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The Asbury Journal publishes scholarly essays and book reviews written from a Wesleyan perspective. The Journal’s authors and audience reflect the global reality of the Christian church, the holistic nature of Wesleyan thought, and the importance of both theory and practice in addressing the current issues of the day. Authors include Wesleyan scholars, scholars of Wesleyanism/Methodism, and scholars writing on issues of theological and theological education importance.

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At the May 2022 commencement, Asbury Theological Seminary marked ten years of graduating Doctors of Philosophy in Biblical Studies. To date, fifty-eight students have walked across the commencement stage, and each represents countless hours of studying and training. Moreover, behind each graduate there were colleagues, family, and professors encouraging them along their climactic journey. In addition, the generosity of the Amos family has also helped make this degree program a reality, and as such, they play a vital role in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary. This volume celebrates all of this.

We are honored to have worked with a great group of contributors to showcase the rigorous and spiritually wholistic education offered at Asbury Theological Seminary. Each was chosen by Myers and Schreiner toward the end of 2020 from the graduates that had already completed the program up to that point. Five scholars who specialize in New Testament studies were chosen alongside five who specialize in Old Testament studies. While each was free to choose a topic, some chose original research while other chose topics associated with their dissertation. The result is an eclectic group of essays that span theoretical issues of biblical interpretation to specific passages of scripture.

- Mark Awabdy considers why God ordered Moses to create a bronze snake in response to Israel’s apostasy during the wilderness period (Numb 21). Invoking symbolic action theory popularized in cultural psychology, Awabdy argues that the bronze serpent was a polysemantic symbol that both reminded Israel of its proclivity to rebel and the Lord’s ability to save. Applied to Jesus, Awabdy argues that the symbolism remains. Christ on the cross urges humanity to recognize its sinfulness and God’s ability to save.
- Ryan Cook studies the so-called Asaph Psalms, showing that they reflect both theological unity and diversity. Using a social identity approach, Cook maintains that these psalms grew out of two major historical crises and collectively establish a group identity.
• Kei Hiramastu tackles the elusive “thorn” in Paul’s flesh. An issue that continues to frustrate scholars, Hiramastu adjusts the conversation by considering implications of the passion narratives. In particular, he considers the thorn in Paul’s flesh in light of specific echoes from said tradition, suggesting that Paul harnesses the passion tradition to legitimize his status in the face of his accusers.

• Drew Holland confronts the perpetual problem of historical criticism and its place within biblical scholarship. Holland does not see the historical critical method as incompatible. Rather, it’s something that needs to be a contributing voice within mature biblical scholarship.

• Judith Odor discusses the construction of communal identity in the letter to the Hebrews. She argues that social identity theory fails to consider the rhetorical processes of language and communication and why those are important for identity formation. Therefore, she utilizes a form of symbolic convergence theory to describe the process of how communal identity is birthed.

• Jason Myers bucks the traditional trends of interpreting Rom 8:1-4. He proposes a unified reading of “law” in conjunction with book-level theme of obedience. Thus, δικαίωμα in v. 4 refers to moral behavior and illuminates Paul’s understanding of the Holy Spirit’s guidance in fulfilling the “just requirement” of the Mosaic Law.

• Philip Richardson compares Paul use of “aliens,” “strangers,” and “citizens” in Eph 2 against its figurative use in selected Hellenistic writings. In contrast to the larger Hellenistic milieu, Richardson argues that Ephesians sees everyone as “alien” unless reconciled by Christ.

• David Schreiner investigates the semantics and function of the ambiguous group of soldiers tasked with breaking the siege of Samaria in 1 Kgs 20, the נוּרֵי יְרוּשָׁלִיָּה. After investigating the semantics of the construct chain, he considers evidence from ancient translations as well as Neo-Assyrian administrative texts. Ultimately, he argues that the phrase speaks of the “junior governors of the provinces” and is part of a larger historiographic agenda that critique a particular modus operandi of the Omride dynasty.
• Paavo Tucker analyzes the pedagogical philosophy of Deuteronomy in concert with Luigi Giussani. Tucker argues for continuity between the philosophies of the two, rooted in ideas of freedom, conviction, and inquiry.

• Joy Vaughan examines the juxtaposition of scenes in Acts 19, arguing that the actions of Paul and Sceva educate the audience on the differences between miracle and magic. Thus, Luke bolsters his rejection of syncretism by a harsh invective against magical practices.

We are deeply honored to offer this collection as a decennial celebration of the Doctor of Philosophy program in Biblical Studies. We pray that it blesses our professors who have been so formative in our educational and spiritual formation, the support staff that allows the program to effectively function on a daily basis, and the institution that continues to produce spiritually vibrant and academically rigorous scholars.

April, 2022
Jason A. Myers
David B. Schreiner
From the Guest Co-Editor:

Jason A. Myers

My time at Asbury Theological Seminary was a formative process in ways that are still bearing fruit today. The relationships that were formed there during the crucible that is doctoral studies are fondly remembered. The excitement of taking classes with world-renowned faculty coupled in a worshipping academic community that resisted the lure to separate academic study of the Bible from worship was crucial in the formation of my own approach to research. Not only did the faculty model this in their own lives, my peers also encouraged and modeled this as well. I am profoundly grateful of the incredible gift of mentoring and friendship provided by Drs. Ben Witherington and Craig Keener who were graciously hospitable to me and have forever changed my life in innumerable ways and continue to this day.

In the midst of doctoral studies, it is the community of fellow students that provide the encouragement, listening ears, and challenging conversations that remind one that one’s value and worth is not in what they produce, but rather in their relationship to the God who has called them to this work. Therefore, in my own journey it would have been immensely more challenging if it was not for the encouragement and prayer of my friends, Drs. Philip Richardson, Tad Blacketer, Scott Engebretson, and Joy Ames. Their friendship was the sustaining force that buoyed the moments of stress, anxiety, and fear that all students move through during their time. Our time over coffee, lunch, or in the carrels, are memories that have now continued into our friendships today.

I concur with my colleague Dr. David Schreiner that it has been a joy to work with him and our peers and colleagues on this journal that is written in honor of the 10-year anniversary of the Biblical Studies doctoral program at Asbury Theological Seminary. It is my hope and prayer that this program continues to form and produce scholars whose desks are
their altars and whose scholarship is on fire, kindled by the Spirit and in proclamation of the Triune God whose kingdom is coming on earth as it is in heaven.

April, 2022
Jason A. Myers
From the Guest Co-Editor:
David B. Schreiner

Some of my favorite memories are those where I am sitting in class at Asbury Theological Seminary, with my colleagues, listening to some of the most respected names in evangelical, biblical scholarship talk about the issues of scripture. For a young, aspiring scholar, this was just so exciting! During my time at Asbury Theological Seminary, I was fortunate to learn how historical-critical scholarship was not necessarily one of the devil’s tools. I heard how Deuteronomy continues to be one of the greatest theological influences and how if we just listen to the text properly, we will find some of the greatest theological nuggets in even the most violent passages of the Old Testament. Above all, I learned how an understanding of language, history, and culture were critical to understanding the depths of scripture’s message.

However, the greatest impact that Asbury Theological Seminary had on my spiritual and academic development was through the creation of a robust theological framework alongside personal relationships that could help not only absorb the ebbs and flows of life but also keep everything in the proper perspective. You see, as we all know, life comes after graduation, and one must navigate positive and negative experiences while keeping a divine calling in focus. If it were not for the friends made and the lessons learned while at Asbury Theological Seminary between 2004-2012, I am confident that my place in life would look dramatically different. I am therefore indebted specifically to: Drs. Mark Awabdy, Bill Arnold, John Cook, Rob Fleenor, Brad Haggard, Sam Long, and Michael Matlock. I remember our time and conversations with the deepest fondness.
It is my honor to have worked with Dr. Jason Myers and a very fine group of young scholars and fellow alumni to present this *Festschrift*. It is my prayer that it becomes an inspiration to all that come through the program and a proper representation of the quality of scholars that Asbury Theological Seminary seeks to form.

April, 2022

David B. Schreiner
Mark A. Awabdy

Snake Iconography, Mythology, and the Meaning of the Bronze Snake Image in Numbers 21:4–9 and 2 Kings 18:4

Abstract:
This study pursues the question of why Yhwh, who in the Decalogue prohibits the creation and worship of divine images, would order Moses to create a snake image as the mode of healing snake bites in the desert (Num 21:4–9). This question is legitimated as the Judahites subsequently burn incense to Moses’ bronze snake, which Hezekiah destroys as an act of loyalty to Yhwh (2 Kgs 18:4). Adopting a definition of meaning from symbolic action theory in cultural psychology, this essay explores what the bronze snake image would have meant for the earliest audiences of these stories. In the core of the essay, the biblical, iconographic, and mythologic contexts are investigated and prove to be suggestive for identifying the meaning(s). In the conclusion, recent studies in psychology offer insight for canonical reflection.

Keywords: Snake Images, Snake Worship, Snake Cults, Bronze Serpent, Aniconism, Developmental Psychology

Mark A. Awabdy graduated in 2012 and teaches Old Testament in the Middle East and South Asia. He is the author of Immigrants and Innovative Law (2014) and Leviticus (2019), and has recently begun a postdoctoral research project on Abraham.
“Make a Venomous Snake”: An Exception to Aniconism?

In a dense cloud on Mount Sinai, Yhwh communicates ten words, the Decalogue, to the prophet Moses that would indelibly influence the world forever. In an apodictic legal form not clearly paralleled in the ancient Near East (Alt 1953: 278–332), the second word—by the count of Jewish and some Christian traditions1—binds the Israelites to the following prohibition:


You must not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of what is in the sky above or what is on the land below or what is in the waters under the earth (Exod 20:4).

A “carved image” (ךסמה) was conventionally made from wood, nowhere conclusively from stone, and then could be overlaid with metal.2 The tripartite classification here naturally refers to images of aerial (“in the sky above”), terrestrial (“on the land below”), and aquatic (“in the waters under the earth”) animals, as such images are commonplace in ANE iconography. What is not said in this verse but is clear from the ANE and the direct context—“you must not have other gods before me” (20:3) and “you must not bow down to them or worship them” (20:5)—is that the forbidden images are not merely aesthetic sculptures, but representations of deities. In the aNE, an image of a god or goddess could be theriomorphic (animal form), anthropomorphic (human form) or therianthropic (animal-human hybrid); (Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 135–6, 273–4). The Decalogue prohibits crafting cult images that are theriomorphic (sky, land, water animals) and anthropomorphic (humans on land),3 and by implication, also images that are therianthropic (sky/land/water + humans on land). Moreover, although the syntax of the prohibition conveys a general or permanent prohibition, but not necessarily both,4 its permanency is underscored by the narrative context which presents the Decalogue (and Book of the Covenant) as coming directly from the finger of God (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 34:1).

As the Torah story unfolds, however, this straightforward interpretation of the Decalogue’s aniconism is challenged for the Israelites and readers alike. After about eleven months at Mount Sinai, the Israelites finally depart for the promised land (Exod 19:1; Num 10:10). Yet on the
opening legs of their journey, Israel violates the covenant through their ingratitude, insubordination, and faithlessness (Num. 11–14), and Yhwh curses them to wander for 40 years in the wilderness and die (14:26–35). Almost 40 years later, approaching the completion of Yhwh’s curse, the Israelites leave Mount Hor, where Aaron had died, and attempt to circumvent the land of Edom (21:4).5 Culminating the Egypt-nostalgia motif in the Moses story (Römer 2013: 70–72, 81–3), the Israelites complain one last time that they have no bread or water and detest the food they do have (21:5).6 Instead of supplying water or a new source of food for them as he had before (11:31–34; 20:11), this time Yhwh responds to their ungratefulness and faithlessness by commissioning venomous snakes to bite the people (21:6). Many Israelites died as a result (v. 7). Complaining against God (נָאָה), not to him like the God-fearing psalmists, was deeply offensive to Yhwh. This is not only because he is holy (deity) and good, worthy of glory and trust, but also because, as the great king, he reserved the right to destroy those vassals who dare to malign him (Mendenhall 1954: 59; Parpola and Watanabe 2021). However, in the face of imminent death, the surviving Israelites—some of whom belonged to the exodus generation cursed to die in the wilderness (14:26–35)—shockingly confess their sin to Moses and plead with him to intercede with Yhwh to remove the snakes (21:7). Moses, now himself bound to die outside the land of Canaan because he did not treat Yhwh as holy in the eyes of the people (20:10–12), does not burst out in anger, but carries out the Israelites’ request and prays to Yhwh (21:7).

Even more stunning than the Israelites’ confession is Yhwh’s merciful response. By means of the snakes, Yhwh could have seized this opportune moment to finish off the cursed generation and move on to the second generation destined for Canaan. Instead, he listens to their cry through Moses and exhibits once again his remarkable longsuffering and mercy (à la 14:17–20; also, Exod 32:30–34). What perplexes the reader aware of the prior Sinai instructions, and I will argue would have perplexed the Israelites and early audiences aware of their own ancient Near Eastern world, is the means of mercy by which Yhwh chose to heal those bitten by the venomous snakes. The same Yhwh who spoke the second word of the Decalogue issues the creation of a theriomorphic image as his means of healing:

וָאֶמר יְהֹウェָה אֲלִמָּהּ שֶׁשֶּׁהָ לָּךְ שֶׁלֹּא יָשָׁם אֱלֹהִים אֲלֹהִים לְהָקֶה יְהֹウェָה אֲלִמָּם וְיָדֶעוּ אֱלֹהִים
YHWH said to Moses, “Make a venomous snake7 and put it on a pole. When anyone who was bitten looks at it, they will live” (21:8).

YHWH does not specify how to make this snake, and within the Moses story perhaps the most natural and orthodox approach would have been for Moses to make a snake from his staff, as Aaron had done in Egypt (Exod 7). Instead, Moses, as if he knew instinctively what YHWH wanted, forges the snake out of bronze (v. 9). Those bitten by a venomous snake who looked up at Moses’ bronze snake lived, which implies that YHWH authorized the bronze snake image as the mode of divine healing (v. 9). No evidence can be marshalled that YHWH hypostatically indwelt the snake image (Hundley 2013, 185–87; Mettinger 1982: 129–31), but why would he endorse such an image at all, especially when the Israelites, prone to crafting and worshipping molten theriomorphic images (Exod 32), could be tempted to worship it as a divine form? After all, subsequent Judahites up until Hezekiah’s time fell into that very temptation:

He removed the high places, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He also demolished the bronze snake that Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been offering incense to it—it was called Nehushtan (Snake-Bronze; 2 Kgs 18:4).

Justin Martyr (2nd cent. CE) has captured the enigma of YHWH’s orders to craft the snake: “Tell me, did not God, through Moses, forbid the making of an image or likeness of anything in the heavens or on earth? Yet didn’t he himself have Moses construct the brazen serpent in the desert? Moses set it up as a sign by which those who had been bitten by the serpent were healed” (Leinhard 2001: 242–3). For Justin, the sign of Moses’ snake serves only to prefigure Christ, whereas for others, like Moroccan Rabbi Or HaChaim (1696–1743 CE), the intermediary snake image remains inescapably perplexing:

Furthermore, we must try to understand why G’d decreed that an object such as this, which resembled a form of idol, had to be made altogether and why looking up to it would heal a person who had sustained a bite. Our
sages in *Rosh Hashanah* 29 claim that as long as the Israelites looked heavenwards this was a demonstration of their faith in G’d, etc. If indeed this was all that G’d had in mind, why did He not order them to look straight at heaven instead of looking at the snake as an intermediary?

That question will drive the present study. Of course, one can silence HaChaim’s question simply by claiming that Yhwh as deity, acting in total freedom, makes an exception to his prior aniconic prohibition “without reason, explanation, or accountability, seemingly beyond any purpose at all.” While Yhwh owes no explanation for his ostensible exception to aniconism, his orders to craft a snake (image) and heal by means of it would have had a perlocutionary effect on the ancient Near Eastern audiences of this story. Our aim in this essay will be to explore what that meaningful effect of Yhwh’s and Moses’ snake image must have been. First, we will observe how the biblical contexts around Num 21 and 2 Kgs 18 underscore forbidden image worship. Next, we will investigate the cultural context of snake iconography, especially in snake cults, and mythology in the ancient Near East. In the conclusion of the essay, we will draw insights from psychology to reflect on the formative impact of the religious symbolism of Moses’ snake image as an antecedent to the Son of Man.

**Moses’ Snake Image: The Biblical Contexts**

What *meaning* did the Israelites in the desert in Num 21:4–9, the Judahites in 2 Kgs 18:4, and the early audiences of these texts assign to Moses’ bronze snake image? Research on modern icons has shown that semantic distance—the nearness of the relationship between the icon and the function it represents—is initially an important factor in how well an icon performs in a culture. However, the later users’ familiarity with the icon becomes more important to its performance because of long-term memory (Isherwood, McDougall, and Curry 2007: 465–76). For contemporary readers, therefore, the semantic distance between Moses’ snake image and the function(s) it represented may be too vast for it to perform independently as a visual symbol today without any explanation of what it connoted in its Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern settings. Also, the function that an icon’s designers assign to it originally may be very different than the meaning that the icon’s users assign to it subsequently (Isherwood, McDougall, and Curry 2007: 467). By analogy to our study, Moses’ snake
image initially exhibited that YHWH’s snake of gracious healing subverts, for the onlooker, YHWH’s snakes of horrible judgment. That is, “the symbol of their suffering was now the focus of their faith” (Card 1989). In this we see a twist on the lex talionis principle: It is not the punishment, but the healing that resembles the crime. Subsequently, however, the meaning must have shifted, as the Judahites began burning incense to the bronze snake (2 Kgs. 18), detaching the icon from its original, nonrepeatable function as YHWH’s prescribed instrument of healing the snake-bitten Israelites in the desert.

According to symbolic action theory in cultural psychology, meaning implies that the symbol—whether an action, object, or object-constellation—relates to an actor’s subjective experience of themselves and to the world that the actor experiences (Boesch 1991: 60). We may extend these implications of meaning to our study: How did YHWH who sent the snakes (object) and healed by means of a snake image he prescribed (actions), and how did the snake image (object) that Moses crafted and raised up (actions) relate to the early audiences’ subjective experience of themselves and of their world? In this essay, I will argue that with respect to Israel’s self-experience, Moses’ actions to craft and elevate a bronze snake would have reminded the Israelites of their predilection toward theriomorphic image production and worship. With respect to Israel’s world-experience, YHWH’s judgment by the snakes and healing by means of the snake image exhibited that YHWH supplants the status of snakes, snake deities, and snake-healing deities. These relations of meaning emerge clearly from the ancient Near Eastern iconography and mythology but are intimated in these stories and elsewhere in the aniconic texts of Numbers and Kings.

In the text of Num 21:4–9, one finds two details that expose the Israelites’ vulnerability to serve other gods. Israel’s henotheistic devotion to YHWH was, once again, compromised. First, they regretted that YHWH had delivered them from the Egypt (v. 5), which means that, among other things, they were not grateful that YHWH had “executed judgments on their [Egyptian] gods” (33:4). Second, they complained about the food and water they did not have and detested the food they did have (v. 5). Such ingratitude could become an impetus for turning to other deities for provision, a causation that Deut 11 would elucidate: “...then he promises, ‘I will send rain for your land...I will provide pasture for your livestock and you will eat your fill.’ Make sure you do not turn away to serve other gods!” (Deut 11:14–15* NET). In the ancient Near East, “contact [with the deity] primarily took the form of service [of the cult image in the temple] so that the resident
deity remained resident and favorably disposed to bless the community around it” (Hundley 2013, 134). Thus, by the time Num 21 arises in the storyline, Moses, Aaron, and the Levites had been serving YHWH in the Tent of Meeting (cf. esp. Exod 33, 40; Lev. 1–16, 21–22; Num. 3–4, 8, 18), and the people expect YHWH to reciprocate with his blessings of food, drink and protection. The subtext of their complaint in 21:5 is either that Moses was failing to keep YHWH favorably disposed, or YHWH was failing to bless the community. In that moment, the Israelites were vulnerable to find fulfillment through other gods and goddesses, as they did at Sinai and would do again at Moab. At Sinai, Aaron had led the Israelites into a syncretistic “feast to YHWH” filled with sacrificial eating, drinking, and probably ritual sex (Exod 32:5–6, 18), and in Num 25 the Israelites would prostitute themselves with the daughters of Moab, engaging in sacrificial meals and worship of the Moabite gods (25:1–3; see Exod 34:15). In Numbers, the submotif of worshipping other gods culminates in the iconoclastic orders to the second generation entering the land: “you must drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images, all their molten images, and demolish their high places” (33:52 NET). The implication of this text, together with the Decalogue and golden calf apostacy, is that Israel would be tempted to either worship other gods or worship YHWH by representing him through indigenous cultic images.

Why, then, would YHWH order the crafting, raising and visualizing of a snake (image) for Israelites predisposed to worshipping other gods or worshipping YHWH through a cult image? This question arises naturally from the Num 21 story, but is validated as a legitimate question by the later record that the Israelites fell into the temptation of worshipping Moses’ bronze snake image until Hezekiah’s reforms in the late eighth century: “He also demolished the bronze snake that Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been offering incense to it—it was called Nehushtan” (2 Kgs 18:4). The past continuous aspect of the paraphrastic construction—“had been offering incense to it”—indicates a cultic custom that antedated Hezekiah, although when the custom originated remains unclear. The people had become accustomed to burning incense to the bronze snake, thinking they were ritually manipulating the snake’s magical powers (Johnston 2004: 147–9), or appeasing YHWH through serving his cult image (2 Kgs 17:32–33; 18:22), or invoking a snake god for their benefit (2 Kgs 17:33–38).9
Moses’ Snake Image: The Iconographic and Mythologic Contexts

To demonstrate that Moses’ bronze snake related in the minds of the Israelites and Judahites to their own theriomorphic image production and worship, and related to Yhwh’s sovereignty over snakes, snake deities, and snake-healing deities, one must discover compelling evidence that snake iconography and mythology would have pervaded the world of the early audiences of Num 21 and 2 Kgs 18. The approach taken here will not be to reconstruct the history of snake images and cults, which others have attempted, but to summarize the snake ideologies that permeated the societies around Israel.
Snake iconography was, indeed, ubiquitous in the ancient Near Eastern world surrounding the Hebrew Bible, as it was present in every major region—Egypt, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Greece. Moreover, it appeared across the eras of the storyline and composition of the HB—LB, Iron, Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic (Hendel 1999: 615–16). The claim of ubiquity is supported further by the diverse functions that snake images served in the societies in and around ancient Israel. Snake amulets were worn to repel venomous species. The Uraeus cobra, worn on the diadem of the Egyptian monarch, protected the king and the pantheon alike.

Apotropaic figurines and jewelry warded off evil, while snake images embellished bowls, and engraved snakes were raised on poles—analogous to Moses’ bronze snake raised on a pole. Finally, metallic snake statues were employed in cultic rituals.

This last function, the ritual use of snake statues in cultic zones, may be particularly germane to the meaning associated with the bronze snake in Num 21 and 2 Kgs 18. First, when the reader arrives at Num 21, Moses was still performing rituals, alongside the Levitical and Aaronic cultic functionaries, in and around Yhwh’s dwelling place (Num 17; 20:6–12; 31:48–54; also, Num 1:1; 2:17; 3:38; 7:89; 27:2). Second, at Sinai the Israelites worshipped another metallic, theriomorphic image, the golden calf, through a sacrificial festival to Yhwh (Exod 32:1–8).
Third, customary incense burning to Moses’ bronze snake, leading up to the time of Hezekiah’s reforms, is a markedly cultic ritual (Exod 30:1–10, 34–38; 37:25–29; 40:5, 27; Lev 4:7; 10:1; 16:12–13; 26:30; Num 4:7, 16; 7:11–88; 16:7, 17–18, 35, 40, 46–47; Deut 33:10; 1 Sam 2:28; 1 Kgs 7:50; 2 Kgs 23:5, 14), suggesting that even in Num 21 cultic worship of the bronze snake was a latent possibility in the disordered affections of the Israelites. Here we have space to survey the snake representations found in cultic centers in Canaan, the Sinai desert, and the Arabian Peninsula.

In the land of Canaan, at the LB temple of Megiddo (Tel el-Mutesellim) an 18 cm. bronze snake was discovered in a sacred zone (stratum X, 1650–1550 BCE), while a second snake was found belonging to a subsequent period in the LBA (stratum VII B; Münnich 2008: 39). At Tel Mevorakh, near Caesarea Maritima, the LB temple yielded a coiled, bronze snake, which “provides the only clue to the rites of the temple” (Stern 1977: 90). At LB Hazor, archaeologists uncovered a 7.3 cm bronze snake with a hole in its tail, which may have been to fasten it to a staff (cf. Num 21:8–9; Koh 1994: 71). In the Babylonian destruction layer of the Philistine capital Ekron (Tel Miqne, 603 BCE), an eight inch, 18-carat-gold cobra was found on the floor of a monumental palace (Unsigned 1996, 28). The cobra, associated with the Egyptian Uraeus, has a prong likely to attach it to the diadem of a statue of a monarch or deity. The elevation of this cobra above the leader’s head, staring down at onlookers, may remind us of the elevation of Moses’ snake visible to onlookers below. At Beth Shan, the southern temple (either Iron Age IB or II A) contained at least five
cylindrical cult stands with carved snakes crawling around them (Mullins 2012: 145, 149).

In the Negev near the copper mines of Timna, 18 miles north of Elat on the Gulf of Aqaba, a desert temple to the Egyptian fertility goddess Hathor was discovered (c. Seti I–Rameses III?, then Midianites). The temple’s naos—the space housing the deity’s statue—contained a vertical recess hewn for a statue of Hathor, the head of which was uncovered at the site (Avner 2014: 105). In or just outside the naos, a small, copper snake was discovered. For all the disagreements about the site, there is a consensus that the copper snake was a votive object used in worship inside Hathor’s temple (Avner 2014: 104–9). Hathor, while normally represented as a cow, was also represented as a lioness, sycamore, and relevant here, as a cobra.

In the Oman Peninsula, there is evidence of an Iron Age II snake cult with centers in Al Qusais (Dubai, U.A.E.), Al Bithna and Masafî (Fujairah, U.A.E.; Benoist 2007: 34–54). The archaeologists of Al Qusais, on the coast of the Arabian/Persian Gulf, found a stone construction on a hill—probably cultic—containing small, bronze snake figurines, and pottery with snake iconography comparable to the snake designs of Elam, suggesting Elamite influence (Benoist 2007: 34). At Al Bithnah, closer to the coast of the Gulf of Oman, a cluster of structures were designed for cultic rituals involving worship of the snake image/deity. The central zone of the site contained many pits, often of stone or clay, all containing animal bones (Benoist 2007: 40–42).
Wells, pools, and a canal were discovered, indicating more than just purification, but likely libation rituals to accompany the animal sacrifices (Benoist 2007: 49). In total, 56 representations of snakes were found, and by contrast, only two of humans and two of felines (Benoist 2007: 49). Roughly 12 miles from Al Bithnah is Masafi, with an Iron Age II cultic building comparable to structure H at Al Bithnah (pictured; Benoist 2007: 52). In that stratum at Masafi, the archaeologists found potsherds with snake images, and in room 386 in particular, many tiny bronze snake figurines, as well as bronze arrowheads, knives, and ceramic vessels, most with snake representations on them (Benoist, Bernard V., Brunet, and Hamel 2012: 153–5). Whereas nearly all the vessels at Al Bithnah were heavily burnt, suggesting cultic reuse in a burning ritual to the snake deity, the vessels at Masafi were not burnt, perhaps indicating they were used as a one-time gift to the deity (Benoist, Bernard V., Brunet, and Hamel 2012: 156). In the desert oasis of Al Ain (Rumeliah), some of the Iron Age pottery
is decorated with snake designs (Potts 1990: 378), and in Saudi Arabia (Dammam) a golden bracelet with an ornamental snake’s head was found (Potts 1990: 330).

On the Island of Bahrain in the Neo-Babylonian period, coiled snakes were buried in open bowls with a ribbed shoulder, and sometimes the coiled snake skeleton was interred with a stone bead, normally turquoise, or in one instance a pearl (Potts 1990: 321). With one possible exception (below), there are no written sources to identify the snake god or goddess worshipped in the Arabian Gulf and Oman Peninsula in the Iron Age.

While the cultic functions of snake iconography often must be inferred without accompanying inscriptions, we are fortunate to have texts of various genres that elucidate ancient Near Eastern conceptions about snakes and their associations with the gods. The central, recurring ideations can be stated in four propositions.

1. The gods create, control and deploy snakes that are frightening and deadly.

   In Enūma Elish, Mother Huber, associated with Tiamat, created monster serpents and “filled their bodies with venom for blood,” and
mustered an army of serpents, dragons and other terrifying creatures for battle (COS 1.111:392, 393, 395, 396). Among the gods of the night praised in an Akkadian Hymn is the “Dragon” and the “Horned Serpent” (COS 1.115:417). The Uraeus symbol, a rearing Egyptian cobra, for the serpent goddess Wadjet safeguarded kings and gods, while kings—divine and snakish in their essence—were immune from and could cure snake bites (Hendel 1999: 744–8). Hence, the Uraeus is promoted as the source of the military destruction of King Thutmose I (16–15th cent. BCE) in his Nubian campaign: “Then these [enemies (?) [...]] fled, weakened by his Uraeus which in a moment turned them into carnage” (COS 2.1:7). This conviction continues for Thutmose III (15th cent. BCE): “It is his uraeus that overthrows them for him, his flaming serpent that subdues his enemies” (COS 2.2B:14–15). During Akhenaten’s reign, a hymn to the solar disk Aten rehearses the negative realities of night after Aten sets, including “All the serpents bite” (COS 1.28:45). In the Ptolemaic period, Egypt’s sun god creator, Atum, self-proclaims: “When I emerged from the roots I created all the snakes and everything that evolved from them” (COS 1.9:15). In the Israelite worldview, YHWH alone is the creator and controller of deadly snakes (Gen 3:1a; Exod 4:3; 7:9–15; Num 21:6–7).

Sometimes the snake was associated with magic or beauty. In the Gilgamesh epic, for instance, a snake carries off the plant that rejuvenates, which serves as an etiology for why snakes molt and regenerate their skin (ANET, 71). Also, in building the temple for Ningirsu, patron god of Lagash, King Eninnu describes the transport of the cedars like “majestic snakes floating on water” (COS 2.155:425). However, the prevailing disposition toward snakes was to fear them for their wild and dangerous power. Thus, a Sumerian epic begins in primeval time with no snakes, scorpions, hyenas, lions, dogs, or wolves (COS 1.547). In one Sumerian fable, the quarreling, accursed turtle twice mocks the heron as having the eyes, tooth, and tongue of a snake (COS 1.178:572; also COS 1.131:453–8), and in another, the wheat reminds the ewe that she fears three enemies who threaten her life in the desert, “snakes, scorpions, and robbers that dwell in the plain” (COS 1.180:577). In a Middle Kingdom Egyptian manual of dream interpretation (possibly originally 12th dynasty), if one dreamt of killing a snake, that indicated good fortune, but of getting bitten by a snake, bad fortune (COS 1.33:53–4). In a Hittite edict, king Ḥattušili I twice calls the mother of his adopted son a “snake,” a pejorative for her powerful sway over her
son against the king’s wishes (COS 2.15:79 §2, §4; cf. Gen 3 and COS 1.103:356).

A Hittite law reveals the belief that killing a snake could invoke magic powers: “If a free man kills a snake, and speaks another’s name, he shall pay 40 shekels of silver. If it is a slave, he alone shall be put to death (COS 2.19:116; Greengus 2011: 272). In a Middle Babylonian hemerology, one who kills a snake on day twenty of the month of Ayaru “will go forth pre- eminent” (Greengus 2011: 272). Perhaps to disassociate his healing power from such magical powers, YHWH did not kill the snakes in the desert, but provided a cure. Finally, in the Aramaic Sêfîre treaty, king Bar-ga’yah king of KTK invokes divine curses on his vassal, Mati’el king of Arpad, if Mati’el is unfaithful: “May the gods send every sort of devourer against Arpad and against its people! [May the mouth] of a snake [eat], the mouth of a scorpion…And may a moth and a louse and a […] become to it a serpent’s throat!” (COS 2.82:214). By analogy, Israel’s divine king YHWH, likewise, commissions venomous snakes against his unfaithful vassals. Or by analogy to Egyptian thought, YHWH subsumes the power attributed to Egyptian kings and their Uraeus snake icon, to destroy his recalcitrant people acting as his enemy.

2. The gods defeat the venomous serpent-dragon monster.

In the mythologies of India, proto-Indo-European cultures, Iran, and the ancient Near East, the snake figure appears most saliently as a serpent-dragon monster that a nation’s belligerent gods must fight and slay (Miller II 2018). For the Egyptians, the sun god Re, with militant god Seth and his magic, defeat the serpent-dragon in the mountains (COS 1.21:32), and for the Hittites, the Storm-god repeatedly struggles with and ultimately defeats the sea serpent, who represents chaos (COS 1.56:150–1). For the Ugaritians, warring Ba’al and Môt “bite each other like snakes” (COS 1.86:272), and Ba’al defeats Yam (Sea), who is identified as “the dragon,” “Lôtan” (cf. Leviathan), “the fleeing serpent,” “the twisting serpent,” and the “close-coiled one with seven heads” (COS 1.86:252, 265, 273). At the core of what is claimed in the dragon-slaying myth is a deity’s victorious power over the serpent-dragon, who is always conquered in the end (Miller II 2018). With unchallenged sovereignty, YHWH subordinates not only the Pharaoh, who wore the Uraeus, the Sea (Exod. 14–15; Ezek 29:3; 32:2; Isa 27:1; 51:9–10), and Egypt’s gods (Num 33:4), but also the venomous snakes that he had sent to punish his rebellious people.
3. Certain gods heal snake venomous snake bites.

Along with Egypt’s divine, snake-natured king, certain gods and goddesses also possessed the power to heal venomous snake bites. A myth of Isis and Re illustrates this and serves as an etiology for divine snake healing. The Egyptian fertility goddess, Isis, forms a serpent by kneading the ground moistened by the spit of the sun god and creator Re (COS 1.22:33–4). The serpent poisons Re, he suffers, and Isis pledges to cure Re if he reveals to her his true name. He pronounces his name, “the Great One of Magic,” and she renders the venom in his body innocuous. Consequently, to cure a venomous snake or scorpion bite of a human, this myth was to be recited as an incantation over images of the gods, drawn on the ill person’s hand and licked off, or on a cloth and placed on their throat, and the victim would imbibe a “scorpion plant” ground with beer or wine (COS 1.22:34). The implication of this myth is that Isis who created the venomous snake is sovereign over it and can reverse its lethal affects. It is hard to miss the analogy between snake-creating, snake-healing Isis and Yhwh in Num. 21. Discovered at Ugarit, two narrative liturgies and incantations pertain to how to counteract snake venom (COS 1.94:295–8). In one of the liturgies, by analogy to the Isis-Re story, the core deities of the pantheon respond to a venomous snake bite like conventional snake-charmers, but are ineffective (cf. Re), whereas the god Ḥōrānu (cf. Isis) performs an incantation that renders the snake venom innocuous (COS 1.94:295). In the Akkadian poem of the righteous sufferer, Marduk sends a favorable sign, a healing serpent that slithers by the sufferer, and quickly thereafter he was healed of his illness (COS 1.153:490). In this example, no snake bite is mentioned, but the deity Marduk reveals his healing through a snake, not unlike Yhwh in Num. 21. Later in Greek mythology, the healing god Asclepius is represented by the symbol of two entwined snakes (Hendel 1999, 615). With just these illustrations, the parallel with Yhwh is unmistakable. Yet for the scribes of the Hebrew scriptures, instead of the divine Egyptian monarch, instead of Isis, Ḥōrānu, Marduk, or Asclepius, it is Yhwh alone who heals his people of venomous snake bites (Num. 21:8–9; cf. Acts 28:3–6).

4. Certain gods were associated with snakes and represented by snake images.

The snake is often associated with particular deities and demons, and the “symbolic associations of the snake include protection, danger, healing, regeneration, and (less frequently) sexuality” (Hendel 1999: 744).
In Mesopotamia, the Elamite chief deity was commonly enthroned on coiled snakes, and the god MUŠ/Nirah could be represented as a snake or hybrid snake (Hendel 1999: 744). Just south in the Arabian Gulf, on Bahrain, a god named MUŠ is attested and could be identical to the snake god MUŠ/Nirah (Potts 1990: 307). The Sumerian goddesses Inanna and Nisaba were exalted in Sumerian hymns: “Like a dragon you have deposited venom on the foreign land” (COS 1.160:519), and “Dragon, emerging brightly on the festival, Mother-goddess of the nation” (COS 1.163:531). Moreover, the god who guards the underworld demons and the gates of heaven, Ningishzida, is depicted with a horned, venomous snake ascending from his shoulders (Hendel 1999: 744). Lamashtu, the female demon, clasps snakes in her hands, and Pazuzu, the male demon, has a phallus like a snake (Hendel 1999: 744). The snake-headed hybrid, mušḫuššu (Akk. “furious or reddish snake”), became the symbolic animal of the god Marduk and his son Nabû (Wiggerman 1992: 168–9). In an inscription, King Ibbi-Sin of Ur III announces his extravagant worship of the moon god Nanna by crafting from the war spoils of Susa a golden šikkatu vessel with the images of a bison, snakes and vibrant dark rain clouds (COS 2.141B:391).

In Egypt, in addition to the abovementioned pervasive Uraeus cobra and the occasional representation of Hathor as a snake, the Egyptian goddess, Qedešet, had Hathor-like hair and was often depicted grasping snakes (Budin 2015: 1–2). Beyond this, frightening snakes protected the gates of the underworld, the ba of the gods reside in snakes, and the deceased become snakes in the Netherworld (Hendel 1999: 744). Notably, the Kḥt serpent was a guardian spirit (COS 1.42:96). The snake was rooted in Egyptian mythology, as Hendel explains:

The sun-god in his nightly passage through the primeval waters of Nun is rejuvenated inside the body of a snake before his reappearance at dawn. The primeval gods at the beginning of time are embodied as snakes in the primeval waters, and time itself can be depicted as a snake. At the end of time Atum and Osiris return to snake-beings in the eternal waters. The deadly and the regenerative powers of the snake occur in varying proportions in these instances; hence the complexity of the snake symbol. (Hendel 1999: 745)

Also important is the myth of the cosmic snakes, Apopis and Ourobors, who challenge the order of the sun god as they represent the forces and
limits of chaos (Hendel 1999: 745). In Canaan and Phoenicia, the Levantine counterpart to Qedeš is Qudšu, who holds either lotus or papyrus, but in an Ugaritic image of gold foil, she is grasping snakes (Budin 2015: 3). There is, however, insufficient evidence to link Qudšu with Asherah as some have done. The Ugaritic god of magic, Ḫōrašānu, who heals snake bites, was a huge serpent who tried to usurp El's throne (Korpel 2016: 24–33).

In summary, the actions and powers conventionally assigned to snake gods, goddesses, and demons, accessed by humans through mythical reenactment, incantations and other magic, are transferred exclusively to Israel's deity, Yhwh. The events of Num 21 and 2 Kgs 18 have been shaped and transmitted for posterity as theological stories. As a result, we encounter the events today through the worldview of the Israelite and Judahite scribes, who honor Yhwh as their deity who subverts the threat of lethal snakes, the status of the prevalent snake deities, and human reliance on magical snake rituals for healing and welfare. The powers assigned to deities to create, control and deploy deadly, terrifying snakes is conferred upon Yhwh alone. While supreme deities subdue the venomous serpent-dragon monster in the cosmic realm, Yhwh subdues the venomous snakes in the desert on earth. The former could not be tested empirically even by the mythologists, whereas the later was encountered through the sensory experience of Yhwh's people in the desert. It is not the Egyptian king or goddess Isis, nor Ugarit's Ḫōrašānu, Babylon's Marduk, or Greece's Asclepius, but Yhwh who powerfully heals venomous snake bites for those who look to his provocative means of healing. Alas, we return to our opening question, why would Yhwh commission Moses to craft a snake image when the Israelites had demonstrated a propensity to creating and serving theriomorphic images? This question is even more acute now that we have surveyed the various snake gods and goddesses whom their devotees worshiped through snake cults and represented through snake images.

Conclusion: Reflections through Psychology

Appropriating the definition of “meaning” from symbolic action theory in cultural psychology (Boesch 1991: 60), we have contemplated how the paradoxical snake image of Yhwh's judgment and grace related meaningfully to the Israelites' experience of themselves and of their world. Regarding Israel's self-experience, the data—the biblical, iconographic and mythic contexts—indicate that Moses' work of creating and raising the bronze snake would have reminded the Israelites of their proclivity to create
and worship theriomorphic images. Regarding Israel’s world-experience, the evidence points toward Yhwh supplanting the status of snake deities and snake-healing deities. This symbolism correlates with the Torah’s recurring testimony of Yhwh’s supremacy over all other panthea (Exod 15:11; 18:11; 20:3; Num 33:4; Deut 10:17; 32:37–9).

We can reflect further on these observations through correlated insights from developmental psychology. In Lev Vygotsky’s model, a mediating device is a symbol, encountered in society whose “evocative power grows in proportion to its role in mediating the development of cognition and affect” (Holland and Valsiner 1988). The inverse is also true: The power of cultural models in a society’s mental life—assumptions about the world that individuals in a society learn—is determined by encountering the symbols of those models (Holland and Valsiner 1988: 257–9). In this line of thought, the evocative power of the snake image for the Israelites in the desert would have grown in proportion to the image’s function in mediating ancient Israel’s cognitive and affective (emotional) development. On a basic level, those who were snake-bitten, whether remorseful (“we have sinned,” 21:7) or just fearful, likely perceived and felt the snake image they beheld to be a symbol of divine grace subverting the venomous snakes of divine judgment. In the same way, Christ crucified, prefigured in the old snake image, invites a cognitive and affective response from those facing imminent death: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who trusts in him might have eternal life” (John 3:14–15). For old and new covenant believers, the symbol of the elevated snake and of Son of Man holds evocative power insofar as it mediates not only cognitive and affective development, but new birth by the Spirit into the Kingdom of God (John 3:3–8; cf. Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:24–27).

Furthermore, from the biblical, iconographic, and mythologic data surveyed in this article, the bronze snake image would have also held evocative power in mediating the development of Israel’s mental and emotional development vis-à-vis the forbidden theriomorphic images they, their predecessors, or their neighbors have made of Yhwh or other deities. Contrary to the ubiquitous divine snake representations in the ancient Near East, Moses’ bronze snake image was not to be conceived as an image of Yhwh—neither Num 21, 2 Kgs 18, nor the aniconic theology of the Primary History condone the imaging of Yhwh—but this does not mean a bronze snake image could ever be detached mentally from the snake images that
were commonplace in and around Canaan. In effect, the same snake image that heals also evokes the memory of cult images and their inhabiting deities that could be served and manipulated to one’s advantage. However, while a simple gaze at Moses’ snake healed in the desert, subsequent visualization of that snake will not automatically evoke shame in the idol-worshipper, leading to repentance and faith in Yhwh. Correspondingly, one study of a diversity of responses to sacred art has indicated “that attention to symbolic content or theological percepts alone was insufficient for personal identification with the meaning” (Lang, Stamatopoulou, and Cupchik 2020: 331). In the same way, looking on the image of the invisible God, Christ, can evoke shame that repels—“Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8)—or that attracts—“A woman in that town who lived a sinful life...began to wet his feet with her tears...” (Luke 7:38)—or that suppresses personal identification—“Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads...the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him...” (Mark 15:29–31* NRS).

Vygotsky’s inverse claim about mediating devices also rings true for the Israelites: The cogency of cultural models—the appeal of serving snake deities or snake-healing deities who could protect, heal, regenerate and entice sexually (Hendel 1999, 744)—in Israel’s mental and emotional life would have been determined by Israel’s encounters with the divine snake iconography and mythology widespread in the ancient Near East. Before Hezekiah destroyed Moses’ bronze snake, the people customarily burned incense to it, imagining they were invoking the snake’s magic, or appeasing the deity Yhwh by serving his cult image, or serving a snake god. In any case, their behavior reveals that they had adopted a prominent cultural model, antithetical to the Decalogue’s signal prohibitions, but indicative of the divine snake iconography and worship in and around Canaan. Yet if Moses’ creation of the snake image confronted Israel’s idolatrous tendencies with divine grace (Num 21), Hezekiah’s destruction of the snake image confronted Israel’s idolatrous tendencies with divine judgment (2 Kgs 18). As Yhwh’s royal Davidic representative on earth, Hezekiah’s iconoclasm demonstrated, for the Deuteronomistic historians, that “he did what was right in the eyes of Yhwh” (v. 3), “trusted in Yhwh the god of Israel” (v. 5a), was an incomparably great king (v. 5b), “held fast to Yhwh and did not abandon him” (v. 6), and “Yhwh was with him, and he succeeded in everything he did” (v. 7).
In summary, Moses’ bronze snake was polysemantic in its symbolism, but not endlessly so. While it negatively reminded Israel of its proclivity toward iconographic worship, it positively depicted YHWH’s healing and supremacy. Subsequently, the meaning of the symbol morphed into to an illicit image that Hezekiah had to destroy to restore aniconic and henotheistic Yahwism in Judah. In theory, one might question the likelihood of such polysemy in a single symbol. The data support it, however, and subsequently, the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross, communicates an analogous polysemy. Looking upon Jesus Christ demands a self-reflection of one’s own sinfulness, but simultaneously exhibits his healing of sin and supremacy over the spiritual forces of darkness and of death. In addition, the cross, as the bronze snake in Hezekiah’s day, can be perverted into a magical amulet, devoid of Christ himself. In this regard, the Catholic crucifix offers a symbolic advantage over the protestant Christless cross (1 Cor 2:2; Gal 2:20), even while, conversely, the Christless cross importantly evokes the resurrection (Heb 6:6; 1 Cor 15:14).

In closing, a recent neurological study offers us a final stimulating thought. Nine psychologists from six universities studied 20 healthy individuals from various religious backgrounds, whose beliefs about God ranged from adaptable to fixed, and who ranged from being on a quest to answer existential questions or not. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, the study analyzed how this sample pool responded mentally to religious positive symbols (the cross, et. al.), religious negative symbols (a pentagram, et. al.), and non-religious negative, positive and neutral symbols (Johnson, et. al. 2014: 82–98). From 120 symbols, the researchers selected 25 based on a survey that revealed consensuses about each symbol’s positivity or negativity. Although the study overlooks that religious symbols are generally, but not universally, perceived as positive or negative (e.g., the cross can be a negative symbol for religious Muslims), nonetheless their conclusion remains persuasive that, “the more an individual’s religion involves an open-ended, responsive dialogue with existential questions, the less activation will be suppressed in the primary visual cortex for both religious and nonreligious negative symbols” (Johnson, et. al. 2014: 92). Corresponding to their findings, another study interjected positive and negative symbols (Christ/heaven, Satan/hell) for its Christian participants, without their conscious awareness, and this influenced a subsequent cardiovascular response, matching challenge and threat states, when
the same participants were asked to give a speech relating to their own mortality (Weisbuch-Remington, et al. 2005: 1203–16).

In our study, there is no way to corroborate how the bronze snake image, in Moses’ day or Hezekiah’s, influenced the activation of the primary visual cortex or cardiovascular system of its onlookers and devotees. We may, however, infer that there would have been a few predominant physiological reactions. At the outset, we should be clear that Israelite and Judahite faith was not necessarily antipathic to an “open-ended, responsive dialogue with existential questions,” as they customarily adapted their faith to \( \text{YHWH} \)’s progressive revelation of himself in history and in the diverse, compositional strands of the Torah (e.g., Patriarchal vs. Mosaic Yahwism) and occasionally engaged in open-ended dialogue about existential questions (e.g., Gen 18:22–33; Exod. 18; Lev 10:16–20; Num. 27, 36). Thus, when gazing at the snake image, which resembled the many divine snake images of their neighbors, the envenomated Israelites facing death had to expand the boundaries of their faith to accept this otherwise negative theriomorphic statue was now the only means of their salvation. Their primary visual cortex would have been activated for the right reasons, and their lives spared as a result. One could conceive, however, that traditionalists in the desert suppressed the activation of their primary visual cortex because Moses’ iconic snake looked just like a cult image. One thinks of Ezekiel’s consternation when God ordered him to eat a barley cake baked over a fire fueled by human excrement. “Then I said, ‘O Lord \( \text{YHWH} \), I have never defiled myself’” (cf. Acts 10:13–15)! Later, other religious leaders would suppress the image of Jesus as the divine Son of Man/God because Jesus was in their minds a human form that must never be worshipped (Matt 26:64–65; Mark 14:62–64; John 10:33). Yet when Moses’ snake was divorced from its original function in the desert, it was also right for Hezekiah to react viscerally. He repudiated the bronze snake as a seductive image, presumably suppressing the activation of his primary visual cortex, and he expressed his loyalty to Yahweh by destroying the image, presumably triggering a cardiovascular response consistent with challenge and threat states. For those who lead God’s people today, we too must safeguard our faith communities from converting forms of worship—crosses and other iconography, liturgies, music, the sacraments, ministries, and even the Bible itself—into objects of worship that undermine worship of the divine image of Christ. In the end, then, both Moses in his activation
and Hezekiah in his suppression must be regarded as vital forefathers in the shaping of our “faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

**End Notes**

1. “You must not make for yourselves an image” is regarded as the *second* commandment by Philo, Josephus, Orthodox Jews (part two of the second), Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Reformed, but as part two of *first* commandment by the Peshitta, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, Roman Catholics, and Lutherans (Youngblood 1994: 30, 32–4, 50, 52).

2. “יוֹפַל,” *DCH* 6:726. The improper synonym, “יָבּוּשַׁיִּים” (*DCH* 5:501), refers to an “image” for cultic use, perhaps from stone or silver, whereas the term “יוֹפַל” (*DCH* 7:124 gloss b) in cultic settings refers more broadly to the “image” of a deity. When these terms are bound (יָבּוּשַׁיִּים, Num 33:52), what is in view is probably “cast images” of deities formed by pouring molten metal into a mold.

3. Both creation accounts present humans as land creatures. In Gen 1:24–31, Elohim creates land animals and his image bearers, the first humans, together on the sixth day (in distinction from birds and fish on the fifth day), and in 2:7, Yahweh Elohim creates “the man” (אָדָם) from the dust of “the ground” (הָאָדָם) (cf. 3:19; 4:11).

4. For הָל + *yiqtol*, see *GBHS* §4.2.11.

5. On the narrative’s chronology, see Num 20:28–29; 33:38.

6. Probably referring to manna, as in 11:6–9.

7. The term “venomous snake” (“יָדִיא”) *DCH* 8:197 gloss 1) occurs earlier in apposition in v. 6, “snakes, namely, venomous ones,” which I have argued elsewhere refers to their species, not as fiery snakes, but venomous snakes (Awabdy 2022). In this essay, I will refer to venomous snakes as those that produce venom, whereas poisonous snakes will refer to species that make one sick because they are eaten.

8. Brueggemann is writing specifically about one of three possible explanations from Scripture that he sees for the COVID-19 pandemic (2020: 10).

9. The first option—the snake as a magical amulet or fetish—may be the most likely, since unlike the golden calves of Aaron and Jeroboam, nothing is said of worshipping Yhwh or other gods (cp. Exod 32:1, 4, 5, 8; 1 Kgs 12:26–33).

11 Most of these enumerated functions are noted by Hendel (1999: 615).

12 Potts, Arabian Gulf, 330.

13 In Mesopotamian divination, if a snake crosses in front of a man from the right to the left, the man will have a good name/reputation, but if from left to right, a bad name (COS 1.120:424).


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*Social Identity in Crisis: Toward a Theology of the Psalms of Asaph*

**Abstract:**

The twelve psalms attributed to Asaph reflect both elements of theological unity and diversity. Both their unified elements and divergent emphases have been explained in various ways. This paper argues that the Asaph psalms grew out of two contexts of crisis: the Assyrian invasion and Babylonian exile. With these contexts in mind, this paper utilizes a Social Identity Approach to analyze the function of the Asaphite psalms in shaping group identity in light of traumatic events.

**Keywords:** Asaph, Psalms 50, 73–83, Social Identity Theory, lament, exile

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Scholars have long observed some common characteristics of the twelve psalms with the authorship designation\(^1\). First, these psalms display a remarkable resemblance to one another. There are many themes and emphases that tie the psalms together. Most of these were noted by previous generations of scholars. Franz Delitzsch provides a helpful list of these common characteristics in his 1890 commentary (1890: 123–124): (1) all are in the so-called Elohistic Psalter (Pss 42–83); (2) they have a judicial and prophetic character in the sense that God frequently addresses the nation directly and appears as a judge (Pss 50; 75; 82); (3) there is an emphasis on recounting history (Pss 74:13–15; 77; 78; 80:9–12; 81:5–8; 83:10–12); (4) there is a focus on Joseph over Judah, meaning the psalms highlight northern tribes over southern (Pss 77:16; 87:9, 67; 81:6; 80). And finally, these psalms frequently employ the metaphor of the people of Israel as a flock and God as a shepherd. All these observations have been grounded more thoroughly and linguistically by several subsequent studies (Nasuti 1983; Goulder 1995; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005).

This combination of elements has led most scholars to discern a sense of unity to the collection. However, there are several features of the psalms that push against their unity. First, they are clearly not written by the same person.\(^2\) While there are a few individuals named “Asaph” in the Hebrew Bible, the likely referent intended by the psalms titles is the Asaph named in 1 Chr 6:39. The Chronicler indicates that he was appointed during David’s reign to oversee liturgical singers (1 Chr 15:16–18). Yet, some of the Asaphite psalms address the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and subsequent exile.\(^3\) Second, the emphasis on Joseph and the northern tribes has led most scholars to assume that a portion of these psalms originated in the Northern Kingdom.\(^4\) This northern provenance contrasts sharply with the clear emphasis on Zion, the temple, and the Davidic dynasty (73:17; 74:1–13; 76:2; 78:65–72; 79:1–4). Third, there are two contrasting ways in which the Asaphite psalms relate to the temple in Jerusalem. On the one hand they describe the temple as the locus of God’s presence and his revelation (e.g., 73:17). On the other hand, they lament its destruction by the Babylonians (74:1–3; 79:1–4).\(^5\)

The history of scholarship on the Asaphite psalms can be summarized as a quest to find a way to explain both the unity and diversity displayed in these poems. Tradition-history approaches represented by Martin Buss have argued that their unity comes from the fact that they were written by “clergy or professional psalmists” (1963: 392). Their diversity is
explained by their compositional history. In Buss’ view, the earlier Asaphite psalms were authored by “pre-exilic, largely North-Israelite Levites” (1963: 386). While the later Asaphite psalms were written after the fall of Samaria when “protodeuteronomic Levitical traditions continued in the south” (Buss 1963: 386). The shift to the south necessarily required some theological adjustment.

Canonical approaches to the psalms have provided another way in which to seek unity in this collection (McCann 1993; Mitchell 1997; Wilson 2005; Jones 2009; Robertson 2015). These studies have grown more methodologically sophisticated and have provided valuable insights into the message of the collection. In particular, there are two insightful conclusions offered by canonical approaches. First, there is not a clear and discernable narrative progression to the Asaphite psalms. Second, the exile is their most appropriate interpretive horizon. That is, as a collection, the Asaphite psalms seek to address the trauma of the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian exile. Christine Brown Jones’ summary reflects both of these conclusion well, “the psalms of the collection move in ebb and flow of waves of despair over the reality that the wicked are still present and threatening and waves of remembrance that God delivered before and can/ will deliver again... [these psalms are] an honest reflection of the confusion encountered after the destruction of the temple and the exile” (2009: 184).

While both conclusions are credible, they do not go far enough to explain the features of the Asaphite psalms as we have them. The exile is not the only interpretive horizon in view in these poems. Additionally, this perspective does not explain the northern focus of several of the psalms. Consequently, this article will argue that two critical social contexts provide insight into the shape and function of the Asaphite psalms: the fall of Samaria with the subsequent influx of refugees from the northern kingdom into Judah and the destruction of the temple and Babylonian exile. Both events created contexts in which first northern Israelites and then the Judeans had to negotiate their identity in light of traumatic events. A Social Identity Approach (SIA) provides several cognitive tools to help understand some important dynamics in this collection.

**SIA as a Lens to Understand the Function of the Asaphite Psalms**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a scholarly construct was launched in a work edited by social psychologist Henri Tajfel (1978). Put simply, it argues that categorization as a member of a particular group leads to
social comparison and the desire for the positive distinctiveness of one’s own group (King 2021: 12; Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011: 50). SIT, therefore, analyses the ways in which social comparison is linked to social identity. Groups exist in the context of other groups, “[the] characteristics of one’s group as a whole...achieve most of their significance in relation to perceived differences from other groups and the value connotation of these differences” (Tajfel 1978: 61–76, esp. 66).

One weakness of SIT was that it did not describe how groups are formed. This task was taken up by Tajfel’s student John Turner, who developed Social Categorization Theory (SCT) (Turner 1982, 15–40). This theory defines what a group is and the socio-cognitive processes that support their creation and continued existence.

Together, these two theories have become known as a Social Identity Approach, which has been subsequently adapted and applied to the study of ancient texts and widely used in New Testament studies (Baker 2012; Tucker and Baker 2016). While not as widely used as an interpretive tool in Old Testament studies, several helpful works have been published in the last decade (e.g., Bosman 2008; Hon Wan Lau 2011; Jonker 2016; Stargel 2018; King 2021). While space prohibits a full exposition of SIA, it will be utilized throughout this study.

The Settings of the Asaphite Psalms

There are two important historical dynamics to consider when reading the Asaphite psalms. The first is to recognize the massive social change engineered by the Assyrian incursions into Israel and Judah in the 8th century (Richter 2014: 337–349; Rainey and Notley 2014: 225–245). The fall of Samaria created a string of refugees who fled to the South, which led to a population growth in Judah (Miller and Hayes 2006: 252, 390; Broshi 1974: 21–26). This immigration created a context in which the northern refugees would have to reassess their group identity. It is likely that these refugees would have viewed themselves as an outsider group in Judah. A brief review of the relevant history provides relevant context for this perspective: at the assembly of Shechem during the Rehoboam and Jeroboam split, deep regional differences surfaced between the northern and southern tribes (1 Kgs 12). This split was more than just political. The Israelites (NK) rejected the Davidic and Zion theologies (Miller and Hayes 2006: 268). Their cry of rebellion was, “What is our portion in David? And we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, Israel! Look to
your own house, David” (1 Kgs 12:16). Rapidly, Jeroboam set up new cultic shrines, religious festivals, priesthood, and began operating on a different calendar (1 Kgs 12:25-33) (Talmon 1958: 58–74).

The NK rapidly overshadowed the kingdom of Judah militarily, economically, and politically. It is probable that during the Omride era, Judah served as a vassal state to Israel (Miller and Hayes 2006: 286). Israel was placed geographically at the crossroads of important trade routes and had more international contact. There were many skirmishes between Judah and Israel, but three incidences are emblematic of the tension between the two kingdoms.

- Amaziah’s defeat at the hands of Joash (1 Kgs 14:2–21). After this significant Judean defeat, Joash assaulted Jerusalem and tore down a section of its wall. He also looted the temple and took political hostages with him back to Israel.
- The brief reign of Athaliah. She was related to the Omride royal line, likely the granddaughter of Omri and daughter of Ahab (2 Kgs. 8:18, 26; 2 Chr 21:6; 22:2) (Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 98). Educated under Jezebel, she was married to Jehoram of Judah. Upon the death of her son, she attempted to eradicate the Davidic line and exercise the kingship (2 Kgs. 11:1). This would be seen by Judah as another NK attempt to wrest royal control from the Davidic line.
- The Syro-Ephramite War. This attack against Jerusalem by Rezin and Pekah illustrates well the political and cultural differences between the two kingdoms and is well represented in the biblical witness (2 Kgs. 15:29–30; 16:5–9; Isa 6:1–12:6; 2 Chr 28:5–21).

From this survey, it’s clear that while Israel and Judah had common ancestors and a shared history, in the generations following the split between the northern and southern tribes, clear divisions between the groups emerged. If social identity is constructed through expressions of difference, then critical differences are displayed between Israel and Judah (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 4). In particular, the NK rejected the Davidic and Zion theologies that unified the kingdom during the Davidic/
Solomonic Era, the NK created a new cultic apparatus, the NK instituted a new liturgical calendar, there is a history of antagonism between the kingdoms, and (5) each kingdom having a sense of superiority to the other.

The second important setting to consider when reading the Asaphite psalms does not need as much exposition. It is the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the fall of the Davidic line followed by Babylonian domination. Both of these contexts provided several triggers for potential identity change as outlined by Social Identity theorists, including immigration, organization changes, social/political changes, and life transitions (Amiot, de la Sablonniere, Smith, and Smith 2015, 176). This does not mean that a change in social identity will or must take place. Only that these contexts provide a typical opportunity to do so. With the fall of the NK and subsequent immigration to Judah, several identity issues would be highlighted. How could these refugees be assimilated into Judean society? How would their sense of identity and the community they belong to need to change? Based on identity forming strategies present in the psalms, many Asaphite psalms appear to address this context (Pss 50, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 81). Similarly, would the fall of Judah and the Babylonian exile necessitate a change in social identity? A different set of identity forming strategies are adopted for these psalms (Pss 74, 79, 82, 83).

Identity Forming Strategies in the Context of Responding to Assyrian Displacement

There are three primary ways in which these Asaphite psalms help to form identity. The northern refugees fleeing to Judah during the Assyrian crisis would likely have viewed themselves as outsiders. There would be a motivation on the part of both displaced Israelites and Judeans to assimilate them into Judean life. SIT has found that when two sub-groups create a new common ingroup, conflict and bias are reduced (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, and Dovidio 1989: 239–249). The creation of a new ingroup does not mean that the subgroups involved need to abandon their previous group identity. Instead, the new ingroup would include aspects of both subgroup identities (Esler 2016: 29). In other words, members of the new ingroup could then conceive of themselves as two subgroups within a larger entity. However, the more dominant subgroup “may project their subgroup identities onto the superordinate category” (Esler 2016: 31).

One way of creating a new ingroup is through the use of a norms and prototypes. Norms are types of behaviors and practices that
“characterize a social group and differentiate it from other social groups” (Hogg and Reid 2006: 7). Prototypes are representatives of the new ingroup that serve as exemplars to emulate (Esler 2016: 33). Applied to the Asaph Psalms, the creation of a new ingroup and the use of norms and prototypes are utilized in the first identity formation strategy. That is, the creation of a new ingroup that includes members of both subgroups. This strategy both allows the outsider sub-group to assimilate into the new context while at the same time challenging the dominant sub-group to live up to the group norms and prototypes for inclusion in the new ingroup. Psalms 50 and 73 demonstrate this strategy.

Psalms 50

Psalm 50 is cast in the form of a covenant lawsuit. God appears in a theophany to judge his people. Within the world of the psalm, God’s speech provides a clear description of ingroup and outgroup characterizations. God calls “his people” to him (יהוה; v. 4). This group is also described as his “godly ones” (יהוה; v. 5). That is, people who had covenanted with him. Yet, this group is not the ingroup itself. The speech is addressed to a mixed group that is comprised of ingroup and outgroup members. The challenge is that the group might not know or might misunderstand where the boundaries are to be drawn. Who is in the ingroup? Firstly, attention to ritual sacrifice is not enough on the part of the ingroup (vv. 8–13). Rather, if one assumes that God is receiving a benefit from sacrifice one has misunderstood its purpose. God clarifies that he does not need food or drink. Instead, God encourages Israel to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving (תודה) and to fulfill one’s vows (v. 14). That is, the purpose of sacrifice should come from gratitude at what God has done, not be an attempt to curry favor with him. This links to God’s call for Israel in v. 15 to “call me on the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will honor me.” The ingroup, therefore, is one characterized as those whose response to trouble is to call upon God and then honor him after the event. Implied in this is also the fact that the ingroup identifies with Yhwh who resides in Zion (v. 1).

The outgroup is described in vv. 16–21. They are called the wicked (יהוה). They do not reject the covenant. In fact, they have it on the tip of their tongue. They can even recite it. Yet in a memorable image, they cast the words of the covenant behind them (v. 17). These verses focus on their rejection of three of the ten words. Their rejection of these covenant
stipulations is subtle. They do not actually steal, but they befriend thieves (v. 18). They do not themselves commit adultery but keep company with those who do (v. 18). Most significantly, they believe they can get away with it. They think that God has the same limitations that humans have (v. 21). The psalm closes with God affirming the ingroup values he has described. He is looking for those who honor him publicly with thanksgiving sacrifices and who order their lives according to the covenant (v. 23).

In summary, this psalm seeks to characterize an ingroup that is not simply all Judah or all Israel, but those who call upon Yhwh during times of trouble, fulfills their vows to him, and affirms that Yhwh resides in Zion.

Psalm 73

Psalm 73 inhabits the space between a wisdom poem, a lament, and a thanksgiving (Tate 1998: 231), and the opening verse is critical to its interpretation. The psalm begins with an affirmation, “Surely, God is good to Israel; to those pure of heart” (v. 1). This is an example of synonymous-specification parallelism (Alter 2011: 32), for the second line sharpens the identity of Israel as “those pure of heart.” In turn, however, this creates an ambiguity. Are all people in Israel pure of heart? Or is God good to a subgroup within Israel—the pure of heart? As the psalm unfolds, it becomes clear that the latter option is what the psalmist has in mind. The psalm presents clear ingroup and outgroup characterizations. The “I” of the psalmist is intended to function as a prototypical ingroup member (King 2021, 59). This person is contrasted with the “wicked” (vv. 3, 12) on every level.

The most obvious difference between the prototypical psalmist and the wicked is at the level of their interior life. The psalm narrates the change in the psalmist from uncomprehending despair and frustration to someone who has a new, hard-won perspective on reality. The Psalmist is deeply self-reflective with a sensitive conscience. He understands that he had almost abandoned the God of Israel because of his envy of the wicked (vv. 2–3, 21–22). Yet even in his despair, he was careful not to demean God before those entrusted to his care (v. 15). He is depicted as someone who considers carefully (v. 16). He was rewarded with new insight obtained at the sanctuary (v. 17). This view is expressed most clearly in the four uses of ᾧ ἵ associated with the Psalmist. He is “pure of heart” (v. 1), cleansed of heart (v. 13), formerly embittered of heart (v. 21), but now has God as the
“rock” of his heart (v. 26). This integrity in the interior life of the psalmist is not matched by outward prosperity. Despite his care to remain pure in every sense of the word, he is physically stricken and deeply disoriented by his experience in life until his encounter at the sanctuary (v. 17).

In contrast, the wicked are at peace. Their physical bodies are described as pain-free and robust (v. 4). They do not have the same cares in life as the “little guy” (v. 5; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 227). Their state of peace and prosperity does not cause them to reflect on God’s grace and faithfulness. They use their position to engage in violence and oppression (v. 5). In a powerful image, they wear pride as a necklace and violence as their garment (v. 6). Their speech is fulsomely described as prideful, blasphemous, and destructive (vv. 8–9). Most troubling is their disposition toward God, “And they say, ‘How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’” (v. 11).

The ingroup and outgroup characterizations in this psalm do not draw a line between Israel and the nations or Israel and Judah. Instead, both groups are part of the same religio-ethnic community. This psalm is depicting a group within a group. Or, to put it another way, it is redefining true Israel as the “pure in heart” as opposed to a Judean or Israelite identity. However, why would someone want to be a part of this ingroup? One of the key insights of SIT is that one desires to be a part of a group because of the positive distinctiveness that comes from being a group member. In this psalm, this distinctiveness comes from the changed perspective experienced by the psalmist at the sanctuary (vv. 17–20; 23–27). The ingroup is one who identifies the locus of God’s presence at the temple.

Also significant is the changed perspective related to time. The term נסק in this context does not refer to chronology, but to outcome (Seebass 1977: 210). And in addressing the ultimate outcome of the wicked, the term takes on an eschatological meaning (Kraus 1993, 89). The psalmist recognized that he should change his horizon for evaluation. He should look not only to the past and present but should include the future. The outcome of the wicked is certain.

The positive distinctiveness of the ingroup comes from two factors. First, God is present with them (v. 23). He guides them by the hand and with his counsel (vv. 23–24). More significantly, and secondly, the eschatological fate of the righteous is assured. Whatever the present circumstances may indicate, the outcome of the wicked is destruction and for the psalmist it is vindication (v. 26–27).
A second strategy these psalms use to form Israel’s identity in the context of the Assyrian crisis is the use of historical recital. Social identity has a temporal element. “With a narrative that invokes a common past, the engineers of history can construct group boundaries and norms in historical terms. They are able to define for the group who they are and, just as importantly, who they are not” (King 2021: 67). This strategy will be illustrated through Psalm 78.

Psalm 78

This psalm is not only the central psalm in the Asaphite collection, it is the central psalm in the Psalter according to the Masoretic notation found on Ps 78:36. It is also highlighted in this collection by its length. In it many important themes in the Asaphite collection come together.

The psalm is a didactic poem. It provides a perspective on Israel’s history to shape belief and identity in its present. In the opening lines, the author asserts that he will recount a “parable” (רַעַב) and “riddles” (רֵיהַמ) (v. 2). These riddles will not be hidden any longer but will be recounted from generation to generation (v. 4). This mystery is the meaning of Israel’s history from the time of the exodus to the election of David and Zion with implications for the present.

The psalm has a clear orientation toward the northern tribes. This is obvious with the references to Ephraim and Joseph (vv. 9, 67) and has been further grounded linguistically in several studies (Buss 1963; Nasuti 1983; Goulder 1995). In terms of ingroup and outgroup characterization, right from the beginning of the psalm the poem states the goal it is trying to achieve. The poet reminds Israel of the Torah to which it is committed (v. 5). The ingroup would be Israelites who recount the obligations of the Torah to their children (v. 5), who place their confidence in God (v. 7), who do not forget his wondrous deeds (v. 7), and who are explicitly not like their ancestors who did none of these things (v. 8). At the end of the poem, the ingroup is also characterized as those who embrace God’s election of David and his choice of Jerusalem (vv. 67-72). God will shepherd these people through his servant, David (v. 71).

Most of the psalm is comprised of narrating this history of Israel’s ancestors who are characterized negatively as the outgroup—the type of person to be avoided. Before we look at the characterization of the outgroup directly, it is worth reflecting on the portions of Israel’s history
that are recounted. The first historical reference is enigmatic, “The sons of Ephraim, armed with those who shoot the bow, have turned back on the day of battle” (v. 9). Of the many suggestions that have been made regarding what this line refers to, the most compelling is to the defeat and capture of the ark in 1 Sam 4-6. This not only fits an Ephramite defeat, but this event is also referenced again near the end of the psalm and so serves as a kind of inclusio (vv. 56–66). From there the psalm goes back in time to recount the exodus and wilderness wanderings with an emphasis on the people’s disobedience and rebellion (vv. 12–40). The psalm then rehearses the exodus event again, but this time includes a listing of the plagues against Egypt (vv. 41–52). This section skips over the wilderness wanderings and focuses instead on the conquest of the land (vv. 53–55). This second narration climaxes with a lengthy description of the Philistine defeat of Israel and the capture of the ark (1 Sam 4–6).

Throughout this historical recital, the people of Israel are characterized in consistent ways. First, terms used for Israel are either ones that can refer to the northern kingdom or exclusively do so (Ephraim, vv. 9, 67; Jacob, vv. 21; Israel, vv. 21, 31, 59; Joseph, v. 67). Second, the people did not keep the covenant (vv. 10, 56). Third, they did not believe or trust in God (vv. 22, 32, 27). Fourth, they forgot God (vv. 11, 42). Fifth, they tested and provoked God (vv. 18, 41, 56). Sixth, they rebelled against God (vv. 17, 40, 56). Seventh, they sinned (vv. 17, 32). When God punished them for their actions, the people seemed to repent and remember God, but they were deceptive (vv. 34–37). Their hearts were not in it (v. 37). Finally, they engaged in idolatry with graven images (vv. 57–58).

It is worth reflecting on why the recitation of Israel’s history may end with 1 Samuel 6. Since the ark resided in Ephramite territory before this event and eventually in Zion after it, it served as a way to indicate that God’s presence has been identified with Jerusalem since that time. It undermines the whole history of the Northern Kingdom, including their worship centers at Bethel and Dan, as not being in the main storyline of God’s people. For refugees flooding into Judah after the Assyrian invasion, the message of this psalm would be clear—they are a part of God’s people and share in the covenant history, but they must embrace the Davidic line and the Jerusalem temple.

This last point provides a helpful segue to the final identity forming strategy in these psalms, the emphasis on Zion and the Davidic king (Pss
This emphasis would be an example of the dominate subgroup instilling its values on the new common ingroup (Esler 2016, 31). A brief examination of Psalm 76 will illustrate this strategy.

Psalm 76

Psalm 76 highlights that God is known in both Israel and Judah (v. 2). At times Judah is used in parallel with “Zion” as a synonym (e.g., 48:12; 78:68; 97:8). In other places in the Psalms it is used in explicit contrast to northern tribes (e.g., 60:9; 68:28; 108:9). The only use of Judah and Israel being used synonymously is in Ps 114:2 in a context that reflects on the exodus from Egypt, which highlights the unity of the twelve tribes. In this context, it is best to see verse 2 highlighting the fact that God is known and revered in both the southern and northern tribes of Israel. Lest there be any confusion, the psalmist quickly reminds Israel that God’s abode is in Salem/Zion (v. 3). So, potentially the ingroup could include anyone from Israel or Judah that affirm God’s abode in Zion.

The ingroup is further identified as the “all the poor of the land” (ךְלָמָנוֹתָיו) whom God will save (v. 10). This group is the frequent object of Yhwh’s pity and compassion (e.g., Isa 11:4; 29:19; 61:1; Zeph 2:3). The term refers both to the economically poor as well as those humble and contrite of spirit (NIDOTTE, 3:458–463). The latter meaning is reflected in the LXX translation of the phrase as the “all the poor of heart” (πάντας τοὺς πραξάς τη καρδία). This designation of Judah/Israel also emphasizes a group within a group. The ingroup cuts across northern and southern national lines to indicate a group based on their disposition toward God combined with a commitment to Zion theology. This ingroup is faithful to both make vows to Yhwh and fulfill them (v. 12).

The outgroup are the enemy warriors who have attacked Zion. Historically they may reflect the Assyrian invasion and the defeat of Sennacherib at Jerusalem in 701 BC. This understanding is reflected in the LXX title as a psalm “concerning the Assyrian” (πρὸς τὸν Ἀσσυρίον). Additionally, the Lion imagery associated with God in vv. 3, 5, and 7 contrast with Neo-Assyrian propaganda in which lion images were used of the Assyrian kings (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 263). If that is the case, God is portrayed here as far greater than the Assyrian army. There is no real battle depicted between God and the enemy army. They are simply destroyed at God’s rebuke. The military technology and power of the horse and rider does not stand a chance against God’s judgment (v. 7).
Identity Forming Strategies in the Context of Responding to Babylonian Exile

Only Psalms 74 and 79 clearly address the context of the Babylonian exile. These are both communal laments which utilize different identity forming strategies.

Psalm 74

Psalm 74 is a communal lament grieving the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. This is particularly jarring in the context of the Asaphite psalms. Psalm 73 just celebrated the temple as the locus of God’s revelation. It was from the temple that the psalmist had his perspective on the present and the future changed. In Psalm 74, the situation of the temple has radically changed and new questions have been raised. This psalm almost certainly dates to the aftermath of the 586 BC destruction of the temple by the Babylonians.18

There are three parties involved in this lament: God, Israel, and foreign invaders. The name “Israel” is not used directly in this psalm. The ingroup is described using the following terms: the flock of your pasture (v. 1); your congregation [ךְּלָכֵךְ] (v. 2); the tribe of your inheritance [ךְּתַנְתַּךְ נֵכֶר] (v. 2); your turtle dove [ךְָנָנָךְ] (v. 19); your poor [ךְָשָמַךְ] (v. 19); the oppressed [ךְָעֲצָךְ] (v. 21); and “poor and needy” [ךְָשָמַךְ וּךְָשָאָךְ] (v. 21). Noticeable in this list is the fact that almost every term is coupled with the second person singular pronoun. The psalmist clearly wants to make the point that despite appearances, these people still belong to Yhwh. The destruction of the temple does not mean that Yhwh has rejected them or should reject them.

The outgroup is described in stereotypical ways. They are not named (e.g., the Babylonians). They are the “enemy” [ךְָרֶאשֶׁךְ] (vv. 3, 18); “your foes” [ךְּרֶשֶׁךְ] (v. 4, 23); the “adversary” [ךְֶשֶׁךְ] (v. 10); “foolish people” [ךְֶזֶנְתֶּךְ] (v. 18, similarly v. 22); and “those who rise up against you” [ךְְזֶנְּתֶּךְ] (v. 23). They are vividly described as lumberjacks hacking down pillars in the sanctuary (vv. 5–6), or roaring lions in its midst (v. 4). They act out of arrogance to oppress and taunt God’s people and destroy God’s meeting place.19

God is the character most fully described in this psalm. Indeed, the psalm is a long accusation against God. Reflecting on the God as shepherd imagery so common in the Asaphite psalms, Zenger comments that here, “instead of caring for them like a concerned, protective shepherd with his flock and driving away the enemies who threaten them, YHWH has
not only left his flock in peril, but has even sent the ‘smoke of his anger’ against them.”20 The psalmist points out an inconsistency in God’s character. Echoing exodus imagery, he highlights that God had redeemed (ָ֫ו) and acquired (ָ֫ו) Israel. God had made his dwelling on Mt. Zion (v. 2). But now God has allowed it to all go up in smoke. God has not sent any signs (ָ֫ו) or prophets to help Israel understand the situation (v. 9). God is not only hostile, but he is also silent. Alluding once again to exodus language, the psalmist asks, “Why do you hold back your hand; and with your right hand from the midst of your bosom, destroy!” (v. 11).21 The Psalmist understands well that God had the power to be able to stop this destruction. Utilizing mythic imagery, he affirms God’s power as seen in the exodus event and in creation (vv. 13–17). The rhetorical force of the psalm comes in the final strophe. The psalmist asks God to “remember” (ָ֫ו) the insults of the enemy. He begs God to remember his covenantal promises and be faithful to them (v. 20).

In this psalm, the destruction of the temple and the suffering of the those who have an in-group identity does not mean that they are now in an out-group. This psalm affirms that God still has a responsibility to his people despite his displeasure with them.

Psalm 79

The tone of Psalm 79 differs dramatically and creates an interesting dialog with Psalm 78. Psalm 78 ended with God’s choice of Zion. Psalm 79 opens with foreign peoples laying waste to the temple and Jerusalem. In this communal lament the ingroup and outgroup are clearly defined. The psalm is a plea for God to vindicate and have compassion on his people. The ingroup is defined by the repeated use of the 2ms pronoun suffix. They are “your servants” and “your faithful ones” (v. 2). Their identity is dependent upon their relationship with God. Normally one desires to be a part of a group because of the positive distinctiveness that group membership provides. Israel however has become mocked and derided by those around them (v. 4). They have been the victim of violent invasion (v. 7). Their positive distinctiveness can only be found in their connection to Yhwh. In attacking Jerusalem, the nations not only attack Israel but Yhwh himself. It is after all his holy temple (v. 1).

The psalmist recognizes that Israel is not entirely innocent. Yhwh’s has a right to be angry. The question is, how long will this anger last (v. 5)? The psalmist admits that their ancestors have sinned, and they have
followed in their footsteps (vv. 8–9). This becomes the basis for a plea for forgiveness and deliverance (v. 9). The ingroup is lastly characterized as the flock which God shepherds. They are people who give thanks to God for his deliverance (v. 13).

The outgroup is also clearly defined as the nations (אֲרֵמָיִם; vv. 1, 6, 10). The nations are characterized as brutal, cruel, and violent. They have no regard for the flesh and blood of God’s people (vv. 2–3). They do not acknowledge God. The people of Israel and God are put together in one group while the nations are in another. They are the “other.” They do not get to speak in the psalm. The psalmist prays for a sevenfold judgment on them for their arrogance and derision (v. 12). This judgment will not only deliver Israel, but it will also protect God’s reputation. What is interesting in this psalm is that the destruction of the temple does not lead to a questioning of the Zion or Davidic theologies, but to a demand that Yhwh deliver on the basis of his covenant faithfulness.

In both Psalm 74 and 79 ethnic difference becomes more salient in determining the ingroup and outgroup. The outgroup are foreign invading armies. The psalmist also emphasizes God’s ownership of Israel, often using the second person singular possessive pronoun. This is done to link Israel’s fate with God’s reputation. God should be invested in their renewal. Both psalms provided Israel with a model—a prototypical example—of how to maintain an identity rooted in Yhwh in spite of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. The lament form itself indicates that the destruction is not ultimate, but there is hope for restoration. This leads to an eschatological hope for God to restore what was lost.

Summary

This article has argued that two interpretive horizons are important to grapple with the unity and diversity in the Asaphite collection. The first horizon is the aftermath of the Assyrian invasion and demise of the NK. One of the functions of the Asaphite psalms was to help assimilate northern refugees into Judean life and faith. This was possible because of their shared deep history but still a challenge because of their recent history and divergent beliefs. This dynamic helps to explain two common features in the Asaphite psalms: the emphases on historical recital and the temple, Zion, and the Davidic king. The historical recitals, which are so common in this collection, focus on the exodus, wilderness, conquest, and judges traditions, eras in which Israel and Judah had a shared history. Noticeably
absent in this collection is the history of the NK. Regarding the emphasis on the temple, Zion and the Davidic king, these were the points most at conflict with northern Israelites. Consequently, bringing them in line with this aspect of Judean belief and practice required a fair amount of sensitivity. Psalm 78 is a particularly important example in this regard. In addition, the rhetorical trope of a group within a group found in the collection (Pss 50, 73, 76, 77, 78). This device is particularly useful because it defines the ingroup not ethnically or geographically but based on their commitment to Yhwh. The ingroup is one who believes in, trusts, and is faithful to Yhwh. One who obeys the Torah and its regulations in right worship. This not only allows northern Israelites to assimilate into Judean life, it also encourages Judeans to reflect on their own standing with Yhwh.

The second interpretive horizon is the exile. In the psalms that highlight this context most clearly, the ingroup/outgroup description also changes (Pss 74, 75, 79, 83). More ethnic language is used to contrast Israel with the nations. However, these psalms do not picture the ingroup/outgroup simply as Israel vs. the nations. The language for Israel still utilizes the group within a group language quite often. Words like “your faithful ones” (מִסָּהַדְקָה), “your servants” (כָּטְרֵךְ), and “your poor” (רְעֵיהּ) are mixed in with clear ethnic designations. Similarly, the foreign nations are not often named specifically (the exception being Psalm 83). Rather, they are defined by their role or stance in opposition to Yhwh. They are the “enemy” (אָפֶּר), “your adversaries” (זֶחָרָה), or the boastful (חֲלוֹאָלוֹת). Again, the ingroup/outgroup is not simply ethnically defined, but ethnicity still matters. The psalmists remind God of his covenant with Israel as a people. They have a shared history with one another and God and marks them out from the nations. That identity still matters even after the crisis of the destruction of the temple.

The Asaphite psalms are unified in that they all seek to address the context of a crisis and the attempt to maintain or shape identity through it. In coming to terms with the unity and diversity of collection within the Psalter, it is helpful not only to look at their canonical placement but also some of the potential social contexts which they addressed. A Social Identity Approach provides one helpful set of tools to engage in this study.
End Notes


2 While Delitzsch argued that some of the Asaphite psalms were written by Asaph himself (Ps 50, 73, 78?, 82?), many of them could not have been (1890: 123–24).

3 It is more appropriate to think in terms of an Asaphite guild of singers that operated over an extended period of time, the “sons of Asaph” (1 Chr. 25:1–2).

4 A rare exception to this understanding is Illman 1976: 50–51.

5 These two perspectives on the temple are juxtaposed in adjacent psalms: 73 to 74 and 78 to 79.

6 Helpful overviews of SIA are Esler 2016: 13–39; Andrew King 2021: 8–30.

7 There are a host of different methodological tools from various disciplines social identity theorists use to analyze group identity and group dynamics, including, ingroup and outgroup characterizations, norms and prototypes for ingroup behavior, beliefs and values, memory studies, and ritual studies to name just a view. For a good overview of this eclectic mix, see Part 1 of T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament (Tucker and Baker 2016).

8 For a survey of historical issues involved in this event, see, Irvine 1990.

9 On the role of shared ancestors as a marker of an ethnic boundary, see Hall 1997: 25.

10 For helpful overviews of this era, see, Moore and Kelle 2011: 334–95; Fulton 2018: 230–35.

11 Samuel Terrien has argued that the term כֹּלִימָל implies that this group is faithful to the covenant (2003: 397). However, the context suggests that this term is being used in a general way to describe all Israel, some of whom are not faithful. See, Goldingay 2007: 113.

12 The BHS apparatus suggests that the text here may have originally been כַּל אֲנֵצֶר. This reading maintains the same consonantal text and makes good sense in the context (it would be parallel with “to the pure in heart”). However, there is no actual textual evidence that this is the original reading and considering that “to Israel” makes sense in the context as well, one would be wise to maintain the reading of the Masoretic Text.

13 His is a plague-filled life. Note the use of נָבָא here in the sense of being afflicted or plagued (v. 14; cf. Gen 12:17).
There is a significant exegetical debate related to the meaning of the pivotal v. 17. Are the “sanctuaries of God” (קדש מקדש) literal or metaphorical? The term “sanctuaries of God” has been understood as metaphorical by Diethelm and recently supported by Zenger (Diethelm 1987: 646; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 231). The primary argument is that it is difficult to imagine such a radical change in perspective occurring through a concrete worship experience in the temple. Instead, the term seems to be used in a way similar to the use of “mysteries of God” in Wisdom of Solomon 2:22. However, the term “sanctuaries” in the plural is only used in a concrete way in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ps 68:36; Lev 21:23; 26:31; Ezek 7:24). In this context the phrase is preceded by the verb “I entered” (אני Entered), which support a concrete understanding as well.

For a list of possible historical references, see, Tate 1998: 289.

LXX Codex Vaticanus.

See the argument in Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 243.

The precise referent of כְּלָלָה is difficult to determine (v. 8). The use of כּוֹצְעַ for a place instead of an appointed time is unusual (Lam 2:6). The plural could reference the whole cultic complex in Jerusalem. But the prepositional phrase יָצָא following seems to indicate otherwise.

Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 244.

Cf. Exod 15:6, 12.

E.g., in Psalm 74, the ingroup is described using the following terms: the flock of your pasture (v. 1); your congregation (people) (v. 2); the tribe of your inheritance (תּוֹךְ נְפָשׁוֹת) (v. 2); your turtle dove (תּוֹכָךָ) (v. 19); your poor (people) (v. 19); the oppressed (people) (v. 21); and “poor and needy” (עָמָד וּפָנִים נְפָשׁוֹת) (v. 21). The psalmist emphasizes that despite appearances, these people still belong to Yhwh. The destruction of the temple does not mean that Yhwh has rejected them, or should reject them.

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Echoes of Jesus’ Cross in Second Corinthians 12:7–10

Abstract:
One of the thorniest exegetical questions in Pauline literature involves the apostle’s story of a thorn in the flesh. Interpreters have often attempted to fathom the meaning of the passage by gleaning insights from historical backdrops. However, in doing so, they have overlooked clues that lie much closer at hand, namely, Jesus’ Passion tradition. Therefore, in this article, I attempt to show that Paul crafted the story of his thorn in light of Jesus’ Passion. Based on analyses of linguistics, intertextuality, and literary context, I explore three significant echoes of Jesus’ cross in 2 Cor 12:7-10: thorn in the flesh, threefold prayer, and antithesis of power and weakness.

Keywords: Thorn in the Flesh, Second Corinthians, weakness, suffering, boasting, intertextuality

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Introduction

Since Richard B. Hays’ groundbreaking work, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, in which he applied a narrative reading to a Pauline letter and aptly demonstrated a narrative substructure of Galatians, scholars have begun to investigate narrative elements in Pauline letters (Hays 1983).1 In the study of 2 Corinthians, one also observes reflections of Jesus’ crucifixion in his discourse, as reflected in Paul’s proclamation in 2 Cor 4:10: πάντατε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ιησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες, ἕνα καὶ ζωὴ τοῦ Ιησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι ἡμῶν φανερώθη (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). In Paul’s understanding, a fusion of Christ’s crucifixion and his own identity has taken place. Thus, throughout 2 Corinthians, the crucified Christ continues to echo. Moreover, as Paul’s apostolic self-defense culminates in 2 Cor 12:7–10,2 a corresponding intensification of the echo effect fittingly accompanies this climactic passage. Regarding the echoes of Jesus’ cross in the apex of Paul’s defense, Jerry W. McCant and Kar Yong Lim investigated several correlative experiences. McCant observes a number of parallels between their experiences as follows:

1. Jesus faces σταυρός, an instrument of death. Paul faces a σκόλων, possibly an instrument of death (2 Cor 12.7).
2. Three times Jesus prays “Let this cup pass” (Mk 14.35 f.). Three times Paul prays for removal of the thorn (2 Cor 12.8).
3. Jesus prays “Not my will but thine…” (Lk 22.42). Paul receives an oracle, “For you my grace is sufficient” (2 Cor 12.9).
4. Jesus is crucified (Mk 15.24). Paul receives “no healing” (2 Cor 12.9).
5. Jesus was rejected by “his own” (John 1.11). Paul’s ‘own’ church rejected him (2 Cor 10.14; 12.7–10).
6. Jesus was raised from the dead “by the power of God” (Mk 16.1). Paul will live with Christ “by the power of God” (2 Cor 13.4).
7. Jesus was rejected as Messiah. Paul was rejected as Apostle.
8. Jesus was a Suffering Servant Messiah. Paul is a Suffering Servant Apostle. (McCant 1988: 571)

Lim likewise observes the resembling experiences, especially paying a close attention to the theme of weakness between Paul and Jesus and concludes, “Paul’s boasting of his weakness is … a theological interpretation of weakness that is grounded in the story of Jesus, the Messiah crucified in weakness but now reigning by the power of God (2 Cor. 13:4).”3

However, McCant does not develop his argument beyond the list of the correlations, and Lim does not adequately investigate other elements that reflect Jesus’ Passion narrative in 2 Cor 12.7–10. Therefore, in this article,
intending to advance the discussions of McCant and Lim, I will attempt to
demonstrate the ways in which Jesus’ Passion and crucifixion echo and
even shape Paul’s argument in 2 Cor 12:7–10. I make such a case on the
basis of the word study of σκόλος in ancient Greek literature, analyses of
intertextual connections between 2 Cor 12:7–10 and the Passion tradition,
and considerations of the literary context of 2 Corinthians. Accordingly, I
will demonstrate three significant echoes of Jesus’ Passion and crucifixion
in 2 Cor 12:7–10: the thorn in the flesh, threefold prayer, and antithesis of
power and weakness.

Thorn in the Flesh

Paul’s “thorn in the flesh (σκόλος τῆς σαρκὸς)” ranks among the
most enigmatic expressions in the NT. Mysteries invite speculation,
and NT scholars have risen to the challenge with innumerable theories
regarding the composition of this particular thorn. However, scholars
do acknowledge the lack of consensus on this question, and some even
express an antagonistic attitude. When it comes to the composition of
the thorn, a counsel of despair may be in order. We may never know if
Paul’s metaphorical thorn referred to spiritual or psychological anxiety,
persecutions, oppositions, or some forms of physical ailment. However, the
theological significance of the thorn may not be out of reach. But in order
to grasp it, we need to entertain a possibility of echoes of the Jesus tradition
with both linguistic and theological dimensions. Therefore, in the following
section, I will argue that Paul’s use of σκόλος, the description of the purpose
of the thorn in the flesh, and his suffering for identity must have evoked
Jesus’ Passion in the minds of his readers.

To begin with, a close lexical affinity between σκόλος (2 Cor
12:7), ἀκανθα (Matt 27:29; John 19:2), and ἀκάνθινος (Mark 15:17; John
19:5) in light of ancient Greek literature suggests that Paul’s employment
of σκόλος reflects Jesus’ crown of thorns (Mark 15:17; Matt 27:29; John
19:2, 5). BDAG defines σκόλος to be “a (pointed) stake,” “thorn,” or
“splinter.” Yet, since the word is a hapax legomenon in the NT, scholars
have investigated various backgrounds of the word to identify what σκόλος
refers to. However, interpreters have not considered the theological
significance of σκόλος in relation to Jesus’ crown of thorns in the Passion
tradition (Mark 15:17; Matt 27:29; John 19:2, 5). Some scholars refrain from
examining harmony and continuity between Paul’s theology and Jesus’
teaching and ministry due to the history of scholarship called the “Jesus
and Paul” debate. Moreover, at first glance, the texts seem to be unrelated since Paul employs σκόλοψ (2 Cor 12:7), whereas the evangelists prefer ἀκάνθος (Mark 15:17; John 19:5) and ἄκανθα (Matt 27:29; John 19:2) to portray Jesus’ “thorns.” Nevertheless, an investigation of the use of σκόλοψ, ἀκάνθος, and ἄκανθα in the ancient writings from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century CE in various corpora, including the LXX, the OT Pseudepigrapha, the Church Fathers, the Hellenistic poetry, oneirromancy, medical documents, and magical papyri, shows a close lexical relationship of these terms, which at times approaches synonymy.

First, Ezekiel 28:24 evinces this semantic overlap quite undeniably. Scholars routinely limit their interest to four passages in the LXX (Num 33:55; Ezek 28:24; Hos 2:6; Sir 43:19) when they conduct a word study of σκόλοψ. However, in doing so, they overlook a very close connection between σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα in Ezek 28:24. In Ezek 28:20–26, Ezekiel declares God’s judgment against Sidon (28:20–23), and God’s vindication leads into two consequences: the removal of Israel’s enemy (28:24) and the restoration of the house of Israel (28:25–26). In this literary context, σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα are synonymously employed as metaphors to portray Israel’s enemy who had shamed them: καὶ οὐκ ἔσονται οὐκέτι τῷ οἴκῳ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ σκόλοψ πικρίας καὶ ἄκανθα ὁδόνης ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν περικύκλω πάντων ἀτμισαντῶν αὐτῶν. Hence, no clear distinction of meaning can be made between σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα in this context.

Second, a work from the OT Pseudepigrapha, Sibylline Oracles, also exhibits a close association of these words. Dating from the second century BCE to the eighth century CE, this collection of oracles provides helpful background for NT studies. In this work, σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα appear together in Sib. Or. frag. 1:23–25. Since the fragment is closely related to Sib. Or. 3:1–45, it is dated to the second century BCE (Collins 1983: 1:361, 467). The fragment 1:1–35 insists on allegiance to one God, manifesting a stark contrast between mortal men and the sovereign and almighty God. The author of the fragment begins with an introduction, identifying the issues of the people who exalt themselves and do not pledge allegiance to God (1:1–6). Then, the author goes on to describe one, sovereign, and almighty God (1:7–14) and to exhort people to worship God (1:15–25) and to stop roaming in darkness (1:26–31). The author concludes the fragment, declaring once again the existence of one sovereign God who is the Lord (1:32–35). In this literary context σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα are employed in 1:23–25 to describe the ways in which the people went astray: τύφω καὶ μανή
δὲ βαδίζετε καὶ τρίβον ὅρθην εὐθείαν προλπόντες ἀπῆλθετε καὶ δὶ’ ἀκανθῶν καὶ σκολόπων ἐπλανᾶσθε. People abandoned the right path and wandered through brier and thorn. Thus, σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα reflect a close lexical affinity in this context.

Third, the Church Fathers also understand the similar semantic meaning between σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα. John Chrysostom (349–407 CE) employs σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα in an equivalent meaning in his work Ascetam facetious utilitarian non debere (PG48.1055). In a context pertaining to the exhortation of modesty and humbleness, Chrysostom employs σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα as metaphors to indicate the means which cause people to go astray: Ὁ γὰρ µὴ µετὰ φόβου καὶ πολλῆς ἐπιμελείας τὴν ἀσκήσιν τῆς ἀφετῆς ἐργαζόμενος, πολλὰς ύψιστα τὰς εἰς τὸ κακὸν ἐκτροπάς, καὶ ὅσπερ εἰς εὐθείας καὶ βασιλικῆς ὀδὸν πλανώμενος εἰς τὰς δὶ’ ἀκανθῶν καὶ σκολόπων πλανᾶς καὶ ἀνοδίας. The close proximity and the analogous semantic meaning of these words suggest at the very least a strong affinity.

Fourth, Callimachus (305–240 BCE), Greek poet and scholar who worked at the Alexandrian library, uses σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα as synonyms in his work, Epigrams (3), which was later incorporated into Anthologia Graeca/Greek Anthology, (7.320). In this short epigram, a man named Τίμων, a misanthrope, gives a florid description of the tomb in which he lives, saying that it is surrounded by σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα: Ὁ ἀξεῖν πάντῃ περὶ τὸν τάφον εἰσὶν ἀκανθαὶ καὶ σκολόπες· βλάψεις τοὺς πόδας, ἥν προσιῆς· Τίμων μισάνθρωπος ἐνοικεὼ. In this context, the writer employs σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα near synonymously to describe objects which inflict pain to the feet upon approach.

Fifth, Oppian (second century CE), a Greco-Roman poet, employs σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα synonymously in his work, Halieutica (5.329). This five-volume work describes sea-creatures and the ways to catch them (Jones 1722). In 5.329 Oppian synonymously employs σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα to describe a physical characteristic of the sea-monster: ο δ’ οξύπρωον ἀκανθὰν θείειται σεμερόνσιν ἀνασταμένην σκολόπεσιν (cf. 4.599).

Sixth, Artemidorus (mid-second to early-third century CE), a diviner, utilizes σκόλοψ and ἄκανθα in his work, Oneirocritica (3.33; 4.57). This five-volume work treats various interpretations of ancient Greek dreams (Harris-McCoy 2012). Books 1–2 provide an encyclopedic collection of interpretations of dreams that relate to the human life-cycle, including climate, body-parts, and life-events such as birth and death (Harris-McCoy 2012: 19). Book 3 is organized as a miscellany (Harris-McCoy 2012: 22–
Books 4–5 contain instructions for interpretations (Harris-McCoy 2012: 24–25). In 3.33 Artemidorus provides an interpretation concerning ἀκάνθα and σκόλοψ. According to his understanding, ἀκάνθα and σκόλοψ are listed together to signify pains, impediments, worries, grief, love affairs, and injustice: ἀκάνθα καὶ σκόλοπες ὀδύνας σημαίνουσι διὰ τὸ ὀξύ καὶ ἐμποδίσμοις διὰ τὸ καθεκτικόν καὶ φροντίδας καὶ λύπας διὰ τὸ τραχύ, πολλοῖς δὲ καὶ ἐρωτικαῖς καὶ ἀδικίαις ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων πονηρῶν. Yet, in a narrow sense, especially with regard to love affairs and injustices, ἀκάνθα signifies injustice committed by women, and σκόλοψ signifies injustice committed by men: καὶ αἱ μὲν ἀκάνθαι ὑπὸ γυναικῶν τὰς ἀδικίαις οἱ δὲ σκόλοπες ὑπ’ ἀνδρῶν προσημαίνουσι. However, in a general sense, Artemidorus treats ἀκάνθα and σκόλοψ as near-synonyms. Also, in 4.57 Artemidorus lists ἀκάνθα, σκόλοψ, παλίουρος, and βάτος together to explain usefulness of these plants: ἀκάνθας δὲ καὶ σκόλοπες καὶ παλίουροι καὶ βάτοι πρὸς μὲν ἀσφάλειαν ἐπιτήδεια πάντα διὰ τὸ φρονηματικό γίνεσθαι καὶ ἔρχοντας, πρὸς δὲ τὰς ἐκπλοκάς οὐ πάντοπ τι ἐπιτήδεια διὰ τὸ καθεκτικόν. They help one build fencing of his or her property as walls. Thus, these terms share a very close semantic meaning.

Seventh, Oribasius (320–400 CE), a Greek medical writer and the physician of the Roman emperor Julian (331/332–363 CE), also employs σκόλοψ and ἀκάνθα as near-synonyms in Synopsis ad Eustathium (7.17; Libri ad Eunapium 3.32). In this section, Oribasius explains remedy for the injuries from pointed objects and employs σκόλοψ and ἀκάνθα to describe types of those injuries: ἀκίδας καὶ καλάμους καὶ ἀκάνθας, ἐπὶ δὲ καὶ σκόλοπας ἐπισπεύδονται ἀναγελλόντες αἱ δύο, ἀριστολοχία, ἀμυωνικόν σὺν μέλητι, ὑσσκυμώμον καρπὸς λείος.

Finally, ἀκάνθωνος and σκόλοψ show a close lexical relationship in their use in the Greek Magical Papyri, the collection of magical spells, formulae, hymns, and rituals, dating from the 100s BCE to the 400s CE (PGM III/IV. 151–152). The passage is located in the context of love magic in XXXVI. 134–160 in which a man is to cast a spell on the woman with whom he wishes to sleep, by invoking Isis, Osiris, and daimons so that the magic brings her sleeplessness, hunger, and thirst until she sleeps with him. In this context ἀκάνθωνος and σκόλοψ are synonymously employed to describe sufferings upon her: ἕαν δὲ θέλῃ κομίζασθαι, ὑποστήρισται αὐτή σττύβας ἀκάνθωνος, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν κοτραφῶν σκόλοπας, ἵνα μου ἐπινεύσῃ ἐπὶ ἑταρωτικῆ φιλία. Thus, these two words are indistinguishable in their meaning.
Having examined the use of σκόλοψ, ἀκανθα, and ἀκάνθινος in ancient Greek writings from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century CE in various genres and corpora, the most plausible conclusion can be deduced that σκόλοψ, ἀκανθα, (as well as ἀκάνθινος) have a close lexical relationship, which at times function as near-synonyms. If so, it is quite plausible that Paul’s description of the thorn in the flesh in 2 Cor 12:7 must have signaled the image of Jesus’ crown of thorns in the minds of his readers.

Furthermore, Paul’s description of the purpose of the thorn in the flesh reinforces the echoes of Jesus’ Passion and crucifixion: Both Paul’s thorn in the flesh and Jesus’ crown of thorns humiliate the recipients. In 2 Cor 12:7 the expression, σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί (with an appositional phrase, ἀγγέλος Σατανᾶ), is surrounded by three ἵνα purpose clauses: ἵνα μὴ υπεραίρομαι, ἵνα με κολαφιζῇ, and ἵνα μὴ υπεραίρομαι. All those clauses (the first and the third clauses are verbatim) express humiliation as the purpose of the thorn in the flesh in two different ways: one in a negative sentence and the other in an affirmative sentence. Namely, the purpose of the thorn in the flesh/the messenger of Satan was to torment Paul. Likewise, Jesus’ Passion story repeatedly describes humiliation inflicted upon him. While a thorn in the flesh was given to Paul in order to beat (κολαφιζῶ) him, Jewish religious leaders beat (κολαφιζῶ) Jesus with their fists while accusing him of blasphemy (Matt 26:67; Mark 14:65). Also, after putting a crown of thorns on Jesus’ head, the soldiers beat (τύπτω) his head with a reed (Matt 27:30; Mark 15:19). Moreover, Jesus’ crown of thorns together with the purple robe and a reed became instruments of insult and humiliation in the hands of the soldiers as they mocked Jesus for his royal pretensions.

In addition, both Jesus and Paul suffer for their identity. On the one hand, Jesus’ torment was due to the accusation of blasphemy for his answer to a question regarding his identity (Mark 14:61–2; Matt 26:63–4). The high priest interrogated Jesus, asking if he was Christ, and Jesus admitted that he was the One. Thus, they accused him of blasphemy and tormented him (Mark 14:61–2; Matt 26:63–4). In other words, Jesus was accused and tormented on the basis of his identity. On the other hand, Paul’s discussion in 2 Cor 12:7–10 reaches its apex regarding the legitimacy of his apostleship. Paul emphasizes his identity as a servant of Christ at the beginning of his speech proper (2 Cor 11:23), and his defense culminates in 12:7–10. Paul must defend his identity against criticisms from his opponents for the sake of the Gospel and the church. In fact, Paul declares in 12:9
that his thorn/weakness has become his identity because his weakness becomes the locus where the power of Christ is manifested. Thus, one can again observe another point of contact between Jesus and Paul: Both were accused and suffered for their identities: Jesus as the Christ and Paul as a servant of Christ. Therefore, a close semantic affinity between σκόλος (2 Cor 12:7), ἁκανθά (Matt 27:29; John 19:2), and ἀκάνθηνος (Mark 15:17; John 19:5) in light of the ancient literature, similar humiliating experiences inflicted upon Jesus and Paul by their “thorn,” and their suffering for identity reveal the striking echoes of Jesus’ Passion narrative in 2 Cor 12:7–10.

**Threefold Prayer**

Regarding 2 Cor 12:8, Paul’s threefold plea continues to echo Jesus’ Passion tradition, namely, the prayer in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46). Some scholars construe the number τρίς to be numerical; others interpret it symbolically. Some argue the Jewish background for the practice of threefold prayer; others insist on the Hellenistic influence, which has led some scholars to deny Paul’s awareness of Jesus’ threefold petition. However, while these traditions may have served as backdrops of the threefold prayer, an analysis of the intertextual connections and literary context of the letter show that Paul’s prayer remarkably resembles Jesus’ plea in Gethsemane not only in its form but also its content and outcome.

First, one striking echo of Jesus’ Passion in Paul’s prayer pertains to his plea to remove his suffering. Paul implored the Lord to remove the thorn (2 Cor 12:7), and Jesus prayed to God to let the cup pass by him (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36). While the exact identification of Paul’s thorn/the messenger of Satan may be out of reach, 2 Cor 12:7 at least indicates that the thorn inflicted some sorts of suffering upon him. Likewise, the Passion narrative clarifies that the term, κύριος serves as a metaphor which refers to Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion. Thus, both Paul and Jesus are burdened with suffering; thus, they petitioned to remove it.

Second, Paul’s direct address to Christ in his plea in 2 Cor 12:8 shows his portrayal of suffering in connection with Jesus. In 2 Cor 12:8, he made a threefold plea to the Lord, Jesus: ὑπὲρ τούτου τρῖς τὸν κύριον παρεκάλεσα ἵνα ἀποστῇ αὐτῷ ἐμοῦ. While the text does not specify who the κύριος is, the immediate literary context clarifies that the Lord refers to Christ (12:9). The significance of this direct address to Christ lies in the fact that Paul directly prays to Christ instead of God the Father only in
12:9 (Windisch 1924: 388). Alfred Plummer suggests that Paul’s use of παρακαλέω is influenced by the gospel narratives (Plummer 1915: 253–354). In fact, when the word παρακαλέω appears in the gospel narratives, 17 times out of 25 times the term is employed to address Christ, especially for pleas for healing (e.g., Matt 8:5; Mark 5:23; Luke 8:41). If so, Paul seems to make his address intentionally to Christ as the One who can heal his suffering from the thorn.

Third, Paul’s use of παρακαλέω in light of the literary context of 2 Corinthians strongly suggests that his portrayal of suffering is grounded in that of Jesus. While Paul employs παρακαλέω in a sense of petition in 2 Cor 12:8, he also employs the same word in the letter, expressing a sense of encouragement (1:4, 6; 2:7; 7:6, 7, 13; 13:11). In fact, God’s encouragement is one of the prominent themes that characterize Paul’s discourse in the letter. Paul declares that God encourages the afflicted (1:3–4) and such encouragement is only available on the basis of Christ’s suffering (1:5). So, Paul may have wanted to call upon (παρακαλέω) Christ in 12:8, knowing that his encouragement is mediated through Christ (δύδα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in 1:5). So, instead of praying to God through Christ, Paul directly implores (παρακαλέω) Christ who is the healer and whose suffering is the source and reason of God’s encouragement (1:4–5). In other words, Jesus’ suffering profoundly echoes in Paul’s understanding: Jesus not only restores him from his suffering but also encourages him because he first suffered for Paul (1:5; cf. 13:3–4). Therefore, Paul’s use of παρακαλέω presents another plausible evidence that his prayer reflects Jesus’ suffering.

Fourth, the reception and acceptance of Paul’s plea remarkably echo those of Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane (2 Cor 12:9; Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Both Paul and Jesus received the answer from the one to which the entreaty was made: Paul from Christ; Jesus from God. Both Paul and Jesus’ pleas were answered but not in the way they had wished. In spite of his plea for removal, Paul’s thorn in the flesh remained with him (2 Cor 12:9). Likewise, despite his prayer for the removal of the cup of suffering, Jesus was betrayed, tormented, and crucified (Matt 26:47–27:56; Mark 14:43–15:41; Luke 22:43–23:49). However, both Paul and Jesus accepted the answers they received. Paul actually embraced his weakness, proclaiming, ὅτι εὐδόκηκα ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ, ἐν ὑβρεῖσιν, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν δυναμοῖς καὶ στενοχωρίας, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ ὃταν γὰρ ἔσθεν, τότε δυνατὸς εἶμι (12:10). Certainly, it was not Paul’s desire to continue to suffer from his thorn, but he accepts his thorn as a final answer from Jesus and resolves to continuously
face his thorn and suffer, knowing that the grace of Jesus is sufficient and his weakness becomes the locus of the divine power. Similarly, Jesus accepted the cup of suffering to be the will of God just as he had prayed for God’s will to be done but not for his own will (Matt 26:39, 42, 44; Mark 14:36, 39; Luke 22:42). Jesus submitted himself and accepted the answer: He was betrayed, tormented, and crucified (Matt 26:47–27:56; Mark 14:43–15:41; Luke 22:43–23:49). Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that echoes of the crucified Christ exist behind Paul’s threefold plea regarding his petition to remove his suffering, his direct prayer to Jesus as the healer and the source of encouragement, and his reception and acceptance of the answer.

**Power and Weakness**

Finally, in 12:9–10, the crucified Christ continues to echo in connection to the theme of power and weakness, especially when considering the literary context of 2 Cor 13:4. Paul depicts his experience based on the experience of Christ crucified.

In 12:9–10, Paul repeatedly highlights the paradoxical truth: power through weakness. In Jesus’ answer to Paul in 12:9a, χάρις and δύναμις are contrasted with ἁπάντησα. In 12:9b, ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ is contrasted with Paul’s ἁπάντησα. In 12:10, Paul’s contentedness with various sufferings once again manifests the paradoxical principle of power and weakness in his life: ὅταν γὰρ ἁπάντησα, τότε δύνατός εἰμι. Thus, a fusion of Paul’s weakness and Christ’s power has taken place; the antithesis of power and weakness has become the essential reality in his life.

Likewise, after articulating the reality of power and weakness in his life in 12:9–10, Paul illuminates this seeming paradox by referring to Christ’s weakness and power in 13:4a. Just as power and weakness characterize Paul’s life and ministry, he describes Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection in light of power and weakness: καὶ γὰρ ἐκστασία ἐξ ἁπάντησις, ἀλλὰ ζηκέκ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ. Moreover, in 13:4b, he further explains the union with Jesus, insisting, καὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἁπάντησομεν ἐν αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ ζήσομεν σὺν αὐτῷ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς. Paul’s use of two prepositional phrases, ἐν αὐτῷ and σὺν αὐτῷ, strengthens his identification with Christ. Murray J. Harris correctly explains, “As a result of being in Christ (ἐν αὐτῷ), Paul shared in the weakness of his crucified Master. As a result of his fellowship with Christ (σὺν αὐτῷ), he shared in the power of his risen Lord (vv. 3b, 4a), a power imparted by God (θεοῦ)” (Harris: 2005: 917). Now, the antithesis of power and weakness between Christ and Paul becomes even more explicit.
As Lim notes, “Paul never divorces the experiences of God’s power from the experience of the cross as the centre of the divine power,” (Lim 2009: 193). Paul depicts his experience of weakness and power based on the experience of Jesus’ death and resurrection (Savage 1996).

**Conclusion**

In this study, I have attempted to demonstrate the echoes of Jesus’ Passion narrative in Paul’s story of the thorn in the flesh in 2 Cor 12:7–10 by investigating three remarkable affinities. First, based on the analysis of σκόλος, ἀκανθα, and ἀκάνθων in the ancient writings from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century CE in various genres and corpora, I concluded that these terms share a close semantic relationship, which at times function as near-synonyms. Thus, I argued that Paul’s use of σκόλος in 2 Cor 12:7 must have brought the image of Jesus’ crown of thorns to the minds of his readers. Also, I have demonstrated that the affinities between Paul and Jesus regarding the purpose of their “thorns” and their experience of suffering for their own identity (i.e., Jesus as Christ and Paul as a minister of Christ) reinforce the picture in their minds. Second, I have argued that Paul’s threefold petition in 2 Cor 12:8 strikingly echoes Jesus’ Passion narrative. Both Paul and Jesus petitioned to remove their suffering. Paul addresses Jesus instead of God in his prayer. Paul’s employment of παρακαλέω in light of the literary context of 2 Corinthians reflects Jesus’ suffering. Both Paul and Jesus accepted the outcome of their prayer. Third, I have demonstrated a fusion of Christ’s crucifixion and Paul’s own identity in the antithesis of power and weakness in 2 Cor 12:9–10 and 13:4. Paul describes his life as a union with Jesus in his weakness and power.

In 2 Cor 10:1–12:13, the underpinning accusation against Paul pertains to his status as a servant of Christ; his rivals do not think that he belongs to Christ (10:7) and that he is not a servant of Christ (11:23). Therefore, Paul not only insists on his status as a servant of Christ (11:23) but also invites the Corinthians to see Christ incarnated in him and his ministry. If he intended to depict the crucified Christ in the apex of his defense in 2 Cor 12:7–10, these echoes of Jesus would well serve this purpose. Various implications arise from these results, but space does not allow for their exploration. For example, if Paul’s thorn in the flesh is to be understood in light of Jesus’ Passion and crucifixion, then the theological significance of Jesus’ echoes may shed a light on the understanding of the enigmatic expression, “σκόλος τῇ σαρκί” (2 Cor 12:7). The expression may encompass
multivalent dimensions, including suffering, persecution, physical pain, opposition, spiritual anguish, etc. Thus, further investigation along these lines seems promising. Moreover, my study may present additional evidence to the plausibility of Paul’s familiarity with the Jesus tradition in the Jesus and Paul debate.

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End Notes


3 See also Kar Yong Lim, “The Sufferings of Christ Are Abundant in Us” (2 Corinthians 1.5): A Narrative-Dynamics Investigation of Paul’s Sufferings in 2 Corinthians, LNTS 399 (London: T&T Clark, 2009: 195).

4 With a number of the growing interpreters who maintain the integrity of the letter, the present study regards the compositional unity of Second Corinthians. Examples of works espousing the unity of the letter includes, Albert Klöpper, Kommentar über das zweite Sendschreiben des Apostel Paulus an die Gemeinde Zu Korinth (Berlin: Reimer, 1874); Adolf Hilgenfeld, Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in Das Neue Testament (Leipzig: Fues, 1875); Heinrich J. Holtzmann, “Das gegenseitige Verhältniss der beiden Korintherbriefe,” ZWT 22 (1879) 455–92; C. F. Georg Heinrici, Das zweite Sendschreiben Des Apostel Paulus an die Korinther (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1887); James Denney, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The Expositor’s Bible (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1894); J. H. Bernard, “The Second Epistle to the Corinthians,” in The Expositor’s Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 7 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903) 3:1–119; Philipp Bachmann, Der zweite Brief des Paulus an die Korinther, ed. Theodor Zahn, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 8 (Leipzig: Deichert,


7 E.g., Hughes, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*: 442; Garland, *2 Corinthians*: 521.
David M. Park proposes three possible definitions, which succinctly provide an overview of scholarly views on the issue: cross, stake, and thorn. First, the Greek classical and apostolic sources employed ἁπακολούθω, the verb from of σκόλοψ, in relation to acts of impalement and crucifixion. Thus, σκόλοψ “signifies a cross, more particularly the cross of Jesus.” Second, since classical writers employ the term in military contexts, particularly in the contexts of defense and torture, σκόλοψ refers to stake. Third, based on the attestation of σκόλοψ in the LXX, classical literature, and the church fathers’ writings (as well as the definition of lexicographers), σκόλοψ can also mean “thorn” (“Paul’s Σκόλοψ τῇ Σαρκί: Thorn or Stake? (2 Cor. XII 7),” NovT 22 [1980]: 179–183). Many commentators particularly favor this third definition due in large part to the usage found in the LXX (Num 33:55; Ezek 28:24; Hos 2:6; Sir 43:19). Park also concludes the third definition to be the more plausible meaning than other definitions in 2 Cor 12:7. See the list of scholars supporting this definition in Alred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915: 349). Also, Hughes, Second Epistle to the Corinthians: 447; Garland, 2 Corinthians: 519.


Theodoret of Cyrus (393–458/466 CE) employs σκόλοψ and ἀκανθα by quoting Ezek 28:24 in his commentary on Ezekiel (1000.80): Καὶ οὐκ ἔσονται ἐπὶ τῷ οἴκῳ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ σκόλοψ πικρίας, καὶ ἀκανθα ὀδύνης, ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν περικύκλων αὐτῶν, τῶν ἀπαθανάτων αὐτῶν, καὶ γνώσονται ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἀδεωναί Κύριος. The TLG text of Theodoret’s quotation from Ezek 28:24 and the LXX’s Ezek 28:24 are slightly different (e.g., addition of Ἀδεωναί in Theodoret’s text). However, σκόλοψ and ἀκανθα are employed in the same meaning and syntax.


Collins translates σκόλοψ as “stake” (ibid., 470). However, “thorn” seems more appropriate translation of the word when regarding the context of wandering in a path.

More specifically, thorn seems to function as a metonymy for briar in this context. Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE) also quotes Sib. Or. frag. 1:23–25 in his apologetic work, Protrepticus/Exhortation to the Greeks (2.27.4): τῷφοι καὶ μανὶ δὲ βαδίζετε καὶ τρίβον ορθὴν εὐθείαν προπλόντες ἀπῆλθετε τὴν ἀκανθαν καὶ σκόλοψαν. The context of the second chapter involves Clement’s attack on Greek cults and gods: He condemns Greek divination (2.11.1–2) and Greek mysteries (2.12.1–22.7) and develops discussions pertaining to Greek atheism (2.23.1–25.2), the heavenly origin of fallen man (2.25.3–4), and the seven ways of idolatry (2.26.1–7), and he moves to exhort the Greeks to run back to heaven (2.27.1–5). In this
exhortation, Clement quotes Sib. Or. frag. 1:23–25 in which σκόλιος and ἠκανθά is synonymously employed. Likewise, Theophilus of Antioch (second century CE) makes use of σκόλιος and ἠκανθά in his apologetic work, Ad Autolycum/To Autolycus (2.36) by quoting Sib. Ora. frag. 1:1–35, although Clement and Theophilus’ works are independent from one another (Nicole Zeegers-Vander Vorst, Les citations des poètes grecs chez les apologistes chrétiens du Ille siècle [Recueil de travaux d’histoire et de philologie 4:47; Louvain: The Presses universitaires de Louvain, 1972] 141). In this work, Theophilus aims to convince his pagan friend, Autolycus, of Christianity and to demonstrate the falsehood of paganism (See the life and work of Theophilus in Rick Rogers, Theophilus of Antioch. The Life and Thought of a Second-Century Bishop [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000]). He quotes the entire section of Sibylline Oracles fragment one.


18 See the translation of 3.33 in ibid., 277.


20 For French translation of Oribasius’ works, see Oribasius, Œuvres d’Oribase, 6 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1851–1876).


22 Also see another magical-medical work in the fourth century CE called Cypandrides that consists of four books. In this collection of the book, particularly book 4 that is classified as bestiary, ἠκανθάνος and σκόλιος are employed together to describe creatures (4.28, 62).
The word κολαφίζω is attested only 5 times in the NT (Matt 26:67; Mark 14:65; 1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 12:7; 1 Pet 2:20).

The Greek words, κολαφίζω and τίτπω, are two different words, but they have a similar semantic domain. See L&N s.v. 19.1 and 19.7.


In Judaism threefold prayer is regarded in relation to Aaronic blessings (Num 6:24–26), Elijah's threefold breathing upon the widow's son with the prayer that he might be restored to life (1 Kgdm 17:21), and the Jewish custom of praying three times a day (Thrall, *Second Epistle of the Corinthians*, 2:818–9). Also, in the biblical tradition (Exod 32:10–14; 2 Kings 20:1–6; 2 Sam 15:25–30), threefold prayer pertains to the idea that one might be able to change God's mind although the result is not guaranteed (Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 639). Likewise, threefold prayers are found in Hellenistic culture. They are often associated with Hellenistic healing (Thrall, *Second Epistle of the Corinthians*, 2:819).


Ulrich Luz explains cup as “a metaphor that since the time of the prophets usually means God’s judgment. Its meaning is not hard and fast, however, and it can also refer to a person’s ‘fate’ or in a narrower sense to death. After [Matt] 20:18–19 the readers have almost certainly understood the cup in the last sense” (*Matthew 8–20*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001]: 543).


The Greek verb, παρακαλέω, is usually employed in relation to “asking for help” but in 2 Cor 12:8 it is used in relation to “calling upon God in a time of need.” See “Παρακαλέω, Παράκλησις,” TDNT 5:794; “παρακαλέω,” BDAG: 764–65.

Paul in fact employs the perfect tense when he says, και είρηκέν μοι in Cor 12:9, to indicate that his answer was permanently valid. The usage here is resultative perfect; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*

32 The inferential conjunction ὅπερ indicates Paul substantiating his claim (13:4a) in 13:4b.

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Why Bother with Historical Criticism?: Lessons for Biblical Studies from the Philosophy of History

Abstract:
This article seeks to integrate insights from the philosophy of history to support the continued use of the historical-critical method in biblical studies. Though the historical-critical method has been much-maligned within biblical criticism over the past seventy years, this essay attempts to demonstrate the value of investigating ancient Israel’s past as part of a full-fledged biblical criticism.

Keywords: Historical Criticism; Philosophy of History; Biblical Criticism

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Since the last half of the twentieth century, many biblical interpreters have become reticent toward the procedures and aims of historical-critical scholarship. Such interpreters include postmodern biblical critics, rhetorical critics, and adherents to the so-called “canonical approach,” among others. While the skepticism toward historical criticism has come primarily within the realm of biblical theology,¹ it has also extended to the secular, descriptive task. Although these interpreters, with their distinct approaches and methodologies, diverge on several important points,² they share a hesitancy to attribute much, if any, interpretational value to the historical-critical paradigms. Leo G. Perdue traces this cynicism within biblical studies, the so-called “collapse of history,” to dubious philosophical underpinnings, the fragmentation of theological approaches, the failures of modernity, a rejection of the descriptive approach by some, the rise of postmodernism, and history’s failure to speak for many different ideological voices (1994: 4–11).³ In shying away from historical criticism, these varying viewpoints of the biblical text have produced fresh, innovative, and interesting readings by focusing rather on the final form of the biblical text.

Yet traditional historical-critical scholarship of the Bible, including the various approaches subsumed within it, persists.⁴ Its interpreters continue to peer back behind the words of the biblical text to discover the meanings of those words and the historical world to which those words refer. Archaeologists unearth and interpret new finds, sometimes leading to debates about corroboration with the biblical witness, and they continue to reveal more about the social, cultural, and religious world of those who lived in biblical times. Source and textual critics persevere in postulating texts and traditions behind the present form of the text. Those operating outside of the historical-critical paradigm sometimes find these readings compelling, but many times they do not. Others still see the entire enterprise as futile.

Indeed, practitioners of traditional historical criticism have erred and have needed correction,⁵ but this essay will attempt to demonstrate that we should not throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Historical criticism has its place alongside these newer, final-form approaches.⁶ Yet its practitioners must proceed responsibly to avoid the incredulity of interpreters from the latter camp. In the space I have been gifted here, I will utilize insights from the philosophy of history⁷ to suggest guidelines for practitioners of biblical historical criticism to continue with caution, while
nonetheless offering constructive guidelines for a historical study of the Bible. I hope that incorporating insights from philosophers and professional historians who have pondered how we can meaningfully reconstruct the past within the discipline of the philosophy of history, an interdisciplinary stratagem not often taken in the defense of biblical historical criticism (Younger 1999:304), will help to provide a foundation upon which we can build a useful and appropriate historical investigation of the Bible. Indeed, biblical historical criticism has its roots in the professional study of history and a deeper dive into the general discipline of history should be helpful. I attempt here to set forth principles that avoid the kind of reckless practice of historical criticism which has, in recent years, created an aversion to this approach.

We begin by looking to how, given its many critiques, historical criticism ought to proceed at its best. Specifically, historians must, in order to be effective, operate with respect towards their subjects, with attention to narrative form and the historian’s biases, with caution toward historical boundaries, and with a large, diverse network of peers. Next, we will show how historical criticism operates at the logical level, an element often overlooked by its opponents. Finally, we will examine the why of historical criticism and uncover its humanizing, and thus theologically significant, raison de être.

**Historical Respect**

A common criticism leveled against traditional historical criticism is its arrogance. In this perception, historical criticism stands at an objective distance from its object of study with the benefit of hindsight and the proper tools to make correct judgments about the past. It resists the foundations of historical criticism as “scientific” or “positivistic,” and urges historical critics to sufficiently attend to the interpretive and artistic dimension of the histories they write.

Most readers of biblical criticism will be able to sympathize with such claims. Many of us have read the works of biblical historians and wondered where they bought their time machines and historical mind-readers. With a cool detachment, some historians confidently reach certain conclusions that otherwise remain under intense debate. Others seamlessly deduce the motivations of historical characters, who have been dead for thousands of years. In viewing some historical conclusions that appear
off-putting in their hubris and omniscient mood, it is clear to see why many potential students have turned from studying the Bible’s past.

To assuage some of these objections to historical criticism, we begin with the common assumption that historical study, and by extension historical criticism, functions in the same manner as the natural sciences. Put directly, the accusation of history as a positivistic, scientific discipline is a philosophical straw man. Although rises in the discipline of history correlate to boons in scientific knowledge, whether we speak of ancient Greece or the Enlightenment, such correlation does not lead to identification. In fact, the connection between the discipline of history and the natural sciences is not assumed by historians, but is very much an ongoing conversation, with practitioners often acknowledging both the convergences and the distinctions. R.G. Collingwood, who worked both as a historian and a philosopher, recognizes that history is a science in so far as it is an “organized body of knowledge” (2014: 249). For him, history’s correlation with science is a matter of defining the latter term. History shares with the natural sciences an interest in evidence and interpretation through the boundaries of a critical method. Yet, for Collingwood, history’s interpretations have a different goal than the natural sciences’ concern for the physical objects of space and time. History’s aim is human self-knowledge, which overlaps, not only with natural sciences, but also with philosophy and art. Patrick Gardiner and Isaiah Berlin are notable among those thinkers who similarly acknowledge history’s intersections with natural science while underscoring its interest in particular human events, which is opposed to the natural sciences’ preoccupation with generalizing rules (Gardiner 1961: 60; Berlin 1960: 1–31). Biblical historians also wrestle with distinctions and intersections between history and science, though their work does not often leave room for meta-level reflections on the philosophy of history (Provan, et. al. 2003: 42). I will not belabor the point, only note that blanket statements of historical criticism as rooted in positivistic science do not reflect the actual practice of historians, who view their work as a related, but not identical, body of knowledge to the natural sciences.

Moreover, because historical criticism is a human-centered activity (see the conclusion below), it is the responsibility of the historical interpreter to treat historical characters as subjects. That is, the historian ought to put forth an effort to understand historical persons and the world
in which they lived. As historians, we are in the wrong to presume thoughts and actions of our subjects without first rigorously studying as much as one can about that person and the historical context (Berlin 1960: 26–27).16 We must enter into historical inquiry with fear and trembling, recognizing the chasm between ourselves and actors of the past, knowing that we study them and their time from a murky distance, but that it is also our duty to allow them to speak as products of their time and as fellow human beings. Mark Day contends the historian must operate with charity, beginning with a default stance of openness to the historical person, assuming her or his reasonableness in acting in or testifying to a historical event. Although historical actors are capable of lying, bias, and irrational behavior, such a posture provides “constraint on the interpretation of others” while also bearing in mind that further evidence may press the interpreter into skepticism of that actor’s thought or claim (2008: 148–149).

In recognizing the temporal distance from our historical objects, especially within the discipline of biblical studies where the temporal distance is so great, it is imperative that we understand our subjects within their own historical contexts. That is, we must rigorously study the thought world and society of biblical authors and characters. We are compelled to know as much Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic as possible. We must study the political landscape of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world. We must familiarize ourselves with archaeological data and sociological models. We study these areas of knowledge, not to know the biblical world better than those who lived in it, but to attempt to be sympathetic to them. To construct, as much as we can, the worldview of the ancients is to admit that the particular topic a historian may study does not arise in a vacuum, but within a complex network of understanding. The responsible historian will attempt to make use of the concepts of her or his subjects, not the historian’s own subjects (Day 2008: 137–144).17 Perdue, who otherwise downplays the use of historical criticism in Old Testament theology, concedes that historical context assists the interpreter in understanding meaning, and will continue to provide a fruitful dimension of historical-critical study (1994: 303–304).18

The French historian Marc Bloch finds respect towards our historical subjects as foundational, not only as a cog of the historiographical method, but to the discipline of history as a whole. He writes,
When all is said and done, a single word, “understanding,” is the beacon of light of our studies. Let us not say that the true historian is a stranger to emotion: he has that, at all events. “Understanding,” in all honesty, is a word pregnant with difficulties, but also with hope. Moreover, it is a friendly word. Even in action, we are far too prone to judge. It is so easy to denounce. We are never sufficiently understanding. Whoever differs from us—a foreigner or a political adversary—is almost inevitably considered evil. A little more understanding of people would be necessary merely for guidance, in the conflicts which are unavoidable; all the more to present them while there is yet time. If history would only renounce its false archangelic airs, it would help us to cure this weakness. It includes a vast experience of human diversities, a continuous contact with men. Life, like science, has everything to gain from it, if only these contacts be friendly. (2017: 134–135)

Bloch’s statement becomes more profound, and more urgent, when we learn he was killed by a Nazi firing squad after composing this statement. His death at the hands of those infamous for their “misunderstanding” underscores how the world needs more understanding, whether with respect to our own time or the past. History is a discipline bound up with human nature (Bloch 2017: 26–27), and it is our responsibility as biblical historians to respect the humanness of biblical actors and authors, giving credence to their world and its events.

**Interpretation**

The aspect of historical criticism that undoubtedly witnesses the most scrutiny within biblical studies is historical interpretation. That we have evidence, testimony, and data concerning the past is doubtful only to the most radical epistemological skeptics. But making sense of this information introduces a host of issues. Whose interpretation of historical realia is best? How would we even begin to claim one interpretation as better than another? What about the historian’s own biases and worldview? Is the past as neat and tidy as historians tend to make it? Can we even claim we know what a historical author was trying to say?

Hayden White’s influential *Metahistory* alerted historians to their own perspectives in writing history. For White, our historical explanations are posterior to our own “linguistic protocols” (1973: 426), which give shape to historical interpretations. Historians must then be cognizant of
their own present linguistic stances from which they write about the past. They have certainly suffered from a lack of self-awareness, as recent subversive approaches have revealed to us. Truly, historians of any subject often remain blind, not only to their linguistic protocols, but to their entire Weltanschauung, which can even dictate evidence the historian chooses to include. And in our present social climate, it might be wise for historians to acknowledge their worldview in order to assist readers who do not know authors apart from their names on the cover.

Tangential to the claim about a historian’s limitations in interpretation is the simplicity with which historians can view historical phenomena. One thinks of Jean-François Lyotard’s deconstruction of modern “metanarratives,” and how this is easily appropriated in critiques of modern historiography (Ankersmit 1989: 148). In Old Testament theology, the twentieth century witnessed the rise and fall of theologies that attempted to describe ancient Israel’s conception of God in a singular manner. But many practicing historians resist simplistic explanations of historical phenomena. Richard J. Evans claims that historians should be, and have been, “hostile to ‘oversimplification,’” as they seek rather to question all narratives, whether those of their peers or even those of past testimonies (1997: 126–127). Sarah Maza writes, “Historians often avoid putting their money on one type of cause over another, instead explaining how various factors accumulate over time to a point of no return” (2017: 173). In the same way, historians of the Bible ought to defy naïve, overarching explanations for historical phenomena and look ever deeper into the historical world into which they explore.

Part of the strong reaction against simplistic explanations is the high perch from which they are offered. When taken in tandem with White’s cautions, postmodernism produces a stark challenge to any valid historical interpretation. Whether Lyotard’s denouncement of metanarratives, Foucault’s work on mental illness (1994: 370–376), or Derrida’s deconstruction of language, postmodernism has sought to tear down the footings of western modes of discourse to make space for new readings of texts, and especially historical ones. From the postmodern view, it seems nearly impossible to use the language of the privileged modern academic historian to speak on behalf of the poor and marginalized (Jenkins 2000: 191–192). Yet, practically speaking, this does not hold true. Because of the use of modern history, we are able to tell stories of heroes of our own culture who have subverted the power of their day, such as
Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Evans counteracts postmodern claims by noting that they divert “attention away from real suffering and oppression…” (1997: 158). In the realm of Old Testament studies, we are pressed to deal with a subject, ancient Israel, who constantly witnesses to its existence in an act of liberation from Egypt and who writes from the perspective of a minor player in the socio-political world of the ancient Near East, constantly worn down under the hegemony of greater military and political entities. In my estimation, it would be disingenuous for a biblical historian, in particular, to deny that studying the past in any organized way prevents us from telling the histories of the powerless.

And what of the oft-debated question of whether an interpreter is ever able to discern an author’s intention? The objection to this has its origins in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s article on the so-called “intentional fallacy” (1954: 1–18). The concept gains steam under the rubrics of postmodernism, which doubts our ability to make judgments on any author’s meaning. Ironically here, we must point to a matter of authorial intention to make the counterclaim to objections of authorial intention. Wimstatt and Beardsley were concerned with poetry, a genre of literature that is often intentionally unintentional. Poets frequently imbue ambiguity into their writing and allow for degrees of interpretation. This is not so with historical records, which attempt to relay a witness or evidence to actions of the past. For instance, humanity’s earliest writing is found on economic tablets from Mesopotamia. These short tablets describe transactions between parties for trade to keep records for these dealings. Room for interpretation here is minimal. As literary genres, including history, and languages become more complex, surely authors begin to write more that is unintentional in their language and more that can often be misconstrued by later readers. Yet misunderstanding of this kind is a matter of degree, dependent upon literary genre, temporal distance, knowledge of the historical context in which the texts were written, and so on. To aver that we can never read intentionality into the text of another author is nonsense. Yes, we must acknowledge our distance from the historical subject and the tendencies toward our own interpretations. But to speak meaningfully about the past and to do so with the respect of our subjects, we must assume they intended to communicate meaningfully about the events of their day. This is no simple assumption, and it requires both self-awareness on the part of the historian to realize her or his own worldview and a deep study of the historical subject’s worldview.
We have seen thus far that historiography must not be an arrogant affair. It necessarily involves a deep engagement with historical actors and their contexts, not assuming or casting aspersions from a safe distance. The writing of history entails the hard work of thorough research and a sympathetic imagination toward the past. It may also include recognition of our biases and acknowledgement of the perspective from which we write, but it must involve that we can somehow speak meaningfully about the past.

**Boundaries in Historical Interpretation**

Although White astutely demonstrated the poignant role of interpretation in the historical enterprise, this does not mean that historians are free to interpret as they wish. Rather, the other side of writing history is dealing with the constraints of evidence. Yes, historical evidence does not interpret itself and requires thorough study before it can be fitted into a broader historical picture. But historical evidence—coins, annals, chronicles, inscriptions, archaeological data, testimony, and more—provides boundaries for the conclusions historians can make. Evidence does not provide a jumping off point for the historian to use her or his imagination unfettered. Bloch trenchantly argues, “Explorers of the past are never quite free. The past is their tyrant. It forbids them to know anything which it has not itself, consciously or otherwise, yielded to them” (2017: 59).

In traditional historical criticism, we give priority of place to the primary sources, those that are more “evidentially reliable” (Day 2008: 27–29). Of course, this is a difficult judgment for the historian to make and it is a judgment that should not be made rashly. Yet before we enter a later section on historical logic, we should note here Day’s claim that the historian’s judgment of evidence should be consilient. That is, it should “account for a wide range of phenomena by postulating fewer hypotheses that explain the phenomena” (2008: 148–149). In short, we ought to choose the relationship between the evidence at hand that requires the most simplistic explanation. This tactic yields a more reasonable explanation with less nuance to create in logical argumentation. This is not to deny, as mentioned above, that the past can be messier than our typically monocausal view of the past. That would be, and is often in biblical studies, the case when evidence from the past is sparse. But our explanations must
logically work to cohere many levels of causes, and consilience remains a logical approach in so far as it acknowledges the full range of evidence, whether primary or secondary, and seeks to paint a fuller picture of the events of the past.\textsuperscript{42}

For students of the Old Testament, for example, consider the biblical events describing King Hezekiah. We have at our disposal the narratives of 2 Kings 18–20, Isaiah 36–39, alongside Assyrian Annals, archaeological data, and realia such as the so-called “Hezekiah coins.”\textsuperscript{43} These are real objects and witnesses to events of the late 8\textsuperscript{th} century BCE in Judah, and we must take them into account when studying this particular time and place. They indicate to us the following minimal boundaries for historical interpretation: that a King Hezekiah existed in this period and ruled over Judah, that there were battles between the Judahites and Assyrians during Hezekiah’s reign including an attempted invasion of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, and that foreign imagery and culture bore some semblance of influence on the tiny nation of Judah. It would be a steep uphill climb for a historical interpreter to argue against such facts. The evidence becomes slightly more precarious when we consider testimony of these events. For instance, there are differing versions of why the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem never occurred, depending on one’s source. We must also note that the Judahite scribes further attest a religious reformation in Judah under Hezekiah, a detailed relationship between Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, and a diplomatic visit from Babylonian envoys. Finally, the place of 2 Kings and Isaiah within the Old Testament canon ascribes these events to the same people group who rebuilt the Persian colony of Yehud under the reign of the Persian King Cyrus. Interpretations of this data range from the so-called “minimalist” response that the testimony reflects a later people group who adopted the Judahite story\textsuperscript{44} to a hermeneutic of historical trust that the Judahite account of the repulsion of the Assyrian army should be treated with the same respect as Sennacherib’s own perspective.\textsuperscript{45} Without drawing judgments about these interpretations, I hope to show by this example how historiography is possible from boundary-providing evidence.

The progenitor of the modern historical method, and one who draws the ire of those skeptical of the modern historical program, is Leopold von Ranke. The nineteenth-century German historian sought to incorporate a more rigorous method into the study of history, thus separating it into its own discipline apart from other academic specializations.\textsuperscript{46} But what has become the most polarizing facet of his system is Ranke’s encouragement
for historians to study the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, or “how it actually was.” Such a claim seems impossible from the present vantage point. How can we know what actually happened in the past? But much of our angst toward Ranke comes, coincidentally, from us imposing our own historical time on Ranke’s. For one, there is some debate about our common translation of *eigentlich* as “actually,” when it could have meant something along the lines of “essentially” or “properly,” equivalents that would ease the arrogance of our usual interpretation of that word. But, more importantly, we must remember that Ranke wrote in the wake of Romanticism (especially Voltaire), a movement that had little regard for historical evidence and was keener to take liberties with historical interpretation.\(^{47}\) In essence, this slogan of Ranke’s is meant, not to confidently venture that we can, through scientific positivism, gain pure understanding of the past, but to set boundaries on fanciful interpretations of the past by carefully respecting the evidence of the past through an organized *Wissenschaft*---a *Wissenschaft* that was determined to be distinct from other forms of knowledge.\(^{48}\)

### The Historical Community

Though the discipline of history is a *Wissenschaft*, it is, as Bloch states, “a science still in travail” (2017: 185). And part of the enduring struggle of the discipline of history is that no one work or interpretation of the past can lay claim to the sole understanding of any one historical event. This means that historians are compelled to seek verification, criticism, and differing viewpoints of their work. Such a practice stresses the interpretational aspect of history. One historian’s triumphant event may be seen as an act of oppression through the lens of another. One historian’s trust in the historical veracity of the exodus event is another’s idealized narrative of the postexilic community. Such conversations enable historians to anticipate objections, hone their explanatory reasoning, and perhaps even be convicted of seeing the past a new way.\(^{49}\) The hermeneutics of historical research requires an ongoing dialogue of the historian with others also familiar with the same evidence to gain a fuller picture of the past. Therefore, Bloch can assert, “…historical research will tolerate no autarchy” (2017: 47).

This process for the historian typically involves the tedious and anxious processes of submitting articles to peer review journals and presenting papers at academic conferences. But the insecurities of the historian aside, the input of the scholarly community assists the entire
discipline at a greater understanding of the past. This is not to say there will always be historical consensus after enough conversations (indeed, that will be rare), but that the practice of historiography is, in Day’s appropriation of Gadamer, “dialogic” (2008: 162–166). In interacting with historical interpretations in the past and present, historians increase the number of voices providing input and gain clarity from their initial conclusions, which are always provisional.50 In their prominent book *Telling the Truth about History*, Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob similarly contend that history requires an epistemological position with “intellectual spirit of democratic scholarship” (1994: 283) and that it must be “a shared enterprise in which the community of practitioners acts as a check on the historian…” (1994: 261). Indeed, as a practice heavily dependent upon interpretation, history is only better for multiple viewpoints. Diversity within the guild will check much of the past pitfalls of the discipline we have already discussed, such as monocausal explanations, Western-only perspectives, and interpretations without evidential support. Such a conception of historical study militates against a charge of arrogance and suggests instead that our views of the past fit better as a guild rather than individually.

**Historical Logic**

Final-form, literary analysis of biblical texts has a distinct advantage of working with materials evident and available to any researcher. The canonical approach, narrative criticism, and postmodern literary criticism all deal with the text as it stands before us and has little-to-no need for getting behind this text.51 Conversely, the historical-critical approach, in the minds of many in the camps of the former, masquerades as a tactic to achieve certainty about the historical realities to which texts point. For instance, Prickett writes regarding the origins of modern historical criticism, “This quest for historical certainty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was in itself partially the result of an earlier failure… to give theology the same kind of external certainties as those apparently enjoyed by the natural sciences in the age of Royal Society and of Newton” (1986: 25). And though many final-form interpreters do not completely deny the aims of historical criticism, postmodernists in particular react to what they perceive as historical criticism’s search for absolute truth and attempt to poke holes in such epistemological assumptions.52
Yet, we must tread lightly in claiming that historical critics search for absolute certainty. This does not fall within the aim of most, if not all, practicing historians. Bloch iterates as much when he notes that historical certainty and universality are “questions of degree” (2017: 17). Tucker reinforces his arguments with the contention that history writing is the best explanation of the evidence at hand (2004: 254–262). Day contends that historical knowledge is both “underdetermined” and “defeasible” (2008: 148–149). Berlin notes that historical language is necessarily fraught with “such words as plausibility, likelihood, sense of reality, [and] historical sense” (1960: 30). Evans writes, rather bluntly, “No historians really believe in the absolute truth of what they are writing, simply in its probable truth, which they have done their utmost to establish by following the usual rules of evidence” (1997: 189). We see that Evans, with his insistence on historians doing “their utmost to establish” the truth, does not want to denigrate the search for historical knowledge. But he concedes that an element of probability is necessarily part and parcel of a historical epistemology. Thus, I think that Evans would agree with the assessment of Keith Jenkins, his postmodern interlocutor, that the truth of history is elusive (2000: 193). Yet he would disagree that it is a futile endeavor. For historians, a well-educated investigation of the past that yields sparse results is more worthwhile than no investigation at all. Surely this is more than mere self-justification on the part of the historian but lies in the initial impulse for her or him to pursue historical studies. And neither, as we have noted do historians believe their work is final, but they must yield to peer review and the possibility of further evidence. Biblical historian V. Philips Long writes, “Just because absolute objectivity is a chimera does not mean that we must resign ourselves to absolute subjectivity…” Instead, for Long, the plausible or probable nature of historical knowledge is “driven by the larger model of reality that we each embrace” (2002: 9). Finally, Collingwood summarizes this process well when he writes,

...no fact ever has been wholly ascertained, but a fact may be progressively ascertained; as the labour of historians goes forward, they come to know more and more about the facts, and to reject with greater and greater confidence a number of mistaken accounts of them; but no historical statement can ever express the complete truth about any single fact... This is perfectly well known to all historians. No historian imagines that he knows any single fact in its entirety, or that any historian ever will (1965: 43).
So, if historians do not seek unconditional certainty, with what logic do they proceed? In short, historical logic is inferential. There is not space here to enumerate the depth of this form of logic, as it is at present an entire subset of study for logicians and has gained popularity for researchers working on artificial intelligence. Inferences may take the form of Bayesianism, which seeks to relate the evidence and the hypothesis by proportion to which they support one another (Day 2008: 37–44). Inferences also may utilize explanationism, which attempts to explain the evidence from the hypothesis (Misak 2017: 25–38). Or inferences may incorporate abduction, which rules out hypotheses that do not fit the evidence. None of these logical tools offers certainty, but they do assist us in reaching more likely historical propositions.

In practice, historians may or may not be conscious of or intentional about the type of inferential logic they use. But, as they attempt to explain historical phenomena, they will undoubtedly use inference because it is an earnest attempt to be reasonable and pragmatic. Inference is reasonable in that it seeks to make the most sense of the connections between the evidence and testimony. It is pragmatic because it acknowledges that we, and the historical actors we study, exist in real time and space. And in time and space, we often must use the best logic available to us, which is often inferential. In fact, we use inferential logic all the time in real life when we conduct “historical” investigations, such as when we piece together data at hand to find lost car keys or try to discern why the restaurant we used to visit suddenly has a closed sign on the door. Historians formalize this process for events temporally more distant and with fragmented evidence, especially as the temporal distance increases. But this does not mean that our hypotheses are without logical foundation. While this sort of logic will not appease the hardline empiricist, it provides workable rationales for understanding the past.

To return to the example of Hezekiah’s run-in with the neo-Assyrian army, archaeological digs in Jerusalem remain limited, and we have conflicting and rhetorically-charged reports of what happened. On the one hand, there are strictures to what we will be able to say about this event, as we have mentioned above. But on the other hand, it is an important inquiry for the guild to pursue due to the bearing it has on everything from the redaction of the Deuteronomic History, the reliability of the Old Testament as scripture, and what causes mighty empires to fall.
And, because of this importance, biblical historians and Assyriologists alike will continue to pursue it. They will do so by drawing conclusions that may appear to be gospel truth given the depth of their research and conviction in their writing, but that all know will be contingent upon the dialogue of the guild and further evidence.

Conclusion

A common thread among philosophers of history is that the discipline concerns what it means to be human. Although we may take natural phenomena into account of our histories, we will only do so in so far as these phenomena relate to the actions of humans. Herein lies history’s distinctiveness from other sciences. Human behavior may at times occur in predictable patterns. It may also appear in unique, particular events. Of course, we study history to shape the present, and to understand why the present is the way that it is. Yet we also study history to discover why we, as human beings, are the way that we are in all of our universalities and particularities. It is this foundational assumption of history that I hope ties together the preceding analysis and encourages us to continue to pursue historical-critical scholarship.

Because history deals with other humans, this requires historical respect towards our subjects. We must recognize that, though years (and, in the case of biblical studies, millennia) separate us, we share the same human condition. And, as it concerns biblical theology, we share with historical actors and authors the same relationship to the God we claim to be constant throughout the ages. Such an approach requires us to place modernist arrogance to the side and encounter the past with questions, understanding, and respect. Even though we cannot deny our interpretations in the act of writing history, the historical-critical approach necessitates that we do our best to study the linguistic and thought-worlds of the past, and sympathetically assume that those who left traces of their time intend to communicate something about the events of their lives. In doing so, we must allow the evidence to set the boundaries of our interpretations.

In the present dialogues about the past, historians must continue to see their work as a humanistic enterprise. Historians (and in our case, biblical scholars) are bound to respect the humanness of our interlocutors, both ideological comrade and foe. Since our branch of knowledge is defeasible and is so heavily dependent upon interpretation, it requires a
community of those committed to understanding more about the past. And in these dialogues, perhaps we will learn more about who we are now.

Critics of the historical-critical approach are correct when they note that the Bible is not history as we currently know the discipline of history. Though historical materials exist within it, and sections such as the Deuteronomistic History reflect a proto-history, the texts within the corpus of the Bible are too diverse to come close to the Rankean vision of professional historiography. Rankean historiography will also not tell us directly about God or divine revelation. Yet simply because the texts were not written within the parameters of our current understanding of history, does not mean we should avoid historical analysis when studying the text. It is my belief that historical study of the biblical text arises from it. A dominant characteristic of the Judeo-Christian faiths, against many of the religions around which these emerged, is the belief that humanity is valuable to God and, therefore, humans ought to respect the image of God (Gen 1:26–27) found in other humans. The study of history in the West, then, is an extension of this belief. Ranke and many of his successors were theists who sought to provide dignity to the actors of the past whose stories had been blurred by the lenses of Romantic narrators. And for the modern Western world shaped by Judeo-Christian values (although we now might also add to “secular humanism,” no doubt emerging from such values in the West), we must continue to investigate the truth of the past with respect for these image-bearers who can no longer speak. Not only will we demonstrate an interest in antiquity for its own sake, but perhaps we will learn our own lessons along the way, given that modern humans are still endowed with the gifts and pitfalls of being human.

In biblical studies, this means that the various branches of historical criticism still hold value. Historians and archaeologists will continue to ask, “Did it actually happen this way?” when reading biblical narratives to understand the actors, or at least the writers who chose to portray historical actions in certain fashions. They will also, perhaps more constructively, assist us with detailing the practical context of daily life in biblical eras. In source and form criticisms, we can begin to understand the emphases of the earliest communities that produced and uttered this literature, as well as the editors and their communities who thought it important to keep these traditions and form them into a new creation. Textual critics will enable us to understand the earliest religious leaders who transmitted, and sometimes altered, texts for particular reasons. In short, these different historical-
critical methodologies will enable us to understand human actions, and in so doing, teach us something about our own human nature.

Perdue, though critical of the aims of historical criticism, concedes that it is necessary to understand the human aspects of the Bible. The well-rounded biblical critic must understand, not only the texts left behind by those of the past, but their authors and actors as well. He writes, “To deny one in favor of the other [historicality and the language of the text] or to privilege one while subordinating the other runs counter to what is fundamentally true about what it means to be human. Thus, history and text belong together” (1994: 303–304). I hope that underscoring this sentiment aids our discipline, however small, in creating a body of scholars who are able to complement one another’s approaches and therefore further our understanding of what it means to be human, and specifically one who encounters the God of Israel.

End Notes

1 In writing about the legacy of the literal interpretation of scripture by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Frei writes, “...historical criticism and biblical theology made for decidedly strained company” (1974: 8.)

2 Practitioners of these methodologies may object to being lumped together, but I wish to focus here on the reticence with which they approach traditional historical criticism. Carroll 1998, Jasper 1998, and Longman 1999 are helpful introductions to these issues. Childs notably wishes to differentiate his canonical approach from postmodern literary criticism because it fails to see the importance of the biblical text within the history of the communities where the text is authoritative (1979: 74).

3 Alter attacks the speculative nature of “excavative” approaches, that look behind the text for meaning (1981: 13–14). Johnson Lim is more foreboding in his assertion that historical criticism may soon become a relic of the past (2000: 252–271).


5 In my primary area of research, the contextual approach of the Old Testament, I think of Samuel Sandmel’s warning about “parallelomania.” See Sandmel 1962: 1–13. Within biblical theology, the so-called “Biblical Theology” movement in particular has come under an insuperable attack. For a stringent review of this movement and its weaknesses, see Barr 1976: 1–17. See also Brueggemann 1997: 42–60.
6 Thus, I count myself with those whom Lim says call “for a synthesis of traditional methodologies and contemporary theories” (2000: 257). Lim specifically mentions Barton as a supporter of this stance, which is apparent in much of his work. I would also add the notable example of Rolf Rentdorff, who also contends for a blending of diachronic and synchronic methodologies. For Barton, 1999: 427–438 and 2007: 187–90. For Rentdorff, see 1999: 67.

7 Zammito acknowledges the challenge of whether we can speak of a theory in the philosophy of history, but contends with a large majority of practitioners that we must move to construct such ideas (2011: 63–84). In this essay, I do not wish to get bogged down in the details of the philosophy of history. But I do desire to elucidate guiding principles of practicing historians.

8 Younger’s own essay here is one of these rare examples. There are also some examples within the volume to which Younger contributes. Yet these examples primarily focus on specific arguments, such as the matter of history as interpretation and the phenomenon of testimony (typically in references to the minimalist/maximalist debates). Here I attempt to provide a foundation for biblical critics to understand the aims of historical criticism as explained by philosophers of history. Since, in my experience, literary critics and historical critics often talk past one another, I hope this essay will assist us to have more mutual understanding between these camps. Two helpful introductions to the history of historical criticism of the Bible and its varying approaches appear in this volume from colleagues Hayes and Miller (Hayes 1999: 7–42; Miller 1999: 356–372).

9 Here I would like to take up David Steinmetz’s challenge to develop “a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting” (1980: 38). Steinmetz is among those who contend that historical criticism is not obsolete but is in need of repair for a return to a holistic (for him, “Medieval”) model of biblical interpretation.


12 Admittedly, most of us learned to eliminate equivocation from our writing, which likely contributes to this phenomenon in much historiography. For example, Gardiner, though allowing for some room for error in hypotheses elsewhere (129), asserts that historians should “insist that their formulation represent the end of historical inquiry, not that they are stages on the journey toward that end” (1961: 95–96).

13 Walsh also appropriates a more general notion of science in 1967: 35–37.
Collingwood’s thoughts on this matter are dense, but particular claims about the relationship between history and science can be found in the following: 1965: 1–10, 234, 305, 318; 1965: 32, 48–49, 136.

The relationship between history and science is a preoccupation of most of Gardiner’s work, but his most essential viewpoints can be seen on pages 28–64. See also Walsh 1967: 18, 25, 30–47.

This also strikes at the motivation for Collingwood’s influential theory of “re-enactment,” in which the historian is called upon to inhabit the particular thought world of a historical subject (2014: 282–302). One can discern this theme throughout Collinwood’s *Idea*, but these pages constitute the most concentrated section on re-enactment in this book. Day recognizes similarities between re-enactment and a fully empathetic rational approach, acknowledging instead the interplay of reason and feelings. Day also stresses that Collingwood has pressed reason too far as a totalizing feature of history (2008: 128–129).

See also Shoemaker’s point in this regard on interpretation of Collingwood’s “re-enactment” phenomenon in 1969: 107. See also Bloch 2017: 35.

See also Frei’s sentiments along the same lines. Frei finds some appeal in Johann Gottfried von Herder’s concept of Einfühlung in theological study, though he is also frustrated that Herder left the concept fully unexplained (1974: 184–92, 321).

From the perspective of biblical studies, see a similar sentiment in Krentz 2002: 47.

As mentioned above, there are many essays within V. Philips Long’s volume on ancient Israelite historiography dealing with this issue of history writing because of long-running debates between so-called “minimalists” and “maximalists.” Many of these essays are found in 1999: 142–278.

White indicates the disagreement among historians about causation and how to interpret is the difference between history and “the sciences,” where there is more agreement on methodology. This is a narrow view of science and assumes more about modern scientific agreement than is true. White’s point is to enumerate the different approaches to historical explanation (1973: 12–13). In some ways, Levin anticipates White’s analysis, but he clearly believes that the best history writing combines literary artistry and historical accuracy (1967: 1–33).

Note White’s own admittance to writing from an “Ironic condition” as he understands nineteenth-century European historiography (1973: 434). Neither is White observation wholly new, though he is the first (to my knowledge) to extrapolate on the concept of interpretation in history. For example, see Santayana in the early 20th century (2021: 239–40).
23 Although I could note several remarkable examples, I will mention only Scholz 2007 and McCauley 2020.

24 Day resists such an idea, however. For him, it is part and parcel of writing and reading history to assume that the historian is “not omniscient” and does not hold the only true interpretation 2008: 179.

25 Lyotard’s most well-known work in English appears in Lyotard 1984.

26 Although a remarkable work in many respects, Eichrodt’s theology (1961) was frequently criticized for a singular focus on the theme of covenant at the expense of a depth of other images he could have used.

27 See also Gardiner, where he notes that cause is a matter of perspective, not something out there for the historian to grasp (1961: 109).


29 Jenkins writes the provocative statement, “To make (to realize) a meaning, to bring a meaning into the world is ultimately an act of violence…” (Jenkins 2000: 192). Presumably, to write history in the modernist vein is to assume an advantaged stance and thus act (however unintentionally) with violence towards those not of the same level of privilege.

30 See also Evans 1997: 128–129. Evans also adds the suffrage movement as an example.

31 Jenkins counters that postmodernism does not deny the reality of events, only the signification of them through words (2000: 190). Either way, Evans, in my opinion, strikes at the more pertinent point that, in order to address injustice, we must be able to communicate and understand history in a meaningful way. For a reading sympathetic to Evans, see Zammito 2011.

32 It is important to note that, within their own society, biblical writers were privileged. But, when writing on behalf of their people, biblical authors were clear that their land was an insignificant one in ancient geopolitics, dependent upon their survival and thriving only at the hands of YHWH. Moreover, I do not suggest that what we find in the Old Testament is history in the modernist, Rankean sense. It is debatable as to whether it even functions as history in the same sense as Herodotus and Thucydides. For attempts to debate this particular issue, see the collection of essays on pages 461–578 of Long 1999. But Aleida Assmann’s studies on the memory suggest that, what we find in the Old Testament is an example of the merger of memory and history. (2008: 49–72) See also Halpern 1998: 276–277.

33 In addition to these points, Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob accept that narrative can shape meaning, but do not wholesale concede that the identification of narrative fundamentally negates meaning. They note that postmodernism has in fact crafted its own narrative, thus undermining its

34 Within biblical studies, see Prickett 1986: 24.


36 Day is correct that, when we make sense of a literary product, “we assign meaning and intention together” (2008: 138). Keith Windschuttle similarly critiques White’s *Metahistory* by claiming that literary devices do not encroach upon the deepest structures of language. He writes, “White has mistaken the surface for the substance, the decoration for the edifice” (1996: 241).

37 Maza notes that contemporary historians assume the critiques of White and the postmodernists, but continue to write about the past as “compelling, fact-based stories” (2017: 233).

38 In an opaque statement, Ankersmit takes the approach that evidence is more like a painter’s brushstroke that puts constraints on a historian responding to the discovery of this evidence than it is like a magnifying glass into the past (1989: 146). Zagorin’s response to Ankersmit on this point is clearer and more in line with what I maintain here (1990, 272). See also cautions in the interpretation of evidence in Day 2008, 159–62.

39 See also Collingwood 2014: 241, 316; Evans 1997: 91, 126; Roberts 1996: 265.

40 For an understanding of this issue within Old Testament studies, see Deist 1999: 373–390.

41 This concept, and the related idea of “colligation,” trace their origins to the philosopher and scientist William Whewell. For a detailed application of colligation to the philosophy of history, see Roberts 1996: 16–37.

42 Roberts writes, “The greatest explanatory power... is gained neither by counting more instances nor by manipulation; it is gained by describing the connection between the two terms of the correlation” (1996: 25). For a review of causation in the philosophy of history, see Tucker 2011a: 99–108; ibid., 2011b: 220–30; Maza 2017: 157–98.

43 For the Assyrian perspective of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem, see COS §2.119B. Regarding the archaeological data of Jerusalem in this period, especially the expansion of the city during Hezekiah’s reign, see the influential article Broshi 1974: 21–26. For a recent summary of the
realia surrounding Hezekiah that has been discovered in Jerusalem, see Ngo 2021.

44 For example, see Lemche 1999.

45 For example, see Kitchen 2001: 50–51.

46 For a concise summary of Ranke’s method, see Evans 1997: 15–17.


48 In their defense of the testimony of the Bible as a legitimate source for historical reconstruction, Provan, Long, and Longman also recognize the distinction between Ranke’s program and the positivism introduced by Comte (Provan et. al. 2003: 21–24, 38–43).

49 This comment is inspired by Day 2008: 21.

50 The understanding of historical conclusions as preliminary appears prominently in Appleby et. al 1994: 284; Collingwood 2014: 248.

51 Since adherents to these methodologies differ in their approach, I intentionally refrain from using Derrida’s rallying cry of there being “nothing outside the text.” But perhaps Jenkins’s interpretation of this slogan is applicable to all, namely that we cannot pretend to know that the text is pointing to realities beyond itself (2000: 190).


54 See also Miller 1999: 357.

55 Or, the ever-pithy Santayana, who writes, “History is always wrong, and so always needs to be rewritten” (2021: 237). Biblical historian Baruch Halpern says, “historiography is never accurate.” Halpern uses the metaphor of a portrait. The painter will not get every detail correct in capturing reality, but will do his or her best to paint reality from his or her perspective. In the same way, the historian cannot capture the reality of the past in every detail and will be led by an interpretive lens, but must still strive to understand the historical subject as best as possible (1998: 8).

56 Collingwood uses this term as a means of demonstrating how history is a science in that it pieces together data to draw conclusions, but historians are not able to empirically observe the events they describe, as natural scientists do (2014: 50, 251–52, 282). Santayana uses the same term in 2021: 238.
For an overview of inferential logic as it is presently practiced, see McClain and Poston 2017.

For a helpful introduction to Bayesinaism, see Day 2008: 31–37.

Also see the volume by McClain and Poston above.

For a review of these methods, as well as some other lesser-known logical tools for history, see Day and Radick 2011: 87–97.

See the discussion of consilience above. Collingwood stresses the importance of the historian’s identification with historical actors in his concept of re-enactment. I would not go as far as Collingwood in assuming the transferability of reason between ourselves and historical actors, but I do believe that, in so far as we share a common human nature with historical actors and thoroughly study their historical context and thought world, we might reasonably imagine their actions in history.

Gardner especially underscores the practical nature of historical understanding (1961: 12).

See Misak’s similar statement about “the solipsist and the skeptic” (2017: 25).


Certainly Collingwood is correct in his assessment that history cannot refer to divine actions (2014: 14). But what it possible, in my opinion, is that we can understand human experiences of God through historical criticism of the Bible.

Perhaps the most influential motivation for studying history comes from Santayana’s statement that, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (2021: 68). In my view, this is only partially true. In studying the past, we can learn much about our foibles and the negative side of the human condition. But this stance also neglects that we can tell history that exalts humanity. Within biblical history, however, I must qualify that any human triumphs are seen as the result of a human yielding to God.
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Abstract:
Since the introduction of social identity theory to the field of biblical studies, the Epistle to the Hebrews has become something of a proving ground for depicting the intergroup relations that are key to understanding relationally-oriented identity dynamics and community identification. However, while social identity theory is a valuable tool for describing how communities self-perceive as unique social entities through the use of in-group and out-group language, social identity theory does not describe the rhetorical process by which such language and communication develops or why this development is so key to creating a distinct community. Symbolic convergence theory, with its elements of fantasy themes, symbolic cues, and rhetorical vision, gives us the unique language we need to describe that process, and the epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates not only the characteristics of a collective identity, but the very birth of that identity as well.

Keywords: symbolic convergence, social identity, Hebrews, rhetoric, community, covenant, worldview.

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Introduction

Since the introduction of social identity theory to the field of biblical studies, the Epistle to the Hebrews has become something of a proving ground for depicting the intergroup relations that are key to understanding relationally-oriented identity dynamics and community identification. However, while social identity theory is a valuable tool for describing how communities self-perceive as unique social entities through the use of in-group and out-group language, social identity theory does not describe the rhetorical process by which such language and communication develops or why this development is so key to essentially creating a distinct community. Social identity theory explains what makes a community distinct and how that distinction is maintained, but it does not adequately explain how an undefined group of individuals becomes a social entity, self-defined in opposition to other communities within the same geographic location.

So while the Epistle to the Hebrews stands as the example par excellence in the NT of identifying in-group, community-defining language, we find that a social identity approach falls short of fully appreciating the rhetorical strategy of the text as it moves the readers from an indistinct, uncertain group into a self-defined, distinct social community. And this is the process we see in Hebrews: Hebrews 6:1-12 indicates that the readers were being tempted to abandon their faith in Christ; 10:1-4, 29-39 imply that these were at least considering a return to Judaism and the sacrificial system. Later, 10:32-35 reveals the reason for this rejection to be persecution, most probably severe social ostracism as well as economic and judicial oppression (12:4; 10:32-34) (Salevao 2002: 126-127). The author’s continued exhortations to unite together in mutual love and support (9:24-25; 13:1-17) suggest a fractured community that does not provide a sufficiently compelling and distinct identity to offset the alienation brought on by persecution. The in-group versus out-group language is centered on symbols—both people and rituals—that are central to Jewish identity, strongly suggesting that the writer’s goal is to strengthen the community identity of these Christians so that their distinction is compelling and preferable to rejoining previous social groups, either Jewish or Gentile. So social identity theory describes what the problem is, and what solution is proposed by the writer of Hebrews. But it does not offer a mechanism by which to trace the rhetorical process by which language impacts the formation of group identity. Symbolic convergence theory, a framework developed to describe the formation of small group community identities...
and frequently used to analyze political rhetoric, gives us unique tools to assess the rhetoric of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Symbolic Convergence Theory: Understanding the Process of Group Self-Identification

Symbolic Convergence as Shared Consciousness

Symbolic convergence theory describes how unconnected individuals come to share a common vision or interpretation of reality; how this shared view grows and is sustained; how it provides “meaning, emotion, and motive for action” for members of that community; and what specifically indicates that such a shared consciousness exists (Cragan 1998: 94). The theory is based on the premise that people interpret their world and experiences through stories that guide and reflect our understanding of how the world works (Littlejohn 2002: 157). As John Dominic Crossan picturesquely states, “we live in story like fish live in the sea” (Crossan 1975: 47). Regardless of language, society, technological development, or any other marker one could affix to a culture, story pervades all of human consciousness. In fact, “man’s very being is affective and imaginative, and his powers of survival and creation are nourished by dynamic impulses which mediate themselves to him through inherited and ever-renewed dramatizations which define his world” (Wilder 1971: 121).

Story is how humanity understands reality and how people cope with their experiences, establish their expectations, and guide their interactions with one another and the world around them. The stories people tell give meaning and purpose to their reality. As people share these stories with each other, various elements within the stories take on meaning larger than the story itself and become symbols pointing to a larger interpretive paradigm of reality (Cragan 1995: 33). Symbols move experiences beyond what the senses perceive into an orderly, logical realm where they can be understood and processed (Foss 1996: 122).

Symbolic convergence theory was born in the mind of Ernest Bormann in his studies of small group communication at the University of Minnesota through the 1950s and 1960s. As he and his fellows studied transcripts of group dialogue, they began to notice that groups did not cohere or self-identify as separate entities until stories had been shared, expanded, and validated by group members. These stories each manifested an aspect of how the group chose to collectively interpret past experiences
or common events. In this sense, these stories were not so much accurate reflections of facts but creative retelling and interpretations of events. Eventually, the stories had been told and retold so many times that the mere mention of a key phrase or theme was sufficient to draw the entire story into group discussion (Hirokawa 1996: 81-83).

For example, stories quickly emerge within student groups of impossible deadlines, the heartless teacher, and the pushover professor. While the stories might not use these particular phrases, their themes were instantly recognized and built on by other students within the group, eventually building a common rhetorical vision of the eternal struggle between the power players (professors) and the powerless (hapless, hardworking undergraduates). Faculty groups, on the other hand, would build stories of the eternally lazy student, lowering standards within education, and high demands placed on overworked teachers. Their rhetorical vision would read somewhat the opposite of their students’! Thus, while the facts remain the same, each group may choose to interpret them differently, leading to different thematic stories that manifest very different perceptions of reality.

Symbolic convergence theory is so named “because it deals with the human tendency to interpret signs, signals, current experience, and human action and to invest those with meaning” (1996: 89). In this sense, an individual’s perception of reality is created by the stories and symbols he or she adopts. The more the stories are told within the community, the more participants’ perceptions of reality converge based on shared adoption and validation of these symbols of reality. As more people share these symbols, a distinct community emerges with a unique vision of how the world operates. The theory thus explains how people come to share belief systems, emotional responses to reality, and loyalty to symbols (1996: 90). This sharing of stories and symbols that indicates a common worldview is called symbolic convergence: a convergence of symbols within a group of people (Foss 1996: 122).

The key to symbolic convergence is the adoption of stories and meanings within a community. As these stories are adopted, they create the shared consciousness that defines a distinct rhetorical community. The stories told within the community first reflect how its members understand the world, and then determine how they interpret their experiences, how they respond to events, and what motivates their actions within the world. Also, since this shared consciousness only emerges when individuals share
their stories, reality—or, rather, their perception of reality—is co-created as they agree on and sustain their rhetorical vision of the world (Cragan 1995: 96). In other words, “a symbolic fact, initiated by one person, is picked up, embellished, and reconfigured by others and becomes the common consciousness (symbolic interpretation) for the community” (1995: 97).

Since Bormann’s original research, John Cragan and Donald Shields have joined him in spearheading a growing number of communications scholars and an avalanche of articles applying symbolic convergence theory to small group dynamics; studies of national, ethnic, or cultural self-identification; interpersonal, mass media, and organizational communication (Cragan 1999: 92-106) and even political manifestos (Bormann 1996: 1-28). It should be noted, however, that each of these studies is an analysis of communication patterns of currently existing rhetorical communities (e.g., small groups, cultural communities, and businesses). Little has been done to date to apply symbolic convergence theory to rhetorical communities that no longer exist, such as the original readers of the Gospels, of Paul’s letters, or of the Epistle to the Hebrews.7

The reason for this is simple: it is much more difficult to analyze the communication patterns and themes of a community when the only remaining records are written. It is comparable to reading a one-sided transcript of a discussion: the entire discussion must be recreated from the words of only one of the participants. This is not an impossible task, however. It merely requires that the groundwork be carefully laid to provide an adequate foundation from which to read the text. So, we turn next to the essential rhetorical elements of symbolic convergence: rhetorical vision, fantasy themes, and symbolic cues. The development of a distinct rhetorical community hinges on these concepts and how they are created and used (Littlejohn 2002: 158).

**Fantasy Themes**

Fantasy themes are the building blocks of symbolic convergence theory. “Fantasy,” however, takes on a unique meaning within the world of symbolic convergence. Instead of referring to daydreams, fantasy “is the creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events that fulfills a group psychological or rhetorical need” (Hirokawa 1996:88). So, a fantasy theme is a creatively designed narrative that strikes a chord in the experiences of the group. Fantasy themes often provide a creative interpretation of group experiences or a way to make sense of a type of experience common to
group member (Foss 1996: 124). This retelling of common experience is further expanded by community members and becomes “symbolic knowledge,” in that as the narrative develops, it becomes invested with more meaning than a simple statement of events warrants (Cragan 1995: 35).

As narratives, fantasy themes contain all of the major elements of story, including plot, setting, and characters. Because fantasy themes are the basic structural elements of a community’s symbolic reality (their understanding of reality as represented by community-validated symbols), fantasy themes require one more element: a sanctioning agent (1995: 35). The sanctioning agent is the trustworthy source of the narrative. In many cultures, especially ancient ones, community members would ascribe the fantasy theme to the ultimate sanctioning agent: a deity. For example, Athena functions as a sanctioning agent in the Odyssey when she offers a cosmic interpretation to Odysseus of his wanderings (Od., Book XIII). The same could be said of Exodus 19, where God speaks to Moses in a cloud and gives him the Law: God functions as the rhetorical sanctioning agent to legitimate the role and power of the Law in Jewish culture.

As stories such as these are told over and over within a community, participants pick up on the themes and elaborate on them, corporately investing their various elements with symbolic meaning and creating fantasy themes that demonstrate and sustain how the community understands and interprets reality (Foss 1996: 123). Sometimes the basic events or skeletal structure of a fantasy theme will be repeated through several similar themes (e.g., God intervening on his people’s behalf). This fantasy type expresses more deeply felt “truths” about reality and experience and actually communicates the “meaning, emotion, and motive” inherent within the original fantasy theme more powerfully than did the theme itself. Recasting a recognized fantasy type in a new fantasy theme, then, immediately elicits the emotional response and loyalty previously linked with the original fantasy theme, even though the context is entirely new (Cragan 1995: 38). This phenomenon proves especially valuable in the New Testament as evangelists seek to recast familiar and accepted stories into a gospel call that will draw the acceptance and loyalty of the old theme; Peter’s Pentecost speech (Acts 2) is one such example.

A single rhetorical community may adopt several such fantasy types, the most powerful of which is the saga. A saga is a fantasy type that retells the triumphs and experiences of the community or of an individual
significant to the community’s existence (1995: 38). Usually, sagas retell the genesis of the community and the challenges it has overcome to exist and succeed. Beyond any other stories, sagas contain the heart and allegiance of the community because they define participants’ heritage and express their deepest hopes for the future.

The essential attribute of all fantasy themes is that they are shared across the community. As they are elaborated on and become more and more familiar to community members, eventually certain key phrases, word plays, or even gestures become so intrinsically intertwined with the narratives that mere mention of these phrases or gestures will bring the entire narrative to the audience’s mind. For example, Seinfeld fans will all recognize the phrase “No soup for you!” as referring to the “Soup Nazi” episode, in which petty tyranny is the revenge of the small-minded (Season 7, Ep. 6). Or, for a more contemporary example, “I can do this all day!” immediately cues the Captain America story, in which sheer perseverance—or indomitable stubbornness! —win over much stronger, smarter, seemingly unbeatable foes. In much the same way, the author of the Gospel of Matthew draws upon the much larger fantasy theme of the victorious Messiah when he quotes Zechariah 9:9 to describe Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:4-9).

These types of phrases and word plays are known as symbolic cues. As Hirokawa and Poole observe, “when participants have shared a fantasy theme, they have charged their emotional and memory banks with meanings and emotions that can be set off by a commonly agreed-upon cryptic symbolic cue” (Hirokawa 1996: 96). So symbolic cues can be slogans and in-group jokes as well as word plays, gestures, or key phrases that identify and tap into entire fantasy themes. In this way, symbolic cues epitomize the symbolic aspect of symbolic convergence theory: the rhetorical community corporately shares specific symbols and symbol referents whose meanings are larger than their semantic weight and that point to stories that reveal a way of interpreting reality that sets the community apart from other groups.

Creating Fantasy Themes

Given the degree of symbolism inherent in fantasy themes, it would seem that creating a fantasy theme would be both complex and time-consuming. However, because fantasy themes are co-created by the community itself, the latent creativity of the entire community is
available to invest new narratives with symbolic meaning. As mentioned above, it is human tendency to perceive and interpret reality in stories, dramatizing events in order to experience them corporately (1996: 92). This dramatization inevitably leads to investing the stories with symbolic meaning, moving the narrative beyond experience toward understanding and interpretation.

Fantasy themes originate with skilled and creative fantasizers whose personal interpretation of events is so convincing and powerful that other members of the group adopt and adapt it. The success of the fantasizer’s message is dependent on his rhetorical skill as well as on its novelty, persuasive ability, explanatory power, and consistent fit with other fantasy themes already accepted by the community (Cragan 1995: 48). If the message is successful, “a chain is triggered by the first dramatizing message and is then picked up and elaborated by the other members” (Hirokawa 1996: 104). As this group- or public-chaining takes place (always swiftly, and sometimes within minutes in a group setting), a fantasy theme emerges with its attendant symbolic cues (Cragan 1998: 108). Creating a fantasy theme, then, is a simple and often surprisingly quick process within a community as long as the theme itself is accepted as viable and consistent with the community’s overarching view of reality.

Rhetorical Visions

This overarching view of reality is known as a rhetorical vision. It is a deep-seated interpretive paradigm shared by the members of a specific community that encompasses the values, beliefs, and expectations of the participants. As Stephen Littlejohn notes, “rhetorical visions structure our sense of reality in areas we cannot experience directly but can only know by symbolic reproduction... in large measure these visions form the assumptions on which a group’s knowledge is based” (Littlejohn 2002: 157). In other words, rhetorical visions work to explain events outside of an individual’s personal experience by linking symbols (specific meaning) to those events and thus bringing them symbolically within one’s experience and thus subject to interpretation and explanation.

However, just because a rhetorical vision explains events that occur beyond personal experience does not mean that it has no ties to existential reality: the vision “spurs people to action, but the need for a link to reality helps squelch totally fantastic fantasies” (2002: 111). On the contrary, rhetorical visions must have reality-links in order to be considered
viable. A reality-link is simply the observable evidence that a rhetorical vision actually does account for sensory experience and current events (Cragan 1995: 46). In other words, a rhetorical vision must have explanatory and predictive power. It must be able to explain not only events beyond community experience but also those occurring within the community. One must also be able to adequately predict cause and effect within the interpretive boundaries of the vision. Simply put, a rhetorical vision is not viable unless the community is able to create reasonable expectations of reality and see those fulfilled.

Furthermore, because rhetorical visions often reflect a view of reality that is outside of one’s experience—frequently describing cosmic- or semi-cosmic conflicts—they may never be fully described within the community. They are instead “built up piecemeal” by sharing fantasy themes within the community that support and sustain the vision (1995: 158). A rhetorical community will share many fantasy themes, each of which manifest a particular aspect of its rhetorical vision. This seeming haphazard construction allows a rhetorical vision the flexibility it needs to adapt to new ideas and events: instead of splintering apart when new information or experiences are introduced, it can be creatively reinvented to encompass and reinterpret events, even leading to a new understanding of the world. In fact, a rhetorical vision is under constant reinvention by community members as they seek to assimilate new experiences into their interpretive paradigm and integrate into their experience and understanding events beyond their immediate reality. Cragan and Shields attribute this process to the novelty principle, which “requires that for fantasies to chain-out, and continue to convey meaning, emotion, and motive for action, they must remain fresh and creative” (Cragan 1998: 109). The annual Passover ritual and recitation (Exodus 12:24-27) is perhaps the most powerful biblical example of this type of consistent rhetorical reinvention, strongly linked to a story—a fantasy theme—core to the Jewish sense of identity.

Because it influences one’s interpretation of experiences in such a fundamental way, a rhetorical vision “is a social bonding agent, a way in which we create narrative structures that give meaning to our lives and a sense of community” (Littlejohn 2002: 158). The very presence of an identifiable rhetorical vision signals that a rhetorical community has been born of those individuals who have helped chain out the fantasy themes and now participate by sharing and sustaining them (Foss 1996: 125). In this way, rhetorical visions perform a vital role in how a group self-defines
as a distinct community: new groups sense a need to create a common identity based on their unique way of viewing the world (Hirokawa 1996: 104). At this stage, rhetorical visions function to “attract attention and build consciousness because they imitate former ways of seeing things that look familiar” (Littlejohn 2002: 158).

As the rhetorical community grows and strengthens, these new rhetorical communities begin to establish boundaries to distinguish between the “us” who adhere to the rhetorical vision and the “them” who do not. We see the in-group heterogeneity and out-group homogeneity familiar from social identity at work at this point of the identity-building process. Community members begin to use the rhetorical vision to proselytize and gather new members as well as to excommunicate disbelievers, tacitly demonstrating a belief that those who do not adhere to the vision have no part in the community and its destiny: “once the sharing of fantasies identifies the group and distinguishes between the insiders and outsiders, the members have clear rhetorical and symbolic boundaries to serve as guidelines for terminating rituals to force members out and for initiation and acceptance rituals for recruits” (Hirokawa 1996: 105). In the final stages of the process, when the community is firmly established, its rhetorical vision functions to maintain its members’ commitment to the values, vision, and group (Littlejohn 2002: 158).

Given the role rhetorical vision plays in defining new communities and the snowballing process that is the creation of rhetorical vision (as various fantasy themes collide, meld, and begin to manifest an overarching view of the word), recasting a vision can completely change how a community self-defines. In skilled hands, using the novelty principle to retell old stories in new ways generates a flood of creative adoption, reinterpretation, and refocusing within the community that signals the birth of a new social identity. This, then, is the challenge facing the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: how to recast what is accepted as true in order to transfer the emotions, motives, and loyalty of a group over to a new vision of reality that will affirm and establish a compelling identity and a distinctly unique community.

**New Eyes on Old Themes: A New Vision for a New People**

The author of Hebrews recognized that the fundamental issue facing his community was not context but collective identity. Persecution, a lack of intra-group loyalty, guilt, and uncertainty were the pressures
facing his audience. And as the pressures mounted, some Christians were apparently leaving the new, liminal church community to return to the safety of the established synagogue (Littlejohn 2002: 133, 140, 144). The threat this posed to the health and strength of the church is apparent; the author of Hebrews discerned that the key issue was not persecution, or comfort, or certainty, but that the community responses were merely symptoms of a deeper problem: the Christians were struggling with an identity crisis based on a misunderstanding of their current reality.

For this reason, he seeks to persuade them that self-defining as a new community, distinct from their previous community, is not betrayal but rather greater fulfillment (Saleoao 2002: 171). In order to accomplish his mission he must recast the old rhetorical vision, in effect presenting a new rhetorical vision sufficiently like the old one that it will sustain what his readers have accepted as true and yet will offer a new interpretation of familiar events: in this vision, faith in Jesus is the core of a new definition of God's people, and those who believe in Jesus rightfully self-define as the children of God, heirs to the ancient Abrahamic and Mosaic promises, and witnesses of their full fulfillment within the new christological community.

Old Forms Invested with New Content: Building a New Rhetorical Vision

The first step, then, is to draw out the fantasy themes and types that are at the heart of the Jewish concept of self, heritage, and one's relationship with God. By drawing on these themes, the author deliberately evokes the powerful emotions and loyalty inherent within them, hoping to transfer these to the new vision he casts and the new community to which he calls his Christian brothers and sisters. In other words, the author will use old forms—fantasy themes familiar to his readers—and inject them with new or expanded content, leaving behind a new rhetorical vision through which to interpret the world and define a new community experiencing the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

Evoking Established Community Fantasy Themes

The themes the author chooses are by no means accidental: he unerringly and skillfully draws out the narratives closest to the heart of Israel: the stories of the exodus, the wandering, the giving of the Law and the tabernacle, and entering the promised land. These are genesis sagas for Israel, portraying their birth as a people and the birth of their unique relationship with God. The rhetorical vision they sustain describes God
intervening in history on behalf of his people, desiring to be in community with his people, and offering them redemptive reconciliation and a return to his presence.

The author of Hebrews uses the figure of Moses to point toward the exodus, wanderings, and covenant (Hebrews 3:2-5). In chapter 2, he references Meribah to cue the fantasy theme of the wanderings—a fantasy theme that was so well-recognized it became a fantasy type describing Israel’s rebellion and God’s faithfulness (Hebrews 3:7-11). He subtly moves from the wandering theme to the promised land theme by quoting a well-known retelling of the story (3:11; 4:3) and briefly mentioning Joshua (4:8). Each of these—Moses, Meribah or “wilderness,” “rest,” and Joshua—serves as a symbolic cue to his readers, bringing to the forefront of their minds the saga of Israel’s birth and God’s choice of them as his people.

Later cues the author uses include the priesthood (chapter 7), the Mosaic Law (7:11-18; 8:7; 10:1), the tabernacle (8:5; 9:1-10), and the sacrificial system (9:12-13; 10:2-11). Each of these cues brings up its own fantasy theme: God’s choice of Levi and of Aaron to serve as the people’s voice to himself; God establishing the Law as his covenant with Israel and dictating the standards by which his people would behave in order to remain righteous before him; God giving the tabernacle as a sign of his presence and a place to worship him; God granting his people a way to be reconciled to himself and escape his wrath at sin. While each theme is its own unique story, all of the stories display similar plots: God creating a way for his people to actively enjoy reconciled relationship with him. This fantasy type, along with the sagas mentioned above, will be the focus of the author’s efforts as he seeks to recast the familiar within a new gospel context.

Recasting and Reinterpreting Established Themes

One of the fascinating aspects of fantasy themes is that they are constantly subject to the novelty principle, constantly being reinvented by the community to account for new experiences and to bring events outside of corporate experience into a manageable symbolic world where they can be vicariously experienced and understood. The more fantasy themes grow and change, the greater their potential to influence and expand the overarching rhetorical vision. This principle is what drives the author of Hebrews as he crafts his famous “greater than” arguments. Due to the limitations of the format, this study will extend only to examining certain
covenant aspects of his arguments. We will focus primarily on the land and the sacrifices: the land because it manifests the promise fulfilled, and the sacrifices because they are the means by which the promise is fulfilled. The promise is complete reconciliation with God, and the themes build on each other to demonstrate that Jesus is the promise fulfilled.

The Land

According Joshua 21:44-45, the land was to be a rest from wandering and from war for the Israelites. For this reason, the fantasy theme describing entering the promised land and the conquest became tied to political peace, and "rest" then became a symbolic cue calling up this sense of safety and security in God's promises. Rest from war was seen as the physical manifestation of God's covenant promise fulfilled, as can be seen in 2 Samuel 7:1-2, where almost the same wording is used to describe David's reign once his enemies were defeated; Psalm 95:11 also uses "rest" to cue an archetypal sense of peace and fulfillment.

However, even in Psalm 95 one can trace the beginnings of a more spiritual echo. As Israel continued in her history, she began to reinvent this theme and the meaning attached to "rest" as a symbol of God's fulfilled promises. The full voice of this reinvention can be found in the prophets, beginning with Isaiah, where the concept of "rest" becomes tied with spiritual peace and the reconciliation and fellowship of one's heart with God (Isaiah 63:11-19). Jeremiah finishes this reinvention in Jeremiah 31:2, tying rest in with the promise of a new covenant that would redefine and surpass the old covenant and offer full fellowship and knowledge of God resulting from a complete and eternal atonement (Jeremiah 31:29-34; see also Hebrews 8:8-12).

It is no stretch, then, to understand how the land and its promised rest became, for first-century Jews, a messianic theme describing an idyllic paradise in which God rules as potentate, protecting Israel from her enemies and offering this new covenant to the true children of Abraham. "Rest" was the expected proof that God's new covenant had come and all of his promises and blessings would be fulfilled.

The author of Hebrews picks up on this fantasy type and reinvents it in light of Old Testament prophecies and the person of Jesus. As will become standard modus operandi for him, he accepts the form of the fantasy type but invests it with new content and new meaning. In a very real sense, he separates the traditional physical or political interpretation
and the spiritual interpretation of two very significant words, “rest” and its antonym, “work.” He presents physical rest and physical work as the prototypes of what he might call true rest and true work: the first was a poor imitation of what the second would be. According to his argument, Joshua may have brought Israel into the promised land and led them through the conquest, but the rest he offered did not fulfill all of the covenant promises (Hebrews 4:8-9). Since the covenant promises (in the prophecies) included eternal forgiveness and removing the need for the sacrificial system, it stands to reason that the “work” he has in mind refers to the never-ending work of the average Jew to keep the Law in order to remain righteous before God.

Oddly enough, the author does not finish his argument with the expected description of real rest from work. Instead, he leaves the ending unspoken in the minds of his readers: Jesus offers real rest from work because those who accept him in faith no longer re-ensure their status before God by their own efforts (Guthrie 1998:164). Thus “land” and “rest” become new spiritual metaphors describing the New Testament spiritual manifestation (forgiveness) of the full covenant promises fulfilled (atonement and knowledge of God). This recast fantasy theme, the story of God’s new covenant, is the focus of the author’s remaining arguments.

The Sacrifices

The author moves forward in his quest to prove the superiority of the new covenant by addressing the core of the Mosaic Law: the sacrificial system. For every sacrifice, there must be—at the very least—both the sacrifice and the sacrificer (the priest). In both of these arenas the author recasts the fantasy themes evoked by these cues and offers a new option compatible with a Jewish heritage yet superior to the Mosaic covenant. The final role, that of the worshipper seeking forgiveness, remains unspoken but imminently present in both the writer and his audience: the worshipper awaits a reconciliation that is true, full, and eternally effective.

The author’s argument regarding the Law and its prescribed sacrifices is best understood in light of Plato’s world of forms, describing the Mosaic Law as “a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (Hebrews 10:1) (Royster 2003: 151). According to Plato’s cosmology, there is an unseen world that contains the true being of which the physical world contains only representations, so that all visible objects are copies of the real entity in the world of forms (Rep. Book VII).
For example, every species of tree or dog is a variable representation of the single “quintessential” tree or dog in the world of forms. Transferring the allegory over to the Law is then a simple matter: the Mosaic Law is the imitation or model of the new covenant, which is inaugurated by Jesus in his death and resurrection.

This fantasy theme was first hinted at in Hebrews 3:2-5, where the author very briefly mentioned Moses to evoke the saga of Sinai, the giving of the Law, and the establishment of Israel as God’s covenant people. In these few verses, the author seemingly haphazardly brushes Moses aside as the lesser servant who, by inference, introduced a lesser covenant. The brief foreshadowing means that when the author reintroduces the Law in Hebrews 10, he has already begun to undermine its authority and recast the establishment of God’s people within a christological context.

Having brought Sinai to the forefront of his readers’ minds, the author of Hebrews expands his symbolic cue to the priesthood, sacrifice officiants and representatives of God’s covenant people to God himself, ensuring their continued fellowship with him: “since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God,… Let us approach God’s throne of grace with confidence” (Hebrews 4:14, 16). With this language, the author infers the Old Testament theme of the high priest who constantly intercedes for the people before God with incense and offerings. At the same time, he begins to recast this drama, portraying Jesus as the quintessential high priest. Again, the author uses forms or cues shared by his readers yet redefines them to offer a new priesthood fantasy theme. He redefines the priesthood itself, moving the institution outside of genetic lineage. The story of Aaron’s calling becomes proof that priesthood is not a matter of parentage but of calling (Hebrews 5:4), while the story of Melchizedek provides a forerunner in a priesthood that takes precedence over Levi’s calling (7:1-10). So when Jesus’ priesthood is authenticated by God via his resurrection, that priesthood is presented as consistent with preexisting Jewish fantasy themes, and yet by redefining the central priesthood theme, the author proves that Jesus is the great high priest, superior to all other priests and, by implication, the story he enacts is superior in meaning to that enacted by the Aaronic high priests.

The second fantasy theme drawn out by the author is that of the sacrifice itself. Here the cue is a phrase redolent of daily business at the Temple: “the blood of goats and calves” (Hebrews 9:12). The story would be a familiar one to every Jew: every day, all day long, the priests were
busy offering up the sacrifices that would ensure the daily reconciliation of Israel to God. Sacrifice offered the consistent guarantee that God forgave sins and counted the repentant as righteous members of his chosen people. The author plays heavily on the daily aspect of the sacrifices, noting that “day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Hebrews 10:11). In this way he underscores the eternal inefficacy of the entire system, intimating that it served only as a sort of placeholder for a new covenant that would not share such weaknesses.

Having thoroughly undermined the efficacy of the sacrificial system, the author proceeds to reinvent the theme by recasting the characters. Instead of an animal sacrifice temporarily turning away God’s wrath, Jesus offers himself as the ultimate sacrifice, effectively offering eternal atonement for all humanity (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus the high priest offers himself as a perfect sacrifice directly to God. Thus, the author retains the fantasy theme of sacrifice but recasts it to offer a christological interpretation that nonetheless remains faithful to his readers’ heritage and understanding of how God works, in effect transferring their loyalty to the sacrificial system over to Christ as the ultimate sacrifice (Hebrews 9:14, 22).

By recasting these two fantasy themes—priest and sacrifice—the author points to a larger view of the Law as utterly superseded by Jesus’ work on our behalf (Salevao 2002: 197). Jesus takes the place of Moses, the Law-bringer; he stands as a high priest superior to Aaron; and he offers a sacrifice more effective than any possible under the Mosaic Law. It is important to note here that the author has so far couched every argument within fantasy themes shared by all first-century Jews, and not only shared, but themes so profound that they defined what it meant to be Jewish.

**A New Vision, a New Community**

So, what is this new vision the author of Hebrews seeks to create? He has thus far painstakingly assembled a grouping of fantasy themes that evoke intensely powerful responses from his audience. Is his purpose simply to invent a new rhetorical vision that proves how inferior Judaism is to Christianity? Or does the author have more in mind here? The rhetorical processes observed and described by symbolic convergence theory suggest a more subtle option.

Throughout his arguments the author has been careful to use symbols that cue intrinsically Jewish stories and concepts. He further used
the forms of these stories, affirming their validity to his audience and thus affirming to them his own faithfulness to their heritage and history with God. He has so far done everything he can to present himself sympathetically and elicit loyalty to his message. None of this suggests that his goal is simply to convince his readers to abandon an inferior religious heritage. If anything, this approach suggests that his goal is, in fact, to validate their heritage.

However, this is not the complete picture, because the author continues by recasting each theme, keeping the storylines but investing each one with new content and, as a result, new meaning. New content and new meaning snowball together with accepted truths into a new yet believable rhetorical vision that does not perceive itself so much as opposition to Judaism as it considers itself the true fulfillment that makes the old forms obsolete. It is believable precisely because it has retained so much already accepted by the community as true in the original vision, and yet it is completely new because it offers an interpretation of reality so different that cannot coexist contemporaneously with the old vision.

According to the old rhetorical vision, God chose Israel and established a covenant with her based on the Law and the sacrifices. The purpose and the promise of the covenant was to offer reconciliation to and fellowship with God. Those who would abide by the Law and offer sacrifices in compliance with it were granted the promises of righteousness—reconciliation and fellowship. The rhetorical vision the author casts offers fulfillment of the purposes and promises of the old covenant: a new covenant is inaugurated in which God’s people are chosen on the basis of faith, and this chosen people are reconciled eternally to God by the eternal sacrifice of Jesus and therefore have no need to abide by an obsolete system that could not offer eternal effectiveness. The old motifs are still in play, but their new content forces a radically different interpretation of reality that is based on faith in Jesus, not on one’s own efforts to retain one’s righteousness before God (Pursiful 1993: 115). So, in this sense, the new vision is not a competing vision per se, but seeks to be understood as the fulfillment of or ultimate expression of the purpose of the old covenant.\textsuperscript{13}

And as the readers begin to accept and assimilate this new vision, they inevitably will change not only how they interpret their experiences but also what they do because of their new understanding of reality. Returning to Judaism and the practice of the Law would be a betrayal of God’s eternal plan in favor of his temporary model (2002: 196). Therefore, as the Christian community reinterprets their individual experiences and
their corporate reality, they begin to self-identify as distinct in both belief and practice from a first-century Jewish community (2002: 193). This radical redefinition allows Christians to affirm their faith heritage while at the same time forcing them to abandon Jewish sacrificial practices that have been made obsolete with the inauguration of the new covenant.

The inevitable results of this self-separation include the development of orthodox beliefs (which would be guided by the content of the Epistle to the Hebrews), intra-community bonding (which would strengthen participants against the pressures of persecution), and loyalty within the group to one another and to the rhetorical vision (which would ensure the success of the vision as well as the establishment of the community). The result is that the author births a new community with new meaning, purpose, and motivation for action based on a common interpretation of reality. In short, he has resolved all of his problems by skillfully recasting a vision in new terms and drawing out its implications on community life.

Conclusion

In the epistle to the Hebrews we are privileged to watch the formation of a collective identity as it happens. Each step of the author’s rhetoric draws on symbols and themes that have historically defined the Jewish people and their worldview but injects new christological content and meaning into them: in this way he extends the core fantasy themes and sagas, creating a new rhetorical vision that drives the creation of a new community of Christians that defines itself as a continuation of, yet utterly distinct from, the Law-observant Jewish community (2002: 171). Symbolic convergence theory, with its elements of fantasy themes, symbolic cues, and rhetorical vision, gives us the unique language we need to describe what we find in Hebrews: rhetoric powerful enough to create a community.

End Notes

2 Social identity theory does address the process of group formation, but primarily as a function of intergroup dynamics; that is, group formation is observed through the development of intergroup comparisons defining out-group as opposed to in-group. The rhetorical process of creating the group identity is something different, and frequently occurs before intergroup comparisons come into play for the purposes of boundary-making and maintenance. See, e.g., Matthew J. Marohl, *Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews: A Social Identity Approach* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 82; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), 61-2.

3 Although the themes of Hebrews are distinctly Jewish, the Greek philosophical arguments suggest at the least a Hellenistically educated audience. Given that the earliest Christians considered the OT their primary scripture, a solid foundation in core Jewish stories and theology would not be surprising, even among Gentile Christians; see David de Silva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 2-5, 9, 12. However, other authors read the same evidence and conclude that the audience was primarily Christian Jews, struggling with the social separation from the Jewish community; see Martin Wessbrandt, “Covenant, Conflict and Collective Identity: The Relationship between Hebrews and 1 Clement” (pp. 257-273 in *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. by Samuel Byrskog, Raimo Hakola, and Jutta Jokiranta, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 267.


6 Most recently, SCT has been applied to the rhetoric of various terrorist factions in an attempt to identify how these communities are born and what draws them together into unified, functioning militant organizations; see, e.g., Jonathan Matusitz, “Understanding Hezbollah Symbolism through Symbolic Convergence Theory,” *Journal of Visual Political Communication* 7:1 (June 2021), pp. 43-60.

7 With the exception of James Hester’s analysis of 1 Thessalonians: “A Fantasy Theme Analysis of 1 Thessalonians,” in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible*, ed. by Stanley Porter and Dennis Stamps (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 504-525.

8 E.g., Marohl, *Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews*, 61.

9 See below for a discussion of his use of Platonic forms; in the discussion of rest he foreshadows this by implying the duality of a false or unfulfilled rest and a true spiritual rest in light of the later duality he
explores between the never-ending Temple sacrifices and the single, eternally effective of Jesus.


13 Most studies of the imagery in Hebrews focuses on an implied conflict in the comparison between the old and the new covenant and symbols. The claim then is that the new covenant “wins” the conflict and emerges as the better, superior option (e.g., Kiwoong Son, Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18-24 as a Hermeneutical Key to the Epistle [Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005], 202). This conclusion is certainly encouraged by the language of superiority within Hebrews. However, the actual rhetorical strategy is that the “old” fantasy themes and symbols are reused and thus reaffirmed. The new, christological content is what creates new meaning and a new interpretation of the community’s current reality. This, then, is what drives the process of creating a new rhetorical vision and thus the creation of a new community, distinct from the familiar Jewish community with its adherence to the Mosaic Law. And it means that to adopt the new rhetorical vision is to fully embrace the old themes, to affirm the old symbols while simultaneously recognizing that they have been reinvested with something new that demands a complete rethinking of what it means to be the community of God’s chosen people. There is continuity with the old first, then conflict generated by the implications of the new.

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Abstract:

Traditional interpretation of Rom 8:1-4 has failed to adequately understand Rom 8:1-4. This paper proposes a unified reading of “law” and supports an unfolding theme within Romans, that of obedience. The rhetorical features of amplification present in 8:1-4 highlight the need for a consistent use of the term νόμος. This allows a proper understanding of δικαίωμα in v. 4 that refers to the realm of moral behavior as described in the law and shows how Paul sees the Spirit guiding his communities to fulfill the “just requirement” of the Mosaic Law.

Keywords: rhetoric, Romans, law, Nomos

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**Introduction**

Paul’s argument in Rom 8:1-4 combines two important themes within Romans: righteousness and law. Scholars have disputed the meaning of both these terms in 8:1-4 and consequently the interpretive history is replete with attempts at elucidating Paul’s statement ἵνα τὸ δίκαιωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν. Some scholars identify a two-fold distinction to the term νόμος in 8:4.¹ Others assume a single referent for νόμος in 8:4.² This article attempts to utilize the ancient rhetorical practice of amplification to illuminate Paul’s usage of these terms.

In this paper, I will demonstrate, through a survey of the recent history of interpretation, that a distinction between the uses of νόμος fails to bring clarity to Paul’s argument in Rom 8:1-4 and instead that a unified reading of “law” supports an unfolding theme within Romans, that of obedience.³ In light of the unsatisfactory reading of a dual use of νόμος in 8:1-4, I propose that three issues have been neglected in regards to the understanding of Rom 8:1-4: (1) the rhetorical features of 8:1-4 and the practice of amplification and; (2) the meaning of δίκαιωμα in v. 4.

**Two Modern Interpretive Strategies**

Commentators disagree on the identification of the two instances of νόμος in 8:2, whether both refer to the Mosaic law or to a “rule” or “principle.” The majority view the “law of the spirit of life” and the “law of sin and death” not as a singular reference to the Mosaic law, but as a “word-play” by Paul on the term νόμος and denoting a “rule” or “principle.” However, a growing majority understand the twofold use of νόμος in 8:2 as referring singularly to the Mosaic law. Here the law is functioning under two different domains, the domain of the “Spirit and life” and the domain of “sin and death.” We will deal with the former view first.

**View One: Two Laws in Rom 8:2**

Two early modern commentators, William Sanday and Arthur Headlam affected generations of scholars by identifying both uses of “law” in 8:2 as “authority.” In their ICC commentary on Romans they argued that, whether νόμος is governed by πνεῦμα or ἀμαρτία / θάνατος each refers to a different “authority producing regulated action such as would be produced by a code” basing this explanation on the genitive as expressive.⁴ This sense of νόμος as a guiding principle or rule is adopted by most of the commentators in this group.⁵ Udo Schnelle remarks that,
By no means can νόμος be understood as a consistent quantity with the same meaning in each case, for the verb ἡλευθέρωσαν clearly expresses that the one νόμος liberates one from the other. νόμος must here be translated with the “rule/norm” or “principle”... which means that in 8:2 νόμος does not refer to the Sinai Torah.⁶

One of the primary arguments to interpreting the uses of νόμος in 8:2 as a “rule” or “principle” is the grammatical construction of the two genitive phrases surrounding the two occurrences of the term. In the first clause of 8:2, the phrase τοῦ πνεύματος is understood as an epexegetic genitive and the second portion τῆς ζωῆς is understood either as qualitative or objective genitive, the entire phrase then reading, “the law which consists in the Spirit leading to life.”⁷

In the second clause of 8:2, the first part of the phrase τῆς ἁμαρτίας is understood as genitive of origin and the second portion τοῦ θανάτου is understood as qualitative genitive, the phrase then reading, “the law brought about by sin and leading to death.”⁸ Taken in this way, the argument is that these are contrasting laws, such that, “here Paul does indeed speak of two laws, not one law seen from two perspectives.”⁹

Here is where problems arise: Why has a shift in genitival use taken place in the second parallel clause of 8:2? Brendan Byrne and others opt to take the genitive phrase τῆς ἁμαρτίας as a genitive of origin, when one immediate clause earlier, the similar clause is taken as an epexegetic genitive.¹⁰ What causes this grammatical shift to take place within such a small portion of the text? Even if one does agree with the argument, there is far more coherence to treat syntactically paralleled clauses with the same grammatical categories. That they are related is clearly indicated by numerous factors: (1) the καὶ linking the two clauses; (2) the use of νόμος; (3) and the contrasting pair of nouns πνεύματος and ἁμαρτίας. There should be a consonance in genitival function. Interestingly, if the same grammatical categories are applied to each section of the clause that is as epexegetic genitives, then 8:2a would read, “the law under sin.” That is the sphere of sin, which in turn would work against the argument thus put forward.

It is simply far more likely that the genitives should be taken in a consistent manner with the parallel clause as genitives of possession. So that, the two occurrences of law that are mentioned are those which belong to the domain of the Spirit and life and the domain of sin and death. This,
however, still does not answer the question of whether there are two laws or two occurrences of law with a singular referent of Torah.  

**View Two: Mosaic Law in Rom 8:2**

Eduard Lohse’s influential treatment of 8:2 and the phrase “law of the Spirit of Life” set out an alternative approach. Lohse challenged the ideas of dual “laws” in 8:2 and argued that νόμος in ch. 8 was “unambiguously the Old Testament law.” Lohse’s advice on Paul and the law is also helpful: “Die Frage, was Paulus unter dem νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς versteht, ist mithin nach wie vor strittig. Sie kann nur beantwortet werden, wenn Röm 8:2 in den Zusammenhang mit der Auslegung des Gesetzes gerückt wird, wie sie in ihrer grundsätzlichen Bedeutung von Paulus entfaltet wird.” Lohse’s insight into 8:2 sparked others, such as E.P. Sanders to question, “whether or not Paul made de facto distinctions between the law which Christians obey and the Mosaic law. The present point is that he made no generalizing or theoretical distinction.” If it could be shown that Paul did not distinguish between law(s), then the interpretation of 8:1-4, and specifically 8:2, must follow along similar lines, mainly that no distinction should be made between Paul’s use of νόμος in 8:2.

Another important contribution was that of James Dunn and his emphasis on the eschatological framework of Rom 8. As Dunn as points out, it is important to remember that the phrase “law of the spirit of life” operates from within the new domain of Christ as introduced in 8:1. The reference to the “law of sin and death” in 8:2 looks back to previous references in ch. 7, which operate within the Adamic state of being. The introduction of “the law of the spirit of life” in ch. 8 should indicate that, “The law of the Spirit is the eschatological law (cf. Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27).” This brings important ramifications for understanding the nature of law within ch. 8. There are not two contrasting laws in operation in 8:2, rather there is the Mosaic law viewed from different eschatological viewpoints. This theme is neither new or novel, but in fact replicates the situation described in Jer 31:31-34. This interpretation is also aided by Paul’s use of ἀρα νῦν in 8:1 which also sets the chapter in an eschatological tone.

The strength of the second view is that the interpretation holds together a unified treatment of the use of νόμος in 8:2. This is not to say that Paul could not speak of a “rule” or “principle” but that if he wanted to do so, other ways were at his disposal. As it stands, in light of Paul’s overall use of νόμος in his letters, it is more likely that a singular reference to the
Mosaic law is intended in 8:2. This combined with the eschatological thrust of the section adds to the support. Lastly, in light of 8:4, caution should be exercised in wandering away from νόμος as a reference to the Mosaic law, as it is precisely this νόμος that it fulfilled in those who “walk according to the Spirit.” Dunn rightly concludes on the entire section that, “In all this the law remains the expression and measure of God’s will, and fulfillment of its just requirement remains the goal of those who walk “according to the Spirit” (8:4).” It is the second view that brings the seemingly disparate sections of 8:1-4 together in a unified fashion. Given the arguments above, more support can be garnered from the following issues; the rhetorical strategy at work through Paul’s use of elaboration on a theme in 8:1-4 and the use of δικαίωμα in 8:4.

The Rhetoric of Rom 8:1-4

Romans 8:1 is the beginning of a new proof for Paul. This is clearly indicated by the marked distinction of forms between chapters 7 and 8. In ch. 8 there is no more diatribe or impersonation. In ch. 8, Paul sets out to positively describe those who are “in Christ” and live in the life of the Spirit and the section ends on a triumphal note in 8:37-39. Romans 8:1-4 is closely related to the proposatio of 1:16-17 as both sections dwell on the twin themes of “righteousness” and “life.” Furthermore, the “salvation to everyone who believes” in 1:16 is now manifest in that, “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1).

One of the most important elements of rhetoric was style. The style consisted of both individual words and clauses. One important aspect was diaphoria in which repeated instances of the same word, build on one another and acquire added significance. In Paul’s argument, the diaphoria occurs with the word νόμος, which occurs four times in 8:1-4. In each recurrence of νόμος the term gains added significance. In 8:2, the relationship between the two instances of νόμος indicates the comparison of the law under two domains and highlights the power of the Spirit to free the law from “sin and death.” Rom 8:3 complements the statement in 8:2 by reinstating the inadequacy of the law under the domain of “sin and death.” In 8:4, the instances culminate in the fulfillment of the νόμος that was freed by the Spirit in 8:2 and can now be “fulfilled” by those who are “in Christ.”

One element of style present in Paul’s argument is that of the theme of distinction. In book four of the Rhetorica Ad Herrenium, in a discussion on style and how to confer “distinction” within style, the author discusses
the theme of “figures of thought.” Within this theme, the author states that a topic is accumulated, then it is refined, and then descanted upon. Accumulation, “occurs when the points scattered throughout the whole cause are collected in one place so as to make the speech more impressive or sharp or accusatory.” Once a topic is accumulated, it is refined, and this “consists in dwelling on the same topic and yet seeming to say something ever new. It is accomplished in two ways: by merely repeating the same idea, or by descanting upon it.” Under the descant, is the amplification, whereby, “after having expressed the theme simply, we can subjoin the Reason, and then express the theme in another form, with or without the Reasons; next we can present the Contrary... then a Comparison and an Example... and finally the Conclusion.” The amplification could be found throughout a rhetorical speech. Five out of the seven features of an amplification are present in Paul’s argument in Rom 8:1-4 and can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amplification of a Theme</th>
<th>Rhet. Her. 4.56-57</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Theme expressed</td>
<td>Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Reason added</td>
<td>Rom 8:2 For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Theme is expressed in new form with or without reasons</td>
<td>Not included, but it is a redundant aspect of the form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Argument from the contrary</td>
<td>Rom 8:3a For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Argument by comparison</td>
<td>Rom 8:3 By sending his own Son in the likeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Argument from example</td>
<td>Rom 8:3 By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Conclusion</td>
<td>Rom 8:4 so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Several insights can be made into Paul’s argument with these categories. First, the argument from the contrary is useful in that it, “forcibly proves what the speaker needs to prove; and from a statement which is not open to question it draws a thought which is in question, in such a way that the inference cannot be refuted, or can be refuted only with much the greatest difficulty.” Paul clearly emphasizes the inability of the law, under the control of the flesh, to accomplish God’s purposes.

Second, the argument from the example is important as, “Exemplification is the citing of something done or said in the past, along with the definite naming of the doer or author.” This is clearly present in 8:3 with the example of God “sending his son” an activity done in time past. Third, the conclusion comes at an important place which is “after the strongest argument.” This is appropriate in ch. 8 as Paul is at the end of his strongest argument which is typically saved for last. This is further supported grammatically by the i3na clause indicating a purpose or result to the previous statements.

The only sections that appear to be missing are part three, where the theme is expressed in a new form with or without reasons. This point is a bit redundant and it is not surprising that Paul omits it here. The fifth part, the argument by comparison, also appears to be missing, although Paul’s use of the word ὅμοιομα in 8:3 displays the idea of comparison. If this final part is accepted, Paul has used six out of the seven parts of an amplification and lends further weight to the rhetorical features present in Rom 8:1-4.

The contribution these rhetorical features make to the previous argument is the need for a consistent use of the term νόμος in 8:1-4. Primarily, diaphoria is the repeated instances of the same word, but with each repetition, the word acquires added significance. To begin to introduce different definitions for νόμος would lessen the significance of the use of the term in 8:4. Furthermore, if the rhetorical feature of amplification is present, the conclusion is based upon the theme and reason added. To maintain a sense of continuity and the integrity to Paul’s argument, a single definition of νόμος must be used throughout. Paul draws his conclusion in 8:4 about “the law” based upon his reason in 8:2. It has also not been noticed, that in Paul’s conclusion in 8:4, he only uses νόμος once. It appears to me that if Paul had meant two different laws in 8:2, he would have needed to have an explanatory phrase in 8:4 suggesting what happens to the “law of sin and death.” To the extent of saying that, “the law of sin and death has been done away with.” Given these rhetorical features in place, we can now turn
to another crucial element in 8:4 that impacts on the use of νόμος in this section the meaning of δικαίωμα in 8:4.

δικαίωμα In Romans

δικαίωμα appears five times within the letter to the Romans, twice in the singular and three times in the plural form. The most pertinent occurrences for this discussion are the instances in 1:32, 2:26, and 8:4.29 The first occurrence appears in 1:32 at the climax of Paul’s diatribe against abhorrent Gentile behavior, where Paul notes that the Gentiles τοῦ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπηγόντες yet praise those who do not practice it. In ch. 1, δικαίωμα appears to represent a moral or behavioral aspect of God’s law and stands in contrast to the practice of the behaviors in 1:18-32 and results in a decree of death. In the immediate preceding section of 1:29-31, Paul provides a vice list of immoral behaviors of Gentiles that stands under the “wrath of God” of 1:18. Within the context, Paul is arguing against “unrighteous” ways of living that stand in rebellion to God. God’s δικαίωμα appears as the contrasting term to the list of behaviors Paul just described in 1:29-31 and the verdict on those “ways” is death. Paul’s use of δικαίωμα reflects the typical usage found within the LXX, that of a statute or law that stands in relationship to God’s command.30 From the viewpoint of chs. 5–8, the list of behaviors Paul describes in 1:18-32 fall under the Adamic state of being and are the epitome of “walking according to the flesh” (C.f. Gal 5). While this instance is not found in direct relationship to νόμος, it best reflects the usage in 8:4, where Paul refers to a single aspect of God’s law without further explanation.

The second usage of δικαίωμα appears in Rom 2:26, where it appears in the plural form. Like 1:31, this usage clearly reflects the usage of the LXX, where δικαίωμα in the plural form represents one aspect of God’s law. In 2:26, it is Gentiles who are “keeping” the δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου. If the position that 2:14-26 represents a group of Christian Gentiles is correct, then 8:4 nicely complements Paul’s statement.31 That is, Christian Gentiles, those who have the Spirit, are the premiere example of the “us” and the “who” of Rom 8:4 (ἐν ἡμῖν τοῖς μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν άλλὰ κατὰ πνεύμα).

The final usage of δικαίωμα appears in Romans 8:4 which is the focus of this paper. In 8:4, like in 1:32, Paul refers to δικαίωμα, this time with the law. Rom 1:32 appears to be the inverse parallel of the usage in 8:4. Those who “walk according the Spirit” have the δικαίωμα of God
“fulfilled” in them. This would at least have to reflect the failures of 1:18-32 resulting in the description of immoral behaviors in 1:29-31. It could then be surmised that when Paul refers to the δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου in 8:4, he is referring to the realm of moral behavior as described in the law that was “rebelled against” in 1:18-32, but now fulfilled or completed in those who have the Spirit. This final usage along with the previous instances of δικαίωμα in Rom suggest that Paul is deeply in line with the LXX tradition. This is supported by several other terms Paul frequently uses to speak of the Mosaic law, such as “words,” “commandments,” and “decrees.”

One note should be made in retrospect. In Rom 2, Paul twice mentions a group (Gentiles/ Uncircumcised) who “do the law” (2:14) and “keep the requirements of the law” (2:26). From the viewpoint of ch. 8 and the dichotomy between walking according to the flesh or Spirit, the groups mentioned in ch. 2 would now clearly be the “us” of 8:4 who have had the law fulfilled in them. For Paul, those that actually “do,” and “keep” the law are clearly those that are “in Christ” and have the Spirit. The ramifications for ch. 2 could not be clearer, the Gentiles in view are Christian Gentiles. This also helps support a unified reading of “law” which begins to show an unfolding theme within Romans, that of obedience.

The most important insight that resulted from this word study is the relationship between Rom 1:32 and Rom 8:4 and the positive and negative responses to God’s δικαίωμα. From this research, δικαίωμα in Rom 8:4 should be taken as the behavior that corresponds to God’s righteousness as found in the law. In other words, the life that the law sets out. From 8:4 onward, this is the life that is characterized by those who “walk according to the Spirit” and thus their lives correspond to God’s intent in the law. The lives of those for whom “the law has been fulfilled in” are characterized in opposition to the litany of descriptions found in 1:29-31. Therefore, they respond in obedience rather than rebellion to God’s decree.

In conclusion, perhaps there is no difference for Paul between the τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ (Rom 1:32), τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου (Rom 2:15), τὰ δικαίωματα τοῦ νόμου (Rom 2:26), γράμματος (Rom 2:27), τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ (Rom 3:2), τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου (Rom 8:4). All these occurrences refer to the same semantic category, namely God’s law. This however, does not mean that Paul cannot stress certain aspects of the law, such as, the penal character in 1:32 or the positive aspects in 2:14-15, 26, and 8:4. Pressing a great distinction between these categories or terms may be to distinguish farther than Paul himself may have differentiated.
Conclusion

In this paper, a central and traditional interpretation has failed to adequately understand Rom 8:1-4. Specifically, that a distinction between the uses of νόμος fails to bring clarity to Paul’s argument in Rom 8:1-4. Instead a unified reading of “law” supports an unfolding theme within Romans, that of obedience. In light of the unsatisfactory reading of a dual use of νόμος in 8:1-4, I proposed several issues that have been neglected in regards to the understanding of Rom 8:1-4. First, the rhetorical features of amplification are present in 8:1-4 and highlight the need for a consistent use of the term νόμος for the rhetoric to “work.” Second, the meaning of δικαίωμα in v. 4 refers to the realm of moral behavior as described in the law. From these arguments, a consistent use of νόμος is critical to understanding Paul’s argument and the nature of “law fulfillment” which Paul himself defines within the argument of Romans and ought to be carried into the micro-argumentation of Rom 8:1–4 and how Paul sees the Spirit guiding his communities to fulfill the “just requirement” of the Mosaic Law.

End Notes


4 Sanday and Headlam, Romans, 190. Also Cranfield, reflecting this train of thought, writes, “we conclude that the most probable interpretation of nomos here is that which understands it to refer to the authority and constraint exercised upon believers by the Holy Spirit.” Of further intrigue is that Cranfield was the replacement for the Sanday and Headlam ICC commentary on Romans and at this point he just propagates his predecessors’ opinions.

5 The argument concerning the cases of the genitives is the cornerstone argument of the dual-nomos view. I am aware that there are multiple issues involved with this view, such as; (1) the verb is connected back to adjectival form in chapter seven, where it is used to describe the
believer’s liberation from the law (7:3), and thus also proves that the Mosaic
law is not in view in 8:2; (2) It is argued that if the Mosaic law ‘sets free’
then verse two contradicts verse three, because that is precisely what the
law could not do in verse three; and (3) the one law view proposes a greater
contradiction, “giving the law this kind of role would contradict a central
and oft-repeated tenet of Paul’s theology” so Moo, Romans, 474.


7 See Moo, Romans, 475-6; Fee, God’s Empowering Presence, 523-4.

8 Even further is Barrett’s Romans first edition commentary that translates 8:2b as “old law” and later “sin’s law” which shows the grammatical constructions at work in interpreting this verse, even to the extent of adding the adjective “old” to describe the law in 8:2b. Cf. Barrett, Romans, 155.

9 Witherington, Romans, 211. Likewise, Heikki Räisänen, Paul and the Law, 52.

10 Bryne, Romans, 242.

11 Ziesler takes both instances of νόμος in 8:2 to be the generic “rule/principle” thus departing from the majority of commentators in this view and creating some interesting problems with vs 3-4.


13 Ibid, 284. See Haacker as well, “Daß zwei Funktionen oder Verständnisse der a Torah im Griechischen mit einer derartigen Genetivverbindung bezeichnet werden konnten, ist jedoch höchst zweifelhaft.”

14 Ibid, 280. “The question of what Paul meant by the law of the spirit of life, is therefore still controversial. It can only be answered if Romans 8:2 is brought into the context of the interpretation of the law as it unfolds in its basic meaning by Paul.”

15 Sanders, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, 96. He also stated, “When Paul uses the word “law” or “commandments” in connection with behavior, he never makes a theoretical distinction with regard to what
aspect of the law are binding, nor does he in any way distinguish “the law” which Christians are to obey from the law which does not righteous, which ties all humanity to sin, and to which those in Christ have died.” Hans Hubner’s work Law in Paul’s Thought has also contributed to the following discussion. Hubner agreed with Lohse’s thesis, that νόμος in 8:2 referred to the Mosaic law, but argued further that the, “expression ‘law of the Spirit’ most likely refers back to 7:14.” In 7:14, however, it is clearly the Torah which is meant. Hubner’s contribution added further support to the work done by Lohse and Sanders. Hubner has been strongly followed by N.T. Wright who generally assumes “Torah” as the meaning of law throughout ch. 8. C.f. Wright, Climax of the Covenant, 204-10.

16 Stuhlmacher likewise emphasizes that, “the Pauline understanding of Law stands in dialectical continuity to the Old Testament” (Stuhlmacher, Romans, 128.)

17 Dunn, Romans, 1:417.

18 Dunn rightly remarks that, “In short, since the second νόμος is still more clearly a reference to the Torah, it would throw the thought into some confusion to understand the first νόμος differently.” Ibid.


20 The importance of style is noted by Quintilian, “When our audience finds it a pleasure to listen, their attention and their readiness to believe what they hear are both alike increased.” Quintilian, Institutio Oratio, 213. 303.

21 Rowe, Style, 133-4.

22 The Rhetorica Ad Herennium is an anonymous work, inaccurately attributed to Cicero, written sometime between 86 and 82 BCE. Although A. E. Douglas, “Clausulae in the Rhetorica Ad Herennium as Evidence of Its Date,” Classical Quarterly 10, (1960): 65-78. has argued for an earlier dating, by 30 years, this has not garnered the support of other scholars. C.f. L. C. Winkel, “Some Remarks on the Date of The “Rhetorica Ad Herennium”,” Mnemosyne 32, 3/4 (1979). See also Aune, Dictionary of the NT, 416.

23 Cicero, Rhetorica Ad Herennium, 363.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid; 369-71.

26 Aristotle, Rhet, 351; Cicero, Or, 36.126-7. Duane Watson has argued that several types of amplification are common to the New Testament given its subject matter. He lists these as “the discussion of important matters related to the heavenly and divine, the love of God, moral
considerations, what is beneficial or detrimental to humankind, and love of close kin.” See Watson’s helpful article for amplification in 1 John and his detailed treatment of “amplification theory” therein, Duane F. Watson, “Amplification Techniques in 1 John: The Interaction of Rhetorical Style and Invention.” JSNT 51 (1993): 101.

27 Unknown, Rhet. Her., 295.

28 Ibid, 145-146.

29 The third usage and fourth usage of δικαίωμα in 5:16, 18 reflects the definition provided by Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle defines δικαίωμα as “the rectification of an act of injustice.” Within Paul’s argument in Rom 5, clearly Paul is setting up a contrast between competing “works” or “acts.” Specifically, the acts of Adam and Christ, with the acts of Adam leading to sin and death and the acts of Christ reversing or setting to right the acts of Adam and leading to righteousness and life (Rom 5:18).

30 δικαίωμα in the LXX occurs 140x and has a wide range of usage. δικαίωμα can be used to designate a statute or ordinance of God, an act, custom or practice, justice, duty, the right to appeal, a cause, principle, and even trembling. The majority of references refer to either a statute or ordinance of God and is typically identified as one aspect of God’s law. E.g., Gen 26:5; Exod 15:25–26; 21:1; 24:3; Lev 25:18; Num 15:16; 27:11; 30:17; 31:21; 35:29; 36:13; Deut 4:1, 5–6, 8, 14, 40, 45; 5:1, 31; 6:1–2, 4, 17, 20, 24; 7:11–12; 8:11; 10:13; 11:1; 17:19; 26:16–17; 27:10; 28:45; 30:10, 16; 33:10; 1 Sam 30:25; 2 Sam 19:28; 22:23; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 17:13, 19, 34, 37; 23:3; 2 Chr 19:10; Ps 18:22; 19:8; 50:16; 89:31; 105:45; 119:5, 8, 12, 16, 23–24, 26–27, 33, 48, 54, 56, 64, 68, 71, 80, 83, 93–94, 112, 117–118, 124, 135, 141, 145, 155, 171, 147:19; Job 34:27; Mic 6:16; Mal 4:4; Jer 18:19; Ezek 5:6–7; 11:20; 18:9; 20:11, 13, 16, 18–19, 21, 24–25; 36:27; 43:11; 44:24.

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Philip N. Richardson

No Longer Strangers and Aliens, but Fellow Citizens: Ephesians 2:12, 19 in conversation with Hellenistic Philosophy

Abstract:
This essay compares Paul’s use of use of aliens, strangers, and citizens language in Eph 2:12, 19 in the wider context of the epistle with its figurative use in select Hellenistic philosophical writers. Whereas philosophers view all, or at least the virtuous, as citizens of the universe, Ephesians sees all as alienated from God, unless reconciled by Christ. Philosophy called the virtuous to live in accord with its path, disdaining the body. For Ephesians, Christ’s new humanity in Christ can live God’s way in the body by the mystery revealed and empowered by the Spirit.

Key Words: Ephesians, citizens, aliens, Hellenistic philosophy, figurative language

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Introduction

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul\(^1\) reminds them that they were at one time without Christ, alienated (ἅπαξλογικός)\(^2\) from the citizenship (πολιτεία)\(^2\) of Israel and strangers (ξένος) to the covenants of promise (Eph 2:12). He uses similar language in Eph 2:19, relegating to the past their status as strangers (ξένος) and resident aliens (πάροικος) in contrast to their current state as citizens together with (συμπολίτης) the saints (probably meaning believers throughout the ages),\(^3\) and therefore members of the household of God. In Eph 2:11–22, Paul is clearly speaking of horizontal reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in Christ, and using language which draws on his Old Testament context, speaking of circumcision and uncircumcision, Israel, covenants of promise, the law of commandments in ordinances, saints and a holy temple, which is the dwelling place of God’s Spirit. At the same time, it is clear that his audience consists largely of Gentiles. He addresses them directly as formerly “you Gentiles in the flesh” (�이데ς τὰ ἐθνῆ ἐν σαρκί; 2:11)—a phrase that is fronted in Greek for emphasis—and also speaks to them as Gentiles in the second person in Eph 3:1. He exhorts them not to walk (behave) any longer as the Gentiles do (4:17), implying that this was their former (non-Jewish) lifestyle, as well as speaking of his apostleship to the Gentiles (3:6, 8). The plentiful use of Jewish terms, allusions to or citations from the OT and Paul’s reference to Gentiles in the third person (3:6, 8) would suggest at least some Jewish Christians among the audience. However, for the reasons given above, the consensus among commentators is that Gentiles make up a high proportion of the readership.\(^4\)

Such Gentiles would have been well aware of the status that resident aliens and citizens held in Greco-Roman society. The criteria for Roman citizenship developed over time, and citizenship could be acquired, as well as inherited.\(^5\) At the time of the first century, as Adela Yarbro Collins writes, “the most important criterion for defining insiders and outsiders was still citizenship” and citizens were the ultimate insiders (Yarbro Collins 1985: 188). Resident aliens were most definitely outsiders, though on a spectrum from “rank outsiders” to those close to becoming insiders (Yarbro Collins 1985: 190–91). Benjamin H. Dunning has explored the topoi of resident aliens and citizens and claims, “the category of the alien is a relational and even parasitic one, an outsider term dependent for its meaning(s) on a corresponding insider term—in this case, the citizen.” (Dunning 2009: 26) Roman citizenship became the “apogee of status across
the Mediterranean world.” (2009: 28; his italics). Gentile readers among
the Pauline communities would have had some awareness of the status of
aliens and citizens under Roman law,6 and Carmen Bernabé Ubieta has
already examined Eph 2:12, 19 in reference to the status of foreigners and
residents of the first century.7

However, Paul’s figurative use of “aliens” and “citizens” language
has yet to be explored in depth. When Paul’s readers did live as “Gentiles
in the flesh” they would have been exposed to a variety of philosophical,
religions, and cultural influences. To better understand the way such a
readership might have responded to Paul’s figurative language, it is helpful
to reconstruct the way an audience might have heard the text from the
available data.8 In particular, philosophy provided a theological and moral
worldview for such people, and although we have no idea what specific
works Paul’s audience had or had not read, Hellenistic philosophy’s
influence was pervasive and its ideas trickled down to influence even those
who had not studied them (Richardson, 2018: 4–6, 43–46).

In the essay that follows, I shall seek to survey figurative references
to all language referring to aliens, strangers, and citizens in the major
Hellenistic philosophical writers, whether in Greek or Latin, and especially
those closest to the period in which Paul wrote. One of these writers, Philo
of Alexandria, is Jewish, but is also writing to a Diaspora audience, and is
drawing heavily on Middle Platonic thought, while writing to a Hellenistic
readership. Given the relative scarcity of sources and the significant witness
of Philo to Middle Platonism, his works justify inclusion, as do others
writing later than the likely date of Ephesians, whose ideas are in continuity
with first century sources.9 More writers were consulted than those drawn
upon here10 but the authors cited were the only ones to provide evidence
for philosophical speculation on figurative alien and citizenship language.
Given the limits of the data and the focus on figurative language, I shall
not attempt to distinguish between the respective statuses of “ζένοι καὶ
πόρισκοι” (Eph 2:19).11 However, Plutarch, Philo, and Cicero’s works provide
evidence for the treatment of aliens, strangers, and citizens in this period,
so while examining their writings, I shall briefly narrate their observations
of the status of each category. Once my findings from the philosophical
works have been examined and summarized, I shall return to Ephesians to
compare what has been discovered within philosophy to the place of aliens
and citizens in Eph 2:12, 19 and its wider context in the epistle.
Hellenistic philosophy: Greek writers

Epictetus

Epictetus opines that all humanity are citizens of Zeus (Diatr. 3.24.19), which means that they are citizens of the universe (Diatr. 1.9.1–2, 6; 2.10.3; 2.15.11; cf. 1.12.8), and “to reach out for the impossible is slavish and foolish; it is acting like a stranger in the universe, one who is fighting against God with the only weapons at his command, his own judgements.” (Diatr. 3.24.22). Yet Epictetus cites, with approval, Homer’s sentiment that in another sense, all are strangers and beggars before God (Diatr. 3.11.4).

Marcus Aurelius

Marcus frequently compares the universe to a city or state of which humanity are citizens (e.g., Med. 2.16; 3.11; 4.3–4; 10.6, 15; 12.36), viewing the universe as the archetypal city (2.16); even speaking of the possibility of fitting oneself to exist in harmony with God and people as their fellow-citizens (συμπολιτεύομαι in Med. 10.1). Yet at the same time life is conceived as “a pilgrim’s sojourn (“ξένου ἴππημία”), in which the only true guide is philosophy; this consists in “keeping the divine ‘genius’ (δαιμόν) within pure” (Med. 2.17).

Musonius Rufus

When consoling a person in exile, Musonius exclaims, “is not the universe the common fatherland of all men, as Socrates held?” (frag. 9.68.15–16). Thus, what some call exile is only banishment from a certain city, not from one’s true fatherland. Rather, such a one, “considers himself a citizen of the city of God which is made up of men and gods” (frag. 9.68.21–22).

Plutarch

Firstly, a stranger (ὁθώαος) is like an “extraneous member” (ἄλλοτρος) of the body compared to a person’s own flesh and blood (Frat. amor.479C). Plutarch speaks of a ladder of status in which citizens rank under the rich and powerful but above their fellows in society (Tranq. an. 470B). He cites ancient laws forbidding the begetting of children by foreign women (ἄλλοδαπός) and even the punishment of death for those who settle among foreigners (μέτοικος) (Ag. Cleom. 800.2). Plutarch speaks
of the shame of Chalcedon women (Quaest. graec.302F) who, owing to the absence of male citizens, were forced to consort with “freedmen” and “resident aliens” (μέτοικος), and the wicked Sulpicius—of whose shameless and evil deeds—none were greater than selling Roman citizenship to freedmen and aliens at a public sale (Sull. 456.1–2). We hear reports of resident aliens being made citizens en masse (Arat. 1044.2–3) but also strict criteria applied to worthy candidates only (Sol. 91.2–92.2); exemplified by Lycurgus, who did not admit all foreigners to citizenship indiscriminately but selectively, based on their manner of life (Ag. Cleom. 799.X.2–4). Sertorius expressed his preference to live in Rome as her most lowly citizen rather than in exile, even if there he should be called “supreme ruler of all the rest of the world together.” (Sert. 580.5) Citizenship entailed duty to one’s fellow-citizens (e.g., Comp. Ages. Pomp. 663.4–5), and Marcus Cato declared that citizens should never accept praise for themselves unless it was of benefit to the commonwealth (Cat. Maj. 347.5). Even though citizenship provided status, it was possible for someone to turn it down on principle, as Xenocrates was reported as doing (Phoc. 755.4).

In On Listening to Lectures (Rect. rat. aud. 37F), Plutarch uses the language of strangers and aliens figuratively when comparing the different categories of newly naturalized citizens (πολιτεία) to students of philosophy. Those who have been reared in philosophy are like resident aliens (μέτοικος) who have grown up with such instruction and reasoning. Those who have no contentment in philosophy and find fault with it are like those born as aliens (ἄλλοδαπός) or strangers (ξένος). Plutarch’s writings witness to the development of philosophical thought related to this topic, citing the eclectic fifth century BCE philosopher, Empedocles, who calls himself, “a wanderer and exile from heaven” (Exil. 607D). Plutarch affirms this idea, agreeing that “all of us … are sojourners (μετανάστης) here and strangers (ξένος) and exiles.” The soul existed long before the body was formed and lives as “an exile and wanderer” (Exil. 607D) from its true home, having left “Heaven and the Moon for earth and life on earth” (Exil. 607E). Indeed, the Stoics considered the universe to be a city, in which the stars are citizens (Stoic. rep. 1076–77F.34; although Plutarch is disputing their claims here, as does Cicero, giving voice to the critique of the Academics in Nat. d. 3.15.39). Zeno of Citium (c. 333–261 BCE), the founder of the Stoic school in Athens, held that, according to Plutarch, “we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity” (Alex. fort. 329B) and Plutarch adds
that Zeno urged all people to consider the whole inhabited earth to be their fatherland (πατρίς); not distinguishing between Grecian (native) and foreigner on the basis of ethnicity or culture but rather dividing the world into the wicked and the virtuous: the person of virtue being figuratively a “Grecian” and a wicked person a foreigner – ἀλλόφυλος in one place, βαρβαρικός in another (Alex. fort. 329AB). Indeed, it is a fool who uses the term “exile” as one of reproach, rather than recognizing that good men can be poor, or foreigners, or exiles (Exil. 607A). In this spirit, Cimon did not distinguish between citizens and strangers in his generosity to all (Cim. 484.1; 485.6) and Plutarch, in his imagined discourse at the dinner of the seven wise men, has Periander praising states and rulers who even put the affairs of strangers before their own citizens (Sept. sap. conv. 151F).

Plutarch’s most significant work related to this topic, On Exile draws the conclusion then that there is no such thing as a native land by nature (Exil. 600E), just as Socrates was reported as saying that he was neither Athenian or Greek but a “Cosmian” (Exil. 600F), and in this world “no one is either exile (φυγάς) or foreigner (ξένος) or alien (ἄλλοδιαπός)” (Exil. 601A); rather all are fellow citizens (Exil. 601B). He agrees with Plato that the place an “exile” chooses for themselves will then become in time their native land (Exil. 602C). Once such a person settles in this land and makes a livelihood for themselves, they cannot be an alien (Exil. 601EF). The person the world may consider merely an exile is actually at great advantage to one who limits their allegiance to a single city, making themselves “a stranger (ξένος) and an alien (ἄλλοδιαπός) to all the rest” (Exil. 602B).

Philo of Alexandria

Firstly, Philo sheds light on the relationship between aliens and citizens in the first century, at least from a diaspora Jewish perspective. The immigrant or sojourner (μετοικος) would not be expected to be as wealthy as a native or an original inhabitant. Such was not the case with Abraham, whose abundance of wealth far surpassed that expected from such a sojourner (Abr. 209, 252). Yet, when Abraham sought to rescue his nephew Lot, he lacked for allies against such mighty forces, as would be common for a stranger (ξένος) and immigrant (μετοικος) (Abr. 231). Philo comments on the plight of Moses and his ancestors who had migrated (μετανίστημι) to Egypt because of famine (Mos. 1.5). He describes the Jews as strangers (ξένος) who should be regarded as suppliants and settlers (μετοικος) seeking asylum and, “near to being citizens (πολίτης) because they differ little from
Richardson: No Longer Strangers and Aliens, but Fellow Citizens

the original inhabitants (αὐτόχθοιν).” (Mos. 1.34–35) When Pharaoh made slaves of the Israelites, “who were not only free but guests (ζένος), suppliants and settlers (μέτοικος), he showed no shame or fear of the God of liberty and hospitality (ἔφέστιος) and of justice to guests (ζένων) and suppliants, who watches over such as these.” (Mos. 1.36; cf. Dio Chrysostom who speaks of Zeus as “God of Hospitality” (1 Regn. 40–41; Dei cogn. 75–76)). In reality, immigrants (ζένος) are treated differently than citizens (πολίτης) (Post. 109). When speaking figuratively about knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, Philo elucidates fine distinctions made between the sojourner (πάροικος) who finds themselves in a liminal position—in some respects on a par with citizens (ἀστος and πολίτης), and yet in other respects, no better than foreigners (both ζένως and ἄλλοςπατος are used; Congr. 22–23).

A recurring theme in Philo is that the good person is more than just a citizen of their country but belongs to the whole world, and that the good and wise are only sojourners on earth. Firstly, Philo avers that the good person possesses nothing of this earthly life but, as one who has received the whole world as their share or portion, is considered a “world citizen (κοσμοπολίτης); Mos. 1.157; a phrase also used by Diog. Laert. 6.2.63). This person of virtue is obedient to the law and thus finds themselves in harmony with nature (Opif. 3), just as Adam, the prime exemplar, who was the first world citizen, counted the world his country, and took the ordinance of nature as its constitution (πολιτεία), which was the law to him (Opif. 142–43). Moses, following in Adam’s footsteps, took the world for his township (ἀστυ) and country (πατρίς) (Conf. 106). Such world citizens are disciples of wisdom who recognize the world as their city, a universal commonwealth (πολιτεία) where virtue holds sway (Spec. 2.45; cf. Migr. 59). Thus, the virtuous person can declare “Every land is my native country” (“πᾶσα γῆ μοι πατρίς”) (Prob. 145). Another biblical model of virtue was Noah, described as an immigrant (μέτοικος) who—unlike others who found themselves in such vulnerable circumstances—refused to conform to the wicked customs of the native inhabitants (Mos. 2.58). Yet, appropriating this image slightly differently, those who honor a life of virtue will be ranked as native-born (αὐτόχθοιν), rather than merely as settlers in the land by God (μέτοικος; Spec. 2.170).

Philo sometimes uses such language figuratively, as in his meditation on Jacob’s blessing of Japhet. In Sobr. 59–69 he draws on the Stoic doctrine of the indifference of bodily and external advantages, which he contrasts with his assertion that moral beauty is the only good.
He should dwell (κατοικέω) in the houses of the soul who recognizes this truth and only sojourn (παροικέω) in the houses of others whose values focus on external things (Sobr. 68). Likewise, the good and wise are those who recognize that they are only sojourners on earth. Those who embrace wickedness settle down and dwell with sin, whereas the wise recognize the earth as foreign soil (ξένος), counting themselves as “strangers (οθνείος) and outlanders (ἄλλοδαπός)” and their stay in this world as only passing through (παρεπιδήμω) (Conf. 76). The wise are not like colonists looking for a new home, but like travelers from heaven who have come to earth merely to see and learn (Conf. 77; compare this with Somn. 1.137 where “imperishable and immortal souls equal in number to the stars” are described as citizens of the air). The wise person is only a pilgrim (μέτοικος) who is on a journey from “the camp of mortality and confusion to the divine life of peace” (Ebr. 100).

It is the heavenly country (οὐράνιος) which is their native land (πατρίς), where they truly live as citizens (πολίτεύματι). Their earthly dwelling is a foreign country (ξένος) to them, they sojourn there (παροικέω) for a time, but they yearn to return to their heavenly mother city (μητρόπολις) (Conf. 78). Such was Abraham, who declared himself to be a sojourner and stranger (“πάροικος καὶ παρεπιδήμος”), once he had died to a life of death and conceit (Conf. 79), thus connecting sojourning in this world with virtue. Proselytes to a new and godly commonwealth (πολιτεία) are those who spurn falsehood and embrace truth in purity (Spec. 1.51). Philo elaborates further, by declaring God himself to be the only citizen, whereas “all created being is a sojourner (παροικος) and alien (έξωλω).” It is a sufficient gift to wise people to accept the rank of “aliens (έξωλω) and sojourners (παροικος).” The foolish person is in an even more precarious state, being nothing more than an exile (οὐράς) (Cher. 121). Such a person’s reason is enslaved by pleasure, making them an exile rather than a true citizen (Opif. 165). By contrast, all of us come into this world as if entering a foreign (ξένος) city (Cher. 120).

The wise person of virtue, who recognizes that they are only sojourning on earth, is like Jacob, who knew that his soul was only sojourning in the body (Conf. 80). This bodily existence should be perceived as a foreign land; the true fatherland (πατρίς) is the virtues perceptible through the mind (Conf. 81). Jacob is also described as one who sojourns (using παροικος) in the foreign land (ξένος) of the senses (which Haran in Gen 28:10 signifies), but as a lover of virtue, has his
mind always set on returning to his true home; described variously using words such as ἀίδηθης (perception), νόητος (intelligence or understanding), νοῦς (mind) and νοητός (intellectual or perceptible to the mind) in Somn. 1.43–46. Jacob is a citizen (πολίτης) whose dwelling is virtue (Leg. 3.2).

Philo interprets the Lord’s words to Abram in Gen 15:13 to mean that God does not grant to the lover of virtue (φιλάρετος) the ability to dwell in his body as if in his homeland (or household: οἶκείος), “but only permits him to sojourn there (παροικέω), as in a foreign country (ἀλλοδαπός).” The fool seeks to dwell in the body, but the wise know that they are only sojourners (πάροικος) in the body; a foreign land (Her. 267; cf. also Somn. 1.180–81).

Joseph’s brothers assured Pharaoh that they had come to sojourn in the land (Gen 47:4), which Philo expounds as a wise person’s recognition that heaven is their homeland (πατρίς), while earth is a foreign (ξένος) country. Wisdom is their true dwelling place, but their body is foreign to them (here ὀθνείος) in which they propose to sojourn (παρασταθμέω) (Agr. 64–65). The mind of the virtuous person “is a sojourner in its corporeal place rather than an inhabitant (“πάροικος ἐν τῷ σωματικῷ τόπῳ μᾶλλον ἢ κάτοικος”).” Its fatherland is “the ether and the heaven” whereas, “its temporary abode is the earth and the earthly body, in which it is said to sojourn” (QG3.45). Logos itself is like one indigenous (αὐτόχθων) to the fatherland (πατρίς); a citizen (ἀστός) of God’s own knowledge. To others, it is like a place of refuge (thinking of cities of refuge in the Old Testament, and interpreting Gen 16:6–12), a land which is strange (ophobic) and alien (ξένος; Fug. 76).

Moses, likewise, saw his body not only as a foreign land (ξένος)—as an “immigrant settler” (μέτοικος) would—but was obligated to alienate himself (using ἄλλοπρόσες) from it (Conf. 82). In fact, people carry about cities which are established in their souls, and true citizenship resides in these commonwealths (πολίτεια), whether good or bad (Conf. 107–09).

The Therapeutae, who contemplate nature and dwell in the soul alone, as citizens of both heaven and the world, are presented to the Father and Maker of all by virtue (Contempl. 90).

Hellenistic philosophy: Latin writers

Seneca

Seneca expresses the view, in common with Musonius and Plutarch (following Socrates), that “Inside the world there can be found no place of exile; for nothing that is inside the world is foreign to mankind” (Helv. 8.5);
The wise person recognizes that every place is their country (Helv. 9.1; also expressed in Ep. 28.4). Thus, there are two commonwealths—that to which a person owes their citizenship “by the accident of birth” and a far grander one, “a vast and truly common state, which embraces alike gods and men, in which we look neither to this corner of earth nor to that, but measure the bounds of our citizenship by the path of the sun” (De otio. 4.1). With this perspective, our momentary dwelling in the body on earth is like a sojourn at an inn (Marc. 21.1; Ep. 120.14–15).

Cicero

Cicero’s writings, like Plutarch and Philo, provide evidence for the common perspectives held on the relationship between aliens and citizens. Foreigners certainly should not hold the same rights and privileges as citizens (Off. 3.11.47) nor meddle in the politics of the country where they reside as alien (Off. 1.34.125). There must be clear distinctions between one’s fellow citizens or countrymen and foreigners (peregrinus) and strangers (alienus) (Amic. 5.19; cf. Off. 1.42.150), without which anarchy would ensue (Resp. 1.43.67). Yet, while foreigners may not enjoy the same rights as citizens, the rights they do have should be respected, and to do otherwise “would destroy the universal brotherhood of man” (Off. 3.6.28) and “to debar foreigners (peregrinus) from enjoying the advantages of the city is altogether contrary to the laws of humanity” (Off. 3.11.47). Honorable people take care to do nothing unpleasant, even to treat “the greatest strangers” (“alienissimus”) as members of one commonwealth consisting of people and gods (Quinct. 16.51).

Cicero also speaks of what it means to be a true citizen of the universe. While not agreeing with Xenocrates, he correctly cites his view that the wise alone are kings and citizens of the world, and that a true foreigner (peregrinus) is someone lacking wisdom ( Acad. 2.44.136), just as the Stoics hold all wise men to be friends (Nat. d. 1.44.121–22). Cicero also gives voice to the beliefs of Stoics (like Seneca) that the gods are, “united together in a sort of social community or fellowship, ruling the one world as a united commonwealth (res publica) or state (urbs).” (Nat. d. 1.44.121–22). Further, “this whole universe . . . [is] . . . one commonwealth (“una civitas communis”) of which both gods and men are members” (Quinct. 16.51). Like Plutarch and Musonius, Cicero acknowledges Socrates’ claim to be a native (incola) and citizen (civis) of the whole world (Tusc. 5.37.108).
property he attributes to the mind (Leg. 1.23.62). In a speech in his defense, Cicero credits Milo with the conviction that there is no such thing as exile (following Socrates and Zeno, cited by Musonius, Plutarch and Seneca), except where there is no room for virtue (Mil. 37.101).

In agreement with Plutarch, Philo, and Seneca, Cicero describes existence on earth as a sojourn (Sen. 23.84; Tusc. 1.19.45). One day the soul will end its sojourn by being released from the shackles of the body, although those who have been defined by these chains will advance more slowly on their heavenly journey (Tusc. 1.31.76).

Summary

If we draw together some of our findings from across the spectrum of Greek and Roman writers, a number of commonalities emerge. Firstly, the universe is understood as one city or state (Plutarch, Cicero, Marcus, and Musonius), or fatherland (Musonius), or a commonwealth to which all belong (Plutarch, Philo, and Seneca). Some see the gods themselves as part of that united commonwealth (Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus). Philo and Dio Chrysostom each speak of the God of hospitality (although it must be acknowledged that Philo is indebted here to his Jewish faith, while Dio may be drawing on this common understanding of Zeus). Philo speaks of God as the only true citizen of the universe. Secondly, in relation to figurative or spiritual language, all the writers examined cite the claim of Socrates, that all are citizens of the universe and therefore there is no such thing as a true exile on earth (though Epictetus recognizes that people are also like strangers on earth in comparison to God). Having said that, Plutarch, Philo, Seneca, and Cicero count the virtuous person alone as a true citizen of earth, classing the wicked as merely foreigners. Both Middle Platonists like Plutarch and Philo, Stoics like Seneca and Marcus, and Skeptics like Cicero speak of life on earth as just a sojourn, since while the soul is in the body, it wanders from its true heavenly home. The one true guide through this wandering on earth is philosophy (Plutarch and Marcus). Turning briefly to the political realities of the day, many of the writers surveyed attest to the second-class status of the alien and the privileged position of the citizen, although Cicero affirms the common humanity of citizens and aliens and Plutarch speaks of situations in which worthy aliens might ascend to citizen status.
Ephesians

How might Paul’s words in the wider context of Ephesians have spoken to those influenced by such ideas? Firstly, whereas the philosophers see the universe as one commonwealth of which all are members, Ephesians also has a comprehensive view of the universe. However, although it lays great stress on God working all things according to the counsel of his will, especially his plan of salvation (Eph 1:11 and more generally 1:3–14), the summing up of all things is still future in “the fullness of the times” and it is to take place specifically in Christ (1:10), who already rules over all things (1:20–22) with God (4:6) and fills all things (1:23; 4:10), a fullness potentially realized specifically in the church (1:23a; 3:19).

Secondly, whereas the philosophers speak of people as citizens of the universe, and assume the possibility of living in harmony with God by one’s orientation of life (e.g., Marcus, Musonius, and Cicero), Ephesians speaks of its readers as those who were by nature in a state of alienation from God (χωρίς Χριστοῦ and ἀπαλλοτριώ without Christ; 2:12, 19). This alienation is described as death in trespasses and sins (2:1, and by implication, 5:14), and walking not in the ways of God and his Spirit, but the reverse: living under the rule of the evil spirit (2:2). To use a different image, it consisted of a darkened understanding and estrangement from the very life of God (4:18). Paul goes further, to describe their previous state as not only living in darkness but actually being darkness (5:8; cf. the polarities described between light and darkness in 5:8–13). Several times Paul uses the particle ὅτε (once, formerly) in juxtaposition with the adverb νῦν or νῦν (now) to contrast the former pitiful state of their readers without Christ with their present one in him (2:2, 3, 11, 13; 5:8).

Instead, only those in Christ enjoy a new type of humanity which corresponds to this transformation in God’s eyes from alien to citizen (“in Christ” or “in him” language is prevalent in Ephesians). Christ has made something new by creating (κτίσα) one new humanity in himself out of the two groups that previously existed in enmity with each other (2:15). They are what has been made by God, created (κτίσω again) in Christ Jesus (2:10). Reconciliation to God and one another (ἐπαγκαταλάβων in 2:16; cf. also the plentiful references to εἰρήνη in e.g., 2:14, 15, 17; 4:3; 6:15) takes the place of alienation, rooted in a unity (ἐνόησι) in the Spirit (4:3) with the potential to grow into the unity of the faith (4:13). Ephesians stresses the oneness that this new humanity shares (e.g., 4:4–6), which will one day be “summed up” (ἀνακαταλαλώ) in a cosmic unity (1:10). Even now, the very existence
of a unified church consisting of previously alienated parties is a witness of God’s wisdom to the spiritual powers (3:8–10). This unity among the new humanity and in its relationship to Christ is frequently emphasized by the conjoining of verbs and nouns with the prefix συν- meaning “together with,” such as συγκληρονόμος, σύσσωμος and συμμέτοχος (a commonality brought out by Max Turner in his translation “co-heirs, co-body members . . . co-sharers” (Turner 1995: 145) in 3:6, and significantly for our purposes, συμπολίτης in 2:19. These fellow citizens are saints of a new temple, a people called to holiness (e.g., 1:4; 4:19; 5:3, 5, 26–27). This new temple is being joined together (συναρμολογεῖται) and built together (συνοικοδομεῖται) into God’s dwelling place (2:21–22; cf. similarly 4:16). Yet the growth of the new humanity into “the perfect man” is still to be attained (4:13–16) and involves both a “putting off” of the old person and a “putting on” of the new one (4:22, 24).

Plutarch and Philo’s works are representative of the trope found throughout Hellenistic philosophical works which elevate virtue (ἀρετή) and wisdom to the highest good, and assume that a person can be guided by both, and choose the right path in a manner according to nature and/or in imitation of God. In regard to virtue, Ephesians also places a great emphasis on “walking” the right way (περιπατεῖτε; e.g., 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15; speaking of ethical practice in imitation of the Hebrew idiom), including the counsel to do so “not as unwise, but as wise” (5:15) and even to imitate God (5:1). The goal is to be holy and blameless before God (1:4); constituting a holy temple; an appropriate dwelling place for God’s Spirit (2:21–22). Half the letter is taken up with instructions on how to live, such as the kind of vice and virtue lists found in other Greco-Roman writings (e.g., 4:17–5:21) including “household codes” (5:21–6:9) (Cohick, 2020: 342–48). Yet it is not assumed that this is possible for a person to choose without being spiritually awakened by Christ (see 5:14). The natural state of humanity without such intervention is a life lived “έν σαρκί” (2:3, 11). Far from being naturally capable of imitating God, such a person is literally “godless” (ἀθεος in 2:12). The innate condition of humanity is as “sons of disobedience” (2:2; 5:6) and “children of wrath” (2:3; here meaning deserving of wrath). Humanity in Christ is instead characterized as “beloved children” (5:1) and “children of light” (5:8). For this reason, they must not be “co-sharers” (συμμέτοχος) with such a one (5:7); that is not to partake (συγκοινωνεῖται) with them in the unfruitful works of darkness (5:11).

Wisdom (1:8, 17; 3:10; 5:15), knowledge and understanding (1:9, 17; 3:3,
5, 10, 19; 4:13, 23; 5:17) and enlightenment (3:3–10; 5:8–14) is important for Ephesians, as it is for the Hellenistic philosophical tradition. However, wisdom is not something that can be acquired through the study (or path) of philosophy. Rather humankind is entirely dependent on God to reveal the μυστήριον (mystery), which was previously hidden to all, even to the “saints of former generations” (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19), but is now disclosed to the holy apostles and prophets of the church (3:5). This illumination comes by the Spirit whom they have received (1:13; 2:18, 22; 3:5; 4:3–4, 30), and the way to receive more of this wisdom is to pray for it (1:17; 3:16–20; 5:18; 6:18).

Unlike other NT writings which, like the philosophers, emphasize the pilgrim’s sojourn on this earth (e.g., 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11; Heb 11:13), the perspective of Ephesians is more obviously focused on the transformation already achieved from aliens to citizens in the present age. Like Phil 3:20, this is a heavenly citizenship, but Ephesians goes even further than Philippians in speaking not just of a future hope of transformation from heaven (Phil 3:20–21) but of a union with Christ that is already shared with him “ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις” (in the heavenly places). Every spiritual blessing is now available to believers there (Eph 1:3) and the experience of the believer mirrors that of Christ, who raises us and seats us there (1:20; 2:6). To be sure, the rulers and authorities are also there (3:10; 6:12), an evil day awaits (6:13) and beyond that, an age still to come (1:21; 2:7); yet nevertheless Ephesians underscores the completed nature of salvation and the blessings that can be accessed through union with Christ in the here and now (e.g., 2:5, 8–10).

Finally, on a tentative and ancillary note to the preceding discussion, the philosophers tend to stress the alienation between soul and body and a longing for bodiless existence in an afterlife. Ephesians does not accent the importance of bodily existence like, say, 1 Corinthians, but it regularly uses “body” (1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30) and “head” imagery (1:22; 4:15; 5:23) for the relationship between Christ and the Church. Of course, this says nothing about Paul’s view of the physical body but he does speak comfortably about the church working like a physical human body (4:16) and openly of a positive delight in one’s own body (5:28). Although most modern commentators take Paul’s reference to reconciliation “in one body” (2:16) to refer to the church, it is certainly possible that it may have a dual reference to both the church and the physical body of Christ on the cross, and Paul chooses to speak of this reconciliation having taken
place through the σάρξ of Christ (2:14; speaking of his crucifixion), just as he speaks positively of the physical flesh of a person and the one flesh relationship of husband and wife (citing Gen 2:24) in 5:29, 31 despite using the term pejoratively in 2:3, 11 (Muddiman, 2001:135). Additionally, the reference to Christ being raised (1:20) is clearly to a physical resurrection, so it is noteworthy that believers are also said to be raised in like manner (2:6; cf. 5:14), even if, for now, this is not speaking of a physical resurrection in the present age.

**Conclusion**

Paul’s figurative employment of aliens, strangers, and citizens language in Eph 2:12, 19 was compared to its use in Hellenistic philosophy, since his Gentile audience may well have been influenced by this worldview when living in “the flesh” (Eph 2:11). Philosophers understood the universe as one state to which all belonged, and viewed all people as citizens of the universe, not just their native land. However, many distinguished between the wicked, who live as foreigners in the world, and virtuous persons who are the only true citizens. All spoke of life on earth as a sojourn from their true heavenly home—just as long as the soul must dwell in the body—with philosophy as the only trustworthy guide through this earthly life. Ephesians also presents a comprehensive picture of a unified cosmos ruled by God, but this unity is yet to be completely realized. In their natural state, it is not the case that all or even those who live virtuously are citizens of the universe. Rather, they exist in a state of alienation from God until the estranged parties are reconciled to God and one another through Christ and his cross. Ephesians still calls for virtuous living, but this cannot be attained by the study and practice of philosophy. Instead, this wisdom or “mystery” must be revealed to them by the gospel through the Spirit. Readers are not merely sojourning as strangers and aliens on earth but enjoy a new citizenship through a union already available with Christ in the “heavenly places” with its concomitant spiritual blessings. Rather than the physical body being a hindrance to the soul, Paul uses positive imagery for both body and even (sometimes) for flesh, viewing the flesh as the place where Christ brought reconciliation and where believers may live out their lives as citizens with all of God’s saints.
End Notes

1 I add the usual caveat that the authorship and audience of Ephesians is disputed. For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to the author as Paul. Although I take the position that Paul is the author, nothing in this discussion rests on this fact nor on whether the audience are solely residents of Ephesus or a collection of churches in two or more cities in Asia Minor.


3 Agreeing with Lincoln, Ephesians, 151; Hoehner, Ephesians, 392–96; Thielman, Ephesians, 179.

4 E.g., Best, Ephesians, 3–4.


8 See a more comprehensive explanation and basis for this approach in Philip N. Richardson, Temple of the Living God: The Influence of Hellenistic Philosophy on Paul’s Figurative Temple Language Applied to the Corinthians (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick, 2018), 2–3.

106–108 touches on some of the references I shall cite from Philo, but is not comprehensive.

10 E.g., I also examined the works of Aelian, Aelius Aristides, Alcinous, Apollonius of Tyana, Apuleius, Arius Didymus, Galen, Aulus Gellius, Fronto, Hierocles, Lucretius, Maximus of Tyre, Petronius, Sextus Empiricus, and Valerius Maximus.


12 All translations provided in this section are taken from the respective Loeb Classical Library editions.

13 See e.g., Hoehner, Ephesians, 108–09 for examples.

14 Without thereby eradicating all ethnic and cultural differences between them, see Lionel J. Windsor, Reading Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism: Christ's Mission Through Israel to the Nations, New Testament After Supersessionism (Eugene, OR.: Cascade, 2017), 143–46.

15 See further on this theme in Max Turner, “Mission and Meaning in Terms of ‘Unity’ in Ephesians,” in Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell, eds. Antony Billington, Tony Lane, and Max Turner (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 138–66. The theme of unity is recognized by commentators as central to Ephesians; e.g., Hoehner, Ephesians, 102–03.

16 See for example the summaries in Richardson, Temple, 85–86, 103–04, 108–09.

17 Although this clearly did not mean “atheist” in the modern sense. According to Paul, these pagan worshipers of many gods failed to worship the one true God.

18 See Richardson, Temple, 179–84, 189–92.
Works Cited


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David B. Schreiner

Breaking the Siege: Examining the ʺˣʰʩʑʣʍ˙ʔʤʩʒʸʕˈʩʒʸʏʲʔʰ in 1 Kgs 20

Abstract:
This article examines the identity of the ʺˣʰʩʑʣʍ˙ʔʤʩʒʸʕˈʩʒʸʏʲʔʰ who dramatically break the siege of Samaria in 1 Kgs 20. Beginning with a grammatical and semantic analysis of the extended construct chain, this essay also considers ancient translations and evidence from Neo-Assyrian administrative texts. I consider how the Neo-Assyrian administrative apparatus, which included The King’s Magnates, may offer a conceptual model for understanding the identity and function of the ʺˣʰʩʑʣʍ˙ʔʤʩʒʸʕˈʩʒʸʏʲʔʰ. I propose that this group is best understood as “junior governors of the provinces,” and their presence in the narrative appears linked to a larger historiographic agenda.

Keywords: siege of Samaria; 1 Kings 20; Assyrian cabinet; governors; provinces

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First Kings 20 recounts Israel’s face–off against a formidable coalition fronted by Ben-Hadad of Syria-Damascus. This coalition was so formidable that Israel accepted their inferiority by taking up a defensive position behind the walls of Samaria (v. 1). Yet after a few rounds of negotiations (vv. 2–9) that eventually degenerated into a trading of insults (vv. 10–11), the Israelite king is suddenly visited by an anonymous prophet as he prepped his troops for the imminent confrontation (v. 13). In this exchange, the prophet anticipates a shocking victory for Israel by an unconventional strategy. Not only was the Israelite king to feature the "עִבְרִיִּים" in his battle strategy, but he was to transfer the theater of engagement into an open field context.

Immediately, a prophet approached Ahab, king of Israel, and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Do you see all of this great multitude? I am giving it into your hands today so that you will know that I am the Lord.’” Ahab answered, “By whom?” He said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘By the young men of the lords of the provinces.’” He asked, “Who will begin the battle?” He said, “You.” To put it simply, the "עִבְרִיִּים" were to initiate an offensive, breaking the siege, and taking the battle directly to the coalition in open conflict.

According to v. 15, the number of the "עִבְרִיִּים" was 232, which in turn was supported by an infantry of approximately 7,000 men (شعبה שלפוף). As substantial as these figures may sound, they paled in comparison to the size of infantry that would have accompanied the 33–king coalition (v. 1). Nevertheless, at noon on the chosen day, the Israelites—under the lead of the "עִבְרִיִּים"—marched out from Samaria and took the battle directly to the coalition (v. 16). Sure, it helped that Ben-Hadad and his cohort were busy drinking themselves into a stupor (כּוּרֵדִים) when the conflict began. But the battle decisively and intensely turned against the coalition, resulting in an Israelite rout of the Syrian-led force.

But who were these "עִבְרִיִּים"? What does their presence in the narrative signify? The text is clear that this group will be the mechanism through which the Lord will deliver his people and facilitate his message of
protection.³ In other words, by this turn of events, people will know not only that the Lord defends his people, but also that he offers miraculous salvation so long as his people respond appropriately to his advice. Moreover, it is significant to note that the larger context admits that the Israelite employment of the נָּעַרּ שָׁלָהְתָּה inscribes a similar tactical change when the Syrian force prepares to avenge the disastrous outcome of Samaria’s siege (vv. 23–25). So, in short, the text emphasizes that the נָּעַרּ שָׁלָהְたָה are not only the facilitators of salvation by and insight of the Lord, but also influencers.

As to a historical understanding of these agents of victory? Appeal is often made to other ancient Near Eastern texts alongside a few biblical texts (e.g. Jdg 9:54; 1 Sam 14:1; 2 Sam 2:14). In particular, appeal is made to Egyptian accounts associated with the Battle of Qadeshe, which reference the נָּרִים as a critical agent in the battle’s outcome. Consequently, Rainey proposed a connection between the New Kingdom texts and the biblical account, stating unequivocally, “In light of this evidence [from Egyptian inscriptions from the New Kingdom], נָּרִים was a term applied to able fighting men in or from Canaan, and in light of this evidence there can be no doubt that the term נָּר, ‘youth,’ in Ugaritic and Hebrew, can be applied to first-class fighting men” (Rainey 1975: 99). Similarly, Montgomery, although without an explicit appeal to the Egyptian texts, refers to the נָּרִים as a “shock force” (1951: 322) and de Vaux essentially agrees (1997: 220–21). DeVries remarks that the נָּרִים “probably refers to a special elite guard, composed of young men, normally attached to the various provincial governors” (2003, 248). Yet most pointedly is MacDonald, who describes this group as “elite troopers, professional, who spearheaded advances against the enemy” (1976: 165). However, Schulman has indirectly pushed back against these tendencies when he questioned whether the נָּרִים of the Battle of Qadeshe constitute any type of “elite troops.” Rather, he argues that in none of the Egyptian accounts “does נָּרִים appear to be the name of a special unit or body of troops, or contain any real technical connotation. It was merely an Asiatic word for soldiers” (1962: 52). If this is the case, then, on what grounds is there to reference a specialized tactical force?

While Schulman rightly does not overextend his evidence when examining the Qadeshe accounts, his argument does not satisfactorily explain why the scribe would have employed a mundane, Canaanite term for “soldier.” Schulman merely suggests that the Egyptian scribe was
“showing off his knowledge of Canaanite,” which is ostensibly not without precedent (1962: 51–52). Nevertheless, the more problematic element of the tendency to appeal to these Egyptian texts and envision the as some specialized force is that this erodes the tone of the narrative. As stated by Cogan, “The terror of the present story calls for a more literal understanding...because only a victory led by a small band of untrained fighters over mighty Aram could prove that it was YHWH who led Israel and caused them to ‘know that I am YHWH’” (2008: 264). To put it simply, the outcome foretold by the prophet points to a dramatic and unexpected outcome that will ultimately bear testimony to and glorify the Lord. The notion of featuring a specialized force may undermine such a dramatic turn of events.

This essay attempts to clarify the in the context of Israelite society, 1 Kgs 20, and the larger context of the Omride Wars (1 Kgs 20, 22; 2 Kgs 3). First, I offer a grammatical and semantic examination of the construct chain. Subsequently, important ancient translations will be surveyed as well as what is known about the Neo-Assyrian royal cabinet as a potential model for insight and clarification. Finally, the function of the in the context of Ahab’s Syrian conflicts will be entertained. I argue that this group likely constitutes a distinct but subordinate faction within a larger group responsible for provincial administration, whose responsibilities included military ones in addition to a wide range of others. Thus, this is likely not a group of specialized soldiers. Moreover, it remains unclear just how “young” these people were.

### The Construct Chain

The phrase can be described as an extended construct chain, where the form further elaborates (IBHS, §9.3c). More specifically, Element A, , exists as an attributive genitive, for characterizes (IBHS, §9.5.3a). That is, the are specified by their association with the provincial system ( on that ostensibly organized the nation. Element B, , develops Element A as a genitive of genus (IBHS, §9.5.3i). Thus, denotes a class within . Cumulatively, therefore, the phrase appears to reference a distinct group, specifically a group of within a larger class of provincial administrators.
However, what is the nature of these נערים? What did they do? What was their function? To answer these and other questions, it is prudent to separate each element within the chain and determine more precisely potential nuances.

The form נער is the masculine plural construct form of נָעָר, which appears 236 times across the Old Testament. While the etymology is disputed (NIDOTTE, 3:124), נער is related to several other forms and all are normally glossed with a sense of youthfulness. Comparatively, נער appears in Egyptian texts and is widely accepted to be a Canaanite loanword (NIDOTTE, 3:124; Schulman 1962: 52). In Ugaritic, the noun displays a broad semantic spectrum, ranging from generic military personnel, palace personnel, or a nonspecific overseer. Yet in Phoenician there is only meager attestation (Dahood 1972, 1:277; HALOT, 1:707; NIDOTTE, 3:124).

Biblically, the majority of occurrences appear in Samuel and Kings (119 times), and the lexeme displays a broad semantic range that defies any well-ordered classification. For example, נער appears antithetical to עז in several contexts (Gen 19:4; Ex 10:9; Josh 6:21; Isa 20:4; Jer 51:22; Lam 2:21; Est 3:13), but contrary to many lexical entries, it seems to reject any simplistic categorization by age as the lexeme refers to an unborn son (e.g. Samson in Judg 13:5–12), a newborn child (e.g. Ichabod in 1 Sam 4:21; Moses in Exodus 2:6), a weaned child (e.g. Samuel in 1 Sam 1:22–24), and even a man of marriageable age well past his twenties (e.g. Joseph in Gen 37:2; 41:12 [with v. 46]). In Josh 6:23, the spies dispatched by Joshua are referred to as נערים as are Isaac and Abraham’s entourage (Gen 22:12), the men with Balaam (Numb 22:22), and the two men who accompanied Saul to Endor (1 Sam 28:8).

Yet social nuances appear among these occurrences. Generally, in contexts that assume a social hierarchy, the form נער usually denotes those who are in a subordinate position, whether they are specifically named,
anonymous, young, or a young adult. So, in the case of Gen 22:5 and 1 Sam 28:8, two unnamed ḥǎ♭ m in support of Abraham and Saul respectively.6 Joseph, whether at 17 or much older (Gen 37:2; 41:12), is clearly inferior to the Egyptian elites as he is a prisoner. In the case of Jeremiah, his self-reference as a ḥǎ♭ is undoubtedly rhetorical (1:6), attempting to highlight his inferior status in an attempt to dissuade the Lord.7 In fact, MacDonald argues that social considerations are critical in determining the usage of ḥǎ♭ in the text (1976, passim).

The lexeme ḥǎ♭ appears over 411 times in the Old Testament.8 It is related to the feminine ḥǎ♭ and the denominal ḥǎ♭. The former appears five times while the latter appears six. Importantly, the masculine noun and its cognates appear widely across the corpora of the ancient Near East. For example, Akkadian makes prodigious use of the related šarrum and šarratum, referring to nobility, rulers in general, and even in discussions about divine attributes.9 In West Semitic texts, it also appears broadly, although it generally rejects any reference to royalty.10 In the Old Testament, ḥǎ♭ refers to representatives of a foreign king (e.g. Gen 12:15; Jer 25:19; 38:17; Est 1:18), a military commander (e.g. Numb 22:8; Judg 7:25; 8:3; 1 Sam 18:30; 2 Sam 10:3; 2 Kgs 9:5), or a range of administrators (e.g. Gen 47:6; Ex 1:11; 1 Kgs 5:30; Dan 1:7). In many instances, the Old Testament parallels ḥǎ♭ with other terms, ultimately suggesting that social concerns are part of the nuances conveyed. For example, ḥǎ♭ is used in association with šarruk (Second Sam 3:3), šarrūt (Isa 3:14), šarrū (Second Sam 19:7), šarrū (Prov 19:10), šarrū (Job 34:19), and šarrū (Jer 1:18). In addition, ḥǎ♭ can be qualified by a specific geographic location and/or royal personnel, such as the unified kingdom of Israel (1 Chr 22:17), Judah (Ps 68:28), the northern kingdom of Israel (Hos 7:3), the cities of Judah (Jer 44:17), Solomon (1 Kgs 4:2), and Zedekiah (Jer 24:8). As for the duties of the ḥǎ♭, they were military (1 Sam 17:18; 22:2; 23:19; 1 Kgs 9:22; 14:27; 2 Kgs 1:9; 25:19), civil (1 Chr 27:31; 28:1; 29:6), and cultic (2 Chr 36:14; Ez 8:24, 29; 10:5).

Epigraphically, ḥǎ♭ appears twice in the Mesad Hashavyahu inscription (ll. 1; 12; cf. Appendix). In this text a harvester complains to the local ḥǎ♭ that his garment has been unfairly withheld from him. He contends that he met his quota and even volunteers his co-workers as witnesses on his behalf. Therefore, he emphatically argues that his cloak be given back
to him. In addition, there is one other uncontested occurrence of רֹשׁ in the epigraphic record. In Lachish Letter 6, an unnamed person responds to Yaush, his superior. After colorfully emphasizing his inferiority to Yaush and other unnamed administrators in the Judean bureaucracy, who are denoted by the form רֹשׁ, he insists that Yaush will not like the answer to his inquiry (cf. Appendix).

Both inscriptions not only testify to the judicial and administrative responsibilities of the רֹשׁ, but in the case of Lachish Letter 6, the רֹשׁ appear to be important voices in a context of war, perhaps as indirect evidence to how the רֹשׁ contributed to military strategy. Moreover, Lachish Letter 6 offers clear evidence for a hierarchy within the Judean bureaucracy. This nuance will re-appear during a discussion of the Assyrian administrative system (see below).

Ubiquitous in Aramaic literature, this noun appears fifty-one times in the Old Testament, and apart from the appearances in Kings (1 Kgs 20:14–19) and Ezekiel (19:8), all instances appear in literary contexts unequivocally set against the Second Temple period. The noun refers to defined administrative districts (HALOT, 1:549), or as Hess has stated, a “geo-political entity serving as a part of a nation or empire” (NIDOTTE, 2:853). Yet there is some question about the etymology. If it possesses a historical association with רֹן (to judge), this may shed light on the judicial function often inherent to all administrative districts.

There is also a question if the noun is to be understood as a linguistic distinctive of a Second Temple context. That is to say, does the usage of רֹשׁ suggest a post-exilic context of composition for that passage? According to Hess, רֹשׁ almost certainly exhibits influence from Babylonian and Persian stimuli, and if 1 Kgs 20:14–19 is accepted as a pre-exilic composition, then the appearance of רֹשׁ there appears anomalous (NIDOTTE, 2:853). Nevertheless, one must be cautious in postulating a context of composition solely by a linguistic phenomenon.

**Summary of the Semantic and Grammatical Inquiry**

Based upon the preceding discussion, the Hebrew phrase רֹשׁ speaks about a class of individuals within a larger social
faction that is defined by a responsibility to govern particular geographic units within the national apparatus. Yet articulating the profile of this class within hinges upon the nuances of کریک. This is a lexeme that often conveys a sense of youthfulness, but there are instances where a social distinction becomes more prominent. That is, some passages suggest that a کریک is defined more by social criteria rather than age. In some instances, that inferior social position is defined by servitude, but this certainly does not appear to be universal. Ultimately, the range of English translations are instructive. They preserve the semantic ambiguity of کریک while shedding light on the three commonly accepted categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>by Youthfulness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASV (1901)</td>
<td>“By the young men of the princes of the provinces”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSB</td>
<td>“By the young men of the provincial leaders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>“By the young men of the rulers of the provinces”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>by Servitude</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEB</td>
<td>“The servants of the district officers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>“By the servants of the governors of the districts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NKJV</td>
<td>“By the servants of the governors of the districts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>“By the young men who serve the district governors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>by a Military Position</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNB</td>
<td>“The young soldiers under the command of the district governors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>“The junior officers under the provincial commanders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJPS</td>
<td>“Through the aides of the provincial governors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLT</td>
<td>“The troops of the provincial commanders”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ancient Translations

The ancient translations of the phrase נָעַרְיָה שֶׁלֶּה הַמְכַרְדֵּה תַתָּה only provide minimal clarification. The LXX reads Ἐν τοῖς πατριάρχοις τῶν ἁρχόντων τῶν χαρῶν. Noteworthy here is the translation of ὕπποι with πατριάρχοι. Because the semantic range of πατριάρχοι revolves around the foci of a child and a young slave (BDAG, 748), not nearly as vast as the semantic range of ὕπποι, this suggests that the Greek translators understood the phrase נָעַרְיָה in a relatively restricted manner. They ostensibly understood the נָעַרְיָה in terms of their service to the נָעַרְיָה. Thus, the NETS translates the phrase as “by the lads who serve the district governors.”

The Targum Jonathan reads בֵּית הָעַלְוָיִים רְבָּכִים מִדְמֵיָה. In particular, this tradition translates נָעַרְיָה with שֵׁלֶם, which, like πατριάρχοι, also fails to mirror the vast semantic spectrum of the Hebrew נָעַרְיָה. Moreover, the semantic foundation of the Aramaic term also revolves around two foci: youthfulness and strength (Jastrow 1971: 1051). Consequently, these considerations imply that the Targumic translators understood the dynamics of the Hebrew similarly to the Septuagint translators—in a way that emphasizes youthfulness. However, Jastrow admits that שֵׁלֶם often functions as a technical translation of נָעַרְיָה. Therefore, he also offers a gloss of “servant” (Jastrow 1971: 1051). Yet less debatable is the precise parallel between the Aramaic phrase רְבָּכִים מִדְמֵיָה and the Hebrew נָעַרְיָה (HALOT, 1:1976). Therefore, whether the נָעַרְיָה were understood by the translators in terms of youthfulness or service, the Aramaic translators tracked closely with the Hebrew as the נָעַרְיָה were understood by their association among the provincial leadership.

The Leiden Peshitta mirrors the lexemes of the Targumic tradition when it reads:

This is of no surprise given the linguistic relationship between Syriac and Aramaic.

The Clementine Vulgate reads, “Per pedissequos principum provinciarum.” The lexeme pedissequus has a sense of “manservant” or “attendant,” but it appears only here in the larger narrative. Later in the narrative, the lexeme puer is used (vv. 17 and 19), which is more semantically broad than pedissequus, although it does exhibit substantial semantic overlap with pedissequus.
In summary, the ancient translations surveyed agree that the breaking of the siege will be facilitated by group within a larger group defined by their administrative responsibilities in the Israelite bureaucracy. Moreover, the witnesses seemed to agree that the element within this larger group is characterized by youthfulness and/or servitude. This relative agreement is interesting, particularly since the Hebrew appears to be slightly more vague with respect to the nuances associated with the "youthfulness". Indeed, the Hebrew is clear that the counteroffensive will be facilitated by an element within a larger group of provincial administrators, but the presence of "youthfulness" does not demand a nuance of youth or servitude. It is just not clear if the "youthful" were owned or coerced by the "young men" or what the ages of these "youthful" were. Consequently, further clarity is necessary, and perhaps the Assyrian administrative system can provide that.

**Comparative Evidence from Neo-Assyrian Texts**

"Although ambitions of universal expansion develop alongside a universalistic ideology and long distance knowledge (acquired through commerce), the ability to control conquered lands is conditioned by a technical capacity" (Liverani 2017: 179). The technical capacity of which Liverani speaks is an empire’s ability to organize administrative units and encourage cooperation among them for the good of the whole. And, among anthropological models, these administrative units are normally characterized by the proximity of a leading city to a surrounding agricultural territory that extends across a particular geographic area. Indeed, this agricultural area may vary in size, but models suggest that a geographic footprint is contingent upon effective transportation and information

<table>
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<td>בּוֹרִי שֵׁלֶית הֵמְדִינָתָהּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targum (Targum Jonathan)</td>
<td>בְּעָלָליְהָ בְּכַרְרוּתָהּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syriac (Leiden Peshitta)</td>
<td>ԺԵԿԱՅԻՆ ՄԻՑԻՐՅԱՆ ԵՔՄՈՒՆՏ ԺԵԿԱՅԻՆ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek (LXX)</td>
<td>Ἐν τοῖς παιδαρίοις τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν χωρῶν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin (Clementine Vulgate)</td>
<td>Per pedissequos principum provinciarum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dissemination. Applied to the Neo-Assyrian Empire, therefore, it was a “mosaic of provinces” whose business and resources were directed by strategic locations and people, all trying to serve the empire and king (Liverani 2017: 179). However, Pongratz-Leisten is more blunt in describing the importance of the provincial system. “The provincial system...became the backbone of the Assyrian empire and the basis of its stability. In this system the provinces delivered regular provisions to the Aššur temple and to the palace; deliveries to the former were effectively an ‘extension of customs which went ultimately back to a system of common ruling family groups of the Old Assyria phase’” (2015: 168).

In the Assyrian system, provinces can be characterized broadly by two short descriptive phrases. On the one hand, the “land of Assyria” refers to the territory acquired during the Middle Assyrian period, “when the original core was expanded to include all of Upper Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and the Zagros Mountains” (Liverani 2017: 180). On the other hand, the “yoke of Assyria” were the lands “subjected to the ‘yoke’ of Assyria” and thus perceived to be “external, still undergoing a process of subjugation and assimilation” (Liverani 2017: 180). In other words, the “yoke of Assyria” were the lands overcome by the imperialistic ambitions of the empire. However, both types of provinces were organized similarly even though the conquered territories did appear to undergo a type of formalization process that involved temple renovations, the appointment of a governor, and the funneling of imperial resources to that location (Liverani 2017: 181–82). Yet this organizational system was not rigid or static. In some cases, changes appear to have been initiated by royal preference. For example, Liverani notes that Tiglath–Pileser III displayed a tendency to reduce the influence of governors while Sargon II celebrated the governors and other high-ranking officials (Liverani 2012: 181–91; 2017: 183–84). More significantly, at the end of the ninth century, there is evidence to suggest that the Assyrian empire experienced a reaction against the traditional provincial system in favor of a new system that emphasized particular offices over others, even posing a threat to the king.15

Fundamental to the provincial system were the offices that governed them. These offices represent a continuous institution across Assyrian history and were apparently strategic to the daily and military operations of the empire. Among these offices was a particular group often referred to as “The King’s Magnates” (LU.GAL.MES; lit. “the great ones”). Those offices include: masennu (treasurer), nāgir ekalli (palace herald), rab
šaqqē (chief cupbearer), rab ša-rēši (chief eunuch), sartinnu (chief judge), sukkallu (grand vizier), and turtânu (commander-in-chief). Based on the evidence, these magnates were closely associated with, but superior to, the provincial governors. But Parpola's now dated argument—that the exact relationship between the magnates and the provincial governors remains a viable topic of discussion—still appears to be appropriate (1995: 379).

The responsibilities for the magnates were extremely diverse, and, based on the Assyrian evidence, they were extremely influential in the operations of the Neo-Assyrian political apparatus. According to Mattila, the responsibilities were economic, military, civil, and religious. While space prohibits an exhaustive discussion of all these responsibilities, focus will fall upon the military and numerous provincial responsibilities in light of the conclusions regarding the Hebrew phrase 18.

Fundamentally, these offices were defined by an association with specific geographic units within the empire. In some cases, these officers appear to be in direct control of entire regions. For example, Aia-halu, the masennu under Shalmaneser III, is named as governor of multiple regions concurrently, including Kipšuna, Qumena, Mehranu, Uqu, and Erimmu (Mattila 2000: 14). Under Tiglath-Pileser III, newly conquered territories were added to the territory of his rab šaqqē, effectively increasing his influence and responsibility (Mattila 2000: 48). And a similar expansion of influence is offered to Tiglath-Pileser III's turtânu, although in this instance the documentation mentions cities being added to the province instead of territories referenced only generally (Mattila 2000: 114–15). Finally, it's worth noting that Shalmaneser III offers the city of Til-Barsip to his turtânu in the wake of the its conflagration. According to the documentation, this allocation also came with the expectation of its usage for a strategic advantage (Mattila 2000: 114).

Proceeding beyond these general statements of responsibility and geographic association, a wide range of specific responsibilities is attested in the Assyrian corpus. First, these magnates were responsible for transferring economic resources by a diverse set of actions. In one instance, the sartinnu Shep-Sharri adjudicated a dispute and imposed a verdict of 1.5 minas of silver (Mattila 2000: 79). The rab ša-rēši of Sargon II underwrote a transaction with Kušši, who sold 6 hectacres of land (Mattila 2000: 66–67). In one instance, Nabû-šarru-usur, the rab ša-rēši under Assurbanipal, secured 1700 hectacres and 40 vineyards tax-free (Mattila 2000: 66)! In other instances, officials were tasked with supplying worship sites with
resources. Thus, Adad–nerari III decreed that his masennu supply the Aššur temple with a variety of sacrificial animals (Mattila 2000: 23). Finally, there is the notable example of Ṭab–šarAššur, a masennu, supervising the construction of the public works in Sargon II’s new capital Dur–Sharrukin, modern-day Khorsabad (Mattila 2000: 26–27).

The magnates were also involved in and beneficiaries of the distribution of imperial tribute. For example, several officers received portions of the tribute given to Sargon II (Mattila 2000: 22). During the reign of Tiglath–Pileser III, the turtānu, nāgir ekalli, and the rab šāqē all received deportees and plunder (Mattila 2000: 37–38). Sargon II distributed barley to his nāgir ekalli as well as silver and clothing to his sartinnu. Similarly, Sennacherib sent silver to his rab šāqē (Mattila 2000: 54), and, in at least one instance, a rab–ša–rēšī received clothes with his silver (Mattila 2000: 68).

Consequently, it seems that a significant portion of the provincial responsibilities were economic in nature. And whether the allocation was specifically the distribution of land, tribute, or something else, these offices were critical functionaries in the Assyrian governmental apparatus. But these men also had tremendous military responsibility. During the reigns of prominent Neo–Assyrian kings, the turtānu was responsible for large numbers of troops including infantry and calvary (Mattila 2000: 121–22). With Shalmaneser III, and similarly with Tiglath–Pileser III and Sargon II, the turtānu occasionally took part in an advanced party to oversee royal initiatives (Mattila 2000: 122–24). The nāgir ekalli also had a variety of military responsibilities, and in one instance the officer was deployed for reconnaissance purposes (Mattila 2000: 43). The masennu were deployed as necessary (Mattila 2000: 25).

It goes without saying that the rab šāqē and the rab–ša–rēšī were critical elements in the Neo–Assyrian war–machine. One sees this in 2 Kgs 18–19, where the text mentions the turtānu alongside the rab šāqē and the rab–ša–rēšī in the advance party representing Sennacherib. In addition, there are copious references across the Assyrian corpus that refer to their responsibility in responding to covenantal infidelity, military strategy, commanding forces, and marching deportees (Mattila 2000: 56–59; 70–79). However, Mattila maintains that it remains unclear what military responsibilities the sartinnu had. Mattila notes sporadic references to the sartinnu in a militaristic context, but the references are unclear as to specific actions or responsibilities of the sartinnu (Mattila 2000: 83–84).
In summary, the organization of the Neo-Assyrian empire had as one of its pillars a group of officials who possessed a wide range of responsibilities and privileges and were closely linked to the king. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that this group of officials functioned with the king to represent the Assyrian pantheon to the populace. That is, as a corporate body of the ideal king paralleling the divine assembly (Parpola 1995: 379–401). Practically speaking, these magnates, or “Great Ones,” owned lands, governed provinces, and possessed significant economic responsibility by stimulating markets and disseminating resources. In addition, there was a clear military responsibility. Whether by leading troops in the theater of war, representing a king in an advance party, or policing covenantal infidelity, these magnates were defined by their military obligations as much as any other imperial obligation.

What’s more, there was significant shared responsibility among these magnates. In other words, it is hard to detect a clear distinction between the responsibilities of one magnate over another, and it is difficult to determine why. Nevertheless, it is likely linked, at least partially, to the administrative developments within the empire. In other words, the rise and fall of an officer’s prominence due to the preferences of an individual king, mentioned by Pongratz–Leisten and others, likely stimulated the overlap of responsibilities.

As for the hierarchy among these governing officials, evidence suggests that one existed. For example, Mattila is certainly correct to point to greeting formulas in official correspondence as evidence of subordination between the magnates and generic governors (Mattila 2000: 165). Yet perhaps more substantial is the example of a governor’s appeal to the king and his magnates over accusations of abusing power. According to Parpola, the presence of the magnates alongside the king to adjudicate the situation between governors not only demonstrates the magnate’s political proximity to the king but also the levels of prominence within the imperial bureaucracy (Parpola 1995: 383, n. 15). However, Parpola notes that the nuance of this hierarchy remains difficult to specify. Nevertheless, I propose that the Assyrian magnates offer a conceptual model to understand the officials that were tapped to break the siege of Samaria. They were members of an administrative apparatus that exhibited a hierarchical structure and was defined by its governance of territories and military responsibilities.
Conclusions

This essay opened by discussing the tendency among scholars to understand אֲנֵהֵרִים as reference to a group of specialized troops. However, there have been a few dissenters, particularly by those who emphasize the dynamics of the prophetic message. In the mind of these dissenters, the shocking nature of the Israelite victory that will follow suggests something other than a group of highly specialized soldiers. From there, this essay engaged a detailed grammatical and semantic analysis of the phrase אֲנֵהֵרִים also considering ancient translations of the phrase in the process. Ultimately, this essay argued that the crux of the entire phrase was the nuance associated with masculine plural construct form אנֵהֵרִים. While the ancient translations are relatively unified in their understanding of the אנֵהֵרִים in terms of youths, servants, or even young the Hebrew is clear that the אנֵהֵרִים charged with breaking the siege were lower–level members of an institution responsible for the administration of the nation’s provincial system.

Finally, this essay considered the Neo–Assyrian Administrative Cabinet as a conceptual model. This group of high–ranking officials, often described as the King’s Magnates, were intimately involved with imperial administration, displaying a wide range of responsibilities. In many instances, individual offices shared responsibilities with other members of the cabinet. Perhaps most importantly, the King’s Magnates were defined by their military responsibility just as much as their civic or religious responsibilities.

It is also clear from the Assyrian record that there was a hierarchy among Assyria’s imperial administrators. In short, not all were equal. And this realization strikes at the heart of this essay. The phrase אנֵהֵרִים appears to testify to an Israelite apparatus that resembles the general dynamics of the Assyrian one. The presence of אנֵהֵרִים suggests a hierarchy among the group of provincial administrators, the אנֵהֵרִים, and the context of war demonstrates a capability and responsibility to fight. Consequently, it seems inexact to understand the אנֵהֵרִים as specialized soldiers. Rather, it is preferrable to understand them as lower ranking officials among the nation’s administrative apparatus whose responsibility it was, at least in part, to fight when called upon. These are “junior governors of the provinces.” Not necessarily in the sense of age, but in the sense of rank and status.
Of course, these considerations raise obvious questions. Why refer to the \textit{ךָ֣שֶׁ֣רְיָ֣רֵךְ֥וּ֣תִּיתָ֣ה} with such a marked level of ambiguity? Why not precisely specify offices, responsibilities, and perhaps even names, akin to what is observed in the Assyrian record? Indeed, the biblical witness demonstrates an ability to do this (cf. 1 Kgs 4), but the phenomenon here is linked to a particular historiographic convention that can be observed throughout the presentation of the Omride Wars (1 Kgs 22; 2 Kgs 3). These chapters, which recount the Omride conflicts between Syria and Moab, make extended use of anonymization. Institutions are emphasized when specific names are either ignored or referenced only economically vis-à-vis a reference to the institution the person represents. For example, in 1 Kgs 20:1–22, Ahab is mentioned two or three times, but \textit{ךָ֣שֶׁ֣רְיָ֣רֵךְ֥וּ֣תִּיתָ֣ה} is mentioned seven times. Moreover, the prophet who approached the king to counsel him is completely anonymous (v. 22), referred only as \textit{ךָ֣שֶׁ֣רְיָ֣רֵךְ֥וּ֣תִּיתָ֣ה}. It seems, then, the historian employs this convention to level a systematic critique of Omride policy in the context of a historiographic program that celebrates Hezekian policies (Greenwood and Schreiner 2023: \textit{passim}).

Indeed, the trend for anonymization in 1 Kgs 20, 22 and 2 Kgs 3 has long been recognized by scholars, but it has traditionally been interpreted as grounds for a complicated redactional program that intensified an anti-Omride polemic (e.g. McKenzie 1991, 81–100, esp. 88–93). However, the data can be interpreted differently, and the use of the relatively ambiguous \textit{ךָ֣שֶׁ֣רְיָ֣רֵךְ֥וּ֣תִּיתָ֣ה} becomes another point in arguing this case. By featuring the \textit{ךָ֣שֶׁ֣רְיָ֣רֵךְ֥וּ֣תִּיתָ֣ה}—lower-level officials in a stratified, bureaucratic system and not specific people or top-level offices—the Lord is focusing on systems, processes, and policies. He is countering the status quo and demonstrating that the established \textit{mode operandi} of the Omride dynasty are not the mechanisms of salvation. Rather, the Lord’s emphatic and unpredictable actions are.

Appendix

\textit{Mesad Hashavyahu Inscription}\footnote{4}{May the official (\textit{הַשֵּׁר}), my lord, hear the word of his servant. As for your servant, your servant was harvesting at Hazar–Asam. You servant harvested, and your servant measured and stored a few days ago before ceasing. When your servant had measured the harvest and stored it a few days ago, Hoshyahu son of Shabay came and took your servant’s...}
garment. When I measured my harvest just now, a few days ago, he took your servant’s garment.
All my brothers will testify on my behalf, those who were harvesting with me in the heat of the day. My brothers will testify on my behalf.
Truly I am innocent of wrongdoing. Please return my garment. Even if it is not an obligation for the official (lšr) to return your servant’s garment, you should grant him mercy. And you should return your servant’s garment and not remain silent…

*Lachish Letter 6*²²

To my lord, Yaush. May Yahweh cause my lord to be well as he experiences this season.
Who is your servant, a dog, that my lord sent the letter of the king and the letters of the officials (hšrm) saying, “Please, read!”?
Look, the words of the officials (hšrm?) are not good—they will weaken your hands and slacken the hands of men who are informed of them?
… …
My lord, why don’t you write to them saying, “Why would you act like this, and in Jerusalem?! Look, to the king and to his house you would do this thing?”
As Yahweh, your God, lives, ever since your servant read the letters, your servant has not had peace.

**End Notes**

I am honored to present this essay to the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary’s School of Biblical Interpretation (past and present) in celebration of 10 years of graduates in the Biblical Studies Ph. D. program. I look back at Asbury fondly, as one of the most spiritual formative contexts of my life. In particular, I am forever indebted to Bill T. Arnold, who was my Doktorvater, and Lawson Stone, with whom I spent countless hours discussing issues of Biblical Studies and, more importantly, life. Their continued guidance even after my graduation has proven to be a blessing.

¹ The form פְּדָה in v. 13 is an *Irreal* Perfect marking a result clause (Cook 2001: 134; Cook and Holmstedt 2013: 66). Thus, the victory that will follow will testify to the Lord’s ability to save and attempt to convince the king.
This figure is derived from my understanding of the opening clauses of v. 1. I have translated as, “Now Ben-Hadad king of Aram gathered his entire army while thirty–two kings were with him with horses and chariots...”

More precisely, the ב preposition on the phrase initiates a phrase that specifies the preceding verbal action (נתן). That is, the Lord intends to give the Syrian coalition into the hand of Israel by means of this group of fighters. See IBHS, §11.2.5e and Arnold and Choi 2018: 118.

Data compiled by Logos Word Study search, Logos 9.6.

See נער, נוער, נועידים

Hamilton notes these two passages with Numb 22:22 and ponders if a literary trope involving two נערי in a possibility. NIDOTTE, 3:125.

It is notable that Jeremiah is a priest from Anatoth, which is the location to where Solomon banished Abiathar (1 Kgs 2:26–27). Thus, it is possible that Jeremiah's status as a member of a rejected priestly family gave the grounds for invoking this term.

Data compiled by Logos Word Study search, Logos 9.6.

CAD, 17:78–114. More specifically, the semantic range includes royalty, petty royalty, the royal family, an entourage, general administrators, and military officials.

NIDOTTE 3:1295. Presumably, the lexemeory and its related terms became the preferred way to reference royalty.

If one accepts the legitimacy of the Moussaïeff Ostraca, then a third occurrence appears in the Hebrew epigraphic record. Moussaïeff Ostraca 2 attests to the civil responsibilities of the נערי as it documents an appeal to the local נשי to award a widow her husband's inheritance. However, not all scholars accept the ostraca due to the problematic provenance. Gogel has summarized the issues. See Gogel 1998: 20, n. 66.

It is widely accepted that נערי appears in line four. However, it is possible to discern another occurrence in line 5. See Gogel 1998: 418; Bekins 2020: 129.

Data compiled by Logos Word Study search, Logos 9.6.


A foundational study is Raija Mattila, *The King’s Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (2000). This study adopts the terminology of Mattila, even though there has been subsequent discussion of some of the technical aspects of Mattila’s work. For example, Parpola includes the *ummânu* (royal scholar) while Pongratz-Leisten agrees with Mattila.

Mattila notes, “Hierarchic position of the highest officials above the provincial governors is clearly illustrated by the greeting formulae used in their correspondence” (2000: 165).

The following summary is indebted to Mattila’s work, which catalogs and analyzes the Assyrian textual evidence of these offices.

Aia–halu appears to be appointed to *turtānu* under Shamshi–Adad V (Mattila 2000: 108).

The mention of Ahab in v. 13 is questioned on text-critical grounds. Ahab does not appear in Vacticanus, the Lucianic recension, and Walton’s edition of the Peshitta. Thus, DeVries accepted the variant tradition (2003: 244). However, Cogan (2008: 460) and Wray Beal accept the MT (2014: 260).

Translation from Bekins 2020: 111.

Translation from Bekins 2020: 131.

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The Shema as Total Meaning of Reality: Tradition, Freedom, and Verification in the Pedagogy of Deuteronomy

Abstract:
This paper will analyze the pedagogy of Deuteronomy in conversation with the educational theory of the Catholic scholar Luigi Giussani. Giussani argues that tradition – as the total meaning of reality, which from a Christian perspective is rooted in the living presence of Christ – should be taught by a process of verification that guides the student, through the exercise of freedom and inquiry, into personal conviction that the tradition coherently accounts for reality. Reading the pedagogy of Deuteronomy through the lens of Giussani’s theory of education will highlight ways in which the instruction of Moses in Deuteronomy initiates the next generation of Israelites into the tradition of Yahwism in a way that allows for the freedom of verification to result in conviction in the veracity of the tradition.

Keywords: Deuteronomy, Shema, education, Moses, Luigi Giussani

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On this occasion of celebrating the establishment of the Ph.D. program in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, I would like to offer some reflections on the task of theological education from the Book of Deuteronomy. The content of Deuteronomy, which is identified in Deut 31:24 as “Instruction” (הָנִיעָה), is primarily concerned with religious education (Olson 2005: 3–5). Of course, much has already been written about education in Deuteronomy. My focus here will be to contribute to the growing understanding of the nature of Deuteronomic instruction through a critical dialogue with the pedagogical theory of the Catholic priest, theologian, and educator Luigi Giussani. The approach of Giussani, centered around the importance of reason, tradition, and verification, views Christian education as an invitation to “risk” that involves guiding the student through a process of attaining conviction in the reasonableness of the tradition. This tradition, which for the Christian is grounded in the living presence of Christ as the total meaning of reality, is transmitted to students as an education into the critical capacity to verify the accordance of the tradition with reality. Only such a foundation can prepare the student to navigate the circumstances and uncertainties of life.

**The Risk of Education: The Pedagogy of Luigi Giussani**

Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922–2005) served as a religious educator in Italy for almost 60 years, first as a Catholic priest and seminary professor, and then most of his career as a High School teacher. His approach to Christian education is crystallized in his book, *Il rischio educativo* (1977), translated as *The Risk of Education* (2019). As Giussani engaged the landscape of Christian education in an increasingly secularized Italy in the late 20th century, he encountered sentiments among High School students that are often seen in Christian traditions today: religious tradition and education is based on irrational faith and cannot be grounded in reason, and it is not supposed to impact social behavior outside of the contexts of Church liturgy and ritual. Giussani perceived the detrimental impact of these deeply rooted assumptions and articulated a robust model of Christian education and spiritual formation that is based on a pedagogy in the verification of tradition to counter these misconceptions. The Christian faith must be embraced through reason as a way of being that has the capacity to improve, illuminate, and enhance authentic human values, and this reasoned approach to faith can only attain the position of conviction among students through a process of verification in which the
Christian tradition is questioned and seen to account for reality (Guissani, trans. Sullivan 2019: 5). Giussani developed the following components as guidelines for executing such an education:

First of all, education ought to be an initiation into the “Total Meaning of Reality” that is comprehensive in its scope of inquiry, and most fundamentally concerned with the question of meaning as foundational for understanding reality as it addresses the existential needs of humanity (2019: 25–28). For Giussani and the Church, Christ is the all-encompassing totality that moves beyond secular educations in practical nihilism by answering the “why” questions of reality. This total meaning of life is rooted in the mystery of God as a living and active presence as the ground of reason. Knowledge of this reality, which has been passed down in tradition by the Church, can be apprehended and verified as truth that is concomitant to reality.

Second, the tradition that is transmitted as the total meaning of reality serves as an “Explanatory Hypothesis” that is the beginning point of education. This hypothesis is passed on from parents in the earliest formative context of the student as the initial set of assumptions about reality with which the student begins to navigate the complexities of life. Without a given tradition as a firm starting point for education, students will flounder in their ability to engage and evaluate reality as they encounter it. Giussani argues that true education requires a “working hypothesis” as a point of departure that offers a context of meaning to the world that the student encounters (2019: 28). Fragmentary models of education that lack a grounding in a total meaning of reality also refrain from offering a coherent explanatory hypothesis as a starting point for education. The Christian tradition on the other hand, rooted in the total meaning of reality that is Christ, has a solid foundation from which students can begin to encounter, evaluate, and integrate new experiences and ideas into their worldview.

Third, the intellectual, psychological, and spiritual education and development of the student must undergo a process of personal verification that leads to conviction. Giussani writes:

In order to adequately respond to the educational needs of adolescence, it is not enough to propose a meaning of the world in clear terms. Nor is it enough for the person making the proposal to have a certain intensity of real authority. Rather, one must cultivate a personal engagement on the part of the young person with his or her own origins. They must verify what tradition has
offered them, and this may only be done on their own initiative, and no one else’s. (2019: 45)

In each generation, the truth of the tradition is re-created in a living manner through verification, where the tradition is found to address the deepest needs of human existence as the student encounters reality. The meaning of the tradition is thus established as a personal conviction of the student through a process in which the tradition can be questioned and challenged in a supportive environment. It is only through critique—taken on by the own initiative of the student—that the student can attain a conviction of the expansive truth of the tradition that can withstand the challenges of alternate views of reality and the pressures of life that the student will face. This verification leads to an encounter with the total meaning of reality and a recognition of the applicability of the tradition to all of life. The main goal of education is to facilitate this process. Giussani writes

...[the] supreme concern of true education, precisely because it resolutely proposes a certain vision of things, is that adolescents be educated to carry out a constant comparison not only between this vision and other people's views, but also and above all between whatever happens to them and the idea that is offered to them (tràdita, ‘passed on’). The need for this personal experimentation is urgent, and this implies that the educator must tirelessly solicit adolescents’ personal ‘responsibility,’ because once the educator proposes the idea and offers cooperation, only conscious engagement on the part of the individual student can concretize the value of the proposal and uncover its existential validity. (2019: 46)

The focus of educators should be on creating an environment in which not only is the content of the tradition taught, but in which the student is also initiated into a process of criticism as a method of questioning and comparing alternative traditions and views. This kind of critical education enables the student to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each tradition and measure their ability to account for reality. Allowing the student to face challenges in their process of formation is the “risk” of education that actualizes the freedom of students to own their personal convictions without coercion or coddling. Only this kind of critical education can ground the student in the tradition as a means to navigating reality (Guissani 2019: 62).
Fourth, this kind of education is guided by a teacher, living out the tradition critically and with an integrity that yields authority, as the embodiment of the experience of the reality of the tradition. The students’ process of verification cannot take place in a vacuum as an abstract intellectual exercise. Rather, it must be modeled by individuals and communities who have undergone the verification themselves, and who understand how to guide the student into experiencing the process for themselves. The role of this authority is not authoritative, but rather is focused on representing an embodiment of the truth of the tradition. This embodiment that models a life that is coherent and consistent with the tradition is an invaluable access point for the student to witness the reality of the tradition. Giussani states,

The educational function of a true authority takes the shape of a ‘function of consistency (or coherence).’ The authority acts as a constant reminder of ultimate values and call for the mind to engage with them, a permanent criterion for judging all of reality, and a solid protection of the link (which is always new) between the shifting attitude of the young person and the total, ultimate meaning of reality. (2019: 42)

The hypothesis of the total meaning of reality, when it is lived out coherently, results in the formation of a community in which the veracity of the tradition has been tried and found true across generations. It is within the context of this community—as an embodiment of the tradition—that individuals find the ultimate meaning of the hypothesis and its ability to account for the totality of life. For the Christian, this community of education and verification is the Church, within which and through which the life-giving presence of Christ is revealed.

**Pedagogy in Deuteronomy**

Transitioning now to the pedagogy of the book of Deuteronomy, we see that Moses’ task of educating Israel bears many similarities with Giussani’s context of teaching. Poised on the edge of the Promised Land, with forty years of wilderness wandering behind them and the uncertainties of life in the land ahead of them, Moses is faced with the urgent and risky task of educating the next generation of Israelites. The whole book of Deuteronomy, characterized as Torah (תורה, Deut 31:24), is instruction to educate Israel for preparedness to enter the Promised Land and live an
obedient, mature, and flourishing life before Yhwh. Several excellent studies of various aspects of the pedagogy of Deuteronomy have already been carried out, including Dennis Olson’s study of Deuteronomy as the instruction of Moses passed on at his death for the future generation of Israelites (2005), Karin Finsterbusch’s exposition of Deuteronomy as the formation of a nation as a religious community of learning by Moses the master teacher (Finsterbusch 2005: 307–308), and Adrian Hinkle’s exploration of pedagogical theory in the Pentateuch and Deuteronomy (Hinkle 2016: esp. 57–80). Specialized studies by A.J. Culp, Steven Weitzman, Ryan O’Dowd, and Dru Johnson consider focused aspects of the pedagogy of Deuteronomy, such as the pedagogical function of ritual and collective memory (Culp 2019), education as a training program of sense perception (Weitzman 2005: 123–139), and the epistemology of Deuteronomy (O’Dowd 2009; Johnson 2018). Numerous other studies could be mentioned, and other themes could be considered. This article—narrowed in on considering the aspects of Deuteronomic pedagogy that are shared in common with the educational theory of Giussani—will highlight what we can learn about Deuteronomic pedagogy as exemplified in the Shema, when considered from the perspective of Giussani’s theory. We will see that Deuteronomic education bears many resemblances to Giussani’s model, with Deuteronomic pedagogy perceived as the passing on of tradition with the goal of initiating the new generation of Israelites, through a process of verification, into personal conviction about the coherence of the tradition. As we shall see, a critical engagement with Giussani’s model facilitates perceiving Deuteronomic pedagogy—synthesized in Deuteronomy 6—as an education into the total meaning of reality as life before Yhwh. Deuteronomic education offers this explanatory hypothesis in the context of personal mentoring and communal guidance as a locus for the student to challenge and verify the coherence of the tradition with reality as it is encountered.

Hear O Israel, The Lord is One: The Shema (Deut 6) as a Total Explanatory Hypothesis of Reality
Deuteronomy 6:1-9

The pristine expression of Deuteronomic education is the Shema, found in Deut 6:4–6. The chapter is also an entry point into Deuteronomic theology and encapsulates the paradigm for Deuteronomic education, and hence will be the focal point of our examination of Deuteronomic
pedagogy. The chapter begins by introducing what follows as “this is the commandment” (6:1), with the entire section of Deut 6–11 encompassing the scope of “this commandment” as an explication of the first of the Ten Commandments propounded in Deut 5:6–7: “I am Yhwh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt... you shall have no other gods before me” (Olson 2005: 49). The first nine verses of Deut 6 elaborate on the commandment, and describe the habitus by which this commandment can be practiced and transmitted to future generations. The second part of the chapter, verses 10–25, describe the giftedness of Israel’s life before Yhwh as the motivation for obedience to the commandment.

Moses begins introducing the commandment ( התורה) as the content that Yhwh has commanded Moses to teach ( תורה) to Israel (6:1). This “commandment” is then expanded to the rituals and judgments ( ה_eff) as a link that frames the laws of Deuteronomy 12–26 as an exposition of this commandment (Olson 2005: 50; Otto 2012: 790). The aim of this teaching is to enable present and future generations of Israelites who enter the land to fear Yhwh “by keeping all his statutes and his commandments... all the days of your life, that your days may be long” (v. 2). If Israel obeys carefully, “it will go well with them and they will multiply greatly” in accordance with the promises of Yhwh (v.3 ). In these opening verses of Deut 6, Moses thus sets up the basic premise of Deuteronomistic education: a total way of life of obedience to the commandments of Yhwh that is encapsulated in the fear of Yhwh. The ability of this way of life of obedience to the commandments to yield a coherent life and account for reality can be confirmed through experience: obedience leads to life before Yhwh—and as Moses will later explain in more detail—disobedience leads to death away from Yhwh. These criteria of verification are developed throughout the book of Deuteronomy, culminating in the blessings and curses of Deut 27–28. At the end of his speeches of Deuteronomy, Moses is thus able to declare that he has “set before Israel life and good, death and evil,” thus delineating the contours of the life-giving tradition, as a precursor for the coming generation to choose this life with conviction (Deut 30:15–20).

With this groundwork established in 6:1–3, Moses explicates the content of this teaching with a positive statement of the first commandment with the Shema: “Hear O Israel, Yhwh our God, Yhwh (is) one/Yhwh alone” (שֵׁם יְהֹוָה יְהֹוָה אַלָּלֶה אֶחָד). The meaning of the Hebrew text of the Shema is ambiguous on a grammatical level.² The two main options for translation
are, “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone”, and “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” The first translation asserts that the relationship between Israel and God is to be exclusive and unique. The Lord is the only deity for Israel. The second translation articulates a theology of the nature of Yhwh as “one,” as a statement of monotheism in some sense. Following the work of Walter Moberly, the parallels of Deut 6:4 to Song of Songs 6:9 suggest the former reading (Moberly 2013: 7–40). According to Song 6:9, the poet praises his beloved with the following words: “my dove, my perfect one, is the only one (אִּנַּכְתּ); the darling (אִנַּכְתּ) of her mother” (RSV). The sense of אִנַּכְתּ here is “one and only” or “unique,” as an individual who is unlike any other. Based on this parallel, Moberly concludes that the meaning of אִנַּכְתּ in Song 6:9, in a context where the term is related to the logic of devotion, is the key to understanding the meaning of אִנַּכְתּ in Deut 6:4 as also related to love and devotion. By this reading, Deut 6:4 would be understood as saying that “Yhwh our God” is “the one and only” deity worthy of Israel’s unreserved love. Within this covenantal context of Deuteronomy, the love of Yhwh thus establishes ethics as a matter of personal relationship of love and affection for the deity (Levenson 2016: 60–62), as Yhwh is a divine person who pursues and demands loving and committed relationship from his beloved people, Israel. Knowledge of Yhwh is thus intrinsically connected to the moral, social, and ethical commandments which Yhwh reveals (O’Dowd 2009: 42).

Verse 5 proceeds to call forth and describe a holistic response to the theology that v.4 articulates, urging Israel to love Yhwh with all their heart, soul, and strength. The heart (לב) is associated with thought and emotion, as the place of internal thought-processes; the soul (נפש) is the life force, vitality, vigor, energy, self-hood, or inner forcefulness of a person; the combination of these terms with “strength” (שרק) calls for a love of Yhwh with one’s whole life, to mobilize all the capacities of the self and to do so to the highest possible degree (Levenson 2016: 69–72). This kind of love includes actions that express one’s orientation toward another. Deuteronomy’s concern is for a thoroughgoing internalization and appropriation of obedient action toward Yhwh so that action and intention fully cohere, as do practice and thought. This is a love that engages the entire person in decisive, passionate, and intense fidelity and obedience to Yhwh. Thus, the telos of Deuteronomic education is shaping the desires of the heart (Culp 2009: 125), rooted in a Hebraic knowledge that is participatory. Theological knowledge is intended to lead to a life lived in
conformity with Yhwh’s order of reality (O’Dowd 2009: 3). The commandments to “love” (v. 4) and “fear” (cf. v. 2, 13) Yhwh entail covenantal loyalty that requires obedience to the commandments, but also inculcates emotional commitment to a relationship of affection and reverence for Yhwh that encompasses all of life (Arnold 2011: 561–562). The laws of Deuteronomy 12–26 delineate the all-encompassing nature of Israel’s response to the experience of Yhwh, which extends the definition of the will of Yhwh to every area of life that is covered by the array of instructional legislation of these chapters.

This love for Yhwh is taught through a program of education outlined in vv.6–9. Educating the next generation is to take place in a family setting where the teaching is memorized (v. 6), as parents teach children about their history with Yhwh and how to walk in the ways of Yhwh and love of Yhwh in daily life (Culp 2009: 117–130). The descriptions of speaking the tradition and reciting it while sitting, walking, laying down, and rising, and of placing physical representations of the teaching on gates, doorposts, and foreheads, mark the instruction as permeating chronological, spatial, and social boundaries (vv. 7-9). These bodily practices prescribe a pedagogy that enculturates the student into an integrated practice of the faith in every area of life, as the Shema advocates all-encompassing devotion to Yhwh (O’Dowd 2009: 46). This pedagogy begins in the home, with the parents as the initial conveyers of the tradition as the embodiment of the present personal authority of the tradition. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Deuteronomy calls Israel into the vocation of a “Nation of Educators,” where the teacher is the greatest hero (Sacks 2019: 99). Moses of course is the teacher par excellence, but the responsibility of pedagogy begins in the family and extends to the various leadership roles of society such as the priests, Levites, and elders (Deut 31:9–13; Olson 2005: 44–45), as well as to the prophet “like Moses” who will be the medium through which Yhwh will guide Israel into fulfilling its covenant obligations to Yhwh in future contexts (Deut 18:18–22). The continuation of the words of Yhwh through prophecy will provide guidance for applying and showing the continuing relevance of the instructions of Yhwh in future situations (Tigay 2003: 176; O’Dowd 2005: 72). Finally, at the end of Deuteronomy, the wisdom of Moses as the teacher of Israel is transmitted to Joshua through a “spirit of wisdom” that Moses imparts to him (34:9). As a result, the authority of Joshua is recognized by all Israel, who obey him as the authoritative purveyor of the tradition and do according to all the commandments of
Yhwh. Thus, in the absence of Moses, the voice of Yhwh will continue to instruct Israel through prophetic revelation as well as the spirit of wisdom that now rests upon Joshua. Other authoritative guides in the community, such as parents, priests, and elders, will continue to provide the content of the tradition through teaching. Their authoritative modeling of the tradition and wisdom from a lifetime of verification will offer guidelines to the students on the application of the tradition to ensure that Israel enters the promised land and experiences the blessings that Yhwh has promised (6:2–3), thus walking the next generation of Israelites through a process of verification to experience the truth of the tradition that is being passed on.

Deuteronomy 6:10-19

Verses 10–19 proceed to anchor the significance of the bodily pedagogy of the Shema in the larger framework of the tradition by locating the practices of transmission within the context of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yhwh. These verses imagine the future that awaits this educated Israel by recalling the giftedness of their existence: Israel is reminded of the gift of the land (vv.10–15) and Yhwh’s provision for them in the wilderness (vv. 16–19; Olson 2005: 52). Again, this section establishes criteria for verification of the tradition: Israel can know through experience the reality of their covenant with Yhwh by discerning and receiving the life-giving provision of Yhwh (vv. 10–11), while turning away from Yhwh results in destruction. The commandment in v.13 to fear and serve Yhwh, and to swear only by Yhwh—as a verbalized expression of covenant commitment(Otto 2012: 815)—communicate exclusive loyalty to Yhwh, before verse 14 warns of a prominent theme repeated throughout the pedagogy of Deuteronomy: the danger of Israel failing to honor Yhwh by “going after other gods—gods of the peoples who are around you.” The language of “going after/walking after” (נָאַת נְאָתֶים) is from the realm of marriage relationships, thus framing the act of religious apostasy as marital infidelity (Otto 2012: 815). Moses presumes—despite commands to annihilate the inhabitants of the promised land Israel is about to enter (cf. Deut 7:1–5)—that Israel will undergo a sustained encounter with Canaanite ideologies upon their entry into the land. This encounter will apply immense pressure to Israel’s understanding of her theological traditions and test the convictions of future generations in the veracity and beneficence of those traditions. Thus, Deuteronomic education must prepare Israel to evaluate the merits of competing traditions in light of the theological and ethical
truth she has experienced from her relationship with Yhwh. These encounters with alternative traditions are foreseen with statements about Israel’s future engagements in the land, articulated especially with conditional ṣ-clauses anticipating Israel’s entrance into the land and the situations they will face (seen here in Deut 6:7, 10, 20, and elsewhere in the “when you enter the land” statements such as Deut 4:19, 25, 30; 7:1–2; 8:12–13; 11:19, 29, 31; 12:10, 20, 25, 28-29; 25:18; 26:1; 27:3–4, 12; 30:1, 10). These statements set up an expectation for Israel to be able to discern the applicability of the tradition and verify it with conviction in future contexts. Especially Deuteronomy 4, as a sustained meditation on the tradition of Israel’s creation theology integrated with her experience of Yhwh at Horeb, establishes parameters for Israel to undermine the intellectual foundations of idolatries she may encounter. The close connections between the exclusive claims of the Shema and the warnings of apostasy in Deut 13 further highlight the way that Deut 6 functions as a hermeneutical key for critiquing and rejecting alternative theological and ethical traditions (Otto 2012: 828).

To enter the land and fully actualize Israel’s potential freedom thus entails risk, and it is only in the responsible exercise of this freedom that each generation of Israelites realizes their individual freedom and reaches maturity as the people whom Yhwh has liberated from Egypt. Diligently observing the laws—thus doing what is right and good in the sight of Yhwh—results in life and prosperity for Israel (vv. 17–18). The imagery establishes a vision of the good of the tradition, from which perspective competing traditions can be evaluated. As this theological overview of the tradition asserts, Yhwh, who dwells “in the midst of Israel,” is an impassioned deity (v. 15). Contrary to common views on the theology of transcendence in Deuteronomy according to which Yhwh is only present in a “spiritual sense” in the sanctuary through his “name” (Tigay 2003: xiii), Deuteronomic theology that describes Yhwh dwelling “in the midst” of Israel (cf. Deut 7:21; 23:14), or Israel living “before Yhwh” (יהוה ידוע cf. v.25) is immensely personal. This personal presence of Yhwh is impending upon Israel at every turn in the book. As J. Gary Millar argues, “The presence of Yahweh at the sanctuary is real and actual... The primary motive for going to the [chosen] place is not simply conformity in worship, but to meet with Yahweh himself. It is this reality that lies at the heart of the covenantal relationship. ‘Rejoicing before Yahweh’ is much more than enjoying the produce of the land—it is revelling in the relationship with the Giver of the land.”
Deuteronomy 6:20-25

As the outline for pedagogy continues, v. 20 anticipates that future generations will inquire about the meaning of the tradition of instruction or doctrines, rituals, and judgments passed down. The response that the authority gives yields a liturgical commemoration of the key events of the tradition (Culp 2005: 126–129): deliverance from Egypt that the parents had seen with their eyes (vv. 21–22), the giving of the land of promise to confirm Yhwh’s oath to Israel’s ancestors (v. 23), and the interpretation of the meaning of the covenant and laws as intended “for our good always, that he (Yhwh) might preserve us alive,” with obedience motivated by the “fear of Yhwh our God” (v. 24). The parents thus recount the way that they were initiated into the tradition: their experiences with Yhwh were followed by instruction and interpretation of the significance of these experiences, which resulted in a life of commitment to Yhwh as defined by covenant (Hinkle 2016: 70). This pattern of how Yhwh instructed the first generation of Israelites is to be replicated as the model education: the parents are to model the covenant faithfulness of Yhwh, which faithfulness the children are to experience in and through the community. The parents are then to offer instruction on the religious and ethical experience of Yhwh for the children to critique and verify.

This initial question by the children about the meaning of the tradition is addressed to the parents in the second person: “what is the meaning of the things that Yhwh commanded you?” (v. 20). The response of the parents links the children with the ancestral traditions and promises of Yhwh as part of the community, including them in the community by using the common plural pronoun “our ancestors” (v. 23). This move integrates the children into the communal identity as part of the “us” whom Yhwh has saved, and to whom Yhwh has given commandments and promises (v. 24). The description of the events of the tradition, which integrates the theology of the oneness/uniqueness of Yhwh that is espoused in the Shema with concrete historical experiences from Israel’s relationship with Yhwh, affects a response of gratitude, motivates obedience, and teaches Israel to own and identify with the foundational events of the tradition and their significance. The chapter concludes in v. 25 with a reminder: the obedience of Israel—characterized as righteousness—results in a coherent life to be lived out before the commanding presence of “Yhwh our God.” Thus, the chapter concludes by setting up the possibility of verification. If
Israel receives and obeys the tradition that Moses is passing on from Yhwh, they will encounter life before Yhwh as a back-and-forth relationship with Yhwh by which Israel can have, what Eckart Otto calls, a “dynamic experience” of this relationship (Otto 2012: 825–826).

Conclusion

We have seen in the pedagogy of Deut 6 that the pressing reality of the oneness of Yhwh for Israel becomes the totalizing explanatory hypothesis within the context of which Israel is to live out its life and vocation in the promised land. In the words of Bill Arnold, the paraenetic preaching of Deuteronomy, as seen for example in Deut 6, is the “first place [in the Hebrew Bible] we find an effort to articulate a theoretical and comprehensive understanding of what it means for humans to live in relationship with God” (Arnold 2011: 567). Passing on this theoretical and comprehensive understanding of relationship with Yhwh to future generations in a manner that leads to experience and conviction is at the core of Deuteronomy’s program of instruction. Reading Deuteronomy in light of the pedagogical theory of Luigi Giussani, we can thus see in Deuteronomy the interplay between the features of education into tradition as a hypothesis about the total meaning of reality, while the authoritative guide and community lead the student through a process of verification that results in the student attaining conviction in the ability of the tradition to account for reality. In each section of Deut 6, the character of Yhwh as the total hypothesis of reality that demands ultimate obedience is articulated. Yhwh, who is the one and only deity worthy of Israel’s love and respect as the Shema articulates (v. 4–5), lives in the midst of Israel as a personal presence that demands ultimate alliance (v. 15). Israel must in turn obey the commandments to live out a life of flourishing in the promised land before Yhwh (v. 25). Concomitant to this ultimate reality, Israel is to live in accordance with “what is right in the eyes of Yhwh” (v.18), not out of coercion, but as a reasoned and loving response to the nature of Yhwh who invites Israel into a covenant relationship in which obedience is for their good (v. 24).

In this process of education, Moses is at pains to set up guidelines for the potential confirmation of the veracity of this tradition—the character of Yhwh, the promises and faithfulness of Yhwh, and the goodness of the instruction of Yhwh—as knowledge that can be verified. The chapter is
interspersed with indications that establish the possibility of the verification of the tradition as an education into the meaning of reality. The pedagogy of the Shema invites the student to critique, inquire about, and examine the value and applicability of the tradition to every realm of life, while forming the student in a way of life grounded in the tradition, within a community in which the reality of Yhwh is regularly encountered. Giussani’s model of education thus has highlighted how Christian educators today may look to Deuteronomy as offering a proven methodology of religious pedagogy in anchoring students in the reality of the tradition and in facilitating experience in the tradition as a total way of life lived before the presence of God as the total meaning of reality.

End Notes

1 I would like to thank my teachers, mentors, and peers at Asbury Seminary for providing a context of Christian education as an initiation into the total meaning of reality that is grounded in the living presence of Christ. Especially I would like to thank Bill Arnold for his guidance and friendship and for modeling passionate engagement with the book of Deuteronomy that has influenced much of my own theological thinking and scholarship, and the Rev. Peg Hutchins, whose pedagogy in the Asbury Seminary Healing Academy time and time again brought me into an experience of the living presence of Christ as the total meaning of reality.

2 Robson 2016: 214–215, for grammatical discussion of the various interpretive options. The key question is the relationship between the two clauses: יְ֥הָ֥ה אַלַּ֥הָי can be taken in apposition to יְ֥הָ֥ה אַלַּ֥הָי, or the two phrases can be taken as nominal clauses, or יְ֥הָ֥ה אַלַּ֥הָי as a casus pendens; cf. Otto, Deuteronomium 4:44–11:32: 794, for further discussion.

3 Culp 2009: 124. On the inclusion also of women in this pedagogical program, see Otto 2012: 806.

4 See Moberly 2013: 41–74 for the implications of the language of herem in Deut 7:1–5 as a metaphor for total obedience that assumes the continuing presence of Canaanites in the land whose ideologies Israel must reject.


6 For this translation of רָ֖פּוֹן, see Tigay 2003: 65, 81.

8 On דרח as doctrines, see Culp 2005: 127.


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Joy Vaughan

*Bringing Evidence to the “Anti-magic” View: A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Acts 19:11-20*

**Abstract:**
In Acts 19:11-20 two main events are set beside one another. The first event tells of the miracles performed by God through the hands of Paul. The second event is the story of the failed exorcism attempt by the sons of Sceva. This article argues that Luke’s purpose in the juxtaposition of the two events is to clarify for the audience the difference between magic and miracle. Key evidence for this interpretation is found in the intertextual relationship between Luke’s terminology and ancient magical literature. Additionally, the rhetorical feature of *synkrisis* (*encomium*/invective) further supports the thesis. Luke does not just resist syncretism. Even further, he writes an invective against the use of magical practices as an attempt to generate the same result as what God was doing through Paul’s hands. This is supported by the effect on the original audience who responds by burning their magical books.

**Keywords:** socio-rhetorical, *synkrisis*, magic, sons of Sceva, intertextuality, Acts 19:11-20

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Introduction

Acts 19:11-16 provides a vivid picture of two main events. The first event is the telling of the miracles performed by God through the hands of Paul. The second event informs of the failed exorcism attempt by the sons of Sceva. Concerning the purpose of Luke’s juxtaposition of these events, there are at least four interpretations held within scholarship. First, a majority of scholars take the stance that the pericope presents a direct contrast between magic and miracle, concluding that the name of Jesus ought not be employed in magical incantations. Secondly, a widening of this view suggests that the text serves as a polemic against religious syncretism in general, summating that the author is not only speaking against the inclusion of magical practices but of the incorporation of any other pagan practices into Christianity (Klein 1969: 262-301). Thirdly, Martin Dibelius insists that vv. 14-16 represent “secular” verses within Acts that do not have any Christian interest. Dibelius takes a stance against the “anti-magic view” and asserts that the purpose of the text is for entertainment value (Dibelius 2004: 44). Further, Scott Shauf downplays the presence of magical elements within the pericope and places the main emphasis upon an issue of identity, namely, “the special status of Paul in God’s activity in the world” (Shauf 2005: 322).

In reference to the “anti-magic” interpretation, relaying that Luke intends to convey the difference between magic and miracle to the audience, Scott Shauf, critiques the view by stating that commentators have often not constructed satisfactory arguments in support of the view. Shauf states, “… it is apparently supposed to be self-evident that Sceva’s sons are to be seen as employing magic and that there is then a resulting contrast intended between the seven sons and Paul which corresponds to the opposing categories of miracles and magic” (2005: 116). In opposition to Shauf’s analysis, I propose that unturned evidence exists in support of this view, especially with regard to the rhetorical nature of the pericope. As a response to Shauf’s thesis, I will specifically draw upon evidence gleaned from three specific avenues including: 1) the presence of magic in antiquity, 2) the intertextuality of Acts 19:11-20 and magical writings, and 3) the rhetorical structure of *syncrisis* present within the text. When looking at Acts 19:11-20 from these three angles, it is possible to see that the contrast between magic and miracle is well-represented in the text itself. In other words, the evidence presented in this research will strongly support the
thesis that the main purpose of Acts 19:11-20 is to show God’s power as superior to magical powers.

In order to demonstrate this thesis, I will first present a brief survey of the background of ancient magic in antiquity especially asking what it would have been like to step foot into ancient Ephesus. Secondly, I will exhibit the unique word base employed by Luke and argue that it is heavily influenced by the magical context and magical literature such as would have been in Ephesus. Thirdly, I will provide an analysis of the rhetorical structure of *syncrisis* within 19:11-16, which clarifies the purpose for the juxtaposition of the stories of Paul’s miracles and the sons of Sceva’s failed exorcism attempt. In each section, I will add further support to the view that Luke intends to set forward a direct contrast between magic and miracle for an audience who might have been unable to make a clear delineation on their own.²

The Prevalence of Syncretistic Magic in Antiquity and Recent Discoveries

Even though much work has been done to establish a description of magic in antiquity as a background for New Testament interpretation,³ this viewpoint still sometimes faces opposition within scholarship.⁴ Simply the use of the term has caused debate amongst scholars mostly due to the ambiguity involved in its definition.⁵ The work of David Aune has sought to bring focus to this issue and to clarify what might be considered as “magic.” For Aune, “magic is defined as that form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution.” Further, magic involves the “management of supernatural powers in such a way that results are virtually guaranteed.”⁶ Aune’s definition acknowledges that religion and magic do no fall into wholly separate categories, and avoids the supposed idea that in the Greco-Roman world a realm of religion existed apart from the realm of magic.⁷ Therefore, within any sociological context, the influence of magic upon other religious activities or vice versa is plausible. In support, Aune notes the continual influence that would have been made specifically in regards to Christianity. He states, Since Christianity began as a religious movement within Judaism and became institutionalized within the Greco-Roman world, one suspects that there was never a time when magical traditions did not exert strong influences upon it. (Aune 2008: 382)
In agreement, Moyer V. Hubbard recognizes its prevalence and describes magic/sorcery as “... the grimy underside of Greco-Roman religion” (Hubbard 2010: 32). He adds that its “ubiquitous presence in the first century is easily confirmed but rarely taken into account when exploring the socio-religious matrix of the fledging Jesus movement” (2010: 32). His key point is that the more attractive elements of antiquity such as its marble temples and Doric columns have overshadowed and obscured the “less romantic reality of curse tablets, talismans, and bizarre nocturnal rituals” (2010: 32).

Consequently, for Jews, this magical context is part of the reality of ancient times. Hubbard points out that Jewish fortunetellers and magicians were found as the subjects in ancient literature. Further, Gideon Bohak has recognized the influence of the magical traditions that he argues were orally transmitted within the intertestamental period and not written down until approximately the third century (Bohak 2008: 138). Adding another influential background, Clinton E. Arnold brings forward the influence of the Testament of Solomon (chapter 18 gives the description of the practice of the invocation of an angel as the key to exorcism and the importance of knowing the name of the “precise angel who has the power to defeat the particular affliction spirit”) (Arnold 2012: 6), which he describes as a “Jewish shaman’s diagnostic manual,” as a key predecessor to the type of Jewish folk magic that presents itself in the actions of the sons of Sceva (2012: 6).

Another key factor at play comes with the Hellenization of the Jews, which not only contributed to the growing influence of magic but also to the burgeoning understanding of the involvement of spirits in human life. Moyer’s assessment of this matter is worth quoting at length here.

It was not only the Gentile world that was befogged with spirits, fair and foul. Many Jews, too, perceived the cosmos to be brimming with supernatural beings, and for them, like their pagan counterparts, this was not an altogether pleasant reality. One of the most important developments in Judaism of the Hellenistic and Roman eras was the widespread belief that the hosts of heaven were actively involved in human affairs-individual and national. These angelic forces, however, were not all benevolent; indeed, much of the speculation of the surviving extrabiblical Jewish texts focuses on the activity of the evil angelic host. A stroll through this literature
takes the reader into a dark and foreboding land, a world where humanity often appears as a defenseless and expendable pawn in a vast cosmic battle. (2010: 28)

Therefore, in Acts 19:11-20 the collision of both a Jewish belief in the presence of evil spirits and the concurrent belief in the potential of power obtained through magical practices collide. This pairing of beliefs is also found in other Jewish literature such as key parts of the Qumran literature. Further, numerous amulets attest to the invocation of angels for power. Due to their syncretistic nature it is difficult to neatly place each amulet into Jewish, pagan, or Christian categories (2012: 15-17). Therefore, the main point of focus here has been well stated by Philip S. Alexander. He writes concerning the syncretistic nature of magic, “Magic is highly syncretistic: magicians were prepared to use names and formulae, whatever their source – Jewish, Christian, Egyptian or Persian. Eclecticism was pursued as a matter of deliberate policy: by invoking diverse ‘gods’ the magician increased his chances of tapping into a tradition of genuine magical power” (Alexander 1999: 1070).

Further, a relatively recently discovered inscription that pre-dates most of the NT writings testifies to the syncretism present amongst magical practices and represents some of the same types of writings that are found in the magical papyri. For example, the majority of the names (including names of Jewish influence including “Iao” and “Adonai”) employed in an inscription (in which Vibia Paulina requests personal protection) are representative of the same names and patterns of invocations for power that are employed in the magical papyri. J. R. Harrison concludes in agreement with Aune and A. D. Nock that these magical formulas were already present and had a defined shape during the NT era (Nock 1972: 176-94). He contends, “If this cameo inscription is representative, we can cautiously use the magical papyri as background in understanding the New Testament texts, without the charge of anachronism disqualifying their relevance at the outset” (Harrison 2012: 10). In other words, as Harrison asserts, “the syncretistic mixture of magical names of Jewish and Graeco-Roman deities in our cameo inscription perhaps provides us imaginative insight into the techniques employed by the Jewish exorcists at Ephesus” (2012: 13). In other words, the exorcists take a cue from the typical magical procedure and attempt to find power by employing a typical magical incantation in their attempt to exorcise the
demon-possessed. Thus, Acts 19:11-20 clearly reflects this type of activity presented in this early magical inscription. These elements of syncretism clarify how the behavior of the sons of Sceva might be categorized and also demonstrate the difficulty in understanding the difference between magic and miracle that is at hand in Acts 19.

A second recently discovered inscription also contributes to the understanding of magic in Ephesus and has relevance for the study of Acts 19:11-20. The description of the victory of Artemis over an evil sorcerer practicing malevolent magic is inscribed on a white marble slab, which dates to approximately AD 165. In this inscription, Artemis is portrayed as the city’s leader who when she is put in a temple “will provide escape from (your) sufferings and will dissolve the man-destroying poison (or ‘magic’) of plague…” (2012: 37). Harrison notes that this passage is of importance for NT studies as it is the presence of Artemis that destroys the plague brought by magicians. Even though the role of magic within the cult of Artemis is greatly debated, Harrison realizes that this inscription does provide insight into the reading of Acts 19:11-20. In convergence, in 19:12 it is the presence of the cloths brought to the sick and possessed in order to provide relief just as it is the presence of Artemis that brings relief. In this, Harrison astutely realizes the correctness in R. Strelan’s observation that, “To a neutral observer, there would have been no difference between the ‘miracles’ of Paul and the ‘power’ of the exorcists or any magician. All operated through the power of a god or demon.”

Adding one more element of convergence, Graf’s analysis of the inscription recognizes the presence of systems of patronage and benefaction within the ideology of the inscription. In particular, Artemis requires that those who experience relief give praise and worship Artemis (Graf 1992: 269-70). Although Acts 19:11-20 does not outline the requirement for patronage, vv. 17-20 summarize the fact that both Jews and Greeks gave patronage to God. They responded by honoring Jesus’ name, confessing their evil deeds, and performing a costly act of burning their magical scrolls.

As noted above, the thesis of this paper asserts that 19:11-20 purposes to inform its audience of the difference between magic and miracle. What is clear from the above descriptions of the prevalence of the magical background in antiquity and also the magical background found in Ephesus is that, because of the depths of syncretism, one might have difficulty distinguishing between the activity of God through Paul as miracle and the demonstrations of power made by magicians. Luke is aware of this
environment and uses this comparison of the actions of Paul and the Sons of Sceva to make clarification.

The Intertextuality of Acts 19:11-20 and Ancient Magical Literature

In Acts 19:11-20 Luke’s choice of popular magical terms provides a link to the sociological and historical situation in Ephesus. Garrett has specifically drawn attention to a list of terms within vv. 11-20 that are common in magical writings including ἐχορκιστής, ὄνομαζειν, ὥρκῳ, κατακυριεύσας, πρᾶξις, περίεργα, and βιβλίος (Garrett 1989:98). Even though Garrett has given an already lengthy list, these are not the only words charged with magical overtones. I add that the terms δυνάμεις, ἀπαλλάσσω, κράτος, and even λόγος were commonly associated with magic. In addition, Garrett’s writing does not always allow for a discussion of each term’s usage within magical literature. In the following section, I will provide a detailed look concerning each term’s usage. Where others have noted that certain terms reflect magical writings, I will synthesize their contributions as well. Each key word will be dealt with in the order of its usage within 19:11-20.

From the outset of the pericope, the forward position of the accusative of δυνάμεις in v. 10 realizes a syntactical emphasis placed upon the term.14 Arnold has recognized the value placed upon δυνάμεις within the Hellenistic World by describing it as “one of the most common and characteristic terms in the language of pagan devotion” (Arnold 1992: 34). This emphasis is also well represented within the Greek Magical Papyri. In particular, as we have seen above, power can be acquired by naming great names of gods. For example, a charm claims one may wear a phylactery in order to be protected from demons, phantasms, suffering and sickness. The charm explains that the phylactery works because “... it is the name of power of the great god and [his] seal... (ἔστιν γὰρ δυνάμεως ὄνομα τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σφραγίς).”15 The text continues by providing the name of the god in detail. The papyri do not attribute power to the name of a certain deity alone, but multiple deities. The underlying premise is that names of deities are named as a way to gain power.

Further, spells themselves did not possess power. Power came from the gods named within the spells. For example, a charm intended to sever a relationship between two men (either friendship or love) or between a husband and wife attributed power to the god Typhon saying, “Strong Typhon, very powerful one, perform your mighty acts” (ἰσχυρὲ Τυφών, μεγαλοδύναμε, τὰς σάς δυνάμεις ἀποτέλει).16 The spells thus served as a tool
to entreat the gods to share their power. For instance, one might find success or an answer in prayer by wrapping his or her body as a corpse, facing the sun and praying. The prayers sometimes included the petition for power, “O grant me power, I beg, and give to me this favor, so that, whenssoever I tell one of the gods to come, he is seen coming…” (δυνάμωσον, ἵκετο, δός τε μοι ταύτην τὴν χάριν, ἵν’, ὅταν τινὰ αὐτῶντὸν θεὸν φράσω μολέν).17

Otto Schmitz characterizes this ideology of power found in antiquity into two main streams. In the magical papyri, Hellenistic thought, and among many of the Diaspora Jews, power was viewed as a “substance.” This view of power contrasts with the view of God’s power held throughout the OT. In the OT, God used his power for his will and also gave power to his servants who had faith in him for the specific purpose of furthering his will.18 Acts 19:11-20 expresses both views of power. Paul is portrayed as an agent of God furthering God’s work and the sons of Sceva attempt to name Jesus’ name in order to solicit his power in exorcism. Right from the beginning of the episode, the author sets forward the topic that is at hand, namely, power. The discourse continues by engaging the reader in the effects of the demonstration of the power of God in Paul’s ministry and the attempt by the sons of Sceva to entreat God’s power by calling upon the name of Jesus.

In order to further realize the meaning of the term δυνάμας, Luke qualifies it by the use of a negated aorist adjectival participle (οὐ τὰς ταχοῦσας) which adds a descriptive element to the type of powers evident in Paul’s ministry.19 Hans Conzelmann has identified this phrase as a Hellenistic idiom referring to something out of the ordinary (Conzelmann 1987: 163). English translations often render the phrase as “unusual.” The usage does not deny that exceptions may occur but rather is suggestive that they are not of the ordinary. However, the verb τυχάνω is not prominent in NT usage nor in magical writings. Further, the presence of the noun form τύχη is entirely absent from the NT corpus. In relation to magical writings, one might consider that NT writers avoided use of the noun because of the well-known presence of the god named τύχη. Betz summarizes the intense impact that the concept fate has upon those who based their religion upon the magical papyri.

The people whose religion is reflected in the papyri agree that humanity is inescapably at the whim of the forces of the universe. Religion is nothing but taking seriously this dependency on the forces of the universe.
Whether the gods are old or new, whether they come from Egypt, Greek, Jewish, or Christian traditions, religion is regarded as nothing but the awareness of and reaction against our dependency on the unfathomable scramble of energies coming out of the universe. In this energy jungle, human life can only be experienced as a jungle, too. People’s successes and failures appear to be only the result of Chance (Tyche). Individuals seem to be nothing but marionettes at the end of power lines, pulled here and there without their knowledge by invisible forces. (Betz 1992: xlvii)

Bearing in mind this context, one may consider that Luke was not only referring to the “extraordinary” nature of the powers but also to their nature as not by chance representing a more common semantic range of meaning for the term. A reader from the Greco-Roman world could understand that it was not by chance, but by the power of God that miracles were done through Paul’s hands. In support, other occurrences of δυνάμεις throughout Acts testify that the δυνάμεις belongs to God and is his work. For example, Acts 2:22 demonstrates that Jesus was approved by God by δυνάμεις καὶ τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα.20

Next, in the description of the healings in 19:12, Roy Kotansky classifies the verb ἀπαλλάσσω as one of the most routine verbs for healing in the magical literature (Kotansky 1995: 244 n.3).21 He also points out that within the NT this is the only instance of the usage of ἀπαλλάσσω for healing disease. Other occurrences are found in Luke 12:58 (used as “to settle a matter with an adversary”)22 and Heb 2:15 (“to set free from a controlling state or entity”);23 however, they represent differing semantic ranges of meaning. Calling attention to the cloths that were used for healing, Kotansky identifies these as amulets that contained no inscriptions.24 This thesis is supported by the use of στάδιον (“linen cloth”) as an important element in certain magical formulas.25 Support is also found through the reference to burning books in vv. 18-19 within the direct context of the pericope. Kotansky concludes,

Although the Ephesus episode does not mention the use of inscribed amulets, the specific reference to the burning of magical books in the immediate context of Acts 19:18-19 implies a close kinship between the ritual acts of the itinerant Jews and the Pauline amuletic kerchiefs, on the one hand, and the sorts of exorcisms and magical acts recorded in the magic literature, on the other. (1995: 245)
What becomes clear from Kotansky’s thesis is that those employing the cloths may have had great difficulty distinguishing between God’s power demonstrated through the cloths and the use of cloth in general within magical incantations.

Further, the Jewish men are referred to as exorcists (ἐξορκιστῶν). Many spells and formulas are contained within the papyri for use in exorcism employing the verb ἐξορκίζω. The etymology of the term as analyzed by Kotansky reveals that the noun form ἐξορκιστής is a budding term since there are no attestations of this form until the second century CE. The term relays the type of activity that the exorcists engage in, namely, they seek to adjure demons and cast them out. Kotansky also notes the new semantic range of meaning for ὄρκιζω (“adjure”). The term’s etymology shows that the ancient usage, occurring as early as the fifth century BCE (ἐξορκίζω), relayed the concept of an oath sworn amongst two groups. In a world attuned to spiritual beings, the use of language responded to the need for specific terminology.

In addition, the similarity between the formula used by the Jewish exorcists to exorcise the demons and the formula within the magical papyri is also at play in this pericope. The practice of adjuring by the use of names (involving ὄρκιζω and ὄνομα) is well established. The widespread use of ὄρκιζω recalls the use adjuration of differing objects towards a desired means. In one example, the underlying premise for naming names is directly stated, namely, that by naming the name of the god, one might then possess the power of that god to facilitate their adjuration. This “commendable love charm” reads,

I adjure you by the great god / who is over the vault of heaven… Hear me, greatest god, on this very day (on this night), so that you may inflame her heart, and let her love me because I have in my possession the power of the great god, whose name it is impossible / for anyone to speak, except me alone because I possess his power…

This thought is also pervasive throughout the exorcism spells. The technique of the adjuration involved not only the naming of the god as a way to assert power, but also a detailed listing of the characteristics of the god as a way to vamp up his reputation in order to cause the desired outcome.

Providing more key evidence, one of the charms accredited to Pibechis, a renowned Egyptian magician, specifically employs the name of
Jesus in exorcism: “I conjure you by the god of the Hebrews, Jesus... (οὗτος ὄρχῳ σὲ χαττὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν Ἑβραίων Ἰησοῦ...).” One is told to write the spell on a tin and hang it on the one being exorcised and recite this specific adjuration that involved the name of Jesus and further characteristics that alluded to the God of Israel. The phylactery notes adjuration by:

... the one who appeared to Osrael, in a shining pillar and a cloud by day... by the seal which Solomon placed on the tongue of Jeremiah... by god, light-bearing, unconquerable, who knows what is in the heart of every living behind, the one who formed of dust the race of humans... by the great god SABAOTH, through whom the Jordan River drew back and the Red Sea, / which Israel crossed...  

Even though these terms represent the common terminology for pagan exorcists, they do not represent the terminology found within exorcisms performed by Jesus. Garret draws attention to this distinction noting that Jesus does not adjure demons. Rather, Jesus “commands” or in third person narrative accounts “rebukes” demons. Again, Luke’s terminology choice recalls familiarity with the magical tradition.

Continuing on, the term πράξις occurs numerous times throughout the magical papyri denoting a “rite” or “ritual.” For example, “This is the prayer of encounter of the rite which is recited to Helios... (‘Εστί δὲ ἡ σύστασις τῆς πράξεως ἢδε πρός Ἡλίων γνῆμενή) ἴδον ἐν στομάτεσσα πάντες κατερύκτενο φωνήν”) or, “This is the ritual using the name that encompasses all things” (ἐστὶν δὲ ἡ πράξις τοῦ τὰ πάντα περιέχοντος ὄνοματος). Barrett educes the use of πράξις in PGM IV. 1227 which states “excellent rite for driving out demons (πράξις γενναία ἐκβάλλωνσα δαίμονας).” Bock concludes that within this setting the term ought to be translated as “magical spells” or “magical acts” rather than “deeds” conveying the people’s turning away from magical activity (Bock 2008: 604). Therefore, within magical writings πράξις is representative of a more specific range of meaning than its standard gloss conveys.

The term περίεργα is also reflective of magical terminology. M. W. Bates lays out an argument for a magical understanding of the term and translates the term as “the dark arts.” More specifically, he establishes the word’s presence in second-order magical discourse (Bates 2011: 412). Barrett also recognizes the term’s significance within a magical realm and
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translates the term as “things better left alone, not meddled with” (Barrett 1998: 2:912). Scholarship has more often noticed the magical use of this term.36

Also present in the pericope is the discussion of the books (βιβλία) that are burned. The papyri themselves attest to a great presence of magical books in antiquity. Books were written to teach others important spells. For instance, a spell for “acquiring an assistant” states, “I have dispatched this book so that you may learn thoroughly (ἀπέστειξα τήνδε τὴν βιβλίον, ἵνα ἐκμάθῃς).”37 Barrett adds that the books would with “no doubt” resemble the Greek Magical Papyri published by Preisendanz. He also reminds of the familiarity of the term ἔφεσια γράμματα within the period in order to point out Ephesus was stereotyped for their possession of such literature (1998:913).

Further, λόγος is the specific term used for “spell” or “formula” in the Greek Magical Papyri. A few examples include: 1) PGM X. 11 (Γάλον λεγόμενος translated as “Spell that is spoken”);38 2) PGM I. 51 (λόγος πείθει θεοίς translated as “god-given spells”);39 and 3) PGM I. 149 (λόγος Ελεήμη / translated as “spell to Selene”).40 In relation to Acts 19:20 the magical overtones associated with this term has caused an alteration in the author’s normal way of depicting a summary statement. Whereas Acts 6:7a and 12:24 talk of the spread of ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, the author of Luke-Acts modifies the phrase to ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου. Because of the large amount of magical terminology within the pericope, the author chooses terms that would avoid a misunderstanding of which god he was talking about.

In addition, the other summary statements in Acts do not use the phrase κατὰ κράτος. A form of this phrase is found in the Magical Papyri three times as part of magical adjuration: 1) “…because I adjure you by the strong and inexorable Destiny… (ὅτι σὲ ἐξωρκίζω κατὰ τῆς κραταιᾶς καὶ ἀρατήτου Ἀνάγκης);”41 2) “… because I adjure you by the strong and great names…” (… ὅτι σὲ ἐξωρκίζω κατὰ τῆς κραταιᾶς καὶ μεγάλων ὄνομάτων…);42 and 3) “… I adjure you by the strong Destiny… (ὅτι σὲ ἐξωρκίζω κατὰ τῆς κραταιᾶς καὶ Ἀνάγκης).”43 Not only does this phrase recall magical terminology, it also has “marked” word order since prepositional phrases do not normally begin Greek clauses. This syntactical arrangement signals an intended emphasis. Klutz adds that this emphasis suggests that both the failed exorcism attempt and the growth of the word of the Lord were a result of the Lord’s power (Klutz 1999: 269).
Further, varied terminology is represented by the replacement of ἐπληθύνετο (“was being multiplied”) with the use of the verb ἰσχύω. Beverly Gaventa has also noticed this “ironic twist” in comparison with the other summary statements pointing out the connection with the repetition of the same verb in v. 16 recalling the power the demons have over the seven exorcists (Gaventa 2003: 268). Adding from an intertextual perspective, Garrett adds that the terminology within the verse clearly reflects Luke 11:21-22 in which the strong man (ὁ ἰσχυρός) has control of his own possessions (1989: 93). The demons overpower the sons of Sceva since they have no authority by which to overpower the strong one; thus, the demon has the ability to remain in charge of the situation.

In summary, terminology common in the Greek Magical Papyri are tightly woven throughout 19:11-20. While some connections may present stronger cases than others (representing more likely allusions), the link between Luke’s choice of terms attests to his familiarity with popular magical practices within society at large. This magical background has the capacity to explain why eight of these terms (ἅπαλασσα, ἔχορκιστής, ὄνομάζω, ἀρκίζω, κατακυριεύσας, πραξίς, περίεργα, κράτος) occur only one time in Acts within Acts 19. It is clear that at the word level, Luke chose a word base that would link the ancient audiences to this magical setting. Luke’s use of terms as in combination with the magical setting at Ephesus helps to realize the fact that a person living in this environment would have had difficulty distinguishing between magical and miracle.

While for the most part this evidence at the word level has been more often noticed in support of the “anti-magic” view, I intend to contribute further evidence through an analysis of the rhetorical nature of 19:11-20. Before analyzing the rhetorical value of the pericope, I will review the status of rhetorical criticism within the book of Acts and note why many have hesitated to study the narrative portions of Acts, such as this one, for their rhetorical value.

The Rhetorical Structure of Acts 19:11-16: Syncrisis

Many biblical scholars have worked to establish the presence of rhetoric within Acts. In addition, scholars have drawn the conclusion that genre of Greco-Roman historiography bore the marks of other genres. Ben Witherington III stresses the fact that from Aristotle on, the influence of other literary traditions and rhetorical devices on history writing was clear. He adds that even at the time of the first century A.D. historical writings often
“owed more to declamation and Greco-Roman rhetoric than to careful historical study of sources and consulting of witnesses” (Witherington 1998: 40).

While scholars have examined much of Acts in light of rhetorical criticism, the methodology has only rigorously been applied to certain portions of the book, especially its speeches. Through a careful analysis of these speeches, scholars have recognized Luke’s awareness of the tradition found in rhetorical handbooks. In contrast, Parsons has noted a reluctance to probe the narrative sections of Acts for their rhetorical value. This hesitancy is connected to the notion that traditional rhetorical handbooks such as those of Cicero and Quintilian are directed towards declamation or speech writing rather than the composition of narrative. However, the exercises of Aelius Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius the Sophist, and Nicolaus the Sophist do demonstrate how to compose narrative in an effective rhetorical manner (Kennedy 2003: xiii). For example, the preface of Theon states:

There is no secret about how these exercises are very useful for those acquiring the faculty of rhetoric. One who has expressed a diēgēsis (narration) and a mythos (fable) in a fine and varied way will also compose a history well and what is specifically called “narrative” (diēgēma) in hypothesis – historical writing is nothing other than a combination of narrations – and one who can refute or confirm these is not far behind those speaking hypothesis… and we amplify and disparage and we do other things that would be too long to mention here. (2003: 4)

In addition, George A. Kennedy notes that the term Diēgēma within the context of Progymnasmatic use had become a term to indicate a type of exercise in narrative (2003: 4).

As the exercises of the Progymnasmata do not preclude an analysis of the narrative portion of Acts through the lens of rhetorical criticism, I propose that vv. 11-16 are presented in the form of a syncrisis. A definition of the syncrisis will follow in order to demonstrate that 19:11-16 adheres to the ancient descriptions of this rhetorical structure.

A Definition of Syncrisis (According to Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius and Nicolaus)

In his Exercises, Theon defines a syncrisis as the “setting the better or worse side by side” (2003: 52). Theon allows for both persons and things
to be included in this arrangement. The goal is to show which matter or person is superior through analysis of actions and good characteristics. Comparisons are to be of matters that are alike in the case when doubt exists as to which has superiority. A *syncrisis* specifically works to realize the superiority of deeds that are successful versus those that are unsuccessful. Common components include a comparison or contrast of 1) the birth, education, offices held, reputation, and the condition of the body of the persons; 2) the actions of the persons giving preference to the one who did well (brought benefit rather than harm); and 3) the resulting advantages in order to decipher which is better. This can be done in two ways including “one-to-one comparisons” (comparison of the bravest man with the bravest woman) or a comparison of things as whole (a comparison between the genus of brave men and brave women) (2003: 52–54).

In his *Preliminary Exercises*, Hemogenes broadened Theon’s view of a *syncrisis* allowing for comparison between similar and dissimilar items, lesser to greater, or greater to lesser. *Syncrisis* may be used within an invective to amplify the misdeeds. In an *encomion* the good may be amplified. For Hermogenes, a *syncrisis* begins with “encomiastic topics.” Also, in the comparison of activities it should be made known who took up the activity first (2003: 83–84). Aphthonius the Sophist also allowed for the arrangement of greater, lesser, or equal items with one another: “As a whole, *syncrisis* is a double *encomion* or <a double> invective or a speech made up out of *encomion* <and invective>” (2003: 114).

Nicolaus the Sophist classified a *syncrisis* as an exercise belonging to *encomion*, but still allowed its use in other forms of rhetoric. When *syncrisis* is used by itself, its function is evaluation. He adds that the goal is to practice “… for invention of prooemia and composition of narrations in which we mention the merits as though giving a narrative, and for the forcefulness of debates in which we try to show that things are like or greater, and for the emotion of epilogues in which we bring the hypothesis to a close” (2003: 165–66). In light of these definitions, the desired outcome of a *syncrisis* is to evaluate two items either in comparison or contrast to one another.

Further, Christopher Forbes’ analysis of the use of *syncrisis* in the Greco-Roman world validates its use as beyond just a rhetorical training exercise, but as “a living feature of literary culture” (Forbes 2003: 138). He adds that ancient authors often employed a comparative model and, in addition to the author’s already discussed, he adds that Aristotle, Cicero,
Philo, Dionyssius of Halicarnassus, and Menander Rhetor of Laodicea also discussed the rhetorical exercise. His key argument is that a chronological study of these contributors provides sufficient evidence to support that there was a “wide range of discussion on the topic” in the ancient context (2003:138). Specifically, Nicolaus gives the reason why in some cases the syncrisis had been left out of progynasmatic exercises. He explains that the syncrisis, even when used as part of another exercise must not lose its place as an exercise itself.

Some have not included what is called syncrisis (comparison) among progymnasmata at all, on that ground that there has been enough practice of it in common-places when we were making a scrutiny of something that was then being judged in relation to other wrongs, and in encomia, where we were trying to show the greatness of what was being praised by setting it next to something else; others have wanted it to be one of the progymnasmata but yet put it before encomium. Neither of these groups deserves praise; for it is not the case, when syncrisis has been taken up as a part (of a larger discourse such as common-place or encomion), that it was necessary for that reason for it to be no longer considered as constituting a whole (2003: 162).

Nicolaus therefore recognizes the syncrisis as part of other rhetorical techniques, but insists that it’s use as a whole is also appropriate.

In light of the above evidence, is it highly likely that Luke was familiar with rhetorical devices including the syncrisis. Luke’s prologue (Luke 1:1-4) to his two-part work highlights his preparedness to write in a highly educated fashion. Witherington draws out this characteristic of Luke when he writes,

... Luke is telling us on the one hand that he intends to write history in the tradition of a Thucydides or a Polybius, a tradition that involved detailed consulting of sources and eyewitnesses, but on the other he intends to write in as rhetorically effective a manner as is possible, as demonstrated by the eloquence of this very sentence (Luke 1:1-4), which some have said is the finest Greek rhetorical prose in the entire NT. (Witherington 2009: 35)

As a result, the evidence weighs in favor for Luke as a rhetorically capable writer who is familiar with the rhetorical structures prevalent in the ancient
times. Now, we will turn to analyze the elements of micro rhetoric found in Acts 19:11-16.

Acts 19:11-16: A Syncrisis


Moreover, Acts 19:11-16 does meet the outlined characteristics of a typical *syncrisis*. At the outset, the two events, the miracles of Paul and the exorcism attempt of the Jewish magicians, are placed beside one another on equal terms. Through one-to-one comparison both parties are “doing” (use of ποιέω) similar activities. The initial comparison would allow for the estimation that since both were doing the same that they would have equal results. Both are on equal grounds and by taking into account Theon’s definition of *syncrisis* there is a possibility that doubt existed as to which was actually superior.

Activity #1
1. Δυνάμεις τε ού τάς τυχούσας ὁ θεός ἐποίει διὰ τῶν χειρῶν Παύλου
2. God was performing extraordinary miracles through the hands of Paul

Activity #2
1. ἦσαν δὲ τινὸς Σκεφᾶ Ἰουδαίων ἁγιερεύως ἐπτὰ νεοὶ τοῦτο ποιοῦντες.
2. Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this (attempting to cast out an evil spirit).

Only through the development of the *syncrisis* does the reader realize that the two do not end on equal terms. Therefore, the *syncrisis* can be classified as an *encomium*/invective type. The actions of God through Paul are shown to be good/successful while the actions of the Jewish exorcists are depicted as being bad/unsuccesful. Particularly, both events present key features of the use of *syncrisis* within the *Progymnasmata* including a
presentation of the reputation or family of the main characters, their actions and a description of the results of their action.

Activity #1
1. **Reputation:** Paul is an agent of God (v. 11).
2. **Action:** God was doing extraordinary miracles through the hands of Paul (v. 11).
3. **Result:** This action produced a positive/successful result and brought benefit to others. The sick were healed, and the evil spirits cast out (v. 12).

Activity #2
1. **Reputation:** The Jewish exorcists’ “good birth” is referred to: They are the sons of Sceva, the Jewish chief priest (v. 13). However, the reputation is quickly narrowed. The evil spirit knew both Jesus and Paul but does not know them (v. 15-16). (The reputation of Jesus and Paul is actually affirmed in this statement). 
2. **Action:** They attempt to employ the name of Jesus in order to cast out a spirit (v. 13).
3. **Result:** The actions of the Jewish exorcists produce a disastrous/unsuccessful result. They are the recipients of harm and shame. They are beaten, stripped, and cast out of the house (v. 16).

The presence of a *syncrisis* intrinsically expresses the relationship between these two events indicating that one must read the events in light of the other. Paul’s success is clearly attributed to the work of God. The results were praiseworthy as many were healed and demons were exorcised. On the other hand, the sons of Sceva experienced severe humiliation and are shamed. First, the reputation is degraded by the demon as he denies an awareness of their identity and in an ironic twist affirms the identity of Jesus and Paul. Further, they are stripped naked and beaten by the man possessed by the demon spirit.

Klutz shows that this story ought to remind us of the Lukan account of Jesus’ encounter with the Gerasene demoniac since, “... whereas Jesus overpowers an entire legion of demons on his own (Luke 8:30-33) and transforms the naked demoniac into a clothed disciple (Luke 8:27, 35) the seven itinerants cannot manage a solitary demon, despite their numerical
advantage, or even prevent the fiend from wounding them and tearing their clothes off” (Klutz 1999: 273). At the heart of the *syncrisis*, Paul is praised as an agent of the power of God while the sons of Sceva are disgraced and powerless over the demon. Therefore, even though the sons of Sceva attempt to do the same type of activity that God had demonstrated through Paul, the two do not end up on equal terms.

**Ultimate Result: Effect of the Syncrisis in Antiquity (vv. 17-20):**

**Result #1:** After this event became known to the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus, they became afraid, and Jesus’ name was magnified (v 17).

**Result #2:** Believers confessed their evil deeds; those who practiced sorcery publicly destroyed their valuable books. (vv. 18-19).

**Final result:** The word of the Lord was spreading and having power.

In vv. 17-20 Luke takes the time to narrate the effect of the juxtaposition of the two activities compared in the *syncrisis*. In other uses of the *syncrisis* as identified by Parsons, Luke also narrates the effect the comparison had upon its first audience. Following the comparison of the two compared events, Luke depicts that when the failed exorcism attempt had become known, believers confessed their deeds and involvement in magical activity, which led to the destruction of their valuable property. Therefore, what the original audience gleaned from the event was that their magical possessions were powerless in comparison to the power of God demonstrated through Paul.

**Conclusion**

In summary, when comparing the actions of the Paul and the sons of Sceva, the *syncrisis* reveals the heart of the comparison as between the action in activity #1 (God was doing extraordinary miracles through the hands of Paul (v. 11)) and the action in activity #2 (The sons of Sceva attempt to employ the name of Jesus in order to cast out a spirit (v. 13)). In light of the magical terminology present within the pericope and the ancient magical setting, all indicators point to the fact that Luke did not write an invective against syncretism in general, but he wrote an invective against those who attempted to employ magical practices to generate the same results as what God was doing through the hands of Paul. Luke’s narration of the effect upon the original audience, namely, the burning of books,
supports this invective against magic. As a result, Luke's juxtaposition of the two events is indicative of the audience’s inability to initially understand the differentiation between miracle as the work of God through the hands of Paul and magic as the invocation of powerful names to attain power. After the syncrisis which includes an encomium for Paul and an invective against the sons of Sceva, this matter is clarified for the audience.

End Notes


2 Space will not allow for an analysis of how this pericope contributes to the overall narrative of Acts. See Garrett who argues that Acts 19:10-20 contributes to the “ongoing Christian triumph over Satan, and, consequently, over magic.” She notes that this pericope’s contribution to the theme of the defeat of Satan has often been overlooked because of the emphasis upon the unknown identity of the sons of Sceva as well as textual issues in comparison with the Western text. Garrett states, “… commentators have failed to ask important interpretive questions, such as how the demon’s vocal and physical response in vv. 15-16 relates to Luke’s understanding of exorcism… ; and why observers could have regarded the apparent victory of a demon as a defeat of magic.” Garrett, The Demise of the Devil, 90.

Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 1-2 notes that much opposition has existed concerning the study of the magical background of the New Testament due to the belief that to gain an understanding of magical practices is considered unacceptable for Christians. She also notes that many readers have become embarrassed by the NT accounts as “Christians’ actions seem hardly to differ from those of the ‘magicians.’”


Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 376-77. Aune 1) emphasizes the near impossibility of categorizing magic and religion into separate socio-cultural classifications, 2) avoids the pejorative usage of the term “magic”, and 3) pinpoints that magic is found within religious traditions and is not religion (it is a species of religion and not the genus of religion itself).

This definition is given largely in response to the view of magic held before World War I that religion and magic were clearly distinguishable from religion. NT scholars after World War II began to employ the distinction and defined magic as a mark of the beginning stage of a person’s religious growth or as a form of perverted religion. What followed was the trend to discredit magic as a form of religion. See Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 371-2.


description of 11Q11, 4Q560, 4Q510 and 4Q511 as Qumran magical handbooks.

10 The Greek transliteration of the tetragrammaton.

11 J. R. Harrison, “Magic” in New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek and Other Inscriptions and Papyri published between 1988 and 1992 (ed. S. R. Llewelyn, J. R. Harrison, and E. J. Bridge; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 10-12. Harrison concludes that this inscription is not from the world of Jewish magic, as it lacks “indications of Jewish monotheism . . . any reference to the angelic world, or to the Old Testament scriptures.” Even though this argument from silence might have some probability of correctness, one must also remember the depth of the syncretism that was often present in these magical contexts. Nevertheless, Harrison does appropriately recognize that the inscription sheds light on the fact that magical formulas such as this one had been formulated at an early date.


14 The same emphasis is seen in the phrase Χάριν δὲ οὖ τὴν τυχεόσαν in Dio Chrysostom, Or. 18. 2:214-15.


16 PGM XII. 375. Betz, The Greek Magical Papyri, 166. Other examples include PGM II 117-124, PGM III 565, and many others.


19 Only one other instance of the use of the negated participle form of τυχέω is found in the NT. In Acts 28:2 the participle is used to give description to the type of hospitality shown to Paul on the Island of Malta. The verb form is found in ten other instances. These occurrences can be categorized into three groupings. Seven times the verb is used transitively taking its object in the genitive case (Luke 20:35; Acts 24:2, 26:22, 27:3; 2 Tim 2:10; Heb 11:35). The objects received by this verb are received as a gift rather than earned (for example: God’s help, salvation, peace, Christ’s priestly ministry). Two times the verb is used within an optative clause (1 Cor. 14:10, 15:37). One instance of an adverbial participle occurs (Heb 8:16). Overall, τυχέω is used with a nuance of probability in mind.
20 See also 3:12-13; 4:7-8; 6:8; 8:10-13; 10:38 in which δυνάμεις is ultimately attributed to God’s work.

21 Witherington also notes that the term frequents within the medical writings in antiquity (The Acts of the Apostles, 580).

22 BDAG, 96.

23 BDAG, 96.


25 Roy Kotansky, “Greek Exorcistic Amulets,” 244. See the usage of συνάρμα in PGM VII. 826; XXXVI, 269 and the use of συνάρμ, συνάγων, and συνάρματα in PGM II. 162 III. 294, 706; IV. 88, 171, 175, 429, 1861, 3095; V. 217; XIII. 98. With this in mind Kotansky concludes “…there is little to detract from the prospect that the cloths, once used effectively, would have been deployed again and again. These magically-charged reliquaries would have no doubt been reapplied with the necessary prayers or incantations: the young Christian community at Ephesus, it seems, adhered tenaciously to their magical beliefs, in some cases for up to two years after conversion (Acts 19:10).” It is not until the failure of the exorcists that the believing ones burn their treasured books.

26 Kotansky, “Greek Exorcistic Amulets,” 249. See 249-277 for a thorough discussion of the term’s use within Greek Magical Papyri.

27 Kotansky, “Greek Exorcistic Amulets,” 245. For Kotansky, the accuracy with which the spell has been preserved speaks to the historical plausibility of the formula as well as the author’s remembering of the trend by Jewish exorcists to use the name of Jesus in their incantation. A. Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, vol. 1 (trans. J. Moffat; London: Williams and Norgate, 1908), 119-21. Harnack adds that it was even admitted that “at a very early period pagan exorcists appropriated the names of the patriarchs (cp. Orig., Cels. I. xxii.), of Solomon, and even of Jesus Christ… even Jewish exorcists soon began to introduce the name of Jesus in their incantations.” See Harnack for evidence showing church’s response which involved making a clear distinction between exorcists using of the name of Christ, magicians, pagan sorcerers, and others.


29 See PGM II 125 as an example.

30 PGM IV. 3015. Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 96.


33 PGM III. 192. Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 23.

34 PGM XIII. 343. Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 182.


36 See BDAG, 800.

37 PGM I. 52.

38 Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 149. This example represents a common way to refer to a written spell and recurs several times throughout the papyri.

39 Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 4.

40 Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 7.

41 PGMXXXVI. 341. Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 277.

42 PGMXXXVI. 347. Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 277.

43 PGMXLIV. 33.


45 Following the syncrisis in 2:29-36, an encomium of David and Jesus, Luke follows up by narrating its effect, which is strikingly comparable to the effect of the syncrisis in 19:11-17 (specifically in comparison is the presence of fear and getting rid of possessions). Thirdly, Acts 19:5 indicates that baptism in the name of Jesus followed.

46 In three other syncrisis identified by Parsons, Luke also narrates the effect the comparison had upon its first audience. Following the syncrisis in 2:29-36 which is an encomium of David and Jesus, Luke follows up by narrating its effect which is strikingly comparable to the effect of the syncrisis in 19:11-17 (specifically in comparison is the presence of fear and getting rid of possessions). Thirdly, Acts 19:5 indicates that baptism in the name of Jesus followed.
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From the Archives: H.C. Morrison- A Man of Mission?!

As we enter the period of Asbury Theological Seminary’s centennial celebration, there is naturally a lot of reflecting back on Asbury’s founder, Rev. H.C. Morrison, and the important parts of his life which led to the founding of the Seminary in 1923. He is known as a fiery preacher, a camp meeting revivalist, an inspirational leader, able administrator, and fierce defender of the holiness doctrine of sanctification. But one label often missed by historians and researchers is his passion for missions. Perhaps this is because it was only beginning to be fully developed when he was chosen to lead Asbury College (now Asbury University) in 1910. This is a part of Asbury’s history which deserves to be told, and which some might find surprising.

Born March 10, 1857, Henry Clay Morrison was converted in December of 1870 and was licensed to preach in the Kentucky Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1878. In 1887 he had his experience of entire sanctification, which radically changed his life. He started a paper to promote the doctrine in 1888, which became The Pentecostal Herald, still published today as The Herald. He left the Methodist Conference in 1890 to focus his energies full time on evangelism and his publishing work at the Pentecostal Publishing Company. He rejoined the Conference only to be expelled in 1896 over his preaching of entire sanctification, and in 1897 in a controversial trial known as the Morrison Case, he was restored to the Church. While he returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and felt strongly that the doctrine of entire sanctification must remain a part of the Wesleyan tradition, the amount of holiness opposition within the church leadership made him recognize the need for a greater organization of holiness people outside of denominational control. After the ecclesiastical trial, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had passed a law in their discipline to specifically
prevent any other denominational pastors or evangelists from preaching in an area without the consent of the local pastor. Morrison ignored this rule and in the summer of 1904 was requested not to hold holiness meetings in Denton, Texas based on this law. Morrison refused to obey, but was clearly aware of increasingly strong opposition to the holiness message in the church hierarchy. He became involved in working to create and support an association called the Holiness Union of the South (or just the Holiness Union), which would help holiness people function in a united, nondenominational way to accomplish larger ministries like conferences, publishing, education, and missions. At this time, his involvement with mission becomes intricately connected with his work on the Holiness Union, but it is important to start at the beginning, with Morrison’s passion for Cuba and how that developed into concrete mission work.

Photo of the wreck of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana Harbor, Cuba in 1898. The sinking of the Maine was the start of the Spanish-American War and the United States maintained a presence in Cuba after the war, opening the way for Protestant mission.

(Photo from the Library of Congress in the Public Domain.)
Morrison became interested in the issue of Cuba along with many others of his day. Cuba had been involved in a long fight for independence from Spain, and Morrison referred to this in *The Pentecostal Herald*, when he wrote in 1904, “I had thought of Cuba for years, and loved her. When Maceo was killed I was preaching in Portland, Oregon, I went down to the basement of the church and cried like a child.” Cuba, along with Puerto Rico and the Philippines were taken as U.S. possessions following the Spanish-American War in 1898. This opened up Latin America to Protestant mission work in a way which had not been possible under Spanish colonialism. From 1898 to 1902 a number of mission groups descended on Cuba. As Louis Pérez wrote, “By the time U.S. military rule over Cuba came to an end in May 1902, no less than a score of Protestant denominations had inaugurated evangelical activities in Cuba, including Northern and Southern Baptists, Southern Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, the Disciples of Christ, Quakers, Pentecostalists, and Congregationalists. In fact, so many missionaries arrived in Cuba at one time that denominational competition quickly got out of hand.” American (or Northern) Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians arrived in 1899 shortly after the Methodists in 1898, with the Quakers arriving in 1900 and the Pentecostal Mission (a holiness group which joined the Nazarene Church in 1915) in 1902.

H.C. Morrison kept his eye on this political and spiritual situation. He wrote in *The Pentecostal Herald* in November of 1898,

The acquisition of new territory by the United States government opens up a large field for missionary enterprise, and greatly increases our obligation. In the territory ceded to us by Spain, either Protestantism has not been tolerated at all, or it has been so greatly embarrassed in its work as to be almost helpless. But now these islands will be open to us and it becomes our duty to carry to them the gospel as soon as we can. The holiness people ought to send missionaries into Cuba, Porto Rico and the Philippines. We would not have any person who enjoys the blessing of entire sanctification fail in the discharge of his full duty to the church of which he is a member. But could we not by some special self-denial during Christmas week of this year, raise a fund sufficient to send a missionary full of the Holy Ghost and faith, into each of these fields? Who seconds this motion?
Morrison was equally encouraged through a speech from Bishop Candler in 1899 at the Broadway Methodist Church in Louisville, Kentucky on the issue of Cuba. He referred to it in a short article in *The Pentecostal Herald*, where he quoted the Bishop as saying “Cuba is our nearest, neediest, ripest field” (emphasis in the original) and added from his own thoughts, “Now is the auspicious moment for work in Cuba. The freedom and food that the Americans have given to those people, have opened a wide and effectual door to their hearts. We should enter at once.” This set the stage for Morrison’s first venture into the world of foreign missions.

**Morrison’s Mission to Cuba and Indirectly Mission to Puerto Rico and Costa Rica**

In 1900, Morrison joined the movement of other Christian denominations and went to Cuba to found a holiness mission. Morrison’s diary relates how he left for Havana on February 27, 1900, and arrived on March 3rd, where he wrote, “Cast on shore in Havana harbor about daylight. Hurrying on deck, I looked out and feast my eyes on what I had longed to see. There was the wreck of the *Maine* just in front of us, and Morro Castle at our rear. Ships of every sort about us, the city rising up from the water’s edge, the palm trees fringing the skyline on the hills in the distance. How beautiful.” The next day was a Sunday, and Morrison preached at the Southern Methodist Mission in Havana, and he noted that he was pleased with the response of the Cuban people. But costs in the capital were high, and Morrison was convinced Havana was not the right spot for a holiness mission, so he set out with a Brother M.L. (Max Leon) Pardo (1867-1928), who would serve as interpreter. He reached Cárdenas on March 9, 1900 and in the course of the day rented a house, chairs, and other furniture for the mission. By March 14th he sailed out of Cuba after preaching among U.S. soldiers at a Y.M.C.A. hall. In reflecting back on this trip in 1904, Morrison wrote,

> I little dreamed that God was going to let me be the first man to unfurl the white banner of perfect love on the Island, and preach the first sermon on holiness, as a subsequent work of grace to the people. I would rather have done this than to have commanded the American army at San Juan Hill. Amen. Bro. Edwards, our missionary at Cárdenas, was the first man on the Island to receive the second definite work of grace.”
Page from H.C. Morrison’s diary for March 3, 1900, when he arrived in Cuba.

(Used with Permission of the B.L. Fisher Archives and Special Collections)
Apparently, Brother Pardo was more than an interpreter, but seems to have run the mission in its first three years. A letter to *The Pentecostal Herald* in May of 1900 from M.L. Pardo in Cárdenas, Cuba noted, “We have been preaching services on Sunday and Wednesday. Organized a Sunday School with twenty members, principally young people, who seem delighted that they could learn more of God.” In addition, Pardo was planning on opening a school. In late 1903 or early 1904 an Asbury College student, Sidney Williams Edwards (1878-1962) was working at the mission in Cárdenas and Morrison was raising money for the mission in *The Pentecostal Herald*. Edwards may possibly be one of the soldiers that Morrison preached to on his first trip based on Morrison’s quote. He had been a soldier in the Spanish-American War in Cuba with the 7th Calvary, Company K, and while we do not know the whole story, he married a young Cuban lady, Margarita Rosa Gacerio. In an account of Edwards attending a convention in 1905, C.F. Wimberly wrote,

The pleasures of the day were greatly enhanced by the arrival of Bro. S.W. Edwards and his beautiful Cuban wife. Bro. Edwards is the Pentecostal missionary at Cárdenas, Cuba. Seven years ago, Bro. Edwards went to Cuba with his gun to fight for Cuban liberty, and while serving as a soldier boy, was sanctified under the preaching of Bro. Morrison. From that hour he began to study and prepare for a liberty to the Cubans that would make them free indeed. He took the first Protestant printing press to the Island, and with it, he has printed tracts by thousands... God can do more for the salvation of a people, with one soldier boy, fully saved, than with scholarly emissaries, endorsed by bishops, university faculties, and missionary boards, without the holy anointing.

According to his 1917 passport application, Edwards had been in Cuba from January 1899 to January 1901 (after being discharged from the military) and returned to Cuba in 1904 (Asbury College records show he was enrolled as a student in 1901-1902). From 1904 to 1907, Edwards is a regular presence in *The Pentecostal Herald*. Early on he reported preaching in three different parts of Cárdenas, and his work frequently involved preaching, visiting, and distributing tracts and Bibles or portions of the Bible in Spanish. Edwards also enjoyed using military imagery for his work as he wrote, “By the grace of God, I have raised a hostile flag to all sin in the island of Cuba; and by His grace will wage an unrelenting warfare against
it until the victory is won, and the warm seas that bathe her rocky shores
sing the sweet anthem of the free; or till I am honorably discharged from the
service. Then I will lay my gun aside, pull off my uniform, and calmly leave
the field, to receive a welcome reception from my loved ones at home.”

In early 1904, Morrison travelled back to Cuba for a visit along
with Edwards and Morrison’s young son, Howard. Morrison reflected back
on his mission work and more recent visit to Cuba in a three-part series in
The Pentecostal Herald. Some quotes from these reflections have been used
earlier in this essay, but he also makes a strong missiological statement when
he wrote, “The Holy Ghost put a love in my heart for Cuba, and the Cubans
years ago, and my heart has cried out for them, and mine eyes have seen
the salvation of the Lord in their midst.” By February of 1904, Edwards
wrote about a revival breaking out in Cárdenas where the size of the church
building they rented could not hold the people, so he moved the pulpit into
the doorway so he could preach to the standing-room only crowd inside
the church and those gathered outside as well. As the year progressed,
Edwards had the help of Raymond C. Moreno, the son of a Cuban professor
who received several years of education in the U.S. sponsored by holiness
people, and the work continued to grow with the help of some 700 copies
of Bibles, testaments, and gospels from the American Bible Society (which
Edwards called his “ammunition”).

By the end of 1904, the mission in Cárdenas was quite successful.
There was a new mission hall created in May from renting two houses and
removing a wall so that it could seat 500 people. An E.E. Hubbard and his
wife Laura, who ran an orphanage in Matanzas relocated to Cárdenas and
soon had 75 children in their care. A Cuban Holiness Association had been
formed with E.L. Latham of Matanzas as the president, E.E. Hubbard as the
vice president, S.W. Edwards as the secretary, and F.E. Blanes of Cárdenas
(apparently a director of a museum) as the treasurer. Contact had been
made with a holiness evangelist, T.L. Adams who visited the area, and he
and his wife became correspondents advocating for the mission work.
Outreach work in the community of Hato Nuevo had begun with some of
Edwards' largest crowds yet (there is some indication this area was where
his father-in-law lived) and the mission had received a portable organ. By
December, E.L. Latham had also relocated from Matanzas and was listed as
a new missionary working alongside Edwards. Edwards had also written a
longer article on the importance of prayer and missions, in which he wrote,
If holiness people were to get the burden of prayer and the spirit of missions and begin to agonize to God, and open their pocket-books, would it be impossible for God to cause a great upheaval in Cuba within the next five years? Suppose we set a day for prayer and fasting that God may raise up workers and means for the speedy evangelization of Cuba? I say, speedy, because the work is urgent. We are not responsible for those who lived a hundred years ago, neither are we responsible for those who will live a hundred years hence; but a fearful responsibility rests upon us for those who now inhabit this fair isle. By bringing those to Christ we shall solve a problem in regard to those who shall live in Cuba a hundred years hence.21

By February of 1905 Edwards appealed to readers of The Pentecostal Herald to help in supplying a building for the rapidly growing mission.

The time has come when we ought to move forward in our work here. House rent is exceedingly high in Cuba. We pay twenty-six dollars every month for house rent; that is more than three hundred dollars a year, and our chapel and living apartments are not at all what they ought to be. There is a corner lot now for sale only a few blocks from the center of the city, and I believe the best located lot for us in Cárdenas, and it is remarkably cheap. A lot near this one and not so well located for us is valued at one thousand dollars. But this lot can now be bought for six hundred dollars,- really we can buy it for four hundred and pay the other two hundred in the future, or never pay it just as we prefer, only that we will have to pay ten dollars every year until we pay the other two hundred.

I am praying the Lord to touch the hearts of the people to help us buy this. We have received one hundred dollars with which to buy the lot and have deposited it in the bank, so we only lack three hundred dollars. A Cuban gentleman who loves our work, and who owns a rock quarry, has kindly offered us all the stone we need to build with. We ought to take advantage of these things. This lot is so cheap that it will not remain unsold very long. I understand that a merchant is now trying to sell some of his property in order to buy this lot and build on it. Let us lay the foundation of a monument to the blood of Jesus to cleanse from all sin, by buying this lot, and then let us put two or three men in the quarry getting out stone with which to build the Lord’s house. Remember that to get this lot we must not delay; in this, time means much money. If you want to have a share in this work send what you can to the Pentecostal
Publishing Company, to Brother Morrison, or to us, only do not delay. Remember we only lack three hundred dollars, but it must be had at once or the lot will be sold.22

In June of 1905 Morrison was looking forward to the second Holiness Union Convention in Meridian, Mississippi (which will be discussed later in this essay). He outlined his missional views connecting the Cuban mission and the Holiness Union in an editorial, which helps highlight his overall vision for mission. He wrote,

We ought to be able to turn over our missionary work to the management of a board made up of one or more representatives from each organization represented in the Holiness Union.

The uniting of our missionary efforts will unite our hearts, in the one greatest work in which the servants of Christ can engage. It will stimulate our efforts, and enable us to accomplish something of a permanent character in the mission fields. It will be the three golden links, to bind us into closer union with Christ, each other, and the lost in the regions beyond.

With such a union of missionary effort we could soon establish a permanent Pentecostal work in Cuba, Porto Rico, Mexico, Japan, China, and India, and other places as the years go by.

Brethren and sisters, you are bound to see the great advantage in such a combination of missionary effort. We love the brethren, we believed that a full salvation gospel is their greatest need, the Lord is calling out missionaries among the holiness people. Let us unite our efforts, and send out and support those who are being called from our ranks to go.23

In September, Edwards also added some of his thoughts about the potential of work with the Holiness Union. He noted, “Our Holiness Union must not think of having just one little mission station in Cuba. We must establish a great printing plant here at Cárdenas, and sow this country down in holiness literature. We must have a home for holiness here in Cárdenas. But we must have a score of holiness missionaries who will follow God’s plan, that is, get the people saved and then educate them. We must have missionaries who will labor to make the Cubans Christians, not Protestants” (italics in the original).24 Edwards went on to report the soon arrival of a printing press, but the need for $300 for printing material. One imagines this goal was probably due to the direct help of Morrison and his Pentecostal Printing
Company work in Louisville, Kentucky, which printed *The Pentecostal Herald*.

In a report on the Holiness Union Convention in Meridian, Morrison noted that $1,721.35 was subscribed for missionary work, and a mission board was established which included B.F. Hayes (president of Asbury College), M.A. Beeson (president of Meridian Male College), and H.C. Morrison himself along with several others.25 By May of 1906 the oversight of the Cuba mission shifted to the Holiness Union,26 and Morrison became more concerned with the overarching work of the organization. But the work of the Cuban mission remained connected, especially through *The Pentecostal Herald* as the voice of the Holiness Union. Throughout 1906 Edwards was busy with a new project, the arrival of the printing press. By June, Edwards has created a weekly Spanish language holiness paper in Cuba (possibly the first Spanish language holiness paper in Latin America) called *El Cristiano Pentecostes*, and had a distribution to 3,000 readers. In addition, he was printing out thousands of Spanish language tracts, which were being requested from Spain, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Central America as well as occasionally from South America and parts of the U.S. as well. Edwards even dreamed of creating a Pentecostal Bible and Tract Depository in Cuba! 27 As Morrison wrote in reporting on the third Holiness Union Convention in Atlanta, Georgia that year,

> Bro. S.W. Edwards, our missionary from Cuba, is here in excellent health with a good report, and full of enthusiasm for the spread of full salvation in Cuba. Through the means of the weekly full-salvation paper he is publishing, he no doubt is touching more people than any other score of missionaries on the Island, and the hungry people of other Spanish speaking countries are eagerly taking the paper... The government authorities of Cuba are so well-pleased with the moral tone of this paper, and its good effect upon the people that they have permitted it to go through the post-office free of any charge.28

At this same convention, the Board of the Holiness Union listed new missionaries, including Bro. Sarmast of Persia, two brothers of the last name Roberts who were planning to go to India, and Bro. James Taylor and his wife Sister Flora Phelps who were leaving to do evangelization in the West Indies.
In early 1907, Edwards returned to Cuba via New York where he picked up much needed printing supplies. In February, M.L. Pardo returned to Cárdenas and reported that the mission was reaching 4,000 people a week. Pardo returned to his former position leading the Cárdenas mission work in March, allowing Edwards to focus more attention on the printing and evangelistic work. In addition, Edwards reported on a third missionary convention being held with all of the evangelical churches in Cuba. By September, Pardo was starting a school in Cárdenas with a $2 a month tuition. In October of 1907, Edwards wrote of increasing anti-Protestant opposition from Catholic leaders, in particular over a lengthy drought that year. Catholic priests blamed the cause of the drought on Cubans allowing Protestants onto the island. In 1908, *The Pentecostal Herald* suddenly becomes silent about Cuba, focusing instead on other missionary endeavors. The only comment on Cuba comes in a brief overview by the secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in June with a rather cryptic comment, “We have the largest Protestant membership on the Island and the largest responsibility for its evangelization” (nothing is said about the work at Cárdenas). Edwards wrote in November of 1908 a letter from Puerto Rico in which he indicated some people might be surprised at his current location, and that he missed Cuba, but,

God has put His seal upon our work here; the first week after landing we began a revival at Culebra Island; it lasted just one week. Fifty were converted and over one hundred professed to have been blessed and expressed a desire to be saved. From Culebra we went to Vieques, or Crab Island, where the Lord most wonderfully blessed us. We were in Vieques nearly two months and the power of God was felt in every service; here we found a large number of English-speaking negros of the British West Indies; many of them Christians and on fire for God. Some of them may be converts of Bro. Taylor. We held English services occasionally for them. My! How they could pray. We kept no account of professions; nineteen joined the M.E. Church.

From Vieques we came to Guayama where we are at present battling for God. The Superintendent of the M.E. Missions here is an old time Methodist; he believes, teaches, professes, and I think possesses the blessing of entire sanctification. We will continue our present work until conference the last of January, when we will be given a circuit of from twelve to twenty appointments, scattered over the mountains and separated by rapid
flowing rivers. The circuits here in many respects resemble the circuits of the mountain districts of Kentucky, save that they are larger and much more densely populated.\(^35\)

A letter from December of 1908 from E.L. Latham shows this worker at the Cuban mission also left in June to take an American congregation in the Canal Zone, and he was expecting this to end in December when he might go into the interior of Panama to preach to the natives.\(^36\) By the 1910 census, M.L. Pardo and his family were living in Waco, Texas, where he was serving as a minister. What happened to the Holiness Union mission work in Cárdenas is still in need of explanation with further research, but it appears to have fallen under the control of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the holiness missionaries dispersed. It is unclear how Morrison felt about this change in the Cuban mission at the time, but he had reflected on this earlier in 1904, when he wrote, “Some suggested that the mission work at Cardenas be turned over to the church (in this case the Methodist Episcopal Church, South). Under existing circumstances, we could not consider such a proposition. The holiness movement needs a Port of Entry, and a coaling station on that Island.”\(^37\) Morrison had previously written in the same article a strong criticism about Methodist missionaries on Cuba not having had the sanctification experience.

It is important to recognize that mission was a key component of the Holiness Union, and in the same issue of *The Pentecostal Herald* where Edwards’ surprising letter from Puerto Rico appears, is also the first announcement of Morrison’s upcoming missionary tour around the world on behalf of the Holiness Union, which will be discussed in the next section of this essay. However, before moving to that subject, it is interesting to follow Sidney W. Edwards and see how Morrison’s initial work ended up powerfully influencing Methodist mission work in Costa Rica. By June of 1908 (based on his 1919 passport application), Edwards had left Cuba as a missionary with the Methodist Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico, where he remained until September of 1917. Edwards’ work in Puerto Rico from 1908 till 1917 needs further research, but it might prove to have had a significant influence on Methodism in Puerto Rico as well.

While Edwards’ experience in Cuba was relatively short (from 1904-1908), this work (and his subsequent work in Puerto Rico from 1908-1917) was training for his entrance into mission work in Costa Rica as a pioneering missionary for the Methodist Episcopal Church. Methodists
entered Costa Rica in 1917, with George Amos Miller from Panama and Eduardo Zapata from Mexico. Miller soon returned to Panama, but Zapata founded the “Church of the Redeemer” in San José in the private home of Modesto Le Roy, and was replaced in 1918 by Sidney Edwards from Puerto Rico. According to Barclay, Edwards

... got off the train in San José at four o’clock on Tuesday afternoon, 22 January 1918, found himself a hotel room, went out and looked up Modesto Le Roy, went back to the hotel for supper, returned to Le Roy’s at eight, and held a prayer meeting with five people. The next night, Edwards held another prayer meeting in the Le Roy home, with twelve present. Following a careful explanation of membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church, all twelve stepped forward and stood in a semicircle around Edwards to signify their candidacy for membership- “twelve as bright conversions as I have ever seen,” said Edwards, who also saw the streets and alleys of San José as “just full of humanity needing salvation.” This he called the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Costa Rica. Prayer meetings continued nightly at Modesto Le Roy’s, winning more converts- young men and women- until on his first weekend in Costa Rica, Edwards received twenty-five probationers. 

Within a short time, Edwards established additional congregations in Cartago and Heredia and rented a building for the congregation in San José and equipped it from his own personal funds. Soon the hall was overwhelmed with more than 100 candidates for membership. The “Church of the Redeemer” moved into a building on Avenida Central in 1919. Some administrators seemed worried Edwards was doing too much too quickly, but an account of his work in Costa Rica from Methodist Mission Secretary North noted, “He is doing one of the finest bits of organizing and training work that I have seen anywhere. He is following the discipline literally and developing a church on strictly old-fashioned, John Wesley, class-meeting lines. He has seven classes with leaders and the leaders report every week on every member and collect the contributions.” By 1919, Edwards and his family were in Meridian, Mississippi (home of a major holiness college also connected to the Holiness Union) while applying for a passport. While Edwards did not remain long in Costa Rica (leaving about 1920 or 1921), few would guess that this pioneering Methodist missionary (arguably the founder of the first Methodist congregations in Costa Rica) was trained and inspired through Morrison’s short holiness mission in Cuba and through
Asbury College. A letter by J.A. Brownlee from Costa Rica, published in *The Pentecostal Herald* in 1921 also noted the connection, as he wrote, “Asbury College is well represented here. Rev. S.W. Edwards, Rev. and Mrs. James N. Smith, and Mrs. Brownlee and I are Asbury folks and none of us ashamed of the doctrines taught there.”^{41} In modern Central America, only Costa Rica has a prominent Methodist presence, and the Costa Rican Church has maintained connections with Asbury Seminary, even if unaware of this early connection and influence.

However, the Cuba mission was not Morrison’s only connection with mission. Back in 1905, at the same time Edwards was making an appeal for a new building in *The Pentecostal Herald*, Morrison was also promoting missions. In February of 1905 in his editorial in *The Pentecostal Herald*, Morrison noted a “Missionary Training School” being held in Nashville, Tennessee in the basement of McKendree Church. He also wrote, “There is arising everywhere the profound conviction that the gospel must be preached, and that without delay, to the whole world. ‘World Evangelization’ is becoming a watchword. Amen. May the Holy Spirit stir and move all Christians, of all churches, in a mighty effort to win the world to Jesus.”^{42} Morrison’s involvement with the Cuban mission does not last long once oversight shifts to the Holiness Union, but it is a key part of the story as it helped Morrison focus his attention on the concerns of mission in terms of the Holiness Union itself.

**Morrison and His Evangelistic Trip Around the World**

While Morrison’s involvement in Cuba and the end of the Cuban mission is not always clear, part of the problem Morrison might have been encountering was the difficulty in maintaining a foreign mission presence from a single holiness congregation in Louisville, Kentucky, even with Morrison’s extensive connections and resources through *The Pentecostal Herald*. Morrison seems to have had this problem in mind, at least partially, when he sought to unite similarly minded holiness organizations and institutions in the Southern U.S. into one common association for tackling the bigger projects of the church usually supported by denominations. This is what became called the Holiness Union, or the Holiness Union of the South, which was formally launched in 1904. In his opening speech in the first convention of the Holiness Union, Morrison noted,
In the great work of spreading scriptural holiness among the people of the present generation, and handing it down to the coming generations, it will be apparent to all that some sort of organization is necessary.

If we could succeed against the mighty forces that confront us in the great work God has given us to perform, we must have that strength which comes from union.

This is evidently the will of God who has baptized us by one Spirit into one body. We have met here to consummate such an organization. It is well understood that there is a great necessity and wide clamor for such an organization as we now propose.

We want to put ourselves into good harness, strong enough to pull our full strength, and yet so loose as in no way to interfere with free and healthful circulation.43

Morrison ended his speech with a call for 100 sanctified men to cause a revival across the South, but right before this call he said, “We will make much of the coming of the Lord, and warn men to watch, lest He come and find them unprepared. We will seek to explain to people the teachings of the Word of God on the healing of disease, and rejoice with all who find succor from the Lord for their bodies. We will try to stir the hearts of God’s people everywhere on the subject of missions; we will not go to the heathen with a grammar, but with a New Testament.”44 On the Friday of the organizational convention, mission was in the spotlight. The account noted that Morrison gave an address on “The Open Door in Cuba” (although the content is not recorded) and asked for $400 to build a “Holiness Tabernacle” in Cuba, with all of the money being pledged in ten minutes! The Vanguard Missionary Association from St. Louis, Missouri was present at this meeting with their founder C.W. Sherman, and Sherman’s daughter Bessie Sherman Ashton spoke on their work in India. This was followed by an address from Rev. B.L. Sarmast, an Asbury College graduate from Persia working in his home country.45 Morrison had previously published a book by Sarmast in 1899 entitled *Persia and the Persians* through the Pentecostal Publishing Company.46

In March of 1905, H.W. Bromley laid out the vision of the Holiness Union Morrison was promoting.47 Bromley lists three aspects of this work. First, *The Pentecostal Herald* to connect holiness people through a common communication forum. Second, the Pentecostal Publishing Company and a Pentecostal Tabernacle that Morrison was building in Louisville, Kentucky, as a type of organizational center and operation to
promote holiness teaching. Third was the work of mission including S.W. Edwards in Cuba, and the work of Brother Sarmast in Persia. Alongside of these three elements was a desire to raise funds to help educate young men to be holiness evangelists at holiness colleges, with a special focus on Asbury College (although Meridian College in Meridian Mississippi, the Bible and Missionary Institute at Columbia, South Carolina, and the Texas Holiness University of Greenville, Texas were also represented in the Holiness Union). Morrison's vision was nothing short of a full-blown holiness organization, designed to spread holiness through publishing, missions, and educational training. It sought to bring together smaller holiness churches and organizations across the South in such a way that a pooling of resources could fund a global revival, and missions was a key part of the vision. While Morrison is known for his work in publishing and religious education, these elements often overshadow his foundational interest in mission as well.

In October 21-25, 1905, the second meeting of the Holiness Union occurred in Meridian, Mississippi.48 As Morrison noted, “At this convention a Missionary Board was elected to collect money and assist in the support of several full salvation missionaries in various fields.”49 Morrison went on to elaborate the mission plan of the Holiness Union,

It was the unanimous decision of this Board of Missions that we should not undertake the organization of churches, or the establishment of independent missions or schools in any of the foreign fields, but that our work should be evangelistic and that we should send out evangelists to travel in the various mission fields, assisting the missionaries of existing churches in promoting revivals of religion. It would be the special work of such evangelists to seek to bring missionaries and native Christians into the experience of entire sanctification. The great desire and purpose of the Holiness Union is to assist in promoting a world-wide revival of full salvation, to help, so far as in them lies, to carry to the ends of the earth the glad news that Jesus Christ is able to save all men from all sin.50

It was to this end in 1908 at the fifth Holiness Union Convention in Birmingham, Alabama, that the Holiness Union Board of Missions decided to send Morrison, “to make an evangelistic tour around the world preaching full salvation, assisting missionaries in revival meetings, making careful note of the spiritual state of the church, and gathering such information as would
be of general use to the Board in future efforts to promote the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification in the various mission fields of the world."51 Financially, the Board supplied the finances not only to pay for Morrison’s travelling expenses, but also to support his family in his absence.

Image of H.C. Morrison taken in Lucknow, India (1909). (Used with Permission of the B.L. Fisher Archives and Special Collections)
H.C. Morrison’s journey along the path of missions came to a crescendo in 1909, when the Holiness Union of the South organized and paid for Morrison to make a tour around the world.\textsuperscript{52} It was fundamentally to preach holiness in foreign fields, but it was also to visit and explore existing holiness mission work and understand the needs for more training and funding to advance the holiness cause. While Morrison set out in 1909 with an Asbury graduate, Rev. J.L. Piercy, his first stops were in Europe and the Holy Land, where he preached entire sanctification, but also took in the sites. The real lesson in mission was to come in Asia. One of the first and longest stops was in India. It was in India that Morrison was best able to study holiness missions, especially among the Methodist Episcopal Church. Shortly after his arrival in India, Morrison travelled to Lucknow, where he stayed in the parsonage of a young new missionary, just recently arrived from the United States. Morrison’s diary for October 20, 1909 notes, “On to Lucknow. Travel 880 miles arrive at lunch, now 6:30. Kind reception by pastor and other brethren. Quartered at parsonage. Rev. Stanley E. Jones pastor. Hopeful outlook. Missionaries coming up from every quarter to attend Dasethra Meetings.” Morrison just happened to encounter E. Stanley Jones, the Asbury College graduate who would revolutionize missions with his work \textit{Christ of the Indian Road} and who would become a major voice for global Methodism. Jones would write articles for \textit{The Pentecostal Herald} about India and maintain contact with Morrison as he took the helm of Asbury College and later Asbury Theological Seminary.

Morrison’s early work in India on this trip was successful, but he became quite ill by December of 1909. In a moving 14-page letter to John Paul, his close friend to whom he entrusted the work of \textit{The Pentecostal Herald} during his absence, he related some of his last wishes for his work in Kentucky and seemed to truly expect death. On page ten of this letter Morrison wrote, “I spent much of yesterday in bed and will lay down as soon as I finish this letter. I am writing it with the thought that I may not be able to write by tomorrow. There is great pain in the lower part of my body that takes all the strength out of me. My soul is well, my faith restful and strong. Jesus Christ is a living reality to me and inexpressibly precious to my heart. If I should die tomorrow, I would praise God that he let me come to India. If I should live, this letter is in confidence between you and me. If I should die, you may publish it.”\textsuperscript{53} Of course, Morrison lived to lead Asbury College and found Asbury Theological Seminary, but this letter also included many insights he had about missions in India.
H.C. Morrison’s diary page from October 20, 1909, when he stayed with a young E. Stanley Jones in Lucknow, India.
(Used with Permission of the B.L. Fisher Archives and Special Collections)

Morrison felt that the Methodist Church had a lot to offer to Christianity in India, but also felt it needed the influence of the Holiness Movement and its teachings on sanctification to be effective. He wrote to John Paul about his views of missions in India,

First, I have found no sort of outspoken opposition to entire sanctification as a second work of grace, but a large majority of the people seem to welcome the truth and desire in some degree the experience.

Second, I find the English-speaking Church in great need of a revival. There seems to have been no great widespread deeply spiritual revival here since the day of William Taylor. He, under God did a great work here.

Third, the missionaries of the M.E. Church impress me as a remarkably intelligent body of men and women, deeply devoted to their work, risking their lives in the midst of contagion and death, and amidst the wild beasts, for it is no uncommon thing to meet a panther, or tiger in the road in some of the far away jungles in which they labour, and to have these ravenous creatures prowling about in their camps at night.
They are a band of heroes. I have never seen a body of such hard-worked people in all my life, but with all of this they are in great need of a gracious revival of the love of Christ, an outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

In India, Morrison also met key holiness missionaries including, Rev. Marcus B. Fuller (Christian Missionary Alliance), Gregory Codding and his wife (Pentecostal Mission from Nashville), Pandita Ramabai, and a host of Methodist missionaries. After leaving India, Morrison would go on to the Philippines, Japan, China, and Korea. Perhaps most interesting in terms of holiness missions he connected in Japan with the work of the Oriental Mission Society (still known as OMS today, but now goes by the name of One Mission Society). This work emerged out of God’s Bible College in Cincinnati, Ohio. In this environment he met both Cowman and Kilbourne in what was one of the first of the holiness missions. The Kilbourne family became a major part of the history of Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary. Ernest A. Kilbourne’s (1865-1928) son, Edwin L. Kilbourne (1891-1980) would have been 18 when Morrison visited the mission in Japan. Edwin’s son, Edwin Williams Kilbourne (1917-2015) would go to Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary and become a president of Seoul Theological Seminary and a vice-president of OMS. Edwin’s other sons would go on to service as missionaries in Japan and China. Kilbourne’s great-grandsons would attend Asbury, one of which was an influential figure in the origin of the Ichthus Music Festival in Wilmore.\(^{54}\) Morrison also referred to meeting a Bro. Cram in Korea, who was a Kentucky Methodist pastor trained at Asbury College. In Fukuoka, Japan it was a Rev. Ira Jones and his wife who were the Asbury graduates.

Shortly after he returned from his world tour, the leaders of Asbury College, facing a financial crisis, convinced Morrison to take over as president of Asbury College in 1910, but I am convinced that Morrison did not forget his heart for missions. He could not forget S.W. Edwards, B.L. Sarmast, E. Stanley Jones, and a host of other Asbury College graduates who were impacting the global world for Christ. By the end of 1910, *The Pentecostal Herald* has a decidedly missionary feel. In November 1910, E. Stanley Jones has an article on “India’s Great Need” and wrote, “A missionary said to me the other day, ‘The Board that sent Bro. Morrison out could not have done any greater missionary work.’ And I heartily agreed. He put his broad shoulder under a struggling missionary and lifted him
many times out of the rut. A rut is a grave with both ends knocked out, someone has said. We need a rut-delivering revival." The reporting from the Holiness Union meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas of that year noted,

Brother H. C. Morrison, who has recently returned from a world tour of missions sent out by this Convention, gave us a broad vision of the holiness movement from the standpoint of the evangelization of the world. Bro. Morrison was weak in body, but has lost none of his old-time force and power as a preacher. His missionary tour has better fitted him for his work as one of the leaders of the holiness movement.

It appears that over $5,000 had been raised for missions over the previous year, in part to support Morrison, but an additional $700 was raised in the 1910 Convention itself. By the November 16, 1910 issue of *The Pentecostal Herald*, Morrison was writing a multi-part work called “A Missionary Enterprise” and a new section in *The Pentecostal Herald* appeared called “The Missionary World” (alongside the final serial chapters of Morrison’s *World Tour of Evangelism*) with various accounts from missionaries of the Mission Board. In the third installation of “A Missionary Enterprise” Morrison raises a critical question on his mind, which might also be reflected in his new position as President of Asbury College, “How can we get the largest number of the best-equipped missionaries upon the most needy fields in the shortest time, at the least expense, situated to accomplish the best results with the smallest outlay?” This, I propose, was the dominating question in Morrison’s mind as he began to think and plan about the future of Asbury College and later Asbury Theological Seminary.

The Holiness Union of the South gradually faded with the last known convention held in Atlanta in 1915. Its end perhaps due to pressures from World War I, the growing rise of Pentecostalism which spilt the Holiness Movement, and the rise of holiness denominations such as the Church of the Nazarene, the Free Methodists, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance in the South, which made the work of the Holiness Union obsolete, but part of Morrison’s goal in taking charge of Asbury College was to further the work of mission. I also believe this is at the core of his decision to found Asbury Theological Seminary. Morrison adopted an attitude of missions which informed his educational administration goals. This can be seen through little things throughout his ministry. For example,
in *The Pentecostal Herald* he worked to support international students for mission work in their home countries. Like a letter from 1915, when he wrote,

> As is well known to the readers of *The Pentecostal Herald* we are educating a number of foreign boys for special work in their home lands. This year we have one young man from India, two from China, three from the Philippine Islands, two from Porto Rico, and two North American Indians, making ten altogether. Two of our young men from the Philippine Islands graduate this spring. They are remarkable fine specimens, excellent students, refined gentlemen, and devout Christians. They will go at once to the work under the M.E. Church in the Philippine Islands, and I am sure will be very valuable additions to the missionary force in that country...

> Up to this year we have found it comparatively easy to raise money for the support of these young men, but for some reason our friends have not responded and we have received only about one-third of their expenses for the school year. We do not believe that there is any better way to make a contribution to the cause of foreign missions than to assist these fine young men in equipping themselves for work in their home lands among their own people.58

Holiness views of Morrison’s day did not separate missions and evangelism, except in terms of location. Morrison wrote in his diary for Sunday, March 11, 1900 on his first trip to Cuba, “Preached twice in the Southern Methodist Mission in Havana. Good time. Some stood for prayer at each service. The Lord was with us. All that is necessary for a revival here is the old-time gospel and methods.” Since Morrison’s time we have developed advanced concepts of missiology and contextual theology, and the methods have clearly changed, but the idea that the gospel changes lives and can lead to true revival has never changed. H.C. Morrison did make the connection between mission training and higher education, and this would continue to shape his work to take “the Whole Gospel” to “the Whole World.” H.C. Morrison was many things, but above all he was a man of mission.
Page ten of H.C. Morrison's letter to John Paul from Bangalore, India when he thought he might die (Dec. 1909).

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The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary's mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.
End Notes

1 All images used courtesy of the Archives of the B.L Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary who own all copyrights to these digital images, unless otherwise noted. Please contact them directly if interested in obtaining permission to reuse these images.

2 This is a reference to a well-known general who fought for Cuban independence, General Antonio Maceo, who was shot in an engagement with Spanish soldiers on December 4, 1896.


7 The U.S.S. *Maine* was a navy vessel sunk in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898. U.S. papers claimed it was sunk by the Spanish (although many now think it was caused by an internal accidental explosion). This was the essential cause of the Spanish-American War. The ship remained in the harbor until 1911, when it was refloated, towed out to sea and sunk.

8 Morro Castle is a defensive fortress guarding Havana built in 1589.


11 Later in 1904, a visiting missionary from Matanzas who would join this mission work, wrote, “This mission was opened by M.L. Pardo and wife whose self-sacrificing work has been rewarded with success. Over work has forced them to return to the States.” E.L. Latham, “A Missionary Trip to Cuba.” *The Pentecostal Herald.* (May 25, 1904): 6-7. Latham later appears in Chitre, Panama at least by May 25, 1916 when a portion of a letter is published by him in *The Gospel Trumpet,* 36(21) (May 25, 1916): 12.


33 S.W. Edwards, “Bro. Edwards in Cuba.” *The Pentecostal Herald*. (October 23, 1907): 11. Despite these problems, Edwards is upbeat and noted since April fourth he had visited 41 towns, and 3,000 homes in his new evangelistic role.

34 The Secretary, “Southern Methodist Missionary Interests.” *The Pentecostal Herald*. (June 17, 1908): 10-11.


39 Ibid., 313.

40 By the 1930 census, Edwards is living in Meridian, Mississippi as a Bible Agent. His first wife had passed away (she is mentioned in his 1920 passport application) and he was remarried to Elsie Pearl McGuire (November 1, 1922 in Muscatine, Iowa), and does not seem to return to the mission field. By the 1940 census he is listed as the minister of a church in Shelby County, Alabama. He passes away on January 3, 1962 and is buried in Eden, Alabama.


44 Ibid., 22.


46 https://place.asburyseminary.edu/firstfruitsheritagematerial/128/


50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., 8-9.


53 This letter is in the Papers of John Paul in the Archives and Special Collections of Asbury Theological Seminary.


**Book Reviews**

**Church Planters: Inside the World of Religion Entrepreneurs**
Richard N. Pitt  
New York, NY: Oxford University Press  
2021, 336 pp., hardcover, $34.99  

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

*Church Planters* is a good example of two disciplines being brought together in a way that sparks new light and illuminates possibilities for further research in each. It is not unusual for one discipline to appropriate an insight from another in order to provide a novel metaphor or angle, but Pitt manages to bring the religious world of church planting into contact with the business-focused sphere of entrepreneurship in a way that benefits both fields. Pitt draws on previous research on Christian pastors, an emic understanding of the perspectives of religious leaders, and an etic sociological approach that allows a serious look at the entrepreneurial functions of certain religious experiences. This background is applied to a fresh, qualitative study of pastors who start new churches: church planters.

Pitt notes that, if we take account of the organizational structures, massive budgets, promotional activities, and market competition that affect the rise and fall of megachurches, there is much that can be directly paralleled with a for-profit corporation. Yet, business textbooks do not tend to look to the religious world for examples of success, and religious leaders are often reticent to view their ministries through the mundane, secular lenses of markets and profit. Spiritual growth is not a product like a Starbucks cup of coffee, and business entrepreneurs do not often have to legitimate their activities by referring to a transcendent calling or purpose.
One can almost feel the magnetic repulsion as Pitt pushes these concepts into view and asks pastors who their competition is, what the church’s market niche and product is, and how they measure success. This is not the usual vocabulary these pastors use to describe what they do, but there are interesting comparisons that emerge through the process of thinking from these angles.

As one might expect, there are ways in which church planting does not fit the mold of a small business. Measurement of success is one of the areas where founding pastors have difficulty pointing to something like profit margin, products sold, or customers served. Identifying outcomes that a founding pastor sees as motivation to continue or not can be difficult. Even after years tending a church plant with little church growth, pastors can fall back on a concept like faithfulness to their calling in a way that business owners responsible to employees, a board, or other stakeholders cannot. In fact, because many of these pastors work another job the church does not have to pay a fulltime salary, and because they tend to have a strong influence over their congregations, church planters avoid some of the pressures that a small business owner would have when the measures of success do not seem to be there.

Pitt has collected a diverse sample of pastors and conducted thorough and sympathetic interviews. I was suspicious at the beginning that Pitt may be too sympathetic and close to his subject matter on the religious side, but there is an admirable even-handedness and objectivity in Pitt’s approach. That feature allows this to be an interesting and useful study, whether the reader has religious inclinations or not. I agree with Pitt’s assessment at the end that the research could have been strengthened by including pastors whose church plant failed, which seems like a gap in the surveying that raises a multitude of questions. However, even with this limitation, *Church Planters* is a useful study for the student of entrepreneurship and/or religion.
The Book of Acts as Story: A Narrative-Critical Study
David R. Bauer
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2021, 304 pp., Paperback, $32.99
ISBN: 978-0801098321

Reviewed by William B. Bowes

David Bauer is Ralph Waldo Beeson Professor of Inductive Biblical Studies and dean of the School of Biblical Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary. In this exceptionally helpful volume, Bauer examines the complete text and sequence of the Acts of the Apostles according to the principles and methods of narrative criticism, offering perhaps the most comprehensive and up-to-date study of its kind. Since the late 1980s, the narrative approach to the Gospels and Acts as a subset of literary criticism has steadily grown in popularity and influence, and by examining the text through this approach Bauer intends to produce “a fresh interpretation of Acts and insights into the meaning of some of the major themes and motifs of the book” (3). The book thus functions as a narrative-critical commentary, and proceeds with a threefold lens that Bauer identifies from the beginning: First that Luke's narrative presents God as realizing his purposes in the world through the exalted Christ who is the story’s dominant character, second that despite narrative tensions and dissonances, Acts presents a consistent message throughout, and third that a narrative approach to Acts illuminates the text in a way not possible through utilizing the more traditional historical-critical method.

The book is divided into seven chapters, with the first three serving as something of an introductory section. The first chapter explores important background elements of the book itself, such as its genre and why genre matters. The second chapter examines narrative criticism as a method for studying Acts, and how viewing Acts through this framework highlights the various ways that the different threads of the story and characters come together to paint a larger and more unified picture. In doing this, Bauer notes how the flow of Acts operates according to different plot levels and unfolds through the development of particular characters moving in a consistent literary trajectory. One of the most useful elements of the second chapter was Bauer’s emphasis on the role of Luke as a narrator, and how his point of view helps us as readers to better understand his work. The
third chapter is an in-depth exploration of the literary structure of Acts, which he divides into a threefold geographical substructure stemming from the statement about the church’s mission in 1:8. The fourth through the seventh chapters are then comprised of Bauer’s commentary, proceeding from this aforementioned substructure. Bauer begins with an analysis of the initial chapter (1:1-26) as a preparation for the three larger sections to follow, which he separates based on the witness to Jerusalem (2:1-8:1a), the witness to Judea and Samaria to Antioch (8:1b-12:25) and the witness to the end of the earth (13:1-28:31).

The fourth chapter examines the initial chapter of Acts according to the idea of a narrative frame which carries readers from the reader's world to the text world. To Bauer, the first chapter is the hermeneutical key for the rest of the whole book, and in each subsequent section the narrator “assumes information from this introductory material to clarify and enrich his account” (80). The fifth chapter focuses on the initial experience of the disciples in Jerusalem through the speech of Stephen and the ensuing persecution, with Bauer thoroughly noting how the narrator continuously emphasizes the unfolding divine plan throughout the initial expansion of the church. The sixth chapter begins with 8:1b, where “the narrator clearly marks a new stage of development in the story” (131) as the mission extends beyond Jerusalem for the first time. Bauer also notes how the focus on characters like Philip marks a narrative shift as well, in that ministerial responsibility and authority begins to shift away from only the original apostles. One of the great strengths of this chapter (and of the book overall) is Bauer’s highlighting of the subtle narrative connections between different characters and events which tie back either to earlier events in the storyline or foreshadow later events in the storyline, based on language, themes, or intertwining plotlines. The final chapter focuses on the last, large section of Acts, dominated by Paul’s evangelistic efforts. At this point, Bauer highlights once more how the narrator focuses not on the efforts of the church’s leaders in the expansion of the witness, but on the character of the Holy Spirit as the primary actor and agent. Additionally, in the shift of the narrative toward Paul, readers again see “the progressive shifting of certain responsibilities that had been lodged in the Twelve to non-apostles” (185). In my view, one of the great strengths of this chapter was Bauer’s excellent analysis of Paul’s different speeches, with his illuminating commentary on the Areopagus speech (201-210) being a highlight of the entire book.
Overall, Bauer’s work has much to commend it and will serve as a helpful addition to recent studies on Acts. In the same way that Robert Tannehill’s two-volume *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (1986, 1989) was a seminal contribution for students of Acts when explorations in narrative criticism were only beginning, so also this volume has the potential to leave a similarly strong mark now that such approaches have become more common. Additionally, an attractive element of Bauer’s work is that it maintains a manageable length while not compromising breadth, due to Bauer’s focus on remaining within the bounds of his method of choice. The book would make an excellent addition to the eager reader’s library.

**Letters for the Church: Reading James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John and Jude as Canon**

Darian R. Lockett
Westmont, IL: IVP Academic
2021, 248 pp., Paperback, $30.00
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Reviewed by William B. Bowes

Darian Lockett is professor of New Testament at Biola University, where he has served on the faculty since 2007. Lockett has distinguished himself in recent years with numerous publications on the Catholic Epistles, and this volume is a helpful contribution to what is commonly held to be an oft-neglected area of scripture. Lockett’s work serves two primary purposes, the first being to illustrate how James, Jude, the Petrine letters, and the Johannine letters belong together as a sub-collection within the broader New Testament (largely due to shared literary features and theological emphases), and the second being to offer what are essentially chapter-length commentaries on each text. In his own words, he seeks “to introduce the context and content of the Catholic Epistles while, at the same time, emphasizing how all seven letters are connected to each other as they stand in the New Testament” (6). Lockett sees these letters not a disjointed series of latecomers to the canon, but a coherent collection that has a unified vision and witness, especially relative to their concern for the connection between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.
Each of the book’s six chapters deals with a particular text (2-3 John are combined in one chapter), and Lockett begins first with James, which he sees as connected to Jude at the end, as intentional bookends to the collection. Each chapter generally proceeds in the same fashion, mirroring what readers would find in a typical commentary. That is, Lockett begins with background issues such as occasion and setting, dealing with questions of authorship (often quite a lively discussion, given that the authorship of every Catholic Epistle is disputed), audience, and genre, and then provides information on the structure and outline of each letter before offering section-by-section commentary. When it comes to the background issues, Lockett leans toward a fairly conservative side of the spectrum but is open and fair to more critical views. In his chapter on James, his observations about the phrase “implanted word” in James 1:21 (23-24), and the perennial controversies over the relationship between faith and words in James 2:14-26 (30-35) were most helpful.

In chapters two and three Lockett offers an analysis of the Petrine Epistles, beginning by noting a series of parallels between 1 Peter and James, from their audiences to their emphases to their scriptural citations. Regarding 1 Peter, some of his best insights come from his commentary on the series of texts about submission to different authorities in 1 Peter 2:13-3:12 (73-81). Lockett’s careful attention to sensitive matters of context (such as the position of women within the Roman Empire) was refreshing. Regarding 2 Peter, Lockett argues that despite questions often leveraged by scholars about its authenticity, 2 Peter was originally intended to be read alongside 1 Peter and that reading the two as a canonical pair and as a “coherent narrative, readers come to appreciate a distinctive Petrine Christology that emphasizes the revelation of Jesus’ eschatological glory at the transfiguration and his second coming (2 Peter) alongside the atoning nature of Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection (1 Peter),” so that both can be seen as “a twofold witness to Peter’s teaching” (96).

Chapters four and five deal with the Johannine Epistles, with Lockett again beginning by noting the importance of canonical placement to interpretation, observing how 1 John shares certain emphases with 2 Peter as its canonical predecessor. Regarding 1 John, Lockett’s discussion of the rather difficult saying about “water and blood” in 1 John 5:6 (162-163) was instructive, as was his focus on elements of hospitality throughout the chapter on 2-3 John. Lastly, Lockett turns to Jude, paying special attention to the urgency of the letter’s language, and the consistency of its appeal to
apostolic authority. Some of his most insightful comments involved Jude’s intentional use of certain terms (such as the verb “to keep”) at certain points in his letter (195, 207). Lockett’s final concluding section seeks to draw together common threads from the commentaries on each letter, again highlighting how he sees all seven as functioning in a coherent collection.

Lockett’s work has much to commend it. While intended for a more academically inclined audience, the book is not particularly technical (footnotes are kept to a minimum, and Greek terms are transliterated), and would perhaps be best used as an introductory text. At the end of each chapter Lockett includes what he sees as the most useful resources for further reading on each text, and this appeals to readers who may be less aware of recent trends in scholarship. In my view, the most helpful part of the book were the eight excursus sections, labeled “going deeper,” which offered detailed explanations of more difficult exegetical questions such as how readers can understand Jude’s use of 1 Enoch, or whether or not 2 Peter should be classified under the literary genre of a “Testament.” Readers of these letters will certainly benefit from Professor Lockett’s careful and thoughtful approach to these texts.

A Stone in My Shoe: Confessions of an Evangelical Outlier
J. Michael Walters
Eugene, OR: Resource Publications
2021, 202 pp., paper, $20.00

Reviewed by Scott Donahue-Martens

A Stone in My Shoe: Confessions of an Evangelical Outlier is a breath of fresh air for the evangelical movement. Written by a committed evangelical Christian, the book grapples with a series of divisive topics openly and honestly. J. Michael Walters describes the discomforts that many evangelical outliers feel. He writes with love and care for the Church, especially as he describes his position as an evangelical outlier. That is not to say that he claims to be outside of the evangelical movement. Rather, the outlier perspective from the margin is still an evangelical perspective. Walters hopes that more than one kind of evangelical can exist. He invites
the reader to consider how the term evangelical has become narrowly defined such that many who ascribe to the central tenants of evangelicalism are pushed to the margins. The book describes a hope that evangelicalism can broaden again so that there is room within the movement for a variety of faithful expressions of Christian discipleship.

Chapter one provides a working understanding of what it means to be an outlier and why Walters identities as one. The chapter embraces an ecclesiological approach to theology, especially claiming that uniformity is not an ecclesial goal. The second chapter brings a missiological ecclesiology into conversation with the failing North American Church. Rather than ignore current trends like decreased church participation and church closures, Walters addresses the need for change within the church. With attention to the modernist-fundamentalist controversies of the 20th century, the third chapter discusses how evangelicals approach the Bible. Walters describes a Jesus-centered hermeneutic which liberates scripture from the confines of modernity and enables scripture to do what it does best in revealing God to us. The next few chapters complexify ways evangelicals understand evangelicalism, sex, politics, America, and science. Evangelicals will readily recognize the contentious ways these subjects have functioned as lightning rods within the movement. By walking a mediating path, Walters speaks with biblical wisdom and theological sophistication on each of these topics.

Readers looking to put the book into a box with prescribed categories will be sorely disappointed as the work continually points to various intricacies on each of these topics. The humility with which the controversial topics are presented prevents the book from coming across as a diatribe. It is truly an invitation into a theological conversation where there are no easy answers. The book speaks prophetically about the evangelical movement, especially by naming missteps. These prophetic utterances are rooted deeply in pastoral concerns and are a form of evangelical accountability. Perhaps, what Walters accomplished so well is to “talk honestly about certain issues” when far too often talking about divisive topics within evangelicalism gets a person “branded as somehow suspect” (6). His background as a pastor and professor makes him an apt conversation starter for his work.

One of the strengths of this book is the way Walters leverages his pastoral and academic backgrounds. Rather than isolated domains, Walter weaves aspects from the church and academy together in order to avoid the
limitations that an over-emphasis on one all too often yields. The result is an informed mature pastoral book that invites readers into a deeper relationship with Christ, especially through Christ’s Church. While the book is not an autobiography, Walters recounts personal experiences and stories from his life. These illustrate the major points and point to the contextual nature of theology. This contextual nature is a gift to the evangelical movement which, with too great frequency, avoids the situational nature of theology.

*A Stone in my Shoe* could be helpful in several settings. It might serve well in practical theology or as an introduction to theology classes, in addition to classes that consider the evangelical movement. Congregations looking for material that invites them into a challenging reflexive conversation can learn from the contents and methods of the book. The book can guide evangelical pastors, including youth pastors, in theologically thinking through relevant challenging topics. As a former student of Walters, it was a joy to be influenced once again by him through this book. I recommend it to anyone looking to have an open and honest conversation about the nature and status of the present evangelical church.

**Interpreting Paul: The Canonical Paul**

Volume 2

Luke Timothy Johnson

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

2021, 616 pp. hardcover, $60.00


Reviewed by Benjamin J. Aich

Luke Timothy Johnson argues throughout *The Canonical Paul* that the construction of Paul, as explored in his first volume (*Constructing Paul, 2020*), and as quoted in his second volume (*Interpreting Paul*), “ought to lead, not to a fixed and final edifice or monument called ‘Paul,’ but rather to a ‘deconstruction’ consisting of discrete and nonsystematic inquiries into the [thirteen] letters themselves, in relation to each other, and in conversation with contemporary concerns of believers” (2). *Interpreting Paul* offers twenty-three examinations of this sort, ten of which are new, in order to encourage further such studies for the life of the church. Instead of summarizing each essay/chapter (as available in other reviews and to
some extent in Johnson’s conclusion [498–500]), this review will focus on portions of the book that model Johnson’s primary thesis and goal, attend to areas with weaknesses, and conclude with some general remarks, especially those on the prospects of future similar research projects.

Concerning the modeling of his thesis and goal, Johnson is to be commended chiefly in two aspects. First, his arguments hold concepts and textual threads together in the interpretation of Paul’s Epistles that are often too effortlessly separated (whether on account of facile systematization or otherwise). Examples of this initial acclamation include, but are not limited to, chapters two, three, nine, twelve, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and twenty-one. Chapter two (“The Social Dimensions of Sēēria in Luke-Acts and Paul”) explores the social dimensions of salvation in Luke-Acts and Paul and holds these authors together, demonstrating the ideological continuity between them (though ironically without evidence from the Pastoral Epistles). Chapter three (“Transformation of the Mind and Moral Discernment in Romans”) shows that in Paul, pneumatology, and ethics are inextricably linked. The only surprise here is Johnson’s lack of engagement with Craig S. Keener’s *The Mind of the Spirit* (2016). Chapter nine (“Ritual Imprinting and the Politics of Perfection”) focuses on ritual (esp. baptism) in Galatians and Colossians, offering a unique comparative analysis that illumines strikingly similar Pauline responses to those inclined toward further, superfluous ritual initiations in these epistles. Chapters twelve (“Paul’s Vision of the Church”), eighteen (“Discernment, Edification, and Holiness”), and nineteen (“The Apostle as Crisis Manager”) exhibit the overarching thematic unity across the *Corpus Paulinum* vis-à-vis ecclesiology and pneumatology. Finally, chapters twenty (“Oikonomia Theou”) and twenty-one (“The Shape of the Struggle”) bring the oft-neglected 1 Timothy into enlightening conversations with other Pauline Letters, most vividly 1 Corinthians (“Oikonomia Theou”) and Galatians (“The Shape of the Struggle”).

Second, Johnson consistently and rightfully reads Paul’s Epistles with a view toward their actualization in the lives of present-day Christians. Instances of this commendation are particularly apparent in chapters four, five, six, eight, eleven, fourteen, fifteen, and twenty-three. Chapters four (“Life-Giving Spirit”) and five (“The Body in Question”) combine to inspire believers to identify themselves as partakers of a new humanity who thus operate like the Body of Christ is not merely a metaphor but much more so the Spirit-energized assembly of the living God and the eschatological expression of the risen Christ. Chapter six (“Glossolalia and the
Embarrassments of Experience”) provides a sober assessment of the gift of tongues, helping the church not to discount this charism or reject its validity but to contextualize it historically. Chapter eight (“Truth and Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians”) contains several implications for practical application in the church, mainly regarding how reconciliation can be realized through shared mission. Chapter eleven (“The Expression of Christian Experience”) contains one of the better cases for understanding *pistis Christou* (cf. Gal 2:20) subjectively as “the faith of Christ,” which is the impetus for the faith/allegiance of believers and the quintessential representation of the life of love they display by the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:6). Chapter fourteen (“Fellowship of Suffering”) proposes a compelling reading of Philippians that ought to encourage churches to jettison competitive rivalries and instead embrace the mind of Christ. Chapter fifteen (“Mystery and Metaphor in Colossians”) urges believers to embrace all that has been given to them through baptism into Christ (cf. chapter nine). Lastly, chapter twenty-three (“The Pedagogy of Grace”) proclaims a potent message from Titus, namely that humans desperately need an inward transformation made possible by God’s grace and love for civilization to flourish.

This volume has remarkably few weaknesses considering its magnitude, although they are present. First, Johnson’s desire to interpret Paul for the life of the church sometimes involves, ironically, readings that either misrepresent or underrepresent the views of numerous Christians across the globe. For example, while chapter sixteen (“Doing the Truth in Love”) may initiate several profitable exchanges regarding human sexuality, Johnson’s imprecise critique of Christian conservatives therein will allow such talks to commence only with great difficulty (see esp. 318). In this same essay, Johnson may also frustrate many Christian scientists and philosophers with his nebulous appeals to science and experience; an updated edition of this chapter might be enhanced by citing recent publications, e.g., from the *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Science*, or the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. A second weakness is that Johnson at times makes his most essential points with false either-or scenarios. For instance, in chapter two, salvation in Luke-Acts and Paul is argued to consist of present and social components *rather than* future and individual ones (39, 44), whereas Johnson must later, and inconsistently, admit that it involves these present social elements *more than* future individual ones (47). And in chapter ten (“The Truth of Christian Experience”), Paul’s pastoral interest
in Galatians, though with valuable nuance, is presented over against the theological concerns of the letter (186).

Overall, however, Johnson offers a unique and crucial scholarly voice in these essays. He refuses to allow the widely held division of the thirteen Pauline Epistles into the categories of “undisputed” and “disputed” (cf. the outmoded and unhelpful division at the SBL Annual Meeting) to prevent him from allowing the texts themselves to speak on their own terms. His work exemplifies canonical, inductive Bible study for the church, thus making it an invaluable resource for students, scholars, and clergy.

Furthermore, and corresponding to his aims, he resists systematizing Paul’s Letters and theology. This point leads me to consider future related academic research prospects. Readers familiar with the imperious work of the late James D. G. Dunn (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 1998) might be disappointed to find that Johnson does not provide substantive interaction with it, despite clearly objecting to several of its foundational elements in his introduction (e.g., using Romans as a framework for Paul’s theology). This omission may be justifiable since persons piqued by this tacit conversation may find traces of it in Johnson’s first volume. Nevertheless, given Dunn’s enduring influence on Pauline studies, it would be necessary to bring his work into a more profound dialogue with Johnson’s, principally if the latter is to disabuse scholars of following the more systematic “Dunnian” way. One exciting avenue for such a proposal would be to write various “theologies of Paul” that, unlike Dunn’s, incorporate all thirteen Pauline Epistles, both undisputed and disputed, in order to decide whether these are comparable to Johnson’s work in terms of their explanatory power. Such studies would benefit the guild and the church, notwithstanding how they would have to confront the apparent incongruities between the letters. For, as rewarding as Johnson’s text is, it is unlikely at this point to serve as a clarion call for scholars to forfeit all notions of “Paul’s theology” or even “New Testament theology.”
Books Received

The following books were received by the editor’s office since the last issue of The Asbury Journal. The editor is seeking people interested in writing book reviews on these or other relevant books for publication in future issues of The Asbury Journal. Please contact the editor (Robert.danielson@asburyseminary.edu) if you are interested in reviewing a particular title. Reviews will be assigned on a first come basis.

Alexander, T. Desmond

Baxter, Jason M.

Begbie, Jeremy, Daniel Train, and W. David O. Taylor, eds.

Bellinger, W.H., Jr.

Bernier, Jonathan

Bundy, David, Geordan Hammond, and David Sang-Ehil Han, eds.

Byrd, Aimee
2022

Carroll, R., M. Daniel
2022

Eilers, Kent
2022

Farney, Kirk D.
2022

Fleming, Dean
2022

Goldingay, John
2022

Gorman, Michael J.
2022

Graves, Shawn and Marlena Graves, eds.
2022

Gustafson, David M.
2022
Hamilton, James M., Jr.  

Harrington, Hannah K.  

Hart, David Bentley  

Jeong, Mark  

Klein, William W. and Daniel J. Steiner  

Linebaugh, Jonathan A.  

Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. and Julie A. Green  

McCoulough, Ross  

Manetsch, Scott M., ed.  

Mariottini, Claude F.  
Pachuau, Lalsangkima  
2022  

Payne, J. D.  
2022  

Powery, Emerson B.  
2022  

Reese, Ruth Anne  
2022  

Sunquist, Scott W.  
2022  

Translation Council  
2022  

Trimm, Charlie  
2022  

Tully, Eric J.  
2022  

Vos, Matthew S.  
2022  

Waters, Brent  
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Watson, Francis  
2022  

Young, Mark S.  
2022  

Zondervan  
2022  
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