It seems somewhat awkward to conclude that it was reluctance or disobedience that kept him back. It appears that at the time of his original call he had already been found faithful. Why else would he be called to be the father of God's people? Again, not only did he leave home in response to the call, but once detained in Haran, he persuasively witnessed for his convictions (Gen 12:5). Then, at his father's death, he resumed and completed his journey. Evidently, Abraham's stay in Haran relates more to respect toward his heathen father than to any reluctance to obey God. Most likely, Abraham did not interpret his deference to-

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<sup>63</sup> Flexibility here suggests itself as yet another principle. But the willingness to change on behalf of the other is an evidence of mutuality.

<sup>64</sup> Hoerth, *ibid.*, 95.

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ward his earthly father as incompatible with his role as inheritor of the sacred legacy bequeathed by Adam's line through Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, and Noah, in prediluvian times, and through Shem's lineage thereafter.

The possible validity of this interpretation does not elevate Abraham's conduct toward his father to the stature of universal paradigm. It should first be seen as the heritage of his own culture. Still, modern gospel communicators should not overlook this principled action by "the father of all who believe" (Rom 4:11). It may already have been too long overlooked. We cannot say for sure, but we may wonder how much more might be done for the truth we proclaim if we could better understand the significance of traditional family units in some cultures and the divine preference for preserving rather than destroying them. We may learn, from Abraham's continuing devotion to his father, that total commitment to God's will does not presuppose that every man be against his father-in-law, every daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and that internal hostility reign in every household (see Luke 12:51-53).

Third principle: Sincerity—"So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; . . ." (Gen 12:4). Just as divine mutuality finds its complement in human mutuality, and divine authority finds its complement in human respect, so divine integrity must be complemented by human sincerity.

And just as God's authority is to our respect, so divine integrity is to human sincerity. If God will offer all, then humans must respond with all. Abraham's sincerity permits him to act "as the Lord has spoken," rather than as he chooses to represent the Lord as speaking. I imply that much room exists for controversy in relation to the principle of sincerity. Abraham's tarrying in Haran could easily be interpreted as proof of lack of full sincerity. So interpreters who seek to share what they have heard of God's voice may encounter frustration when those hearers do not respond in precisely the way that preachers hope. But this gives no license to discredit anyone's sincerity. In the final analysis, sincerity, like everything else in salvation, is a matter between God and an individual. Spiritually minded representatives of God will show patient respect for the mystery of the Spirit's working in the lives of their hearers.

Fourth principle: Trust—"So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; . . ." (Gen 12:4). The principle of trust closely resembles but differs from sincerity. It is one of the two polar options sincerity permits—skepticism and faith. Trust is the willingness to believe rather than the sincere suspicion of all belief. Trust lets us grow. In the end it is a better option than that skepticism which preserves us from both gullibility and the disinterested benevolence of a friend. God, as our friend, puts His credibility on the line. His integrity is no theoretical abstraction. God opens Himself to our criticism by making an invitation and offering guarantees, guarantees pledged in blood. And yet, the rewards of those promises depend on our trust. If we will not trust enough to surrender to



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His will and power, then He cannot act on our behalf. Trust counts as evidence the things not seen. Without trust it is impossible to please Him.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

As discussed in this paper, the two major challenges to effective gospel sharing across cultures today are ahistoricist hermeneutics and the tyranny of cultural relativism. The ahistoricist mindset prevents the reader from accessing an author's original intention because he or she does not believe it is possible to do so. With regard to Scripture, this means it is not possible to know what God meant when He spoke, if indeed He did speak, as reported in Scripture. Relativist presuppositions do not privilege one people's self-expressions above another's. This paper has sought to show the falsity of claims that an author's intentions cannot be known. Notions of scholarly disagreement and rejection of an opponent's point of view support the belief that a literary text can reveal its author's intention and function as disseminator of his or her ideas.

The Bible, with God as author, is such a text. In it He has revealed Himself to humanity and set forth in comprehensible fashion His will for humanity. It is also a valid historical record of how God has bridged the gap between the two most alienated cultures of all, those of earth and heaven. In the story of Abraham's call and covenant God presents Himself as the ideal model of the communicator who understands the truth about salvation and must share that truth with a culture incompatible with his. Abraham's response to God's call illustrates several principles of attitude and conduct facilitating divine success in the business of transcultural gospel communication. His response also shows that obstructive presuppositions notwithstanding, God's Holy Spirit, the Author of sacred Scripture, is ever present and committed to making Scripture both available and comprehensible to alien cultures. Principles of attitude and conduct discussed include mutuality, authority, and integrity on the part of God and His representative exegetes and missionaries. For their part, respondents who follow Abraham's example will be guided by principles of mutuality, respect, sincerity, and trust.

As regards mutuality, the student of the Word must be willing to share with the God who has shared Himself in revelation. Then, as communicator, the speaker must value the hearer as God values Abraham and all humanity, enough to share with them and us the treasure of Himself. Such communication finds the hearer where he or she is. And the God who knows Abraham's name and identity, as well as where Abraham is, would guide we who speak on His behalf, that we may know who and where our hearers are. Hearers, for their part, when they listen, give evidence of the same spirit of sharing, the same mutuality that moves God to reach out to us and led Abraham to respond positively to God.

As regards authority, we remember that God is not altogether like us. Listening and the multiple expressions of mutuality are not all. God still is authority. When he speaks to us we hear the voice of authority. The Spirit who gave

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the Word is uniquely authorized to speak its meaning to us. And we speak with authority when we speak in His name. The Spirit of God performs the miracle inspiring rebels to show respect to that authority. And those who yield to the Spirit's impressions choose the path to a saving knowledge of truth.

Integrity on God's part requires sincerity and inspires trust on the part of respondents. Abraham's sacrifice of his son revealed most clearly of all the totality of his sincerity and the depth of his trust. God's passing between the pieces (Gen 15:17) and provision of a substitute for Isaac (22:13, 14) prove for all time, and to people of all of earth's groupings and subgroupings, that our sincerity will never surpass His own integrity, and that His integrity is worthy of our absolute trust. As we speak on behalf of the God who has already won our total allegiance, we may be assured that through our life and voice, as through that voice which Abraham heard 4,000 years ago, He will continue to breach the barriers of alien cultures to create, in place of the alienations that distinguish and separate us, that oneness with Himself in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, because we are all in Him, Abraham's descendants, inheritors all of the promises of eternity (Gal 3:28, 29).

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## The Location of the Sea the Israelites Passed Through

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### Introduction

Scholars disagree over the exact location of the body of water the Israelites passed through on their way out of Egypt. The disagreement stems from different interpretations of the Hebrew term *yam sūph*, the name given the sea where the miraculous crossing of the Israelites took place. The expression “is too vague a term to locate it.”<sup>1</sup> It has been translated as “Red Sea,”<sup>2</sup> referring to the large body of water that divides Arabia from North-East Africa.<sup>3</sup> It has also been rendered as “Sea of Reeds” or “Reed Sea.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, “What We Don’t Know about Moses and the Exodus,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 3 (June 1977): 29. I want to thank Dr. William H. Shea for reading a draft of this paper, making valuable suggestions, and providing materials not available in the Philippines. Also, I am grateful to Jonathan Rodgers of the University of Michigan Library for sending important articles I needed for this paper. Finally, I thank Dr. Kenneth D. Mulzac for making objective criticisms on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In the Septuagint, *yam sūph* is consistently translated as *erythrē thálassa*, which means “Red Sea.” This translation is also reflected in the KJV.

<sup>3</sup> “The Red Sea is a narrow strip of water extending southeastward from Suez, Egypt, for about 1,200 miles (1,930 kilometers) to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects with the Gulf of Aden and thence with the Arabian Sea. Its maximum width is 190 miles, its greatest depth 9,580 feet (2,920 metres), and its area approximately 174,000 square miles (450,000 square kilometres).” *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1992 ed., s.v. “Red Sea.”

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tynedale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 2:44-45; Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 180. For a listing of those who hold this view, see Bernard F. Batto, “Red Sea or Reed Sea? How the Mistake was Made and What *Yam Sūp* Really Means,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10 (July/August 1984): 63, n. 3.

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In spite of the general acceptance of the translation “Reed Sea,”<sup>5</sup> scholars are divided over exactly which one of the reedy lakes (or “Sea of Reeds”) of the Eastern Delta is *yam sùph*.<sup>6</sup> Suggestions include: “Lake Menzaleh,”<sup>7</sup> “Lake Ballah,”<sup>8</sup> “Lake Timsah,”<sup>9</sup> and “Bitter Lakes.”<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the term *yam sùph* is used in some places in the OT for the Gulf of Aqabah,<sup>11</sup> which is the northeastern finger of the Red Sea. In other passages this term is used for the Gulf of Suez,<sup>12</sup> which is the northwestern finger of the Red Sea.<sup>13</sup> Thus, based on the foregoing, there is a need to re-evaluate the different arguments forwarded in order to answer the question, “Which ‘sea’ did the Israelites really pass through?”

The purpose of this paper is to explore the possible location of the body of water the Israelites passed through on their way out of Egypt. We hope to achieve this by identifying *yam sùph* biblically and linguistically. In identifying *yam sùph* biblically, archaeological findings will be utilized to supplement the data found in the Bible, especially in identifying some geographical places.

### Identifying *Yam Sùph* Biblically

Exodus 13-15 gives a detailed narration of the Israelites’ exodus and their subsequent crossing of the *yam sùph*. The text also names the campsites used before the Israelites crossed the *yam sùph*. These help us identify which sea the Israelites passed through.

**Contextual Study of *Yam Sùph* in Exod 13-15.** Exod 13:18 says: “So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea [*yam sùph*]. The

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the annotations in the NIV, RSV, NEB, and Jerusalem Bible.

<sup>6</sup> See J. L. Mihelic, “Red Sea,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (IDB)*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:20-21; Andrew E. Hill, and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 110.

<sup>7</sup> “The deliverance through the sea could be located in the north, perhaps on a southern extension of Lake Menzaleh.” T. V. Brisco, “Exodus, Route of the,” *ISBE*, 2:240. See also G. E. Wright, “Exodus, Route of,” *IDB*, 2:198.

<sup>8</sup> William Shea, “Leaving Egypt: Encounter at the Sea,” *Adventist Review*, 31 May 1990, 18.

<sup>9</sup> M. Haran, “Exodus, The,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, supplementary vol. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 308.

<sup>10</sup> “[I]t is likely that the Israelites crossed not the “Reed” Sea but the “Red” Sea, specifically the southern end of the Bitter Lakes or the northern end of the Gulf of Suez.” R. L. Hubbard, Jr., “Red Sea,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1978-88), 4:60.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g., Num 21:4; 1 Kings 9:26; Jer 49:21.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Num 33:10-11; Josh 4:23; Ps 106:7, 9, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, (1960), s.v. Horn has suggested that “Red Sea” points to the Gulf of Suez, specifically to the northern end, as the sea the Israelites crossed. See also, “A Strong East Wind” [Exod 14:21], *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1956-80), 1:567.

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Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.”<sup>14</sup> From this text, one can see the direction the Israelites took. They took the “road toward the Red Sea [*yam sūph*].” The phrase “toward the Red Sea,” suggests that the route the Israelites took immediately upon leaving Egypt was “in the direction of” the Red Sea.”<sup>15</sup>

This direction is the “southeasterly direction,”<sup>16</sup> for it is in harmony with the record of Exod 13:17 that says, “God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, ‘If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’”

Furthermore, Exod 13:18 gives us an idea of what *yam sūph* is referring to. Logically, *yam sūph* here refers to the Red Sea proper in general, specifically to its western arm at the north—the Gulf of Suez, since it is the nearest arm of the Red Sea to the eastern Nile delta. Also, the text does not say that the Israelites crossed the *yam sūph*, but that the route they followed immediately upon leaving Egypt was in the direction of the *yam sūph*.

Interestingly, Exodus chaps. 13 and 15 use the word *yam sūph*, but in chap. 14 it is not used. When referring to the sea that the Israelites passed through, chap. 14 describes it merely as “the sea” (Heb. *hayyām*).<sup>17</sup>

In Exodus 15, however, *yam sūph* is identified as the sea of crossing. In the second half of v. 4, the sea of crossing is implicitly identified as *yam sūph* through synonymous parallelism:

Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea [*hayyām*],  
The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea [*yam sūph*]. (Exod 15:4)

From this parallelism, the sea [*hayyām*] is synonymous to the Red Sea [*yam sūph*], thus indicating that the sea the Hebrews passed through is also the sea where the Egyptians were drowned: the Red Sea [*yam sūph*].

Another occurrence of *yam sūph* in Exod 15 is in v.22:

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea [*yam sūph*] and they went  
into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert  
without finding water. (Exod 15:22)

The latter verse appears to be a continuation of the narrative recorded in Exod 14:31, after it is interrupted by a poem (i.e., Exod 15:1-18), a short narrative (Exod 15:19-20), and a short poem (Exod 15:21). This interruption is evident from the literary structure below:

A<sup>1</sup> Narrative about miracle on the sea (Exod 14:29-31)  
B<sup>1</sup> Poetry about miracle on the sea (Exod 15:1-18)

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<sup>14</sup> All scriptural citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>15</sup> “Through the way of” [Exod 13:18], *SDABC*, 1:561.

<sup>16</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 185.

<sup>17</sup> See Exod 14:16, 22, 27, 29.

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A<sup>2</sup> Short Narrative about miracle on the sea (Exod 15:19-20)

B<sup>2</sup> Short Poetry about miracle on the sea (Exod 15:21)

A<sup>3</sup> Continuation of the Narrative from the sea of miracle onward  
(Exod 15:22ff)

Although chap. 14 does not identify the sea of the crossing, chap. 15 in its continuation of the story identifies the sea as *yam sūph*. This is how chap. 15 continues the last part of chap. 14:

But the Israelites went through the sea [*hayyām*] on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore (Exod 14:29, 30). . . . Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea [*yam sūph*] and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. (Exod 15:22)

In sum, the sea the Israelites passed through, according to Exod 13-15, is described in Hebrew as both *hayyām* and *yam sūph*. In Exod 15:4, *hayyām* is parallel to *yam sūph*, indicating the sea of the miracle crossing is indeed *yam sūph*. Hence, *yam sūph* and *hayyām* refer to the same body of water. Further, *yam sūph* in the above text is both the sea the Israelites crossed over and the direction of their route when they came out of Egypt.

It is also interesting to note that in the same passage the various campsites before and after the miraculous sea crossing are mentioned. Those campsites are crucial in trying to locate the sea the Israelites crossed.

**Campsites before Crossing the Sea.** In Exod 13:18-14:3, the various campsites used by the Israelites before they crossed the sea are named. Based on Exod 12-14 and its parallel text in Num 33:3-8, we can list these campsites in this order:

**Exodus 12-14**

1. Rameses (12:37)
2. Succoth (13:20)
3. Etham (13:20)
4. Places near the sea (13:20)
  - a. Pi Hahiroth
  - b. Baal Zephon
  - c. Migdol
5. Passing through the sea (14:22, 29)

**Numbers 33**

1. Rameses (v.3)
2. Succoth (v.5)
3. Etham (v.5)
4. Places near the sea (v.7)
  - a. Pi Hahiroth
  - b. Baal Zephon
  - c. Migdol
5. Passing through the sea (v.8)

We will survey the current research on the location of these places. Several studies present the likely location of these places. They utilize both archaeological findings and ancient traditions.

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Fig. 1. A general map of the area at the time of the Exodus, showing most of the toponyms mentioned in this paper. The dotted line represents the Wadi Tumilat. This map also shows the location of Lake Ballah and Lake Timsah, one of which may be the “sea” the Israelites crossed over.

**A. Rameses.** In Exodus 12:37 and Numbers 33:3, the Israelites started their journey from the Egyptian city of Rameses. However, employing the name Rameses does not mean the Exodus happened during the time of Rameses II, the pharaoh the city was named after. Gen 47:11 records how Joseph and his brothers, together with his father Jacob, settled in the “district of Rameses.” This is evidence that the mere presence of the name of Rameses II of the 19th Dynasty does not mean the place called Rameses existed in the time of Joseph, any more than the settlement of Joseph and his father and brothers happened in the 19th Dynasty.

The way the name Rameses is employed in Gen 47:11 is similar to the book of Exodus. The use of the toponym Rameses in the Exodus event “represents the

modernization or updating of an older name for that region.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the use of Rameses “cannot be the final arbiter of the date of the Exodus.”<sup>19</sup> Besides, Gen 45:10 and Exod 8:22 record that the Israelites lived in “the land of Goshen.” If Gen 47:11 is compared with 47:6, it is clear that the biblical author equates Goshen with “the land of Rameses.” Evidently, Rameses was the later name for the district of Goshen, a name it received in a later period, especially “during or after the Nineteenth Dynasty.”<sup>20</sup>

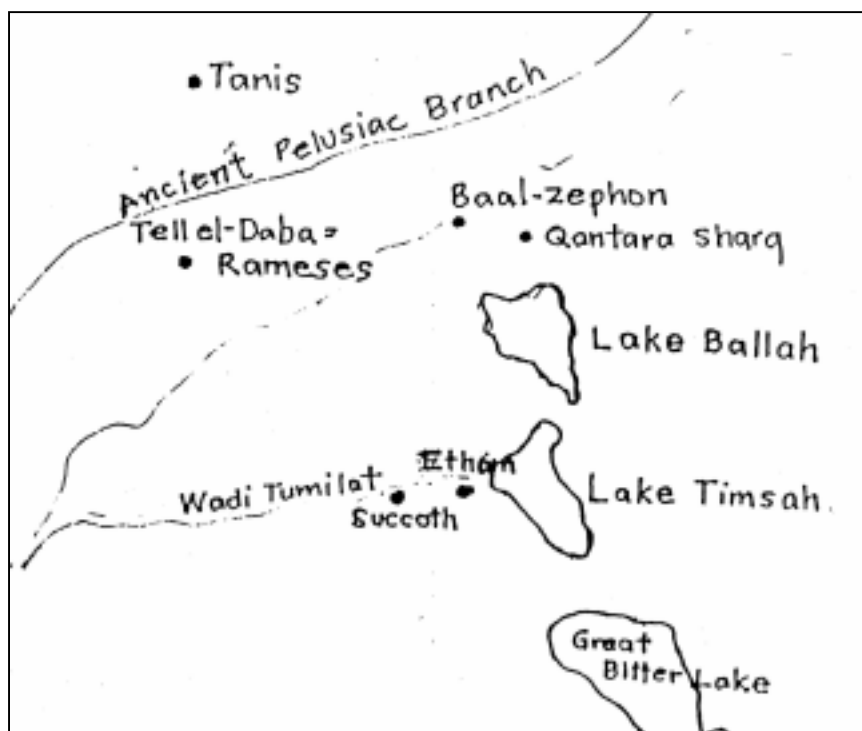


Fig. 2. A close up map, showing the toponyms not seen in fig. 1.

Based on recent archaeological study, it is now widely accepted that modern Tell el-Dab'a is the likely candidate for the city of Rameses.<sup>21</sup> The traditional view that biblical Rameses is the modern Tanis has been corrected. On geographical grounds, Tanis is not the likely candidate. Since it is located on the

<sup>18</sup> W. H. Shea, “Exodus, Date of the,” *ISBE*, 2:232.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> E. P. Uphill, “Pithom and Rameses: Their Location and Significance,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 28 (January 1969): 38.

<sup>21</sup> John R. Huddleston, “Red Sea,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD)*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:639.



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farther west bank of the ancient Pelusiac branch of the Nile, the Israelites would have had to have crossed the said Pelusiac, which is unlikely because “it would have involved ferrying all the Israelites and their livestock across the Pelusiac branch of the Nile by barge or boat.”<sup>22</sup>

By contrast, Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup> is on the east bank of the ancient Pelusiac branch, so there was no body of water to hinder the children of Israel at the start of their journey. This would fit the biblical record, because there is no mention of Israel crossing the ancient Pelusiac branch of the Nile as they started their journey from Rameses.

Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup>, according to Manfred Bietak, the excavator of that site, has “more than one millennium of settlement activity.”<sup>23</sup> Archaeologists have found “a rich stratigraphy of occupational debris dating from the beginning of the 12th Dynasty down to the Ramesside and Third Intermediate Periods.”<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy that a certain level of occupation of Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup>, from stratum F to stratum E/3-1, has been identified with the Hyksos Period because of the Semitic character of the houses, burial customs, artifacts, and pottery found in those layers.<sup>25</sup> These Semitic archaeological remains formed an Asiatic (Canaanite) community that flourished “from the time of the 13th dynasty until the beginning of the 18th dynasty.”<sup>26</sup>

We know from Egyptian history that the Hyksos established their capital in the Eastern Nile Delta in Avaris, “where Rameses II later built his delta residence.”<sup>27</sup> According to Bietak, “in the 19th and 20th Dynasties Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup> was part of a large town site which extended from Qantir, in the north, to Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup>, in the south,”<sup>28</sup> pointing to the fact the Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup> -Qantir is the city of Rameses.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> William Shea, “Leaving Egypt: The Starting Point, *Adventist Review*, 11 May 1990, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Manfred Bietak, *Avaris: Capital of the Hyksos* (London: British Museum, 1996), 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Manfred Bietak, *Avaris and Piramesse: Archaeological Exploration in the Eastern Delta*, Proceedings of the British Academy (London: Oxford UP, 1979), 65:232-37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>27</sup> Shea, “The Starting Point,” 10. Cf. K. A. Kitchen, “Egypt,” *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas et al, 2d ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1982), 304; Horn, *SDABD*, s.v. “Egypt.”

<sup>28</sup> Bietak, *Avaris and Piramesse*, 282. Cf. E. P. Uphill, “Pithom and Raamses: Their Location and Significance,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 27 (October 1968): 291-316.

<sup>29</sup> Bietak, *Avaris and Piramesse*, 282, further notes, “Jean Yoyotte found in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, an inscription on a shrine dating from the 20th dynasty which mentioned a ‘temple of Amun of Rameses, great of victories, at the harbour of Avaris.’ The epithet ‘great of victories’ belonged to Piramesse and its gods. This inscription, which hitherto received little attention, indicates that the name of Avaris was still in use in Ramesside times, specifying that part of Piramesse which lay near its harbour.”

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Both from geographical and archaeological evidence, we can safely conclude that biblical Rameses can be identified with Tell el-Dab<sup>30</sup>, where Israel commenced their journey to the land of Canaan. The Israelites under the leadership of Moses gathered at this place to start their memorable exodus.

**B. Succoth.** After Rameses, the next place Israel camped was Succoth (Exod 12:37; 13:20; Num 33:5). It has been widely believed that biblical Succoth is to be identified with Tell el-Mashkutah,<sup>31</sup> which is in the eastern end of Wadi Tumilat. One of the evidences proposed is that the ancient name of that site is still preserved in the modern Arabic name, *Maskhuta*.

Archaeological excavation in Tell-Mashkutah reveals that there was a period of non-occupation during the New Kingdom period.<sup>32</sup> Evidence for this is found in the preliminary report of the dig in 1980 at Field L, where excavators found fragmentary walls belonging to the Persian Period, and further down the tell, they discovered major walls belonging to the earlier Persian phase. Then immediately below the Persian phase, they found two burial remains which they dated to the Middle Bronze IIA Period.<sup>33</sup>

From this preliminary excavation, it appears that there was a gap in occupation between the Persian and Middle Bronze IIA period. This preliminary excavation was further validated in 1992, when archaeologists noted “a long abandonment” from the final phase of Middle Bronze II to “the last decade of the 7th century B.C.”<sup>34</sup>

This description of the period of non-occupation fits the time when the Israelites fled from Egypt in the fifteenth century B.C.<sup>35</sup>—a figure derived from 1 Kgs 6:1.<sup>36</sup> If the Exodus happened in the fifteenth century at the period when Tell el-Mashkutah was unoccupied, the Israelites could have reached the place safely and spent the night without being harassed or threatened by any Egyptian presence in that area.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See also Hershel Shanks, “The Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea, According to Hans Goedicke,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 7 (September/October 1981): 43-44, about the arguments of Hans Goedicke in support of this view. Cf. Brisco, 2:240.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., J. E. Huesman, “Exodus from Egypt,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (1967), 5:745; Brisco, 2:240; Wright, 2:198; Cole, 112; W. F. Albright, “Exploring in Sinai with the University of California African Expedition,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 109 (1948): 15.

<sup>32</sup> John S. Holladay, Jr., “Maskhuta, Tell el-,” *ABD*, 4:590.

<sup>33</sup> Burton MacDonald, “Excavations at Tell el-Mashkuta,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 43 (1980): 53-54. Cf., Shanks, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Holladay, 4:589.

<sup>35</sup> John J. Bimson and David Livingstone, “Redating the Exodus,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13 (September-October 1987): 40-53, 66-68.

<sup>36</sup> Shea, *ISBE*, 2:230-38.

<sup>37</sup> Shea, “The Starting Point,” 14.

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So from Rameses, the Israelites followed the direction of the Wadi Tumilat<sup>38</sup> in a south-easterly direction until they reached Succoth. The important information to note about this campsite is that the Israelites were still at the east end of Wadi Tumilat in the eastern Nile delta, far from the Gulf of Suez.

**C. Etham.** After Succoth, Etham was the next stop. The Bible precisely describes this as being at “the edge of the desert” (Exod 13:20; Num 33:6). In other words, “the Israelites were still only on the edge of the steppe country.”<sup>39</sup>

Biblical Etham can be identified through the meaning of its name. It is believed that the name Etham is derived from the Egyptian name *htm*, meaning “fortress.”<sup>40</sup>

Egyptian records reveal that there were fortresses “distributed in a north to south line across the Isthmus of Suez. The purpose of these forts was to serve as watch posts along the border, to monitor the movements of foreigners in and out of the country.”<sup>41</sup> Some of these fortresses “lay at the edge of the eastern desert, [so] it is possible that one of them is referred to”<sup>42</sup> as the biblical Etham.

If Etham is one of the fortresses mentioned in the Egyptian record, where was it located? The location of this fort remains uncertain.<sup>43</sup> However, based on the specific description of the text that it is “on the edge of the wilderness,” biblical Etham appears to be “at the eastern end of Wadi Tumilat, east of Tell el-Maskhuta, perhaps in the Lake Timsah region.”<sup>44</sup>

**D. Pi Hahiroth, Baal-zephon, and Migdol.** After the encampment at Etham, the Lord commanded Israel to change direction. Exod 14:1-2 notes, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon.’” Similarly, Num 33:7 states, “They left Etham, turned back to Pi Hahiroth, to the east of Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol.” Shea admits that “the Hebrew verb used for ‘to turn’ [Heb. *šûb*] in this passage is nonspecific as to the direction in which the Israelites turned.”<sup>45</sup> Yet,

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<sup>38</sup> Although Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, “The Route Through Sinai: Why the Israelites Fleeing Egypt Went South,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15 (May-June 1988): 31, notes the importance of the Israelites tracking along the wadis in the Sinai wilderness because of the availability of water resources—mostly found in the wadi beds. The Israelites may have also traveled along wadis when they journeyed from Rameses to Succoth.

<sup>39</sup> Cole, 118.

<sup>40</sup> H. Cazelles, “Les localisations de L’exode at La Critiques Littéraire,” *Revue Biblique* 62 (1955): 358.

<sup>41</sup> Shea, “Encounter at the Sea,” 16.

<sup>42</sup> “Encamped in Etham” [Exod 13:20], *SDABC*, 1:562.

<sup>43</sup> C. de Wit, “Etham,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 351.

<sup>44</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 182; Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, 1979 rev. ed., s.v. “Etham”; Hubbard, 4:60; Shea, “Encounter at the Sea,” 16. For a different view, see K. A. Kitchen, “Exodus, The,” *ABD*, 5:745.

<sup>45</sup> Shea, “Encounter at the Sea,” 16.

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he adds the possibilities that “either they turned north or they turned south.”<sup>46</sup> If we could locate these three places—Pi Hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal Zephon—with certainty, then we could know which direction the Israelites “turned.”

Some commentators maintain that the Israelites turned south, without giving cogent reasons why they turned south.<sup>47</sup> Gordon Wenham, who opts for the southern direction, contends that if the Israelites had turned north or west, that “would have brought them closer to the Egyptians.”<sup>48</sup> Although this seems reasonable, there appears to be convincing evidence that the Israelites did in fact turn north.

Based on archaeological findings, all three of the places mentioned in the text are located in the north—somewhere in the northern end of the Isthmus of Suez. The evidences are appealingly suggestive.

1. Baal-zephon means “Baal of the north.” This Canaanite god, Baal, was adopted by the Egyptians into their pantheon of gods. Perhaps the Egyptians built a temple or a city in his honor in the north, where he originally came from. Baal-zephon may then be located along the coastal road by the Mediterranean Sea, which is in the northern end of the Isthmus of Suez, and not in the south.<sup>49</sup>

2. Pi-hahiroth literally means “mouth of the canal,” taken from the Hebrew stem *h-r-t*, which means “to incise, engrave, carve, cut into.”<sup>50</sup> Pi-hahiroth may indeed refer to the mouth of a canal.<sup>51</sup> In 1967 archaeologists discovered an ancient canal in the north, which could fit to the toponym Pi Hahiroth. This huge canal is “twenty meters wide at the bottom and seventy meters wide at water level.”<sup>52</sup> According to Shea, this canal could have been constructed since the time of Merikare of the 10th Dynasty (ca. 2070-2040).<sup>53</sup> Its primary purpose was for defense in the Eastern Delta from the Asiatics, who were causing prob-

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “Turn and encamp” [Exod 14:2], *SDABC*, 1:564; Cole, 119, writes, “*Turn back* [italics his] should mean a reversal of direction. Perhaps it means a sudden swing to the south, instead of direct march eastwards.”

<sup>48</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1981), 2:224.

<sup>49</sup> According to Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 71, “Baal was the storm-god and also the patron of mariners. Several cult sites dedicated to him were built along the shores of the Mediterranean. A Phoenician letter from the sixth century B.C.E. seems to identify one Egyptian site named Baal-zephon with Tahpanhes, modern Tell-Defneh, some 27 miles (48 km.) south-southwest of modern Port Said.”

<sup>50</sup> Shea, “Encounter at the Sea,” 16.

<sup>51</sup> Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel: To the Exodus and Covenant of Sinai*, trans. by David Smith (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 379.

<sup>52</sup> John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 131.

<sup>53</sup> William H. Shea, “Date for the Recently Discovered Eastern Canal of Egypt,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 226 (1977): 35.

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lems for the Egyptians at the time.<sup>54</sup> Then, during the time of Amenemhet I of the 12th Dynasty (ca. 1991-1962), this canal was continued and dug out to serve as a defensive “wall” depicted in Seti’s relief.<sup>55</sup>

During the 12th Dynasty, the Asiatics were again troubling the Egyptians. Such chaotic conditions necessitated the building of a wall, which came from the earth “dug out” from the canal. This means that the “digging of the canal would have produced a double wall with a moat in the middle.”<sup>56</sup> Eventually, this Eastern Canal in the Delta “went out of use” during the 20th Dynasty, “although the idea of a canal from the Nile to the Gulf of Suez cropped up again in the later Saite and Persian Periods.”<sup>57</sup>

Although this Eastern Canal in the Delta went out of use only at the time of the 12th Dynasty, it was still in existence at the time of the Exodus and thus stood as a barrier to the Israelites when they went out of Egypt. Hoffmeier identifies the mouth of this Frontier Canal in the Eastern Delta as the “Pi-ha-hiroth,” translated in its Semitic origin as “mouth of the canal(s).”<sup>58</sup> This Eastern Frontier Canal, as he calls it, “ran from Lake Timsah, north to El Ballah Lake, and from its north side up to the Mediterranean coast.”<sup>59</sup> Thus he concludes that the mouth of this canal fits well, with its Semitic reading, as the location of Pi-ha-hiroth.<sup>60</sup>

3. Migdol, which simply means “fort,”<sup>61</sup> could be identified with modern Qantara Sharq, a mound located at the northern end of the line of forts across the Isthmus of Suez. This mound is near to the modern town of Qantara.<sup>62</sup> Based on excavation at that site, archaeologists discovered that it was actually a fortress city. Furthermore, it was found that this city was a major fort at “the easternmost delta”<sup>63</sup> that guarded any group wanting to enter or leave Egypt. This fort could be identified as the Migdol of the Exodus because of its location today as “near the point of where the modern road from Gaza to Cairo crosses over the Suez Canal,” where “the ancient crossing must have been located.”<sup>64</sup> Although this

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Hoffmeier, 170. Cf. Lawrence A. Sinclair, “Pi-Hahiroth,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1057, for the Semitic origin of the term Pi-hahiroth. However, Sinclair notes that “the name cannot be identified with any known site.”

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence A. Sinclair, “Migdol,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 898.

<sup>62</sup> Shea, “Encounter at the Sea,” 17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 123, notes that “the crossing took place not far from the present-day El Qantara on the Suez Canal.” For the identification of Migdol during Jeremiah and Saite’s period, see

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city has not been dated with certainty, “the settlement that underlies it dates to the Hyksos period in the middle of the second millennium B.C.”<sup>65</sup>

From the foregoing reasons, it is quite evident that the places where the Israelites turned were located in the northern end of the Isthmus of Suez, still far from the northern edge of the Gulf of Suez. If Baal-zephon, Pi-hahiroth, and Migdol were located in the northern end of the Isthmus of Suez, the location of the sea (or *yam sūph* in some biblical texts) that the Israelites crossed was probably somewhere in that area, too.

Thus, from the present findings of the location of these three toponyms, we can suggest that the “sea” that the Israelites passed through was either in the Lake Timsah or Lake Ballah area, since both lakes are located in the northern end of the Isthmus of Suez. The Israelites were trapped by these three obstructions: the “sea,” the frontier canal, and a major Egyptian fort. It appears that the Israelites had nowhere to go, unless they somehow crossed the “sea” in front of them, “the barrier between Egyptian soil and the desert wilderness.”<sup>66</sup> So Yahweh performed a miracle by dividing the water and making it possible for the Israelites to walk on the dry ground.

**Campsites after Crossing the Sea.** After the miracle crossing at the *yam sūph*, both texts in Numbers 33 and Exodus 15-16 mention another set of campsites used by Israel before they reached the Desert of Sin. We could better locate “the sea” the Israelites passed through if we could identify these stopping places. We can enumerate these campsites in the following order, based on Exodus 14-16 and Numbers 33:

**Exodus 14-16**

1. Passed through the sea (14:22, 29; 15:22)
2. Desert of Shur (15:22)
3. Marah (15:23)
4. Elim (15:27)
5. -----
6. Desert of Sin (16:1)

**Numbers 33**

1. Passed through the sea (v.8)
2. Desert of Etham (v.8)
3. Marah (v.8)
4. Elim (v.9)
5. Camped by the Red Sea (v.10)
6. Desert of Sin (v.11)

According to these texts, the next place after crossing the *yam sūph* was the Desert of Shur or the Desert of Etham. It appears that the Desert of Shur and the Desert of Etham are one and the same area in this parallel account.<sup>67</sup> In both accounts it is recorded that the children of Israel traveled for three days in this desert (Exod 15:22; Num 33:8) after crossing the *yam sūph*. For those three days

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Eliezer D. Oren, “Migdol: A New Fortress on the Edge of the Eastern Nile Delta,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 256 (Fall 1984): 7-44.

<sup>65</sup> Shea, “Encounter at the Sea,” 17.

<sup>66</sup> G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 61.

<sup>67</sup> David R. Seely, “Shur, Wilderness,” *ABD*, 5:1230.

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they could not find water to drink until they reached Marah. At Marah, there was water available, but it was bitter, so they could not drink it. But we know from the story that God performed another miracle to make the water potable (Exod 15:23-25).

Now, if we could locate the Desert of Shur/Etham, we would have a clear idea about the location of the sea of the miraculous crossing. In the biblical account this area is located between the sea of miracle and Marah. Kenneth Kitchen, the renowned Egyptologist, locates this wilderness region

in the North West part of the Sinai isthmus, south of the Mediterranean coastline and the “way of the land of the Philistines,” between the present line of the Suez Canal on its West and the ‘River of Egypt (Wadi el-‘Arish) on its East.<sup>68</sup>

This description by Kitchen would support our proposal for where the sea of the miracle crossing is located. The wilderness of Shur is directly opposite Lake Ballah and Lake Timsah. Exod 15:22 records that after the Israelites crossed the *yam sùph*, “they went out into the wilderness of Shur” (NASB). In other words, “only then when Israel crosses the sea does she enter into the wilderness.”<sup>69</sup> G. Ernest Wright correctly observes: “As soon as the sea was successfully crossed, the terrifying, waterless desert was before the fleeing Hebrews, and soon the murmurings of fear and discontent arose.”<sup>70</sup>

If the sea that the Israelites crossed is the Gulf of Suez, the area that they should have entered opposite to it was either the area known as the Way of Seir or the Paran Desert. However, the Bible is quite clear that after the miraculous sea crossing, the children of Israel entered the desert of Shur or Etham.

If we follow carefully the stage by stage account of Numbers 33, we notice that “the station at the sea of crossing (verse 8) is quite distinct from *yam sùph* (verses 10-11), since the Israelites arrive at the latter some three camping stations later.”<sup>71</sup> Kitchen affirms this view. He writes:

After reaching the wilderness of Shur/Etham (Exod 15:22; Num 33:8), the Hebrews in three days (? on third day, our mode of reckoning) reached Marah, went on to Elim and thereafter encamped by the *yam-sup* (Num 33:10, 11) before proceeding into the wilderness of Sin (Exod 16:1; Num 33:11) en route to Sinai which they reached after three more stops (Exod 17; 19:1, 2; cf. Num 33:12-15). On this reckoning, the *yam-sup* (of Num 33:10, 11) would be somewhere on

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<sup>68</sup> Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Shur,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 1110. Although Kitchen (1014) holds the view that the sea that the Israelites passed through is in the Bitter Lakes region because it is opposite to the area of Shur, yet Lake Ballah and Lake Timsah are also opposite to the area of Shur and therefore could also be good candidates for *yam sùph*.

<sup>69</sup> Brevard S. Childs, “A Traditio-Historical Study of the Reed Sea Tradition,” *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970):409.

<sup>70</sup> Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 61.

<sup>71</sup> Batto, “Red Sea or Reed Sea,” 20.

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the Gulf of Suez coast of Sinai, if Mount Sinai/Horeb be located in the South of that peninsula.<sup>72</sup>

It would suggest that the “sea of miracle crossing” is still far from the Gulf of Suez.<sup>73</sup> Hence, the view that the Gulf of Suez is the likely candidate for the sea that the Israelites crossed appears untenable.

**Identifying Yam Sûph Linguistically**

From the previous discussion, we have learned that the sea the Israelites passed through was either Lake Ballah or Lake Timsah. However, there is also difficulty when the term *yam sûph* in the Hebrew Bible is used to refer to the Gulf of Aqabah or to the Gulf of Suez. I propose that the solution to this problem lies in the possibility that the Israelites and the other ancient peoples did not distinguish between the Red Sea and those lakes along the line of the modern Suez canal and thus called them both *yam sûph*. In other words, *yam sûph* may refer to a specific body of water and at the same time to a general body of water.

There is strong evidence that the term *yam sûph* has a broader and more extended meaning than has been commonly assumed. What follows is the evidence for this hypothesis.

**Linguistic Study of Yam Sûph.** The connection of *sûph* to the Egyptian *ṯwf* is one of the crucial arguments for the “Sea of Reeds” hypothesis. It has been believed that *sûph* is an Egyptian loanword from the word *ṯwf(y)*, which is translated “papyrus plant,” or “papyrus reeds.”<sup>74</sup> Two texts in the OT recognize this connection. In Exod 2:3 and Isa 19:6, the Hebrew word *sûph* is translated “marsh reeds” or “rushes.”<sup>75</sup> However, there is complexity when *sûph* in Jonah 2:5 is translated as “seaweeds,” which “suggests the possibility that *sûph* is a generic term (‘underwater plant growth’) including both marine and freshwater vegetation.”<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, the connection of *sûph* to *ṯwf* has been cogently challenged. William Ward does not see the relation of the Egyptian *ṯwf* with the Hebrew *sûph*. He argues that Egyptian *ṯ* is not equivalent to the *ס* of Hebrew, phonetically. Normally, the equivalent of Egyptian *ṯ* is *š* in Semitic languages and not *ס*.<sup>77</sup> One can see that the linguistic argument for the connection of the Hebrew *sûph*

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<sup>72</sup> K. A. Kitchen, “Red Sea,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, (1975-1976), 5:47.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Albright, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Huddleston, 5:636. Cf. Thomas O. Lambdin, “Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 73 (1953): 153.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. R. D. Patterson, “*sûph*,” *TWOT*, 2:620.

<sup>76</sup> Hubbard, 4:59. Cf. Patterson, 2:620; Bernard F. Batto, “The Reed Sea: *Requiescat in Pace*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 32.

<sup>77</sup> William A. Ward, “The Semitic Biconsonantal Root *SP* and the Common Origin of Egyptian *ḤWF* and Hebrew *SÛP*: ‘Marsh(-Plant)’,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974): 346-47.



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to the Egyptian *ṭwf*, which is the basis for the Sea of Reeds hypothesis, is difficult.

A different argument against the connection of the Egyptian *p3-ṭwf(y)* with the Hebrew word *yam sūph* has been eloquently argued by Bernard F. Batto. He argues that *p3-ṭwf* is found in many places in the Egyptian texts referring to

a papyrus marsh *area* or *district* [emphasis his], not to a lake or body of water. In some texts *p3-ṭwf* is used to designate a district or area not only where papyrus grows but also where animals are pastured and agricultural enterprises undertaken.<sup>78</sup>

John Huddlestun, who evaluated the several usages of *p3-ṭwf* in different Egyptian texts, concludes that “it is not possible to isolate all occurrences of *p3-ṭwf* in Egyptian texts to one specific area in the Delta; rather, different passages point to varying locations.”<sup>79</sup>

For that reason, *p3-ṭwf* is neither referring to a specific local area nor to any single body of water. Thus, Batto maintains that “Egyptian *p3-ṭwf* has nothing to do with Biblical *yam sūp*.”<sup>80</sup>

Maurice Copisarow indicates that to the ancient Egyptians the “Red Sea is primarily seen as but a part of the vast domain of the Goddess of the *Great Green*.”<sup>81</sup> The Egyptian term for the Great Green Water is *wadj-wer*, which applies to the “Red Sea, Mediterranean or any other sea.”<sup>82</sup> Then, over the years of the history of ancient Egypt, this term came to include the Ionian Sea.<sup>83</sup> This study of Copisarow suggests the general character of the term “Red Sea.”

The broad and general meaning of *yam sūph* is attested in the way Greeks applied the term and the way it was understood in antiquity. N. H. Snaith succinctly describes this position:

The rendering ‘the Red Sea’ goes back to the LXX *hē Erythrē Thálassa*. According to Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, this phrase was used by Herodotus to denote the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean (I, 180, etc.), and similarly by Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 4, 448. Later, when the Greeks had discovered the Persian Gulf, the phrase included that also: Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 8.6.10, and it could also be used vaguely of far-away, remote places. The phrase thus means ‘the sea over there,’ as the speaker pointed vaguely in a southerly direction. It was a sea different from the virtually land-locked Mediterranean Sea, though nobody knew how far it extended. It was the sea at the end of the land.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Batto, “Red Sea or Reed Sea,” 59.

<sup>79</sup> Huddlestun, 5:637.

<sup>80</sup> Batto, “Red Sea or Reed Sea,” 59.

<sup>81</sup> Maurice Copisarow, “The Ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Hebrew Concept of the Reed Sea,” *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962): 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> N. H. Snaith, “yam sūp: The Sea of Reeds: The Red Sea,” *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 395.

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Taking a similar view, Batto adds,

[B]oth the fragmentary Aramaic text from the Dead Sea Scrolls known as the *Genesis Apocryphon* (21.17-18) and the famous first-century A.D. Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.1.3) state that the Tigris and the Euphrates empty into the Red Sea. The book of *Jubilees* (third or second century B.C.) says that Eden and the lands of India and Elam (Persia) all border on the Red Sea (8.21, 9.2).<sup>85</sup>

If *yam sūph* has been understood with a broad and general meaning, most likely the translators of the LXX “may well have understood *sūp* to mean, not ‘reeds,’ but ‘end,’ equaling or perhaps reading *sōp*.”<sup>86</sup> This understanding of the LXX translators can be seen when they translated *yam sūph* in 1 Kgs 9:26 as *tēs echatēs thalassēs*, which means “‘the uttermost sea’ or ‘the sea at the furthest region.’”<sup>87</sup> This is another evidence to argue that *yam sūph* has a broad and general sense.

The term *yam sūph* is also translated as the “End or Border Sea.” This alternative translation has been proposed by Copisarow. According to him, when Jacob and his family entered Egypt (Genesis 46) to join his son Joseph there and settled between the Gulf of Suez and the Nile, “Jacob and his family used their Chaldean vocabulary in naming the two terminal features, the Gulf and the bank of the Nile. סוף ים and סוף נהר derived from the patriarchal common noun סוף in the sense of end.”<sup>88</sup> Over time in Egypt this term was extended and “applied to the banks of the Nile, the Gulf of Suez and later to the Gulf of Akaba and the Red Sea” in the sense of border or boundary.<sup>89</sup> Appealing to the usage of the term סוף in the Targum Onkelos, he further argues that “by replacing קץ (Gen 4:3, 8:6, 16:3; 40:1, and Exod 12:41) by סוף in the sense of end, and then סוף in the vegetative sense (Ex 2:3 and 5) by יערא, Onkelos obviously accepted סוף ים to mean the End or Border Sea.”<sup>90</sup>

James Montgomery suggests the same idea when he favors the Greek translation of *yam sūph* as *hē eschātē thálassa* with *ultimum mare*. He bases his argument on Ps 72:8, where the king “will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.” He admits that “the River” in this text is generally thought to refer to the River Euphrates, but “the seas” not definite. However, he argues from v.10 of the same text that the phrase “from sea to sea and from the River” is referring to “the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, for him “the seas” in Ps 72:8 are a reference to the Red Sea. He further supports his

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<sup>85</sup> Batto, “Red Sea or Reed Sea,” 59-60.

<sup>86</sup> Snaith, 395.

<sup>87</sup> Huddlestone, 5:637.

<sup>88</sup> Copisarow, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>91</sup> James. A. Montgomery, “Hebraica (2) *yam sūp* (‘The Red Sea’)=Ultimum Mare?” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 58 (1938): 132.

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argument by quoting Exod 23:31, where God sets “your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines and from the desert to the River.” From this text, one can observe that Red Sea (*yam sūph*) is described as one of the borders or boundaries. Hence, Montgomery concludes that the Red Sea is one of the “*Ultima Maria* of Biblical geography.”<sup>92</sup>

The foregoing discussion strengthens the idea that Red Sea is considered as the “End or Border Sea.” It is quite possible to think of *yam sūph* as such, for the term might come from the root word פִּי־סוּף, which is literally translated as “come to an end.”<sup>93</sup> In ancient times the end of a journey is any area that holds water, which was also considered as “the border, [or] limit of the country.”<sup>94</sup>

**The Wider Meaning of the Word *Yam Sūph*.** The wider meaning of *yam sūph* is seen in the broader use of the term to refer to different bodies of water. In a number of biblical references, *yam sūph* has a wider meaning than has been generally assumed. The term generally refers to the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba, yet specifically to “the sea” of the miracle crossing. Again, the hypothesis of this study that no distinction was made at the time of the Exodus between the “Red Sea” and the particular “sea” (i.e., “Lakes Ballah or Timsah”) that the Hebrews passed through is established in the following discussion.

Exodus 13:17-18 mentions that God did not lead the Israelites on the road through the land of the Philistines, which is North of Egypt, but instead “God led the people [of Israel] around by the desert road toward the Red Sea [*yam sūph*]” (v.13a). In this passage, “the desert road toward the Red Sea” [*derek hammidbār yam sūph*] refers to the direction the Israelites took from Egypt. Apparently, *yam sūph* here refers to the Red Sea in general and not just to any particular body of water,<sup>95</sup> such as the reedy lakes along the line of the modern Suez Canal area.

Exodus 10:13-19 narrates how Yahweh brought a hoard of locusts which were carried by the east wind and settled in every area of Egypt and plagued the country. After Pharaoh repented, the Lord “changed the [east] wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea [*yam sūph*].” If one looks at the map, one sees that the body of water to the east of Egypt is the Gulf of Suez, an arm of the Red Sea. So the strong west wind blew the locusts east, that is, to the body of water east of Egypt, the Gulf of Suez. Thus, there is no likely candidate where the locusts were carried away other than the Gulf of Suez bordering Egypt in the east.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> See William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1988), s.v. “Swp.” Cf. Patterson, 2:620.

<sup>94</sup> Ward, 345.

<sup>95</sup> Some scholars have pointed out the vagueness of this passage. See Huddlestun, 5:634, for a list of these scholars.

<sup>96</sup> Huddlestun, 5:634.

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The term *yam sūph* has also been used to refer to the Gulf of Aqabah or Eilat. Jeremiah 49:21 explains this. The prophet Jeremiah prophesies against Edom that at their fall, “their cry will resound to the Red Sea [*yam sūph*].” The mention of Edom in this passage suggests that the “sea” is the northeastern finger of the Red Sea bordering the land of Edom to the west.<sup>97</sup> 1 Kings 9:26 is another example of the usage of *yam sūph* to refer to the Gulf of Aqaba. It says, “King Solomon also built ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath in Edom, on the shore of the Red Sea [*yam sūph*].” It is clear in this description that the “sea” near to the land of Edom points to the Gulf of Aqabah. The *yam sūph* here (i.e., Gulf of Aqabah) “marks the southernmost border of the territory [of Edom] under Solomon.”<sup>98</sup>

Other places in the OT, *yam sūph* consistently refers to the sea the Israelites crossed over on their way out of Egypt. This sea is sometimes called the “sea of the Exodus” or the “sea of the miracle crossing,” in distinction both with the Gulf of Aqabah and the Gulf of Suez.

In Deut 11:4, Moses reminded the people of Israel about the good things that God had done to them. One of them was God’s overwhelming the Egyptian armies and their horses and chariots with the waters of *yam sūph*.<sup>99</sup> In Josh 2:10, Rahab told the two spies sent by Joshua to spy out the land of Canaan, especially Jericho, that the people of the land had heard “how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea [*yam sūph*] for you when you came out of Egypt.” Joshua, after crossing the waters of Jordan on dry ground, and after setting up at Gilgal twelve stones taken out of the Jordan, said to the Israelites:

In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, ‘What do these mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what He had done to the Red Sea [*yam sūph*] when He dried it up before us until we had crossed over. (Josh 4:21-23)

From the foregoing texts, we can recognize the wide and narrow meaning of the term *yam sūph*. The wide meaning is seen in the way it is used to refer to the Gulf of Suez and to the Gulf of Aqabah or Eilat. The narrow meaning is found in the way it is used to refer to “the sea” that God dried up.

In summary, we have established the wider meaning of *yam sūph* through its alternative translation as “the End or Border Sea.”<sup>100</sup> Also, the wide as well as the narrow meanings of *yam sūph* are seen in the various ways the term is used in the Bible. Therefore, most likely the Israelites and other ancient peoples

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<sup>97</sup> Other texts where *yam sūph* is used to refer to the Gulf of Aqaba are Num 21:4; 14:25; Deut 1:40; 2:1; Judges 11:16.

<sup>98</sup> Huddleston, 5:633.

<sup>99</sup> See also Ps 106:7, 9, 22; 13:13, 15.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Allen C. Meyers, ed., *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (1987), s.v. “Red Sea”; Snaitch, 398; Hubbard, 4:59.

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did not distinguish between the “Red Sea” and those lakes in the north of Egypt and called them both *yam sūph*.<sup>101</sup> According to Kitchen, this wide and restricted use of *yam sūph* is

not specially remarkable or unparalleled. About 1470 B.C., for example, Egyptian texts of a single epoch can use the name Wadjmer, ‘Great Green (Sea),’ of both the Mediterranean and Red Seas, and Ta-neter, ‘God’s Land,’ of both Punt (East Sudan?) in particular and Eastern lands generally.<sup>102</sup>

#### Conclusion

In the contextual study of *yam sūph*, using the biblical linguistic data and the historical data regarding the different campsites used before and after crossing the *yam sūph*, we were able to locate the “sea” that the Israelites miraculously passed through. The “sea” [*hayyām*] is most likely located in the Lake Ballah or Lake Timsah area, along the line of the modern Suez canal, but definitely not in the Gulf of Suez, the northwestern arm of the Red Sea.

From our linguistic study of *yam sūph*, we have established the wider meaning of *yam sūph* through its alternative translation as “the End or Border Sea.” Moreover, we have learned that the usage of the Hebrew term *yam sūph* in a number of biblical references has a wide as well as a narrow meaning.<sup>103</sup> It may refer to the Gulfs of Aqaba and Suez and also to “the sea” the Israelites passed through. Thus, *yam sūph* as the sea of the miracle crossing is the narrow use of such term.

At the present time the evidence from both the archaeological and the biblical data points to Lake Ballah or Lake Timsah as the *yam sūph* the Israelites passed through on their way out of Egypt. This particular “sea” Israel crossed over is the narrow use of the wider meaning of *yam sūph*. Having located the sea that Israelites passed through, we can be confident that the writer of the narrative of the Exodus knew very well the different places he mentioned and thus established the historicity of the event.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. Batto, “Red Sea or Reed Sea,” 62.

<sup>102</sup> Kitchen, “Red Sea,” *NBD*, 1014-5.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Wenham, 224; Patterson, 2:620.

<sup>104</sup> Cole, 44.

## **“The Remnant of My Sheep”: A Study of Jeremiah 23:1–8 in its Biblical and Theological Contexts**

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Jeremiah’s early ministry (622–605) B.C.E. occurred during the time of Josiah’s reform (Jer 1:2; 2 Kgs 22–23; 2 Chron 34–35) when “he shared the broader hope that Judah will now seize the opportunity . . . to renew commitment to the ancient Yahwistic faith.”<sup>1</sup> But with the untimely death of Josiah,<sup>2</sup> the nation plunged into anarchy, and Jeremiah witnessed and testified during its ultimate demise (chaps. 37–44). Nevertheless, he maintained a salvific hope for the remnant. However, for Jeremiah the true remnant did not consist of the people who remained in Judah after the exile; rather the exiles themselves comprised the remnant for whom the promises of divine restoration were reserved.<sup>3</sup> Jer 23:1–8 presents three oracles which discuss the future remnant community.

### **Translation and Textual Considerations**

(1) “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture,”<sup>4</sup> says the Lord. (2) Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel against the shepherds who are shepherding my people, “You yourselves have scattered my flock and have driven them away and

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<sup>1</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, “Jeremiah (Prophet),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 3:687. There is some debate concerning Jeremiah’s prophetic career. While the majority favor the claim of Jer 1:2, a handful of claimants say that he came to prophetic office after the death of Josiah. For an overview, see Robert Altmann, “Josiah,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 3:1017.

<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Nelson, “Josiah in the Book of Joshua,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 540, claims that Josiah’s piety was “the decisive criterion” by which the kings of Judah were judged. As such, he surpassed even David.

<sup>3</sup> See my “The Remnant Motif in the Context of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Jeremiah,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1995), 376–77; idem, “The Remnant and the New Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah,” *AUSS* 34 (1996), 248.

<sup>4</sup> MT reads *mar‘itī*, “my pasture.” LXX reads *nomēs autōn*, “their pasture.”

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you have not taken care of them. Behold, I will take care of you for the evil of your deeds,” says the Lord. (3) “Furthermore, I myself will gather together the remnant [š<sup>o</sup>ērîṭ] of my sheep from all the places where I have driven them there; and I will cause them to return to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. (4) Furthermore, I will appoint shepherds over them who will shepherd them. And they will not be afraid anymore, nor be dismayed; neither shall any be missing,” says the Lord.

(5) “Behold, days are coming,” says the Lord, “When I will raise up for David a Righteous Branch.<sup>5</sup> And He shall rule as King and deal wisely; and He shall do justice and righteousness in the land. (6) In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. And this is his name by which he will be called:<sup>6</sup> The Lord is our righteousness.”<sup>7</sup>

(7)<sup>8</sup> “Therefore, behold, days are coming,” says the Lord, “When they will no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel<sup>9</sup> out of the land of Egypt;’ (8) instead ‘As the Lord lives who brought up and who brought back the seed of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the lands where I had driven them.’<sup>10</sup> Then they shall dwell<sup>11</sup> in their own land.”

### Structure

There is much discussion regarding the extent of this passage. Some exegetes believe that only vs. 1–4 comprise a complete unit.<sup>12</sup> C. H. Cornill claims that it envelopes vs. 1–6.<sup>13</sup> Others contend that the pericope extends from v. 1 to v. 8.<sup>14</sup> Several factors recommend this position:

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<sup>5</sup> MT *šemah šaddîq*, “a righteous branch” or “legitimate growth,” points to a true or genuine shoot from a tree. See Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 446. LXX reads *anatolēn dikaian*, “righteous rising,” where *anatolēn* has both the idea of “growing” and “rising” (a figure used of heavenly bodies or the rising of the sun).

<sup>6</sup> MT *yiqr<sup>o</sup>*, “he will call him,” is quite unusual. A few MSS read *yiqr<sup>o</sup>û*, “they will call.” Syr., Tg. and Vg. all have *yigrāuhû*, “they will call him.”

<sup>7</sup> LXX transliterates the name as *Iōsedek*, preceded by *kurios*. Hence, “The Lord will call his name *Iōsedek* (i.e. “Yahweh is righteous”).

<sup>8</sup> In LXX vs. 7–8 are located after 23:40.

<sup>9</sup> Instead of “children of Israel,” LXX reads *ton oikon Israēl*, “the house of Israel.”

<sup>10</sup> MT reads *hiddahim*, “I have driven them”; but LXX *exōsen autous* and the parallel passage in Jer 16:15, *hiddihim*, both read “he had driven them.”

<sup>11</sup> LXX reads *kai apekatestēsen autous*, “and he has restored them.” In a parallel passage in 16:15, MT reads *wahšibtim*, “I will bring them back.”

<sup>12</sup> John Bright, *Jeremiah*, Anchor Bible, vol. 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 145–46; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 613; Carroll, 443; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 26 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1991), 324. Hereafter cited as CKD.

<sup>13</sup> C. H. Cornill, *Das Buch Jeremia*. (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1905), 262.

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 485–86; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 3d ed., Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 12 (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), 125; Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A*

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1. V. 9 introduces a new section with the sub-heading *lann<sup>o</sup>biʾim*, “Concerning the prophets.”

2. The entire unit is linked by the divine formula *n<sup>o</sup>um ʾadōnāy*, “says the Lord” (vs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7).

3. Echoes, such as *lākēn*, “therefore” (vs. 2 and 7) and the hiphil form of the verb *ndh*, “to drive,” in vs. 2, 3 and 8 also demarcate the unit.

4. The woe oracle of the introduction and the salvation oracle of the conclusion illustrate a contrast that forms an inclusio of sorts. This is highlighted, in that the introduction deals with “scattering” while the conclusion denotes “re-gathering.”

5. Finally, the motif of restoration is like a thread that binds the entire section together.

It may be best to consider Jer 23:1–8 as the conclusion to the complex of sayings extending from 21:11 to 23:8, where the message of judgment in chaps. 21–22 turns to a message of hope. This conclusion consists of three brief oracles<sup>15</sup> dealing with the future of the remnant:

1. Vs. 1–4, as introduced by the Woe Oracle, *hōy*;
2. Vs. 5–6, as introduced by the phrase *hinnēh yāmīn bāʾim n<sup>o</sup>um ʾadōnāy*, “behold, days are coming, says the Lord.”
3. Vs. 7–8 as introduced by the phrase *lākēn hinnēh yāmīn bāʾim n<sup>o</sup>um ʾadōnāy*, “therefore, behold, days are coming, says the Lord.”

The first oracle is chiasmatically arranged:<sup>16</sup>

- A** Woe to shepherds destroying the flock (v. 1).
- B** You yourselves scattered, thrust out, have not taken care of my flock (v. 2a).
- C** Behold I will take care of you (v. 2b).
- B** I myself will gather, bring back my flock (v. 3).
- A** I will raise up shepherds who will shepherd (v. 4).

The second oracle is similarly arranged:<sup>17</sup>

- A** God will raise up a legitimate/righteous ruler (v. 5a–c)
- B** This king will reign prudently/have success (v. 5d)
- C** He will bring justice and righteousness (vs 5e–f)
- B** Judah/Israel will be delivered and be secure (v. 6a–b)
- A** God will name him “Yahweh our Righteousness” (v. 6c–d).

The final oracle may be divided into three parts:<sup>18</sup>

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*Commentary*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 517–19; F. Nötscher, *Das Buch Jeremias* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1934), 174.

<sup>15</sup> Bright, 145; R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation (Atlanta: Knox, 1988), 137–38.

<sup>16</sup> CKD, 325.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 332.



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1. An old oath: Yahweh brought up Israel from Egypt (v. 7);
2. A new oath: Yahweh brought back the seed of Israel from exile (v.8a);
3. Again they dwell in their own land (v. 8b).

#### Historical Background

Some commentators insist that the motif of the ingathering of “the remnant of my flock” (*ʿet-šerîṭ šōʾnî*) points to Ezek 34 and deuteronomic authors.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it presupposes the exile. However, as Holladay has expressed, the deliberate play on the nuances of *pqd* in vs. 2 (used twice) and 4, and the precise repetition *hārōʿîm hārōʿîm*, “shepherds who shepherd,” suggest the mind of Jeremiah.<sup>20</sup> It is then proposed that the tone of hope in this passage suggests a period shortly after Jeremiah’s purchase of the field at Anathoth, “in the summer of 588,”<sup>21</sup> late in Zedekiah’s reign.<sup>22</sup>

#### Interpretation

This passage, written in prose,<sup>23</sup> begins with a woe oracle.<sup>24</sup> Introduced by *hōy*, the woe oracle functions as a threat, pronouncing not only the “forecast of the catastrophe but consciously endorsing and promoting it.”<sup>25</sup> The oracle intro-

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<sup>19</sup> Carroll, 445; E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1–25*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 191; W. Theil, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremiah 1–25*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 41 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 246–48; Seigfried Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament: Ursprung und Gestaltwandel*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 5 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer 1965), 207–08, 212; J. Lust, “‘Gathering and Return’ in Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” in *Le Livre de Jérôme: Le prophète et son milieu les oracles et leur transmission*, ed., P. M. Bogaert (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1981), 134–35, n. 70. Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremiah* (Kristiania, Norway: J. Dybwad, 1914), 50, accepts the literary integrity of the passage but adds that it is an exilic interpolation based on Ezek 34.

<sup>20</sup> Holladay, 614.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Bright, 145–46. Cf. Thompson, 487.

<sup>23</sup> Most commentators have urged that this is a prose passage. See Bright, 145; Feinberg, 517; CKD, 324; Rudolph, 124. Others see vs. 2, 4 as poetry while v. 3 is secondary. So Norbert Mendeki, “Die Sammlung und die Hineinführung in das Land in Jer. 23,3,” *Kairos* 25 (1983): 99–103. Thompson (485–86) regards the first two sections as mostly poetic segments, with vs. 7–8 comprised of prose. W. L. Holladay, “The Recovery of Poetic Passages of Jeremiah,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 420–424, once considered the entire passage poetic. He has since changed his position to “a carefully crafted sequence of structured prose (*Kunstprosa*).” See his *Jeremiah 1*, 613.

<sup>24</sup> The woe oracle begins with the cry *hōy*, “woe,” followed by a participial clause which describes the offense and announces the judgment. It has three parts: (1) Opening, “Woe to the shepherds” (v. 1a); (2) Accusation, “You destroy and scatter my sheep” (v. 1b); (3) Judgment Speech or Prediction of Disaster (v. 2).

<sup>25</sup> Erhard Gerstenberger, “The Woe Oracles of the Prophets,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 251. Richard J. Clifford, “The Use of *Hōy* in the Prophets,” *CBQ* 28 (1966): 463–64, has shown that the woe oracle has an increased bitterness in Jeremiah and Habbakuk. As to the role of *hōy* in the prophets, he adjudges that it is an automatic reaction of the prophets upon hearing the word of God’s judgment. “To

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duces a pattern of speech described by W. Janzen as the “reversal pattern,” which in its most pointed form is as follows: You have done X; therefore, X will be done to you.<sup>26</sup> This points to the idea of *lex talionis*. Therefore, the woe oracle provides a climactic, emotional content to the judgment at hand.

This woe oracle indicts the shepherds<sup>27</sup> for destroying and scattering Yahweh’s sheep.<sup>28</sup> W. L. Holladay comments, “The implication here is that neglect leaves the sheep as dead as if they have been deliberately killed; ‘scatter’ has a similar implication.”<sup>29</sup> The duty of the shepherds was to protect the sheep and keep them safe from the attacks of wild animals that would destroy and scatter the flock. Hence, the shepherds are like wild animals, destroying and scattering that which they were supposed to protect.

Further, a bit of irony is exposed here. Since both verbs (“destroy” and “scatter”) are usually used with Yahweh as subject (cf. 15:7; 18:17), “he may have occasion to punish his people, but it is illegitimate for the kings and officials of the people to do so.”<sup>30</sup>

The accusation of the “woe” oracle is followed by the elements of a typical judgment speech in v. 2:

- (i) the transition word *lāken*, “therefore”;
- (ii) the messenger formula *kōh ’amar* <sup>ʾ</sup>*dōnāy*, “thus says the Lord”;<sup>31</sup>
- (iii) the people accused (*the shepherds shepherding my flock*);<sup>32</sup>
- (iv) the accusation (“*you yourselves have scattered my flock*”); and

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the prophet, God’s word is as good as the deed it announced. Promise of destruction was the destruction.”

<sup>26</sup> W. Janzen, *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle*, BZAW 125 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 82. This woe oracle also provides a link with 22:13, where it is employed in a similar manner: “*Woe to the one who builds his house in unrighteousness.*”

<sup>27</sup> “Shepherd” is a time-hallowed title for kings in the ancient Near East. See Ralph W. Klein, “Jeremiah 23:1–8,” *Int* 34 (1980), 168. The reference in Jer 22:22 to the shepherds, speaks of Judah’s leaders, especially her kings. Since chap. 22 dealt with Judah’s kings, some named and others unnamed, it seems safe to infer that the shepherd imagery in chap. 23 has the same meaning. While no kings are specified here, they are lumped together. As Klein, *ibid.*, 167–68, says, “Their misdeeds are summarized as those of malpracticing shepherds.”

Elsewhere, the sheep-shepherd imagery is to be found in Pss 74:1; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3; Isa 40:10–11; Ezek 34. Since Ezek 34 contains the expression “my sheep” eleven times, this has prompted Norbert Mendecki, “Einfluss des Buches Ezechiel auf Jer 23,3; 29,14; 32,37,” *Collectanea Theologica* 55 (1985): 147–51, to claim that Jer 23 depends on the language of Ezekiel.

<sup>28</sup> Both *m<sup>ʿ</sup>abb<sup>ʿ</sup>dīm*, “destroying,” and *m<sup>ʿ</sup>piṭīm*, “scattering,” are participles, suggesting a continued practice.

<sup>29</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 614.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> CKD, 325, shows that both the transition word and the messenger formula are stylistic features that link the oracles of 22:18 and 23:2.

<sup>32</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 614, claims that this “precise duplication *hārōʿīm hārōʿīm*, is witty for it is clear that the assumed syntax is an agent noun followed by a participle with verbal force . . . analogous to ‘prophets who prophesy’ (*hannebiʿīm hannibb<sup>ʿ</sup>īm*) in v. 25.”

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(v) a divine speech issued in the first person (“Behold, I am about to take care of you”).<sup>33</sup>

The emphatic pronoun, *’attem*, (“you yourselves”) stands at the head of the judgment oracle. This oracle, issued in direct speech, picks up the terminology of the first accusation and extends it: *You yourselves have scattered my sheep and caused this dispersion/scattering.*” The judgment is then voiced by the play on the key word *pqd* since it is this same verb that expresses both the shepherds’ sins and Yahweh’s punishment of them. The shepherds have failed to “take care of” (*pqd*) the flock in a positive sense; therefore, God will “take care of” (*pqd*) the shepherds, in a negative sense. This is a case of reversal. Yahweh will visit upon the shepherds the evil of their actions; He will turn their own deeds back upon them. This pun goes beyond irony. It becomes “clear that the shepherds are only the *cause*, but Yahweh Himself is the *agent* of judgment on the kings.”<sup>34</sup> The judgment oracle then ends abruptly with the repetition of the messenger formula, “thus says the Lord.”

Verse 3 now expresses a reversal from judgment to salvation.<sup>35</sup> Further, the emphatic “*I myself*” is contrasted to that of v. 2, “you yourselves.” This emphasis introduces another shift in the passage. Whereas in v. 2 the shepherds were accused of the dispersion, in v. 3 Yahweh claims responsibility for the dispersion.<sup>36</sup> But there is no contradiction. Yahweh had exiled the people on account of their sins and those of the leaders. This truth may be expressed either as Yahweh as the active agent of the exile, or by saying that the people’s sins caused their exile.

However, v. 3 presents a striking contrast with v. 2 in terms of the actions and results of the shepherds and Yahweh. The shepherds’ actions resulted in the flock being cast out, but Yahweh’s actions result in the ingathering of the remnant.<sup>37</sup>

This may be expressed in terms of contrastive parallelism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See CKD, 325; Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form Critical Method*, trans. S. M. Cupitt (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 210–20; Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 404–05.

<sup>34</sup> Klein, 168.

<sup>35</sup> The conjunction *waw* connects both verses. It appears that this conjunction is not completely adversative (“but”) or temporal (“then”). As CKD, 326, points out, it seems to have “both a temporal quality, marking a shift between what the shepherds had been doing and what Yahweh *could do* (past, present and future), and a contrast between the shepherds and Yahweh. ‘Furthermore’ seems to be the best word to capture both elements.”

<sup>36</sup> This is seen by some scholars as being contradictory, and hence they see the phrase “from all the lands where I have driven them” as an insertion which disrupts the flow of images in vs. 1–2, 4. However, such a claim for divine prerogative is widespread in the book of Jeremiah: 8:3; 16:15; 23:8; 24:9; 27:10, 15; 32:37.

<sup>37</sup> Bright, 139, translates *š’erîṭ šō’nî* with “what is left of my flock.” Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 615, accounts for the use of the term “remnant” as another suggestion of the kings’ neglect.

<sup>38</sup> CKD, 326–27.

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A You (shepherds) scattered my flock  
B and you thrust them out  
C and did not take care of them  
C I (Yahweh) will take care of you  
A I will gather the remnant of my flock  
B I will cause them to return.

Yahweh's ingathering and return of the remnant is in direct contrast to the shepherd's actions of scattering and thrusting out the flock. In fact, the verb "gather" is a precise resolution of "scatter" in vs. 1–2a.<sup>39</sup> This act of salvation on behalf of the remnant speaks of

Yahweh's sovereign role. It is further highlighted in that the remnant will be returned to their own pasture. In Jer 6:2 the "fold" metaphor functions in an oracle of judgment where foreign shepherds will dominate Judah. But in Jer 23:3 the sheep will be returned to their rightful pasturage.<sup>40</sup>

The restoration of the remnant is further emphasized by the last two verbs in v. 3: *ûpârû w'râbû*, "and they shall be fruitful and they shall multiply." These reflect on Genesis and creation terminology.<sup>41</sup> These are the same words pronounced both on the sea creatures and birds (Gen 1:22) and to humankind (Gen 1:28). They were reaffirmed to the remnant who survived the flood (Gen 9:1). Therefore, this ingathering signals a new beginning, as did creation and as did the post-flood time. Further, the book of Exodus opens with the same motif: *the Hebrews were fruitful and multiplied*, so that the land was full of them (Exod 1:7). Similarly, the restoration of the remnant is a new exodus, a new return. Indeed, "Exodus and creation terminology intermingle, and this new exodus/return will use both types of language."<sup>42</sup>

Also, this phrase reminds one of covenantal promises and blessings. Jeremiah had earlier mentioned such a promise in 3:16. It functions here to remind "the people that God will not forget his covenant with them. Political and national changes will take place. The continuance of Yahweh's covenant, however, is assured."<sup>43</sup>

The salvation of Yahweh on behalf of the remnant is furthered in v. 4: Yahweh will replace the bad shepherds with good shepherds, who will really

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25: To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 99.

<sup>40</sup> The pasture (*nāwah*) may be used in reference to a place of security, refreshment, and contentment. This "fold" metaphor has both a positive (31:32; 33:12; 50:19) and negative (10:25; 25:30; 49:19, 20; 50:7, 44, 45) value in the book of Jeremiah.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982), 110–14. See also, my "'Creation' in the Book of Jeremiah," in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan*, ed. Jiri Moskala (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2000), 40.

<sup>42</sup> CKD, 327.

<sup>43</sup> Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 703.

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shepherd.<sup>44</sup> It is now noted how Yahweh's actions completely reverse the situation of judgment to that of salvation: the verbs "scatter," "drive away," and "not taken care of" (v. 2) are now replaced with "gather," "bring back," and "shepherd."<sup>45</sup> The effect will be that there will be no more fear or dismay. The combination "not fearing" and "not being dismayed" is a "typical promise of deliverance based on Yahweh's presence."<sup>46</sup>

The last phrase now returns to the play on the verb *pqd*. In the expression *w'lo' yippaqēdū*, the niphal form here may be understood as "none will be lacking/missing." As such, the idea is denoted that none of the flock will be missing. Yahweh's work is perfect. When He gathers the remnant and returns them to safety, with new leaders, there would be no need for apprehension. Yahweh will not miss a single one of His remnant flock.

In this pericope, judgment and salvation stand side by side. Just as Yahweh had executed punitive action against his people, He could return the exiled, here described as the remnant. Otherwise, the people's fate would have been permanent loss.<sup>47</sup> Holladay concludes, "The fact that the passage is both a judgement oracle and a salvation oracle indicates that it stands at the beginning of a new age."<sup>48</sup>

The restoration of the remnant and the installation of the new age requires that proper leadership also be restored to the community. Jer 23:5–6 now introduces the leader, *par excellence*, a royal figure whom Yahweh will "raise up" (*qūm*). This verb provides the link between both sections, since it is used in vs. 4 and 5. Hence, the new David is the concrete manifestation of God's promise to "set up" or raise shepherd kings over the restored remnant community.<sup>49</sup>

Whereas vs.1–4 placed emphasis on the deliverance of the remnant, vs. 5–6 focus on this figure who will lead the restored remnant community.<sup>50</sup> This is borne out by the structure: Yahweh is the subject of A/A' while the royal figure is the subject of B/B' and C. He is characterized as a righteous ruler. As the structure indicates, there is a strong interest in *šdq*, "righteous(ness)." The root

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<sup>44</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 615, comments with great insight that the shift from the participle in v. 2 to the waw-consecutive perfect *w'rā'ūm* ("and they will shepherd them") signals a movement: they will really shepherd.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Klein, 169. See also Geo Widengren, "Yahweh's Gathering of the Dispersed," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer, JSOT Supplement Series 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 227–34. He believes that Mesopotamia was the point of origin of this motif of the gathering of the dispersed but that the formality of this theme is most remarkable when dealing with the Israelite-Judean people especially as witnessed in the phenomenon of such verbs used in apposition.

<sup>46</sup> CKD, 327.

<sup>47</sup> Carroll, 445.

<sup>48</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 615.

<sup>49</sup> Klein, 170.

<sup>50</sup> CKD, 329, points to the similarity with the figure in Isa 11:1–9.

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*sdq* forms an inclusio in vs. 5c and 6d. It is also at the center of the chiasm dealing with this king's rule of righteousness (v. 5f.).

This ruler will come from the Davidic tree (i.e., dynasty), which is cut off but not dead.<sup>51</sup> Jeremiah 21:11–22:30 showers judgment upon the representatives of the Davidic dynasty during Jeremiah's time because they failed to demonstrate the true qualities of kingship.<sup>52</sup> Further, J. Swetnam has demonstrated that with the appointment of Zedekiah as a Babylonian puppet king replacing Jehoiachin, who was exiled, tension broke out in Judah regarding legitimacy.<sup>53</sup> Against this background Jeremiah delivered his message of the *semah saddiq*, the "Righteous Shoot" or "True Shoot" or "Legitimate/Righteous/True/Scion."<sup>54</sup> In short, the only legitimate leader of the reconstituted community is the *semah saddiq*. Kingship and therefore leadership had failed. The leaders were in no position to save the scattered people. With the harsh denunciations in Jer 22:24–23:2, Jeremiah meant to stifle any hope that leadership at that point was the solution. A new form of leadership was needed.<sup>55</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin has made a case that this refers to a figure who incorporates the offices of both priest and king.<sup>56</sup> Such a figure is identified as the Messianic King.<sup>57</sup> This is the direction of the Targum, which has "an Anointed One/Messiah of Righteousness." The shoot is that which springs from the fallen tree and thus bears in itself and

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<sup>51</sup> Thompson, 489.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> J. Swetnam, "Some Observations on the Background of *saddiq* in Jeremiah 23:5a," *Bib* 46 (1965): 29–40. He holds that the oracle legitimizes a pro-Babylonian ruler instead of the captured Jehoiachin. E. Lipinski, "Études sur deux textes 'messianiques' de l'Ancien Testament," *Semetica* 20 (1970): 41–59, believes that this passage was delivered in 597 B.C.E. as an official proclamation of the new name of the new king, Zedekiah.

<sup>54</sup> This expression is seen as a *terminus technicus* for the Messiah in the book of Jeremiah. See M. Rehm, *Der Königliche Messias im Licht der Immanuel-Weissagung des Buches Jesaja*, Eichstätter-Studien, 1 (Kevelaer: Butzon und Bercher, 1968), 254–256. Cf. Bright, 144. This is the best rendering of the same expression in a third-century B.C.E. Phoenician inscription from the northern coast of Syria and from Ugaritic texts. See Swetnam, 29–33; J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 3: *Phoenician Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 134–41. See also G. A. Cooke, *A Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions: Moabite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Jewish* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 86; A. M. Honeyman, "A Phoenician Inscription of Ptolemaic Date," *JEA* 26 (1940): 64; Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 161. However, H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 166, says that in Jeremiah the term has not yet become a Messianic title, but simply refers to "those who come after."

<sup>55</sup> W. J. Wessels, "The Fallability of Leadership According to Jeremiah 23:1–4," *Old Testament Essays* 6 (1993): 334.

<sup>56</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, "*Semah* as a Technical Term in the Prophets," *VT* 14 (1964): 93–97.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Isa. 11:1; Jer 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 338; J. Becker, *Messianic Expectations in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Van Groningen, 704; Bright, 143; H. Freedman, *Jeremiah*, Soncino Books (London & Bournemouth: Soncino Press, 1949), 153.

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sustains new life. This is precisely the task of the Messianic figure whose rule is described as establishing an able rule characterized by prudence (*škl*): MT *ûmālak melek w<sup>e</sup>hiškîl*, literally, "And a king will rule and act wisely." The point is made that this ideal king will exercise real sovereignty over the remnant community, unlike Zedekiah, who was merely a puppet king.<sup>58</sup> This is so because he will "deal or act wisely" with prudence (*hiškîl*). He will be an able leader<sup>59</sup> who will have insight and act circumspectly. This results in success.<sup>60</sup> Jer 10:21 describes the judgement invoked upon the shepherd-leaders, who were regarded as foolish, since they did not seek the Lord. Hence, they lost their flocks. Now the leadership and success of the ideal king are brought into bold relief, for as leader *par excellence*, all of his fold will be accounted for; none will be missing (Jer 23:4).

The reason for such success is that central to his rule he will execute justice (*mi pat*) and righteousness (*š<sup>e</sup>daqah*). This is a summation of the function of the ideal king. William McKane comments that the king's responsibilities point to the demands made on Davidic kings and criticism of their performance found in 21.12 (22.3) and 22.13–19. It recalls passages in the books of Samuel where the king's supreme responsibility in these matters is assumed and his incorruptibility expected (2 Sam 12.1–17), where neglect of them is represented as a grave dereliction of duty and a reason for withdrawing loyalty (2 Sam 15.1–6), and where his profound legal acumen is portrayed (2 Sam 14.1–24; cf. 1 Kgs 3.16–28).<sup>61</sup>

Viewed against the prevailing social milieu of Jeremiah's time, the just and righteous rule of this figure is highlighted. The king was commissioned to "do justice and righteousness" (*ʿašû mišpat ûš<sup>e</sup>daqah*). Instead, Jehoiakim was guilty of covetousness, oppression, violence, murder and foolish building projects in time of siege. Because of this, he deserved the burial of an ass (Jer 22:13–19). Zedekiah was weak, vacillating, and indecisive, and disobedient to the divine will (Jer 37:3; 16–21; 38:1–5) and he broke the covenant with the manumission of the slaves (chap. 34). Hence, he failed to rule with justice and righteousness. In direct contrast to such evil, the coming king will reign with justice and righteousness, effecting what Mowinckel calls a "moral revival."<sup>62</sup> In short, this king will bring the covenant conditions to the people: righteousness and justice.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Thompson, 490.

<sup>59</sup> Bright, *Jeremiah*, 140. "As king he shall reign—and ably."

<sup>60</sup> Louis Goldberg, "saka," *TWOT* (1980), 2:877; M. Saebo, "škl hi. einsichtigein," *THAT* (1984), 2:824–28.

<sup>61</sup> William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, I*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 562.

<sup>62</sup> Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 179.

<sup>63</sup> CKD, 331. Cf. Thompson, 491, who rightly ties the realization of blessing in the land with kingship exercised in the context of faithfulness to covenant stipulations

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The result of such rule is found in v. 6ab: Judah “*will be delivered and Israel*<sup>64</sup> *will dwell securely (in safety).*” This is an expression of confidence where the restored remnant community will live under Yahweh’s protection.<sup>65</sup> Mowinckel comments correctly that this salvation (*ys’*) “includes not only deliverance, preservation, and victory in war, but also every kind of well being, good fortune, and ideal conditions.”<sup>66</sup>

This rejuvenation is directed toward Judah *and* Israel. While it has been put forward that “Judah” and “Israel” are being used synonymously,<sup>67</sup> it may also be suggested that such usage points in an eschatological direction; that is, it points to faith in the future,<sup>68</sup> “the new and the entirely other (occurring) after a break with what has gone before,”<sup>69</sup> the inauguration of a new era.<sup>70</sup> When the prophet speaks of the salvation of the remnant community, the idea of the glorious days of the united kingdom under the united monarchy comes to the foreground. This is especially highlighted in view of the successful rulership of the *semah saddiq*, the Messiah. Mowinckel says convincingly, “The Messiah is the future, eschatological realization of the ideal of Kingship.”<sup>71</sup> He is raised up by God, not by an accident of history. He is the One through whom the redemptive, salvific activity of God, on behalf of the (eschatological) remnant, will be effected.<sup>72</sup>

Further, this is the intent of the expression *hinneh yamim ba’im*, “behold, days are coming.” This is an eschatological formula, as attested by Walter C. Kaiser.<sup>73</sup> This points to a distant rather than an immediate future and is indicative of a decisive break in the history of the Davidic monarchy and the Judean

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<sup>64</sup> LXX reads “Jerusalem” instead of “Israel.” Cf. Jer 33:16.

<sup>65</sup> Alfred Jepsen, “*aman*,” *TDOT* (1974) 1:292–322. This expression is found repeatedly in the OT: Lev 25:18, 19; 26: 5; Deut 12:10; 33:12, 28; Isa 32:17; Jer 33:16; 32:37; Ezek 28:26; 34:25, 27, 28; 38:8, 14; 39:26; Zech 14:11.

<sup>66</sup> Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, 177. This is an approximation of *shālôm*, which points to “safety and security, good order and morality in the nation, fellowship (‘wholeness’) and brotherhood, in short whatever may be described as material well-being and sound social and moral conditions.”

<sup>67</sup> CKD, 330.

<sup>68</sup> Robert P. Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition?” *ZAW* 94 (1982):48.

<sup>69</sup> Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 11.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 215–17. See also W. J. Wessels, “Jeremiah 33:15–16 as a Reinterpretation of Jeremiah 23:5–6,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991): 327.

<sup>71</sup> Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 156. Cf. H. L. Ellison, *The Centrality of the Messianic Idea for the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1953), 12, who claims, “The Messiah is an eschatological figure.”

<sup>72</sup> Contra to E. Jenni, “Eschatology in the Old Testament,” *IDB* (1962), 2:130, who sees the Messianic hope as being invalid in the book of Jeremiah. Jutta Hausmann, *Israel’s Rest: Studien zum Selbstverständnis der nachesilischen Gemeinde*, Beitr\_ge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, 7 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987), 208, says that the remnant thought is encountered in combination with Messianism, but is not fundamentally connected to or an integral part of it.

<sup>73</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” *JETS* 15 (1972): 19. See also von Rad, “‘Day’ in the OT,” *TDNT* (1964), 2:946.



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state. It is not merely the introduction of a prediction of the replacement of one Judean ruler "with another within the framework of a continuing historical institution of monarchy. It involves rather, as does vs. 1–4, an acceptance of the inevitability of political collapse and disintegration."<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the name of the king is given: *YHWH šidqēnū*, "Yahweh is our Righteousness." This is a biting play on king Zedekiah for this name is practically Zedekiah written backwards, *šidqî-yāhû*. This means "Yahweh is righteousness/ my righteousness" but the king himself was far from such. Like his predecessors Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, Zedekiah had "little interest in the establishment of God's righteous kingdom. . . . [He had] perpetuated the policy of *Realpolitik* and opposed Jeremiah's prophetic message."<sup>75</sup> But this new king *par excellence* is already characterized as righteous. Hence, the intent is a reversal of all the aspects of Zedekiah's (and previous rulers') reign and fate: whereas Zedekiah sought a miraculous intervention, but only the pronouncement of judgment was given (21:1–10: chap. 34), and the scattering of the people, this new king will succeed in the deliverance and regathering of the remnant: whereas Zedekiah failed to live up to his name, this king will not fail.

The final oracle (vs. 7–8)<sup>76</sup> of this pericope continues the message of hope already present in the previous two oracles. The expression *lākēn hinnēh-yāmîn ba'im*, "therefore, days are coming,"<sup>77</sup> effectively links this with the previous oracle, with the divine formula, *n<sup>e</sup>um <sup>a</sup>dônāy*, "says the Lord," connecting all three units.

Structurally, it is based on the replacement of an old oath with a new one. What is recounted is the Exodus from Egypt, which is used in the first oath formula, "As Yahweh lives who brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt." The new oath<sup>78</sup> now invokes a new Exodus that surpasses in grandeur the original Exodus from Egypt. The new Exodus has a wider scope than the first, regathering the people from the north and from all the lands where they were driven. This scope suggests an eschatological proportion. Klein points in this direction when he says that Yahweh's faithfulness is expressed in this new act of

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<sup>74</sup> McKane, 560. Cf. Rudolph, 202; and M. Sekine, "Davidsbund und Sinaibund bei Jeremia," *VT* 9 (1959): 55, who maintains that the phrase *harē hayyāmîm hāhēm* is a technical term which points to the eschaton.

<sup>75</sup> VanGemeren, 312.

<sup>76</sup> These verses occur with minor variations in Jer 16:14–15.

<sup>77</sup> M. Weinfeld, "Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel," *ZAW* 88 (1976): 18, has demonstrated that this and similar expressions are particularly Jeremianic, occurring numerous times within the book of Jeremiah and only four times outside: 1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kgs 20:17 = Isa 39:6; Amos 8:11; 9:13. He shows also that the introductory formulae are associated mainly with the return of the captivity, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the shoot of David, as well as with vengeance executed on the enemies of Israel.

<sup>78</sup> P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 238, calls this a new *confessio fidei* that summarizes "the account of what Yahweh had done in the great decisive moment of the Exodus."

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salvation, the antitype of the old: "He is not merely a deliverer in the past tense. Rather, he will deliver in the future from the north country and from all the countries where he had driven the people. His new action surpasses the old."<sup>79</sup>

The idea here is that as in the first Exodus there was a single unified nation, so now with the restoration of the remnant in terms of a new Exodus there is the reunification of the people and the name Israel returns. Stephen D. Hicks, in commenting on the motif of restoration and renewal, points to an eschatological fulfillment when he adds that "nothing past or present conforms to this vision. Its realization belongs to a 'redeemed people' . . . in the messianic age."<sup>80</sup>

This new Exodus of the regathered or the remnant community is tacitly connected to the New Covenant of Jer 31:31–34. Inasmuch as the Exodus from Egypt was ratified by the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, so now the new Exodus is to be ratified by a New Covenant. In both cases God took the initiative, but just as the new Exodus replaces the old one as the decisive saving event,<sup>81</sup> so too must the New Covenant replace the former. Gerhard F. Hasel focused on this in his description of the eschatological remnant community as "a remnant comprising those with a 'new heart' who live on the basis of the 'new covenant' (Jer. 31:31–34)."<sup>82</sup>

The "new heart" also provides a connection between the remnant and the New Covenant in that it embodies the ideal of interiority.<sup>83</sup> It is this "internalization that assures the success of the new community."<sup>84</sup> Holladay has noted the nexus between this restored remnant community and the New Covenant, "If Israel is to swear by a God of the new exodus, then that new exodus will have to overshadow the old, just as the new covenant (31:31–34) will overshadow the old."<sup>85</sup>

The fundamental quality of the first Exodus and covenant was to establish the people. So too, the new Exodus and the New Covenant are to reestablish the people, that is, the remnant community. Both share the reality embodied in

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<sup>79</sup> Klein, 171.

<sup>80</sup> Stephen D. Hicks, "The Prophetic Literality of Tribal Reconstruction," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileady (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 280. Cf. Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 853.

<sup>81</sup> McKane, 566.

<sup>82</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, "Remnant," *ISBE* (1988), 4:133; idem, "The Origin and Early History of the Remnant Motif in Ancient Israel," (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1970), 395–99, has much to say about the eschatological remnant in the book of Isaiah.

<sup>83</sup> H. D. Potter, "The New Covenant in Jeremiah XXXI 31–34," *VT* 33 (1983): 350; E. Jenni, "Eschatology in the OT," *IDB* (1962):130; J. Swetnam, "Why Was Jeremiah's New Covenant New?" in *Studies on Prophecy: A Collection of Twelve Papers*, VT Supplement, vol. 26, ed. G. W. Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 111–13.

<sup>84</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34," *JETS* 15 (1972): 12.

<sup>85</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 623.

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Yahweh’s *Bundesformel* (Covenant Formula):<sup>86</sup> *I will be your God and you will be my people* (Jer 31:33; Deut 29:12, 13).<sup>87</sup>

Jeremiah had criticized the people and the leadership for breaking and abandoning the covenant.<sup>88</sup> In its place they had adhered to institutions such as the temple which had degenerated to mere human structure maintained and protected by mere human effort and ingenuity.<sup>89</sup> But Jeremiah now vigorously declares that Yahweh will inaugurate a new era with the renewed remnant community ruled under the auspices of the New Covenant with a new king.<sup>90</sup>

### Conclusion

God takes the initiative in the restoration of His people. Despite the actions of the leaders or shepherds in leading the people astray. God determined to perform an act of salvation: the regathering of the remnant. It is not that they possessed some special quality that recommended them to God and resulted in their rejuvenation. The divine initiative is not to be overlooked.

Contrary to the actions of the leaders, God will set up a new leader *par excellence*—the Righteous Branch/Shoot, identified as the Messiah. In contradistinction to the leaders, his rule will be characterized by wisdom, justice, and righteousness. In fact, a central interest of Jer 23:1–8 is righteousness (*sdq*). Even the name of the new king is “The Lord our Righteousness.” In the face of controversy regarding legitimate leadership, Jeremiah shouts that no confidence is to be placed in the leadership, only in the *ṣemaḥ ṣaddiq*. As His name denotes, only He can effect salvation.

God’s regathering of the remnant is described in terms of a “New Exodus.” The scope and magnitude of this event places it in the direction of eschatology.

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<sup>86</sup> R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel*, Theologische Studien 68 (Zurich: EVZ, 1963), 6.

<sup>87</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982), 101–02; Steven M. Fettke, *Messages to a Nation in Crisis: An Introduction to the Prophecy of Jeremiah* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 49; E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah*, (Oxford & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 82–83; B.W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), 394.

Kaiser, 12, insists that this “promise is actually God’s single all encompassing declaration” and that this formula epitomizes the content of promise. In his assessment of this promise, Van Gemeren, 314, says, “The hope of the new community remains the same covenantal promise.” He adds, 502, n. 90, that this reflects the eschatological era.

<sup>88</sup> For a thoroughgoing study of how Jeremiah was a critic of society and how he used social criticism to illustrate the people’s failure of realizing the covenantal ideal, see Laurent Wisse, *Jérémie, critique de la vie sociale: justice sociale et connaissance de Dieu dans le livre de jérémie*, (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982).

<sup>89</sup> VanGemeren, 312; William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 83–86.

<sup>90</sup> See G. Pattison, “The Moment of the Void: A Meditation on the Book of Jeremiah,” *ExpT* 97 (1985–86): 132–36. He claims for Jeremiah an ultimate horizon, a place for meeting and listening to God, who in turn is attentive to human needs and well being.

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Further, the regathering of the remnant in terms of the new Exodus provides a tacit connection with the new covenant concept, in that, inasmuch as the first Exodus was ratified by the covenant at Sinai, so now must this new Exodus be ratified by the new covenant. The focal point voiced by the prophet is that God will inaugurate a new era with the renewed covenant community under the articles of a new covenant with a new king.

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## ***The Christian & Rock Music: A Review Essay***

Ed Christian  
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. . . In religion  
What damned error, but some sober brow  
Will bless it, and approve it with a text,  
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?  
—Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, III.ii

What music is appropriate for Christians? What music is appropriate in worship? Is there a difference between music appropriate in church and music appropriate in a youth rally or concert? Is there a difference between lyrics appropriate for congregational singing and lyrics appropriate for a person to sing or listen to in private? Are some types of music inherently inappropriate for evangelism?

These are important questions. Congregations have fought over them and even split over them.<sup>1</sup> The answers given have often alienated young people from the church and even driven them to reject God. Some answers have rejuvenated congregations; others have robbed congregations of vitality and shackled the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is generally called Contemporary Christian Music (or CCM) embraces a wide variety of musical styles. What they have in common is that they are contemporary, in some way Christian, and music. CCM includes the work of Ralph Carmichael and the Gaithers. It includes both the gentlest of folk music and the hardest of heavy metal and rap. It includes praise songs, scripture songs, country music, white gospel and black gospel, jazz and blues, reggae and ska,

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<sup>1</sup> I watched attendance at one large church drop by half over several years when a new minister of music ruled that only “serious music,” preferably instrumental and played by professional musicians, could be performed there. If there had to be congregational singing, it should be limited to a handful of great anthems. The pastor, cowed by this woman, accepted the argument that God could not accept as worship or praise what was imperfect.

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celtic music, bluegrass, and much more. What draws the most attention—and the most concern—is Christian rock of various sorts. The sales are immense, and so is the influence.<sup>2</sup> Some people find this deeply threatening.

Books by Christians opposed to rock music have been coming out for forty years. I remember when the Beatles first visited America. I knew their names and faces from articles in *Life* magazine, even though I first heard their music several years later. I was in elementary school and had no access to a radio. Before I heard their music, I heard that I shouldn't listen to it because my heart would synchronize with the beat. This synchronization would make my heart beat faster than normal. As I look back on this argument, I know there's a certain truth to it. But now I have the sense to ask, "Why is that a problem?" My heart speeds up when I sit up in the morning or walk up the stairs. My heart is designed to do that. It's normal.

In the 70s and 80s there was a flood of books revealing the real or imagined problems of rock music. These were sometimes true, but often sensationalistic, exaggerated, and even built on half-truths. There was a serious tendency to quote and understand literalistically what was said ironically. Supermarket tabloids were cited as reliable sources. False claims were passed from book to book. People with no scientific training were cited as "research scientists" on the cutting edge because they'd made some daring claim supposedly based on research.

Because there was virtually no Christian rock in those days, few of the books mentioned it. In the 90s Christian rock began to draw criticism from these authors, as well. Because the Christian musicians, though fallible like the rest of us, pretty much kept their noses clean, those opposing them used as their primary weapon guilt by association. The Christian musicians might not be satanic or promiscuous or drug users, but because some secular musicians were, the Christians too were tarred and branded.

### **Big Sales and Big Influence**

In 2000 Samuele Bacchiocchi self-published *The Christian & Rock Music*.<sup>3</sup> The sales and profits have been surprisingly good for a self-published book.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Last week the Grammy award for best album of the year went to a collection of gospel hymns and other country songs from decades past, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" Here is a best-selling CD that has shared the gospel message with millions.

<sup>3</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, ed., *The Christian & Rock Music: A Study on Biblical Principles of Music* (Berrien Springs, Mich: Biblical Perspectives, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> I refer to profit for the author, not for the publishing house. Publishers usually pay between 7% and 15% royalties to the author (so 10,000 sales of a \$20.00 book would earn the author between \$1,400.00 and \$3,000.00), whereas by self-publishing, the author's profit is often 80% or more. For example, a 384 page trade paperback selling for \$20.00 costs the author only about \$2.00 per copy with a 10,000 copy print run. Even if the author sells it at "half-price," he still makes about \$8.00 per copy. There are many books that have sold more copies than *The Christian & Rock Music*, but little of that money has gone to the author.

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The book includes seven chapters by Bacchiocchi, two by Calvin M. Johansson, and one each by Brian Neumann, Eurydice V. Osterman, Güenter Preuss, Tore Sognefest, and Wolfgang H. M. Stefani.<sup>5</sup>

I greatly admire Dr. Bacchiocchi's many personal qualities, and in the past he has published some outstanding work on the New Testament and church history that I cite and praise in my Bible classes. I wish I could praise this new book, but I can't. It has all the problems found in the anti-rock tirades of the 70s and 80s, mentioned above (not surprising, as it mines them for information). If the book had drawn no attention, I would not bother to review it, because I don't like to say negative things about a book, especially a friend's book. However, it has had so much influence that young people, parents, and church leaders frequently ask me what I think of it. I believe its influence is damaging their relationships by leading to tensions between the young and their elders.

In this essay I will review *The Christian & Rock Music* by presenting a series of quotations from the book—more or less in the order they are found there—and commenting on them. My comments will suggest what I consider to be a more appropriate way of dealing with the issue. I hope these comments will lead to healing, to learning to tolerate the praising of God in ways we ourselves don't enjoy, to worship renewal and personal renewal, and to better relationships between parents and children, closer walks with God, and more effective evangelistic witness.

The genesis of *The Christian & Rock Music* illustrates the thinking behind the book. It began when Dr. Bacchiocchi was visiting Australia in October of 1999. He had been invited to attend a church campmeeting and speak in the "Connections" tent (age thirty and up) for a week. The night before he was to speak, however, a Christian band played a concert in that tent. As he describes it,

For the first one hour, from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., they played and sung jazzy, night club type of music, with various percussion instruments. The men of singing group on the platform were jumping up and down as if it were a night club performance. In all my travels across the USA I have never witness such a heavy beat, night club type of music, even in the so-called 'celebration churches.'<sup>6</sup>

He was so offended that he refused to speak in that venue if such music was played. The next day the music planned was cancelled, so he spoke, but after

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<sup>5</sup> Bacchiocchi has been a professor of religion at Andrews University. Johansson teaches music at Evangel University, and Osterman teaches music at Oakwood College. Stefani and Preuss have both written dissertations on church music. Sognefest and Neumann have both been musicians in rock bands.

<sup>6</sup> Endtime Issues No. 29, 17 October 1999, available at [www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti\\_29.html](http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti_29.html). Other issues of the newsletter dealing with music or printing early drafts of chapters found in the book are no. 30 and 33–41. These are all available on the web site.

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that he was replaced and given another venue at a different time. He began speaking against this music, and the response was so positive that he decided he should write a book about how Christians should respond to the use of this music for supposedly sacred purposes.

Dr. Bacchiocchi maintains an extensive e-mail list-serve of people interested in his work, as well as a web site ([www.biblicalperspectives.com](http://www.biblicalperspectives.com)). When my name was added to the list-serve there were, as I recall, some 6,000 people on his list, and I believe that number has doubled since then. Bacchiocchi sends e-mails telling us where he's been speaking and will be speaking, giving us his take on current affairs in society and the church, sharing early drafts of his latest work, and offering special discounts on his many books.

Because I receive these e-mails, I heard about the Australia experience a few days after it happened, and I was among those who received and read the chapters of *The Christian & Rock Music* as they were written. In the e-mail quoted above, Dr. Bacchiocchi solicited our comments: should he or should he not write about music in the church.

Given his reference to “jazzy, night club type” music and his response to the music, it was clear to me that he didn't know enough about contemporary music to write convincingly about it. I sent him an e-mail (4 November 1999) pleading with him to drop the project. I told him I didn't think he had enough first-hand experience with rock music, didn't know enough about it, to write such a book. I told him he seemed to be using the same questionable arguments used for years. He responded that he was reading many books on the topic. What's more, there would be professional musicians writing some of the chapters. I'm afraid my fears have proven true, and this, combined with the book's popularity, leads me to respond.

#### **Where I'm Coming From**

What follows will be better understood if I explain the perspective from which I view the issue. I began listening to rock music in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I can still whistle most of the top forty hits of that year, should I hear their titles. By the time I was sixteen I was playing electric guitar in a band, reading *Rolling Stone* cover to cover, and experimenting with drugs. In college and graduate school I listened to rock for hours every day. My mind was filled with the music and the words. I couldn't get them out of my head. My actions—or at least my dreams—were influenced by these words to some extent.

After marrying, when I was 28 I began walking with God, or at least toward him, and I began to realize that the music I listened to was not godly and was holding me back. I began pleading with God to free me from it. One night I awoke sensing God had opened the door to freedom, if I were willing to walk through it. I spent the rest of the night looking at each album, looking at the names of the songs and thinking about them, then renouncing them. By morning I had said goodbye to 300 albums.



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I consider my deliverance from this music to be supernatural. I can still recall the songs, but I don't choose to, and they aren't running through my head. It should be clear from this confession that if I disagree with Dr. Bacchiocchi over the suitability of Christian rock music, it is not because I like or listen to this music myself.

I don't often listen to music these days—I prefer silence—but when I do it's usually hymns: choral, *a cappella*, orchestral, folk, or bluegrass. For me, the great old hymns found in our hymnal have a wonderful ability to focus the mind on God and help one say no to temptation.<sup>7</sup> I enjoy classical music of many sorts, though I seldom listen to it. I also enjoy some types of jazz, especially clarinet solos, and bluegrass, though I rarely listen to them. I used to love opera, especially Mozart and Verdi, but when I read the librettos in English and discovered their focus on sin, I stopped listening, though I still enjoy the overtures.

I took an instant dislike to praise songs when I first heard them. The primary reason was that they were replacing the hymns I loved—so rich and meaningful—with simplistic melodies, words, and emotions. The second reason is that I'd heard praise songs sung well, so they powerfully moved the audience, but never in the church I attended. However, I've come to understand that praise songs really are what they claim to be: they do praise God, and well. Though I can't yet bring myself to sing them in church, I no longer fight them, and I enjoy accompanying with my guitar those who sing them. Who knows, someday I may burst into song.

Five years ago I would have agreed with Dr. Bacchiocchi's general conclusions, though not with the sources he cites and many of his claims. Two insights have turned my thinking around.

A few years ago I was invited to speak at a conference at the University of North Carolina. Sunday morning, driving home to Pennsylvania, I grew weary of sermon tapes and turned on the radio, looking for some classical music. I was approaching Lynchburg, Virginia, Jerry Falwell country, and just about the only thing on the radio other than rock music was various sorts of contemporary Christian music. I had virtually no knowledge of this music, though I had scoffed at it for years.

I found myself listening to a song, and before long several hours had passed, and God was revealing to me a lesson as important (to me) as Peter's lesson about not calling people unclean in Acts 10–11. I realized that while I didn't like this rather sappy music, vaguely country-western, it was sung from the heart. These were songs about struggle and victory, about searching and finding, about turning to God for help over the little things. These weren't hymns. There weren't appropriate for church. But they were Christian songs,

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<sup>7</sup> I've also found that the lyrics are often stirring and beautiful. My three-tape collection of 155 hymn lyrics read as poetry is available from American Cassette Ministry ([www.americancassette.org](http://www.americancassette.org) or 1-800-233-4450). Wonderful though the melodies may be, they often obscure the beauty of the verse.

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whether I liked them or not. I saw as if on a screen housewives doing their chores, struggling to keep their faces turned to God, struggling to believe, struggling to put meals on the table and keep clothes on the kids. I sensed their radios on, filling their lives with songs I scorned, yet songs that touched them and strengthened their faith. May God rebuke those who disparage music that draws people to God, however it may sound. It's odd how quick we are to call sinful what we simply don't like.

Insight number two. The next summer my sons Paul and Peter returned from a week at junior camp excited about the camp theme song—a song from a Christian rock CD. Paul sang it to us in the car. I was astonished that such music was heard at camp. Why would counselors introduce my children to music from which I'd carefully shielded them, not wanting them to have the trouble with rock music I had had? My first thought was to say, "I do not want you to sing that song again." But I kept my mouth shut, not wanting to have an argument on the way home. I could tell them later.

That night Paul, then eleven, came to my room. "Dad," he said, "you know that song we learned at camp? The words really got me thinking, and I decided to recommit myself to God."

I was thrilled, of course, but I could hardly breathe. In my heart I was saying, "Oh, God, I nearly bawled him out for liking a song that brought him to you. Thank you so much for shutting my mouth!" Now, at thirteen, Paul dreams of becoming a youth pastor. He understands a love for CCM to be a requirement for being a youth pastor. We've made a deal that he can listen to any music he likes, so long as it's Christian. He listens to Christian rap and Christian punk, and we have wonderful, open-hearted conversations about the relative quality of the bands he likes and the effect of their lyrics, and about God and the Bible.

There is nothing I want more than for my children to share eternal life with me. May God rebuke those who turn away these little ones from God and his church because they don't realize God can be praised in any language and with any music. To deny this is to deny the clear evidence of conversions and transformed lives. May our teaching be based on evidence, not on our prejudice.

### Quotes and Comments

Before commenting on a series of quotations from *The Christian & Rock Music*, I'd like to mention several points on which I think Dr. Bacchiocchi and I would agree. It is true that some rock stars live lives of sin and excess, though not all do.<sup>8</sup> It is true that the lyrics of many rock songs extol the pleasures of various sinful acts (this is also true of country-western songs, show tunes, and

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<sup>8</sup> A rather accurate portrayal of the temptations facing heavy metal stars can be found in the film *Rock Star*, starring Mark Wahlberg, who recently gave his heart to God and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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even the ballads of centuries past).<sup>9</sup> Even those lyrics that don't celebrate sin may be problematic, because they focus the mind on secular things, such as romance, instead of on God and our search for him and walk with him. Maintaining a walk with God over a lifetime is so difficult that we should consider leaving behind anything that threatens it. In this light, "neutral" lyrics, like "harmless" television and reading and sports, may actually threaten our relationship with God by robbing from us the time we need to keep it fresh. I want to make it clear that while I will argue in this essay that any style of music can be used with lyrics that praise God, and by so doing lead people to God and keep them with God, I think Christians would do well to turn away from any music with secular lyrics, or at least limit themselves to small doses of secular lyrics that are not problematic for Christians.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Bacchiocchi writes, "Listeners to religious rock will never be humbled by the majesty of God, nor will they be convicted of God's moral claims upon their lives" (30). This is a rather bold claim. The fact is, I know many who listen to religious rock who have been "humbled by the majesty of God" and admit his "moral claims upon their lives." They sit in my classes. They sat in his classes, too, I'm sure, though I'm not sure he realized it. It's a brave thing to make such a claim. It's the equivalent of stating *ex cathedra* that "listeners to religious rock" will not be saved. I'm not sure humans have that power before God.

What should we do with a statement like this? "The Sabbath teaches us to respect the distinction between the *sacred* and the *secular*, not only in time, but also in such areas as church music and worship. To use secular music for the church service on the Sabbath is to treat the Sabbath as a secular day and the church as a secular place" (36). The distinction between the sacred and the secular is much stressed in this book, but the Bible says, "The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof" (Ps 24:1; 1 Cor 10:28). That makes it harder to separate the sacred from the secular. Does the opposite hold true as well? Do we despoil the sacred by singing sacred songs on secular days? "This is the day the Lord has made" (Ps 118:24). I'm not arguing that we should sing secular songs on the Sabbath, but wondering if there are "secular" days of the week, or even if Christians should be singing secular songs on any day. Besides, the only people I know who think we should sing secular songs on the Sabbath are those who, like Calvin Johansson, think "serious music" without words is appropriate for worship simply because it's "great," even if it is written by those who deny

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<sup>9</sup> Consider, for example, the many old English or Scottish ballads with gentle tunes but lyrics dealing with adultery, violence, or magic. Even when the lyrics show the negative effects of these things—and they often do—providing a positive moral dimension, they still keep the mind on worldly things rather than on spiritual things.

<sup>10</sup> For example, my grandmother used to love to watch The Lawrence Welk Show on Saturday nights. This is an exceptionally clean-cut show, of course, and none of the songs have lyrics that might make a grandmother blush. On the other hand, could that time have been better spent reading the Bible or some devotional book?

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God or live lives of sin, as if they were rock stars. I don't know of anyone who likes Christian rock who thinks we should sing the Rolling Stones' song "Dancin' With Mr. D" for the opening hymn. To insinuate that those who like CCM might do that is like an attempt to win an argument using false statistics.

A number of times in *The Christian & Rock Music*, Bacchiocchi makes inferences based on misreadings of biblical texts. He writes, for example:

Twice in Daniel 3 there is a long list of the different musical instruments used to produce 'every kind of music' (Dan 3:7, 10). . . . Could it be that, as in ancient Babylon, Satan is using today 'every kind of music' to lead the world into the endtime false worship of the 'beast and its image' (Rev 14:9)? Could it be that a Satanic stroke of genius will write Gospel songs that will have the marking of every taste of music: folk music, jazz, rock, disco, country-western, rap, calypso? Could it be that many Christians will come to love this kind of Gospel songs because they sound very much like the music of Babylon? (37)

This implies that one of the reasons why the three Hebrew worthies did not bow to the image in the plain of Dura was that "every kind of music" was playing. Nothing in Daniel 3 leads us to think the instruments are the problem, nor even the way they were played. The problem is in bowing in worship to an image of anything or anyone. There is no evidence that Satan was using these instruments because they tend to lead people into false worship in and of themselves. By definition, "Gospel songs" are meant to lead people to Christ, not to Satan. To suggest a relationship between pagan worship and "Gospel songs" is an example of the rhetorical fallacy of *non sequitur*. Rhetorical fallacies often convince people to accept ideas, whether true or false, but their intent is to convince through deception, not through clearly presenting the evidence.

As I will show later on, there are some substantial contradictions in the book. At some points plainsong is praised, while at other points rock music is blasted for not maintaining a balance between melody, harmony, rhythm, and tone or for not being sufficiently "serious" or difficult. Bacchiocchi writes, for example:

The solemn, awe-inspiring music of the early church [such as Gregorian chant (50)] was driven by a lofty view of God. Its avoidance of the secular associations that musical instruments might bring is particularly relevant to the current debate over the use of music and instruments associated with the rock scene. (51)

Is he saying here that we shouldn't use musical instruments in worship because they have "secular associations"? No, he is saying we shouldn't use instruments "associated with the rock scene." But what instruments used in churches is not also used in rock music? The piano and organ are staple instruments in rock music! He admiringly quotes Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, who writes, of early Christian and Islamic music,

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“Performance practice, relying on the human voice, has avoided the secular associations which instruments might bring, as well as the chordal harmonies which could be suggestive of emotional or dramatic effects. Even the use of the human voice or voices . . . has avoided the sensual and imitative in order to enhance the spiritual effect on the listener.” (51)

Are we then to oppose harmony in the church, or the use of chords? Plainsong was and still is highly conducive to trance states, even though beat free and drawing words from the psalms. Also, the sense of God moving in the person was very important among the monastics. We see here the rhetorical fallacy of “special pleading.” Instruments used to play the music Bacchiocchi dislikes are not acceptable because they are “associated with the rock scene,” but the same instruments are acceptable if they play music he likes. If he were to argue that no instruments should be used at all, he would at least be consistent. Of course, given that Bacchiocchi is best known for his excellent book *From Sabbath to Sunday*, showing the influence of the early Roman church on the change in the day of worship, it’s odd that he would recommend to us the example of Catholic monks. Necessity acquaints one with strange bedfellows.

To immediately follow one cliché with another, it is said that the proof of the pudding is in the tasting. Similarly, Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt 7:20). Bacchiocchi, it seems, prefers another cliché: the apple never falls far from the tree. He writes, “If the church uses a rock type of music, which is associated with sex, drugs, satanism, violence, and the rejection of the Christian faith, it obviously is not able to challenge the youth to live up to the moral claims of the Gospel (97).” He assumes that if secular rock has these associations, Christian rock must, as well. This is a bit like saying that because some cultures combined worship and prayer with sacred prostitution, we should not worship and pray to God. The fact is, Christian rock music has proven over and over that it *is* “able to challenge the youth to live up to the moral claims of the Gospel.” In fact, the type of CCM I least enjoy, Christian rap, proves to be the most hard-hitting in its challenge—much harder than most preachers I’ve heard.<sup>11</sup>

Guilt by association is a long-used tool for controlling people and stifling what may be a harmless style. I remember being told in academy, as a teenager, that Christians shouldn’t wear jeans because that’s what rock musicians and drug users wore. Similar arguments are still being used. Bacchiocchi writes:

Can rock music, which in the sixties rejected Christianity, glorified sexual perversion, and promoted drugs which claimed the lives of some of its heroes, be legitimately transformed into a fitting medium to worship God and proclaim the Gospel’s message? In answering this question, it is important to remember that *the medium affects the message*. If the medium is associated with the rejection of Christian-

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the group from Philadelphia called the Cross Movement.

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ity, sexual perversion, and drugs, it cannot be legitimately used to communicate the moral claims of the Gospel. (84)

The medium of television, the medium of books, and the medium of magazines are all associated with “the rejection of Christianity, sexual perversion, and drugs,” yet Christians use them all to spread the gospel, consecrating them to the work of Christ. A number of previous musical styles—some now considered “serious music”—were to some extent associated with sex and drug use or considered risqué or dangerous. Recall, for example, some of the romantic composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>12</sup> or the opera, or the waltz. Haydn’s tune used for the German national anthem,<sup>13</sup> “Deutschland über alles”—made notorious during the Nazi period—is now the tune of a favorite hymn, “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken.” If we must believe that secular connotations negate the spiritual force of sacred music, we would do well not to forget the first and last two lines of the second verse of this anthem: “Deutsche Frauen, deutsche Treue, / Deutscher Wein und deutscher Sang.”<sup>14</sup>

What makes a book worth citing? Is it scholarly accuracy, or first hand authority, or is it salacious rumor-mongering? Bacchiocchi writes:

In his book *Dancing with Demons*, Jeff Godwin gives startling evidence on a number of popular rock musicians who have studied the ancient beat of satanic worship. These rockers include Brian Jones (Rolling Stones), John Phillips (The Mamas and the Papas), and Paul McCartney (The Beatles). These men have studied with satanic masters in order to learn how to use effectively the hypnotic power of the rock beat in their songs. (89)

One reviewer says Jeff Godwin is “much given to misinterpretation, misquoting, general cluelessness, and outright lies.” His approach is to find satanic conspiracies everywhere in rock music, on the flimsiest of evidence, such as supermarket tabloids. This is typical of many of the sources quoted in *The Christian & Rock Music*. None of the three men mentioned above were drummers. Jones was known for introducing the marimba, the dulcimer, the recorder, and the harpsichord to rock music. Philips is best known for his song “California Dreamin’” and McCartney for his song “Yesterday.” Ancient satanic beats? Hardly.

Bacchiocchi writes, “The defining characteristics of good music is a balance among three basic elements: melody, harmony, and rhythm” (129). Wouldn’t this mean that early church music, which didn’t use harmony or rhythm, was unbalanced? Does the balance have to be exact? What about an *a cappella* solo performance of a hymn? It seems that by Bacchiocchi’s definition, such a per-

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<sup>12</sup> Among those whose work I’ve heard played in church, Berlioz wrote a symphony while using opium, Schubert was a heavy drinker and had syphilis, Chopin and Liszt are notorious for their sex lives, and Brahms got his start in music playing in bars.

<sup>13</sup> The words were written in 1841; Haydn wrote the tune in 1797 for an Austrian patriotic song honoring the emperor, “Gott, erhalte Franz, den Kaiser.”

<sup>14</sup> “German women, German fidelity, / German wine and German song.”

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formance could not possibly be “good music.” He adds, “Rock music inverts this order by making rhythm its dominant element, then harmony, and last melody.” If they are balanced, then they are equal, so there is no order to be inverted. However, why is it necessarily wrong to have rhythm stronger than harmony or melody at times? Surely there are a great many instances of “great music” where this is the case.

When people make categorical statements defining “good music,” they often open themselves to ridicule. Bacchiocchi is no exception. He writes:

In any good piece of music, the strongest beat in a pattern (measure) is the downbeat (the first beat in the pattern). If a pattern has four beats, the strongest [in “good” music] is the first, and the second strongest beat is the third, . . . Rock music reverses the common order of the beat by placing the emphasis on what is known as the offbeat. In the offbeat, the main emphasis falls on beat four and the secondary beat is on beat two. (131)

It is true that the usual definition of a downbeat is the accentuated first beat in a measure, or the first and third beat of a measure in 4/4, while an upbeat is generally defined as the unaccented second and fourth beats of a measure in 4/4. However, this is actually arbitrary: the first beat in the measure is stressed because that’s the way composers have been taught to do it. Does this mean that melodies always begin with a stressed note? Not at all! How, then, does a composer write out a melody that begins with an unstressed beat? The composer begins with an incomplete measure, so the first stressed beat will fall at the beginning of the first complete measure.

However, the fact is that this works on paper, but our bodies don’t have the sheet music. Our bodies recognize the rhythms inherent in songs, not the artificial system of measures. Most people can’t read music, but they sense rhythmic patterns and respond to them. For most people, the notes before the downbeat are part of the entire rhythm. It is true that rock music often (but certainly not always) accentuates the second and fourth beats of the measures, but to some extent this is because the songs are written out by people who haven’t learned the “rules” for how to do it right. Have you ever listened to your heart with a stethoscope? Which comes first, the stressed beat or the unstressed beat (or can you hear more than that)? A cardiologist might be able to tell you, but for most of us, whether our hearts sound like “dub-DUB-dub-DUB” or “DUB-dub-DUB-dub” is a trick of the ear not trained in the physiological facts. What really matters for most of us is not which beat comes first, but that they continue beating.

To show the weakness of Bacchiocchi’s assertion—a favorite of anti-rock crusaders for decades—it suffices to consider the *actual* beat in several of our greatest hymns (I am basing this, remember, on how they are sung, not how they may look on the page). “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” has this “rock” beat. So does “The Old Rugged Cross” (and it is also “anapestic”—a beat condemned later in this essay). “O Worship the King,” “O Word of God Incarnate,” and “O

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Little Town of Bethlehem,” among many others, use this beat. This is the beat in the march “Stars and Stripes Forever” (though not on the sheet music). This is also the beat found in poetry written in iambics (probably 90% of metric verse in English)—one reason it’s common in hymn settings. On the other hand, it might be worth mentioning that bluegrass music is characterized by the beat Bacchiocchi requires for “good music” (though with the guitar chords played on the second and fourth beats). I don’t know how he feels about bluegrass, but I’m sure his co-author Calvin Johansson, whose chapters are discussed below, would not consider bluegrass “serious music,” as he calls the music he likes. It is true that there are certain ways of playing this “reversed” beat Bacchiocchi complains about that can make people want to dance, but that in itself is not sinful.<sup>15</sup>

He continues, “The fundamental problem with rock music is its relentless beat which dominates the music and produces an hypnotic effect.” It is true that some rock music has a “relentless beat” that can cause a trance-like state (though not literally “hypnotic”). However, many forms of music have a similar effect, when people allow themselves to concentrate on the music to the extent that they tune out what is happening around them and almost seem to enter the music or have the music enter them. For example, in orchestral performances of classical music, it is common to see people in the audience with their eyes closed and their hands surreptitiously conducting the music or keeping the beat. At band concerts one often finds people tapping their feet during marches without realizing it. The Gregorian chant Bacchiocchi celebrates in his book is deliberately designed to induce a trance-like state in which one feels very close to God, and it certainly succeeds, if one is willing to relax one’s analytical faculties and surrender to the music. Experiencing this trance-like state is not in itself necessarily a bad thing. It’s pleasurable, relaxing, and not generally harmful. It becomes dangerous when it leads to violence or other sinful activity, or makes one more likely to accept sinful ideas found in song lyrics. But if the words heard during this trance-like state induced by the “relentless beat” of Christian rock are “Lord, I praise you,” where’s the problem? Many of us are so rational that we have a very hard time surrendering to any beat, and for us to “lift up holy hands in prayer” (1 Tim 2:8) while singing praise songs is unimaginable. But perhaps that is our loss. Why should we impose our own failures on those able to praise God with greater enthusiasm than we ourselves can muster?

Here is another categorical “good music” statement. “Good music follows exact mathematical rules, which causes the mind to feel comforted, encouraged, and ‘safe.’ Musicians have found that when they go against these rules, the lis-

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<sup>15</sup> One might say I am quibbling here, that Bacchiocchi is talking about deafeningly loud rock ‘n’ roll drumming, not about the rhythms found in hymns. This may be the case, but he doesn’t say so. Instead he categorically condemns a specific rhythm found not only in songs but in poetry. I assert that the inaccuracy of his language makes my comments appropriate and suggests that he hasn’t really thought through the implications of his statements. Neither, unfortunately, have many of his readers, judging from the influence the book is having.



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tener experiences an addictive high” (134). Given that the musical scale we use is based on “exact mathematical rules,” “bad” music also follows exact mathematical rules, or we wouldn’t recognize it as music. But does “good music” always make us “feel comforted, encouraged, and ‘safe’”? The “Dies Irae” (“Day of Wrath”) section of Verdi’s *Requiem* is generally considered “good music,” but the music is terrifying—fitting for the topic. Beethoven’s fifth symphony is generally considered “good music,” but it hardly makes one feel “comforted, encouraged, and ‘safe.’” Even jazz and blues music, which “bend” notes away from the strictly mathematical scale, achieve their effect only because there *is* a mathematically described scale against which they can push. Furthermore, if “Musicians have found that when they go against these rules, the listener experiences an addictive high,” then we would all be addicted to atonal music, which is not the case. Can people grow so fond of music that their lives seem empty without it? Yes, of course, but this isn’t quite “an addictive high,” and it happens with all types of music. Do some types of rock music have physical effects that some listeners crave? Yes, but not all types, and not because the music doesn’t follow “mathematical rules.” Do some people gravitate toward music that makes them feel depressed, angry, or frightened? Yes, but this doesn’t characterize the majority of rock music.

Here’s an interesting question: “Ultimately, the question is: *Should church music stimulate people physically or elevate them spiritually?*” (138). The answer is *both*, because they are related. Physical stimulation in moderation makes people more receptive to spiritual influence, putting them in a good mood, with a smile on their face, ready to learn and to hear God’s voice.

Bacchiocchi writes, “As Christians, we need to be aware of the fact that music is perceived through the portion of the brain that receives stimuli for sensations and feelings, *without being first screened by the brain centers involving reason and intelligence*” (139) While there may be some truth to this, it is also true that the reason and intelligence immediately set to work on the stimulus, deciding whether they like the music or not, if it’s well performed, if mistakes are being made, if the lyrics are true. Furthermore, this applies to all music, not merely rock music. Consider, for example, the thundering pipe organ in church. Does that affect us? Can some organ music make us feel hopeless or worried? Yes! The fact that such music is “serious” and of a high quality does not mean it is necessarily conducive to worship.

Here’s another categorical assertion: “The Christian commitment to Christ leaves no room for Christian artists to cross over into the secular rock scene.” (147). This is a little like saying, “The Christian commitment to Christ leaves no room for Christians to associate with non-Christians in order to share God’s love with them.” Are there dangers inherent in trying to be a Christian in the “secular rock scene”? Of course! But there are also dangers in going to a foreign land as a missionary. Furthermore, it is also difficult to be a Christian musician per-

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forming in secular symphony orchestras. There are tough decisions to make. But people do it.

For biblical scholars, some of the most worrisome of Bacchiocchi's statements are those deriving principles from the Hebrew cultus, as it has so little relationship to our worship today, and he frequently misinterprets the passages he cites. He writes:

Those who believe that the Bible gives them the license to play any instrument and music in church, ignore the fact that the music at the Temple was not based on personal taste or cultural preferences. This is indicated by the fact that other instruments like timbrels, flutes, pipes, and dulcimers could not be used in the Temple, because of their association with secular entertainment. (178)

Bacchiocchi is basing this comment on 2 Chron 29:25, referring to the reconsecration of the temple under Hezekiah. The verse reads, "He stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of the prophet Nathan, for the commandment was from the LORD through his prophets" (NRSV). There are a number of problems with Bacchiocchi's statement. First, there is nothing at all in this text or in any associated text (such as 1 Chron 25:1, 6) that says other instruments couldn't be used because of "their association with secular entertainment." After all, "cymbals, harps, and lyres" were *also* used for secular entertainment. Second, the text does not say these were to be the instruments used in the temple for all time. Third, if we assume this command still stands, we must exclude the piano and organ from the worship service. (Certainly the guitar is more like the harp and lyre of David's day than is the organ, and drum sets have cymbals.)

It would be interesting to know more about music in the temple services, but our lack of knowledge should not be seen as an invitation to invent what is not provided. Bacchiocchi cites admiringly a studies by John W. Kleining A. Z. Idelsohn that claim that in the temple services the cymbals and trumpets did not accompany the singers, but were used only to introduce songs and mark ends of lines or stanzas (206–207). He claims that only the lyres and harps were used to accompany the singing, citing 2 Chron 5:12–13 as supporting this (207). However, 2 Chron 5:13 tells us explicitly that the trumpeters and singers sang and played *qōl-ʿehad*, "as one" or "in unison." Then it adds that the singing was done "with trumpets and with cymbals and with the instruments of the song" (my own awkward but exact translation). Note that the word *with*, repeated three times, makes it clear that all these instruments *accompanied* the singing and didn't merely indicate stanza or line breaks.

Bacchiocchi writes, "Some argue that if we are to follow the example of the Temple, we need to eliminate in the church such instruments as the piano and the organ, because they are not string instruments. Such an argument ignores the distinction between a biblical principle and its cultural application. The biblical

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principle is that instrumental music accompanying the singing should aid the vocal response to God and not drown it. . . . Another point is that instruments like the organ or the piano were unknown in Bible times” (209). This is again the rhetorical fallacy known as “special pleading.” Bacchiocchi makes this plea for acceptance of what he approves of on the basis of the “cultural application” of a “biblical principle.” He ignores the fact that the electric bass, keyboard, and drum kit also didn’t exist in Bible times. In fact, the organ in some churches does drown the singing. Also, if people are singing enthusiastically, the instruments may have to get pretty loud before they are drowned out. Again, even electric guitars and drums can be played more quietly than the singing of a congregation.

Consider, too, the singing of heaven. When the huge army of the redeemed sing, they sound “like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting,” “like the roar of rushing waters and like peals of thunder” (Rev 19:1, 6). If they are playing harps at the same time, the harps may need to be electrified if they are to be heard. Then again, “like peals of thunder” sounds rather like a rock concert! If we are to admit 2 Chron 29:25 as relevant, then we must go all the way: we must have 288 musicians who play in groups of twelve, with each group playing for two weeks a year (1 Chron 25:6–31). Also, we must have only men in our choirs, and we must put an end to congregational singing. We must also have people assigned to the “ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals” (v. 1; NIV; v. 3 defines “prophesying” as “thanking and praising the LORD”). While we’re at it, we should dismiss any pastors, elders, or deacons who can’t prove themselves descended from the tribe of Levi. We should also start offering animal sacrifices.

In truth, the instruments used in services at Solomon’s Temple are completely irrelevant to the question of what instruments we should play today when praising God. The temple services were very different from church services today, and the function of the temple was also far different than the function of today’s church. Consider that the primary purpose of the temple was not worship, but sacrifice. Consider that worshipers could not enter the temple. They probably couldn’t even enter the courtyard. The temple was the way God was able to have his presence among his people. It was not a place of communal worship, in general, but a way of segregating God from his people so he didn’t destroy them with his holiness. What was appropriate in the temple, in the presence of God, may not be what is appropriate in our churches today.

Our churches are more like the synagogues of Jesus’ day. Whether or not instruments were played in synagogues is immaterial, because the Bible gives us no command about synagogues. If we must do in our churches what was done in the synagogues, then pastors must stand when they read the Scriptures and sit when they explain it. When we sing “The Lord Is In His Holy Temple,” we speak metaphorically. Our bodies are the temple of God today (1 Cor 6:19), and the body of believers called the church is the temple of God (2 Cor 6:16). If God

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is more fully present in the church building than elsewhere, it is only because there are believers gathered together in his name, so there he is (Matt 18:20). This makes it much more difficult to distinguish between sacred and secular, because we may defile the temple of God by defiling ourselves, but even so we still *are* that temple. This means we should *always* be careful what we do or say or listen to.

Bacchiocchi writes, “No ‘Jewish’ or ‘Christian’ music concerts were performed by bands or singing artists at the Temple, synagogue, or Christian churches. Religious music was not an end to [*sic*] itself but as [*sic*] a means to praise God by chanting His Word” (193). He neglects to mention that there were also no sacred concerts of “serious music,” either. To be consistent, if Bacchiocchi is right, we should no longer sing hymns whose lyrics are not in the Bible. We should not sing in any case, but chant. We should have no more vocal solos, no more instrumental performances without singing.

He adds, “Pleasure in singing comes not from a rhythmic beat that stimulates people physically, but from the very experience of praising the Lord” (193). Actually, “pleasure in singing” can be had from a wide range of music, while much of what passes for “praising the Lord” is far less than enthusiastic. If *true* pleasure in singing comes when praising God, does that logically mean that this must not be accompanied with “a rhythmic beat”? Most hymns are best sung with “a rhythmic beat.” Indeed, according to Bacchiocchi’s definition of “good music” as “a balance among three basic elements: melody, harmony, and rhythm” (129), singing without “a rhythmic beat” cannot be “good music.”

He also claims that David’s dancing before the Lord (2 Sam 6:14) led David into serious error. In the excitement of this dance David seems to have removed his royal robes—probably rather hot and heavy—and danced in “a linen ephod.” Bacchiocchi writes, “Nowhere does the Bible suggest that the ephod could be legitimately worn by someone who was not a priest” (226). This is true. However, there is also nowhere where the Bible says a linen ephod is to be worn only by a priest. (Some people say, “What is not specifically allowed is not allowed.” Another type of people say, “What is not specifically forbidden is allowed.” I believe Christians should be among the latter group.) We don’t really know much about ephods. In some cases they seem to be something used for telling the future or inquiring of God (Judg 8:27; 17:5; 1 Sam 23:9; Hos 3:4). More often they are garments worn by the high priest and containing the stones used for inquiring of God. They are also the simple white garments worn by priests. Were they also worn by others? Is ephod a word for the garment worn under the outer robes? We don’t know. But nothing tells us it was only for priests. Bacchiocchi then says “By offering sacrifices dressed like a priest, David was assuming a priestly role in addition to his kingly status. Such an action cannot be easily defended biblically.” How dancing led to this, I’m not sure. However, when 2 Sam 6:17–18 says David offered sacrifices before God, that does not mean he himself performed the priestly duties. More likely he offered the sacri-

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fices expected of a king, or had them sacrificed for him. Bacchiocchi also writes, “But it would appear that during the dance, David may have become so excited that he lost his loin cloth.” He bases this on the accusals of David’s wife Michal in 2 Sam 6:20. Given what we know of mores in ancient Israel, it seems highly unlikely that David danced “before the Lord” without his loincloth, or that “the vulgar fellows” did so. It seems much more likely that Michal is exaggerating, making what was innocent seem perverse and sinful. Bacchiocchi does the same throughout *The Christian & Rock Music*. In our eagerness to call sin by its right name, we can sometimes label as sinful what is simply different.

Bacchiocchi devotes about ten pages of his chapter on “Biblical Principles of Music” to the relationship between dancing and music (218–228), though scholars might see his explication, as is so often the case in this book, not as exegesis but as wriggling away from texts that weaken his thesis. While this paper is not about dancing but music, this section of the book deserves comment.

The most important texts he needs to deal with are Ps 149:3 (“Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.”), and Ps 150:4 (“Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!). Both “dancing” and “dance” in these verses are from the same word in Hebrew, *māḥôl*. This and the related word *m’ḥôlâ* are used in two-thirds of the references to dancing in the Old Testament. They are the usual, general words for dancing, and they are not used figuratively, but always literally, though for various types of dances, some of which might be used for praising God and some of which would dishonor God. (Similarly, we use the general word “dance” for classical ballet, the Jitterbug, and break dancing, different though they may be from each other.)

Eager to avoid admitting that we can praise God by dancing, Bacchiocchi suggests (fairly) that the noun *māḥôl* may be derived from the verb *ḥûl*, but then quotes the speculation by the 18<sup>th</sup> century commentator Adam Clarke that *ḥûl* means “to make an opening” (that may be the idea behind *ḥûl*, but it is not the meaning of the word). He also emphasizes the dubious marginal note in some KJV Bibles that the word might refer to a pipe. Thus, for Bacchiocchi, dancing has been turned to piping. However, the more authoritative Brown, Driver, and Briggs translates *ḥûl* as “whirl, dance, writhe,” including writhing in the pains of childbirth. Only two or three times is the word *ḥûl* translated as dance, but it helps us understand the nature of dance in the Old Testament: it whirled and writhed. It was not necessarily stately or balletic. There is no suggestion in the BDB that *ḥûl* might mean piping.

A favorite trick of Bacchiocchi is to call figurative what he doesn’t want to be literal. There is some figurative language in Pss 149 and 150, but not where the dancing is involved. The most important question for him is whether dancing occurred in Solomon’s temple, but I’ve shown above that for Christians, the temple ceremonies have nothing to do with the Christian worship service.

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Psalm 149:1 seems to indicate that the setting is “in the assembly of the faithful,” but of course the “assembly of the faithful” never entered the temple, and only those who were sacrificing, it seems, could enter the inner courtyard. Psalm 150:1 says, “Praise God in his sanctuary,” but the parallel line says “Praise him in his mighty firmament!” This may suggest that God’s true sanctuary is not on earth but in the heavens. Thus, neither psalm says beyond doubt that it is talking about the worship service in the temple. Furthermore, “let them sing for joy on their couches” (149:5) can’t possibly refer to the temple, and 149:6–9 calls on God’s warriors to praise God while slaughtering their enemies, which again wasn’t supposed to be done in the temple.

It is true that these psalms don’t necessarily refer to sanctuary worship, even though Ps 150 may be speaking of the sort of worship *the people* did outside the temple, especially on feast days, even if the priests were more restrained. However, Bacchiocchi has missed the most important implication of these chapters for his thesis: the irrefutable evidence that the psalmist here urges the people, whoever they may be and wherever they are, to *praise* God *while* singing, dancing, playing stringed instruments, wind instruments, and various loud percussion instruments. Whatever people may have done during worship services at the temple, the psalmist tells us that praise and dance and percussion instruments go together. Indeed, the word “praise” is in the imperative—a strong urging, or even a command. Whether or not these instruments were all used by Levites in the formal temple services is beside the point. These psalms clearly suggest that the whole gamut of instruments in the psalmist’s day could be used to praise God. If we want to talk about “biblical principles,” *there* is the biblical principle: any instrument today can be used to praise God—even the needle on the record turntable scratched back and forth by rap DJs.

I’m not eager to see “liturgical dance” in the worship service today, but the Bible explicitly calls on believers to praise God while dancing. Last semester I had a Messianic Jew in my Old Testament Literature class, and it turned out that she is the dance instructor for her synagogue. The religious folk dances that are an important part of worship in the Messianic Synagogue are fun for the children and draw many people who would otherwise not at first be interested in the message of Messianic Judaism. I’m not urging that we too dance as part of worship, but neither can I biblically condemn those who do.

Like Calvin Johansson (below), Bacciocchi draws from the idea of the unblemished sacrifice the idea of unblemished music, as if making a mistake in a performance were a sin. He writes, “As He required the burnt offerings to be ‘without blemish’ (Lev 1:3), so it is reasonable to assume that He expects us to present Him with the very best musical offering. There is no biblical basis for believing that the loud, noise-making music or questionable lyrics are acceptable to God” (198). Contemporary Christian music is not, of course, known for “questionable lyrics.” No one is proposing that “questionable lyrics” be sung in church. If God “expects us to present Him with the very best musical offering,”

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does that mean he wants us to hire professional musicians to play for him? If, in order to present “the very best musical offering,” we exclude congregational singing and turn to choirs and professional musicians, then we are counting on others to do for us what, since the cross, we ourselves can do. We don’t need an earthly musical mediator to translate our praises into a style God can appreciate any more than we need an earthly priestly mediator to pray for us. Similarly, I love to hear my children sing God’s praises, no matter how out of key they may be.<sup>16</sup> I think God feels the same, even if the music is loud.

Bacchiocchi writes, “The frequent references to praising God among the heathens or Gentiles (2 Sam 22:50; Rom 15:9; Ps 108:3) suggest that singing was seen as an effective way to witness for the Lord to unbelievers. However, there are no indications in the Bible that the Jews or the early Christians borrowed secular tunes and songs to evangelize the Gentiles” (198). This is the rhetorical fallacy known as the “argument from silence.” We know nothing about the tunes or songs used “to evangelize the Gentiles.” We don’t even know if songs were used for evangelism, or only to praise God when *among* Gentiles. (The music scholar Suzanne Haik-Ventura believes the Hebrew Old Testament text contains notation allowing the entire Old Testament to be sung, but few Hebrew scholars agree with her.<sup>17</sup> In any case, if her tunes are correct, Old Testament singing was wildly different indeed from both our hymns and the singing in the synagogue today—beautiful, but rarely in stanzaic format. What is more, we don’t know the tempo or rhythm with which they were sung. Haik-Ventura believes the songs would have been sung slowly, but they might just as easily have been sung with a strong rhythm, like Jewish folk-singing today. If the scales she posits are correct, we might also argue that in light of sacred song in the Old Testament, we should usually sing in minor keys today. I’d rather not.)

If we should try to do things as they were done in the time of Christ, perhaps we should allow no musical instruments at all in church. Bacchiocchi writes, “Apparently Christians followed the tradition of the synagogue in prohibiting the use of musical instruments in their church services because of their pagan association” (216). Should we do the same? Do our instruments, such as the piano, have any less pagan association? Anyway, where does the New Testament say instruments weren’t used in Christian worship because of their pagan association? This is simply Bacchiocchi’s guess, and again it is an example of the rhetorical fallacy of the “argument from silence.” Perhaps the average person didn’t know how to play a musical instrument!

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<sup>16</sup> Which is not to say that they necessarily sing out of key, given that they have all sung for years in a very rigorous classical children’s chorus.

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne Haik-Ventura, *The Music of the Bible Revealed: The Deciphering of a Millenary Notation*, trans. Dennis Weber (n.p.: D. & F. Scott, 1991). There are tapes and CDs available of her transcriptions being performed by professional musicians. The music is beautiful, but certainly not singable by an untrained congregation.

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If we follow the Bible, perhaps we should not only have no musical instruments in the church, but not allow women to take part in worship music. Bacchiocchi has little biblical footing when he opines,

Why were women excluded from the music ministry of the Temple, first, and of the synagogue and early church later. . . . From a musical perspective, the style of music produced by women had a rhythmic beat which was better suited for entertainment than for worship in God's House. . . . Women's music was largely based on a rhythmic beat produced by tapping with the hand the tabret, toph, or timbrel. . . . From a sociological perspective, women were not used in the ministry of music of the Temple because of the social stigma attached to their use of timbrel and the entertainment-oriented music. . . . The lesson from Scripture and history is *not* that women should be excluded from the music service of the church today. Praising the Lord with music is not a male prerogative, but the privilege of every child of God. It is unfortunate that the music produced by women in Bible times was mostly for entertainment and, consequently, not suitable for divine worship. (228–231)

The Bible does not tell us women were “excluded from the music ministry” of the Temple, synagogue, or early church. It simply tells us the singers in the Temple were men. Nothing in the Bible suggests that women did not sing in the synagogue or early church (which is not the same as proving they did, of course). Nothing in the Bible tells us women were excluded from singing because their music “had a rhythmic beat which was better suited for entertainment than for worship in God's House.” This is mere *eisegesis*, forcing one's own prejudices onto the text. In 1 Sam 18:6 women sing “joyful songs” while praising David and Saul, but to call this “entertainment-oriented music” is misleading. The “lesson from Scripture and history” Bacchiocchi draws is a *non-sequitur*. Nowhere are we told in Scripture that they were excluded because they played rhythm instruments. We simply find no women performing in the temple. If there is lesson we should draw from the temple in considering our actions today—and I don't think there is, given that the temple was not a church as we use the word—then that lesson, logically, is exactly the one Bacchiocchi disavows: we should have no music by women in the church. If they didn't do it then, we shouldn't do it now. Essentially, Bacchiocchi's argument is as follows: (1) women didn't sing in the temple back then; (2) their not singing then is significant for us today; (3) so women *should* sing today, but without singing “women's music.” This is not a logical syllogism.

As for women as entertainers, we might consider three great hymns by women: the song of Moses and Miriam (Exod 15:1–21); the song of Deborah (Judg 5); and the song of Mary<sup>18</sup> (Luke 1:46–55). The reversed narrative order in Exod 15 is quite common in Hebrew, but it can mislead English speakers.

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<sup>18</sup> Miriam and Deborah are called prophetesses in the Bible. Mary is not, yet she too speaks prophetically in her song.



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Following the story of the destruction of the Egyptians in Exod 14, chap. 15 devotes eighteen verses to the song sung by “Moses and the Israelites.” Where did that song come from? This is the question readers might ask. We find out in vs. 19–21. “Miriam the prophetess,” beating a tambourine, and followed by “all the women,” also beating tambourines and dancing, sang this great hymn, for-bear of the song of Moses and the Lamb sung in Rev 15. Miriam sings the song alone, with accompaniment. Note that in v. 1 “Moses and the Israelites” sing it. Where did they learn it? Surely they didn’t all sing it together without ever learning it! The answer is that they learned it from the one who sang alone, from Miriam, its probable author. We see thus that rhythm instruments can be fitting accompaniment to praise given to God.

Having considered seven chapters by Samuele Bacchiocchi, we now turn to Tore Sognefest’s essay “The Effects of Rock Music.” Again, while some of the claims may be correct, the implications seem to have been insufficiently thought out. He writes, [T]he rock beat places the human body under stress by increasing the pulse rate, the blood pressure, and the production of adrenaline” (236). Later he adds,

[E]xposure to music with ‘disharmonic’ rhythms—“whether it be the ‘tension’ caused by dissonance or ‘noise’ or the unnatural swings of misplaced rhythmical accents, syncopation, and polyrhythms, or inappropriate tempo—can result in a variety of changes including: an altered heart rate with its corresponding change in blood pressure; an overstimulation of hormones (especially the opiates or endorphins) causing an altered state of consciousness from mere exhilaration on one end of the spectrum to unconsciousness on the other; and improper digestion.”<sup>19</sup> (241)

While these physiological effects may indeed occur at times, they are effects not only of listening to rock music, but of vigorously singing hymns, of listening to marches, and of watching sports. One might also ask, “Why is this a problem?” Speeding up the pulse is one of the goals of exercise. It’s good for us, within reason.<sup>20</sup> The production of adrenalin is a natural phenomenon. Vigorous walking and vigorous hymn singing both lead to the release of natural opiates and endorphins. That’s why one feels better after doing them, more relaxed, less sensitive to pain. Dissonance can make one tense, but the organist in my church frequently uses dissonance in the hymn reharmonizations she writes. It’s true that “misplaced rhythmical accents, syncopation, and polyrhythms” can make

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<sup>19</sup> Sognefest is quoting Carol and Louis Torres, *Notes on Music* (New York: 1990), 19. This is a 52 page book by evangelists.

<sup>20</sup> On p. 246 Sognefest writes that after five minutes of exposure to hard rock, the pulse rate of high school students increased by seven to twelve beats per minute. By contrast, vigorous walking can easily increase the heart rate by fifty beats or more per minute. So can *lifting* hard rocks, rather than listening to hard rock.

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one want to hop around, but given the many references to God-approved dancing in the Scriptures,<sup>21</sup> this is not necessarily a problem, in its place.

Sognefest writes, “Critics of rock music generally appeal to the harmful physical effects of its rhythm which overshadows the melody and lyrics. They explain that good music should consist of a combination and balance of five basic elements: Melody . . . Tone color . . . Harmony . . . Rhythm . . . Tempo” (240). Categorical prescriptions for “good” music like this make me roll my eyes. One is very hard pressed to find a rock song that does not “consist of a combination and balance” of these five. If by “balance” Sognefest means an *exact* balance, how can one ever tell if these five are in exact balance? How does one balance a tempo with a melody? In any piece of music—or in various passages of a single piece—some of these receive more emphasis than others. There is nothing wrong with that. If many rock songs emphasize rhythm more than melody, surely that doesn’t mean they are not music.

Consider a few problem cases. Have you ever heard a solo sung *a cappella*? It has no harmony! Is it then not “good” music? Gregorian chant, praised earlier in the book, turns out not to be “good” music because it attempts to avoid rhythm and so lacks “balance.” Does a song stop being “good” music if it is played too slowly, unbalancing the tempo? Surely the waltz, the march, and many other musical forms have emphatic rhythms.<sup>22</sup>

Where Bacchiocchi condemns what poets call an iambic rhythm as particularly alien to true Christian worship, Sognefest condemns the anapestic rhythm.

Particularly harmful is the rock music which employs an ‘anapestic’ beat, where the last beat is the loudest, such as ‘da da DA.’ . . . the anapestic beat, characteristic especially of rock music, is disruptive because it is the opposite of the heartbeat and thus places the normal body’s rhythm under stress. This results in perceptual difficulties and manifestations of stress. In young people these manifestations may include decreased performance in school, hyperactivity and restlessness, decreased work output, more errors, and general inefficiency. In adults the symptoms include reduced decision-making capacity on the job, a nagging feeling that things just are not right, and the loss of energy for no apparent reason. (245)

Sognefest goes on to cite a study showing that a man’s strength is “reduced by about a third” when he listens to an anapestic beat. If this is so, then why are heavy rock songs played at professional football games? So the players will be weak? No, because the music pumps up the players so they can play harder, less bothered by fatigue.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Exod 15:20; 2 Sam 6:14, 16; Ps 30:11; 149:3; 150:4; Eccl 3:4; Jer 31:4, 13; Matt 11:17; Luke 7:32; 15:25—12. out of seventeen times the words “dance” or “dancing” occur in the NIV.

<sup>22</sup> In the church hymnal, “Onward, Christian Soldiers” is a march, while “Morning Has Broken” is a waltz.

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What is this “anapestic beat”? It’s a rhythm used on rare occasions in English poetry. For example, it is used in the following lines from Coleridge’s poem, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” in which I’ve used bold type for the stressed syllables (the first line has four anapestic feet, the second line two—get ready to rock!:

For the **sky** and the **sea** and the **sea** and the **sky**  
**Lay** like a **load** on my **weary eye**, . . .

One great hymn that has an anapestic rhythm is “Immortal, Invisible God, Only Wise.” Strange that I usually feel stronger after singing that hymn. Perhaps it’s the lyrics that strengthen me. “How Firm a Foundation” has an anapestic rhythm, and so does “Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown.” Bach’s well-known “Bourée in E min” is also in anapestic rhythm (according to its melody, regardless of how it might sound on a page).

I think what Sognefest is talking about is a 2/4 time signature with two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, played by the drums, or the equivalent in 4/4. This is the drum beat in the Beatles song “Magical Mystery Tour,” for those who might recall it. The drummer for the Rolling Stones often uses a more sophisticated version of this beat. It is certainly conducive to making people want to move in some way, but that is not necessarily bad in itself, provided the movement does no harm. Music by Mozart or Haydn might help relieve stress when I’m writing or grading papers (though I prefer silence), but if I were stacking a cord of firewood, a strong anapestic rhythm or a vigorous march would help me work harder than Mozart (unless it were the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*).

Calvin M. Johansson is a professor of music at Evangel University, an organist, and author of books on church music. He is also, unfortunately, a musical elitist championing an ideal far removed from the likes of most church-goers. He seems unaware that many of his elitist complaints about rock music also apply to hymns. He writes,

The first and most obvious trait of all pop music is that it is entertaining, . . . No matter how vehemently people deny it, pop entertains. That is why it exists. . . .

Pop’s musical composition insures that this is so. Entertainment occurs when music is crafted devoid of musical reason. Harmony, melody, rhythm, and timbre are shaped to be fun and viscerally stimulating. Without theoretical depth, pop utilizes a construction which is empty of serious musical thought. It is one-sided, costing the listener little in the way of intellectual investment. (277)

It is true that popular music is, by definition, accessible to the populace, the people, and if they enjoy it and want to listen to it, it must be entertaining in some way. Of course, where one finds music not meant to entertain in some way one finds music virtually no one wants to listen to. If one wants to share the gospel using music as a tool, one would do well to choose music people under-

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stand and enjoy. If one wants to touch lives, more lives are touched by what is popular than by what is understood only by some musical elite.

Is the listener's "intellectual investment" a crucial aspect of music acceptable in a worship setting? Very few hymns require such an investment, though the lyrics may reveal their meaning through study. Indeed, most "serious" music was also written to entertain. Did Mozart write to instruct? Did his patrons hire him to write a new symphony so they could be educated? I think not. Did patrons flock to the opera to be instructed? I think not. Did Bach compose his fugues to instruct worshipers in "serious musical thought"? I think not. Handel's *Messiah* richly rewards careful study, but it's popular because it's *popular*, even though it is also "serious."

Johansson writes, "Entertainment occurs when music is crafted devoid of musical reason." This is elitist and simply untrue. On the one hand, if "musical reason" weren't entertaining, P. D. Q. Bach would lose the audience of those who can understand his musical jokes. Some of the best-reasoned compositions are among the most delightful, even to the barely initiated. On the other, a good deal of popular music is crafted with great care and complexity.<sup>23</sup> It is true that many popular rock musicians are not well-educated musically, and some rock music is primarily guitar and drum bashing. However, even that can be done with skill and by design. Those who understand such music have no difficulty distinguishing between bands with talent and bands without.

When I see a sentence like "Without theoretical depth, pop utilizes a construction which is empty of serious musical thought," I get nervous. Why? Because the same thing said about popular music goes for hymns. Many of the best hymns have lyrics by talented poets, though few indeed have lyrics by what are generally considered great poets. The music, though delightful and satisfying to me, is also popular and seldom betrays "serious musical thought." I get nervous because if Johansson bothers to apply his dictum to hymns, what will we sing in church? Johansson writes, "Gut-wrenching, life-changing redemption has little in common with amusement" (278). That may be, but it also has little in common with "serious musical thought."

When I imagine the sort of church Johansson prefers, I picture a century old red brick mainstream Protestant church peopled by pillars of the community who wouldn't reveal an emotion in church even if they sat on a tack. I imagine a church where worship is not a group activity, but something interior, private, not

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<sup>23</sup> Jazz is especially well known for its complex "musical reason." I might mention Dave Brubeck, Charlie Parker, Benny Goodman, Miles Davis. However, a number of rock musicians are classically trained, and this shows in their work. For example, the band Steely Dan in the *Aja* period, Billy Joel (whose CD of piano pieces written in homage to Rachmaninoff, Chopin, and others is presently at the top of the classical charts), Paul Simon, the band Emerson, Lake, and Palmer (which introduced a generation of young people to classical music, including me). Others, not classically trained, have still developed very complex music, such as Joni Mitchell, Randy Newman, and Tom Waits.

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to be shared. I imagine a church people attend because it's the socially correct thing to do, even though the membership is half what it used to be. That is to say, I imagine a dead or dying church. He writes:

It should be obvious that to use popular music of any type in worship simply turns worship into entertainment, no matter what category, stripe, style, or subspecies of music it is. Whether rock, CCM, swing, or ragtime is used, the end result will be the same: convoluted worship, trivialization of the faith, and immaturing of the believer. On the other hand, great music edifies the listener. The composer invests in the musical traits which call the listener to reflect seriously on levels of musical content that go beyond the temporal. With emotional and intellectual balance as a result of competent craft, musical depth in great music sympathetically resonates within the heart and mind of the listener in the manner of a gestalt. (278)

"Great music" may edify Johansson, but many people do not respond to it. Furthermore, to "reflect seriously on levels of musical content" is not what I want people doing in church. I want them to feel emotionally exposed to God. I want them to feel like part of one body of believers, joyous and enthusiastic and glad to be together. I want them to receive and embrace God's word for them. This happens best through vigorous hymn-singing, testimony, and prayer.

Certainly "great music edifies the listener," but it is also entertainment. Whether it be "great music" or popular music, "special music" is essentially entertainment. "Great music" may require more skill and training than popular music, but they both entertain, and they both focus the congregation on the performer rather than on God. When people in the congregation sing their hearts out, they sing to God and give him glory. When they listen to a performer, they may say amen, they may applaud, but *they* are not glorifying God. The problem is more severe with instrumental solos. If the music is drawn from a well-known hymn, it may call to people's minds the words of that hymn, and so lead them toward God, at least fractionally. If the music is not drawn from such a hymn, it is secular music. Some classically trained musicians fondly imagine that if it's classical, it's suitable for the worship service. This is not true. Neither the lack of words nor the quality of the music makes it sacred. Is it performed by a musician who wants to give the glory to God? Fine, but that doesn't mean it is leading the congregation to do the same. We don't worship God well by giving him the best quality of music we can dig up, but by giving him our hearts. Listening to "serious" music is not conducive of that.

What is more, "great music" may help people be introspective. It may give them an opportunity to examine themselves. But the effect of this music is to bring the pulse back to barely thumping. In the church I attend, we have a somewhat lively song service and testimony period, accompanied by a piano, and people begin drawing together, preparing themselves for hearing God's word to them. They sing a hymn, which also helps. However, then there is five minutes of reverent organ music while the money is collected, then "special mu-

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sic” also dampens the spirits. The result is that the congregation rarely lets out an “amen” and the pastor says, “Are you awake out there?” No response. I don’t believe in speaking in tongues or being slain in the Spirit, but I’ve got to say that charismatics know a whole lot more about really worshiping and maintaining that emotional and spiritual connection with God and each other for a long time than do the worship leaders in the churches I generally attend.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps that’s why they often attend church because they love it rather than because it’s the thing to do. Johansson imagines that people attend such churches because they want to be entertained, but I would suggest that they are more likely to attend such services because they don’t want to be entertained but want to worship and feel the Spirit active in them. I would suggest that those who want to be entertained are more likely to go to churches where “serious music” is the norm. There they can enjoy the beauty of the music, enjoy the sermon, all in silence, without having to participate in any worship. Watching worship happen is not the same as worshiping.

Some people are edified by “great music” (I am, though that’s not what I want to hear in church). But no one is *saved* by “great music,” or brought to Christ by “great music,” unless it is music like *The Messiah*, combining glorious music with a glorious message. Even then, to be really moved by *The Messiah*, one needs to give in to it, let the music and the message inhabit one. Is this a form of trance or hypnosis? Yes, it is, to some extent, but it’s a holy trance. This is why I can’t listen to *The Messiah* with my heart without tears. Of course, I get the same result with “God Be With You Till We Meet Again” (the original 1880 tune by W. G. Tomer, though I like Ralph Vaughan Williams’ setting, too).

Johansson writes, “The competence of compositional craft determines the work’s integrity. Both imagination and craft are necessary.” What he is saying is that unless you are trained as a composer, your music will lack “integrity.” “Integrity” sounds like something music offered to God should have, doesn’t it? However, this is like saying that only the greatest theologians and preachers are able to bring people to Jesus. This is certainly not the case. Indeed, some theologians have a hard time communicating on the level of the common people (though they have an important work to do). Most people brought to Jesus are brought by family or friends: people who often know relatively little about the Bible, but know a God worth trusting. Similarly, more people are brought to Jesus by a simple song that touches their heart—however lacking in the “competence of compositional craft”—than by anything Chopin ever wrote, much as I enjoy his music. If the church service is about bringing people to God and keeping them there, the question should not be “Is there any room for contempo-

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<sup>24</sup> Not all emotions are holy, of course, and there are times when one wonders just what spirit is driving some behavior in charismatic churches. In some cases the spirit seems to be granting license to excess, and that is problematic. I am praising, rather, the best of the often noted surrender to worship in song and praise and response to the Word and the spirit of love and unity often seen. I myself am so self-conscious, alas, that I can only sit quietly and observe in such meetings.

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rary Christian music,” but “is there any room for classical music and pipe organs.”

Here is a categorical assertion likely to surprise people who appreciate popular music. Johansson writes,

Popular music does not aspire to the highest degree of creative excellence. It is too facile, too obvious. It lacks the musical craft and imagination of great music. While some pop songs may be better than others, none rise to the level of excellence found in serious music. It may be novel, but it does not have Godly creativity. Since pop has no musical depth (as an art music), the inevitable conclusion is that pop creativity and Godly creativity run counter to one another. This makes pop an inadequate medium for theistic witness. (280)

Johansson confuses “the highest degree of creative excellence” with “Godly creativity.” Is the purpose of worship to watch the trained musical elite perform with “the highest degree of creative excellence”? Is that what it means to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord”?<sup>25</sup> Is that what fills us with joy and leads us to praise God with all our hearts? We need only watch the congregational reaction to such music to see that while the saints may appreciate the “creative excellence” (I do), it does not fill them with joy, reveal to them the mighty acts of God, nor result in praising Christ for the salvation he has made available to us. It may have “musical depth,” but unless there are words that guide us to God, “serious music” has little if any *spiritual* depth, and so its appropriateness in the worship service is debatable. One might even argue that its emphasis in mainline churches has had a sizable influence on their general lack of spiritual fervor.

Is popular music “an inadequate medium for theistic witness”? Most hymns are “popular music” written not by great composers exhibiting “the highest degree of creative excellence,” but by less-educated composers and lyricists who love God. It will not do to say “Oh, those are hymns, but when I say “popular music” I mean rock music and things like that.” One cannot fairly argue that older popular music is acceptable, but contemporary popular music is not. I will not dig out the old argument that many hymns were derived from barroom songs,<sup>26</sup> because I consider it irrelevant. Popular music is by accurate definition music appreciated by the people, whether that means top forty rock music or hymns or praise songs, and whether the venue is a barroom or a church. Certainly its “musical depth” varies, but we can admit that it is rarely if ever at the depth of “serious music.” But I would respond that “great music” is rarely an adequate “medium for theistic witness.” When was the last time Wagner brought anyone to Christ? “Just As I Am” is not “great music,” but probably millions have sung it while giving their hearts to God. Very few of the “great composers”

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<sup>25</sup> Encouraged in Ps 66:1; 81:1; 95:1, 2; 98:4, 6; 100:1.

<sup>26</sup> Though one of the most popular hymns in my congregation these days is sung to the tune of “Danny Boy,” which is still a favorite barroom ballad in Ireland.

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wrote music for evangelism. Indeed, many of them had a rather tenuous relationship with God.

Johansson writes, “The general aesthetic principle upon which pop is based in immediate gratification. . . . Little aesthetic subtlety exists in pop” (281). This is true, but the same goes for hymns. If a hymn needs to be studied in order to be appreciated, it cannot do its intended work. What Johansson writes about the musical excellence of “serious music” compared to that of “popular music” is generally true. The problem is that he assumes there is a correlation between musical excellence and spiritual depth.<sup>27</sup> There isn’t. To say that God is best praised by giving him the best compositions written is like Cain arguing that God is best praised by giving him the best vegetables. It is like saying that God is better praised by a Rembrandt nude than by a Harry Anderson painting of the resurrection and second coming. It’s like saying that God is better praised by a Hemingway novel than by a conversion story in a church paper.

How hard should we have to work to understand worship music? Johansson writes,

The primitive seeks almost immediate gratification for his tendencies whether these be biological or musical. Nor can he tolerate uncertainty. And it is because distant departures from the certainty and repose of the tonic note and lengthy delays in gratification are insufferable to him that the tonal repertory of the primitive is limited, not because he can’t think of other tones. It is not his mentality that is limited, it is his maturity. . . . The opposite corollary of immediate gratification is delayed gratification. It is one of the key aesthetic principles employed in creating music of integrity and worth. My experience over a lifetime of rehearsing college and church choirs has been that music of delayed gratification wears well over weeks and months of rehearsal. But popular music of whatever ilk does not fare as well. Choristers tire of rehearsing its predictable tunes and harmonies. (281–283)

This may well be true,<sup>28</sup> but the fact is that it’s hard to find a great hymn that doesn’t return to the tonic, to “certainty and repose,” within eight bars. They all

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<sup>27</sup> Perhaps what Johansson has done is to take the standard arguments used in “Music Appreciation” class to convince students that classical music has excellences that make it more deserving of study than popular music and applied them to worship. I use similar arguments when I lead students through great poetry and help them appreciate its glories, but I don’t argue that the most complex poetry is the most suitable for worship. In the classroom setting, rather than the worship setting, his arguments have merits. I see no problem with helping students appreciate elitist music, because such music adds richness to their lives, and appreciating it often requires training. What he has failed to notice is that the worship service is not the proper setting for such a class. Worship is inherently “popular” in a church setting, because it is something all the people are called to do.

<sup>28</sup> Though to be fair we might point out that the “primitive” drum polyrhythms of Africa sometimes take ten minutes or more before they come together and the rhythmic scheme can be comprehended. The Grateful Dead are famous for using a similar approach to their songs, sometimes keeping the audience in suspense for twenty minutes before the instruments gradually come together.



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get back home by the end of the verse and chorus, which means a delay of no more than about twenty seconds. It may well be true that singing hymns bores choirs addicted to “music of integrity and worth,” but such choirs singing such worthwhile music rarely have an evangelistic impact. The purpose of hymns is to have an immediate impact, not to engage listeners with complex music that delays their gratification. Enjoying “great music” is so pleasurable that I think everyone should be taught how, but it is a *learned* ability requiring a good deal of musical sophistication. We can no more *expect* seekers to come to us with such abilities than we can expect them to be able to find the various books of the Bible when they first pick one up. People can be trained to enjoy this music, but the worship service is not the place to do it, and if we play this music in church, we are catering to the elite.<sup>29</sup>

Johansson writes, “Gut-wrenching, life-changing redemption has little in common with amusement” (278). It has even less in common with “serious music.” He writes that popular music “is unable to display general revelatory gospel witness. Pop music simply has little in common with the gospel” (284). Frankly, I can’t figure out how he could come to such a conclusion if he had the slightest familiarity with popular Christian music. For example, Thomas Dorsey composed jazz and blues songs before he turned to gospel, and that background is always evident in his music. His song “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” is still a favorite of jazz and soul singers and instrumentalists. But Dorsey’s life was dedicated to “gospel witness,” and that song reveals in essence the correct stance for the repentant sinner, as described by Jesus (Luke 18:13). It reveals it even in smoky nightclubs.

Again, Johansson writes, “[M]usic of artistry assumes the normalcy of high expectations. Composers don’t write “down” to an audience, even at the subconscious level. Unlike pop composition, which exists within an assumed framework of the necessity of mass acceptability, art music expects the listener to rise to the standard set by art work” (284). Thus, such music doesn’t reach most people. By definition, this *limits* its use as a vehicle of the gospel. He writes, “[G]race calls us to a higher standard than the law ever did” (285). This is true, but it doesn’t call us to a higher *musical* standard. We are not *saved* by “art songs.” Salvation does not depend on appreciation of “serious music.”

Once one gets started pointing out the holes in Johansson’s arguments, it’s hard to stop. He writes, “[N]o composer worth his salt would allow his musical integrity to be compromised by strictures to his compositional technique. The making of a genuine work of art is not tied to acceptability” (288). Surely Mozart and Bach, among many others, often had to write what they were told to write. If “a work of art” isn’t accessible to the audience, reviews are bad, people

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<sup>29</sup> When I was in college I attended a local Unitarian Church a number of times as part of a class assignment. What I noticed was that the music was always superb, catering to the intellectual elite, and the sermons were also intellectually satisfying, but didn’t mention the Bible. Bible teaching and “art music” don’t really go together very well.

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don't come to performances, and commissions dry up. Verdi, Puccini, and Gilbert and Sullivan were all under intense pressure to produce "hits." Even Handel wrote *The Messiah* hoping it would be a hit.

He complains, "Thus, churches have to pay a royalty to use most CCM. . . . Although the gospel is inherently noncommercial, commercialism shapes the church's worship when religious pop music is used" (289). What he neglects to mention—though as a choir director he surely knows it—is that churches have to pay to use "serious music" under copyright, too, or at least spend hundreds of dollars for choir parts, which has the same effect. Dare we mention that many ministers of music and soloists also expect to be paid?

The chapter by Güenter Preuss is titled "Rock Music and Evangelism." Preuss is a church music director who was finishing his dissertation on "reformed hymnody between 1700 and 1870" at the Sorbonne when he contributed this article. What is the difference between "sacred" and "secular" music? Preuss writes, "There are those who contend that music per se is neither sacred or secular—it is a neutral thing. For them, what makes music 'sacred' is not its style, but its lyrics. This popular view is flawed both historically, theologically, and scientifically" (303). He continues,

Sanctification presupposes a separation from the world in order to be set aside and consecrated to the service of god. Whatever is used for the service of God is sacred, that is, set aside for holy use. This is true not only of music but of speech as well. The profane language used in the street is inappropriate in church. In the same way, rock music used in bars or nightclubs to stimulate people physically cannot be used in the church to elevate people spiritually. (303)

I don't know about Preuss, but I speak the same language "in the street" that I speak in church: English. Perhaps he'd prefer a return to a Latin liturgy, but that too was a street language when it entered the church. Certainly there are words I *hear* in the street that are not appropriate in church, but of course they aren't appropriate in the street, either, and I don't use such language. Also, I don't hesitate to speak about God in the street (or in my classroom in a secular university). I know a few people who only talk about God in church, but I question their Christian commitment. It's true that "sanctification presupposes a separation from the world," but only in a manner of speaking, and not in the way he claims.

I cannot say that I've ever heard in church "rock music heard in bars," unless the song had Christian lyrics (and rock songs with Christian lyrics are occasionally heard in bars). On the other hand, I've often heard in church the compositions of Chopin or Debussy, and I'm not aware that these compositions are considered sacred. They are certainly much heard in the secular concert hall. Even the work of Bach, who understood himself to be writing to the glory of God, is not inherently sacred. If we see his fugues as sacred, it is only because we've heard some of them in church. I'm fond of "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring,"

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but I don't know any other words from the song, and without those words I'd have no way of knowing the song was to be considered sacred. The psalms sung in the temple services were available for anyone to sing while plowing a field. Today our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. This suggests that we should avoid defiling them with what is impure—including music—but it also means there is no difference between what is appropriate music for Christians in church and what is appropriate for Christians anywhere else, except that when Christians worship together, they should avoid music that offends some who are present.

Are some types of singing more appropriate in the worship service? Johansson writes, "Rock singing does not use the techniques of classical music based on a relaxed larynx and rich harmonic overtones. Instead, it employs high-pitched strained voicing" (304). This is not strictly true. Many of the top R&B singers use these classical techniques. These techniques were perfected in and for the opera, but opera is far from sacred. The techniques are beautiful to those who have learned to appreciate them (as I have), but they are artificial. They help singers achieve volume and control and protect their voices, but that doesn't make them holy. Indeed, the very artificiality of the operatic voice lessens its effectiveness in evangelistic witness, even with an inherently evangelistic song, because the vocal style is beautiful but seems insincere. There's more sincerity and authenticity in the cracked and scratchy voice of an out of tune old saint humbly singing God's praises than in the glorious voices of Placido Domingo or Leontyne Price, much as I enjoy them. Of course, most hymn-singers don't use these techniques either (though I do). When it comes down to it, we aren't saved by "relaxed larynxes," and "rich harmonic overtones" bring few people to God.<sup>30</sup>

Preuss writes, "Musically speaking, most 'Christian' rock is no different from secular rock, except for the lyrics" (306). Musically speaking, Verdi's *Requiem* isn't much different from his opera *La Traviata*, either, except for the lyrics, but we know better, I would hope, than to perform the latter in church.

What is "vain repetition"? Preuss writes, "Two major problems with CWM [Contemporary Worship Music] is that it generally incorporates rock rhythms with a heavy bass line and is very repetitious. Jesus warned against using vain repetitions in worship (Matt 6:7)" (306). This is not, of course, what Jesus meant by "do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do." What about the four living creatures of Revelation 4, who "never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come'" (v. 8)? Repetition is not *vain*

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<sup>30</sup> I might also mention that the "high-pitched strained voicing" of many popular singers is just as deliberate as the operatic voice of Luciano Pavarotti, though less trained. The best of these singers have very distinctive, recognizable voices admired and praised by those trained to appreciate them. Most aspiring popular singers fail to develop such a voice. Just as one can learn to appreciate the excellences of the operatic voice, one can learn to appreciate the excellences and variations found in popular singing.

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unless it is *in vain*. When the heathen pray to gods of wood and stone, they are not heard—their prayers are in vain. They repeat their prayers over and over because they think this will help their gods hear them.<sup>31</sup> That's not why we repeat the Lord's Prayer year after year. We may ask God many times for something, such as healing or safety, but that is not "vain repetition." We may say "Lord" or "Father" many times in our prayers, but that's not "vain repetition," either, even though it may be so redundant as to sound more like a hiccup than a consciously called on name.

We sing many hymns that repeat words or phrases in choruses, such as "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder."<sup>32</sup> What about "Praise Him, Praise Him, Jesus Our Blessed Redeemer"? Is that too repetitive? What about "So Send I You" or "Amazing Grace" or "Lift Up the Trumpet"? By condemning Contemporary Worship Music Preuss implicitly condemns many of the favorite hymns of our past. It is true that when praise songs are sung in charismatic churches, they are often repeated several times, and this can have an emotional effect on audiences, but these emotions are holy. May God forbid that musical elitists should try to keep the people of God from praising him over and over as best they know how. The first praise song known to have been written in English is also the oldest surviving English poem, "Caedmon's Hymn." It was composed by an illiterate herdsman and preserved for us by the greatest theologian of his day, Bede.<sup>33</sup>

Preuss writes,

Christian rock artists, stemming from different churches, espouse virtually the same expression of a minimal Gospel. Doctrinal differences do not really matter and should not be expressed in song. What matters is joining together in praising the Lord. . . .

Evangelistic music, instead of bringing people from the world to Christ, often brings the world's agenda into the church, thus undermining the identity and mission of the church. (308)

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<sup>31</sup> By contrast, when Roman Catholics say the rosary, it is not because repetition makes it more likely God will hear them, but because it both focuses the mind on God and clears the mind of the detritus of worldly worries, making it easier for God's voice to be heard.

<sup>32</sup> That was a favorite hymn of mine when I was a child, but I thought the phrase was "When the road is called a pyonder," and I often wondered why it would be called that.

<sup>33</sup> Bede writes of Caedmon, in *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (ca. 731), "It often happened that his songs kindled a contempt for this world and a longing for the life of Heaven in the hearts of many men. Indeed, after him others among the English people tried to compose religious poetry, but no one could equal him because he was not taught the art of song by men or by human agency but received this gift through heavenly grace. Therefore, he was never able to compose any vain and idle songs but only such as dealt with religion and were proper for his religious tongue to utter." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Middle Ages*, seventh ed. (New York: Norton, 2000), 24. Note that these were popular songs, composed and sung by an untrained man.

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We might note that the church hymnal has relatively few hymns dealing with doctrinal distinctives. Indeed, most were written by Christians of other denominations. Some were revised to remove doctrinal ideas we do not accept. Hymns cross denominational lines quite easily. For example, the song “Majesty,” a praise song often sung in the church I attend, was written by a leading charismatic pastor, Jack Hayford. There is a big difference between bringing “the world’s agenda into the church” and using songs written by Christians from other denominations. It is, rather, “serious music” that brings in the world’s way of judging quality and places “art” above popular congregational appeal.

### Conclusion

Though I have not discussed the final three chapters of *The Christian & Rock Music*, I think I’ve made my point sharply enough. There are some good things about the book. Osterman makes some good points, though her comments about various types of African-American music and some of their characteristics seem unfair, and some of her arguments are simplistic. Stefani’s chapter is not objectionable, and he has more reputable sources than the other authors. I was drawn to Brian Neumann’s personal testimony as a person who has actually been a successful rock musician with hit records but given it up. I agree with all of the writers that rock music with secular lyrics poses real dangers for Christian young people, easily turning their focus away from God. Trying to stay close to God while listening to a lot of secular rock music is a bit like trying to remain a virgin while sharing a bed with your boyfriend. It can be done, but it makes life a lot more difficult.

There are several places where the book fails. It fails to realize the serious difference between CCM and secular popular music. If the authors had bothered to spend a few days reading the lyrics of CCM songs and reading interviews with CCM musicians, the book might have been much different. There are certainly problems with a lot of secular music and the musicians who perform it. That does not mean it is fair to also tar Christian musicians whose music may sound similar, though the words and philosophy are wildly different. Similarly, there are problems with a lot of secular *people*. Does that mean all secular people should be avoided? Does it mean Christian people should be avoided, since they too are people? There are young people with wild hair and clothes and tattoos and body piercings who make appallingly bad choices. I’ve also had students who look like that who are seeking God. We must judge a tree according to its fruits, not its leaves.

The book fails because the authors fail to notice that CCM of all sorts has a huge positive influence on listeners. Most of the musicians I’ve read about seem to see themselves primarily as missionaries. That doesn’t mean they are necessarily seeing conversions and baptisms, though many do. In some cases their lyrics are quite elliptical, and it takes a good deal of thought to recognize the

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religious content.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes this is because the musicians are trying to reach out to people who have an antipathy to Christian triumphalism. At other times it is because they see themselves as musicians who are Christians, rather than as Christian musicians. In this case the lyrics reflect the questions and struggles of the Christian heart in a truthful way. We can't all always be bubbling over with Jesus' love, and sometimes we need to know that others face the same problems.

The book fails because its "research" is based primarily on sensationalistic sources and on the work of other writers who haven't thought out the implications of their arguments and whose claims are inaccurate and based on literalistic readings of their sources. The writers seldom turn to primary research by scientists publishing in scholarly journals for their information on the physiological effect of music, for example. Also, nearly all the bad examples are drawn from the most notorious secular rock musicians. This may help us understand the ideal relationship between the Christian and secular rock music, but it doesn't help us understand the ideal relationship between the Christian and Christian rock music. If there is a difference, and there is, it should be acknowledged.

The book fails because of its shocking lack of tolerance of differences in taste. As I read the book, with a couple exceptions, what I sensed over and over is that what these authors consider acceptable music for everyone is the music they themselves like, and what they consider unacceptable music is the music they don't like. I myself don't listen to CCM by choice, but I do listen to it with my sons when they ask me to, and I judge it according to what it is and is trying to do, not according to whether or not I like it. I try to judge the music according to its fruits. How does it make people behave? Does it lead them to sin? Does it lead them to Christ? Experience proves beyond doubt that Christian rock in its many forms is leading many listeners into a closer walk with God.

Finally, the book fails because time after time its biblical support is based on *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*. I've seldom seen in one book so many weak interpretations and so few sound ones. The subtitle of the book is "A Study on Biblical Principles of Music." Frankly, the Bible says virtually nothing specifically about music that helps us determine biblical principles. There are two texts that give us principles we can use. One is Phil 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." The other is Col 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Whatever combination of words and music meets those criteria is fine for praising God, whether or

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<sup>34</sup> Just as Johansson argues that "serious music" doesn't reveal itself all at once, the same is true with serious poetry and lyrics. There is a place for Christian lyrics that take some work.

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not I like it. That doesn't mean it's necessarily appropriate in church, where there is a need for unity and there may be many people who don't like it, but it's appropriate for those who like it, whether they be alone or in a group. Also, if any combination of words and music that meets these criteria proves itself able to touch the hearts of unbelievers, it is fine for evangelistic purposes, even though it might not be appropriate in an actual evangelistic campaign with a wide range of people attending.

As I said at the beginning of this review, these authors are my brothers and sisters in Christ, and many are friends. If the book were not selling well, if it were not having an influence on pastors and church members, I would not devote my energy to exposing its weaknesses. However, because it is in fact having a large influence, I provide this (though it goes to a much smaller audience) so others can refer to it as necessary.

As I've also said earlier, the fate of our young people is far too important to allow the influence of one ill-considered book to turn them away from God. They need our friendship and counsel, and they want it. We need to know the right things to say and the right way to say them.

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## **Music for Contemporary Christians: What, Where, and When?**

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What music is appropriate for Christians? What music is appropriate in worship? Is there a difference between music appropriate in church and music appropriate in a youth rally or concert? Is there a difference between lyrics appropriate for congregational singing and lyrics appropriate for a person to sing or listen to in private? Are some types of music inherently inappropriate for evangelism?<sup>1</sup>

These are important questions. Congregations have fought over them and even split over them.<sup>2</sup> The answers given have often alienated young people from the church and even driven them to reject God. Some answers have rejuvenated congregations; others have robbed congregations of vitality and shackled the work of the Holy Spirit.

In some churches the great old hymns haven't been heard in years. Other churches came late to the "praise music" wars, and music is still a controversial topic. Here, where praise music is found in the church service, it is probably accompanied by a single guitar or piano and sung without a trace of the enthusiasm, joy, emotion, and repetition one hears when it is used in charismatic churches. Many churches prefer to use no praise choruses during the church service, some use nothing but praise choruses, and perhaps the majority use a mixture. What I call (with a grin) "rock 'n' roll church," where such instruments

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<sup>1</sup> Those who have recently read my article "*The Christian & Rock Music: A Review-Essay*," may turn at once to the section headed "The Scriptural Basis." Those who haven't read it should read on.

<sup>2</sup> I watched attendance at one large church drop by half over several years when a new minister of music ruled that only "serious music," preferably instrumental and played by professional musicians, could be performed there. If there had to be congregational singing, it should be limited to a handful of great anthems. The pastor, cowed by this woman, accepted the argument that God could not accept as worship or praise what was imperfect.



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as drums and the electric guitar and bass are used for the song service, is rare. Even where one finds such services, the singing is sometimes lackluster and attendance sparse, so clearly such services are not the sole answer to tepid worship. Few would consider music the heart of the gospel, but it is still a topic that inspires strong statements and hurt feelings.

What is generally called Contemporary Christian Music (or CCM) embraces a wide variety of musical styles. What they have in common is that they are contemporary, in some way Christian, and music. CCM includes the work of Ralph Carmichael and the Gaithers (the first recently deceased and the others elderly). It includes both the gentlest of folk music and the hardest of heavy metal and rap. It includes praise songs, scripture songs, country music, white gospel and black gospel, jazz and blues, reggae and ska, celtic music, bluegrass, and much more. What draws the most attention—and the most concern—is Christian rock of various sorts. The sales are immense, and so is the influence. Some people find this deeply threatening.

In this essay I will present a scriptural basis for making decisions about music. I will then share a number of suggestions about how Christians might best use music, whether as entertainment, as worship, or as a combination of the two, and whether personally, in groups, or in the church setting. My approach is to allow freedom where there is no harm, especially when this builds faith. I will urge tolerance of all differences that are not sinful and recognition that differences in taste or practice are not necessarily sinful. However, I will also uphold the need for congregational unity and consideration of the “weak brother” (1 Cor 8).

#### **Where I’m Coming From**

What follows will be better understood if I explain the perspective from which I view the issue. I began listening to rock music in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I can still whistle most of the top forty hits of that year, should I hear their titles. By the time I was sixteen I was playing electric guitar in a band, subscribing to *Rolling Stone*, and experimenting with drugs. In college and graduate school I listened to rock for hours every day—whenever I was studying or writing or driving or reading. My mind was filled with the music and the words. I couldn’t get them out of my head. My actions—or at least my dreams—were influenced by these words to some extent.

About the time I got married, when I was 28, I began walking with God, or at least toward him, and I began to realize the music I listened to was not godly and was holding me back. I began pleading with God to free me from it if that was his will. One night I awoke sensing that God had opened the door to freedom, if I were willing to walk through it. I spent the rest of the night looking at each album, looking at the names of the songs and thinking about them, then renouncing them. By morning I had said goodbye to 300 albums.

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I consider my deliverance from this music to be supernatural. I can still recall the songs, but I don't choose to, and they aren't running through my head. It should be clear from this confession that if in this essay I speak favorably about Christian rock music or other forms of CCM, it is not because I like or listen to this music myself.

I don't often listen to music of any sort these days—I prefer silence—but when I do it's usually hymns: choral, *a cappella*, orchestral, folk, or bluegrass. For me, the great old hymns found in our hymnal have a wonderful ability to focus the mind on God and help one say no to temptation.<sup>3</sup> I enjoy classical music of many sorts, though I seldom listen to it. I also enjoy some types of jazz and swing, especially clarinet solos, and bluegrass, though I rarely listen to them. I used to love opera, especially Mozart and Verdi, but when I read the librettos in English and discovered their focus on sin, I stopped listening, though I still enjoy the overtures.

I took an instant dislike to praise songs when I first heard them. The primary reason was that they were replacing the hymns I loved—so rich and meaningful—with simplistic melodies, words, and emotions. The second reason is that I'd heard praise songs sung well, so they powerfully moved the audience, but never in my own denomination. However, I've come to understand that praise songs really are what they claim to be: they do praise God, and well. Though I can't yet bring myself to sing them in church, I no longer fight them, and I enjoy accompanying with my guitar those who sing them. Who knows, someday I may burst into song.

Because I know what it's like to be virtually addicted to rock 'n' roll music and have its incitements to sin running through my head, for many years I was very much opposed to CCM. Two insights have turned my thinking around. A few years ago I was invited to speak at a youth conference at the University of North Carolina. Sunday morning, driving home to Pennsylvania, I grew weary of sermon tapes and turned on the radio, looking for some classical music. I was approaching Lynchburg, Virginia, Jerry Falwell country, and just about the only thing on the radio other than rock music was various sorts of contemporary Christian music. I had virtually no knowledge of this music, though I had scoffed at it for years.

I found myself listening to a song, and before long several hours had passed, and God was revealing to me a lesson as important (to me) as Peter's lesson about not calling people unclean in Acts 10–11. I realized that while I didn't like this rather sappy music, vaguely country-western, it was sung from

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<sup>3</sup> When thoughts I'd rather avoid enter my head, I often begin whistling a hymn, because that seems to drive out temptation. Because I associate the music with the words, merely humming the melody keeps me close to God. I've also found that the lyrics are often stirring and beautiful. My three-tape collection of 155 hymn lyrics read as poetry is available from American Cassette Ministry ([www.americancassette.org](http://www.americancassette.org) or 1-800-233-4450). Wonderful though the melodies may be, they often obscure the beauty of the verse.

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the heart. These were songs about struggle and victory, about searching and finding, about turning to God for help over the little things. These weren't hymns. They weren't appropriate for church. But they were Christian songs, whether I liked them or not. I saw, as if on a screen, housewives doing their chores, struggling to keep their faces turned to God, struggling to believe, struggling to put meals on the table and keep clothes on the kids. I sensed their radios on, filling their lives with songs I scorned, yet songs that touched them and strengthened their faith. May God rebuke those who disparage music that draws people to God, however it may sound. It's odd how quick we are to call sinful what we simply don't like.

Insight number two. The next summer my sons Paul and Peter returned from a week at junior camp excited about the camp theme song—a song from a Christian rock CD. Paul sang it to us in the car. I was astonished that such music was heard at camp. Why would counselors introduce my children to music from which I'd carefully shielded them, not wanting them to have the trouble with rock music I had had? My first thought was to say, "I do not want you to sing that song again." But I kept my mouth shut, not wanting to have an argument on the way home. I could tell them later.

That night Paul, then eleven, came to my bedroom. "Dad," he said, "you know that song we learned at camp? The words really got me thinking, and I decided to recommit myself to God."

I was thrilled, of course, but I could hardly breathe. In my heart I was saying, "Oh, God, I nearly bawled him out for liking a song that brought him to you. Thank you so much for shutting my mouth!" Now thirteen, Paul dreams of becoming a youth pastor. We've made a deal: he can listen to any music he likes, so long as it's Christian. He listens to Christian rap and Christian punk, and we have wonderful, open-hearted conversations about the relative quality of the bands he likes and the effect of their lyrics, and about God and the Bible.

There is nothing I want more than for my children to share eternal life with me. May God rebuke those who turn away these little ones from God and his church because they don't realize God can be praised in any language and with any music. To deny this is to deny the clear evidence of conversions and transformed lives.<sup>4</sup> May our teaching be based on evidence, not on our prejudice.

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<sup>4</sup> Sam Leonor, bass player and vocalist for the band Big Face Grace, writes, "I am a witness to the fact that listeners (and players) of Christian Music have and are being humbled by the majesty of God, and they have been and continue to be convicted of His moral claims upon their lives" (personal e-mail, 11 February 2002). Like three other members of his band, Leonor has an M.Div degree. He is the campus chaplain at La Sierra University. I met him at the youth conference mentioned above. I was at first prejudiced against Leonor, as at the time I was very much against any type of rock music. However, I liked what he said to the students at the conference, and we ended up talking together for a couple hours. I was impressed by his dedication to doing God's will and his commitment to Bible teaching. The shock of meeting a theologically conservative rock star (I'm exaggerating) prepared me, I think, for the insights I received the next day as I drove home listening to CCM on the radio.

### The Scriptural Basis

There are those who try to base their principles of music on biblical references to musical instruments and musical performance, most of them in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> This approach is less useful than they think. First, there is no reason to think we should restrict ourselves to instruments mentioned there. The ones mentioned are the ones they had to work with, and we simply have more now than they did then. Some try to suggest that certain instruments—especially rhythm instruments—are not mentioned in connection with Israel’s worship because they were associated with pagan worship or secular entertainment. There is no biblical evidence for this at all, unless one chooses to twist and misread the texts. There is no reason why a piano or organ should be considered more acceptable, from a biblical viewpoint, than an electric guitar or bass (though I will provide certain cautions later in this essay).

Second, the Israelite temple services give us little useful guidance on music, because there is only a slight relation between the temple services and our church services. There were worship services at the temple, but that was not its primary purpose. The Israelite tabernacle—and later Solomon’s temple—was where God dwelt among his people. He was in some way physically present in the most holy place, and because his holiness would destroy what was sinful, he had to be isolated from his people. This is what the tabernacle was for. It was an isolation chamber. Since God was there, that was where people came to sacrifice and worship. However, the worship service as we know it did not exist. There were sacrifices on the Sabbath, and in Solomon’s temple there was a choir that sang psalms. But there was no church building in which people met to worship, usually no sermon, no children’s story, no congregational singing. (Ezra 10:9 records the people’s distress at having to sit in the rain outside the temple while Ezra called them to repentance. Ezra agreed to postpone his sermon.) People were not required to come to the temple on the Sabbath. They were not even required to worship on the Sabbath or say certain prayers, so far as we know from the biblical text. They rested on the Sabbath in their own homes. I suspect the people devoted part of their time to prayer and thanksgiving, but it seems that few went to the temple to do that.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See my “*The Christian & Rock Music: A Review-Essay*,” for more on why this is not a useful approach.

<sup>6</sup> In the fourth commandment (Exod 20:8–11) God commands that the Sabbath be kept “holy,” but I think the Hebrew word *qodeš* should in this context be translated “separate” rather than “holy.” God does not command worship in this commandment, but a ceasing from work (the word Sabbath means “ceasing”). The opposite of work is not holiness, but not-working or separation from work, so “separate” seems more appropriate. The fourth commandment gives as a reason for this ceasing God resting from his work on the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:3) and blessing the day, not on his declaring it a day on which he is to be worshiped. The Sabbath is, thus, a blessed and God-mandated day of rest from week-day labor. It is also a wonderful time for God’s people to meet to praise him, but that is not the primary purpose of the day. This is supported by the fact that in the Torah God

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Today both *our bodies* and the believers *as a body* are the temple of God's Spirit (1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). Biblically, there is no other temple on earth for God's people today. Jesus says, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt 18:20). This is a staggering thought. It means the center of holiness is inside us, so we must do our best to keep ourselves holy and separate from things that defile us, not only on the Sabbath, but at all times, whether working or resting. We must try to be holy in thought, word, and deed. We must approach fellow believers reverently, because God is present inside them. It also means the church building has no special holiness of itself and need receive no special reverence. God is less present in an empty church than in two believers praising God together while working in a sewer. Thus, it is paradoxical to ask believers to leave "the sanctuary" if they want to chat, because when they leave the room they take the sanctuary with them.<sup>7</sup>

We have no biblical warrant for treating our place of meeting like the tabernacle was treated. This means the restrictions on the tabernacle may apply to us personally in some ways, but usually in a metaphorical way. (Thus we are counseled to offer ourselves as "living sacrifices" [Rom 12:1], even though we are sinful and physically blemished.) It also means, however, that they do not apply to the church building. This is fortunate. Those who turn to the Hebrew temple as a model for modern worship, using that to call for the highest level of music and the restriction of instruments, go only part way, when logically they should go the whole way (Gal 5:12). They should dispose of the organ and piano and use only cymbals, lyres, trumpets, and harps (2 Chron 5:12; 29:25–26). There should be no singing of hymns, but only psalms, and no congregational singing, but only singing by a choir—men only—wearing white linen dresses. Of course, the entire choir would also have to be from the tribe of Levi, and they would stand outside while singing, barefoot, even in winter. Indeed, if we feel ourselves bound to the musical methods of the temple, we ought also to return to offering sacrifices (Rom 2:17–26 is an especially appropriate warning for those who counsel this return to temple music).

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never commands his people to gather together to worship on the Sabbath at the tabernacle in the generations to come, whereas he does command them to come to the tabernacle to celebrate several feasts.<sup>7</sup>

(This is not to say that when we meet in a place of worship we should do things that distract from our own worship of God or others' worship or threaten the unity of spirit God desires in his people when they worship him.) We may call the room where the church meets "the sanctuary," but that is merely our own coinage. God does not call it that in the Bible or hallow it. I do not mean to suggest that believers should not meet together. We are urged to do that (Heb 10:25), and the Sabbath is an excellent time to do it. If we choose to meet in what we call a church, in a building we have dedicated to God (even though he hasn't asked us to), and if we choose to have the order of service we have, that is fine, but that order of service is not ordained by God, and many a church service takes place where the "worship" is tepid or cooler. There is no virtue in gathering together to play dead.

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So is there, then, anything in the Bible that can guide us as we consider what music might be appropriate for God's people? There is. There are three texts that give us principles we can use. One is Phil 4:8:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

This text is more ambiguous than it seems at first. Does Paul counsel us to think only about things that meet all of these criteria? Is everything true lovely? Is everything lovely pure? How much praise is "any praise," and who is doing the praising? (Does "damning with faint praise" meet the requirement for "any praise"?) How can we do this consistently while also doing our daily work? Does everything in the Bible meet these criteria? I think the answers are suggested in v. 9: "And the God of peace will be with you." Paul is not making an explicit command here, but counseling us that if we think on these things, we will sense God's peace in us, and this will "guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). That is to say, thinking on these things helps us maintain our relationship with God, keeps us faithful. Likewise, thinking about what is dishonest, unjust, impure, ugly—thinking about what is sinful—draws us away from God. If we apply this principle to song lyrics, we can easily determine whether we should listen to them or sing them. If we want to be more like God, if we want to experience God's blessings, we should limit our exposure to things that don't draw us closer to him. If you don't want to do that, what follows won't make much sense to you.

The second text that provides a useful principle is Col 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

This is not specifically referring to a church service, but in v. 15 Paul refers to the Colossians as "members of one body," which suggests a corporate application. Paul counsels the Colossians to fill themselves with the words of Christ (so seldom heard in churches today). He asks them to use "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (the distinction between these three is still debated) for three purposes: to teach each other, to admonish each other, and to sing to the Lord. Furthermore, he asks that singing to the Lord be done "with grace in your hearts." I take this to refer to a sense of God's presence, perhaps an upwelling of love and gratefulness leading to emotional expression in song.

The third principle I find in the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20–21:

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

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Jesus was particularly concerned for the unity of his people. The divisions within Christendom make worldwide unity difficult, but even in the local congregation there are often divisions. When we allow them to continue, we keep Christ's prayer from being answered as he wished. Whatever music we ourselves prefer, we must keep in mind the unity of God's people. Maintaining that unity may call for compromise, for accepting what we ourselves don't much like, for not insisting on our own musical preferences if some are offended by them.

Whatever combination of words and music meets these criteria is fine for praising God, whether or not I like it. That doesn't mean it's necessarily appropriate in the church building during the worship service, where there is a need for unity and there may be many people who don't like it, but it's appropriate for those who like it, whether they be alone or in a group with similar tastes. Also, if any combination of words and music that meets these criteria proves itself able to touch the hearts of unbelievers, it can serve an evangelistic purpose, even though it might not be appropriate in an actual evangelistic campaign with a wide range of people attending.

#### **Suggestions**

The following suggestions are based on my belief that the most important thing in the world is establishing and maintaining a close, loving, and obedient relationship with God, what I call radical discipleship. This applies both on the personal level and in the church body. What neither strengthens nor weakens that relationship may be tolerated within measure, but is suspect. Whatever weakens that relationship is dangerous and to be avoided. Whatever strengthens that relationship is praiseworthy, even if I myself don't happen to like it. These suggestions are for those who agree with this belief. Those who don't believe a relationship with God is important won't be convinced.

I also believe that this relationship with God is not a figure of speech. Instead, its presence is felt, sensed. When we find the "fruits of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22) present in our lives, that is evidence of the relationship. True worship, whether individual or corporate, is different from the "going through the motions" so common in churches today. It fills us with joy, with love, with peace. It makes us feel kinship with other believers. Sometimes this may remind us of Wordsworth's nun, "breathless with adoration." At other times it may lead to ecstatic praise, choruses of amens. Not everyone feels it all the time or with a similar intensity, but when we feel it we feel God's presence. Whether silent or noisy, a church service without this sense of God's presence may be a church service without true worship. If we truly understand what God has done for us, how can we remain dry-eyed? My suggestions aim at producing and maintaining the sense of God's presence in the believer and the worship service.

**Music for Personal Enjoyment**

**1. Apart from words, music is not of itself morally right or wrong, good or bad. However, music can affect the mind and the body in a variety of ways, and some of these effects can make it more difficult to walk with God.**

Most music, if played loudly enough to hear it properly, has a physiological effect on people, and this physiological effect can in turn cause a psychological effect. Some music speeds up the heart rate and makes one want to march, tap one's feet, wave one's hand as if conducting, beat out a rhythm on the nearest available object, or even dance. This music may help one do repetitive tasks quickly. It can also make one feel happy. Other music calms the heart and stills the mind. This music may help one relax after a difficult day or accomplish a complex task one isn't eager to do, like writing a college paper or balancing the checkbook. An increased heart rate is seldom a health problem, especially for young people.

Almost any style of music can be used to convey a Christian message.<sup>8</sup> There are some styles, however, where even without words the music is dark and menacing. Listeners feel increasingly depressed and desperate. I would suggest that Christians shouldn't listen to this, because these feelings are at odds with the good news of salvation.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, musicians shouldn't try to connect such music with a Christian message. (Oddly, while this music is generally found in a tiny segment of rock music, there are also styles of "serious music" that have this effect. Some argue that this music is merely reflecting the anxiety of our times. This may well be, but Christians don't need that anxiety in their lives.)

We don't know what music David played for Saul when Saul was having mental problems, but people have long known that music can change moods and make people feel better. Today researchers know that vigorous singing or similar physical participation in music can release naturally occurring chemicals in the brain that ease pain or lead to a feeling of well-being. Such feelings are not in themselves spiritual, but when they accompany the spiritual they intensify it and encourage unity, joy, and care for others.

**2. Christians should be very cautious about "secular music." A large percentage of the lyrics of such songs, no matter what the style, don't meet the standards outlined in Phil 4:8. It's not easy for Christians to keep their minds fixed on heavenly things. Any Christian music helps those who like it, but the lyrics of "secular music" generally don't.**

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<sup>8</sup> I used to doubt that blues music—especially the Chicago blues style—could be used with Christian lyrics, but then I heard the Will Derryberry Band and realized it could be done.

<sup>9</sup> There are rare exceptions—such as the "Dies Irae" section of Verdi's *Requiem*, where the music is dark and violent yet acceptable for Christians—in this case because it is portraying the wrath of God against sin on the day of judgment.



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This caution applies to the lyrics of any kind of “secular music.” Broadway showtunes, operatic arias, Celtic ballads, classical *lieder*, and country western songs are as likely to be problematic as rock music. If we want to walk with God as consistently and fruitfully as possible, we should simply not listen to music with lyrics that make us consider doing things Christians shouldn’t do. This needn’t be seen as a great sacrifice. The good effects outweigh what we give up. Also, just as for those who like meat but want to be vegetarians there are meat substitutes, there are Christian substitutes for all of these types of music. (Like meat substitutes, they may be less tasty than the real thing, but they are much better for you.)

I’ve often heard young people say, “I don’t listen to the lyrics, so they don’t harm me. I just like the music.” If that’s the case, however, why, when pressed, do they turn out to know the lyrics to great numbers of songs on the radio? The problem with these lyrics isn’t really that, say, listening to someone croon about the pleasures of illicit sex makes one want to go and do likewise (though it might). Listening to a song about killing cops doesn’t make most people want to kill cops. However, illicit sex and killing cops are not pure, virtuous, or praiseworthy. Songs about these acts will thus interfere with our experience of purity, virtue, and praiseworthiness, because they get into our minds and are difficult to get out.

Some lyrics don’t seem “all that bad.” For example, many pop songs are about love. What’s wrong with love? What’s wrong with a song where a boy sings “I’ll love you forever” to his girlfriend? Songs like this encourage romantic notions at tender ages and teach unrealistic ideas about love. If one hears them too often, one gets the idea that this kind of romance is a bigger part of life than it really is. Romance, like dessert, is good, but best in moderation. (Can listening to a great deal of CCM lead people to think that *God* should be a major part of their lives? Yes, of course! That’s part of its purpose!) Hearing these songs now and then in the shopping mall is not a major problem, but because they may not be true and virtuous, they get in the way of our walk with God. It really isn’t all that easy to maintain a walk with God day after day. Anything that can help is worth a try. Anything that doesn’t help should be reconsidered.

There are some lyrics that deal with human things rather than godly things, but are not impure. For example, some songs are about nature. Others are protests against oppression, reminding us of things that are unpleasant but true.<sup>10</sup> Some songs are comic, and others tell stories. This music does little harm in moderation, apart from sometimes taking time that could be devoted to better

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<sup>10</sup> In the years before Bob Dylan and I gave our lives to God, his album *Street Legal* (1978, a year before his first Christian album), which I listened to over and over, kept raising a longing for God in my life. Whether or not he knew it at the time, his songs were crying out for salvation (“Is there anybody listening, Señor?” “Will you tell me what the answer is, Señor?”), and they had the same effect on me. Last summer I listened to them again, after not hearing them for years, and I was moved to tears as I sensed the Holy Spirit chasing Dylan like Francis Thompson’s Hound of Heaven.

things. Of course, it won't do to listen for these songs on the radio, because one doesn't know when they will come on.

**3. Music videos and MTV are nearly always more problematic for the Christian than the songs alone. They demand more attention than the songs alone, they glorify the performers beyond their musicianship, they often introduce themes of sex or violence not present in the songs themselves, and because they are often lip-synched, they seem insincere. The primary exception is some videos of concerts. Even Christian music videos move the focus from the song to the performer, degrading the spiritual message.**

If the purpose of CCM is to turn the hearts of listeners to God, as claimed, we do well to notice that Christian music videos turn the attention to the performer. There is a natural interest in seeing what performers look like, how they play. This is part of why people go to concerts rather than merely listening to CDs—no matter what the style of music. This in itself isn't a problem, because the concert doesn't last long. (The performers share the limelight with God for an hour, then retreat into the background.) Similarly, watching a video of a concert isn't much of a problem. When a song is turned into an MTV style music video, however, a script writer and director take over—often not themselves Christians—and they may change a song's focus as they use their unsanctified imaginations to make a song more entertaining. This doesn't mean young people shouldn't watch Christian music videos, but that they should be cautious and not make them part of their daily diet.

However, Christians would do well to not watch non-Christian music videos at all. Such a large proportion of the videos on MTV are impure in some way that one might as well be watching the "hot" scenes from R rated movies.<sup>11</sup> The popularity of MTV with many young people suggests that watching music videos can become almost compulsive behavior. Experience and reason quickly reveal that it is very difficult to maintain one's focus on God while watching these videos.<sup>12</sup> Many music videos cost as much to make as advertisements and

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<sup>11</sup> A few weeks ago I walked into Best Buy to purchase an ink cartridge for my printer and was accosted by a twenty foot wide bank of television screens hooked up to work as one huge screen. On the screens was a music video of pop singer Britney Spears. Her nearly naked torso could be seen from across the store. As she lip-synched her song she caressed her flesh and offered each body part to the camera as to a lover. When I was close enough to hear the words, I was surprised to find that she was singing a relatively inoffensive love song. The video portion of the performance said something quite different from the lyrics, however. An hour spent watching music videos on MTV will reveal many similar examples.

<sup>12</sup> Let's be fair. It's also hard to maintain one's focus on God while watching the evening news, or sports, or just about any television program. There is very little in the news that is pure, lovely, or indeed entirely true—television news is a wallow in filth garbed in the supposedly hallowed robes of relevance and importance, interspersed with frequent appeals to sensual gratification and worship of worldliness (called advertising). By contrast, some Christian television can help us

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much more, minute for minute, than most movies. The reason is that video directors try to make them as compelling as possible, hoping to keep viewers watching. Unfortunately, sex and violence draw our attention, so they are emphasized in videos.

**4. Each style of music has its own criteria for excellence of composition and performance. We can't fairly judge one style by the criteria for another style. Other things being equal, excellence is preferable to mediocrity, because excellence comes closer to the creative perfection of God.**

We don't complain that the leopard is inadequate because it doesn't have stripes like a tiger. We don't think less of the chicken because it doesn't bark like a dog. Similarly, we need to judge Christian music, whatever its style, according to the conventions of that style. Some university-trained professional musicians believe the only appropriate music for worship is "serious music," and the highly trained operatic voice is most suitable for the gospel (despite the fact that it is sometimes difficult to understand the words).<sup>13</sup> This is simply not true.

As I write, the Winter Olympic games at Salt Lake City have just ended. What if the judges in the figure skating competitions marked skaters down because of insufficient speed? What if the judges in the speed skating competitions marked down speed skaters because they didn't leap into the air and spin? Yet within each competition excellence can be judged (though, as with music, there is a necessary subjectiveness to this judging).

Similarly, we can easily determine whether classical music is well-performed, but if we judge it according to the conventions of bluegrass music, the best of it will fall far short. That doesn't mean bluegrass music is better than classical music. It simply means it's a different style. If we judge Christian rock according to whether it is as melodically and harmonically complex as some classical music, it will of course fall short, but that isn't what it intends to do, nor are the criteria of classical music divinely revealed. There is a substantial joy to be gained from what is melodically and harmonically simple, as well as from what is complex. Many of us who play instruments can only play what is simple, and if only what is complex is praiseworthy, then we won't be able to play. Yet even what is simple can praise God.

In singing as well, the criteria for excellence vary with the style. In country-western vocals a southern accent is expected, and a little sob or yodel in the voice is appreciated. In bluegrass a bit more twang in the voice is appropriate.

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keep our eyes on God, much as CCM does—though some is sensationalistic or theologically suspect, and the frequent request for donations is appalling (see Acts 8:18–24).

<sup>13</sup> For example, Calvin M. Johansson's chapters in *The Christian & Rock Music*. See my review for a refutation of his elitist ideas about music and worship.

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White blues singers are expected to sing with black accents.<sup>14</sup> In opera, the voice is an instrument of beauty rather than communication. In the Broadway musical, on the other hand, singers are supposed to have interesting voices, rather than beautiful voices. Rhythm and blues singers these days have developed their own ways of replacing held notes with little scales. Black gospel uses some similar techniques in singing, but white gospel needs a plainer voice, preferably with some sort of Appalachian accent. Jazz singers have to croon with beautiful voices, but their sense of rhythm is far different from that of opera singers. An operatic voice may at its best be the acme of human vocal achievement, but it sounds ludicrous, wildly inappropriate, with rock music. It also sounds out of place with praise songs.

Each of these vocal types can be very pleasant to listen to. Each can appropriately communicate the Christian message. We can't fairly denigrate one appropriate style of singing because it isn't another appropriate style of singing. However, within a single style of music, we can fairly judge the relative merits of voices. Some have a more pleasing sound, greater range, more accurate intonation. We can fairly prefer excellence to mediocrity, and we can train performers. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that there are many singers whose voices are nothing special, yet have a gift for conveying spiritual things in music.

I'm not saying that it's as difficult to sing folk music as it is to sing opera, or that some country blues tune is equal in compositional complexity and excellence to a Brahms symphony. I am saying that each has its own criteria for quality, even if some styles require more training than others. God can be praised in every style. What's more, the God who loves and heals sinners and prefers the poor in spirit to the proud must certainly take at least as much delight in hearing the screechiest six-year-old violinist who loves him with all her heart as in hearing the pure notes of the professional who receives a check and who only shows up when she's performing (though I'd rather listen to the professional). There is room for *all* creatures of our God and King to praise him.

**5. Spiritual, emotional, and intellectual sincerity and authenticity are valid criteria for judging music and lyrics. Quality of composition and performance in any style of music cannot make up for lack of evident sincerity. In worship, excellence without sincerity borders on blasphemy.**

It's been said, "You've got to suffer if you want to sing the blues,"<sup>15</sup> and this has an application to other styles of music, too. We should, perhaps, be dis-

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<sup>14</sup> If that sounds silly, it is less so than rhythmically-challenged white choirs struggling to sing Negro spirituals.

<sup>15</sup> This is one reason why the Negro spiritual is not usually the best choice for a choir of white college students. They may enjoy the song, but in their mouths it loses the integrity it once had, because the dialect is not their own. Those interested in the background of this type of music should read Thomas Wentworth Higginson's groundbreaking article "Negro Spirituals," published in the

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turbed to hear people sing “Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It” when they haven’t been born again and don’t love to proclaim their relationship with God. Jesus was more pleased by the widow who gave her last two mites than with the trumpeted charity of the rich. I think he would be more pleased by the creaky-voiced grandmother who breaks down in tears while singing “Jesus Paid it All” than by the opera singer who can sing “Agnus Dei” in a piercingly beautiful voice but has never surrendered herself to the Lamb of God.

Even those who walk with God can’t sing all songs with sincerity. A song about being lifted up from the gutter is not convincing from the mouth of someone who has never turned away from God. Canned music is inherently lacking in sincerity, so singing to a taped accompaniment during the worship service is not generally the best way to bring people to God (I’ve heard it called “sacred karaoke”). Some Christian songs strike me as less heartfelt than others. Some seem less than authentic and more like attempts to make money or tug on emotional heartstrings (sentimentalism). As a child of the late 60s and early 70s, back when authenticity and sincerity were considered important virtues, I have a special respect for performers who write their own songs, even if their voices and playing are less than superb. I don’t mean to say that performers should write their own songs for worship, but I do think believability should be on the list of criteria when we judge a performance.

**6. Some Christian lyrics contain theological errors. This is not a large problem for the spiritually mature, but it can confuse those who are not biblically literate. Thus, we should consider whether the pleasure we gain from a song outweighs the potential harm of biblically inaccurate lyrics.**

Few Christian songwriters are theologians. Most of them reflect what they’ve read, what music they’ve heard, and what their pastors say. Thus, it’s not surprising that some songs have lyrics that reveal a misunderstanding of the Bible. This is perhaps least likely with praise songs drawn straight from the Bible and with the great 18<sup>th</sup> century hymns written by poets who were theologically sophisticated.<sup>16</sup> It is more of a problem with Negro spirituals and black and white southern gospel. I’m very fond of many of these songs, and I don’t mean that we shouldn’t use them, especially since they can be very effective at bringing unity to a group of believers. I am saying simply that some really have very little scriptural support, and we might do better to prefer the sounder ones.

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” is a delightful song, fun to sing if it swings a little, but those who don’t realize how it draws on the Elijah story and uses symbols to represent actual events might come to expect Christ to carry them away in a chariot. I’ve long been puzzled by the popular white gospel song “Great

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June 1867 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, but available on-line at several sites, such as <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TWH/Higg.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Though indeed these hymns are often rewritten or have problematic verses left out.

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Speckled Bird.” Guy Smith writes, in the final stanza, “When Christ cometh descending from heaven / With the clouds as He writes in His Word / I’ll be joyfully carried to meet Him / On the wings of the great speckled bird.” I’ve been told that Smith somehow saw the church as a great speckled bird, for some reason, but the connection puzzles me. “I’ll Fly Away” is another gospel tune that is less than biblically accurate. I’ve heard “Ave Maria” sung in Protestant worship services several times, but while I love the melody, I disagree with the sentiment expressed.

**Music for Group Worship**

**7. Music is not of itself sacred or secular, whatever its style. Classical and sacred are not synonymous. Quality of composition or performance does not make music without words suitable for the worship service. When instrumental music calls to mind sacred lyrics, it can lead to worship, though generally less efficiently than music with words. At best, from a spiritual viewpoint, music without words in the worship service provides a background for meditation. However, many listeners don’t make use of this opportunity.**

Some people assume that any classical music is appropriate in the worship service because it has no words and its beauty and excellence praise God. However, while such music may be so beautiful that it makes us thank God, we are more likely to simply enjoy it because it is beautiful, with no conscious thought of God. It may be edifying to the intellect and the emotions, but it is not spiritually edifying. At best, it provides a pleasant background to the Spirit’s working on the heart during meditation, should we choose to meditate. More often it holds our attention and keeps us from such meditation.

There are times when instrumental music might provide a background for whatever else is going on, such as before the worship service begins or after it ends. However, if it calls to mind spiritual lyrics familiar to most people in the audience, it will have more spiritual impact. Thus, playing hymns on the organ may do more to bring the congregation to God than playing a Bach fugue, even though the fugue was dedicated to God’s glory and exhibits a greater technical excellence.

Our primary concern as we consider what music to use in the worship service should be its effect on the worshipers. Does it bring them to a unity of spirit? Does it make them more receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit? Does it help convince them of their need of a savior, remind them there’s power in the blood, encourage them to be like Jesus, inspire them to praise God with their whole heart? Meditative organ music may prepare some people to quietly receive the Holy Spirit, but it does little to make a group of people feel “of one accord,” and there are more effective ways of ushering in the Spirit, such as singing hymns with heartfelt sincerity.

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Outside the worship service, instrumental music is less of a problem. Listening to classical music is a spiritually neutral occupation, in general, though it has physiological and psychological effects that have a bearing on our spiritual focus. Some “serious music” is disturbing, but most isn’t. It can make a pleasant background for daily life. However, songs with Christian lyrics, performed in a style we appreciate, do much more to keep us close to God, whatever their level of excellence.

**8. Any style of music can entertain. Entertainment is not in itself wrong, in its place, but the worship service is not the place for entertainment, because the more we are being entertained, the less we are worshipping. Thus, the worship service will be more spiritually profitable if we avoid music that entertains. “Special music” in the worship service can sometimes provide an opportunity for meditation or allow God to speak to the listener, but primarily, I believe, it entertains the congregation, despite the performers’ desire to give glory to God.**

Some condemn certain kinds of CCM because they are entertaining, but any time performers perform and people watch rather than participating, the watchers are being entertained, even when that music is “serious.” The performer may be praising God, and some of those listening may be praising God as a result of the performance, but the fact remains that the primary purpose of “special music” is providing a special treat for the listeners, which is to say, entertainment. Watching someone else worship is not in itself worship.<sup>17</sup>

In 1 Cor 14:26, Paul tells us something about how worship sometimes occurred in New Testament times. He writes, “What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” This verse is less clear than it seems, but I take it to mean that in Corinth (a church with every problem in the book, though also with good qualities), everyone liked to have a part in the worship service. I suspect that ideally they would take turns rising and sharing. It was a sort of spiri-

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, it’s possible to worship while watching or listening. It’s simply not the *most effective* way of achieving unity in worship. I recently took my sons, ages eleven and thirteen, to their first CCM concert, one they very much wanted to see: Jennifer Knapp and her band and Jars of Clay. These are among the most talented CCM performers. In concert, however, the music was deafening, the sound systems rather crude, and I could rarely understand a word the vocalists sang, though my sons were enthralled. I was impressed by the clean-cut modesty of the some five thousand young people in attendance, and the lack of smoke, alcohol, and drugs (very much present at concerts in my rock ‘n’ roll days). What most impressed me, however, was looking around at those sitting or standing near me. As the music roared about us, hundreds of these teenagers and college students had their eyes closed and their faces and hands lifted up to God. They knew every word, and they were singing along with the bands, but where the bands were entertaining, these young people were worshipping. Indeed, I might even say they were completely immersed in worship and communion with God. Frankly, I was jealous. If I saw more of that during special music or organ preludes when the church gathers to worship, my comments would be less pejorative.

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tual amateur hour. Paul doesn't condemn this, and it shouldn't be seen as entertainment, though it could degenerate into prideful performance if not controlled. I see it more as a sort of testimony service, with everyone edified by hearing what God was doing in the lives of their brothers and sisters. Paul then provides the principle on which to rate these things: "Let all things be done for building up." I think that means that we should evaluate everything in our worship service by whether or not it helps people draw closer to God and stay closer to God.

I place "special music" in quotes because often it's not very special, and if it is scheduled every week it's doubly not special. I think I would feel better about it if the singer sang from the congregation rather than from the platform, so there would be less emphasis on the performer. The hand-held microphones and seemingly calculated poses and gestures I often see during the worship service seem more like entertainment than worship.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps performers would do well to ask themselves, "Is this my individual worship, regardless of anyone else who may be listening? Am I trying to lift the other worshipers to God by sharing with them a song that will edify them? or am I really trying to please them, entertain them, or elicit their praise?"<sup>19</sup>

When one listens to music in the car or the home, entertainment is not out of place, but there are various types of entertainment. Being entertained by mu-

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<sup>18</sup> Some will ask, at this point, "What about applause during the worship service?" I know the argument that we aren't applauding the performer, but the message, or God, but the fact is that we don't applaud God after we sing a congregational hymn well. Thus, whatever we may pretend, applause after "special music" is nearly always performer focused, and so questionable. I don't get applause after I preach a terrific sermon, so why should we applaud a musician during the worship service? In actuality, we applaud during the worship service because we are used to applauding at secular performances, but in so doing we make it clear that "special music" is more entertainment than worship. I have no problem with applauding a Christian entertainer performing at a concert, even if that concert is in the room where the church meets to worship, because a Christian concert may praise God and may lead people to him, but it is not communal worship. Concerts often bring people into unity, but their purpose is not congregational unity as an essential element of corporate worship. However, I think applause during the worship service is a sign that we need to rethink whether worship should entertain us or be something we do together. (Similarly, I cringe at the trend these days for pastors to say, "Let's give God a big hand of applause." If God has done some mighty act, we'd do much better to spontaneously begin singing the Doxology.) Experience shows us that God doesn't strike us dead or send fire from heaven to destroy us if we applaud during the worship service. If I were a pastor, I don't think eliminating such applause would be high on my agenda, because the church will not begin worshipping "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) merely because it no longer applauds performers. This would be about as effective as a plastic surgeon bestowing youth and beauty by doing a nose job on an eighty year old person who weighs four hundred pounds. The Body of Christ needs a much more substantial makeover before true worship will happen every time it meets.

<sup>19</sup> I recall a few years ago hearing one of my students tell about singing in church the previous week. Her singing rival had walked into the service wearing a big white hat in the midst of my student's performance (her choice of word). "I know she was just trying to draw the attention away from me," my student said. Her moment in the spotlight was ruined. But standing in the spotlight is not the purpose of worship.



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sic in private even as one is lifted to God by it is quite acceptable. As I've explained above, music videos have so much entertainment that the edification can be missed, but this problem needn't happen with music one hears. Some time with God is better than other time with God, but any time with God is better than no time with God.

**9. Everything in the worship service should encourage an intense unity of the believers, a unity of thought, feeling, and worship, preparing believers to receive God's word to them. Any element of the service that lowers congregational fervor or detracts from congregational unity should be changed or deleted.<sup>20</sup> Silence should not be equated with true reverence or worship (though true worship is sometimes silent, of course).**

I admit that this is an unusual position. However, what most concerned Jesus as he prayed in John 17 was the unity of the believers. Three times Jesus commanded, "Love one another" (John 13:34; 15:12, 17). I assume he meant it. It seems to me that we praise and worship God best when we do it from a position of loving unity. When we are filled with love for each other, when we come to feel open to each other, concerned about each other, connected to each other, then, I think, we can feel the Holy Spirit descend upon us, whether we be silent or singing, and then true worship begins. I have sat in worship services hundreds of times where I've felt that little worship is going on because there is no connection. I've sat in services in the same rooms that were foretastes of heaven, with God's presence very near.<sup>21</sup>

It's harder to reach this unity in a large church than in a small church, and it's harder to reach it in a nearly empty church than in a full church. The unity

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<sup>20</sup> The ideal worship service is analogous to a nuclear chain reaction. The aim is producing energy to motivate Christian devotion, worship, service, and evangelism, but too much energy at once can lead to a catastrophic explosion or meltdown. In one sort of nuclear reactor, if the control rods are in all the way, the radioactive rods are insulated from each other, and nothing happens, no power is generated. As the control rods are withdrawn, the energy generated increases. Various aspects of the traditional worship service act as control rods, limiting the production of spiritual energy. The best worship leaders know how to pull out or push in the rods to maintain maximum useful spiritual energy while avoiding an explosion into emotional chaos. Some congregations explode every week, with members falling to the floor, shouting, or leaping around the room laughing. This is problematic. Other congregations are so nervous about the energy that they produce little or none. This is a waste of time and effort. However, as in a nuclear power station, the purpose of God's people meeting together in worship should be power generation. True worship results in power generation. When radioactive rods are exposed to each other, they work as one, and the resulting energy is exponential. Similarly, when God's people become one as they worship, they transcend the world and enter into God's presence.

<sup>21</sup> In my own life, I experience this most often at campmeeting. The evening meetings are often held in the same room where I worship every week, but the people are different. Those who come to spend a whole week at campmeeting are eager to receive a blessing, they are confident that it will happen, and it does. (What a treat to speak to groups like this.) Too often, those who sit there once a week are there because it's the right or required thing to do. This isn't really worship.

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can sometimes be faked if people sing loud enough, but there is a true unity that transcends volume. Unity is very difficult to achieve when a congregation sits in pews looking at the back of the heads of the people in front of them. Unity can be more easily achieved by merely angling the pews, so it's easier to turn one's head and see and hear the other worshippers. Then one feels less alone. Better yet is people sitting in a circle, and even better people sitting at home in a living room, praising God together.

I believe that everything in the worship service needs to be subordinate to the goal of worshiping God in unity. If the organ prelude or the special music lower the spiritual temperature by drawing people away from each other and focusing on a private experience of God, replace them with congregational hymns. If taking up the offering distracts people from God, collect it earlier or later. If the verse or two that far too often passes for a Scripture reading and the "morning prayer" don't inflame the congregation, then replace them with a season of prayer and Bible quoting and singing that lasts an hour, rippling back and forth across the congregation and gathering the worshippers together as a harvester gathers wheat into sheaves. Then, when the church is *one* as the Father and the Son are *one* (John 17:11), when the church has joyfully and tearfully praised God as one and lifted up each other to God, let God the gracious king respond to his people, guiding them and training them, admonishing and comforting, through the person of his ambassador, the pastor. I long for this. I believe God longs for this.

Some might say I am mistaking manufactured emotions for genuine worship, or that I am trying to conjure up the Spirit. I don't think so. Consider the difference between watching your favorite football game while sitting in the stadium and watching it at home with the television's sound turned down low. You can see better at home, but you entirely miss the physiological and psychological transformation that comes from being with 50,000 people who are loudly of one accord. Imagine what would happen if you invited a dozen people to your home, then made them sit in rows in your living room, with no eye contact. Would that increase the feeling of caring friendship? Recall the difference between visiting with a dear friend face to face and visiting by telephone. I remember, a generation ago, talking on a pay phone in England to my fiancée in California, once a week, for ten minutes (all I could afford). The experience was more frustrating than fulfilling. That's the way what passes for worship often seems to me.<sup>22</sup> It can be both disconcerting and disheartening to look at people in the church service and see profound boredom on their faces.

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<sup>22</sup> Not always, though. Last week the room was packed, the hymns sung with vigor, and we sang one of my favorites, "For All the Saints." I couldn't sing the last verse. I was too choked up and overwhelmed by the ocean-roar of voices describing what I most long for: "From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast, / Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host, / Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: / Alleluia, Alleluia!" That's worship! That's what I'm pleading for!

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Perhaps I simply have a harder time letting go of myself than do most people, but I believe there is a large core of thoughtful people who are deeply unhappy with the worship service, who like me are starving for a sense of holy community, of being “one in the Spirit,” as the song claims, of not only being acquainted with each other but of loving each other. Some are young, and some are older. If to obey is truly better than sacrifice, we should obey our Lord and love one another. Music, used rightly, is one of the most effective ways of reaching this state. If young people were accustomed to reaching it every week by singing the great old hymns, they would be less interested in trying other musical styles that might help them reach it.

I think we should choose music for the worship service according to its effectiveness in moving us to this blessed state. I don’t think instrumental music does this effectively. It can be done with the great old hymns, with praise songs, with black gospel and white gospel, even with the accompaniment of a rock band, so long as the worshipers aren’t offended by the music. A congregation that doesn’t know or like the old hymns I love might want to try something else (though there is much to be said for training people during afternoon hymn sings).<sup>23</sup> A congregation that gags at drums and electric guitars can usually compromise on other types of music. I suspect, though, that if the congregation is really intent on entering into worship, any of these styles of music will work.

**10. Congregational singing is the only music encouraged in the New Testament for group worship.<sup>24</sup> Vigorous congregational singing has potent physiological, mental, and spiritual effects. When vigorous congregational singing continues for some time, it encourages a feeling of unity among the singers. Vigorous congregational singing is our fullest expression of corporate worship.**

The fact that select choirs or instrumental music are not encouraged in the New Testament doesn’t necessarily mean they shouldn’t be used in worship services, but does suggest that they should not be seen as preferable to congregational singing.

When we sing vigorously, we breath deeper and we exercise our chest, back, and abdominal muscles. This floods our cells with extra oxygen, making us feel alert, strong, and energetic. It also releases naturally-occurring sub-

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<sup>23</sup> One of the most memorable evenings of my life was spent in a hymn-sing led by a man who knew how to lead singing (Charles L. Brooks, an editor of the hymnal I use) and a pianist who knew how to accompany hymn-singing (his daughter). The leader took us through dozens of songs, helping us learn how to sing, how to understand the songs, how to enjoy them. As he moved us from anthems of praise to quiet songs of contrition and surrender and back again, as he gauged and controlled our enthusiasm, we coalesced. I began with a migraine headache. I ended feeling wonderful. This was my introduction, fifteen years ago, to the glory of hymns and the physiological effects they can have.

<sup>24</sup> The heavenly choirs of the redeemed seem to include everyone, so they are less choir than congregation. The instruments they play seem to be for accompaniment.

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stances in our brains that relax us, decrease sensitivity to pain, give us a feeling of well-being, encourage a feeling of compassion for others, and lower our inhibitions slightly (making it easier for us to respond to the work of the Holy Spirit on our hearts). Meanwhile, the lyrics of songs build our faith, urge us to witness, and help us praise God.

In most worship services there is very little truly corporate worship, with the entire congregation worshipping out loud at the same time. Too often what is called worship is essentially a spectator sport. We listen to a Scripture reading, a prayer, a call for the offering, perhaps a children's story, "special music," a sermon, a benediction. We can do this without being involved, with our mind focused on other things. When the congregation sings, however, it can sing together.

Most hymns should be sung vigorously, faster and with a stronger emphasis on the beat than is generally done. However, once the congregation is warmed up, the blood flowing, there are slower songs that can have a potent spiritual effect. When hymns are sung more slowly, there is time for people to sing harmony. Singing *a cappella* is especially conducive to singing harmony, and when we sing harmony we have to sing together. (Singing in harmony depends on having a bit of training, but it doesn't require that one sing the notes in the hymnal. There are other good harmonies to be sounded out. The harmonies used in the shape note tradition of *The Sacred Harp* seem discordant to many ears, but they soon come to sound beautiful, and they have spiritual power. I'd love to see congregations taught to sing *a cappella* from *The Sacred Harp*.)

Vigorous singing, however, does not necessarily mean spiritual singing. Sometimes it is simply vigorous, with no sense of the Spirit, and in that case it's primarily good exercise. Some of the most spiritual singing I've experienced has been among people gathered for the Lord's Supper, their hearts prepared, spontaneously singing such slow songs as "Just As I Am," "I Surrender All," and "Amazing Grace."

**11. Tepid congregational singing is false worship, a mockery of worship. It says, in effect, "God hasn't done much for me and doesn't really deserve my worship."**

Tepidness in singing often reflects spiritual lukewarmness, though not necessarily. Whether lukewarm or simply quiet, the physiological, psychological, and spiritual benefits of whole-hearted congregational singing simply aren't experienced by those who don't join in. This means they receive less personal benefit from the worship service. It also means they have less to offer to others and to God. Those who don't sing vigorously with heart and voice miss out on much of the feeling of unity available to those who sing together. There are some, it is true, who are so tone deaf or otherwise impaired that they disrupt the service if they sing. This is a disability, and people with disabilities need special

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care and extra support and understanding. It is sometimes possible to find some other way to include them in the worship experience.<sup>25</sup>

It is up to the leaders of the worship service to encourage vigorous congregational singing. This can be done by explaining how singing affects people. It can also be encouraged by having talented song leaders.<sup>26</sup> I have often heard organists kill congregational unity by playing hymns too slow or even too fast. This decreases unity by frustrating the singers. When organists fail to keep regular time, extending notes longer than the music on the page shows, they can also throw off the congregation. (True, there are some songs where congregations are accustomed to extending certain notes, and in this case not extending them can cause confusion. However, singing songs slowly and extending notes works best with *a cappella* singing.) Some organists like to include “reharmonizations” when they play hymns. This is often very impressive, and it can lead the congregation to greater enthusiasm, but if the reharmonization is too discordant or loses track of the melody, the audience can be confused. If the organist plays too quietly, people sing less vigorously, and this is not desirable. However, if the organist plays too loudly, it can be difficult to hear one’s own voice, and this too is a problem.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> I’ve mentioned that while I can’t yet bring myself to sing praise songs, I enjoy accompanying them on the guitar. Music therapists working in nursing homes have found that people who can’t carry a tune can often carry a rhythm with a tambourine or rhythm sticks, and so be included. On the other hand, I’ve often been dismayed when a congregation begins clapping along with a song—not because the clapping is necessarily inappropriate, but because they generally clap out of time. (Being rhythmically challenged seems to be a specifically Caucasian disability, though not all Caucasians suffer from it. I have never seen found this disability in African-American churches. Actually, people of any background who listen to a lot of popular music often have a better sense of rhythm than many church-goers.) Perhaps the tone deaf could provide a steady monotone drone or hum, rather like the drone of a bagpipe or dulcimer (this suggestion is partially tongue in cheek).

<sup>26</sup> Leading songs effectively in worship requires not only some musical training and enthusiasm, but spiritual maturity and an ability to sense the congregation’s spiritual and emotional needs and choose music and make comments that fill them.

<sup>27</sup> *Christianity Today* columnist Andy Crouch makes some interesting comments on musical volume in article “Amplified Versions” (22 April 2002: 86), though he is dealing with a serious problem with what I call “rock ‘n’ roll church,” rather than with overly-loud organs. He writes, “At its best, amplified music is to sound what a cathedral is to stone; an expression of the timeless longing to build something greater than ourselves, pointing to Someone greater still.

“But I am troubled by many amplified worship services. Next time you’re in one of these settings, watch and listen to the congregation. Get ready for the sound of silence. If the sheer volume of amplified worship is like a sonic cathedral, it can also trump the most forbidding medieval liturgy in its capacity to stun churchgoers into a passive stupor. . . . In the face of amplified worship, most congregations don’t do much more than clap, close their eyes, and sway a little. . . . When you can’t hear yourself singing, why even try.”

I don’t have enough experience with this kind of church service to judge whether the problem is as common as he claims. I suspect many worship leaders would think he is exaggerating. However, I think he is right to the extent that whether the high decibels come from an organ or a band, if they discourage unified participation, limiting participants to those with microphones and instruments and talent, they both squelch true worship and set up what Crouch calls “a new priesthood . . .

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Tepid singing is not only a problem with hymns. I attend a church that has about two hundred teenagers in the pews. We often sing praise songs in church, and we do it because that's supposed to be what the teenagers like. Yet often the teenagers sing them with no more enthusiasm than the older people exhibit (not much). This makes me wonder why we bother. The interesting thing is that I've also heard the same group of teenagers sing the same songs in the same room when there are few adults around. Then they sing with enthusiasm and with pleasure, and with about four times the volume. I'm not sure why this is—it seems almost as if they're trying to punish the adults for making them come to church. What I do know is that teenagers who want livelier worship services should take the first step by singing as if they were alive.

**12. Vigorous congregational singing is always appropriate during the worship service, and many musical styles are acceptable for such worship, so long as those present are not offended. Music that offends some in the congregation is not acceptable, because it destroys the unity of the body of Christ.**

When young people complain about singing “the old hymns,” it is usually, I think, because they associate them with the dismal, joyless singing they are used to singing in church, singing they rightly recognize as a sort of blasphemy. Thus, the pressure for new music in the worship service is primarily the fault of those who didn't sing the old hymns with fervor. The good news is that it's not too late to teach tepid singers to sing vigorously, and it's not too late to show young people that the old hymns, properly sung, are wonderfully fulfilling and too great to be neglected.

Should there be a place in the worship service for music written by people who are still alive? Yes, there should. We should keep in mind, however, that singing contemporary Christian music in worship is not a guarantee of great singing and spiritual unity. Those who sing hymns tepidly are quite capable of doing the same with contemporary songs. I have often seen praise songs slaughtered by pianists or organists who despise the songs and seem to deliberately mangle the tempo or the beat.<sup>28</sup>

The primary determinant of the appropriateness of music for worship (apart from the lyrics) should be whether or not the audience is offended. This calls for compromise—not a compromise of principles, but a willingness to put the needs

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the amplified people [who] do for us what we cannot do for ourselves: make music, offer prayers, approach the unapproachable.” True worship should come from brothers and sisters coming together in unity (Ps 133:1).

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps I am being unfair. There are many highly trained musicians with a classical background who are simply rhythm-deficient when it comes to syncopation. I recently heard a talented classical violinist accompany on the bongos a bell choir playing a lovely Caribbean tune. He hit every note exactly as the sheet music specified, but half a beat slower than the Caribbean style of the song called for.

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of others before our own needs. I do *not* mean by this only that older people need to loosen up and let young people do what they want. I also mean that younger people need to learn to appreciate what the older people enjoy. Young people need to be willing to learn to love the old songs if they expect the older people to learn to like the newer songs. This surrender of self for the good of others is at the heart of the Christian ideal.

If a congregation can achieve unity and praise God with their hearts while a rock band accompanies the singing, then God accepts that worship with joy, I think. If a congregation is simply entertained by the band, however, and doesn't achieve unity or sense a connection with God, then something is wrong, and the worship team needs to reconsider their approach. If some in the congregation can't bear the music, then the music is destroying the unity of the Body of Christ.

The same warnings go for singing praise songs during the worship service. They also apply to singing traditional hymns. Where offence is given, there is a need for either change or education. Perhaps we need a sort of worship rating system based on the movie rating system. Then, people offended by a certain kind of music could avoid services where it is found.

**13. Some Christian songs are appropriate for outside the worship service, yet not for congregational singing. Songs for congregational singing should praise God in some way or teach and admonish the congregation. They should have lyrics that are fitting for many people to sing at once, rather than focusing on individual experience. Their tunes should also be melodic, as this makes them easier to sing and remember.**

A large percentage of CCM has lyrics more suitable for personal than corporate singing. Many musicians write about their search for God, their struggle to maintain their relationship with God, their doubts and fears, their attempts (often failed) to do what Jesus would do. Sometimes they write about relationships with other people, loneliness, longing, love of nature, work, marriage, parenting, with little if any explicit Christian content. These are legitimate topics that deserve exploration by Christians. The lyricists are often dealing with problems faced by many in their audience. When we hear others sing about our problems, we gain strength, even if we aren't always presented with the gospel as an answer to the problems. However, these songs simply don't work very well in corporate worship. The expected pronoun for corporate worship is "we." When "I" occurs too often, it can come to sound self-centered rather than God-centered or Body of Christ-centered.<sup>29</sup> (I don't agree with those who say we

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<sup>29</sup> This is part of why I don't like to sing that favorite hymn, "In the Garden." It's too personal (and, of course, sappy). Even a song like "How Great Thou Art," though not sappy, might be better with less of "I" and "my" and more of "we" and "our."

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shouldn't sing praise songs because the word "I" occurs too often, though we might do well to consider the focus of songs as we choose what to sing.)

For corporate worship we do better to sing songs expressing corporate praise, corporate supplication, corporate needs, corporate faith, corporate hope, whatever the music that accompanies the lyrics.

Praise songs often have simple melodies, but they are singable melodies. Most hymns have singable melodies.<sup>30</sup> One problem I've noticed with transferring rock-type or folk-type CCM to the worship setting is that the melody is sometimes minimal, hovering around one note and seldom going more than a step above or below it. For example, the Jars of Clay song "Flood," though it has a powerful message, works well as a song played and sung by a band, and was a big hit, has a melody with about four notes, and much of the chorus uses only two notes. I've heard groups of people try to sing this, but it simply doesn't work. In the head the song is fine, but there's no melody worth whistling aloud, and it's difficult for a congregation to sing a song that alternates between two notes and doesn't regularly reach a melodic resolution. What sounds good in a band with one singer sounds like a monotone drone sung by a congregation. When choosing music, we need to consider not only message but melody, whatever the musical style may be.

### **Conclusion**

While I myself much prefer the great old hymns, I would strongly urge those who agree with me to bear in mind that our most important duty is to bring people to Christ, rather than turning them away from Christ. We have a special duty to bring our children to God, rather than alienating them. We should be willing to sacrifice our own tastes in order to keep our children with us, and we should make certain that what we assume to be our principles are not in fact merely our tastes.

Musical style is a matter of taste, not right or wrong, but because above all the church needs to be unified, we need to be ready to compromise our own preferences for the sake of the Body of Christ. We do better to train people than force people. If the church can't agree on music, it is better to split a church physically into separate congregations than to split it spiritually by imposing the tastes of one faction on another.

Because congregational worship isn't true worship unless the congregation worships as one, and because congregational singing not only helps us achieve that unity but is the primary way in which the church worships at one time, we need to devote more time to learning how to sing together, and we need to devote more time to singing together. We need to surrender ourselves to the good

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<sup>30</sup> The hymn book I use is full of very singable hymns, though some of the songs are trite (and some of the modern hymns included are only marginally spiritual). However, I have heard some truly uninspired melodies in churches in England and in Lutheran and Catholic services (though some are excellent). Boring melodies don't encourage vigorous singing.



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of the whole body and sing with our hearts. I believe this is the worship God desires, rather than a worship that is decorous, reverent, but dead.

As for the individual, apart from corporate worship, if the music causes no harmful effects and if the lyrics are pure, virtuous, praiseworthy, and especially if they help the individual walk with God, God approves and blesses. Parents who take this approach—whatever their own tastes—will be less likely to alienate their children.

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