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EDITORIAL

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* * * * *

The coming of the Messiah is the most anticipated event in redemptive history. It is the subject of the very first prophecy of the Bible where God Himself promises that the Messiah will crush the head of the serpent and reverse the curse of sin (Gen 3:15). The rest of Scripture—the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament—develops this prophecy, records its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus, and awaits the final crushing of the serpent at the Second Coming of Christ. In fact, Revelation 12 alludes to Genesis 3:15 and describes how the serpent tries to kill the Messiah (Rev 12:4–5), but the Messiah triumphs, achieves salvation, and receives all authority (12:10–11). From Genesis to Revelation, the Messiah is the central focus of all Scripture.

Scripture also reveals that God's people throughout biblical history paid close attention to the prophecies of the Old Testament about the Messiah. Peter explained that the prophets who spoke of the Messiah carefully searched their own prophecies to find out what person and time the Spirit of God intended, so they would understand "the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet 1:10–11). According to Luke 2:25, Simeon was waiting in the Temple for the Messiah whose coming would bring consolation to Jerusalem. The disciples themselves were looking for the Messiah, for when Andrew found Jesus, he ran to Simon Peter and exclaimed, "We have found the Messiah!" (John 1:41). John the Baptist shared that same anticipation, for when he was arrested, he sent a message to Jesus, asking: "Are You the One who is to come, or shall we look for someone else?" (Matt 11:3). The crowds to whom Jesus preached reflected a wider expectation of the Messiah, as they too inquired whether Jesus was that Messiah (John 7:40–43). Even the angels looked with curiosity into the person and the redemptive work of Christ (1 Pet 1:12). And when Jesus considered the question of His Messiahship, He pointed to the Word of God and declared that the Old Testament Scriptures "bear witness about Me" (John 5:39).

When we join the prophets, the Old Testament saints, the apostles, and the angels in the study of the person and work of the Messiah, we are led to the unassailable reality of the Messiah's supremacy. One way He demonstrated His supremacy was by achieving what no mere mortal could achieve—He fulfilled the roles of both king and

priest in His one person. On the one hand, Psalm 110:1 depicts the Messiah as a king, as Yahweh says to Him: “Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet.” At the same time, Psalm 110:4 declares Him to be a priest, as Yahweh says to Him: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Historically, this is a conundrum, because no Israelite was permitted to serve in both roles; those who tried were punished severely (cf. 2 Chron 26:18–21). The priests came from the line of Levi (Exod 28:1–3), while the kings came from the line of Judah (Gen 49:8–12; 2 Sam 7:12), and the two never converged. Even the author of Hebrews recognized that Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi, saying, “For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests” (Heb 7:13–14). Nevertheless, according to Hebrews 7:21, Jesus was appointed to be priest directly by God the Father. Jesus was the only Israelite who could serve as both priest and king. This dual role of Christ was, in fact, prophesied in Zechariah 6:13, which says of the Messiah, “He will be a *priest* on His *throne*, and the counsel of peace will be between the *two offices*” (emphasis added). The only other person who served as priest and king was Melchizedek, a non-Israelite; and he prefigured Christ in this role (Gen 14:18; Heb 7). As priest, the Messiah would intercede on behalf of man before God; and as king, the Messiah would reign over man on behalf of God. In this way, the Messiah would achieve what no other Israelite was able to achieve—the full restoration of the relationship between God and man.

The dual function of the Messiah as priest and king is truly marvelous. But our study of the Messiah reveals yet another awesome truth: He is truly God and truly Man. The divinity of the Messiah was already implied as early as Genesis 3:15, when God proclaimed that the Messiah would one day defeat Satan, the serpent (cf. Rev 12:9; 20:2). In Isaiah 7:14, a passage further pointing to the Messiah’s deity, God revealed that the Messiah would receive the name Immanuel, meaning, “God with us.” Isaiah prophesied additionally that this child will be called “Mighty God” and “Eternal Father” (Isa 9:6). The picture becomes still clearer in John 12:41, a verse explaining that when Isaiah saw Yahweh of hosts in Isaiah 6:5, he in fact saw Jesus. According to John 19:37, Jesus also fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10, in which God said: “They will look on Me whom they have pierced.” Jesus’ deity is ultimately confirmed by Jesus Himself, when He alluded to the name of God “I am who I am” (Exod 3:14) and declared: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

In His incarnation, the second Person of the Trinity humbled Himself and assumed to Himself a human nature in union with His divine nature—remaining wholly God while also becoming wholly man. As Paul explained to the Philippians, although Jesus existed “in the form of God,” He came to earth “in the likeness of men” and “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6–8). Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the Old Testament prophesied that God would in fact be pleased with Jesus’ death: “But Yahweh was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief” (Isa 53:10). Moreover, Isaiah even said that the death of the Messiah was part of the redemptive plan of God: “But Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isa 53:6). Peter reiterated this incredible truth in Acts 2:23, saying that Jesus was “delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God,” being “nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men” (cf. 1

Pet 1:20–21). Every detail of Jesus' passion was fulfilled in perfect accord with Old Testament prophecy (cf. Matt. 26:54). How, then, did the divine Messiah suffer such humiliation when He deserves absolute glory? Jesus Himself answered this while speaking to two men on the road to Emmaus: "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:25–26). The suffering and death of the Messiah was the path to glory and joy (Heb 12:2).

But we may still ask: How is it that God the Father was pleased with an event as horrific as the death of His Son? Isaiah 53 holds the answer: "Yahweh was *pleased* to crush Him" because "the good *pleasure* of Yahweh will succeed in His hand" (Isa 53:10; emphasis added). God was pleased to crush the Messiah because the Messiah became a guilt offering and achieved the will of God (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). This is the very reason God the Father exclaimed to Jesus: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:11; cf. Matt 3:17). This is also Paul's explanation for God's pleasure, that God predestined us "to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:5). God was pleased with the death of Jesus because it accomplished the divine plan of redemption (cf. Isa 53:12).

Hence, the death of the Lord Jesus is the central message of the gospel, as Paul declared: "We preach Christ crucified!" (1 Cor 1:23). Indeed, Christ Himself explained that He was born in order to die: "Even the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In the end, because Jesus humbled Himself, God the Father exalted Him: "Therefore, God also highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (Phil 2:9). The plan of redemption that originated in eternity past will reach into eternity future, as believers worship Christ for being the Lamb who was slain. Having searched the Scriptures to see the Messiah in the Old Testament (Acts 17:11), we now look to the day when we shall see Him in His glory (1 John 3:2). Because our hope is in Him, we will join the myriads of saints and angels to worship Christ for His death and resurrection, singing: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev 5:12).

“THEY WERE NOT SERVING THEMSELVES, BUT YOU”: RECLAIMING THE PROPHETS’ MESSIANIC INTENTION

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* * * * *

This article defends the view that the Old Testament declares Christ from the beginning. However, we must discern Christ in the Old Testament by a careful study of the text and the intent of the text, not by reading new meaning back into the text. The authors of the Old Testament wrote about the Messiah, and they formed a deep messianic theology. In light of this, it is incumbent upon us to be watchful for how the biblical writers use and reuse words and phrases, how they form connections and patterns, and how they make linguistically distinctive associations in order to develop a messianic theology. In this way, we will be able to identify the messianic character and purpose of the Old Testament authors, and we shall see where they were “predicting the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Pet 1:11).

* * * * *

Introduction

In dealing with the topic of Christ in the Old Testament, some may charge that dispensationalists take issue with the Christocentric hermeneutic because we do not believe that Christ is central. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We believe that the Old Testament declares Christ from the beginning. The very opening chapters of Genesis declare Him (cf. Gen 3:15), setting the very trajectory of redemptive history.¹ Because of this, we believe that the flow of God’s plan revolves around preserving a line of seed culminating in the Messiah. He is the climax of all history. We believe Christ is not only at the beginning and at the end of history,

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 248. The outline of the above paragraph corresponds with the summary of Christology found in this volume. That is intentional. It demonstrates a Christ-centered viewpoint in a work that affirms dispensational distinctives.

but also that He drives this history. He at times acts as the Angel of Yahweh or the Word of Yahweh (cf. Exod 3:2; Zech 12:8).² We believe that the Old Testament attests to Him in direct prophecy (cf. Num 24:17). We believe that the Davidic dynasty sets up for Him, and that He is the fulfillment of its royal destiny.³ We believe that the Old Testament establishes important theological realities—including atonement, salvation, forgiveness, and righteousness—that can only be accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. We also believe that the storyline of the Old Testament inexorably drives toward the New Testament and thereby the revelation of the Messiah in His incarnation.

Within the New Testament, we believe that the Gospels reveal Him with particular focus upon His atoning death, resurrection, and ascension. We believe that in Acts the church is His witness, testifying of Him (Acts 1:8), and that the epistles establish both practice and theology that exalt Him. All of this moves to the book of Revelation where heaven asks who is worthy to open the scroll (Rev 5:2). All Scripture has already testified to the answer, for it has established that only One has been the culmination of God's plan, the driver of His work, the only true King, the Savior, and the fulfillment of theology, history, and prophecy. This One—the Lord Jesus Christ—is the only One worthy to receive and open the scroll, judge and claim the earth, reign over it (Rev 5:12), satisfy His wrath against His foes (Rev 14:10), and be celebrated forever (Rev 22:3). He is the final Adam who will never let the world fall into sin ever again (cf. Rev 20:10–15) and is thereby the solution to the problem of evil.

Thus, there is no salvation apart from Christ. Israel also will not receive her promises as originally articulated apart from the Lord Jesus. There is no kingdom apart from Him. And we believe that the fullness of that kingdom and all that is promised therein can only come about by the Messiah. Therefore, all glory belongs to Him and Him alone. Him we proclaim (cf. Col 1:28).

No one should say that dispensationalists do not believe in the centrality of Christ simply because we insist on consistently holding to a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic. In fact, it is the opposite. We believe Christ's lordship is so central that He is not only over our proclamation but also over our study. Christ does not permit one to handle His word in any way he chooses (cf. 2 Tim 2:15; 2 Pet 3:16). And such a hermeneutical standard is not merely conceptual, but it is demonstrated by our Lord's direct action. In Matthew 4, Satan quotes from Psalm 91 to argue that Christ should leap from the highest point of the temple (Matt 4:5–6). The devil's interpretation of the psalm is technically based upon the wording of the text, and the implication he raises is logically possible. Nevertheless, our Lord strongly and rightly rebukes him (Matt 4:7). The meaning of the text is not merely what one wants it to be or even what the text could say or imply. Our Lord's standard is higher. Only the interpretation and the implication that fall within what the author willed are valid.⁴ True interpretation is about upholding the words "thus says Yahweh," and maintaining the words "all that the prophets have spoken" (cf. Luke 24:25), as opposed to prophesying from one's own heart (cf. Ezek 13:2). This standard is the driver behind a literal-grammatical-historical

² MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 240–41.

³ MacArthur and Mayhue, 253–54.

⁴ Robert H. Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 451–56.

hermeneutic, which revolves around affirming the authority of authorial intent (literal), communicated linguistically in a text (grammar) and in light of what the author refers to outside of the text (history). The framework of the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic is designed to glean what the author meant. In this way, this hermeneutic arises from a concern to say only what God permits in any given text, a fidelity the biblical writers themselves demand (cf. Ezra 7:10; Neh 8:8; Ezek 13:2; 2 Pet 3:16) and demonstrate (cf. John 10:35; 1 Cor 4:6; 15:1–5). All this to say, the care for hermeneutics is not because Christ is not central, but, to the contrary, because He is central. We want to honor Christ in both declaring Him, but also in handling His Word accurately (cf. 2 Tim 2:15).

At this point though, a pastoral issue arises. As an expositor teaches the Old Testament, one might wonder if a certain text or idea connects with Christ. How does one know that with certainty? We desire to declare Christ, and rightly so. But how does that exactly work in daily study and weekly teaching? It is one matter to pick a single passage that we already know links with Christ, yet it is an entirely different matter to discern these issues as one walks through Old Testament books.

Other works have critiqued the Christocentric hermeneutic.⁵ However, the above questions give rise to another avenue in discussing the issue of Christ in the Old Testament and the Christocentric hermeneutic. The goal of this article is not to critique as much as it is to construct, and to construct not merely a practical methodology of discerning Christ in the Old Testament but an epistemological framework for how Christ is in the Old Testament. In other words, this article seeks to answer the questions: How is Christ in the Old Testament and how do we know?

In response, my thesis is simple. A new or special hermeneutic is not required to see Christ in the first part of Scripture; one does not need to circumvent authorial intent. Instead, one just needs to have a proper view of the Old Testament authors. The prophets knew complex theological ideas including the Messiah, they intended to speak of Him, and they knew how to do so. Indeed, as Peter asserts regarding “the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow,” the prophets “were those who were not serving themselves,” but us (1 Pet 1:11–12). As such, one just needs to carefully follow what these authors were saying (as he is always supposed to), and upon doing so, he will inevitably see Christ in the Old Testament. That is because the prophets, under the inspiration of the Spirit, consciously advance the messianic theology in the Old Testament which sets up for the New Testament, just as the apostles claim.⁶ By tracing this messianic theology, we not only honor Christ in the means of study, but also exhibit a more thorough and rich proclamation of Christ in the end.

Identifying the Central Problem

In advancing this thesis, one must correctly identify the issue. Often the debate about Christ in the Old Testament revolves around hermeneutics. After all, the topic

⁵ See Abner Chou, “Real Thick Meaning and Preaching Christ from the Old Testament,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22 (2018): 143–55; Abner Chou, “A Hermeneutical Evaluation of the Christocentric Hermeneutic,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 27 (2016): 113–39.

⁶ See Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning Interpretation from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 123–25 for a list of introductory formulae which demonstrate the claim that the NT is in harmony, grounded upon, or consistent with the OT.

is even labeled as the Christocentric hermeneutic (versus the Christotelic hermeneutic).⁷ However, my contention is that the main issue is not about hermeneutics as much as it is about bibliology. To be sure, the latter drives the former. Nevertheless, the crux of argumentation does not hinge on hermeneutics as much as on the nature of authorial intent in the Old Testament.

The way the Christocentric hermeneutic is often argued illustrates this. As noted, this article does not intend to engage in a critique of the Christocentric hermeneutic. A more thorough summary and analysis can be found elsewhere.⁸ Nevertheless, a brief summary can demonstrate that in the end, what begins as a hermeneutical argument moves to a bibliological argument about the nature of the authorial intent in the Old Testament. The Christocentric hermeneutic maintains that one should situate every Old Testament text in Christ.⁹ That can happen through a variety of means including typology, prophecy, or biblical theological themes.¹⁰ While these things certainly happen in the Old Testament, what makes some uncomfortable is the insistence to make connections with Christ that seem far outside of what was originally articulated.¹¹ The counter to such apprehension is that there is a hermeneutical shift due to the Christ event, which allows one to see the full Christological meaning of the Old Testament (cf. Luke 24:27). Proponents of the Christocentric hermeneutic contend that there was always symbolism that pointed to Christ latent in the Old Testament. And because of Christ's coming, what was hidden is now revealed. Christ has opened people's eyes to re-read the Old Testament with a proper lens and unlock what was always there.¹² Advocates of the Christocentric approach argue that this hermeneutic shift is precisely why the New Testament writers employ texts in supposedly unusual and non-contextual ways. Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 is case in point. Though Hosea 11:1 originally was speaking of Israel's exodus, Matthew appeals to the text to describe Christ's escape from Herod. Supporters of the Christocentric hermeneutic believe that this reflects a new hermeneutic that should be used on the whole of the Old Testament.¹³

In the above discussion, the Christocentric argument presumes a certain nature of the Old Testament. Put simply, the Christocentric approach argues that because there is an additional layer of meaning in the text, there must be an additional

⁷ See Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 269–75; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 106–108; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 105–14.

⁸ Chou, "Christocentric Hermeneutic," 115–23.

⁹ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Model* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 203–205.

¹⁰ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 269–75; Goldsworthy, *Biblical Theology*, 106–8.

¹¹ See examples in Chou, "Christocentric Hermeneutic," 118–19.

¹² Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 1; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 5; Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, 1st ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 228–29.

¹³ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 138–39; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 84.

hermeneutic to access it.¹⁴ Thus, while the case for the Christocentric may initially be hermeneutical, it is ultimately grounded upon how it views authorial intent and the Old Testament. Even more, such understanding not only drives the framework of the Christocentric hermeneutic, but it also generates its major methodological challenge. Because the additional (divine) layer is not readily seen by what the original authors articulated, it becomes difficult to prove with certainty one's Christocentric interpretation over another.¹⁵ As Daniel I. Block questions, how does one know if an interpretation of a text is coming from its actual meaning as opposed to the ingenuity of the interpretation?¹⁶ This is an important question, for if an idea comes from one's self as opposed to Scripture itself, then one is not declaring God's Word, but his own word. Scripture warns against such practices (cf. Deut 18:20; Ezek 13:2). As commented elsewhere, the Christocentric hermeneutic has done well to contend for the recovery of a "thick" meaning of Scripture; that is to say, that the Scripture is filled with theology, and not just a series of moral lessons.¹⁷ However, their challenge is whether that meaning is "real." Is it from Scripture itself or from the interpreter?¹⁸ And that question directly stems from how the interpreters perceive the meaning of the Old Testament.

However, the Christocentric hermeneutic is not the only viewpoint that wrestles with the issue of authorial intent and the Old Testament. This also applies to those who fall into the opposite extreme. In avoiding reading Christ into the Old Testament, people can inadvertently read Christ out of the Old Testament. The introduction of this article hinted at the practical situations that lead to this. As one begins to study the Old Testament, he encounters various challenges against a messianic interpretation of certain texts. For instance, scholars argue that Psalm 110 is simply about Solomon's inauguration or that Psalm 22 is about David's illness.¹⁹ Likewise,

¹⁴ Or a more expansive explanation: the Christocentric hermeneutic contends that the Old Testament writers were limited in their ability to speak of the Messiah. So a full messianic theology is hidden away in the text, unbeknownst to the prophets and thereby undetectable via literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Rather, this additional (divine) layer awaits the Christ event which will unlock it. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 51; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 84; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 137.

¹⁵ This becomes evident in the clash of interpretations in the series of articles: Daniel I. Block, "Christotelic Preaching: A Plea for Hermeneutical Integrity and Missional Passion," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2018): 7–34; Craig A. Carter, "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Response to Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson and Vern Poythress," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2018): 129–41; Vern S. Poythress, "Christocentric Preaching," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2018): 47–66; Elliott E. Johnson, "Expository Preaching and Christo-Promise," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2018): 35–45.

¹⁶ Daniel I. Block, "Daniel Block on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," in *Christ-Centered Preaching and Teaching*, ed. Ed Stetzer (Nashville: Lifeway, 2013), 7.

¹⁷ David Murray, "David Murray on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," in *Christ-Centered Preaching and Teaching*, ed. Ed Stetzer (Nashville: Lifeway, 2013), 9; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 294.

¹⁸ See discussion in Block, "Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," 7. See also Chou, "Real Thick Meaning," 149–51.

¹⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 197; T. Longman, "The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings," in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. S. E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 17; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 834; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 347; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 294.

some put forth the idea that Psalm 2 merely describes a generic royal coronation.²⁰ Upon reading such analysis, one begins to wonder if the biblical writers really knew about a Messiah, why they would write about Him in these kinds of circumstances, and if they did, how they would indicate any of this. These questions begin to incite suspicion against the prophets' ability to engage in a messianic theology. They make it seem that the prophets have less to say about Christ, and certainly that they have less opportunity to do so. Longman's comments illustrate this mentality: "As we read the psalm in its Old Testament context, we have no reason to insist that the human composer consciously intended the referent of the anointed to reach beyond the human ruler."²¹

This line of thinking though, just like the Christocentric hermeneutic, revolves around the nature of meaning in the Old Testament. While the above questions may seem honest and legitimate, they actually stem from the influence of higher criticism. In essence, higher criticism seeks to explain the nature of Scripture apart from supernatural influence, and instead from an Enlightenment framework of the history of religions.²² From JEPD to the Baur hypothesis, higher criticism argues that the Bible's own account for its origin is not the actual story; rather, using a variety of literary and linguistic analyses, higher criticism maintains that there was a history of composition and conflict to produce what we now have in the Bible.²³ In a lot of ways, higher criticism is deconstructive; it deconstructs biblical claims and explanations in order to show what "truly" took place. And many have aptly written to counter these arguments.²⁴

That being said, what at times is forgotten in these discussions is that higher criticism is not merely deconstructive, but that it is also constructive. It not only tears down but also leaves a new framework in its place. Consequently, having torn down the biblical claims about its origins, higher criticism depicts the scriptural writers in a completely new light. The analyses within higher criticism reorient one's perspective on the Old Testament prophets. For example, source criticism argues that the Scripture came from a variety of competing traditions. As such, the Bible is

²⁰ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 126; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 64; deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 65; Longman, "Messiah," 17.

²¹ Longman, "Messiah," 17.

²² Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooper, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2011), 136–37.

²³ J. W. Rogerson, *W. M. L. De Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography*, Journal for the Study of The Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 91–103; Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983), 37–60. For NT, see Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1986*, 2nd edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20–46, 205–51.

²⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, "The Development of the Historical Critical Method," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Mark F. Rooper, Michael A. Grisanti, and Eugene H. Merrill (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2011), 129–48; Iain Provan et al., *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 3–36; Jens B. Kofoed, *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003); Robert L. Thomas, "Redaction Criticism," in *The Jesus Crisis*, ed. Robert L. Thomas and David Farnell (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 233–70; Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

stitched together by a process of people compiling, inserting, resisting, merging, and redacting sources for political reasons.²⁵ Based upon this framework, the biblical writers could not have known a cohesive theology because a cohesive Bible never existed. Source criticism begins to swap out a picture of the prophets as those who studiously searched the Scriptures (cf. 1 Pet 1:10–11) for one that depicts them as merely editors and pseudo-historians.²⁶

Similarly, form or genre criticism also reimagines the biblical writers. A part of genre criticism is not merely to identify literary style of a certain passage of Scripture, but also by this to establish its *Sitz im Leben* and purpose.²⁷ That is why, for example, certain psalms are strictly tied with historical events of the psalmist's day.²⁸ Such analysis depicts the biblical writers as people consumed with the circumstances of their day. Accordingly, form criticism restricts the purpose of the biblical writers. They had myopic vision, only dealing with contemporary matters, and they had no interest in addressing anything beyond this.

Another major analysis in higher criticism is redaction criticism. This endeavors to identify the way an editor shaped sources toward his agenda. One might initially think that this activity would be useful as it brings forth theology from the text. However, two major qualifications exist. First, while redaction may initially point out some theological emphases and themes, those observations are quickly turned to the political agenda of the redactor.²⁹ These redactions are therefore not theological, but rather ideological. Second, redaction criticism argues that the significance of a text is found in these edits, which are often few in number and subtle in appearance. In this framework, everything outside of these edits is simply part of the original source and remained unchanged because it was outside of the "theological" purpose of the redactor. As opposed to bringing forth theology from the text, redaction criticism ends up negating the depth of large swaths of texts.³⁰ In light of this, the biblical writers are not those who write a cohesive text that is theological in nature. At best, there are certain subtle features within a text that reflect their ideology, while the rest of the material does not even reach that level of theological information.

Hence, higher criticism has reconstructed the nature of the biblical writers. They become writers who do not meditate on God's Word (cf. Josh 1:7–8), who are so focused on their current circumstances that they never would address matters from (or unto) a larger redemptive historical perspective, and who at best engage in subversive ideology.³¹ With such conceptualization, skepticism of a messianic

²⁵ Jonathan Huddleston, "Recent Scholarship on the Pentateuch: Historical, Literary, and Theological Reflections," *Restoration Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (January 1, 2013): 195, 205–206.

²⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, "Ark in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 1968): 2; Ronald E. Clements, "Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition," *Vetus testamentum* 15, no. 3 (July 1, 1965): 302; Frederick E. Greenspahn, "Deuteronomy and Centralization," *Vetus testamentum* 64, no. 2 (January 1, 2014): 227–28.

²⁷ Longman, "Messiah," 17–18; Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 11.

²⁸ See Longman, "Messiah," 17–18; Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 3–45.

²⁹ Clements, "Jerusalem Cult Tradition," 300–12; Neill and Wright, *Interpretation of the New Testament*, 26–42.

³⁰ Merrill, "Historical Critical Method," 140–42.

³¹ *Ibid.*

theology in the Old Testament is not merely reasonable but expected. How could the prophets know and speak of a Messiah if they had no robust religious text to refer to, but only had bits of source material which could never provide such a perspective?³² Similarly, why would the prophets bother to talk about Messiah if all they cared about were the issues of the present moment, per form criticism? Even more, how would the biblical writers convey such an extensive theology if they only engaged in limited and subliminal theological activity, as redaction criticism highlights?

At this point, two observations should be made. First, the reservations listed above are the very kinds of questions people ask in studying the Old Testament. Second, what the above discussion has shown is that these questions are not neutral. Rather, they are directly tied to the way higher criticism conceptualizes the Old Testament writers. Put differently, biblical claims do not drive the types of questions in the previous paragraph. The question of whether the biblical writers knew deep theological truths cannot logically come from the assertion that the prophets meditated on Scripture day and night (cf. Pss 1:2; 16:7; 63:6–7; Dan 9:2). Likewise, the question of whether the Old Testament authors wrote to bigger issues than their current circumstances cannot be derived from the fact that these men were constantly aware of Israel's covenant history (cf. Neh 9:1–37; Dan 9:1–19; Pss 78; 105–106).³³ And the question of whether they did theology does not fit with the depiction of Scripture as profitable, deep, and wonderful (cf. Pss 19:7–14; 119:18, 124). In effect, Scripture's self-descriptions do not fuel the above questions. Something else does. And that external factor is higher criticism. It has reimagined the biblical writers, what they can and cannot do, and what they are inclined and not inclined to do. These observations are not new. Hamilton and Rydelnik have raised these critiques in the past.³⁴ More recently, those who have advocated for the theological interpretation of Scripture have also aired these concerns.³⁵ While we may have disagreement with the solution proposed by some of these camps, they all have rightly observed the same problem.³⁶ Higher criticism has placed artificial restrictions upon the biblical authors and thereby the meaning of the Bible.

³² With a theological avenue removed, the only way the Old Testament writers could come up with such a concept is through experiencing the historical failing of the royal dynasty of Israel and postulating against hope that there would be one to revive the line of kings, as higher criticism postulates.

³³ Paul R. House, "Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005): 245.

³⁴ Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 2–7; James Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10 (2006): 44.

³⁵ As mentioned, the weakness of the Christocentric hermeneutic is whether the interpreter could truly establish that a certain Christological reading was truly from the text or from one's own creativity. This approach has the thickness of meaning but lacks the epistemological grounding to ensure its reality. Methods that lean more toward higher criticism have the inverse problem. They are certainly grounded to the text and are "real" in that way. However, they often lack the sophistication of meaning one might expect with Scripture that is inspired and profitable (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). Such readings might be real, but they lack thickness. See discussion in Chou, "Real Thick Meaning," 143–50.

³⁶ Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14 (2010): 28–36; D. A. Carson, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But," in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 187–207. As Carson particularly explains, "Should the

This brings the discussion of this particular section full circle. I originally contended that the issue in Christ in the Old Testament is not as much hermeneutical as it is bibliological. It is not about methodology, but about the nature of the biblical writers themselves. And that has borne out on both sides of the issue. The Christocentric hermeneutic appeals to a hidden divine layer of meaning on top of the biblical writers' intent. And approaches from the opposite spectrum emaciate authorial intent. Whether a person is accused of reading Christ in or reading Christ out, the issue all revolves around one's perspective and response to authorial intent.

Therefore, the solution to this issue revolves around dealing with authorial intent. It is by recovering the fullness of the prophets' intent that we can show the Old Testament provides the rich theological meaning the Christocentric hermeneutic desires while also showing that this meaning is from the very intent of the prophets, which satisfies those who are concerned with exegetical realism. Reclaiming the sophistication of authorial intent is the way forward.

And this tact is not merely philosophically warranted, but more importantly, biblically demanded. We can see this in three ways. First, Scripture establishes that its meaning is authorial intent. Scripture itself grounds that its meaning is authorial intent. Introductory formulae, like "what was spoken through the prophet" (Matt 21:4) or "what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (Matt 1:22) or "what was written by the prophet" (Matt 2:5) or "the word of Isaiah... which he spoke" (John 12:38), assert that the meaning of the text is the idea of the divinely inspired writer.

Second, Scripture establishes that divine and human intent are concordant or confluent.³⁷ The above formulae interchange the human and divine writers. They are one and the same in their intent. In addition, 2 Peter 1:21, in providing a definition of inspiration, also articulates this union between human and divine authorship. In this text, it is noteworthy that the subject of the sentence is "men" (ἄνθρωποι). Peter articulates that the Scripture does not arise from dictation where people are just automatons for the divine author. Instead, the apostle asserts that the biblical writer is speaking.³⁸ The substance of its meaning is seen in the intent of that individual (with his own language and style) as perfectly guided and superintended by the Spirit. Our Lord in Luke 24 also affirms this. Christ describes the Old Testament as "all that

secular hermeneutical categories of habitual naturalism constrain our reading of the Bible, or should we read the Bible as Christians?" (188–89). See also Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018); Carter, "Preaching Christ," 129–38. In the latter work, Carter evaluates Elliot Johnson's argument about messianic prophecy in the OT. Carter's quote is helpful to elucidate not only his position but also what he is arguing for and against: "Johnson recognizes the importance of understanding the Christological meaning being inherent in the OT text and not merely read into it after the fact. He says: 'The presence of Christ is the result of the author's intent as the promise is expressed in the text and is capable of being understood at that time in history; whether or not we have indication in the text that characters did understand'" (36). Johnson argues that a grammatical interpretation of OT texts lead to a Christological interpretation. This emphasis on the objective Christological meaning of the text is a welcome one insofar as it grounds the Christological meaning identified by the apostles as inherent in the text itself" (138).

³⁷ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1948), 88–96.

³⁸ Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 233; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 324; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 214.

the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). Such wording ascribes that the substance of the Old Testament is what the prophets themselves expressed under inspiration.³⁹

Third, Scripture presents the prophets as consciously aware that they spoke of Christ. Having described the Old Testament as that which the prophets have spoken (cf. Luke 24:25), our Lord “interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Christ believed that the meaning of the Old Testament was authorial intent, that within this intent there were “things concerning Himself” (τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ), and that these things were distributed “in all the Scriptures” (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς). Put together, our Lord believed that the prophets throughout the Old Testament willfully discussed Him.⁴⁰ That is why He rebukes the disciples: “And He said to them, ‘O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!’” (Luke 24:25). In context, this is a reprimand of the disciples who should have been able to understand that the Christ was to suffer and then enter into glory (cf. Luke 24:22–24, 26). Such a rebuke presumes that the Old Testament already articulated such ideas apart from any hermeneutical shift or additional meaning. It reflects that the prophets knew of Him and deliberately wrote about Him in ways that were clear. Along that line, Peter claims that David knew of the Messiah and spoke of Him (cf. Acts 2:30–31).⁴¹ Elsewhere, the same apostle also says that while the prophets may not have known the timing or the exact circumstances of how their prophecies would be fulfilled, they understood “the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Pet 1:11).⁴² In addition, Paul contends that the gospel of Christ’s death for sin, burial, and resurrection on the third day are all according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1–4). The New Testament writers believe that the Messiah is in the Old Testament not in spite of the Old Testament writers, but because the Old Testament writers in fact wrote of Him.

Thus, Scripture establishes that its meaning is authorial intent, that intent cannot be bifurcated between human and divine, and that the human authors themselves, under inspiration, had rich knowledge and expression of the Messiah. These truths remind us that as opposed to appealing to a divine layer of meaning or limiting authorial intent, we need to recenter the Messianic meaning of the Old Testament where the Scripture does: in the inspired intent of the prophets. This point is not just a solution in light of how the debate over Christ in the Old Testament has played out; it is the framework that Scripture itself establishes. Such a framework argues that this proposal is not just a theoretical way forward, but that it is part of the true solution toward understanding Christ in the Old Testament.

³⁹ See D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 282–83.

⁴⁰ In addition, the verse does not mean that Christ made all things in Scripture concerning Himself. Note that the construction διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ is not a double accusative equating one with the other (i.e., He explained to them all Scripture *to be/as* the things concerning Himself). Rather, this verse does say that He spoke about Himself from the portions of Scripture that discussed Him. See Carson, *Collected Writings*, 282–83.

⁴¹ Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 230; David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 148; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 146.

⁴² Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 99; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter*, 73.

The Prophets of the Old Testament

As discussed, higher criticism has both deconstructed and reconstructed a picture of the biblical writers. Higher critics would have us see the prophets as editors, pseudo-historians, and politicians. But, as we will argue, Scripture depicts them as exegetes and theologians, those who carefully searched out the Scriptures and expounded upon its deep truths. These are two starkly contrasting pictures. And even if one does not hold to the extreme of higher criticism, perhaps he does not think of the prophets as highly as he ought. Given the difference of perspective, how do we recover a correct depiction of the biblical writers? There are three steps in rebuilding our conceptualization of the Old Testament writers. We need to show that the biblical writers can speak with sophistication, that they have the knowledge to do so, and, therefore, we must then engage in this. This progression builds a case, contra higher criticism, that the prophets have the ability, inclination, and intent to do theology as they write Scripture.⁴³

The Prophet's Ability (Intent)

First, we can fundamentally contend that the biblical writers have the capacity to communicate theological and even practical truths. The reason for this goes back to the nature of intent. While claiming that authorial intent is central, we need to know what the nature of intent is. Intent is far more than just information. It deals with the purpose of what is said in context, and as such, it includes the desired effects it is to have on the reader. For example, if someone playing baseball sees the ball flying at him and says, "I got it," he does not want the other players on the field merely to comprehend that he aims to catch the ball. Rather, the purpose of him saying this is also to warn the player not to interfere, but to move out of his way. Thus, if someone runs into this individual despite the warning, he might say, "Did you not hear what I said?" This is because he presumes that if one heard his words, the hearer not only understood what he said, but that he understood also why he said it and what the proper response to it should have been. That is the nature of intent. The same is true if one comes home to one's spouse and says, "Honey, I am home." The spouse could easily respond, "Well, that is obvious." To be sure, if one is audibly heard in the house, presumably it is obvious that he is physically present in the home. Nonetheless, that is not the point of why a person says the statement. The intent of such a statement goes beyond what is said (i.e., that someone is physically present at home), to why it is said (i.e., that it serves as an enthusiastic greeting and joy to be home), to the particular reaction it aims to prompt (i.e., a warm greeting back or an embrace). Intent is far more than just information.

Some may contend that such a notion of intent as "what," "why," and "so what" stems from speech act theory. It is true that speech act, with its delineation of locution (what is said), illocution (purpose or motivation behind the statement), and perlocution (effect), provides such a framework.⁴⁴ However, this observation about

⁴³ Hamilton, "Seed of the Woman," 30. To use Hamilton's words, the Old Testament is a "Messianic document." That is because the prophets intentionally wrote it for this purpose.

⁴⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 198–210.

intent is hardly contingent upon the theory. For example, works on Bible interpretation often talk about identifying the “point” of a passage.⁴⁵ The notion of a “point,” “main idea,” or “thesis” of a text is a reminder that authors do not merely provide a list of ideas. That is why hermeneutics textbooks speak of various grammatical and logical relations—including coordination, explanation, and argumentation—as one traces the biblical writer’s flow of argument.⁴⁶ Such analysis reflects the reality that biblical interpretation sees how facts align to accomplish the author’s purpose. That recognizes intent to be not merely as what is said, but also why it is said, and moreover the so what of what is said. Hermeneutical thinking long before speech act has acknowledged this in one way or another.⁴⁷

More importantly, Scripture itself articulates these categories. For instance, believers should be not only hearers but doers of the Word (cf. Jas 1:22–23). Scripture has both a *what* and a *so what*. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testament writers point out that Scripture also has a *what* and a *why*. For example, at times Israel may have kept *what* the law said (Isa 1:10–15), but still disobeyed because they failed to keep the reason behind *why* God gave the law in the first place (Isa 1:16–17; Amos 5:21–26).⁴⁸ They kept the letter of the law, but did not heed its spirit or intention. This illustrates that God not only cares about *what* is said, but also about *why* it is said. That is part of scriptural meaning. In fact, the legal language of the Bible recognizes these categories. The phrase “statutes and judgments” (הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים) is often used in the law (cf. Deut 6:1; 12:1). The term “statutes” can denote a boundary and refers to the fundamental reason or principle behind the law.⁴⁹ It determines why a certain rule(s) exists, forms the essential line between keeping or breaking the rule, and thereby determines the extent of these rules. In contrast, the word “judgments” refers to particular judicial decisions made based upon legal principles. The language of “statutes and judgments” then discusses the *what* (specific judgments) of the law even as it discusses the *why* (the statutes or principles) of the law. Consequently, such a framework accounts for why Jesus can talk about how the law concerning murder relates ultimately to anger (Matt 5:21–22) or the law of adultery is inherently

⁴⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 608–11; Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victory Publishing, 2003), 123–33; Howard G. G. Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 274.

⁴⁶ Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 598.

⁴⁷ The same could be said about the notion of meaning and significance or meaning and application. Meaning is what and why it is said, and application/significance is the “so what.”

⁴⁸ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1–39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 96. M. Daniel Carroll R., *The Book of Amos*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 346. Carroll states, “A third alternative is that the people of God performed rituals during the wilderness sojourn but that these were not characterized by the kind of wrongheaded beliefs, lack of ethical concern, and extravagance that mar their current practices. The problem in Amos’s day was not the cult itself but the manner in which Israel conceived of and executed worship. Rituals had always been part of the veneration of Yahweh, but obedience and moral sensitivity are axiomatic to the covenant bond. They give meaning and direction to the ceremonies and should be nurtured through religious practices.”

⁴⁹ G. Liedke, “חֻק,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1:470; Peter Enns, “חֻק,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:250–51.

connected to the issue of lust (Matt 5:27–28). It is also why Paul can relate feeding an ox with paying a pastor (1 Tim 5:17–18; cf. Deut 25:4). All these discussions recognize that intent is not merely the particular information given, but that it also entails the broader reason that drives that specific discussion. Accordingly, categories of what, why, and so what are not man-made, but are part of scriptural logic.

In this article, there has been a healthy emphasis on the intent of the biblical writers, but that intent must be defined. Intent means that the scriptural authors do not merely communicate data, but rather that this information has a greater point and a desired set of results. Such a reality of intent should reorient one's mind about the biblical writers. Often the average reader observes how the Old Testament has history, genealogies, laws, and lists. They assume from this that these mundane facts are the sum total of the Old Testament message, and as a result, that the biblical writers are devoid of any theology. To be sure, the Old Testament has these things, and they are part of the writer's intent. One cannot strip away the historicity from the Scripture.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, intent reminds us that this is not all that is going on in a text. The biblical writers are not merely reciting history, genealogies, or lists, but are using those facts for a contextual purpose and to affect the reader in certain ways. Therein is the opportunity for every Old Testament text to have theology and practicality. Hence, intent points out that there is more to the Old Testament than simply what is said. Put differently, the proper definition of authorial intent is a reminder that the prophets can speak with greater sophistication than we may give them credit for.

The Prophet's Awareness

To say that the prophets can speak in sophisticated ways is not the same as saying that they do so. The prophets could very well be using all that they discuss to make theological points with devotional effects. However, they could have a different purpose. As higher criticism alleges, the prophets could simply be people writing with a political and cultic goal. So the next stage is to see how the Old Testament writers describe themselves and to allow that to begin to fill in the purpose of their writings and its intended outcomes.

It does not take long to see that the prophets deeply cared about Scripture. Moses was consumed with God's law. His final words comprise an explanatory message on the law (Deut 1:5) and within that, he repeatedly urges God's people to listen to the Lord's statutes and judgments, and not to add or subtract from them in any way (Deut 4:1–2).⁵¹ Joshua follows suit as he urges Israel to be courageous in doing the law

⁵⁰ This is a problem with speech-act. For an example see Kevin J Vanhoozer, "Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth, and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 210–36. For critique of this, see R. Albert Mohler, "Response to Kevin Vanhoozer," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 288–92.

⁵¹ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 92. Craigie states concerning Deuteronomy 1:5, "The word *expound* (*bē'ēr*) has the sense of making something absolutely clear or plain; the same verb is used in 27:8 to indicate the clarity or legibility with which the words of the law were to be inscribed in stone. *This law*,

(Josh 1:7) and not to allow the book of the law to depart from their mouth (Josh 1:8). This begins an entire mentality in the prophets: they command Israel to know God's Word (Isa 1:10; Jer 10:1; Hos 6:1–3) and condemn Israel for failing to heed it (2 Kgs 17:15–18; Jer 6:19; Ezek 33:32). Furthermore, the prophets did not merely command their hearers to know Scripture, they claim that they themselves knew Scripture. David meditates upon Scripture in the night watches (cf. Ps 63:6). Asaph does as well (Ps 77:12). Solomon's understanding of the Davidic covenant influences his prayer (1 Kgs 8:14–21). Similarly, Daniel's reading of Jeremiah informs his petition to the Lord (Dan 9:2). Ezra 7:10 famously recounts how the scribe sought to study, live, and teach God's Word. Thus, Old Testament writers from early on to the post-exilic period, in wisdom literature to Pentateuch and to prophecy, all demand and demonstrate a fixation on Scripture. If one accepts the prophets' self-description as accurate,⁵² then the prophets not only *can* speak in sophisticated ways (see above), but they also have the knowledge base to do so.

The Prophet's Activity

This leads to the final step in reconstructing the biblical writers. We must move from what the prophets potentially can do to what they actually do carry out. We need to show that they take the deep scriptural knowledge they have and apply it in their writings. We need to demonstrate that this is their primary activity as they write Scripture.

To prove this exhaustively is far outside the scope of this article. Other writings have already demonstrated the intertextuality of the Old Testament quite thoroughly.⁵³ Nevertheless, a short summary of these findings is helpful. The historical books certainly reference prior revelation. For example, David alludes to the Old Testament law in demanding four-fold restitution for theft (cf. 2 Sam 12:6; Exod 22:1). In addition, the biblical narrator consistently assesses the kings of Israel relative to their obedience to God's Word (cf. 1 Kgs 14:22; 15:3, 11, 26; 16:25, 30). On top of this, the biblical writers even structure their narratives to

which Moses was to expound, is probably to be understood as *all that the Lord had commanded* (1:3); it was this that formed the basis of the covenant relationship between the Lord and his people. It is important to stress that the content of Deuteronomy is an *exposition* of the law; the book does not simply contain a repetition of the earlier legal material known in Exodus and Numbers, to which a few new laws have been added. It is true that there is a common core of law with the earlier books, but here the law is to be explained and applied by Moses to the particular situation of the Israelites." See also J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 62; Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 57.

⁵² See James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 42–44. As Hamilton discusses, one should take compositional comments in Scripture as they stand.

⁵³ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Craig C. Broyles, "Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon," in *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*, ed. Craig C. Broyles (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 151–76; Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 55–64; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, reprint ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017). In addition to lists of intertextual texts, the existence of Old Testament theologies demand that the biblical writers were proactively connecting their works with previous revelation and developing it. After all, what else are theologians tracing? See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 126; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 55.

correspond to biblical truth. In 1 Kings 10–11, the narrator discusses how Solomon multiplied gold (1 Kgs 10:14–20), horses (1 Kgs 10:23–29), and then wives (1 Kgs 11:1). That is significant since the law of Moses prohibits the king from multiplying those three things (Deut 17:14–17). In the flow of 1 Kings, only when Solomon multiplies all three of these things does the narrator declare that Solomon is officially disqualified. This reflects that the biblical writer not only understood the law of the king but also, under inspiration, understood how to interpret Israel's history in light of it. All of this illustrates that the historical books are replete with scriptural allusion. It demonstrates that while the biblical writer is giving history, he is simultaneously analyzing it theologically.

Such intertextuality and theology are also found in wisdom literature. For example, Psalm 89 is an exposition of the Davidic covenant.⁵⁴ Psalm 2, with its emphasis on sonship (Ps 2:7, 12), alludes back to this same covenant (cf. 2 Sam 7:14). In addition, Psalm 114, in the Egyptian *hallel*, discusses Israel's departure from Egypt, passing through the Red Sea, as well as the crossing of the Jordan. Such intertextuality illustrates how Psalms contemplates the theological significance of Israel's past and promises. This kind of deliberation is not merely in the psalter, but also in the book of Proverbs. For example, Proverbs references Moses' counsel to bind God's Word to one's head and hands (Prov 3:3; cf. Deut 6:5–8). It also reflects on the Pentateuch in its discussion of adultery (Prov 4:15; 7:25; cf. Num 5:12, 19, 20). Earlier, the book of Numbers discusses an adulterous woman who *goes astray* (הטש, Num 5:12). The language is quite rare, so it is significant when Proverbs picks up on this terminology and counsels young men to *stray away* from such a woman (הטש, Prov 4:15) and to not let one's heart to *go astray* into her ways (הטש, Prov 7:25). The writer of Proverbs understands how sin was described earlier and from that, forms a countermeasure against it. That is rich practical theology.

The prophetic books also interface heavily with previous revelation. That is seen in their covenant lawsuits (Isa 1:2; Mic 1–3), which appeal to what Moses established early on (cf. Deut 30:19). It is also seen in the blessings and curses they appeal to (cf. Amos 4:1–13; Joel 1; Lev 26:14–46; Deut 28:38).⁵⁵ In addition to this, the prophet's fixation with Scripture is found in particular details of their writings. For example, Isaiah speaks of how Yahweh will ultimately dwell over Zion in a pillar of smoke and fire (Isa 4:5). This alludes to the Exodus. Similarly, the same prophet discusses how Yahweh, who “makes a way through the sea” (Isa 43:16), will also make a roadway in the wilderness and rivers in the wasteland (Isa 43:19). The language also refers back to the Exodus and reminds God's people that while God delivered in the past, there is a new Exodus awaiting them.⁵⁶ Isaiah certainly engaged in prior revelation to develop theology. Jeremiah does so as well. He speaks of the Branch (cf. Jer 23:5) which was first introduced in Isaiah (Isa 11:1). Jeremiah also speaks of a new heart (cf. Jer 31:31) which alludes back to Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 36:26) and

⁵⁴ John H. Walton, “Psalms: A Cantata about the Davidic Covenant,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (March 1991): 21–31.

⁵⁵ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 337.

⁵⁶ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40–66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 154; Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 208; A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 335–37.

ultimately the book of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut 30:1–6). Major prophets though are not the only ones who develop what had been revealed before. Although smaller in size, the Twelve, along with the book of Daniel, also do this. Zechariah speaks of the Messiah riding humbly on a donkey (Zech 9:9), which alludes back to how the Messiah will come in on a donkey in Genesis 49:10.⁵⁷ Micah prophesies that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, which recalls past revelation of David's birthplace (Mic 5:2). Nahum speaks of how beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news (Nah 1:15), using wording that is identical to Isaiah (cf. Isa 52:7). Nahum's allusion to Isaiah is deliberate as his message brings comfort by providing a near prophecy that guarantees Isaiah's more distant prophecy.⁵⁸ In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of how a stone made without hands crushes a formidable statue and becomes a mountain that "fills the earth" (Dan 2:35). Such language alludes to a familiar phrase where God fills the earth with His glory (cf. Num 14:21; Isa 6:3; Ezek 43:2). The conclusion of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and this prophetic declaration coincide. The prophets were indeed steeped in biblical knowledge and wrote to expound upon those truths.

The Old Testament writers did not merely interact with individual details and passages from prior revelation. They understood how Scripture also recounted the overarching story of God's plan and situated their ministries within that greater narrative. Moses himself recounts Israel's history as part of the context of God's covenant with Israel (Deut 1–4). Joshua sets Israel's experiences of the Conquest within this history (Josh 24:1–13). Later individuals follow suit including Samuel (1 Sam 12:6–18), David (2 Sam 7:22–24), Solomon (1 Kgs 8:12–21), Asaph (Ps 78), Ezekiel (Ezek 16; 23), Daniel (9:1–14), and Nehemiah (Neh 9). From the beginning to the end of Old Testament history, the prophets have consistently contemplated and located themselves within God's redemptive historical agenda. In scholarly terms, the prophets have maintained a covenantal perspective of history per a Deuteronomic framework.⁵⁹ Such a viewpoint not only looks back, but also looks forward toward the Davidic dynasty (cf. Ps 78:65–68) and even toward the need for God to fulfill His promises (Ezek 16:60–63; Dan 9:24–27; Neh 9:36–38).⁶⁰ With that, Scripture has oriented the way the prophets think about history and their context.

Again, this list is by no means comprehensive. However, it does provide examples⁶¹ throughout the Old Testament that illustrate how the prophets were

⁵⁷ Deborah Krause, "The One Who Comes Unbinding the Blessing of Judah: Mark 11:1–10 as a Midrash on Genesis 49:11, Zechariah 9:9, and Psalm 118:25–26," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations & Proposals*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 141–53.

⁵⁸ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 83.

⁵⁹ Some would call this Deuteronomic history. See Hermann Austel, "The United Monarchy: Archaeology and Literary Issues," in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, ed. David M. Howard, Jr. and M. A. Grisanti (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 160–68.

⁶⁰ House, "Old Testament Narrative," 243–45.

⁶¹ These examples are different from others that I have provided elsewhere. See Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 55–64.

consumed with God's Word in their writings. They not only thought through detailed propositions of Scripture, but also understood them as the entire paradigm of history.

Even in this brief discussion, one can see a picture of the prophets forming in a manner that contrasts the formulation of them by higher criticism. Contrary to source criticism, the prophets did not have an atomistic view of revelation. Rather, they reflected Israel's history (cf. Ps 114), God's promises (cf. Pss 2, 110), and God's law (cf. Num 5:12, 19, 20; Prov 7:20). This is a far cry from piecing together source material for political ends. Moreover, contra form criticism, the prophets did not merely write in light of their current circumstances, but rather with a redemptive-historical viewpoint. Their books not only addressed the issues of their time, but did so in a way that pointed people to God's greater plan, and they sought to advance it. The Old Testament authors wrote in a grander context than higher criticism envisions. On top of all this, contrary to redaction criticism, the writers of the Old Testament were constantly relating what had been revealed with new revelation to advance theological discussion (cf. Jer 23:5; 31:31). The activity of reflection, redemptive-history, and relating new revelation with old show that the prophets were not merely historians, recounters of law, or record keepers. They were exegetes as they knew Scripture, and theologians as they expounded upon it.

One additional prophetic activity is worth mentioning in further depth for this discussion. The prophets did not merely reflect on past revelation, recall redemptive-history, or relate it with new revelation, they also recapitulated it. Put differently, they recognized past patterns in redemptive history, knew under inspiration that what they were discussing followed that pattern, and made this clear in their writings. Such acts of literary recapitulation are what we call typology. Because typology has attracted quite a bit of debate, particularly in the discussion of Christ in the Old Testament, it is appropriate to outline the mechanics by which it works. As just mentioned, the Old Testament writers themselves set up such analogy by connecting what they were writing about with an earlier established pattern. A simple example of this is the incident when Isaac tells Abimelech that Rebekah is his sister (Gen 26:7). The moment is identical to what happened earlier between Abram, Sarai, and Pharaoh (Gen 12:13). The similarity is striking and not lost upon scholars. They rightly observe that the parallel demonstrates that the way God was with Abram continues on in the next generation with Isaac.⁶² The reason that such a parallel occurs is not because these scholars have a typological hermeneutic per se, but rather because they can observe how Moses is raising the similarity between Isaac and Abram.

Another example would be in Exodus 2. There it speaks of how Moses' mother desired to hide her child from Pharaoh. She builds a basket for her son and sends him down the Nile. However, the term for basket is unusual. It is actually the word "ark" (תֵּבָה; Exod 2:3), the same term for Noah's ark (Gen 6:14). In context, Moses' mother most likely did not float a vessel the size of Noah's ark down the Nile. That would hardly be inconspicuous. Nevertheless, Moses, as the writer of Exodus, describes the event in a certain way so as to draw a parallel and raise a pattern. Just as God delivered through Noah, so He would do the same with Moses. Along that line,

⁶² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 191; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 402.

Exodus also discusses at Moses' birth how the "ark" or "basket" was put among the "reeds" (Exod 2:3, 5). The term "reeds" (רִיב) is the exact same word used for the Red Sea (רִיב־יָם) later on (Exod 13:18). With that, Moses' rhetoric not only reaches back to prior incidents but also reaches forward in anticipation of future deliverance. As a result, Moses shows that he not only continues God's work of deliverance as seen in Noah, but he is also deliberately casting a foreshadowing of what God will do for His people at the Red Sea. Again, Moses himself sets up these analogies by his careful word choice and narration.⁶³

Yet another example of typology is found in the life of David. At one point of his life, David finds himself running for his life in the wilderness (1 Sam 21–26). The structure of these episodes seems to revolve around three parts. The first is marked off by David going to the priests for bread, but afterwards the priests die for aiding him (cf. 1 Sam 21–22). The second section (1 Sam 23–24) concludes with David having opportunity to kill Saul, but he does not do so at En Gedi. The third section also concludes with David having opportunity to kill Saul, but he does not do so at the hill of Hachilah (1 Sam 25–26). Within this three-fold structure, Bergen notes the frequent allusions to Israel's own wilderness wanderings:

Favoring the Paran location is the fact that David's life is deliberately presented as a parallel to the history of Israel; this portion of David's life is more closely parallel with Israel if he, like Israel, spent time in the Desert of Paran (cf. Num 10:12ff.). Furthermore, the Desert of Paran, which included Kadesh Barnea, was situated on the southern border of tribal territories allotted to Judah (cf. Josh 15:3) and thus provided the most isolated location within David's homeland for hiding from Saul.⁶⁴

And later Bergen also notes:

These nine chapters depict David's "wilderness experience." As Israel's wilderness experience followed an exodus from a foreign king, so David's followed an exodus from a king "such as all the other nations have." And as the wilderness for Israel preceded possession of the Promised Land, so for David it preceded possession of a promised kingdom. Furthermore, during this wilderness period David experienced events that in crucial ways paralleled those of the Israelites following their expulsion from Egypt—pursuit by the armed forces of the king they were fleeing, a hostile encounter with the Midianites, an attempted foray into Moab, and yet the Lord's protection against all human foes.

These connections between David's life and the Israelites' experiences recorded in the Torah not only magnify the story of David to one of epic

⁶³ See Broyles, "Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon," 157–65; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

⁶⁴ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 263.

proportions, but they also create the expectation that the Lord would ultimately give David the fulfillment of all the good promises made to him.⁶⁵

David is part of a pattern, a pattern found in Israel's wilderness wanderings, and this pattern has ramifications on the rest of redemptive history. After all, David will not be the final person who wanders in the wilderness and undergoes three trials, the first of which deals with bread. Our Lord will as well (Matt 4:1–11), and that follows the pattern set up in the Old Testament.⁶⁶

Several observations can be made from this sampling of typology.⁶⁷ First, typology occurs not because of one's creativity or even a conceptual link the

⁶⁵ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 220. See also, James M. Hamilton, "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12 (2008): 52–77.

⁶⁶ For more details on this see Abner Chou, "Where Did David Go? David's Wilderness Wanderings and the Testing of God's Son," in *Written for Our Instruction: Essays in Honor of William Varner* (Dallas: Fontes Press, 2021), 149–74.

⁶⁷ See later discussion for more examples. In addition to what is mentioned above, these limited examples begin to breakdown some other stereotypes about types. First, they demonstrate that not every type is inherently prophetic. The context of the events surrounding Elisha and Jonah do not necessarily indicate some foreshadowing of Messiah. Nevertheless, they provide a theology that the Messiah can partake in and work out. That is a legitimate application. Second, at the same time, it would be going too far to say that there are no types that have prophetic anticipations. For example, things in the life of David pertain to the nature of the Davidic king of which Christ is chief. There is a more direct association in that case. Similarly, with the birth of Moses, a type-scene is being developed concerning the birth of significant individuals in Scripture. This does set precedent for how Messiah, the ultimate hero, will be born. However, there are mechanisms within the type itself that have already begun associations with Messiah and thus anticipate Him. Third, some assign that the primary significance of a typological event or person is how they prefigure Christ. This gives rise to the exegetical and homiletical methodology to immediately make parallels between Christ and the earlier person or event as if that is the main point or purpose of the passage. However, the above examples show that this is not the case. What technically takes place is that these events or persons establish a certain theological precedent which, being picked up by Christ, is incorporated into His work and actually provides the theological significance of His person and activity. In other words, instead of just showing a parallel between OT and NT events and declaring prophetic fulfillment, the way this actually works is that the parallel with the OT may indicate a prophetic fulfillment (if the original text warrants it), but the connection shows the import of the theology established in the OT text that is incorporated into Christ's person and life in some fashion. Fourth, while typology often sees a very formulaic pattern of some sort of heightening, that may not inherently be the case. For instance, David's failure in the wilderness is righted and fulfilled by our Lord. The same logic applies to the parallel between our Lord and Jonah. However, the parallel between the births of Moses and Christ are not necessarily one of heightening. The parallel there is to show continuity between the two so as to demonstrate that one is the continuation of the other. As such, this of course demonstrates that Jesus is a second Moses. Nevertheless, heightening is not required between the events themselves. This raises the point that just as the author generates, under inspiration, the type, so he also assigns the significance of it as well. Fifth, because typology is anchored upon parallelism with the OT text as well as its theology, then in typology, later revelation does not override earlier revelation. Rather, later revelation depends upon it. In sum, the author of Scripture establishes a pattern which later authors of subsequent revelation pick up on and connect legitimately with Christ. As such, the authors generate the type, and they assign the significance of the type. They do not necessarily fall into the paradigms we as readers have traditionally created. Typology in that way is not always typical. However, based upon these observations, typology actually falls squarely within the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic because the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic is designed to detect what the writer has done, and typology is part of the writer's intent.

interpreter draws, but rather because of a linguistic association found objectively in the text. In that way, typology still falls within the realm of intertextuality.⁶⁸ Second, along that line, this indicates that typology is generated by the author who makes these connections and articulates them in his writings. Third, all of this happens because the prophets are far more than just people who piece together Israel's traditions, but are, under inspiration, those who seek to develop a deep theology of God and His plan. If the prophets are mere record keepers, then it certainly is odd to envision this activity. However, if they are theologians, then it is entirely reasonable for them to discuss history inerrantly and with such theological perspective. And from the above analysis, that is precisely who they are, and the activity of typology reinforces this notion.

This analysis begins to answer some questions. People often wonder if they should engage in a typological hermeneutic. Should we see typology beyond what is stated in Scripture?⁶⁹ While typology does not always need to use the word "type" (see examples above), the only valid type is one that comes from the meaning of Scripture, from the author's intent. That is true of any interpretation of Scripture. No one has the right to use God's Word any which way they please. Scripture condemns this and labels it as presumption (cf. Deut 18:20; Ezek 13:2; 2 Pet 1:20; 3:16).⁷⁰ So the only valid type is one that the author establishes, and what we have seen above is that the authors of both the Old and New Testaments do this quite clearly and capably. Accordingly, a new hermeneutic is not required. In rightly dividing the word of truth (cf. 2 Tim 2:15), the exegete can discern profound connections and see compelling patterns that go far beyond the superficial analogies that interpreters have contrived.⁷¹ That is because the biblical writers themselves are not simpletons, but, under the superintendence of the Spirit, are profound thinkers of scriptural truth.

This underscores the main point of this section. The prophets are exegetes and theologians in their own right. They know the Scripture, and their main purpose in writing Scripture is to use a variety of forms of communication to express a sophisticated theology. This helps us more accurately view the Old Testament. The

See Richard Joseph Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 37–52; Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Τυπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 286–96; Ardel B. Caneday, "Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured: 'Which Things Are Written Allegorically' (Galatians 4:21–31)," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14 (2000): 66–77; James M. Hamilton, *Typology-Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations Are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 17–28.

⁶⁸ Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology*, 42. For classic criteria to detect intertextuality see Hays, *Gospels*, 7; and Hays, *Letters of Paul*, 29–32.

⁶⁹ Robert Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 209.

⁷⁰ The reference to 2 Peter 1:20 is particularly helpful in this discussion. The translation of ἐπιλύσεως in 2 Peter 1:20 is often the translation and is legitimately so. It specifically talks about how divine revelation was accompanied by a divine interpretation (cf. Greek translation of Gen 40:8; 41:8, 12). Accordingly, while the idea of "interpretation" is located in the origination of Scripture, it speaks of this origination in a specific manner. Namely, that the very interpretation of Scripture is locked down to what God inspired. Man's own ideology, fallibility, or ambiguity is not part of Scripture so as to give opportunity for subjective interpretation.

⁷¹ Examples may include Rahab's red scarf; see Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 88, 279–85.

Old Testament is not just a collection of nice moral stories, random antiquated laws, or stale historical records which reflect political and cultic agendas and must have new life breathed into them to have theology and be about Christ. If that is what we think the Old Testament is, then that is how we will approach it. However, that is not the picture Scripture provides of itself. Rather, the writers of the Old Testament are theologians who write theology, and therefore, that is what the Old Testament is. It is a theological document. And that reality should change our perception, value, and approach to this first part of Scripture.

The Prophets' Messianic Theology

Since the prophets are exegetes and theologians, they can engage in theological development of a variety of topics including the Messiah. Thus, Christ in the Old Testament is not something that has to be read into the Old Testament from the New, but rather it is what the prophets themselves advance just as our Lord says (cf. Luke 24:25–27). Given who they are, the Old Testament writers have a rich messianic theology, and this section intends to survey through this. There are at least four ways that the Messiah is seen in the Old Testament, and the biblical writers consciously expressed each of them.

Prophecy about Messiah

First, the Old Testament writers expound upon the Messiah through direct prophecy. One can demonstrate the deliberateness of the prophets in this activity through observing the intertextuality of Genesis 3:15. The Protoevangelium itself has a messianic focus as it concentrates on an individual (“He,” הוּא), it is eschatological as “He” is at the climax of the line of the seed, it is climactic because He is paralleled with the Satan/serpent himself, and it is victorious as He crushes the serpent’s head.⁷² There is a reason that theologians have regarded this prophecy as the first gospel. These features are compellingly culminative and thereby Messianic.⁷³ At the same time, many prophecies incorporate elements of Genesis 3:15 to show they relate and develop this original promise. For example, Balaam prophecies in Numbers 24 about the star that arises from Jacob (Num 24:17). Many have advocated this to be messianic, and what helps to bolster the case is that it mentions that this individual will crush the head of Moab (וַיִּדְרֹשׁ מִן־מוֹאָב; Num 24:17b).⁷⁴ This indicates that Balaam’s prophecy builds upon Genesis 3:15, and as Genesis 3:15 is messianic, so is Numbers 24. The same language of crushing the head is found in passages like Pss

⁷² Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman,” 30–54; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 245; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 197; T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed, and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44 (1993): 255–70; Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 139–48; T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 363–67.

⁷³ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 198; Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 75.

⁷⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 207; Dennis R. Cole, *Numbers*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 425; Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman,” 34.

68:21 (אֶלְהִים יִמְחֹץ רֹאשׁ אֵימָר) and 110:6 (שָׂרַף מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם); both of these texts are used to speak of Christ in the New Testament (cf. Matt 26:64; Eph 4:8; Heb 1:3). In addition, Habakkuk 3 uses the language of crushing the head (שָׂרַף מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם, Hab 3:13) and even mentions the Messiah in context (לְיֵשׁוּעַ מְשִׁיחֵנוּ, Hab 3:13a).⁷⁵ Overall, by using the language of “crushing the head,” these passages anchor themselves to Genesis 3:15 to show that they expound upon the same promise.

Other language from and around Genesis 3:15 is also found in other messianic predictions. For instance, Psalm 72 speaks of how the enemies of the ultimate Davidic king will lick the dust, just like the serpent in Genesis 3 (Ps 72:9; cf. Gen 3:14). In addition, a grammatical peculiarity of Genesis 3:15 is repeated throughout Old Testament prophecy. In Genesis 3:15, the passage juxtaposes a singular pronoun (הוא) around the term “seed,” which in the context carries a plural sense. A similar juxtaposition of singular and plural occurs in Genesis 22:17–18, where the seed that should be as numerous as the sand is paralleled with “He” who will capture the gates of His enemies. This unique combination seems to connect this passage with the Messiah and Genesis 3:15, a connection that is confirmed by Psalm 72:17 and Galatians 3:16.⁷⁶ Likewise, this same grammatical construction is found in the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:12), which is also linked with the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Sam 7:14a; Heb 1:5).⁷⁷

While, of course, there are many more messianic prophecies (cf. Job 19:23–25; 33:23; Isa 7:14; 9:6; 11:1; 52:13–53:12; Jer 23:1; Amos 9:11; Zech 9–14), the point of this discussion is not only to show that such prophecy exists, but also to demonstrate that the biblical writers were conscious in predicting the Messiah. They show the reader that they deliberately spoke of Him because they linked their texts back to prior discussions of the Messiah through distinctive terms and phrasing. So identifying messianic prophecy is not subjective or something that must be read back into the text. Rather, because the Old Testament writers are theologians and exegetes, they intend to speak of Him and do so in ways that are objectively identifiable.

Participation in the Old Testament

Second, the prophets' messianic theology also includes how the second person of the Trinity participates in the Old Testament. As others have discussed, the

⁷⁵ Some translations render Habakkuk 3:13 as God going out for the salvation of His people and the Messiah. However, the construction of the parallel lines is slightly different. While the first line does not have the particle את (לְיֵשׁוּעַ מְשִׁיחֵנוּ), the second line, in speaking of the Messiah, does (לְיֵשׁוּעַ מְשִׁיחֵנוּ). The distinction shows that while God goes out for the salvation of His people, He goes to save *with* the Messiah. See Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 236.

⁷⁶ Alexander, “Further Observations,” 363–67.

⁷⁷ One could continue from this point and speak of how the Davidic covenant itself forms the background of other passages, like Psalm 2 and its employment of sonship terminology (Ps 2:7; cf. 2 Sam 7:14). Psalm 2 is of course used of Messiah in later revelation (cf. Matt 3:17; Heb 1:5). That is because it deliberately anchored itself before in such a trajectory. Psalm 2 speaks of the Messiah's reign in terms of going to the ends of the earth (לְעַד־אַפְסוֹת־הָאָרֶץ; Ps 2:8). Interestingly enough, that is quite technical language found later on in Psalm 22:27, a messianic passage (לְעַד־אַפְסוֹת־הָאָרֶץ), in Isaiah 52:10 about the Suffering Servant, and later in the NT concerning our Lord and the mission of the church (Acts 1:8; 13:47). Though the main discussion has been on the intertextuality between Genesis 3:15 and certain passages, such connectivity starts a chain reaction of messianic theology in the OT.

language of the Angel of Yahweh (Gen 16:7–11) or the Word of Yahweh (1 Kgs 13:1–32) refers to one who is divine (cf. Gen 16:11, 13; Exod 23:31; 1 Kgs 13:26), but this language also relates to Yahweh Himself (cf. Gen 16:11; Exod 23:31).⁷⁸ This coincides with other declarations of the Old Testament where Yahweh interacts with Yahweh. For instance, Zech 2:8–9 states, “For thus says Yahweh of hosts... Then you will know that Yahweh of hosts has sent Me” (Zech 2:9). In these verses, Yahweh Himself states that Yahweh has sent Him. Yahweh is sending Yahweh. Such a description illustrates that the Old Testament recognizes that the persons of the Godhead exist and that the persons of the Godhead participated in the plan of God. It also sets up for New Testament language of the Father sending His Son (cf. John 5:23; 17:3).

The prophet Zechariah provides another insight in this discussion of the Son's participation. One might argue that the prophets acknowledge the persons of the Godhead within the Old Testament, but that they may not have known that the Angel of Yahweh was the Messiah Himself. Even if this was the case, the prophets still set up for the connection to be made later. However, two factors in Zechariah indicate that the prophets were aware of the association between Messiah and the Angel of Yahweh. First, Zechariah, along with other Old Testament writers (cf. Ps 110:1; Isa 9:6; Dan 7:13–14) depict the messianic king as divine. This at bare minimum syllogistically aligns the participation of the second person with the Messiah. Second, more than this, Zechariah seems to establish a direct parallel between the Angel of Yahweh and the Messiah Himself. In Zechariah 12:8, the prophet speaks of how the Angel of Yahweh will lead Jerusalem in battle in the end times. However, throughout the book, Zechariah has discussed how the Messiah will be at the center of His people at this time (Zech 6:9–15), conquering on their behalf (Zech 9:9–10). In light of this, Zechariah seems to equate the Angel of Yahweh with the Messiah Himself. That again is reasonable given the fact that the Angel of Yahweh is God Himself, and Zechariah acknowledges that the Messiah is God as well (cf. Zech 12:10). All this to say, the Old Testament writers have a messianic theology which highlights how the second person of the Trinity has driven redemptive history forward. And this, indeed, is part of the prophets' messianic theology, for they set up for and even show awareness that the Messiah is divine and the divine participant in these situations.

Preparation for the Messiah

Third, messianic theology in the Old Testament can include individual theological details that eventually connect with Christ. The theological realities of sacrifice (Lev 1–4), atonement (Lev 4:35; 16:6–20), kingship (2 Sam 1–2; 5:1–12; 7:1–14), kingdom (1 Kgs 4:20–34), priesthood (Exod 28:1–43; Lev 8–9), or the Exodus in and of themselves may not originally be talking directly of the Messiah. However, at one point or another, whether in the Old Testament (Ps 110:1; Isa 52:13–53:12; Ezek 21:26; Zech 3:10) or in the New Testament (Mark 10:35; Col 1:13; Heb 7; Rev 12:10), they are incorporated into the Messiah's work. So in understanding these concepts, one is better prepared to understanding the person and ministry of Christ.

⁷⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 240–44; James A. Borland, *Christ in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1978).

Typology certainly fits in this category.⁷⁹ As discussed above, this may cover how events in the life of people like David and Moses carry theological significance that is taken on and completed by Christ. One may also observe such patterning in the lives of Elisha and Jonah. Elisha's ministry has a wide geographical spread (cf. 2 Kgs 3:1; 4:8, 38; 5:16:20). His ministry shows God's reach over all of Israel and even the nations (cf. 2 Kgs 5:1–15). Within this, Elisha performs a miracle where the prophet takes twenty loaves of barley and multiplies it for one hundred men (2 Kgs 4:42–44). This parallels our Lord's feeding of both the so-called five and four thousand (Matt 14–15; Luke 9:12–17). The event not only shows Christ's divine power, but that He assumes and advances the reach of Elisha's ministry. This theological point is seen in that our Lord feeds both the five thousand and the four thousand, both Jews and Gentiles respectively.⁸⁰ It is also confirmed in how Luke particularly establishes the nature of the similarity between Christ and Elisha. In Luke 4, Jesus rebukes His countrymen and declares that while there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's day, only Naaman of Syria was cleansed (Luke 4:27). Our Lord's appeal to Elisha indicates that He will serve not only those in Israel, but also those in the Gentile world. So when our Lord parallels Elisha later on in Luke, the purpose of this is clear, having been defined in context.⁸¹ Luke, under inspiration, narrates Christ's life to parallel previous characters and events in order to show how past theology integrates into Christ's ministry.

Jonah is another type in Luke's gospel. He was a prophet known to resist God's call to preach to the Gentiles (Jon 1:3). Luke describes how, like Jonah, our Lord falls asleep in a boat which is going to Gentile territory (Luke 8:22–25; cf. Jon 1:5). The linguistic overlap between the two accounts is distinctive.⁸² Hence, Luke deliberately describes our Lord's experience in light of Jonah's. This recapitulation is a form of typology and carries theological significance. In this case, Jesus triumphs where Jonah had failed and fulfills God's purpose to reach out to those who are not of Israel.

The list of the ways that the Old Testament prepares for Christ could go on. Nevertheless, from a hermeneutical standpoint, it is important to note that there is an underlying logic to all these examples in this third category. Namely, later revelation takes the theology of the Old Testament to amplify the person and work of Christ. The New Testament does not reinterpret or override the meaning of the Old, rather the Old illuminates all that is happening in the New. This is a reminder that we should

⁷⁹ Typology also at times may be direct prophecy if it can be proven that the OT writer was tracing a pattern into that which inherently leads to the Messiah. See earlier example on Moses. The author knows how to foreshadow events by rhetorically setting up a pattern to connect with a later event that will be discussed. In addition, an author may be engaging a repeating pattern, which by virtue of such repetition, should be ongoing and thus anticipate a final culmination. This is especially the case if the pattern connects with something inherently associated with the Messiah. For example, if a pattern connects with the life of David, it most likely will connect with Christ since the entire life and line of David moves towards Christ as the Davidic covenant anticipates (cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7). Thus, there are ways that a typological connection anticipates or expects climax in Christ.

⁸⁰ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 245.

⁸¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 825.

⁸² The Lukan account and Jonah uniquely share the terms κλύδων and κινδυνεύω. It is significant that both of these terms are extremely rare and that even the synoptics do not always use the same verbiage. It puts the two accounts in close parallel.

understand the distinctive theological voice of the Old Testament. The better we understand the theology that is originally established, the richer a theology of Christ we will have. That is because later revelation incorporates and depends upon what has already been written. So the better we grasp what was written, the fuller understanding we will have of what is later revealed. At times, one can faultily create a canon within a canon where anything outside of certain Christological themes or ideas are not given attention.⁸³ Such practice actually detracts from the glory of Christ for it omits and flattens out elements and details of all the glories that surround Him. All this to say, the prophets at times directly develop a messianic theology. However, as theologians, that is not the only area of theology they discuss. And the entirety of their theology is inspired, profitable (cf. 2 Tim 3:16), and often ultimately correlated with the person and work of Christ. Thus, we need the totality of biblical and systematic theology to know and honor Christ. It fills out His fullness. This is a call then for consistent and faithful exposition of all Scripture without compromise.

Paving the Way for Messiah

Fourth, the prophet's messianic theology also deals with how all of redemptive history paves the way for the Messiah. As noted earlier, the prophets are not merely focused upon contemporary issues, but rather they have a wider viewpoint on history, one based upon the covenants. This perspective is pointedly messianic. For instance, the book of Deuteronomy anticipates a messianic figure with its conclusion that no prophet has arisen like Moses (Deut 18:15; 34:10). Similarly, Judges looks forward to a king with its refrain that there is no king in Israel (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). In that vein, God recounts to David that His focus was not on building a house per se, but upon the shepherding of God's people (2 Sam 7:7) and the Davidic line. Psalm 78 echoes this perspective. Having recounted Israel's history, Asaph concludes with the reality that God chose His servant David (Ps 78:70). As scholars note, there is a deliberate movement in past redemptive history toward a king, Davidic dynasty, and thereby the Messiah.⁸⁴

There is likewise a deliberate movement in the future of redemptive history toward the Messiah as well. The Messiah factors heavily in the way that Daniel recounts the seminal moments of Israel's destiny in the seventy-week prophecy (Dan 9:24–27). Zechariah, in speaking of the key events in the era of the Gentiles (Zech 9:1), discusses the Messiah riding in on a donkey (Zech 9:9) and the betrayal of the Shepherd for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:12–13). In that same book, Zechariah articulates that history moves to the point where the Messiah is inaugurated and welcomed by Israel (Zech 12:10), as He is the one who restores them and even builds a temple for them (Zech 6:9–15).

The prophets' construction of redemptive history from past to future consistently revolves around the Messiah. As such, to be sure, the Old Testament (and really the entire Scripture) speaks of many theological topics and themes, necessary for the glory of God and the formation of His people. Nevertheless, because the prophets write all of these with such a redemptive historical perspective, these ideas are part

⁸³ See discussion in Chou, "Christocentric Hermeneutic," 133–35.

⁸⁴ House, "Old Testament Narrative," 229–35; Alexander, "Genealogies," 255–70.

of God's bigger plan. And so, they all play a role in setting up for and presenting the grand context for Christ's person and work. Knowing this plan is part of magnifying Christ as well.

Synthesis

The prophets have penned a messianic theology. They have prophesied about Him, pointed out His participation in history, prepared for Him theologically, and shown how redemptive history paves the way for Him. Their theology includes the present and the future, both intricate details as well as the breadth of God's plan.

While the examples above are not exhaustive, they do illustrate how the prophets, under inspiration, are truly theologians who have written a rich theology about the Messiah. After all, they cover a host of topics including kingship, deliverance, atonement, sonship, and priesthood. They also reveal particular details of His birth (Isa 7:14; cf. Exod 2), birthplace (Mic 5:2), miraculous ministry (Isa 42:7; cf. Jhn 9:1–41), sacrificial death (Ps 22; Isa 53:13–53:12), resurrection (Job 19:23–25; Ps 16:10), and final victory for His people (Zech 12–14). Moreover, the prophets' theology is truly their intended theology. This is not a theology that is read into the text, but rather one that they consciously wrote. They connect their prophecies through key terms and phrases with earlier messianic passages to signal that they knowingly are writing about the Messiah. They give indication that the Angel of Yahweh is linked with the Messiah (cf. Zech 12:8). They provide a dense theology that they themselves at times incorporate into discussions about Christ (Lev 1–4; cf. Isa 53:7). They consistently view history from the same lens, continuously showing how each new stage anticipates, depends upon, and moves toward Christ. The Old Testament has a sophisticated messianic theology because it has always had one. That is what the prophets have established for us, and it is just waiting to be studied.

Conclusion

With that, we can return to the verses quoted in the introduction, 1 Pet 1:10–12a:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you, made careful searches and inquiries, inquiring to know what *time* or what kind of time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He was predicting the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you...

In a lot of ways, this entire article is about proving and explaining the truths of these verses. To be sure, the prophets did not know what *time* or what kind of time (τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν) of the Messiah's work. They did not know the exact timing ("what *time*," τίνα) of His coming and activity, and they did not know the specific circumstances of what that would look like ("what kind of time," ποῖον καιρὸν).⁸⁵ Nevertheless, there are things they knew. They knew the Scriptures, for they "made careful searches and inquiries" (ἐξεζήτησαν καὶ ἐξηραύνησαν) into what was written.

⁸⁵ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 102.

They knew that the Old Testament discussed Christ and that they themselves were involved in this. They were, under inspiration, “predicting the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (προμαρτυρούμενον τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα καὶ τὰς μετὰ ταῦτα δόξας). They also knew that their writings would carry truths far beyond them. They knew that “they were not serving themselves, but you” (οὐχ ἑαυτοῖς ὑμῖν δὲ δηκόνουν αὐτά). Peter declares that the prophets knew the Scriptures, that they had a theology of Christ, and that they deliberately entrusted this to us. In effect, the Old Testament exalts Christ. And that is not because one has a new hermeneutic that can finally see the hidden meaning of the Old Testament. It is also not in spite of the massive ignorance of the Old Testament writers. Rather, as this article has argued, and as Peter so eloquently states above, it is because the prophets themselves knew and spoke of Him. They were serving us, leaving for us a theology to be grasped, and so it is now our job to grasp that revelation.

Hence, we do not need hermeneutical creativity, but hermeneutical sensitivity. We need to be watchful for how the biblical writers reuse words and phrases from the past. These form connections and patterns that develop theology. And when we observe linguistically distinctive associations,⁸⁶ we should not just chalk that up to chance or randomness. Instead, we should be confident that these are intentional because we know the biblical writers’ character and purpose. They are those who speak about Christ for our sake. They are not those who write better than they know, but better than we give them credit for. And we should give them credit for their Spirit-guided genius. So may we speak of Christ as the prophets spoke of Christ—as the Scripture speaks of Christ—in all the riches of prophecy, participation, preparation, and divine plan. Then we will honor Christ in both the means of study and the end of proclamation. Then we will truly be Christocentric.

⁸⁶ See Hays, *Gospels*, 7; Hays, *Letters of Paul*, 29–32; Christopher Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 23; Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 40–41.

REVERSE OF THE CURSE: AN ALLUSION TO GENESIS 3:15 IN PSALM 110:1

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This study proposes that when David penned Psalm 110:1, he was thinking of Genesis 3:15. The linguistic, literary, and theological correlations between Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1 recommend the conclusion that Psalm 110:1 is consciously alluding to Genesis 3:15. That is to say, the statement in Psalm 110:1 “Until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet” hearkens back to the statement in Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman,” in order to cast the text of Psalm 110:1 in light of the text of Genesis 3:15. This allusion to Genesis 3:15, in effect, achieves within Psalm 110:1 a cosmic theological message—the reversal of the curse. These conclusions are further substantiated by the broader interconnectedness between Psalm 110 and Genesis 3:15, by the general association of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3 in 1 Corinthians 15:21–28, and by the specific combination of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 in Romans 16:20.

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Introduction

The particular language of Psalm 110 suggests that the significance of this psalm transcends the domain of human combat. Analysis of the linguistic, literary, and theological elements in Psalm 110:1 indicates that the verse—and more broadly the psalm as a whole—manifests a direct allusion to Genesis 3:15. That is, the statement in Psalm 110:1 “Until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet” hearkens back to the statement in Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman,” in order to cast the text of Psalm 110:1 in light of the text of Genesis 3:15. In this way, Psalm 110:1 communicates a theological message of cosmic significance—that God promises to achieve the reversal of the curse (cf. Rev 22:3). In other words, the implication of this intertextuality is that, the triumph of “my Lord” in Psalm 110:1 is not merely personal, political,

or national, but that it represents ultimate triumph over any expression of enmity, which at its core finds its place of origin in Genesis 3:15. Thus the victory in Psalm 110 actually provides the solution to the problem of enmity introduced in Genesis 3:15.

In addition to the linguistic, literary, and theological correlations between Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1, the conclusions of this study are substantiated furthermore by three textual factors—first, the broader interconnectedness between Psalm 110 and Genesis 3:15; second, the general association of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3 in 1 Corinthians 15:21–28; and third, the specific combination of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 in Romans 16:20. In other words, when Paul was composing 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 16, he was thinking of Genesis 3 and Psalm 110 as two texts that relate to one another; and this makes itself evident in the concepts and terminology he used in these passages.

The discussion of this article is fundamentally concerned with demonstrating intentional intertextuality behind the composition of one passage (Psa 110:1) with respect to another passage (Gen 3:15). However, as Richard Hays remarks, “Sometimes the echo will be so loud that only the dullest or most ignorant reader could miss it . . . ; other times there will be room for serious differences of opinion about whether a particular phrase should be heard as an echo of a prior text and, if so, how it should be understood...”¹ In view of this note, the aim of this study is to discern whether sufficient textual evidence can be brought to demonstrate that Psalm 110:1 alludes to Genesis 3:15. Concerning this exercise, Hays produces a list of seven categories that help demonstrate intentional intertextuality, which, in turn, can be applied to the study at hand: 1) *availability of the original text*: was Genesis 3 available to David when he composed Psalm 110?; 2) *volume of references*: is the allusion linguistically, syntactically, and structurally clear and compelling?; 3) *recurrence*: does David refer to Genesis 3 elsewhere, whether in the same psalm or outside of the psalm?; 4) *thematic coherence*: does Genesis 3 fit the context of Psalm 110?; 5) *historical plausibility*: is it plausible that David alluded to Genesis 3, and might his readers have discerned this allusion?; 6) *history of interpretation*: do later authors—whether pre-critical or critical—make this connection between Genesis 3 and Psalm 110?; and 7) *satisfaction*: does the allusion to Genesis 3 contribute to the message of Psalm 110?² Keeping these criteria in mind, this article contends that, when David penned Psalm 110:1, he was thinking of Genesis 3:15.³

¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29.

² Hays, *Letters of Paul*, 29–32; G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 32–34; Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 126; Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 206, n. 17.

³ For a brief discussion of the Davidic authorship of Psa 110, see Michael A. Rydelnik, “Psalm 110: The Messiah as Eternal King Priest,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 589–94; and for non-Davidic authorship Herbert W. Bateman IV, “Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1992): 444–45.

Correlation between Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15

A series of linguistic, literary, and theological correlations between the opening lines of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 suggest that David, the author of Psalm 110:1, is intentionally alluding to Genesis 3:15. First, from a linguistic perspective, Psalm 110:1 employs a word-pair and syntax of this word-pair that is otherwise unique to Genesis 3:15. This particular lexical and syntactical usage of the terminology between Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 serves as the trigger to draw the literary line from Psalm 110:1 back to Genesis 3:15. As regards diction, the statement in Psalm 110:1 “until I put [אַשִׁית] your enemies [אֹיְבֵיךָ] as a footstool for your feet” uses the same pair of Hebrew roots that appear in Genesis 3:15 in the statement “And I will put [אַשִׁית] enmity [אִיבָה] between you and the woman,” namely, the roots “put” שִׁית and “enemy, enmity” איב.⁴ As regards syntax, the line in Psalm 110:1 arranges the syntactical structure of these two terms “put” שִׁית and “enemy, enmity” איב just like the line in Genesis 3:15, placing the root איב “enemy, enmity” as the object of the verb אשית “put.” The significance of this is that these are the only two passages in the Old Testament in which the root איב “enemy, enmity” appears as the object of the verb אשית “put.”⁵ Concerning linguistic distinctiveness and intertextuality, Abner Chou writes:

I propose the author would have left some word, phrase, or context that would trigger an allusion back to a previous text. One must prove such a word or phrase is a legitimate trigger. I call this “linguistic distinctiveness” or how a term is unique enough to point to a (set of) texts but at the same time does not point to other texts. Overall, we are demonstrating the “trigger” is poignant enough to cause the reader to recall a certain text(s).⁶

The distinctive linguistic usage of the terminology between Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 arguably serves as the necessary trigger to draw this intertextual line from Psalm 110:1 back to Genesis 3:15.

Second, on a literary level, Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 suggest an intertextual relationship in that both passages use the rare word-pair (“put” שִׁית and “enemy, enmity” איב) within direct discourse, and in both passages the speaker is God. In Genesis 3:15, Yahweh God (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) addresses the serpent and declares the inception of enmity. In Psalm 110:1, Yahweh (יְהוָה) addresses “my lord” (אֲדֹנָי) and

⁴ Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 46.

⁵ The root שִׁית appears eighty-five times; the root איב appears 283 times (once as a verb in Exod 23:22, otherwise as a substantive); and the noun אִיבָה appears five times (with an additional possibility according to a conjectural reading in Ezr 3:3). Cf. this imagery in Joshua 10:24–25. Note that of the six appearances of the term “footstool” קָדָם, the term serves as the footstool of Yahweh five times and then once it appears in Psa 110:1 (Isa 66:1; 1 Chr 28:2; Psa 99:5; 132:7; Lam 2:1). Sam Meier, “שִׁית,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:101.; Tyler F. Williams, “איב,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:365–72.

⁶ Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 39–40.

announces the subjugation of His enemies.⁷ The significance of this is twofold: not only is *the author* of Psalm 110 alluding to Genesis 3:15, by expressing the specific wording of God in a way that corresponds to Genesis 3:15, but the author also depicts *God Himself* to be alluding to Genesis 3:15, by attributing the words of Psalm 110:1 specifically to God Himself, just like the words are attributed to God in Genesis 3:15. In this regard, Chen writes: “This enmity [of Gen 3:15] has been ‘set’ (שׂית) by the Lord himself, but he declares in similar language in Ps 110:1, ‘I will set [שׂית] your enemies [בְּאֵי] as a footstool.’ Thus, according to the purpose of God, the enmity ends when the Messiah reigns in fullness.”⁸ The theological consequences of this connection are immense—with this construction of the text, not only is the author recognizing the text of Psalm 110 to be a response to Genesis 3:15, but the author is, more than this, indicating that this is precisely how God views the words of Psalm 110:1 as well. As the author makes this literary and theological link from Psalm 110:1 to Genesis 3:15, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author simultaneously suggests that this claim of cosmic triumph is the very design and intent of God. In the manner of Genesis 3:15, in other words, Psalm 110:1 presents the words “put” שׂית and “enemy, enmity” בְּאֵי as being an utterance and as being announced by one and the same person—Yahweh God.

Third, with respect to theology between the passages, Psalm 110:1 communicates a message that is distinctly related to Genesis 3:15—the reversal of enmity. While in Genesis 3:15 God announces the inception of enmity, in Psalm 110:1 God announces the subjugation of enemies (with the notion of “enemies” being, in essence, the practical outworking of “enmity”). The sense of conquering the enemies in Psalm 110, moreover, is not within a context of a local battle, but, rather, with reference to worldwide conquest, as vv. 5–6 further indicate.⁹ Admittedly, Psalm 110:1 uses the concrete noun “your enemies” אֵיבֹתָיִךְ (i.e., a participial substantive), while Genesis 3:15 uses the abstract noun “enmity” אֵיבֹרָה.¹⁰ However, the logical step from “enmity” in Genesis 3:15 to “enemies” in Psalm 110:1 is not insurmountable; after all, enemies exist only as a result of enmity.¹¹ In fact, two ancient translations of Genesis 3:15, Targum Neofiti and the Syriac Peshitta, render the abstract “enmity” as the concrete “an enemy” in their translations. Targum Neofiti

⁷ Carl R. Holladay, “What David Saw: Messianic Exegesis in Acts 2,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 19 (2016): 105–106; Bateman IV, “Psalm 110:1,” 450; Aran J. E. Persaud, *Praying the Language of Enmity in the Psalter: A Study of Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139, and 149* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 33; and G. Vanoni, “שׂית,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 655; John Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 90–150*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 294.

⁸ Chen, *Messianic Vision*, 46.

⁹ Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Messianic Prophecy Objections*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 141; Persaud, *Language of Enmity*, 32–33; and Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 814.

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, “בְּאֵי(י)א,” in *HALOT*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 1:38–39; Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, “אֵיבֹרָה,” in *BDB* (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 33.

¹¹ Compare this, by analogy, to Schreiner’s comment on Rom 16:20, in which he states: “The presence of adversaries is due to the Adversary, Satan (τὸν σατανᾶν, *ton satanan*)” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998], 804); and see Chen, *Messianic Vision*, 46.

Genesis 3:15 states: *וּבַעַל דְּבַר אֲשׁוּי בִּינְךָ וּבֵין אִתְּתָהּ*, and the Syriac Peshitta has: *ܘܒܥܠܕܒܪܐܝܢܐܝܫܘܝܐܝܢܐܝܬܬܗܐ*, both of which mean: “I will put *an enemy* between you and the woman” (italics mine).¹² Moreover, and indeed significantly, the Aramaic translation to Psalm 110:1 translates the noun “enemies” *ܐܝܩܝܕܐ* exactly as that, as the noun “enemies” *בְּעַלֵי דְבַר*, that is, using concrete terminology akin to Neofiti Genesis 3:15, albeit in plural form, in accordance with the Hebrew text *אֲדִיבֶיךָ* “your enemies”: *וְאֲשׁוּי בְּעַלֵי דְבַרְךָ כְּבִישׁ לְרַגְלֶךָ*: “And I will put *your enemies* as a footstool for Your feet.”¹³ Arguably, then, despite the slightly different articulation in the biblical text between “enemies” in Psalm 110:1 and “enmity” in Genesis 3:15, the common semantic range expressed in the identical root of both words (i.e., “enemy, enmity” *אֵיב*) sustains the linguistic and theological connection. Thus, in its allusion to Genesis 3:15, Psalm 110:1 is declaring the final outcome of enmity in human history—that enemies, who exist as a result of enmity, will ultimately be conquered.

Moreover, related to the theological message articulated above, the two passages also express a literary relationship of another kind, that is, one that is antithetical—the recipients of God’s utterances in the two passages are absolute theological adversaries. In Genesis 3:15, the recipient is the serpent, that is, the enemy *par excellence*, who endures this enmity between the woman and her offspring from the origins of enmity to the time of the crushing of the serpent (Genesis 3:15b–c). In contrast, in Psalm 110:1 the recipient is “my Lord” *אֲדֹנָי*, that is, the representative of God *par excellence*, who receives the place of honor at the right hand of Yahweh, and who later is unequivocally identified by Jesus to be the Messiah (see Matt 22:41–45; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44; and also Acts 2:34–35).¹⁴ After citing Psalm 110:1, Jesus declared in Mark 12:37 that when David made reference to “my lord,” David was in fact speaking of the Messiah: “David himself calls Him [i.e., the Messiah] ‘Lord.’” The significance of this observation is that the recipients of God’s message in Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 have a historical and a theological relationship—they are ultimate adversaries.¹⁵

¹² See comments in Martin McNamara, trans., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 1A, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 61, n. 11; B. Barry Levy, *Targum Neophyti 1: A Textual Study*, Studies in Judaism (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 1:96; Roger Le Déaut with Jacques Robert, eds. and trans., *Targum du pentateuque: Traduction des deux recensions palestiniennes complètes avec introduction, parallèles, notes et index, Genèse*, Sources Chrétiennes 245 (Paris: Latour-Baubourg, 1978), 94–95, n. 10.

¹³ Cf. translation in Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., *The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Psalms*, trans. David M. Stec (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), at Ps 110:1.

¹⁴ Commenting on Mark 12:35–37, Richard Bauckham writes: “As I have argued at length elsewhere, a claim to share the divine throne of the universe was necessarily, in the Jewish theology of this time, a claim to share the identity of the one God of Israel, who alone rules the whole cosmos from his heavenly throne. The language of Dan 7:13–14 does not so clearly require this meaning, since the figure ‘like a human being’ does not share the heavenly throne of God and is merely said to be given rule over all people on earth. It is the combination of this text with Ps 110:1 that makes this ‘Son of man’ an unambiguously divine figure” (Richard Bauckham, “Markan Christology according to Richard Hays: Some Addenda,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11, no. 1 [2017]: 32); see also Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, 152–81); Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 479; and Rydellnik, “Psalm 110,” 591–92.

¹⁵ Gordon H. Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King*, ed., Herbert W. Bateman IV, Darrell L. Bock, Gordon H. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 462–63.

It is worth noting here that the assumption of Jesus' argument and His reference to Psalm 110:1 is that "my Lord" אֲדֹנָי is not David, but that "my Lord" אֲדֹנָי is greater than David, that is, that "my Lord" אֲדֹנָי is the Messiah Himself.¹⁶ More than this, Brown observes that the New Testament depicts Jesus presupposing that the messianic interpretation of Psalm 110 was the well-known and widely accepted interpretation of His time as a whole, otherwise the logic of Jesus' argument would lack potency.¹⁷ Brown remarks that, "the *fact* of the Messianic interpretation of the psalm was not in dispute, only the specific meaning of the verses."¹⁸ Therefore, in Jesus' view, "my Lord" אֲדֹנָי in Psalm 110:1 was the Messiah. Ultimately, then, the reference to "my Lord" אֲדֹנָי in Psalm 110:1 is a reference to a figure who is unique and who consequently stands in direct opposition to the Serpent of Genesis 3:15 who is also unique in his own right. Thus, the fact that the antithetical statements are delivered to absolute opponents contributes to the literary interworking between Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15.

To summarize, the linguistic trigger in Psalm 110:1 of an allusion to Genesis 3:15 is the otherwise distinct word-pair "I will put" (אֶשֶׁת) and "enemies/enmity" (אֹיְבָבָה/אֹיְבִיבָה) and its particular syntactical formulation within which the root אִיב "enemies/enmity" appears as the object of the verb אֶשֶׁת "I will put." Furthermore, the literary correlation—that in both passages the word-pair appears within direct discourse and the speaker of the words is God Himself—reinforces the legitimacy of the linguistic link. Moreover, the fact that God addresses two opposing persons who possess an antithetical relationship contributes to the interconnectedness between the two passages. And finally, the theological significance of the connection between the passages is that the text of Psalm 110:1 communicates a message of hope that God will undo the harm that had been done in the events recorded in Genesis 3.

The interpretative and theological results of all this are that, this allusion accentuates the significance of the promise declared by God in Psalm 110:1. Inasmuch as the enemies in Psalm 110:1 are now recast in the light of the enmity that was established in Genesis 3:15, the enemies of Psalm 110:1 are, in effect, not a mere human phenomenon limited to the natural wars between nations. Rather, the enemies are a product of the spiritual warfare that stems from the very origins of enmity due to the rebelliousness of mankind against God as described in Genesis 3. And inasmuch as the promise of God in Psalm 110:1 is presented in the light of the context

¹⁶ Bauckham, "Markan Christology," 31; and see Holladay, "What David Saw," 106; Michael Vlach, "The Trinity and Eschatology," *TMSJ* 24, no. 2 (2013): 202–203. In fact, Chou observes that "Jesus points out David must have known Psalm 110:1 referred to Messiah" (Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 124, 161–62). For the view that "my lord" initially referred to Solomon, see Bateman IV, "Psalm 110:1," 438–53.

¹⁷ Brown, *Jewish Objections to Jesus*, 140. It is of note that Jewish tradition, in *Midrash Tehillim* 18:29 (cf. 2:9; 3rd–13th c. AD?), appears to apply this psalm to the Messiah as well, indicating that it is the Messiah who "sits at the right hand of the Lord." Brown points to this Midrash to show that according to some Jewish tradition, "Abraham sits at the *left hand* of God, while it is *the Messiah* who sits at the Lord's right hand" (Brown, *Jewish Objections to Jesus*, 3:140; and see Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts: Jewish Legends of Three Thousand Years* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 17–22. For discussion of date and provenance of *Midrash Tehillim*, see Günter Stemberger and H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd ed. [originally in German: *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1920)]; ed. and trans. Markus Bockmuehl [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996], 322–23.)

¹⁸ Brown, *Jewish Objections to Jesus*, 3:142.

of Genesis 3:15, the implications of this promise bear a significance of cosmic proportion—God is announcing the future reversal of the curse through the work of the Messiah.

Correlation between the Broader Context of Psalm 110 and Genesis 3:15

While this focused evidence within the immediate text of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 suggests that David, the author of Psalm 110:1, is alluding to Genesis 3:15, a question does arise: Are these linguistic, literary, and theological correlations merely incidental and, therefore, insignificant by virtue of their being isolated cases of interrelationship between these two passages? As a matter of fact, the parallels between these verses are not isolated instances of literary connections between Psalm 110 and Genesis 3:15. Rather, a broader contextual infrastructure between Psalm 110 and Genesis 3:15 has been demonstrated on account of various linguistic and conceptual links.¹⁹ These links, to be sure, speak to the criterion of “recurrence” to which Hays refers in his tests of intentional intertextuality, and concerning which we asked the following question: Does David refer to Genesis 3 elsewhere, whether in the same psalm or outside of the psalm?²⁰ Indeed, a plurality of connections between the remainder of Psalm 110 and Genesis 3:15 does occur, and these connections serve as corroborating evidence of intent in the particular wording of Psalm 110:1 and its relation to Genesis 3:15.

With a view to demonstrate the intertextual impact of Genesis 3:15 on later portions of Scripture, James Hamilton produced an article titled “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,”²¹ in which he concludes that “Several images from Genesis 3:15 seem to be brought together in Ps 110.”²² In building his case, he first points to a linguistic link between the two passages in the term “head” ראש, noting that the statement in Psalm 110:6 says “he will shatter *chiefs* [ראש; lit. head],” and that the statement in Genesis 3:15 has “he shall bruise your *head* [ראש]” (italics mine).²³ He explains here that the usage of the same term “head” ראש to portray a comparable image of defeating an enemy suggests an intertextual relationship between the passages. Second, he observes a conceptual relationship between the line in Psalm 110:1 “until I put your enemies as a *footstool for Your feet* [יְהַדְּמֵם לְרַגְלֶיךָ]” and the line in Genesis 3:15 “and you shall *bruise him on*

¹⁹ See James Hamilton, “Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman in Genesis 3:15,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30–54; James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 76–77; Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 83–39; Walter C. Kaiser, *Messiah in the Old Testament*, SOTBT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 95–96; and more broadly, T. Desmond Alexander, “Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis,” in *The Lord's Anointed*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 19–39; R. A. Martin, “The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *Journal for Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 425–27; Walter Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?” *CBQ* 36 (1974): 361–65; John H. Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” *JETS* 44, no. 1 (March 2001): 5–23.

²⁰ Hays, *Letters of Paul*, 30.

²¹ Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman,” 30–54.

²² Hamilton, 37.

²³ *Ibid.* See Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 88; Persaud, *Language of Enmity*, 35, 48–49. Note the translation of Psa 110:6 in the *Legacy Standard Bible*: “He will crush the head *that is over the wide earth.*”

the heel [תְּשִׁפְנוּ עָקֶב]” (italics mine).²⁴ While he recognizes that the terminology is different, he nevertheless remarks that, “The statement that the enemies will be made a footstool for the feet of the Davidic king (110:1) seems to draw on the connection between the damaged heel and head in Genesis 3:15.”²⁵ Speaking to the methodological concern of demonstrating intertextuality on the basis of conceptual connections, Chou writes: “I can also point out that intertextuality does not require identical terms to generate a connection. Scholars have observed that synonyms also work as well as phrases and motifs that resonate with the original idea of a text.”²⁶ Finally, Hamilton takes note of the verb “shatter” מָחַךְ in Psalm 110:5, and makes another conceptual parallel with Genesis 3:15, stating: “The Lord will also do some shattering in 110:5 (*māhas* again). Yahweh smashes, the Messiah smashes, and the enemies are under the feet.”²⁷ On account of these connections, Hamilton suggests: “Genesis 3:15 is not directly quoted [in Psa 110], but it is not far away.”²⁸ In line with the perspective of Hamilton, but addressing the relationship between the passages on a broader level, Walter C. Kaiser states that Psalm 110 speaks of “God’s final showdown with the forces of wickedness and evil,” and then draws a parallel to Genesis 3:15, exclaiming: “That is exactly what was promised in Genesis 3:15...the serpent (i.e., the devil himself), along with the kings of all the earth, will have their heads shattered and crushed.”²⁹ In short, the specific link between Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 for which this article argues is one among a series of other literary connections between Genesis 3 and Psalm 110.

In the end, this abundance and this manner of contextual continuity between Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110 at various portions of the Psalm suggests that Genesis 3:15 served as a literary and theological background for Psalm 110. From a methodological perspective, these numerous parallels reveal “volume,” “recurrence,” and “thematic coherence” between the two passages, which helps to establish intentional intertextuality.³⁰ An abundance of literary correlations, in other words, contends for knowledge of a previous text and intent for alluding to a previous text; for the abundance in the connections reduces the plausibility that the parallels are merely coincidental. In accordance with this framework of the Psalm, then, the allusion in the opening line of Psalm 110:1 to the opening line of Genesis 3:15 fits well with the character of this Psalm, for which Genesis 3:15 is arguably a literary and theological background. And this then serves to endorse the specific contention of this discussion that the linguistic, literary, and theological correlations between Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 are, in effect, deliberate. However, while the literary correspondence between the two passages in their broader context is of general nature, the allusion in the opening line of Psalm 110:1

²⁴ Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman,” 37.

²⁵ Ibid. See Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?” 363; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Editorial: Foundations for Faith,” *SBJT* 5, no. 3 (2001): 2–3.

²⁶ Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 208.

²⁷ Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman,” 37–38; and see Bateman IV, “Psalm 110:1,” 439.

²⁸ Hamilton, 38. See Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 88.

²⁹ Kaiser, *Messiah*, 95–96. See a similar view in Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73–150*, ed. E. Ray. Clendenen, vol. 13, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2019), 344; and Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 144–45.

³⁰ Hays, *Letters of Paul*, 30.

to the opening line of Genesis 3:15 demonstrates literary distinctiveness and theological significance. Consequently, this specific intertextual relationship between the opening lines of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15 demonstrates a more certain expression of intent on the part of the author.

Correlation between Psalm 110 and Genesis 3 in the New Testament

A perceived literary relationship between Psalm 110 and Genesis 3:15 (and also Genesis 3 more broadly) is also evident within two passages of the New Testament—1 Corinthians 15:21–28 and Romans 16:20. Analysis of these two passages reveals that these passages were composed with a view to communicate their respective message by means of a combined reading of Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110, though, to be sure, each in its own way. In other words, both 1 Corinthians 15:21–28 and Romans 16:20 utilize Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110 in their compositions in a manner that suggests a presupposition that Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110 are communicating messages that are theologically involved with one another—more precisely, that Psalm 110 is informed by Genesis 3:15. One of the criteria that Hays listed to show intentional intertextuality was “historical plausibility,” in light of which the question concerning the present study was: Is it plausible that David alluded to Genesis 3, and might his readers have discerned this allusion? The fact that 1 Corinthians 15:21–28 and Romans 16:20 each, in their own way, presuppose a relationship between Genesis 3 and Psalm 110 suggests that Paul read the two passages together—and this, in turn, commends the case that the content of Psalm 110 was intentionally referring to the content of Genesis 3.³¹

Genesis 3 and Psalm 110 within 1 Corinthians 15:21–28

The intertextual relationship between Psalm 110:1 and the broader context of Genesis 3 is evidently presupposed by and is the foundation of Paul's discourse on Christ's victory over death in 1 Corinthians 15:21–28. In his discussion, Paul first analyzes the commonality of death for all mankind, and he then appeals to Psalm 110:1 as the divine counter to the effects of the Fall.

On the one hand, allusion to Genesis 3 in this pericope is evident in that the fundamental basis of Paul's treatise on resurrection is dependent upon the fact that humans die. He articulates this premise explicitly in two consecutive statements in vv. 21–22.³² In v. 21, he states, “For as by a man came death...” (ἐπειδὴ γὰρ δι' ἀνθρώπου θάνατος), hearkening back to the first man of Genesis 3 through whom death entered into the world. And in v. 22, he specifies the first statement, stating, “For as in

³¹ More broadly, Psa 110 also refers to Gen 14 in its explicit mention of Melchizedek in v. 4, as Chou writes: “Furthermore, Psalm 110 pulls from Genesis 14 (Melchizedek) to describe a royal priesthood of a higher order than Levi. Such a lofty ideal also accords with the Messiah. On top of this, the prophets envisioned a messianic individual who was both priest and king (Ezek 21:27 [Heb., Ezek 21:32]; Zech 6:9–15). This idea probably stems from Psalm 110:4, which discusses someone who is both king and priest, one in the order of Melchizedek” (Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 162). See Rydelnik, “Psalm 110,” 598–99.

³² Wesley Crouser, “Satan, the Serpent, and Witchcraft Accusations: Reading Romans 16:17–20a in Light of Allusions and Anthropology,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 4, no. 2 (2014), 223. Cf. Rom 5:12–21.

Adam all die...” (ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν), thus referring to Adam by name. While Adam and Eve do not physically die in Genesis 3, the discussion about their death, whether explicitly or implicitly, does appear in three portions of the chapter. First, in vv. 3–4 the Serpent and Eve discuss the possibility of their death. Eve asserts to the Serpent that she and Adam are not to eat of the tree that is in the midst of the garden lest they die (“lest you die” פְּנֵי־תָמוּתוֹן; cf. 2:17); the Serpent, however, emphatically responds that they most certainly would not die (“You surely will not die!” לֹא־מִוֹת תָּמוּתוֹן). Second, in v. 19 God implies the death of man when He announces to Adam that Adam shall return to the ground out of which he was taken: “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (כִּי־עֵפֶר אָתָּה וְאֶל־עֵפֶר תֵּשׁוּב). And third, in vv. 22, God indicates that the ultimate fate of Adam and Eve is death when God exclaims: “Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” (וְעַתָּהוּ פָּנֵי־יְשׁוּעָה יָדוֹ וְלָקַחְגָּם מֵעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחָי לְעֹלָם). In addition to this, Paul’s explicit mention of Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 is plausibly even a concrete reference to Genesis 3:19, for as David Garland remarks: “‘In Adam’ is a Jewish idea rooted in Genesis. 3:19.... It is fully expressed in 4 Ezra (2 Esdr.) 7:116–26: ‘O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants’ (7:118).”³³ Sailhamer, therefore, writes that in Genesis 3, “the verdict of death, of which the man was warned before the Fall (2:17), had now come upon him.”³⁴ As a whole, then, Paul’s discussion of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:21–28 is grounded in and founded upon the context of Genesis 3 that relates the introduction of death into the human race.

On the other hand, upon establishing this context, Paul cites Psalm 110:1 specifically as a passage that presents the resolution to the dilemma of enmity and death, the origins of which, as indicated above, are based in Genesis 3. According to Paul’s argument, in other words, Psalm 110:1 provides the response to Genesis 3. In delivering this argument, Paul applies the triumph over this enmity and death to the person of Christ, stating in 15:25: “For He [i.e., Christ] must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸν βασιλεύειν ἄχρι οὗ θῆ ἅντας τοὺς ἐχθρούς ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ.³⁵ This interpretative reading of Psalm 110:1—in which Christ is the central and victorious figure—is made evident in the textual differences between the Hebrew text of the psalm and Paul’s rendering thereof in 1 Corinthians 15:25. As Garland observes:

Paul changes direct speech, with the verb θῶ (first person), to indirect speech, with the verb θῆ (third person). He inserts the word πάντας and changes references to the second person, ‘your enemies’ and ‘your feet,’ to ‘every enemy’ and ‘his feet.’ He omits the word ‘footstool.’³⁶

³³ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 714. He also lists the following passages for reference: 4 Ezra [2 Esdr.] 3:7, 21; 4:30–31; 2 Bar. 17:2–3; 19:8; 23:4; 48:42–43; 54:15, 19; 56:6; and Sir. 25:24, which, however, attributes the blame to Eve.

³⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 109.

³⁵ Hays, *Letters of Paul*, 84, 163; Derek Brown, “‘The God of Peace Will Shortly Crush Satan under Your Feet’: Paul’s Eschatological Reminder in Romans 16:20a,” *Neotestamentica* 44, no. 1 (2010): 12; Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., WBC 21 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 119.

³⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 714.

In short, these textual nuances reveal Paul's careful approach to applying the content of this Psalm to the person of Jesus. By this, he shows how Jesus fulfills Psalm 110 and resolves the problem of enmity and death introduced in Genesis 3.³⁷ As a whole, this analysis of 1 Corinthians 15:21–28 indicates that Paul builds his case for the triumph of Christ by interpreting Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3 together as passages that are theologically involved with one another.

Furthermore, Paul also reveals his combined reading of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3, along with Psalm 8, in his interpretative contention that the final enemy to be destroyed is death itself. While Paul's reference to death as the final enemy is not articulated in Psalm 110:1, this image can be traced back to Genesis 3 through an intertextual link in Psalm 8. Upon citing Psalm 110:1 in 1 Corinthians 15:25 to show that Christ will triumph over "the enemies" τοὺς ἐχθροὺς (in the plural), Paul then focuses his attention on the specific meaning of "the enemies" τοὺς ἐχθροὺς and reintroduces the term in 15:26 in the singular "enemy" ἐχθρὸς, in order to single out a distinct enemy from the entire category, namely, death itself. Thus he states in 15:26: "The last enemy to be abolished is death" ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος. The notion that personified death is included in the category of "enemies" within the text of Psalm 110:1, however, is less than obvious from the context of the psalm. The destruction of death itself is not the subject of Psalm 110:1; and death is not identified as one of the enemies in the context of Psalm 110:1. Rather, as Persaud recognizes, "according to the inner logic of the psalm, the 'ֹיָבֹֿיב [enemy] of v. 1 are the גֹּיִּים [nations] of v. 6" (italics original).³⁸ If this is so, then how does Paul explicate the term "enemies" of Psalm 110:1 to include death?

One part of this interpretative decision, suggests Derek Brown, among others, pertains to Paul's reading of Psalm 110:1 in light of Psalm 8:7 [Eng. v. 6].³⁹ That is, Paul interprets the phrase "your enemies" יְבֹיָבֶיךָ of Psalm 110:1 in light of the statement in Psalm 8:7 [Eng. v. 6] "you have put *all* things under his feet" כָּל שֶׁתָּהָה יְחַתֵּרְךָ (italics mine), and thus recasts "your enemies" יְבֹיָבֶיךָ as "*all* the enemies" πάντας τοὺς ἐχθροὺς (italics mine), in this way making explicit the point that "your enemies" יְבֹיָבֶיךָ is to be understood as an all-inclusive statement. Addressing this matter, Wilber B. Wallis explains that "Paul's argument is based on the interlocking promises from Psalms 8 and 110," and then adds:

The necessity for Christ's reign rises from the fact that Psalm 110:1 promises that all His enemies will be put under His feet. Paul has added the word "all" in v. 25 in his allusion to the Psalm. Then the clinching and comprehensive promise of Psalm 8 is brought in, justifying Paul's addition of the word "all" in v. 25. The promise of Psalm 8:7 [Eng. v. 6] is that "all things" will be put under His feet. The "all" is completely all-inclusive, excluding only the one who subjects all things to the Son. The "all things" must therefore include Christ's enemies, the last of which is death.⁴⁰

³⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 711; Vlach, "The Trinity and Eschatology," 203–204, 208.

³⁸ Persaud, *Language of Enmity*, 32–33; and see Elliott E. Johnson, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1992): 429–32.

³⁹ See Brown, "The God of Peace," 8–9; Persaud, *Language of Enmity*, 38–40.

⁴⁰ Wilber B. Wallis, "The Use of Psalms 8 and 110 in 1 Corinthians 15:25–27 and in Hebrews 1 and 2," *JETS* 15, no. 1 (1972): 26; and see Vanoni, "פִּי," *TDOT*, 655.

Despite this explanation, however, Psalm 8 still stops short of providing concrete material for Paul's inclusion specifically of death, since death is not the subject of Psalm 8 (or of Psalm 110). The context of Psalm 8:7 (Eng. v. 6) is God's creation—"the works of your hands" (בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יְדֵיךָ) and as vv. 8–9 (Eng. vv. 7–8) specify: "all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas" (צִנּוֹר וְאֵלֶּפֶיִם כְּכֹל הַיָּם בְּהֵמֹת שָׁמַיִם) (צִפּוֹר שְׁמַיִם וְדָגֵי הַיָּם עֹבְרֵי אֶרְצוֹת יַמִּים). To be sure, this does set up the textual atmosphere for Paul potentially to include death as part of the "enemies," due to the all-inclusive nature of Christ's triumph, but there is no trigger in Psalm 8 to prompt the inclusion specifically of death itself in 1 Corinthians 15:26.⁴¹

This trigger, however, is to be ascertained in the second part of the interpretative process, that is, in Paul's reading of Psalm 110:1 in light of Genesis 3. The precise reasoning for Paul's designation of death as the final enemy emerges out of Paul's perspective that Psalm 110:1 is God's response to the consequences of enmity and death introduced in Genesis 3. Paul's dependence on Genesis 3, as already demonstrated above, makes itself manifest in Paul's references to the origins of death through Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22. As Paul then strives to show the comprehensive degree of Christ's triumph, he, on the one hand, looks forward to the culminating point of history—that is, "the end" τὸ τέλος (v. 24)—in which the enemies are defeated; and, on the other hand, Paul reaches back to the very origins of history within the context of Genesis 3, in which enmity and death are introduced. The lexical focus of Paul's statement in v. 26 are the two locutions "enemy" ἐχθρὸς and "death" ὁ θάνατος, both of which serve to explicate the noun "the enemies" τοὺς ἐχθρούς in v. 25. The use of the singular "enemy" in v. 26 both links this statement to the noun "the enemies" in the preceding verse, and it isolates its focus on a particular and singular enemy within this broader category of enemies—that is, this singular enemy death.

To be sure, while death is not viewed as a personified enemy in the context of Genesis 3, death is a central matter in the events of that chapter. Indeed, a major focus of Genesis 3 is specifically the subject of death. Eve explains to the serpent that they must not eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden lest they die (Gen 3:2–3), while the serpent responds to Eve with the categorical statement in Genesis 3:4: "You will not surely die!" לֹא-מוֹת תָּמָתוּן; LXX: Οὐ θανάτω ἀποθανεῖσθε (cf. Gen 2:17). This serpent who fulfilled an integral role in bringing about death within the human race by manipulating Eve to disobey God is then cursed by God and is constricted to a relationship that is defined by enmity in Genesis 3:14–15. In the end, both death and enmity are elements that find their origins in the context of Genesis 3. Arguably, then, as Paul sets Christ's fulfillment of Psalm 110:1 more broadly in the light of the context of Genesis 3, Paul also draws on the context of Genesis 3 specifically to introduce death as the final enemy that Christ destroys in His ultimate and comprehensive victory over His enemies.

Ultimately, then, this discussion shows that Paul's treatise in 1 Corinthians 15:21–28 depends on his combined reading of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3. And this suggests that Paul perceived a literary and a theological relationship between these two passages.

⁴¹ In fact, Rydelnik suggests that Psa 8:7 (Eng. v. 6) is itself "an innertextual reference to Gen 3:15" in its statement: "you have put all things under his feet" כָּל שְׂתָה תַּחְתֵּי רַגְלָיו (Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, 145).

Genesis 3 and Psalm 110 within Romans 16:20

Another intertextual relationship between Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3, specifically 3:15, is also presupposed in Romans 16:20 within Paul's discussion of God and the believers crushing Satan. On the one hand, the image of Satan being crushed harkens back to Genesis 3:15; on the other hand, the specific language and the role of God in Romans 16:20 in fact align with Psalm 110:1. Thus the totality of Romans 16:20 reflects Paul's combined reading of Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1.

On the one hand, then, a link between Romans 16:20 and Genesis 3:15 has been identified in the image of the serpent being crushed by the feet of Eve's offspring in Genesis 3 and Satan being crushed by God under the feet of the believers in Romans 16.⁴² This connection between the passages is conceptual and may be explained by Paul's use of the term "foot" (πούς) in Romans 16:20 and the appearance of the term "heel" (Heb: כַּקָּעָה; Gr: πτέρνα) in Genesis 3:15.⁴³ While this is not a precise lexical link, scholars do concede that the image of Satan being crushed appears to harken back to the battle announced in Genesis 3:15. In reference to Romans 16:20, Dunn, for example, writes: "That there is an influence from Genesis 3:15 is probable, but not necessarily direct (LXX uses different language)."⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Schreiner affirms the connection without any reservation, stating: "Paul is reflecting on Genesis 3:15 MT, which promises victory over the serpent and his seed."⁴⁵ According to this understanding, Paul identifies the serpent of Genesis 3:15 with Satan in Romans 16:20 (cf. Rev 12:9; 20:2), and he identifies the offspring of Eve of Genesis 3:15 with the believers in Romans 16:20 (cf. Rev 12:17).⁴⁶

Besides the echo of Genesis 3:15, however, a compelling case has been made that Romans 16:20 also alludes to Psalm 110:1.⁴⁷ Advancing this view, Derek R. Brown provides four reasons to show that Paul is, in fact, thinking of Psalm 110:1 within Romans 16:20.⁴⁸ First, Brown calls attention to the significance of "the prepositional phrase ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ὑμῶν ('under your feet')" in Romans 16:20 and explains the implications of this phrase as follows:

In considering whether we are to recognize the presence of Ps 110:1 in Rom 16:20a, it is important that we take the actual words of the verse seriously.

⁴² See Crouser, "Satan," 219–23, although his conclusion that "Satan in 16:20a should be understood as an epithet for Paul's opponents in 16:17–19" is objectionable (*ibid.*, 233).

⁴³ Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 208.

⁴⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 39B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 905.

⁴⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 804. See also Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 279–280; Johnston, "Messiah and Genesis 3:15," 468.

⁴⁶ Werner Foerster notes that "Since Paul is alluding to Gn. 3:15 in R. 16:20 ... he, too, equates the serpent of Paradise with Satan" (Werner Foerster, "ὄφις," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *TDNT* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–], 5:581). See also Seth Postell, "Genesis 3:15: The Promised Seed," in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 245, 247.

⁴⁷ See Brown, "The God of Peace," 1–14; Derek R. Brown, *The God of This Age: Satan in the Churches and Letters of the Apostle Paul*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, 2nd Reihe (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 101–10; and see remarks in P. W. Macky, "Crushing Satan Underfoot (Romans 16:20): Paul's Last Battle Story as True Myth," in *Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* (Cincinnati, OH: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies, 1993), 121; D. M. Scholer, "'The God of Peace Will Shortly Crush Satan Under Your Feet' (Romans 16:20a): The Function of Apocalyptic Eschatology in Paul," *Ex Auditu* (1990), 6:53; and Crouser, "Satan," 220, n. 9.

⁴⁸ Brown, "The God of Peace," 10; see also Macky, "Crushing Satan Underfoot," 121.

For Paul could have simply written ὁ δε θεός της ειρήνης συντρίψει τον σαταναν ... ἐν ταχει [And the God of peace will crush Satan...soon]. He does not stop there, however, but adds a phrase well-known in early Christianity and loaded with meaning: ὑπό τούς πόδας ὑμων [under your feet]. To overlook this prepositional phrase or to read it apart from its other occurrences in early Christianity would be a mistake.⁴⁹

Brown's point, stated plainly, is that Paul chose his words deliberately, and the implications of this phrase are that Paul is thinking of Psalm 110:1. Secondly, Brown observes that, "in the NT this phrase almost always comes from Ps 110:1 or Ps 8:7 [Eng. v. 6] or a combination of the two verses," therefore, suggesting that in Romans 16:20 this phrase also reaches back to Psalm 110:1.⁵⁰ Third, and on a broader contextual level, Brown remarks that, "the concept of Satan being crushed 'under foot' fits with one of the most common uses of Ps 110:1 in early Christianity: to affirm the subjugation of enemies."⁵¹ Fourth, and yet more broadly, he notes that, "the violent language of Rom 16:20a fits with the warfare imagery of Ps 110."⁵² Further expounding upon the fourth reason, Brown writes:

In the royal psalm, the two oracles (v. 1 and v. 4) are amplified with language resonant of military-like dominion. In addition to the promise of enemies being made "your footstool", the psalm also tells the king "to rule in the midst of your enemies". In the latter part of the psalm we read of YHWH'S defeat of Israel's enemies, whose kings he will "shatter" (ῥῥῃ/συνθλαω) on the day of his wrath (v. 5) and whose heads he will "crush" (ῥῥῃ/συνθλαω) over the whole earth (v. 6).⁵³

He adds to this that, "Paul's verb choice (συντρίβω), while not taken directly from Ps 110, nevertheless shares with the psalm connotations of violent and utter destruction of one's enemies."⁵⁴ As a whole, then, these elements of Romans 16:20 suggest that Paul's statement is indeed echoing Psalm 110:1.

Furthermore, reading Romans 16:20 in light of both Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1 in fact helps to explain the content of Romans 16:20 more precisely and holistically. First, while the mention of Satan can be linked to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 (but not Psalm 110:1), the specific language of "feet" can be traced to the text of Psalm 110:1

⁴⁹ Brown, "The God of Peace," 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; and see the following relevant verses: Matt 16:19; 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:43; Acts 2:33–35; 5:31; 7:49–56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25–28 (20–28); Eph 1:20–23; Col 1:13; 2:10, 15; 3:1; Heb 1:3; 13; 2:8; 5:6, 10; 7:15–25; 8:1; 10:13; and 1 Pet 3:18–22.

⁵¹ Brown, "The God of Peace," 10. Commenting on Rom 16:20, Dunn writes: "The hope of Satan being 'crushed under foot' is part of a larger eschatological hope for the final binding or defeat of the angelic power hostile to God (see e.g. *Jub.* 5.6; 10:7, 11; 23.29; *1 Enoch* 10.4, 11–12; 13.1–2; etc.; *2 Enoch* 7.1; *T. Mos.* 10.1; IQS 3.18; 4.18–23; IQM 17.5–6; 18.1; Rev 20:10)" (Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 905).

⁵² Brown, "The God of Peace," 10.

⁵³ Ibid.; see also Macky, "Crushing Satan Underfoot," 121; Persaud, *Language of Enmity*, 31–35; and Bateman IV, "Psalm 110:1," 450, n. 57.

⁵⁴ Brown, "The God of Peace," 10.

(but not Gen 3:15).⁵⁵ Second, while the believers can be associated with the offspring of Eve in Genesis 3:15 (but not with Psalm 110:1), the fact that the ultimate agent of the crushing is God can be traced to Psalm 110:1 (but not Gen 3:15).⁵⁶ Third, while the temporal element until the crushing of the serpent is achieved is merely implied in Genesis 3:15, an explicit temporal adverb is indeed present in Psalm 110:1, even if expressed differently (“until” $\tau\upsilon$; LXX: $\epsilon\omega\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\nu$; Romans 16:20: $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\acute{\alpha}\lambda\chi\epsilon\iota$).⁵⁷ Finally, while the implied triumph of Christ as Lord in the context of this passage can be directly traced to Psalm 110:1, this reference to Christ specifically as Lord is lacking in Genesis 3:15 (although Christ has been recognized to be an offspring of Eve who defeats the serpent).⁵⁸ These observations suggest that the content of Romans 16:20 cannot be traced to Genesis 3:15 alone or to Psalm 110:1 alone. Rather, the text of Romans 16:20 depends on both of these passages—Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1. In other words, upon composing the triumph of God, Christ, and the Church over Satan, Paul reflected upon two passages together—Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1.

Conclusion

The contention of this paper, put simply, is that when David penned Psalm 110:1, he was thinking of Genesis 3:15. To argue this thesis, the paper generally depended on the seven criteria, as listed by Hays, that demonstrate intentional intertextuality. However, at this point it would be helpful to consider these criteria systematically

⁵⁵ Cf. Rev 12:9. Referring to this perspective of Gen 3:15 in ancient Jewish literature more broadly, James Kugel writes: “It seemed most unlikely that the Bible here was really concerned with future relations between humans and snakes. . . . Instead, many interpreters concluded that these words were addressed to the eternal Tempter with whom humanity would forever be pitted in an unending struggle” (James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998], 99); and see Foerster, “ Οφίς ,” *TDNT*, 5:581; Crouser, “Satan,” 223–26; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 107; Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, 135–37.

⁵⁶ Cf. Rev 12:17. See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 55; on this point, Brown writes: “What Paul has done in Rom 16:20a, therefore, is to extend the eschatological victory over God’s enemies to believers. They will share in that victory since all of God’s enemies—whether it be Satan, death, or those who cause schisms within the church—will be placed not only under the feet of Christ but also under *their* feet” (italics original; Brown, “The God of Peace,” 12). See Johnston’s remarks on the plural reference to offspring in Rev 12:17 and its relationship to the singular pronoun הוא “He” in Gen 3:15 in Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” 469–71; and on this, see a comment in Postell, “The Promised Seed,” 250, n. 8; and see Pauline Paris Buisch, “The Rest of Her Offspring: The Relationship between Revelation 12 and the Targumic Expansion of Genesis 3:15,” *Novum Testamentum* 60 (2018): 400–401; Michael B. Shepherd, “Targums, the New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah,” *JETS* 51, no. 1 (2008): 45–58; Michèle Morgen, “Apocalypse 12, un targum de l’Ancien Testament,” *Foi et vie* 80, no. 6 (1981): 63–74; Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (1997): 139–48; Martin, “Messianic Interpretation,” 425–27; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 115; Mounce, *Romans*, 280, n. 69.

⁵⁷ William Arndt et al., “ $\tau\acute{\alpha}\chi\omicron\varsigma, \omicron\upsilon\varsigma, \tau\acute{o}$,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 993; see Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, “ $\tau\acute{\alpha}\chi\omicron\varsigma, \omicron\upsilon\varsigma, \tau\acute{o}$,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 3:338; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 905; Schreiner, *Romans*, 805; Persaud, *Language of Enmity*, 39; Brown, “The God of Peace,” 5.

⁵⁸ See Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 167; Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” 459–72; Martin, “Messianic Interpretation,” 425–27; Postell, “The Promised Seed,” 211–21.

and to recognize that in fact each of the seven criteria is evidenced in the study of the relationship between Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1.

First, in reference to *the availability of the original text*, we asked: Was Genesis 3 available to David when he composed Psalm 110? Considering that Genesis was composed significantly before Psalm 110, and that David knew the Scriptures well (see Deut 17:18; Psa 25:4–5, 8–10, 14; Psa 110:3 and Gen 14:18), it is reasonable to conclude that Genesis 3:15 was indeed available to David.

Second, in reference to *the volume of references*, we asked: Is the allusion linguistically, syntactically, and structurally clear and compelling? And the answer is certainly affirmative, considering the distinct terminology and structure that is shared between Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1.

Third, in reference to *the recurrence* of literary links between Genesis 3 and Psalm 110, we asked: Does David refer to Genesis 3 elsewhere, whether in the same psalm or outside of the psalm? Again, the answer is a certain yes, particularly to the first part of the question, as Psalm 110 refers to other elements of Genesis 3—whether linguistically or conceptually—in latter portions of the psalm as well (vv. 1, 5, 6). In addition to this, the psalm reveals that David was thinking of Genesis even more broadly in that he refers to Melchizedek from Genesis 14:18 in Psalm 110:4 (see fn. 31 above).

Fourth, in reference to *the thematic coherence* between the passages, we asked: Does Genesis 3 fit the context of Psalm 110? And the answer is a resounding yes, considering that both passages speak of enmity / enemies and that the two key figures of these passages will oppose one another on account of enmity, ultimately resulting in the reversal of the curse.

Fifth, in reference to *the historical plausibility* of this literary link, we asked: Is it plausible that David alluded to Genesis 3, and might his readers have discerned this allusion? This too receives an affirmative answer. David would have had good reason to refer to Genesis 3:15 since he would have found the origins of the enemies of Psalm 110:1 in the context of Genesis 3:15. Moreover, Paul's composition of 1 Corinthians 15:21–28 and Romans 16:20 suggests that David's readers would have recognized this link as well.

Sixth, in reference to *the history of interpretation*, we asked: Do later authors—whether pre-critical or critical—make this connection between Genesis 3 and Psalm 110? To be sure, the broader connections between Genesis 3 and Psalm 110 have been outlined above, and the specific link that is the subject of this paper is briefly noted by Chen in his work *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*.⁵⁹

Seventh, in reference to *satisfaction*, we asked: Does the allusion to Genesis 3 contribute to the message of Psalm 110? And the definite answer to this is absolutely—for with Genesis 3:15 in view, Psalm 110:1 declares that God will achieve the reverse of the curse.⁶⁰

In effect, with all seven of Hays' criteria receiving an answer in the affirmative, it is more than reasonable to conclude that, when God said to the Messiah, "Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet," God was declaring that He would achieve a reversal of the enmity and death that had entered the world with the fall of man.

⁵⁹ Chen, *Messianic Vision*, 46. After I presented this paper at SBL in 2019, Chen's book was subsequently published, where I saw that he too observed this intertextual link.

⁶⁰ Hays, *Letters of Paul*, 29–32; Beale, *Handbook*, 32–34; Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 126; Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 206, n. 17; and Postell, "The Promised Seed," 245.

A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS: THE MESSIAH IN GENESIS 49

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Biblical theological efforts to trace the hope of a Messiah have often read Genesis 49:8–12 in isolation from 49:22–26, the blessings of chapter 48, and the Jacob tôledôt as a whole. In turn, this has led to an overly simplistic rendering of Israel's history—one that neglects the importance of Joseph's line throughout the remainder of the OT. This paper seeks to address this matter and examine the nature of Jacob's promises to Judah, in light of those given to Joseph. While both of these brothers play a prominent role in the book of Genesis, at the end of the narrative it is the younger son, Joseph, who receives the blessing of the first-born. Although no comment is made regarding the immediate status of Judah, Jacob's words anticipate an eventual deliverer who will come from the line of his fourth-born son. This study explains the initial prominence of certain Josephites in Israel's history, and the subsequent transition wherein God rejects the tribe of Ephraim, and raises up the line of Judah, through which comes the Messiah.

* * * * *

Introduction

As the narrative world of Genesis comes to a close, Jacob summons his sons so as to issue a final benediction (Gen 49:1). With patriarchal authority, the aged father speaks prophetic words, projecting a varied lot for the future tribes of Israel (49:2–28). Foremost amongst the blessings is Jacob's announcement to Judah (49:8–12). Therein he depicts his fourth-born son as a lion, to whom his brothers will pay homage. Interpretations of the blessing have typically centered on the meaning of "Shiloh" שִׁילֹה—a well-established *crux interpretum*, around which there remains

little consensus.¹ The benediction has also received attention due to its messianic implications. As Jacob speaks of a scepter, ruler's staff, and the obedience of peoples, his words align with the theme of kingship, prevalent throughout the Genesis narrative.² This, in turn, has been coupled to the promised "seed" זרע, introduced at 3:15.³ Thus, the regal blessing of 49:8–12 is read as an indication that the hope of a deliverer will be fulfilled through the line of Judah. Projecting forward, the words contribute to the ancestry of David, and of Christ.⁴

As biblical theology has enjoyed something of a resurgence in recent times, these relationships have received more attention. Indeed, the blessing given to Judah has become a focal point within Genesis that informs our reading of subsequent biblical history. Certainly, such interpretations should be welcomed, inasmuch as they refute readings that had previously sought to undermine notions of messianism in the

¹ Predominant views include: 1) שִׁילֹה is an irregular spelling of Shiloh (compare שִׁילֹה, found only at Gen 49:10, with שִׁלֹה, used twenty-one times, שִׁלֹ, used eight times, and שִׁילֹ, used two times), 2) שִׁילֹה should be revocalized so as to read שִׁלֹה—"until He comes to whom it is," 3) שִׁילֹה is a corruption of שִׁילֹה (cf. 2 Sam 23:3; Mic 5:1), or is related to the Akkadian šēlu, 4) the text should be repointed so as to read לֹה בָּא שִׁי לֵה—"until tribute is brought to him." For proponents of the first view, see Joh. Lindblom, "The Political Background of the Shiloh Oracle," in *Congress Volume: Copenhagen 1953* (Leiden: Brill, 1953), 78–87 and more recently Serge Frolov, "Genesis 49:10ba, One More Time," *JBL* 131, no. 3 (2012): 419–22. For arguments in favor of view two, see Kevin Smyth, "The Prophecy Concerning Judah: Gen 49:8–12," *CBQ* 7 (1945): 296–99; H. Cazelles, "Shiloh, The Customary Laws and The Return of the Ancient Kings," in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies*, ed. John I. Durham and J. R. Porter (London: SCM, 1970), 248–49. In favor of the third view, see Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 425; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1987), 231. For proponents of the fourth view, see J. L. Moran, "Gen 49:10 and Its Use in Ez 21:32," 39, no. 4 (1958): 412–14; Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, "Deux textes messianiques de la Septante: Gn 49:10 et Ez 21:32," *Bib* 61, no. 3 (1980): 359–60; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 336; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1994), 478; Raymond de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in Its Literary and Historical Context* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 129–39. More recently, see Steiner, who argues for the precedent of the qal stem of בֹּא used with inanimate precious objects (Gen 43:23; 1 Kgs 10:10; Isa 60:13; Jer 27:18). Richard C. Steiner, "Poetic Forms in the Masoretic Vocalization and Three Difficult Phrases in Jacob's Blessing: שִׁילֹה (Gen 49:3), שִׁילֹה (49:4), and שִׁילֹה (49:10)," *JBL* 129, no. 2 (2010): 219–26.

² This feature is well summarized by Alexander, who writes, "the entire book of Genesis is especially interested in highlighting the existence of a unique line of male descendants which will eventually give rise to a royal dynasty." T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48, no. 1 (1997): 366. See also, T. Desmond Alexander, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology," *TynBul* 49, no. 2 (1998): 198–206; T. Desmond Alexander, "The Regal Dimension of the תּלֹדֹת יַעֲקֹב: Recovering the Literary Context of Genesis 37–50," in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. G. McConville, and K. Möller (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007), 202–207.

³ Walter Wifall, "Gen 3:15—A Protoevangelium?," *CBQ* 36 (1974): 363. Wifall notes that, "The picture of a god or king treading with his feet upon the heads of his enemies was common in ancient Near Eastern art and literature." Furthermore, he rightly asserts a degree of congruency between God's promise to the serpent and certain Davidic passages such as Ps 89 and 2 Sam 22.

⁴ See for example, Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 700; Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 114, 208; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 94–96.

Torah.⁵ At the same time, caution should be exercised. Notwithstanding the value of tracing thematic emphases in Scripture, the nuances of redemptive history are manifold. When considering the implications of a text on subsequent revelation, attention should be given to its immediate context, and attendant theology.

The words spoken to Judah come as part of a benediction bestowed on all of Jacob's sons. Of comparable prominence to 49:8–12 is the blessing given to Joseph at 49:22–26. Similar in length, and laden with patriarchal imagery, the promises issued to the favorite son also portend a rich heritage for his line. Proper consideration of the words spoken to Judah should demonstrate cognizance of those directed to Joseph. What bearing does one blessing have on the other? Does the relationship between them affect the interpretation of subsequent history? The importance of these questions is further evidenced when the benedictions are read as the outworking of a narrative whose primary concern is to establish Jacob's heir.⁶ As the prevailing context has commended both sons as legitimate leaders of the family,⁷ the relationship between the blessings warrants consideration.

The goal of this article is not to detract from the messianic implications of 49:8–12. Rather, it is to understand more fully the nature of Jacob's promises to Judah, in light of those given to Joseph. By reading chapter 49 as the fruition of a story wherein both brothers play a prominent role, it is shown that the younger son emerges with the blessing of the first-born. As the narrative world of Genesis comes to a close, the promised line of the "seed" זרע is set to perpetuate through Joseph. Jacob's words to Judah anticipate an eventual deliverer from his line, without offering comment on his immediate status among the brothers. Projecting forward, this reading explains the prominence of certain Josephites in Israel's history, and the subsequent transition wherein God rejects the tribe of Ephraim, favoring instead the line of Judah (Ps 78:60, 67, 68).

Certainly, others have commended such an interpretation of Jacob's blessing. Particularly noteworthy is the prevalent expectation, in Jewish writings, of a Messiah ben

⁵ See for example, R. A. Martin, "The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *JBL* 84, no. 4 (1965): 425; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. John J. Scullion S.J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 260–61; James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 140n28; Tremper Longman III, "The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings," in *The Messiah in The Old and New Testaments*, ed. S. E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 13.

⁶ This point will be developed more fully below, suffice to say it derives from a synthetic reading of Genesis that asserts the *tôledôt* formula as the primary structuring tool of the narrative, and the "seed" זרע as the foremost point of interest. For a similar reading of Genesis, see T. Desmond Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44, no. 2 (1993): 255–70. Previous readings of Gen 37–50 have often bifurcated the text and suggested a different narrative interest. See for example Coats, who argues for a transitional function, from Jacob in Canaan, to Israel in Egypt. George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 9, 53–54. See also, Ska, who suggests the narrative is primarily concerned with familial strife, but not the establishment of Jacob's heir. Jean Louis Ska, "What Do We Mean by Plot and by Narrative Continuity?" in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 210.

⁷ Certainly, Joseph receives most attention within the narrative. However, properly understood the story holds in view the twelve sons of Jacob, with a particular interest in Judah and Joseph. This point will be developed more fully below.

Joseph.⁸ The present article asserts the immediate heirship of Joseph, and certain inferences concerning his line. At the same time, an eventual reign of Judah is affirmed—from him will come the promised “seed” זרע, who fulfills the role of a deliverer.

By reading 49:8–12 in light of the prevailing context, certain biblical theological implications ensue. Without negating the relationship between Jacob’s words to Judah, and the house of David, greater cognizance should be afforded to the line of Joseph. Attempts to trace the messianic hope of the OT should acknowledge the immediate leadership of the favored son, the implications for the tribes of Israel, and the eventual transference of power to the line of Judah. Such a reading would espouse a more nuanced ancestry of David—one that begins with a tale of two brothers.

A Tale of Two Brothers

Genesis 37–38

With the announcement of the Jacob *tôledôt* at 37:2, several narrative inferences arise. Inasmuch as the *tôledôt* formula serves as the primary structuring feature of Genesis,⁹ and orders the narrative around a concern for the promised “seed” זרע,¹⁰ genealogical issues are foremost. Specifically, the narrative marker prompts the question: which of Jacob’s sons will be his heir? Or, stated with reference to the redemptive plan, through which of the twelve will the line of promise proceed? The previous sins of Reuben (35:22; cf. 49:3–4), Simeon, and Levi (34:30; cf. 49:5–7) preclude them from receiving the blessing of the first-born. As such, the fourth-in-line, Judah, stands ready to become Jacob’s heir. However, narrative preference is afforded to Joseph

(“These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph...” אֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף; 37:2),¹¹ intimating that which is subsequently stated: the younger son has the special affection of his father (37:3).

That this preferential love might establish Joseph as the heir of Jacob is suggested by several features in the narrative. The younger son shepherds his

⁸ See in particular the works of Mitchell who deals well with the complexity of the issue. David C. Mitchell, “Rabbi Dosa and the Rabbis Differ: Messiah ben Joseph in the Babylonian Talmud,” *RRJ* 8, no. 1 (2005): 77–90; David C. Mitchell, “Messiah bar Ephraim in the Targums,” *AS* 4, no. 2 (2006): 221–41; David C. Mitchell, “Messiah Ben Joseph: A Sacrifice of Atonement for Israel,” *RRJ* 10, no. 1 (2007): 77–94; David C. Mitchell, *Messiah ben Joseph* (Newton Mearns: Campbell Publications, 2016).

⁹ For helpful arguments that represent this well-established consensus, see Sven Tengström, *Die Toledotformel: und die literarische Struktur der priesterlichen Erweiterungsschicht im Pentateuch* (Lund: C W K Gleerup, 1981), 28; B. Renaud, “Les généalogies et la structure de l’histoire sacerdotale dans le livre de la genèse,” *RB* 97, no. 1 (1990): 7–15; Matthew A. Thomas, *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the Toledot Formula* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 37; Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis,” *JETS* 56, no. 2 (2013): 222–35.

¹⁰ See in particular, Alexander, “Genealogies,” 255–70.

¹¹ Further, Coats draws attention to the contrast with his siblings, who are not identified by name, but simply as his brothers (יְהוָה 37:2). Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 11.

brothers.¹² He receives a special garment from his father.¹³ And he dreams of leading his family.¹⁴ The regal connotations of each element work together to form the cumulative testimony that Joseph will receive his father's special blessing. Moreover, they align the favorite son with the aforementioned royal ideology of Genesis, hinting that the promised "seed" זרע will come through him.

With the preeminence of Joseph established, the crisis of the narrative unfolds. The favorite son is exiled to Egypt, at the hands of Midianite traders (37:25–28).¹⁵ Concerning family dynamics, of particular interest is the passive portrayal of Joseph, and the active depiction of Judah. The former no longer asserts himself. Rather he is directed by a stranger (37:15–17), accosted by his brothers (37:23–24), and fails to speak another word.¹⁶ By contrast, Judah takes the initiative to lead his siblings, proposing a plan to which they all accede (37:26–27). Brief comments concerning Reuben's attempts to lead emphasize the point (37:21–22). Proposing, in essence the same plan, the oldest son is overlooked and so functions as a foil for Judah, who emerges as the new leader amongst his brothers.¹⁷

With Joseph established as the favorite son, yet exiled to Egypt, the narrative's focus shifts to the fourth-born (38:1–30). Genealogically, Judah is qualified to assume the coveted position of primogeniture. But questions arise as to his righteousness. Concomitant with the theme of kingship in Genesis, virtue serves as a persistent attribute of the chosen line. The promise of the "seed" זרע is sustained

¹² Pirson argues well for the possibility that זרע be rendered a *nota 259ccusative* based on the same syntactical construction at 37:12. Ron Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37–50* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 29. See also, Duane L. Christensen, "Anticipatory Paronomasia in Jonah 3:7–8 and Genesis 37:2," *RB* 90, no. 2 (1983): 263; Sama, *Genesis*, 255.

¹³ Notwithstanding the ambiguous nature of the garment, its function is intimated by the only other biblical reference to a כְּתֹנֶת פְּסִים, at 2 Sam 13:18–19. Therein, the regal connotations are clear. Thus, Matthews and Alexander rightly suggest such a garment infers a position of privilege, with royal undertones. Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," *JSOT* 65 (1995): 30; Alexander, "Regal Dimension," 202.

¹⁴ Of particular significance are the verbs of authority used in the telling and interpretation of the dreams: חוה 37:7, 9, 10, מלך 8 [x2], משל 8 [x2]. Joseph, his brothers, and his father all perceive a projection of preeminence by virtue of the visions. See A. W. Richter, "Traum und Traumdeutung im AT: Ihre Form und Verwendung," *BZ* 7 (1963): 208; Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 143–65.

¹⁵ Another *crux interpretum* within the Jacob *tôledôt*, the Midianite/Ishmaelite problem has provided fertile soil for source critical approaches throughout the history of Pentateuchal scholarship. Of the various synchronic solutions that have been offered in response, they may be aptly summarized according to three categories: (1) those that understand the Midianites and Ishmaelites as the same group; (2) those that suggest the Midianites sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites; and (3) references to the Midianites and Ishmaelites create an intentional juxtaposition of conflicting views. For a helpful summary, see Matthew C. Genung, *The Composition of Genesis 37: Incoherence and Meaning in the Exposition of the Joseph Story* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 40–43, 51–53.

¹⁶ Fokkelman summarizes, "the proud subject is sent away, loses his certainty on this outward journey and shifts to the object position." J. P. Fokkelman, "Genesis 37 and 38 at the Interface of Structural Analysis and Hermeneutics," in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 160.

¹⁷ In light of the prevailing context, the most reasonable explanation for Reuben's efforts views them as an effort to regain the right of primogeniture. So Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?," *JBL* 96, no. 1 (1977): 40; James S. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, with James S. Ackerman (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 100; Sama, *Genesis*, 259.

through those deemed righteous. The wicked are rejected.¹⁸ Thus, as Genesis 38 focusses on the fourth-born of Jacob, the interplay of references to his “seed” זרע (38:8, 9 [x2]), and the family’s unrighteousness elucidate the problem.¹⁹ Judah must find a more virtuous way if the promised line is to progress through him.

Such a path presents itself, albeit through an unfavorable set of circumstances. Tamar tricks Judah as he pursues relations with her (38:12–19), leading to a confrontation between the two (38:24–25). As the daughter-in-law presents his belongings, Judah understands the implications of his actions, and confesses his unrighteousness: “She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah” זרעו שלמה לא נתתי לה לְשֵׁלָה בְנִי (38:26). That his admission of guilt extends beyond his immediate failings, but also includes his treatment of Joseph, is perhaps inferred by a series of correspondences with chapter 37.²⁰ At the moment of confession, Judah unreservedly acknowledges his unrighteousness, thereby indicating a change in character. Clifford aptly summarizes: “Verse 26 marks a turning point in Judah’s attitude. After his courageous acknowledgement, he rises to a level of moral behavior from which he will never deviate. Gone forever is the Judah who conspired against his brother, scorned endogamy, neglected a widow, associated with a prostitute, and recklessly condemned a family member.”²¹

Confirmation of this reading is offered by the enigmatic conclusion to the chapter, wherein Tamar gives birth to twins (38:27–30). Just as the opening verses had portrayed Judah as wicked, and he had suffered the loss of two sons, so now with his righteousness established, his line is restored. Indicative of divine acceptance,²² the narrative implications are clear. In Joseph’s absence, Judah has emerged as a leader amongst his brothers, and is morally qualified to receive the blessing of the first-born.

Though there is undoubtedly more to say concerning chapters 37 and 38, this brief exposition draws attention to the dynamic between Joseph and Judah.

¹⁸ By way of example, Seth is selected in preference to Cain (4:10). Noah is preserved (6:9), amongst the wickedness of his generation (6:5). Abraham is chosen (15:6), rather than Lot, who lacks virtue and often acts as a foil. Notwithstanding the many failings of these characters, to which the narrative readily draws attention, a contextually defined standard of uprightness appears to govern the progression of the chosen line. So Alexander, “Genealogies,” 264–65; Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 2; Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-Structure of Genesis: ‘Will the Righteous Seed Survive?’ in the Muthos-Logical Movement from Complication to Dénouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1.

¹⁹ Judah has relations with a non-Israelite woman (38:3–5), and deceives Tamar (38:11b), while his sons are deemed wicked by God (38:7, 10).

²⁰ These include the theme of deception, the role of clothing, a goat, and use of the verbs שלח, and נטר (38:25–26 cf. 37:32–33). Drawing from Rabbinic interpretations of the narrative, Alter notes how the deceiver is deceived. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 1–24. Moreover, Lambe rightly argues, as the correspondences serve to press one narrative into the other, Judah’s confession should be read as a response to his guilt with respect to Tamar and Joseph. Anthony J. Lambe, “Judah’s Development: The Pattern of Departure-Transition-Return,” *JSOT* 83 (1999): 59–60.

²¹ Richard J. Clifford, “Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story,” *CBQ* 66, no. 4 (2004): 531. Patterson notes that Clifford’s reading of the text aligns with a growing consensus regarding Gen 38: its primary contribution to the Jacob *toledot* is to portray Judah’s character development. Patterson, *Plot-Structure*, 188. Others that affirm this reading include, Lambe, “Judah’s Development,” 58–60; André Wénin, “L’aventure de Juda en Genèse 38 et l’histoire de Joseph,” *RB* 111, no. 1 (2004): 21–24; Hyun Chul Paul Kim, “Reading the Joseph Story (Genesis 37–50) as a Diaspora Narrative,” *CBQ* 75 (2013): 235.

²² Goldin, “The Youngest Son,” 30; Diane M. Sharon, “Some Results of a Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah and Tamar,” *JSOT* 29, no. 3 (2005): 300.

Functioning as something of an overture to the Jacob *tôledôt*, the opening chapters introduce a tale of two brothers. Joseph is the favored son, but Judah is the next-in-line. Joseph is exiled and must find a way back to his father. Judah was morally unfit, but has walked a path of character transformation. As the story progresses, both sons will remain in view, and the question of Jacob's heir persists.

Genesis 39–41, 42–44

Subsequent chapters narrate Joseph's time in Egypt, noting in particular his rise to prominence. The literary triptych formed by chapters 39–41 casts Joseph as a quasi-regal figure, to whom unprecedented authority is afforded, in a foreign land.²³ Noting again the prevalence of a kingly theme in Genesis, the portrayal of Joseph in Egypt is significant. His status compounds the inference forged by the narrative's exposition: perpetuation of the promised line of the "seed" *זרע* will come through him. This impression is further augmented by several allusions to the patriarchal promises throughout ("like the sand of the sea" *כְּחול הַיָּם* 41:49 cf. 22:17; 32:13; "For God has made me fruitful" *כִּי־הִפְרֵנִי אֱלֹהִים* 41:52 cf. 17:6, 20; 28:3; 35:11).²⁴ Thus, Joseph's time in exile is not unrelated to the broader narrative concern of Jacob's heir. Notwithstanding the need to be reunited with his father, he is increasingly portrayed as the one with whom the promise of the "seed" *זרע* will reside.

Certainly, Judah's role at this time is not insignificant. He remains a leader amongst his brothers, pressing for a solution amidst the dilemma of a famine (43:3, 8–10). Furthermore, in a providential encounter between Joseph and his siblings, Judah demonstrates moral fortitude by offering his life in place of Benjamin's (44:18–34). Insomuch as the prevailing narrative evidences a multitude of connections with the past, the willingness of Jacob's fourth-born son to surrender his freedom for the sake of another should be read as the fruition of his earlier experiences.²⁵ As Judah's moral fortitude is manifest, further confirmation is given concerning his suitability to receive the blessing of the first-born.

²³ Joseph's ascendancy begins in Potiphar's house, as he is entrusted with responsibilities there (39:4, 5, 6). This pattern continues even in the prison (40:4), reaching its culmination before Pharaoh. The Egyptian king bestows upon Joseph his own signet ring, linen garments, and a gold chain (41:42). He entrusts all things to Joseph (41:40) and instructs the people to honor him (41:43). Scholars note similarities with Tûtu during the time of Akhenaten (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 395), Rekh-mi-Re during the reign of Thutmose III (Sarna, *Genesis*, 286), and Necho under Ashurbanipal (Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 95; Sarna, *Genesis*, 287). The last of these is particularly pertinent since the same three items of clothing given to Joseph are mentioned. The correspondence of imagery speaks to the significance of Joseph's promotion. His clothing is indicative of an investiture of authority, on behalf of the king.

²⁴ Consider also the use of *יָהָה* (39:2, 3 [x2], 5 [x2]) and *בָּרַךְ* (39:5 [x2]). The significance of both is seen by noting their relative frequency throughout Genesis as theologically significant words, and yet their relative sparsity within the Jacob *tôledôt*.

²⁵ The primary correspondences begin with the accusation that the brothers are spying the nakedness of the land (42:9, 12), which creates a conceptual parallel with the charges brought against Joseph by Potiphar's wife (39:14–18). Their time of incarceration (42:17) replicates the protagonist's time in prison (39:20), while the detaining of Simeon (42:24) represents the scenario of Joseph in the pit (37:24). See Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 90–93; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and The Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 288–91; Turner, *Announcements*, 156; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 408. Of particular interest is Judah's offer to

In sum, the rising action of the Jacob *tôledôt* perpetuates the dynamic established by chapters 37–38. The story is one of two brothers, both eligible to receive the first-born blessing of their father. However, the regal inferences of Joseph’s ascendance in Egypt imply that he, not Judah, will be announced the heir of Jacob. Notwithstanding the reality of his exile, and the ongoing narrative testimony of Judah’s eligibility, it seems the younger son is presented more deliberately in accordance with expectations of the promised “seed” זרע. As the narrative trends towards its dénouement, acknowledgment of these details anticipates that somehow, Jacob will give to Joseph the blessing of the first-born.

Genesis 48

After the self-revelation of Joseph (45:1), and the reunification of the family (46:28–30), the narrative moves towards its resting point. Prior to Jacob summoning his twelve sons to bestow a final benediction (49:1), he meets privately with Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh (48:1–22). The significance of the encounter is immediately inferred by several features of the narrative, including the switch from Jacob to Israel at the moment of blessing (48:2),²⁶ and multiple allusions to the patriarchal promises (48:4 cf. 17:8; 28:3; 35:11).²⁷

The ageing father then makes known his intention to adopt Joseph’s sons (48:5). Particularly noteworthy is Jacob’s comparison of Ephraim and Manasseh with Reuben and Simeon: “Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are” אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה כִּי־אֵינִי וְרְעֹבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן יִהְיֶינִי. In light of the prevailing narrative, Lee is correct to suggest that the implied relationship is one of replacement.²⁸ Due to their previous failings, the first two sons of Jacob will not receive anything akin to the appropriate blessing. Rather, Ephraim and Manasseh will be counted in their place. Jacob’s acquisition of Joseph’s sons establishes them as the priority with regard to inheritance.

The significance of this reading is understood by considering adoption practices in the ancient Near East. Specifically, such a ritual did not represent a severance of ties with the original father. Though a new relationship was forged, the adopted child would still be known as a son of the previous parent.²⁹ Thus, Jacob’s acquisition of

his father: “I myself will be *the* guarantee for him” אֲנִי אֶעֱרָבֶנּוּ (43:9). His earlier encounter with Tamar is brought to mind, wherein he had offered a pledge (“the guarantee, the pledge” הַעֲרָבוֹן 38:20). Ackerman, “Joseph, Judah, and Jacob,” 105; Alan T. Levenson, *Joseph: Portraits through the Ages* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2016), 142; Judah Kraut, “The Literary Roles of Reuben and Judah in Genesis Narratives: A ‘Reflection Complex,’” *JSOT* 43, no. 2 (2019): 218.

²⁶ In agreement with literary readings of the Jacob *tôledôt*, the two names should be understood as inferring different theological perspectives: familial and tribal. Jacob is employed when the dealings of the father and his sons are in view. Israel is used when a particular accent is implied on national affairs. See Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 9; Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 150. Thus, the switch at 48:2 from “Jacob” יַעֲקֹב to “Israel” יִשְׂרָאֵל is not insignificant. The father of Joseph was notified, the patriarch of Israel readied himself to bless. Kerry D. Lee, *The Death of Jacob: Narrative Conventions in Genesis 47:28–50:26* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 106.

²⁷ Note also, the use of “El Shaddai, God Almighty” אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי. Wenham rightly notes its use in other contexts that bring into view the promise of descendants. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 20.

²⁸ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 119.

²⁹ Lee cites adoption contracts from Nuzi, wherein the testator Zigi continues to refer to his offspring as “my son,” even after custody has been surrendered. Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 120, n. 94.

Ephraim and Manasseh would not disassociate them from Joseph. The point is confirmed by the interpretive comment “And he blessed Joseph” אֶת־יֹסֵף (48:15). With his hands on the boys’ heads, Jacob bestows a blessing on Joseph. Thus, the proleptic nature of the adoptive act transpires. As the patriarch prepares to summon all of his sons (49:1), he has already nominated his chosen heir. By elevating Ephraim and Manasseh with respect to birthright, Joseph will receive the blessing of the first-born (49:22–26 cf. 1 Chron 5:1–2).³⁰

Genesis 49

Insomuch as the announcement of the Jacob *tôledôt* prompts the question of heirship, Genesis 49 provides the declarative response. However, the patriarch’s words should not be read in isolation from preceding events. Brief consideration of the narrative has shown it to espouse a tale of two brothers. Judah and Joseph are candidates for the blessing of the first-born, but development of the kingly theme around the travails of the favorite son suggest that he will be named as Jacob’s heir. Then, a private meeting with Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh confirms the fact. He, not Judah, will be established as leader of the family.

This reading of the Jacob *tôledôt* commends a specific interpretation of the benediction given to Joseph (49:22–26). With the longest blessing in the chapter, the ageing father makes oblique reference to the past, and the hatred of Joseph’s brothers (49:23–24). He then confirms his choice of his favorite son, with words similar to those spoken in Genesis 48 (49:25, 26). Drawing on his patriarchal heritage, and the attendant promises, Jacob establishes Joseph as a prince amongst his brothers (“prince, distinguished,” נָוִיר 49:26). Within the narrative world of Genesis, such a blessing is indicative that through this son, the line of the promised “seed” זָרַע will continue.

This reading of the Jacob *tôledôt* also commends a more nuanced interpretation of the benediction spoken to Judah. With Joseph established as the first-born of Jacob, how should the imagery of 49:8–12 be understood? Of what significance is the preponderance of regal metaphors, and the projection of an idyllic kingdom? The answer may be found by giving attention to a less frequently noted interpretive issue, namely the syntactical pertinence of עַד, typically translated as “until.” Though it is often read as representing a point of cessation, Steiner notes that a point of culmination could be intended.³¹ That is, rather than highlighting the terminal point of an immediate reality, it may simply reference a final state without giving comment

³⁰ Concerning the switching of Jacob’s hands, this further confirms his intentions to bless Joseph as the first-born. Wenham rightly notes the correspondence of the narrative with Gen 27, wherein Isaac was tricked by his son. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 460. So also Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 187; Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 161. With similar elements in view (patriarchal blindness, primogeniture reversal, protest and reaffirmation), minor perturbations infer narrative significance. Specifically, whereas Isaac had kissed Jacob to determine his identity (וַיִּשָׁק לְיָדָיו), Jacob kisses the boys (וַיִּשָׁק לְהֵמָּה), certain of who they are. Whereas previously, continuity of chosen line had been wrought through deceit, how much more so now, as Jacob understands fully the situation before him. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 465. Similarly, von Rad, *Genesis*, 416; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 351–53.

³¹ Richard C. Steiner, “Four Inner-Biblical Interpretations of Genesis 49:10: On the Lexical and Syntactic Ambiguities of עַד as Reflected in the Prophecies of Nathan, Ahijah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah,” *JBL* 132, no. 1 (2013): 37.

on what comes before.³² Thus it would read: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, *until* (at the time when) Shiloh shall come, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” Two features of the text suggest that such a meaning is intended.

First, the collocation of $\text{יָ} \text{וָ}$ with an imperfect verb is exceptional.³³ Rather than render its meaning uncertain, the pairing places an accent on the forward-looking nature of Jacob’s words. Judah’s rule shall be realized when Shiloh comes, and not before. He shall hold a scepter then, but not now. Second, the concluding words of the benediction describe the kingdom as replete with grapes, vines, and milk (49:11–12). Spoken of elsewhere in the OT, these symbols are representative of an idyllic age, to be established in the future (cf. Lev 26:5; Ps 72:16; Isa 25:6; Joel 2:24; Amos 9:13). Judah’s beneficent reign will come to pass in days to come. The cumulative weight of the blessing is one that projects the eventual hope of a royal deliverer, from the line of Judah.

This reading is substantiated by the commentary on Israel’s history offered in Psalm 78. Therein, a change in leadership is noted, as God forsook Shiloh (Ps 78:60), and Joseph’s tent (78:67), choosing instead the tribe of Judah (78:68).³⁴ Jacob’s words in Genesis 49 intimate this change. The coming of Shiloh is a synecdochic representation of God’s presence. His dwelling at Shiloh will move to Judah.³⁵

In sum, Jacob’s blessing upon his sons anticipates a complex history that is not linear. By paying heed to the antecedent narrative, and various syntactical features, Genesis 49 projects the immediate precedent of Joseph, and the eventual reign of Judah. Messianic expectations will be established through the line of the fourth-born, but not without an ongoing testimony to the favorite son of Jacob.

The Preeminence of Joseph’s Line

The reading offered above carries certain implications to the interpretation of subsequent history. Biblical theological efforts to trace the hope of a Messiah have often read Genesis 49:8–12 in isolation from 49:22–26, the blessings of chapter 48, and the Jacob *tôledôt* as a whole. In turn, this has led to an overly simplistic rendering of Israel’s history—one that fails to heed the importance of Joseph’s line, throughout

³² For others who have read $\text{יָ} \text{וָ}$ as representing a point of culmination, see E. Kautzsch ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), §164f; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2005), 895.

³³ To be sure, $\text{יָ} \text{וָ}$ occurs in narrative prose, wherein it is followed by a perfect verb (cf. Gen 26:13; 41:49; 2 Sam 23:10; 2 Chron 26:15.). Occurrences of וָ in poetry are followed immediately by a finite verb. See Steiner, “Genesis 49:10,” 38.

³⁴ The significance of this switch is well noted, though seldom with reference to Gen 49:8–12. See for example, Amos Frisch, “Ephraim and Treachery, Loyalty and (the House of) David: The Meaning of a Structural Parallel in Psalm 78,” *VT* 59, no. 2 (2009): 195–96.

³⁵ Regarding this interpretation, see Alexander’s comments pertaining to the decline of the Ephraimites. During the time of the Judges, they fail to take a military lead and oppose those who do (Judg 12:1–7). Eventually the ark of the covenant is captured by the Philistines, and Eli’s daughter-in-law exclaims, “the glory has departed from Israel” (1 Sam 4:21). T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 106–107.

the remainder of the OT. By considering more carefully events that follow Jacob's death, a nuanced path emerges towards the establishment of David's throne.

After God leads Israel out of Egypt, gives to them His law, and leads them to the border of the promised land, Moses speaks a blessing upon the nation, reflective of that given by Jacob to his sons (Deut 33:1–29). Particularly noteworthy is the brevity with which the tribe of Judah is addressed (33:7). Occupying only one verse, the sixteen words spoken by Moses comprise a prayer that God would fight on Judah's behalf, and bring His people in. Though not insignificant, the blessing fails to present itself with the same prominence as the words spoken to Judah by Jacob in Genesis 49. The discrepancy is perhaps explained by noting the immediate purview of the blessing. Whereas Jacob projected towards an idyllic age, Moses focusses on the immediate occupation of the land. As Genesis 49:8–12 anticipated an eventual reign of Judah, Deut 33:7 confirms that his time is not yet.

By contrast, Moses' blessing on Joseph constitutes fifty-four words, five verses, and is the most theologically rich in the whole chapter (33:13–17). Continuity with Genesis 49:22–26 is inferred by a series of lexical and thematic correspondences, not least the announcement of the favored son as a prince (“prince, distinguished,” נָזִיר Deut 33:16), and firstborn bull (“firstborn of his ox,” בְּכוֹר שׁוֹר Deut 33:17). In agreement with the words of Jacob, Moses affirms the preeminence of the Josephites in the life of Israel, as they prepare to enter the promised land. The implications of this blessing are then realized as Joshua, son of Nun, is appointed to lead Israel forward (Deut 34:9; Josh 1:1–2). Notwithstanding the eventual military prowess of the Judites, a Josephite marshals the armies of the conquest.³⁶

Certainly, as the history of Israel progresses, the role of the Judites develops. They begin to function more as a leader amongst the tribes (cf. Judg 1:2, 8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19), until their ascendancy is established with the selection of David (1 Sam 16:1–13; 2 Sam 2:1–7; 5:1–5). As discussed above, this switch from the line of Joseph is explained by the psalmist, who notes a rebellion against God, intimated by idolatry (Ps 78:58). Though He had made His dwelling place at Shiloh, their unfaithfulness prompted His judgment (78:60–62). Thus, God allowed His people to fall by the sword (78:63–64), which is indicative of His rejection of Joseph, and His choice of Judah (78:67–68).³⁷

Conclusion: Preaching the Messianic Hope

Having considered more fully the promises given to Judah at Genesis 49:8–12, it is appropriate to think briefly upon the implications for the task of preaching.

³⁶ Alexander notes that though Joshua is not referred to as a king, his success is linked with obedience to the law (Josh 1:8). Such casts him in the light of the kings of Israel, according to Deuteronomy 17:18–19. Alexander, *Promised Land*, 105, n. 58.

³⁷ Certainly, connecting the poetic commentary offered by the psalmist to a single event in the history of Israel is a precarious task. Debates pertaining to the date of authorship, and original setting evidence a range of possible solutions. See for example, Mark Leuchter, “The Reference to Shiloh in Psalm 78,” *HUCA* 77 (2006): 1–31. However, the promises given to David (2 Sam 7:8–16), the prosperity of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 4:20–34), and the division of the kingdom at the hands of Jeroboam—a Josephite (1 Kings 12:16–20), suggest the reasonableness of a correspondence with the psalmist's words. By virtue of Ephraim's failings, prominence is transferred to Judah. The line of the promised “seed” זֶרַע will perpetuate through him.

Moving from the domain of exegesis to homiletics, the pastor's challenge is to represent with clarity the subtleties of the OT messianic hope. He must resist the temptation to adumbrate the narrative, choosing instead to communicate the many contours of Israel's history.

Certainly, the task of preaching the line of Joseph, in tension with the line of Judah, may appear daunting for several reasons. First, a cogent treatment of the dynamic requires that a foundation be laid first in the narrative world of Genesis. The reasonableness of a Messiah ben Joseph can only be seen after the thematic burden of the Jacob *tôledôt* has been shown. For the overly busy pastor, whose desire is to minister salient NT truths on a Sunday morning, such a task may seem overwhelming. Second, the preeminence of Joseph's line, up until the establishment of David's house, renders OT messianic expectations as inescapably complex. Tracing the promised line of the "seed" זרע beyond Genesis necessitates that the pastor does not bypass various tensions, but draws attention to them. For the passionate preacher, who is excited to expound the glory of God's redemptive plan, such a task may lack appeal. Perhaps, he feels that a convoluted path will detract from the wonder of Jacob's promises finding their fulfillment in Christ.

Both of these concerns are remedied with a brief consideration as to the nature of expository preaching and its relationship to biblical theology. The NT infers the local church as the primary setting for the communication of God's Word. As such, a degree of continuity is implied in the task of preaching. Rather than the isolated, sporadic articulation of truth, a biblical ecclesiology commends the sustained, weekly exposition of Scripture.

The benefit of adhering to this logic is the inevitable correspondence between exegesis and homiletics: the argument of the text becomes the outline of the sermon. Stated otherwise, because the preacher will be back the following Sunday, his exposition can adhere to the logic of the passage in view. He should not feel burdened to accomplish everything in one sermon. As his preaching consistently traces the argument of his passage, the wholistic thought is borne out through the cumulative testimony of his sermons.

Certainly, he has the liberty to go beyond the bounds of the text in his teaching. Indeed, oftentimes it is prudent to bring the entirety of biblical history into view, so as to make plain the significance of a certain theme or motif. However, pastors do not need to distill the entirety of a particular metanarrative into every sermon. A commitment to sustained expository preaching allows for the articulation of God's redemptive plan, as it is presented by the text.

This approach to Sunday's sermon allows for a more nuanced rendering of the messianic hope. The pastor does not feel burdened to connect various lexemes, or phrases, without due consideration of the context in which they are found. He need not etch a line across the landscape of Scripture, which fails to represent the actual development of the theme in view. Rather, he is afforded the time to preach the details of the narrative, tensions and all.

The significance of Jacob's words to Judah serves as an appropriate example. Without detracting from the implications of Genesis 49:8–12 to the messianic hope of the OT, the pastor does well to exposit the benediction in its original context. By taking time to communicate the significance of the blessing given to Joseph, and the details of the Jacob *tôledôt*, he can communicate a more nuanced reading of the text.

Adhering to a pattern of weekly exposition, the pastor can demonstrate the eventual emergence of a king from the tribe of Judah, but only after the preeminence of the Josephites fades. Over time, he will preach a messianic hope that more closely traces the contours of Israel's history.

Certainly, the pastor need not fear that by drawing attention to the details, he will detract from the beauty of biblical history. Rather, he trusts that the fruit of his labors will be evidenced over months and years. As tensions are addressed, and nuances considered, a fuller articulation of the glory inherent to God's redemptive plan will result. His commitment to expository preaching will complement the Bible's development of its themes, not least the outworking of the messianic hope.

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THE MESSIAH IN ISAIAH 7:14: THE VIRGIN BIRTH

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* * * * *

Many evangelical scholars deny that Isaiah's prophecy of a virgin giving birth to Immanuel directly predicts the birth of Jesus, arguing that the words and syntax of Isaiah 7:14 demand fulfillment in the time of King Ahaz. This article provides three arguments to support a messianic-only interpretation. First, the greater context of chapters 1–12 consistently anticipates immediate judgment upon the nation, with Judah's hope lying beyond exile when God takes up residence with his people. Second, hermeneutical proposals of double fulfillment are shown to be unconvincing because they lack any basis in the text. Third, analysis of Isaiah 7:14–17 reveals that an 8th-century fulfillment is impossible given the nature of the sign, the meaning of almah, the syntax of the announcement, as well as the child's name, role, diet, and character. A closer look at the timeline in Isaiah 7:16–17 shows that Immanuel could only be born after the land of Judah was laid waste, a reality that did not occur in the 8th century. This study thus concludes that Matthew and the early church exercised sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles in identifying Jesus as the sole fulfillment of the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy.

* * * * *

Isaiah the prophet had a most fitting name, for his book reveals how “Yahweh is salvation.” Though the sinful nation would be hardened in their sin through his preaching, atonement was freely offered to those who recognized their woeful condition and trusted in the Lord. The depravity of the nation began at the top, with King Ahaz rejecting Yahweh's salvation in favor of Assyrian “salvation,” and King Hezekiah putting his trust in the Babylonians (Isa 7, 39). The salvation that Isaiah progressively revealed centered on a king who would trust Yahweh and rule over the nation in righteousness. This same king would serve his people by laying down his life to atone for their sins, and he would be raised to life to bring the scattered exiles back to the land so that the now holy people would accomplish their original purpose of displaying God's glory to the nations.

What Isaiah then chiefly reveals is that Yahweh's salvation comes through the Servant-King, an individual who is at once markedly human yet also more than a man. His humanity is emphasized through the prophecies of his childhood, his ordinary appearance, and his suffering unto death (Isa 49:5; 53:2, 9). His deity is adumbrated through his divine names, his perfect righteousness, and his ability to atone for the sins of the nation (Isa 9:6; 11:2–5; 53:4–12). He is the “seed” who is “holy,” the child called “Mighty God,” and the one who dies yet reigns forever (Isa 6:13; 9:6–7; 52:13–53:12). The Messiah's mission was not only to restore Israel, but to be Yahweh's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6).

This portrait of the Messiah in Isaiah is confirmed in the apostolic writings of the New Testament as well as by interpreters throughout church history. But whereas many evangelical scholars today would largely agree with this overall presentation, many would exclude Isaiah 7:14's prophecy of the virgin birth of Immanuel as directly predictive of the Messiah. Instead, they argue that this prophecy was fulfilled in some manner in the time of Isaiah. The *almah* was actually a young married woman who gave birth to a child named Immanuel as a sign to Ahaz that God was with Judah in the dark hours of foreign invasion.

The debate has been quite contentious, particularly in the 20th century. The single greatest factor behind conservatives' rejection of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) in the 1950s was the translation of *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 as “young woman” instead of “virgin.” The creation of the New American Standard Bible was one of the results of this controversy, and the RSV and its successor NRSV are only rarely found in evangelical churches. It may then be surprising to some that many evangelical scholars today believe that “young woman” is the correct translation, and that a young married woman gave birth to an Immanuel child prior to the birth of Jesus.

Some representative evangelical scholars may be cited. Eugene Merrill writes, “The lexicography and grammar certainly favor the idea that a young woman (thus *almâ*), well-known to King Ahaz and the prophet, would soon give birth to a child against all odds of it happening naturally.”¹ James Hamilton agrees: “Taken in the context of Isaiah 7, it is hard to deny that verse 14 directly predicts a child who would be born *during* rather than *after* Ahaz's life.”²

Stating the matter more strongly, Rodney Decker argues that “Isaiah did not prophesy regarding the birth of Messiah. He would not have known that his prophecy of the destruction of Aram and Israel, of the birth of a son as a sign of God's presence with his people, and of the explanatory text surrounding those statements, had any reference beyond the 8th century BC.”³ Steve Moyise is emphatic: “If this is a prediction of the birth of Jesus 700 years hence, then it makes utter nonsense of the story being narrated in Isaiah.”⁴

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 510.

² James M. Hamilton Jr., “‘The Virgin Will Conceive’: Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–23,” in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 238–39; emphasis original.

³ Rodney J. Decker, “Twisted Text? The New Testament's Uses of the Old” (The Clearwater Lectures: Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Virginia Beach, VA, 2002), 50.

⁴ Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 3.

The goal of this article is to prove the very opposite. In fact, the lexicography, grammar, and context of Isaiah 7 positively preclude the possibility of a child being born during Ahaz's life. Furthermore, the acceptance of an 8th-century fulfillment eliminates the possibility of the fulfillment in the birth of Jesus, and the various hermeneutical maneuvers used to justify the "both/and" approach—including double fulfillment, *sensus plenior*, and typology—are illegitimate, persuasive only to those determined to save Matthew from the charge of misreading the text.

There is no need to come to Matthew's rescue, or to that of the church who for centuries believed in a single fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy.⁵ Matthew was not ignorant of Hebrew grammar or syntax, nor would he have expected that his Jewish audience would have permitted him some dubious hermeneutical tactic. He knew that they would be "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).⁶

This article will demonstrate that Isaiah 7:14 is strictly and solely a prophecy that was fulfilled in the virgin birth of Jesus. It will do this first by examining the greater context of chapters 1–12, revealing that Isaiah's hope for the nation resided strictly and solely in salvation *after judgment* in the form of a child who will be both Israel's king and "God with us." Second, hermeneutical proposals of double fulfillment will be evaluated and shown to lack any textual basis. Third, an analysis of chapter 7 will show that Isaiah's hope for the nation was found in the miraculous birth of a child born to a virgin after judgment had fallen on the nation. Contrary to the analysis of many modern interpreters, the details of the Hebrew text, including the oft-cited references to time markers, eliminate the possibility that Isaiah 7:14 could have been fulfilled anytime before the year 586 BC.

The Book of Immanuel (Isaiah 1–12)

Including a broader survey of Isaiah 1–12 is not common in a study of the Immanuel debate, but I believe that the greater context essentially resolves the interpretive question of 7:14. In other words, the reader who is familiar with chapters 1–6 and 8–12 can predict the content of chapter 7 on the assumption that Isaiah presents a unified message. Isaiah 7:14 is indeed entirely consistent with the message of the prophet in the preceding and following chapters. To say it another way, if Isaiah 7:14 was a glorious sign of hope fulfilled in the time of Ahaz, it was a decidedly jarring prophecy unlike anything else in the context.

The common disregard for the greater context is no small matter, and it may be the single greatest factor contributing to the erroneous interpretations of Isaiah 7 over the years. Ignoring the context surely makes it easier to adopt a non-messianic interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy. In fact, this general principle may be observed from the history of interpretation of Isaiah 7: non-messianic views require atomizing

⁵ Cf. *Isaiah 1–39*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Steven A. McKinion, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 60–64; John Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I–XXXIX. With Introduction and Notes*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), 64.

⁶ Contra John Goldingay who believes that NT authors were speaking only to those already persuaded. John Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 32.

the text, an approach popularized by higher-critical methodologies with their interest in identifying underlying sources and their resistance to the unity of the text. Evangelical scholars, perhaps to some degree unwittingly, could have been influenced by this approach, with the result that conclusions about Isaiah 7:14 are sometimes based on analysis of a few words or a few verses but without regard to the book of Isaiah as a whole, or the so-called “book of Immanuel” (chapters 1–12) more specifically. Three striking omissions illustrate this failure in numerous studies: the meaning of curds and honey, the connection to the child of chapter 9, and the theme of “God with us” from chapters 2 to 12. The fact is that the greater context precludes a non-messianic interpretation of the virgin birth prophecy.

Judgment and Hope in Isaiah 1–5

It is well-known that throughout his book Isaiah easily moves back and forth between themes. This is the case in the first five chapters, where Isaiah interweaves the themes of the nation’s guilt, judgment, and hope. The first chapter is primarily one of indictment, charging the people for false religiosity, social injustice, and defiance of God’s law. Consequently, the prophet foresees the nation being ravaged, destroyed like Sodom except for a few survivors. Yet God promises to smelt away their dross and restore their judges so that “afterwards” Jerusalem “will be called the city of righteousness” (Isa 1:26). Already in chapter 1, Isaiah’s message is clear: judgment is coming soon, but restoration will follow.

In chapter 2, Isaiah briefly develops this idea of restoration, declaring that “in the last days” all nations will stream up to Zion to learn from the Lord (Isa 2:2). Israel’s hope lies in the future, at a time when the Lord himself will reside in Jerusalem, judging between the nations and establishing peace on earth. Beyond the impending invasion of armies to destroy Israel’s land, the Lord will be with his people to fulfill their mission of being a kingdom of priests and a marvel to the world (cf. Exod 19:5–6; Deut 4:6–8).

The rest of chapter 2 and all of chapter 3 describe Israel’s pride and coming judgment. The nation is guilty of parading their sin like Sodom, and so their men will be slain, and their women disgraced. But after judgment, there is hope, for “in that day the Branch of Yahweh will be beautiful and glorious” (Isa 4:2). While the reference to this “Branch” will become clearer later in the book of Isaiah (with its messianic references to stump, shoot, and root) and be confirmed by Jeremiah and Zechariah (Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12), the immediate context reveals the transformation brought about in that future day. The remnant of Jerusalem will be called holy, their women’s filth will be cleansed, and Yahweh will dwell with his people as a cloud by day and a flaming fire by night (Isa 4:2–5). Once again, Israel’s hope lies on the far side of judgment when God will reside with them.

Israel’s immediate reality, however, is depicted in a song in which Yahweh’s vineyard must be made a wasteland because it is worthless. A drumbeat of six woes condemns the nation for rejecting Yahweh’s law and reveals that his angry hand is raised in righteous judgment. The Lord calls the nations to carry Judah off into the darkness of exile (Isa 5:1–30).

The message of chapters 1–5 is the message of the book of Isaiah in embryonic form. Later chapters will provide further detail about the identity of the invading

nations, the nature of the coming exile, the character of the glorious branch, and the establishment of Zion in righteousness, but the framework of Isaiah's prophecy is in place and will not be altered. It should be emphasized: Israel's hope lies on the other side of judgment. The nation's guilt demands punishment, but a remnant will be preserved and made holy so that God may dwell with his people. Nothing in the text to this point suggests that faithless Judah has any short-term hope.

Judgment and Hope in Isaiah 6

Chapter 6 is well-known for being a critical hinge chapter in the book of Immanuel, bridging the more general prophecies given in chapters 1–5 with the more specific ones of chapters 7–12. In this vision of the Lord, Isaiah's guilt is removed in a picture of the nation's future forgiveness. But Isaiah's immediate commission is to bring about the nation's hardening through his preaching, resulting in the people being deported and the land being left desolate. But though Isaiah's ministry results in the nation's judgment—the metaphorical cutting down of Israel's forest—a “stump” remains, which is the “holy seed” (Isa 6:13).

Though the identity of the seed is not clarified in the immediate context, the alert reader recalls the “seed” of the woman to crush the serpent, the “seed” of Abraham to bring blessing to the world, and the “seed” of David to reign forever (Gen 3:15; 22:18; 2 Sam 7:12–16). Furthermore, the reader of Isaiah already anticipates Yahweh's glorious branch, a purified Israel, and the nations being blessed from Zion (Isa 2:1–4; 4:2–6). That all these threads converge in one individual becomes indisputable later in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and in the New Testament, but we should not be surprised to see the convergence even sooner in Isaiah 7–12. The connections become more obvious if we do not overlook the descriptor “holy” used of the seed, particularly in a context where only Yahweh is holy, and where Isaiah declares himself ruined. Whoever this seed is, he is surely greater than Isaiah.⁷ With the introduction of a glorious branch and a holy seed, the prophet has prepared us well for chapter 7.

Judgment and Hope in Isaiah 7–12

In chapter 7, King Ahaz proves himself to be like the nation in its rebellion against the Lord. Faced with invasion by Aram and Ephraim, Ahaz must decide whom to trust for his salvation. Through Isaiah, Yahweh appeals to the king to stand firm in faith, or he will not stand at all. Though offered a sign of his own choosing, Ahaz refuses to trust the Lord. Second Kings 16 fills in the details: Ahaz has sought salvation not from Yahweh, but from Assyria, paying them a heavy bribe to attack his enemies and end the siege (2 Kgs 16:7–8). What Isaiah said in response to Ahaz's faithless decision is the controversial subject of this paper and will be developed below, but this much is indisputable: Ahaz chose to be saved by Assyria, and so he

⁷ One could argue that the “holy seed” here is collective, given the prophecy in 4:3 that the people will be holy. Further revelation, however, will clarify that a single holy individual brings about the atonement of his people, thereby securing their holiness (Isa 53:5–12; 59:16–62:12).

will be “saved” by Assyria.⁸ What Ahaz seeks as salvation is actually destruction, and the land of Judah will be ravaged to the point where the remnant who survives will eat a diet of curds and honey. As in the preceding chapters, Isaiah’s message is that Israel’s sin merits judgment. The only question in chapter 7 is the nature of the hope that the Lord offers through the birth of the Immanuel child.

Chapter 8 begins with the birth of a son to Isaiah whose name signifies the destruction of Aram and Ephraim. But while this may, at first glance, appear to be good news, it is only pseudo-salvation, for it is brought about by the arrival of Assyria. Isaiah explains that because Judah rejected the Lord, symbolized by the gentle waters flowing from Jerusalem’s spring, they will be inundated by the overflowing river of Assyria. But once again, judgment is not the last word, for Judah’s land belongs to “Immanuel,” and God will be with his people to shatter the invaders (Isa 8:1–10). It is important to note here that an individual named Immanuel can lay claim to the land, and that the deliverance occurs after Judah’s destruction. The hope of this passage comes not before the judgment, but after.

Given the impending judgment, the Lord directs Isaiah to prepare his disciples by teaching them to wait upon him and to guard the word of the Lord (Isa 8:11–22). The nation is about to enter its darkest hour, and the way through is by clinging to the Lord who has promised Israel’s restoration. Indeed, the darkness will remain until a great light dawns on the land of Galilee (Isa 9:1–2). The tribes that had first experienced judgment through the Assyrian invasion will be the first to be honored by the appearance of this light. The nation once reduced in territory will now be enlarged, and their sorrow will be replaced by joy, for Yahweh will defeat the enemy, destroy the battle gear, and give the nation a child who will reign on David’s throne as “Mighty God,” establishing peace and righteousness without end (Isa 9:3–7). Some readers may be inclined to identify this king with the glorious branch and the holy seed. Should he not also be identified as the “God-with-us” child?

Chapters 9 and 10 continue with four stanzas expressing Israel’s guilt and judgment, with each stanza concluding that “in spite of all this, His anger does not turn away” (Isa 9:8–10:4). But this judgment is not the last word, for the Assyrians who execute Yahweh’s judgment will themselves be completely destroyed (Isa 10:5–19). And it will be “in that day” that the remnant of Israel will finally trust the Lord and return to the “Mighty God” (Isa 10:20–21). Once again, we see salvation on the far side of exile. We also see the role of the child born to reign on David’s throne in restoring the remnant.

Chapter 11 begins with a prophecy of a shoot springing up from the stump of Jesse, reminding the reader of the glorious branch and the holy-seed stump. Though the Hebrew words here are not the same ones used in Isaiah 4:2 and 6:13, the conceptual connection is unmistakable. As is his method, Isaiah builds on ideas previously introduced, providing more detail. The glorious branch who is associated with a holy remnant in chapter 4, and the holy seed that survives the nation’s

⁸ As Peter J. Gentry observes, “The brief conversation recorded between Ahaz and Isaiah is a pivotal point in the narrative plot-structure of the Old Testament that causes the tree of the Davidic dynasty to be cut down.” Peter J. Gentry, “Isaiah 7:12–16—Cutting Down the Davidic Tree: Pivotal Point in the Israelite Monarchy,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 4, no. 1 (2019): 54.

destruction in chapter 6, is now identified as a fruitful branch who is a new David.⁹ The righteous conditions of chapter 4, and the holy nature of the seed in chapter 6, are realized here in Yahweh's Spirit resting on this individual so that he judges the nation in absolute righteousness. This must be the same individual as the child born to establish righteousness throughout David's kingdom (Isa 9:6–7). His role in restoring his people from exile, previously seen in Isaiah 10:20–21, is developed further in 11:10–16.

The “book of Immanuel” concludes with an exuberant song in chapter 12, with the people rejoicing that Yahweh's anger has turned away and he has become their salvation. The nation has faced God's just judgment and come out on the other side. The concluding verse is exactly what we would expect, for the inhabitant of Zion is told to shout for joy, “for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel” (Isa 12:6). God will be with his people in salvation after judgment.

Immanuel in the Context of Isaiah 1–12

Isaiah's message in chapters 1–12 is a unified one: Judah is guilty of covenant treachery, displayed dramatically in choosing Assyria as her savior, and the Lord will use Assyria as the rod of his anger to destroy Judah and carry the people into exile.¹⁰ Ahaz could not save his dynasty through his works, but the Lord would preserve the house of David through his promise. Out of the exile, a child will be born to defeat the nation's enemies, restore the people to their land, and establish righteousness in David's kingdom eternally. He is the glorious branch, the holy seed, the Mighty God, and the Spirit-endowed son of David. This is the portrait that emerges even without the testimony of chapter 7.¹¹ The question now is how the prophecy of the Immanuel child fits in this greater context.

Isaiah 1–6, 8–12 Individual	Isaiah 7 Individual
Born in a devastated land (6:13; 8:10)	Born in a devastated land (7:15, 18–25)
Identified with God by his name (9:6)	Identified with God by his name (7:14)
Belongs to the royal family (9:7; 11:1)	Belongs to the royal family (7:13–14)
Emphasis on individual as child (9:6)	Emphasis on individual as child (7:14–16)
Emphasis on the child's naming (9:6)	Emphasis on the child's naming (7:14)
Able to make righteous decisions (9:7; 11:3–5)	Able to make righteous decisions (7:15–16)

⁹ The contemporary prophet Micah will also suggest that the king who arises out of exile is a new David by virtue of his birth in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2–4).

¹⁰ The baton of Judah's judgment is passed from Assyria to Babylon when Ahaz's son Hezekiah chooses Yahweh for salvation instead of Assyria, and Jerusalem and the house of David avoid conquest (Isa 36–37). But when Hezekiah trusts Babylon, Isaiah reveals that Babylon will conquer Judah and carry off the princes of the house of David (Isa 39).

¹¹ Micah's contemporary prophecy confirms this interpretation of Isaiah. He too sees an immediate destruction of Jerusalem—“Zion will be plowed as a field”—but “in the last days,” Jerusalem will be restored when the Bethlehem-born ruler from ancient times brings Israel back to the land and establishes peace (3:12–5:5).

As we come then to a careful investigation of chapter 7, we can expect one of three possible conclusions for relating the Immanuel child to the greater context of chapters 1–12: (1) the Immanuel child is the future king described in the greater context; (2) the Immanuel child has no relation to the future king described in the greater context; or (3) there is some kind of double fulfillment, with the child born in chapter 7 somehow foreshadowing or typifying the future king.

On the face of it, option one probably would be the first choice of all evangelical interpreters absent the details of 7:14–17. Indeed, those who end up preferring option three would likely agree that the greater context surely has some kind of “influence” on their interpretation of the Immanuel passage. In other words, whereas they believe that the language of 7:14–17 by itself demands a child born in the time of Ahaz, the “atmosphere” of the chapters also suggests some kind of relationship between Immanuel and the future Davidic king.¹²

The problem with some kind of double or typological fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy in Jesus is that there is no basis for such an idea in the text of chapter 7. A considerable variety of explanations have been offered for how an Immanuel child could have been born twice, but their sheer number indicates that none of them have met with any kind of broad acceptance.¹³ They are all intended to provide evangelicals with a hermeneutical “escape hatch,” allowing them to honor their non-messianic interpretation of Isaiah 7 while still as Christians affirming the inspiration and accuracy of Matthew’s fulfillment quotation.

This double-fulfillment approach will be considered next, beginning with a brief summary of why many interpreters feel compelled to see an 8th-century Immanuel child, followed by a critique of proposed hermeneutical solutions. After that, I will show how an accurate interpretation of Isaiah 7:13–17 eliminates the possibility of an 8th-century fulfillment. Ultimately, my goal is to show that not only does any sort of double-fulfillment interpretation fail textually and hermeneutically, but that there is no need for interpreters to seek anything other than a messianic-only fulfillment.

Arguments for Contemporary Fulfillment

Christians who believe in a contemporary fulfillment of Immanuel’s birth have a variety of textual arguments, but they all agree that the specific language of Isaiah 7:14–16 demands a child born in the time of Isaiah. Their two most significant arguments are: (1) a sign would have no significance to Ahaz if not fulfilled at that time; and (2) the boy had to be born before Aram and Ephraim were destroyed. The most common identification for an 8th-century fulfillment is Isaiah’s son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and this proposal merits further consideration. It will also be noted below that the interpretation of *almah* as “young woman” (instead of “virgin”) does not require a contemporary fulfillment, but only allows for it.

¹² Though stating that the identification of Immanuel as Maher-shalal-hash-baz is the “most attractive option,” John Oswalt also notes a “remarkable congruence” between the child of ch 9 and Immanuel and asserts that the child of ch 9 is the “ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel sign.” John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 213, 247.

¹³ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 207–208.

Scholars regularly claim that a prophecy that would not be fulfilled for more than seven centuries would have no relevance to Ahaz and his contemporaries, and such an interpretation is thus excluded. Duane Garrett provides a recent example of this argument: “It is hard to see how the birth of Jesus has any relevance for this war [against Aram and Ephraim], and it is impossible to explain how it could serve as a sign to Ahaz. By the time Jesus was born, everyone involved in this story had been dead for some seven hundred years.”¹⁴

The second argument is generally considered to be even more significant in denying a messianic-only fulfillment. In this interpretation, verse 16 provides a timeline which requires that the child was born before the destruction of Aram and Ephraim, not later than 732 BC.¹⁵ The LSB translation of this verse is not significantly different than other major translations: “For before the boy will know to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.” The word translated “before” is *בְּתֵרֶם* (*beterem*), and this places Assyria’s conquest of Ahaz’s enemies prior to the child reaching the age of maturity.¹⁶ The chronological sequence is thus adduced as follows: (1) Immanuel is born; (2) the land of Israel and Aram is laid waste; (3) Immanuel knows to reject the wrong and choose the right. This is not a correct chronological analysis, as will be shown below, but it is a common interpretation that necessitates the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy during the reign of Ahaz.¹⁷

This argument is usually supported by appealing to the birth of the child in chapter 8. There we see a number of similarities with the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, including a sign that a boy will be born, a prophecy of the child’s name, and most importantly, the timing of the destruction of Israel and Aram being linked to the age of the child. Many, in fact, believe that Isaiah 8 records a fulfillment (or partial fulfillment) of the 7:14 prophecy. In this scenario, the *almah* is Isaiah’s wife, and the timeframe of Israel’s deliverance is within a couple of years of the baby’s birth. This view is also deemed attractive because otherwise there is no mention of the prophecy of 7:14 being fulfilled.

The identification of Immanuel with Maher-shalal-hash-baz is by no means unanimous among those who hold to an 8th-century fulfillment, particularly because they recognize differences between the children that are too significant to overcome. The objections are substantial: (1) Though the Lord says that the prophesied child will be called Immanuel, and though it is in Isaiah’s power to so name him, the prophet gives his child a different name. (2) The name that Isaiah gives the child has a symbolic meaning which is unrelated to the meaning of Immanuel, and which speaks of judgment, not hope. (3) The mother of the child is not identified as an

¹⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *The Problem of the Old Testament: Hermeneutical, Schematic, and Theological Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 358.

¹⁵ Assyria conquered Galilee, Gilead, and Damascus by 732 BC, thereby eliminating the threat to Judah.

¹⁶ A qualification may be made: while all agree that *בְּתֵרֶם* serves as a time marker, some try to solve the problem by proposing a shift in subject in this verse, such that the boy in view is no longer the Immanuel child but another child, such as Shear-jashub. E.g., Michael Rydelnik, “Isaiah 7:1–16: The Virgin Birth in Prophecy,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 823.

¹⁷ Proponents of this argument include the medieval Jewish commentators Rashi, ibn Ezra, and David Kimhi. Cf. Antti Laato, “Isaiah in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Jewish Traditions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 511.

almah but as a *nevi'ah*, a “prophetess” (Isa 8:3), the wife of Isaiah; the suggestion that the *almah* was Isaiah’s second wife is pure conjecture.¹⁸ (4) Isaiah, not the child’s mother, names the boy. (5) The time frames given for the two sons are different; one refers to the age of twenty years old, while the other to about the age of two.¹⁹ (6) The reference to Immanuel as the owner of the land (Isa 8:8) would apply to the child born to the house of David, but not to Isaiah’s son.²⁰ (7) Isaiah never informs his readers that Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz are the same child. In conclusion, it seems that the text quite clearly differentiates between the two children, thus eliminating the possibility that Isaiah’s son is the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy. These are two distinct children who signify different prospects for Judah. Maher-shalal-hash-baz is a sign of Assyria’s destruction of Aram and Ephraim, whereas Immanuel, as will be shown below, is a sign that God will be with his people on the other side of the exile. In other words, Isaiah’s child signifies Judah’s pseudo-salvation while the virgin’s child signifies Judah’s true and ultimate salvation.

Another proposal is that the Immanuel child prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Hezekiah.²¹ But this view is widely rejected given that Hezekiah was 25 when he ascended the throne in 715 BC, making him at least five years old when Ahaz’s reign began in 735 BC. Consequently, most of those who do not equate Maher-shalal-hash-baz with Immanuel conclude that the *almah* and her child are unknown. But, as Motyer observes, this theory “perishes by requiring for a prophecy so solemnly announced a fulfillment so drab that no-one bothered to record it!”²² The best solution is to recognize that no fulfillment was recorded because no fulfillment occurred.

The question of the interpretation of *almah* should be noted in the context of the contemporary fulfillment views, for it must be made clear that interpreting *almah* as “young woman” instead of “virgin” is not an argument for contemporary fulfillment, but only a necessary condition. That is, identifying the *almah* as a non-virgin is mandated once it is concluded that Immanuel was born in the 8th century, because no one believes that a virgin miraculously conceived in the time of Isaiah. But the belief in a contemporary fulfillment has spurred tremendous effort to deny that the Hebrew word *almah* signified a woman who never had sexual relations with a man. If this effort fails, then a contemporary fulfillment is excluded. This subject will be considered more carefully below.

¹⁸ Duane Garrett avoids this difficulty by claiming that the Lord told Isaiah to have sex with a virgin who was not his wife in order to beget this sign-child. He notes while this appears “scandalous to us,” the Lord often required his prophets to engage in behavior that was “highly unconventional and even offensive,” citing Hosea’s marriage to a prostitute and Isaiah walking about naked (Garrett, *Problem*, 362). But having marital relations with someone other than one’s spouse is fundamentally different than any other recorded prophetic act and one that makes the Lord the initiator of sin.

¹⁹ See below for an explanation of these ages.

²⁰ The greater context would suggest that this land is not the land of Judah only but the land of all Israel, for the child born to be king brings light first to Galilee (9:1–7), and a shoot from the stem of Jesse signifies a new David who gathers not only the exiles of Judah but also those of Israel, uniting them into one people to celebrate God’s salvation (11:1–12:6). Though both Hezekiah and Josiah made attempts to bring the survivors of the northern tribes into the fold and claim the land, neither were very successful (2 Chr 30:5–11; 34:6–7; 35:20–24). This indicates that the Immanuel child is greater than them both.

²¹ E.g., Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic,” *EvJ* 6 (1988): 65–67.

²² J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 86.

Hermeneutical Approaches for Double Fulfillment

Many interpreters, including evangelical scholars, have been persuaded that an Immanuel child was born in the time of Isaiah. Jewish interpreters who do not embrace Jesus as the Messiah are content with a single fulfillment that occurred in the 8th century. Christians, however, believe that Jesus's birth to the virgin Mary fulfilled, in some way, the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy, as Matthew states (Matt 1:23). This requires them to explain how there can be two fulfillments. In other words, they recognize that the text of Isaiah speaks of only one virgin and one child, but by virtue of confession—affirming Jesus's virgin birth—they must also conclude that Isaiah 7:14 was somehow fulfilled in the birth of Jesus to Mary. This has led to hermeneutical proposals that are more satisfying theologically than textually.²³

A brief review of how evangelicals interpret Isaiah 7:14 is instructive in revealing the poverty of these hermeneutical approaches and the lack of a plausible hermeneutical escape hatch for those who believe in an 8th-century Immanuel. Though all of these views may be considered “double-fulfillment” since they believe in the birth of two children in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, they usually do not use this language. Stanley Toussaint, however, does: “The Isaiah 7:14 prophecy has a double fulfillment—a near and far accomplishment of the prediction with the ultimate being the final fulfillment in the care of the virgin Mary and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.”²⁴ The hermeneutical weakness of this view is that there is no warrant in the text that there would be two young women and two boys named Immanuel. There was a divine prediction, but once that prediction was accomplished, there is no basis for asserting that a later event, even if exactly the same, was the intended object of the prophecy.

Another approach is to see a prophetic foreshortening of time. Robert Gundry holds to this view:

Since Isaiah goes on to speak of the near future, we are to think of his prophecy as having come to pass partly during the youth of Mahershalalhasbaz (see Isa 7:15–8:22). But the part of his prophecy having to do with the virginal conception and birth of a divine child awaited fulfillment till Jesus' nativity. The NT distinction between two advents of Christ similarly rests on the phenomenon of partial fulfillment followed at some distance by a completion.²⁵

In other words, portions of the prophecy were fulfilled in the 8th century and the remainder was fulfilled in Mary and Jesus. Gundry is correct to observe that many

²³ This would include Jewish readers who are unwilling to grant special hermeneutical concessions in order to reach a desired conclusion. To be sure, evangelical scholars who embrace some kind of *sensus plenior* or double fulfillment generally believe that this hermeneutic is required by a number of NT texts, not only Matthew 1.

²⁴ Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980), 46. Prior to his death in 2017, Toussaint told me that he no longer holds to this view, but, for hermeneutical reasons, has adopted a position similar to the one defended in this article.

²⁵ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 25.

OT prophecies do not distinguish between aspects of Jesus's first and second comings. For instance, Zechariah 9:9–13 describes the entrance of Israel's king to Jerusalem, approaching on a donkey, before defeating the enemies and ruling “from sea to sea.” Matthew sees Jesus's entrance to the city during the week of his crucifixion as fulfilling part of that prophecy, for he ends his citation before verse 10 (Matt 21:4–5). Most Christians believe that Jesus will fulfill the rest of the prophecy when he is welcomed by his people (Matt 23:39).²⁶ Such an approach to Isaiah 7, however, is problematic. Which parts of Isaiah's prophecy were fulfilled in which century? More specifically, how does one divide the *almah* into two distinct periods of time? Theoretically, it could work if the *almah* conceived in the 8th century and gave birth in the 1st century, or if she named her child 700 years after delivery, but it is difficult to see in the text how two separate Immanuel children could together fulfill this prophecy.

A more common view is that an initial fulfillment foreshadowed a “full fulfillment” in Christ. Several statements of adherents of this view can be considered. Eugene Merrill writes:

The virgin” (*hā'almā*), already pregnant, would give birth to a son and would name him Immanuel (“God with us”) (v. 14). The lexicography and grammar certainly favor the idea that a young woman (thus *'almā*), well-known to King Ahaz and the prophet, would soon give birth to a child against all odds of it happening naturally. The Greek Old Testament (the LXX) already saw something more to the promise than a historical fulfillment, however, and translated *'almā* by *parthenos*, “virgin” This is a classic example of a messianic text which, while having a limited meaning in its historical context, goes beyond that meaning in a future, Christological context. . . . The unusual—indeed, supernatural—character of the Messiah is borne out by Isaiah's further reference to him as “a child will be born.”²⁷

First, there is something appealing about an extraordinary birth to the *almah* to which “further reference” is made in Isaiah 9. However, it is unclear from the text how exactly the 8th-century birth is extraordinary and occurred “against all odds.” There does not seem to be any reason to insert a supernatural element in a birth in Isaiah's day.²⁸ Second, it must be asked how a text can go “beyond” its own meaning. At what point did the text gain more than its “limited meaning in its historical context,” and how did it make such a gain? Answers to these questions cannot be found in the text, because they are hypothesized by an interpreter seeking a solution. A more satisfying view is that the LXX and Matthew and others “saw something more” not beyond a literal interpretation, but in a literal interpretation.

²⁶ Other examples of this type of prophecy cited in the NT include Isaiah 61:1ff, Micah 5:2ff, and Malachi 3:1ff.

²⁷ Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 510.

²⁸ One response to this could note that the prophecy correctly predicted that the child would be a son, not a daughter. Still, this does not seem to indicate that the birth itself was “against all odds.”

Duane Garrett affirms that Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy, down to the details of him eating curds and honey in a devastated land.²⁹ He then rightly wonders “if there is anything left of the text” that could be fulfilled in Jesus.³⁰ His answer is that the ambiguity of the terms *almah* and Immanuel suggests that Isaiah’s son does “not exhaust” the meaning of the prophecy.³¹ The eschatological son’s birth to an *almah* fulfilled the “cultural connotations of virginity . . . more absolutely,” and the meaning of his name goes beyond the “more limited sense of ‘God will help us’” fulfilled in Maher-shalal-hash-baz to now signify “the fuller sense of ‘God present among us.’”³²

But is not the idea of “not exhausting” better understood as “not fulfilling”? If Maher-shalal-hash-baz had a mother who was not an *almah* and a name that he did not live up to, should we not say that he fell short of the prophecy and did not fulfill it? We can acknowledge similarities, but it is the differences that are all-important with respect to determining a prophecy’s fulfillment. Anyone in that day tempted to see Isaiah’s son as the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy would have readily observed the discrepancies and looked for another son.

Robert Chisholm has suggested that the arrival of the first Immanuel guaranteed the arrival of a second Immanuel:

Matthew . . . applied Isaiah’s ancient prophecy of Immanuel’s birth to Jesus (Matt 1:22–23). The first Immanuel was a reminder to the people of God’s presence and a guarantee of a greater child to come who would manifest God’s presence in an even greater way. The second Immanuel is ‘God with us’ in a heightened and infinitely superior sense. He ‘fulfills’ Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy by bringing the typology intended by God to realization and by filling out or completing the pattern designed by God.³³

It is not clear, however, how the text of Isaiah communicates the idea of a first child guaranteeing the coming of a second one. What clues can the interpreter find in the Hebrew words or syntax of Isaiah 7? How did contemporaries of the “first Immanuel” know that he was but a precursor of another? What evidence is there of a “typology intended by God”? If the answer is that this typology is revealed by the Isaiah 9 child who is the “second Immanuel,” then Jesus can only be rightly identified with the “second Immanuel” and not the first. This view would be more compelling if Matthew claimed that Jesus’s birth was the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6–7 instead of Isaiah 7:14.

Darrell Bock is even more specific in defining the sense in which the second virgin and “Second Immanuel” are an escalated sign. He writes:

Isaiah points to a woman who is currently a virgin . . . who will give birth to a child. That child’s arrival is the sign, represents “God with us,” and starts the clock ticking on Ahaz’s judgment. The child contextually would

²⁹ Garrett, *Problem*, 360.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Garrett, 362.

³² Garrett, 364.

³³ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 34.

probably be Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Isa 8:1–4), although the exact initial referent is debated among exegetes of Isaiah. But the text as a potential pattern text points to a “type” of sign child that has a second, escalated realization in Jesus. With the type’s arrival in history comes the escalation to point to the unique culminating fulfillment. So now the woman (referent: Mary) who gives birth *is* a virgin *at the child’s birth* (here is the escalation—the anticipated birth from a current virgin has escalated to become a virgin birth), and yet the child still represents *and is* (a second escalation) “God with us.” Note how the language of the text has not changed, since Isaiah 7:14 is cited here. The referents and their force have shifted slightly (to reveal the escalation). Both women were virgins at the time of the prediction, but in the escalation, the second has a virgin birth.³⁴

There are many difficulties with this explanation. First, it separates the sign from the thing that it signifies. There appears to be nothing of “sign” quality in the woman or even in the child by themselves. The name “Immanuel” certainly has significance, but if the boy served to comfort anyone, the text ignores it. The real “sign” for Ahaz, according to Bock, is that the birth of this child “starts the clock ticking.” But if that is so, how did Jesus’s birth “escalate” the ticking of the clock? If the “First Immanuel” started the clock, how does the “Second Immanuel” bring it to a “unique culminating fulfillment”? Furthermore, the status of the woman is ancillary, and an “escalation” of her to a virgin does not contribute to the sign of a ticking clock. It simply is not necessary to the sign, on this view, that Mary was a virgin. Yet Matthew’s presentation suggests that her status as a virgin was the essence of the sign.³⁵

Second, Bock claims that he has only “shifted slightly” the referents and their force. But in the 8th-century fulfillment, the woman who conceived was not a virgin, and the woman who conceived in the 1st century was a virgin. A conception by natural means is of a different kind than a conception by supernatural means. The same might be said for the boy. The “First Immanuel” is a regular boy; the “Second Immanuel” is deity incarnate. Clearly there is an “escalation” here, but it seems difficult to maintain that the initial and later referents are not completely different things.

Third, Isaiah 7 is allegedly a “potential pattern text [that] points to a ‘type’ of sign child.”³⁶ The pointers in the text to a type are difficult to find, and Bock does not explain. Would an observer in the court who witnessed an *almah* who gave birth to a child that she named Immanuel have expected something more? What basis would he have had for expecting another child? If the Isaiah 7 prophecy was fulfilled in the 8th century, then no one should be looking for a future fulfillment of it, including the writer of Matthew. The notion of “potential pattern text” seems contrived in order to resolve what is deemed to be a contradiction between Isaiah and Matthew. But while a Christian may feel the need to embrace it, it seems unlikely to convince a Jewish reader that the meaning derives from their Scriptures rather than

³⁴ Darrell L. Bock, “Scripture Citing Scripture: Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 266.

³⁵ On this approach, it is not even necessary that there is a woman or a child at all. The sign simply becomes a measure of time before Assyria arrives.

³⁶ Bock, “Scripture,” 266.

from a NT author. This seems contrary to the apostles' method of proving Jesus's identity from the OT (Acts 8:34–35; 13:23–37; 17:2–3, 11).

Bock's hermeneutical approach is more complex because he desires to honor OT authorial intention while remaining committed to NT conclusions. Ben Witherington simply gives greater freedom to the NT writer, arguing that the prophecy of a virgin birth only existed once Matthew "found" it.

The upshot of these observations is that Matthew did not likely derive the notion of the virginal conception simply by reading either the Hebrew Bible or the LXX, which he seems to cite at Matthew 1:23. It was rather the event in Mary's life that forced him to go back and re-examine Old Testament stories, seek to find what prophecy had foretold this would happen. The historical substance of the narrative is what forced such a move on the part of Matthew.³⁷

So, what Matthew could not initially find in the text of Isaiah he later discovered when the need arose. What drove Matthew's interpretation, then, was not the text of Isaiah, but an event in history.³⁸ The authority of the prophecy lies with Matthew and not Isaiah. The problem with this approach is that it contradicts Matthew's own claim that the virgin birth "took place in order that what was spoke by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled" (Matt 1:22). Matthew believed that the authority came from the prophet, not from himself.

Paul Wegner claims that "NT authors sometimes add new, different, or fuller meaning to an OT passage," and he likens such fulfillment to a coffee cup being filled up with new meaning being "poured" into it.

This is distinctly different from *sensus plenior*, for there is no hidden meaning in the OT that the NT author has discovered through divine inspiration. Rather, the meaning was not in the OT context. The concept here is distinct from typology in that it is not simply a general structure that the NT author picked up from the OT and applied to a NT concept. Rather, the NT author is informing the reader of his intentions by using the word *πληρώω* before adding the new meaning to the OT concept.³⁹

Again, the authority for Matthew's claim resides with Matthew, which seems precisely contrary to his statement that Mary's conception fulfilled "what the Lord had said through the prophet" (Matt 1:22). Why bother bringing Isaiah's prophecy into the discussion at all if the "meaning was not in the OT context" but was created by Matthew?

Several points need to be made before undertaking a detailed examination of Isaiah 7. First, none of the views presented above provides any *textual* basis for a

³⁷ Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2006), 41.

³⁸ Watts says something similar, but more bluntly: "Had it not been for Matthew's use of this text, it is extremely doubtful if anyone would have ever read it so." Rikk E. Watts, "Immanuel: Virgin Birth Proof Text or Programmatic Warning of Things to Come (Isa. 7:14 in Matt. 1:23)?" in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. Craig A. Evans (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 100.

³⁹ Paul D. Wegner, "How Many Virgin Births are in the Bible? (Isaiah 7:14): A Prophetic Pattern Approach," *JETS* 54, no. 3 (2011): 482.

future Immanuel. All of them believe that there was a “Second Immanuel” solely on the authority of Matthew.⁴⁰ If one believes that a contemporary of Ahaz gave birth to a boy who was named Immanuel, then the text provides no reason to believe that there would be another such boy.

Second, the implication that an OT text changes meaning on the basis of a NT text rightly brings charges that the NT is guilty of misinterpreting the OT text. If a passage can only be accurately understood in light of a new hermeneutical prism provided by the NT, then the text is actually misleading to those who lack the appropriate reading glasses. S. V. McCasland makes this point well: “Matthew’s use of Isaiah 7:14 to explain the mystery of the birth of Christ not only shows the power exercised by the ancient Scriptures in forming Christian doctrine, but how a misinterpreted passage might be just as influential as one correctly understood.”⁴¹ If one cannot find a basis for one’s views *in the text*, then one cannot persuasively refute charges that he has misinterpreted the text. The implications go further, for if Matthew twisted his OT sources, why should we doubt that he twisted his contemporary ones as well?⁴² Scholars who solve one problem with hermeneutical license may find that this escape route leads to unpleasant destinations.

In my assessment, all of the views cited here fail to honor the authorial intentions of Isaiah and of Matthew. The question that now remains is whether a historical-grammatical interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth can and must be understood as solely predicting Mary’s virgin conception of Jesus. To answer this question, we must look carefully at Isaiah 7:14–17.

A Messianic-Only Interpretation

The prophecy of the birth of Immanuel was given to the house of David following Ahaz’s refusal to trust the Lord. Isaiah had implored the king to stand firm in his faith, but Ahaz spurned the Lord’s offer of a sign. Ahaz reasoned that Assyria was a more reliable savior from his present attackers, and so he turned from the Lord, albeit in pious language.

The Sign of Immanuel’s Birth

It is very important to recognize that the sign of the virgin birth was not the sign previously offered by the Lord. When Ahaz refused the sign, the Lord did not simply move forward anyway with great blessing for a hardhearted Israelite. Actually, the

⁴⁰ As Bryan Beyer claims, “Our understanding of the original meaning of Isaiah 7 does not necessarily affect what we believe about the manner of Jesus’s conception and birth or his sinless nature.” Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah: A Historical and Theological Survey*, Encountering Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 74.

⁴¹ S. V. McCasland, “Matthew Twists the Scriptures,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 149.

⁴² In arguing that Matthew misinterpreted his ancient sources, McCasland claims that he is untrustworthy with his modern ones. “Since we have discovered that Matthew felt free in changing and distorting the Scriptures, it becomes a probability that he has used an even freer hand in modifying, rearranging, and shaping documents not protected by scriptural sanctity, sources of a popular character which he used in putting together his gospel. And that is just what we find on examining Matthew’s Gospel in comparison with Mark and Luke, the other synoptic Gospels.” McCasland, *Right Doctrine*, 149.

opposite was the case. If Ahaz had trusted the Lord, he would have been saved. But since he did not trust the Lord, he would not. Salvation has always been by faith, and those who do not believe are not saved.⁴³ Indeed, Ahaz was granted his wish: he would be “saved” by the object of his faith—Assyria. This is the larger point of verses 14–17, though too many miss it because of the debate over verse 14. Or it might be said this way: the sign of salvation (the Immanuel child) will come in a future day, after Ahaz has already been “saved” by Assyria. This will become clear as we proceed.

Isaiah declared that the Lord would give a sign “to you” (plural). This shift in verse 14 from the singular “you” in verse 11 reveals that it is the “house of David” (v. 13) who will receive the sign of the virgin-born child. The emphasis upon the “Lord Himself” giving the sign alerts the reader to the magnificent nature of the sign; the sign is no ordinary event. Some argue that the sign must occur in the time of Ahaz, or it would not be a sign to him at all. This is refuted by three facts: (1) the sign is not to Ahaz individually but to the house of David generally; (2) the context reveals that the child is born after the destruction of Jerusalem; and (3) nothing in the nature of a sign requires that it be fulfilled immediately.

While some signs are “present persuaders,”⁴⁴ including that given to Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:7, Ahaz has already refused to trust and is under God’s judgment. Rather than a sign to persuade, this sign is a demonstration that God’s word is true. An example of this type of sign occurs when Moses arrived at the burning bush and the Lord declared that the sign that he was with Moses was that he would bring the Israelites back to the same mountain (Exod 3:12). That sign would occur after a sequence of events in Egypt, and it would confirm what God has told Moses. That this is an appropriate way to understand the sign of Isaiah 7:14 is evident from the fact that a series of future events are described in verses 15–25, culminating in the birth of Immanuel, and no call for a decision is made. The sign of Immanuel will thus confirm that God has done as he said in judging the nation as well as in preserving the house of David.

A Miraculous Conception

The debate around the term *almah* is important for one reason. It is necessary to deny that this word means “virgin” for there to be any possibility of an 8th-century fulfillment. As noted above, if *almah* means “virgin,” the discussion is ended, for no one believes that a virgin gave birth in the time of Ahaz. To be sure, the argument has been advanced that the *almah* became pregnant (naturally) out of wedlock.⁴⁵ Such a fulfillment would be strange indeed, since it means that the sign-child named “God with us” would be illegitimate. The sense of the text is that the *almah* is virtuous, and the child is part of the divine sign, uncontaminated by an immoral beginning. The

⁴³ Seven centuries later, another son of David, when called by the Lord’s messenger to “not be afraid,” trusted the Lord, providing a sharp contrast with Ahaz’s response. Dale Ralph Davis, *Stump Kingdom: Isaiah 6–12* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2017), 44–45. It was thus Joseph to whom was given the son named “Immanuel.” The obedient son of David was blessed with God’s presence whereas the faithless son of David was not.

⁴⁴ This term is taken from J. A. Motyer, “Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14,” *TynBul* 21 (1970): 120.

⁴⁵ E.g., Garrett, *Problem*, 359.

other possibility, far more popular, is that the *almah* became married, then had intercourse, and then conceived a child naturally. But upon marriage, the *almah* would no longer be an *almah*, and so it would not be an *almah* who would conceive, and the prophecy would not be fulfilled.

Can the word *almah* be used of a married woman or of a non-virgin? Many have claimed that it can. The evidence, however, conclusively refutes this idea. In every usage in the biblical text, *almah* refers to an unmarried young woman.⁴⁶ Though the idea of virginity is not the primary focus of this word, it is certainly assumed, for an unmarried young woman with sexual experience would be considered immoral and liable to death by stoning (Deut 22:23–24). The only other text where the meaning of *almah* is debated is Proverbs 30:19, but this passage makes most sense when understood as a virgin.⁴⁷ A recent book-length study on the word *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 is decisive:

From an inductive point of view (namely, from the point of view of the attested evidence), the examination of all the uses, both those found in the versions and available texts, leads the researcher to endorse the following conclusion: ‘*almā* designates a teenage girl who is a virgin. In the absence of any new elements, such is the necessary result the facts point to.’⁴⁸

Some claim, however, that the definite article “the” applied to the *almah* requires that the woman was standing before Isaiah at the moment of the prophecy. If so, this would demand an 8th-century fulfillment. Indeed, the article indicates that a specific woman was in mind, but it does not demand the woman’s presence as the article could “denote a single person or thing . . . yet unknown, and therefore not capable of being defined.”⁴⁹ In other words, Isaiah’s prophecy speaks of a particular woman, but the use of the article does not by itself indicate that she was present or even alive at the time.⁵⁰

The words that follow confirm this interpretation, though this is too often overlooked. The phrase *הָרָה וְיִלְדָּה* (*harah veyoledet* “will be with child and bear a son”), with the adjective plus participle construction, is only used twice elsewhere, both of significant births. Appearing to Hagar, the angel of the Lord declared, “Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael” (Gen 16:11). Later the angel of the Lord told Manoah’s barren wife, “Behold, you shall be with child and give birth to a son” (Judg 13:5, 7). In both cases, a momentous conception was announced by the Lord. To one will be born a son of Abraham and to the other a barren woman will conceive.

⁴⁶ Edward J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 177.

⁴⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 492.

⁴⁸ Christophe Rico and Peter J. Gentry, *Mother of the Infant King, Isaiah 7:14: 'almā and parthenos in the World of the Bible: A Linguistic Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 167–68.

⁴⁹ GKC §126q-s.

⁵⁰ As Willis J. Beecher observes, “He was not, as some have supposed, addressing some woman then present, but was using, by quotation, phraseology that was somewhat familiar, and he used it in the grammatical form in which it had become familiar.” Willis J. Beecher, “The Prophecy of the Virgin Mother,” in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr (1889; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 181–82.

In the case of Manoah's wife, the woman was barren at the time the announcement was made (cf. Judg 13:3), which requires that her conception be in the future. This parallels the declaration in Isaiah 7:14, which should also be taken as a future condition. The construction $\text{וַיִּלְדָּה} \dots \text{וַיִּהְיֶה}$ (*hinneh* . . . *veyoledet* "Behold . . . and will bear") is what is known as a "participle of the immediate future," though it signifies not so much immediacy as certainty.⁵¹ The use of this construction in Isaiah 7:14 indicates that the virgin is not yet pregnant, but will surely conceive. The parallels with the language in Genesis 16:11 and Judges 13:7 reveal that this conception of the *almah* was a significant event in the history of God's people.⁵² As E. J. Young explains,

Isaiah, therefore, because of the tremendous solemnity and importance of the announcement which he was to make, used as much of this ancient formula of announcement as suited his purpose. His reason for so doing was to draw attention to the announcement itself. If Ahaz and others who were present were at all familiar with this commonly employed formula of the ancient Near East, they would immediately realize that an announcement of supreme importance was about to be made.⁵³

To review, the case is quite strong that the woman's conception was very significant and even miraculous. First, the conception is part of a sign, and signs are sometimes miraculous. Second, the Lord was prepared to give a miraculous sign to Ahaz initially (Isa 7:11), which prepares the reader for a potentially miraculous sign. Third, the sign comes from "the Lord himself," with emphasis on the divine origin of the sign. Fourth, the child is named "God with us," a name which has little similarity to the names of Isaiah's two sons, but has significant overtones from previous and later prophecies of God's presence with his people.

Fifth, the *hinneh* construction with the participle ("behold . . . and will bear") recalls the previous momentous birth announcements. Sixth, Immanuel is presented uniquely, "with an aura of mystery,"⁵⁴ with no mention of a father, and later as the owner of the land of Israel. Seventh, Micah 5:3 seems to allude to Isaiah 7:14, with the statement there indicating that Micah knew that the child had not yet been born. While any one item may not be conclusive by itself, when taken together these textual features form a compelling argument that the sign was the miraculous conception of a virgin mother who would name her son Immanuel. These features are not, however, compatible with the description of the birth of Isaiah's son or with some other child whose birth Isaiah did not record.

⁵¹ Despite the name of this construction as the "participle of the immediate future," the event need not occur in the near future, as is clear from its use in Exodus 34:11; Numbers 15:2; 2 Kings 4:16; Jonah 3:4. As Clendenen notes, this grammatical construction "describes an event as occurring in the imminent future . . . or with such certainty that it may be considered 'on the way.'" Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 290. Cf. Jan Joosten, "The Predicative Participle in Biblical Hebrew," *ZAH* 2, no. 2 (1989): 145.

⁵² As Murray Adamthwaite notes, the use of וַיִּהְיֶה (*hinneh*) in Isaiah "always presents a future phenomenon of great importance. It cannot be relegated to the category of the everyday and mundane." Murray Adamthwaite, "Isaiah 7:16—Key to the Immanuel Prophecy," *RTR* 59, no. 2 (2000): 77.

⁵³ Young, *Studies in Isaiah*, 160.

⁵⁴ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 212.

Curds and Honey

There would probably be no debate about the preceding matters, including the interpretation of the word *almah* as virgin, were it not for the questions that circulate around Isaiah 7:15–16. These verses are often interpreted in a way that demands the birth of a child in Isaiah’s day. While interpreters vary in the particulars, several faulty conclusions often lead to this interpretation, including: (1) defining “curds and honey” as the food of prosperity; (2) taking לֶדָּהּ (leda ‘to) in a temporal sense (e.g., “when”) instead of final (e.g., “in order that”); (3) understanding the boy’s age as being two or three years old; (4) relating the initial clause of verse 16 to verse 15 instead of verse 17; and thereby (5) considering verse 16 to be a positive statement of deliverance. These will each be considered in turn.

In verse 15, Isaiah declares that the Immanuel child “will eat curds and honey in order that He will know to refuse evil and choose good.” Some have understood the phrase כֶּמֶס וְדבֶשֶׁת (*khem’ah udevash*; “curds and honey”) as a depiction of a wealthy diet,⁵⁵ but this is not so. Though the phrase is sometimes used as part of a longer list of products to express the bounty of the land (e.g., Deut 32:13–14; 2 Sam 17:29), by themselves “curds and honey” reflect the opposite. These come not from the harvest of a cultivated land, but are the subsistence diet during a time of famine or agricultural devastation.⁵⁶ Verses 21 and 22 say as much, for the survivors in the land of Israel in the time after the Assyrian invasion keep alive a young cow and two goats in order to eat curds and honey. The land, once agriculturally prosperous and teeming with “one thousand vines, valued at one thousand shekels of silver” (Isa 7:23), is now filled with briars and thorns, as too few farmers survive to cultivate it, and the land reverts to grazing land.⁵⁷ The shocking picture here is that this child, though a sign to the house of David, does not grow up living in the palace and eating at the royal banquet table, but he is raised in a land that has been devastated and where the royal family struggles to survive.⁵⁸ This simply cannot be fulfilled in Ahaz’s day, for Jerusalem was not conquered for more than a hundred years.⁵⁹ This observation

⁵⁵ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 160–61.

⁵⁶ This phrase should also be distinguished from a “land flowing with milk and honey,” which describes the prosperous, but untended, land that the Lord was giving to Israel. Much work had to be done to bring about the desirable foods described in Deuteronomy 8:8. For a helpful explanation of “milk and honey,” see Nogah Hareuveni, *Nature in Our Biblical Heritage*, trans. Helen Frenkley (Kiryat Ono, Israel: Neot Kedumim, 1980), 11–22.

⁵⁷ This conclusion is supported by the verb יָחַיָּהּ (*yekhayyeh*) which means “keep alive” and is only used in Scripture of desperate situations. Cf. Joseph Jensen, “The Age of Immanuel,” *CBQ* 41, no. 2 (1979): 230. Assyrian records describe the fertile Jezreel Valley making just such a transition to grazing land in the aftermath of Tiglath-pileser III’s invasion. Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 92, n. 38.

⁵⁸ The text does not explicitly state that the Immanuel child is part of the royal family, but this seems likely given (1) the sign is to the “house of David,” and (2) the present threat is the removal of the Davidic king. The Lord’s declaration assures the house of David that though Ahaz is faithless, the Lord will preserve the royal line through the birth of Immanuel. This interpretation is supported by the royal identity of the child in chapter 9 as well as the fulfillment in Matthew 1. In other words, all Christian interpreters affirm, one way or another, the royal identity of the child.

⁵⁹ The case could be made that the land of Judah was devastated by the Assyrian invasion in 701 BC, and thus the child could have been born any time after that. But this seems too early, because Jerusalem

should, by itself, be sufficient to deny the possibility that an Immanuel child was born in the 8th century, but several important questions about verses 15 and 16 remain.

Moral Discernment

The second issue in verse 15 is the misunderstanding of the word לֵדָא (leda 'to). Translators have often understood the ל (lamedh) here in the temporal sense (e.g., “when”), taking the boy’s diet as relative to the time of his moral discernment. For example, the ESV translates this verse: “He shall eat curds and honey *when* he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.”⁶⁰ However, elsewhere in the OT, the infinitive construct of “to know,” when joined to the preposition ל (lamedh), is translated in a final sense (e.g., “in order to/that”) and there is no reason not to do the same here.⁶¹ The verse should be translated, “He shall eat curds and honey *that* he may know how to refuse the evil and choose the good.”⁶² In other words, Ahaz ate the food of royalty, but did not learn how to refuse evil (making alliances) and choose good (trusting the Lord), but this child will eat the food of poverty and this will teach him moral discernment.⁶³

The phrase מָאֹס בָּרַע וּבָחַר בְּטוֹב (“to refuse the evil and choose the good”) is found in both verses 15 and 16. Some interpreters, influenced by similarities with the account of Maher-shalal-hash-baz, take this phrase as equivalent to the age when a boy can say “Mommy” or “Daddy” (Isa 8:4). By this interpretation, a very short timeframe is in view, and this is used to support the idea that Immanuel is to be identified with Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Interpreters then may be tempted to read the significance of Maher-shalal-hash-baz’s name (Isa 8:4) into verses 15–16.⁶⁴ In fact, the prophecies associated with Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz are distinct, and one of the clues is that knowing good from evil always refers in the OT to the moral discernment associated with adults.⁶⁵ The clearest example is Deuteronomy 1:39, in

had not fallen and the royal family continued to live in prosperity (cf. Jer 22:13–15). Contra Paul D. Wegner, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 109–11. Furthermore, as noted above, the conquest of Judah was delayed by Hezekiah’s response of faith, pushed off into the time of the Babylonians. Thus, it seems best to consider the earliest possible fulfillment of a royal child growing up in poverty conditions in the land of Israel to be after 586 BC.

⁶⁰ Emphasis added. Similarly, NASB, NIV, NRSV, JPS, CSB. Those that take it in the final sense include KJV, NKJV, NET, and LSB.

⁶¹ Jensen observes, “It is interesting to note a tendency to see the final sense as preferable as long as the verse is not tied to Isaiah’s historical situation.” Jensen, “The Age of Immanuel,” 228. It seems that they are motivated to adopt this unusual translation (as temporal) by their understanding of verse 16.

⁶² Emphasis added. Cf. Chisholm, *Handbook*, 30. A similar concept, but different wording, is found in Deuteronomy 8:3: the Lord “fed you with manna . . . that He might make you know.”

⁶³ The writer of Hebrews may have seen the fulfillment of this verse in Jesus’s experience: “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (5:8).

⁶⁴ A similar bias of the NET Bible translators may have influenced them, in the note on Deuteronomy 1:39, to read the phrase of 7:16 into 8:4 when it is not there.

⁶⁵ “Refusing evil and choosing good is connected to the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2:9, 16. It refers to making moral choices on one’s own and hence refers to the age of accountability” (Gentry, “Isaiah 7:12–16,” 65). Contra John Goldingay, who trivializes this phrase to refer to the child being able to decide what baby food he likes (Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*, 34). The context, with Ahaz’s failure to refuse evil and choose good in the face of the nation’s extermination, points to a more sober interpretation, just as the prophecy of Gen 3:15 can hardly be understood at a momentous point in mankind’s history to simply describe human aversion to snakes.

which those exempted from the judgment of dying in the wilderness are those who do not know good and evil (לֹא־יָדְעוּ הַיּוֹם טוֹב וָרָע). This group is defined in Numbers 14:29–30 as those who are under twenty years of age (cf. Num 32:11).⁶⁶ This interpretation is confirmed by Isaiah’s use of סָמָּא (*ma as*; refuse) in the sense of a moral rejection, and not an aesthetic preference (Isa 5:24; 8:6; 30:12; cf. Ps 36:5).⁶⁷

The Timing of Immanuel’s Birth

Verse 16 is often taken as the determining factor for locating the birth of Immanuel in the 8th century. Watts is direct on this point: “The sign is simple. It has to do with a period by which time the present crisis will no longer be acute or relevant.”⁶⁸ What this interpretation does is to shift the sign that the Lord gives from the woman, from the child, and from his name Immanuel, and instead put the whole significance of the sign on a timeline. The birth of the child begins the countdown for deliverance. Ahaz’s hope is in the twenty years, not in the child himself. Since Ahaz’s deliverance is dependent upon the age of the child, interpreters feel compelled to see the birth of Immanuel in the 8th century. Another approach, however, is offered by Machen, who disconnects the child from the time marker, saying that *if* the child was born at that time, he would be this old when deliverance came.⁶⁹ Understanding the sign to be primarily a time marker, however, ignores the grammar. The same child is in view throughout verses 14–16, verses 16–17 are grammatically related, and the duration clause is grammatically a subordinate feature of the sign.⁷⁰

Before explaining this crucial aspect, a review of the interpretation to this point is appropriate. The sign is that a virgin will bear a son and name him Immanuel. He will eat a diet of poverty in order to learn moral discernment. The question that arises is “why?” Why does this boy eat “curds and honey,” when the land is full of agricultural produce today? Verses 16 and 17 answer that question. Verse 16 begins with the particle כִּי (*ki*), which is loosely, but accurately, rendered by the NET Bible as “Here is why this will be so.” The main clause in verse 16 is “the land will be

⁶⁶ Ahaz, interestingly enough, is twenty years old when he becomes king, which makes him accountable for his decisions (2 Kgs 16:2).

⁶⁷ An extensive and convincing discussion of this issue can be found in Jensen, “The Age of Immanuel,” 221–27. By itself, this interpretation does not automatically eliminate the possibility that the Immanuel prophecy was fulfilled in Maher-shalal-hash-baz, as one could argue that Isaiah’s later prophecy simply reduced the length of time before Judah would be delivered (from twenty years to two). Given everything else in the passage, however, it is best to recognize that these are two distinct timeframes for two different boys.

⁶⁸ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 97.

⁶⁹ J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1930; repr., 1958), 292. See also, R. Bruce Compton, “The Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14–16 and Its Use in Matthew 1:23: Harmonizing Historical Context and Single Meaning,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 12 (2007): 13–14.

⁷⁰ Michael Rydelnik argues that כִּי (*ki*) at the beginning of verse 16 should be taken not as causal but as adversative, thus dividing the passage into a long-term prophecy of Immanuel (vv. 14–15) and a short-term prophecy of his own son Shear-jashub (vv. 16–17; Rydelnik, “Isaiah 7:1–16,” 823). This is unlikely: (1) the כִּי (*ki*) is normally and naturally taken in a causal sense; (2) there are no contextual markers indicating that Isaiah is now prophesying about a different son; (3) the presence of Shear-jashub cannot be said to have no other purpose in the narrative, for he serves as a sign and symbol in Israel as well as indicating that Isaiah’s wife was not a virgin (8:3, 19); and (4) the interpretation offered here is a more cohesive explanation of the passage without requiring an arbitrary shift that seems wholly borne out of an attempt to avoid an undesirable conclusion.

abandoned.” The “land” is identified as that belonging to the two kings, and the reason why their land will be abandoned is given in verse 17. Since there is no conjunction at the beginning of verse 17, the initial imperfect verb *בָּרֵא* (“bring”) should be taken asyndetically with the imperfect *נִזְנָה* (“forsaken”) of verse 16, with the result that these two verses are tightly linked.⁷¹ The point is that the land of Aram and Israel will be forsaken because of Assyria.⁷² But Isaiah presses on, spelling out the judgment in careful detail. It is Yahweh who will cause it. He will bring Assyria upon Ahaz (you, sg.), upon Judah, and upon the house of David. The devastation will be the greatest since the ten tribes were torn away from Judah in the time of Rehoboam. This is why the boy will eat “curds and honey”: because God will judge the house of David through an Assyrian invasion. The sign of Immanuel is a sign of hope, but not to Ahaz and his contemporaries, for they will first face judgment.

The question of timing is answered in verse 16: the devastation of the land will occur before the boy is of the age of moral accountability. It usually is assumed that this requires the Assyrian invasion to occur between the conception of the boy and his moral maturity, but this is an unwarranted assumption. The focus of the sign, rather, is upon the boy who learns to refuse evil and choose good because he grows up in a land that has been devastated. Indeed, the invasion must occur before the boy’s maturity, but the timing of his birth is nowhere indicated. The fact that he grows up eating curds and honey indicates that he is born after the land is laid waste. A close look at the timeline of Isaiah 7:14–17 clarifies this point: first, Assyria destroys the land of Aram and Ephraim; then, Assyria destroys the land of Judah; and after that, Immanuel grows up eating curds and honey. The timing of the birth of Immanuel is not specifically given, and the focus of the prophecy is now most decidedly on the impending judgment, described in grim detail in verses 18–25.

Interpreters often err in reading this passage as giving hope to a king who has rejected the Lord, emphasizing verse 16’s mention of the destruction of Ahaz’s enemies. But this is not the right way to read this verse or this chapter. Ahaz had already been told (in vv. 4–9) that these enemies would be defeated. The Lord does not simply reaffirm hope to Ahaz after his faithless rejection; this would be inconsistent with the Lord’s character and method. The new word given in response to Ahaz’s rejection is how these kings will be destroyed and what that means for Judah. The Lord had offered Ahaz salvation from these enemies if he trusted him; when Ahaz refuses, the destruction of those enemies becomes a word of judgment because they will be destroyed by a greater enemy who will also lay waste to Judah. In other words, Ahaz’s refusal to trust transforms salvation into judgment. But for the house of David, all is not lost, for beyond judgment lies salvation—the virgin will give birth to Immanuel.

⁷¹ Jensen, “The Age of Immanuel,” 222, n. 7.

⁷² Adamthwaite offers another proposal, reading verse 16 as, “the land which you (*Ahaz*) are tearing apart (*by your unbelieving policies*) will be forsaken of her two kings.” This identifies the two kings not with Aram and Israel but with Israel and Judah and understands *רָרַק* to mean “tearing up” instead of “dread.” This fits with the focus of the immediate context on Israel and Judah as well as the condemnation of Ahaz for what his refusal to reject the wrong will result in. It also identifies the singular “land” not as incongruously applying to Aram and Israel, but to the land of Israel and Judah which actually belonged to Immanuel (8:8). Though not followed here, this plausible interpretation also eliminates the need for an 8th-century Immanuel (Adamthwaite, “Isaiah 7:16,” 78–80).

Careful examination of Isaiah 7 thus reveals that an 8th-century fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy is impossible because (1) the word *almah* requires a virgin to be pregnant, an event which did not occur at that time; (2) a child born at that time could not have been forced to eat curds and honey because Jerusalem was not conquered for more than one hundred years; (3) neither Hezekiah nor any of his immediate descendants knew to refuse evil and choose good;⁷³ (4) nothing in the text indicates that the Immanuel child was a type or initial fulfillment; (5) salvation is always by faith, and the Lord did not provide salvation to a faithless king. To this can be added that an 8th-century fulfillment is unlikely given the use of the announcement formula and the reference to the “Lord himself,” both signifying a momentous birth that is incompatible either with an anonymous child or with the ordinary birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Furthermore, an 8th-century fulfillment is not necessary given that the sign is made to the house of David generally and not to Ahaz specifically.

The interpretation of a messianic fulfillment corresponds precisely with the hope described in the greater context of Isaiah. The holy seed is the stump in the land where the forest has been cut down through God’s judgment (Isa 6:11–13). The child born in chapter 9 comes to a land in great darkness because it has been conquered (8:22–9:7). This individual, known as “Mighty God,” is instrumental in the remnant’s return to their land from exile (10:20–23). From the stem of Jesse springs up a branch who will be a standard for the peoples, gathering all those who have been scattered among the nations (11:1, 10–13). Likewise, the “God with us” child is born after judgment has fallen on Judah.

The sign that many want to see in Immanuel is actually found in Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa 8:1–8). It is he, not Immanuel, whose name, birth, and age point to a short-term “hope” through the defeat of Ahaz’s enemies through Assyria. His name signifies that the king of Assyria will carry off the plunder and spoil of Damascus and Samaria. That this occurred before the boy could say “my father” or “my mother,” roughly the age of two, was fulfilled in the invasion of Tiglath-pileser III in 734–732. But Judah’s “salvation” was illusory, for the “River” of Assyria soon overflowed its banks and swept through Judah, flooding the breadth of Immanuel’s land. But the hope of the virgin-born Immanuel child signified a more distant promise to the house of David, for out of exile, the Lord would raise up a righteous heir to reign forever.

Conclusion

The best understanding of Isaiah 7:14 agrees with the interpretation of Matthew and the view of the church for most of its history. Because of Ahaz’s refusal to trust the Lord, Isaiah prophesied judgment against him and his kingdom. Like most other prophecies against Israel, this one had a silver lining. A special child would be born

⁷³ It seems likely that every single king of Judah after Ahaz made alliances with foreign kings, including Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah’s descendants. Amon’s reign is brief, though the statement that he “walked in all the way that his father had walked” implies that he was also guilty in this regard (2 Kgs 21:21). Josiah is not said explicitly to have made alliances, but his attempt to prevent Pharaoh Neco from passing through his land suggests a potential alliance or a desire to curry favor with the Babylonians fighting against Egypt (2 Chr 35:20–24).

during the time of exile and would be called “Immanuel.” This prophecy could not have been fulfilled in the time of Isaiah because the conditions did not match the prophecy, and it was fulfilled once and only once in the person of Jesus the Messiah. The historical-grammatical interpretation of Isaiah 7 eliminates the need for hermeneutical liberties, fits the greater context of Isaiah, and corresponds with the fulfillment recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. The prophecy of the virgin birth heralded the earth-shaking tidings of the coming of God to live with his people as a man, making him qualified to atone for their sins and rule over God’s kingdom in righteousness.

PRIEST ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

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The Messianic Hope of Israel includes more than just the right to rule over all the nations from the Davidic throne. It also incorporates a replacement of the Aaronic priesthood with a priesthood patterned after that of Melchizedek. The evidence for this is found in the predictive promise made by Yahweh through David in Psalm 110. In the New Testament, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews explains and applies this same promise as a justification for the superiority of Christ to both the Aaronic priesthood and the entire Old Testament sacrificial system. This article will present the case for the Messiah being not only one with a rightful claim to sovereignty over all nations, but also as one appointed eternally as the mediator between God and men.

* * * * *

Introduction

Most discussions about the Messianic hope are focused upon the Christ’s right to rule and reign. From Jacob’s blessing of Judah (Gen 49:8–12)¹ to Daniel’s prophecy of the one like the Son of Man (Dan 7:13–14), the emphasis is on the Messianic right to rule and reign both the nation of Israel and all nations. The Davidic Covenant affirms that the Messiah will be a son of David (2 Sam 7) and Psalm 2 declares that He will be God’s Son who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. The prophets likewise confirm this—even the fact that this son of David will be both sovereign and divine (Isa 7:14; 9:6–7).² These are texts and promises that the New Testament writers pick up and apply directly to Jesus (Matt 1:20–23; Luke 1:30–33; 2:10–11; 1 Cor 15:20–28; et al).

However, what Christians must also understand and value is Christ’s role as our great High Priest. This is not just a New Testament doctrine. It is a promise from God to the Messiah in Psalm 110. It states that one greater than David will be divinely

¹ See Paul Twiss, “A Tale of Two Sons: The Messiah in Genesis 49,” *MSJ* 33, no. 2 (2022): 255–67.

² Todd Bolen, “The Messiah in Isaiah 7:14: The Virgin Birth,” *MSJ* 33, no. 2 (2022): 271–95.

ordained to be not only sovereign over the nations, but the Priest of God Most High just as was the case with Melchizedek (Gen 14:18–20). This is an eternal role that the Messiah will fulfill for God’s people, and it is just as essential to the Messianic Hope as His right to rule.

The Promise of a New Priesthood

The first direct biblical reference to this promise appears in Psalm 110, the most frequently cited Old Testament passage in the New Testament. This fact alone demonstrates the critical importance of this subject. But Psalm 110 is not merely referenced in the New Testament to assert the priesthood of the Messiah. Jesus cited this text in order to affirm His divine sovereignty.

In His interactions with the religious leaders on the temple grounds in the final week of His earthly life and ministry, Jesus used Psalm 110 to silence His critics. He began by asking an obvious and direct question concerning the heritage of the Messiah. He asked in Matthew 22:42, “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” Their immediate response was a given—David (cf. Matt 22:42). Jesus then continued with another question in 22:43–45, referring to Psalm 110 and saying:

Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet”’? If David calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?³

Jesus silenced the Pharisees with this question because it forced them to admit that David, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called the Messiah, Lord—that is, his sovereign. Furthermore, it also forced them to recognize that the promise given to this one who is greater than David was a position of divine authority seated at the right hand of God, who also has authority over all nations. From the perspective of Psalm 110, this is its primary point.

Yahweh Promised Universal Dominion to the Messiah

A detailed examination of Psalm 110 clearly shows the promise of God to one greater than David of universal dominion over the earth. The psalm’s heading indicates Davidic authorship.⁴ Jesus’ citation not only confirms this but is also predicated upon it.⁵ So, this is not a promise God made to David, but to one greater than David. Psalm 110:1 states:

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NAU.

⁴ Despite this internal testimony to the contrary, Davidic authorship has been summarily denied by many—see Charles Augustus Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 375–76.

⁵ So, any question of Davidic authorship in this case introduces challenges that transcend the interpretation of the text itself and draw into question everything from the inspiration and authority of Scripture to its inerrancy. All these basic tenets of the faith are affirmed by this author and presumed true throughout this article.

A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

The opening expression can be misleading in English translations because the word "says" is a noun, not a verb. Thus, it is better taken as an introduction to a prophetic declaration. The translation could be the following then: "A Psalm by David. The utterance of Yahweh to my Lord," with a promise that follows. The word "utterance" or "oracle" is used elsewhere to indicate a revelatory declaration or statement (cf. Joel 2:12; Isa 49:18; 56:8).

This is not an enthronement psalm as some have argued.⁶ This is a prophetic declaration written in the form of a psalm that David penned under inspiration (cf. 2 Sam 23:1–2). It is a promise from God to the one greater than David that is not applicable to any lesser son of David. It is uniquely applicable to Messiah. That it is not tied to David's enthronement is evidenced by the way Yahweh speaks—not to David, but to David's Lord. That it is specifically Messianic can be discerned by the uniqueness of the promise. When Yahweh declares to David's Lord that He should sit as His right hand until He makes His enemies a footstool for His feet, He has revealed more than simply a position of sovereignty for Him. Sitting at Yahweh's right hand is not an earthly throne. It is a heavenly seat next to Yahweh Himself until He is established in authority over all His enemies. A comparison with a plurality of New Testament references reveals that Christ is the one at God's right hand (Acts 2:34–35; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:13; 1 Pet 3:22). This seat is not a mere earthly position. But it does come with a promise of earthly dominion. Thus, Psalm 110:2 proceeds to say:

The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies."

The promise of subjugation has been extended now to the earthly realm. Yahweh has promised to grant full authority to this one who is greater than David and who will rule from Zion. Zion historically referred to the hill in the city of Jerusalem where David pitched the tabernacle and Solomon later constructed the Temple. It soon became synonymous with Jerusalem and then the nation of Israel. Psalm 2:6 likewise asserts that the Son will reign over all the earth from Mount Zion. But in Psalm 110, the idea of His scepter (the symbol of His office) being stretched forth with the charge to rule indicates that the realm includes the earthly. This is a divine authorization for the Messiah to rule over all nations—including those opposed to Him and His reign. He will not simply rule over Zion and be victorious over His enemies. He will rule over all—including His enemies (cf. Dan 7:13–14; Psalm 2).

The psalm then refers to the time in which the Messiah assumes the power that is promised and destined to Him. Psalm 110:3 states:

⁶ See the many and varied suggestions regarding the nature of this Psalm as an enthronement psalm. Cf. Tremper Longman, III, *Psalms*, TOTC, vol. 15–16 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 381–82; Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 339–44; Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 111–14.

Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array,
from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew.

This further elaboration of the promise speaks of the ‘day of Your power.’ This seems to refer to the time the one greater than David comes to power. As such, it speaks of the time after Yahweh has subjugated His enemies beneath Messiah’s feet. From an eschatological perspective, this fits best with the time of Christ’s return and the establishment of His kingdom on earth (Rev 19:11–20:6). It is this context that helps define the rest of the promise. “Your people” are contrasted with the “enemies” of the previous verses. In other words, this identifies those who belong to the Messiah—His people. The idea of “volunteer freely” comes from the Hebrew term used here that typically describes freewill offerings. Thus, His people offer themselves as freewill offerings to Messiah and His service when He establishes His kingdom here on earth.

The expression “in holy array” matches the picture given by John at Christ’s second coming (Rev 19:11–16, esp. v. 14). The “womb of the dawn” speaks of the start of the day. So, it will be this way from the beginning of the Messianic reign on the earth. The final expression is somewhat debated. However, it seems best to simply relate “Your youth” back to “Your people” at the beginning of the verse. If this is correct, then the clause “Your youth are like dew” means that the Messiah’s people are as numerous from the start as the dew on the ground.

Put together then, the ultimate promise is that Messiah will be granted dominion over the whole earth. All His enemies will be subjected to Him, and His people will be as numerous as dew on the ground in the morning from the start of the kingdom. This is Yahweh’s promise of universal dominion to the one greater than David from the start of His kingdom.

Yahweh Promised a Perpetual Priesthood to the Messiah

But in the second part of the psalm, the promise goes beyond merely that of dominion. The Messiah will also serve as the mediator, that is, the priest, between God and His people. However, it will not be a continuation of the Aaronic Priesthood. Instead, He will be appointed according to the order of Melchizedek. Psalm 110:4 articulates this as follows:

The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest
forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”

The idea of God swearing an oath may seem redundant. God’s yes is always a yes since He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Why then swear an oath? Moreover, why add the expression “and He will never change His mind” as well? Because it makes it clear that this is a solemn and an irrevocable promise from Yahweh to the one greater than David who will inherit both the throne and the office of priest. The primary sense of the word “change” here is to regret. In other words, Yahweh will never regret making this promise and seek to alter it. This is an everlasting promise. He will not only serve as sovereign, but also as priest.

There are two significant points to note here. First, this is very different from the way God established the roles for leadership in the nation of Israel initially. There were

three primary offices established by God for Israel. Prophets spoke for God to the people. There were clear instructions given by God to enable His people to discern between true and false prophets (Deut 18:14–22). Kings ruled over people on behalf of God. The anointing of Saul (1 Sam 9–10) and later David (1 Sam 16) at God's insistence demonstrates their divine appointment. Priests interceded between God and His people. Of these three roles, the two most relevant for this discussion are priest and king. These two offices were not interchangeable. No king was allowed to function as a priest because the role of priest was restricted to Aaron, his descendants, and the Levites (Num 3:5–10; cf. Heb 7:12–17). Following God's rejection of Saul, one needed to be a descendant of David to be king in Zion. This is a fundamental part of the Messianic claim to the throne (2 Sam 7:1–17; Isa 9:1–7). Prior to the Davidic covenant, Saul was rejected by God because he disobeyed Him repeatedly. But it was the taking of the role of priest upon himself that proved to be the ultimate provocation (1 Sam 13:8–15). After the Davidic covenant, Uzziah was struck down with leprosy when he set foot in the temple looking to make his own offering to God (2 Chron 26:16–21). But the promise Yahweh makes to Messiah here in Psalm 110 is that He will be appointed both as sovereign over God's people and as priest.

The second significant point is that this is a very different priesthood than the Levitical priesthood established by the Mosaic Law (Lev 1–16; Num 3:5–10; Heb 7:11–22). The Levitical system was hereditary and temporary, and therefore ultimately deficient. The Aaronic priesthood was limited first by the hereditary fallibility of its priests. Aaron (and each of his sons after him) had to first offer sacrifices for themselves to cover their own sins before any one of them could then act as a mediator between God and His people (Heb 5:1–3; Lev 16). They were able to identify with the people on behalf of whom they ministered because they were sinners just like them (Heb 5:2). But they were not able to approach God apart from a sacrifice first for their own sins (Heb 7:23–25). In addition, both Aaron and then his sons died. The hereditary nature of the Aaronic priesthood makes it inadequate to secure eternal salvation, since they do not live forever making intercession between God and His people.

The Aaronic priesthood was further limited by the temporary nature of its ministry. The offerings made at the temple were animal sacrifices (Heb 9:6–10). So, they were not able to serve as a propitiation for the sins of men (Heb 10:4; cf. Psalms 51:16–17). They were accepted by God when offered in faith as a covering for sins. But they did not, in themselves, satisfy God's wrath. They merely covered sin until an adequate sacrifice could be made on behalf of God's people. Thus, Hebrews 10:1 refers to the entire sacrificial system as “a shadow of the good things to come.” The very fact that these offerings were presented repeatedly demonstrates that they were insufficient to secure eternal salvation (Heb 10:1–4). The entire Mosaic system was established to point to the need of a once-for-all sacrifice that would satisfy God's wrath and a Great High Priest whose ministry is eternal. This is what Yahweh promised to Messiah in Psalm 110:4.

The Nature of This New Priesthood

There are only two references to Melchizedek in the OT. The first is in Genesis 14. The second is in Psalm 110:4 mentioned above. Yet within these two texts, a true appreciation for the nature of this new priesthood for Messiah can be discerned.

Divinely Ordained Priesthood

God's word is clear in affirming that no one can take the role of priest upon himself. It is uniquely restricted to those God has personally appointed to the task. This is made abundantly clear during Korah's rebellion (Num 16). When Korah and his followers insisted that they had as much right to the priesthood as Aaron, God struck them all down in front of the tent of meeting (Num 16:35). He then gave a lasting sign to the nation confirming the Aaronic priesthood by causing his staff to sprout buds (Num 17).

In addition, the role of priest must be held by one who comes from among men in order to be a representative of man before God (Heb 5:1–3). But he must also be appointed by God to that position (Heb 5:4). The promise of Psalm 110:4 is a divine appointment to the position of priest by God—independent of the Aaronic priesthood. It is also the appointment of a man, the Messiah, to the role of priest. Hebrews 5:5–6 says as much:

So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”; just as He says also in another passage, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

Just as God's declaration regarding the Son in Psalm 2 confirmed His position of sovereignty over the earth, so too His promise in Psalm 110:4 ordained Him as a priest forever. This is a divine appointment to serve as a permanent mediator between God and men. His qualifications to serve as a proper representative of man are derived from both the incarnation and His perfect obedience to the Father throughout His earthly life and ministry (Heb 4:14–16; 5:7–10; Phil 2:5–11; Psa 2:7). His qualification to serve perpetually as priest is derived from this divine appointment.

The element that makes it most distinct from the Levitical Aaronic priesthood is the fact that it is an appointment like that of Melchizedek. When Abram rescued Lot in the battle of the five kings, he was blessed by Melchizedek. He was both the king of Salem (best understood as an early reference to what became the city of Jerusalem) and a priest of God Most High. Genesis 14:18–20 describes Melchizedek in the following way:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” He gave him a tenth of all.

Much is made about the name Melchizedek in theological circles and commentaries.⁷ The Hebrew itself means “king of righteousness.” Whether this was a name or a title

⁷ For a good theological summary, see Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 182–87.

has been debated.⁸ But that fact that he was a priest of God Most High is most significant for this study. This means that he had been appointed by God before the days of Moses and the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood to be a priest for God. It was an independent appointment by God of this man to this role. That Abram was blessed by him and that Abram offered a tenth of the spoils to him shows that Abram recognized him as such as well (Heb 7:1–2).⁹ That Melchizedek served as a mediator between Abram and God also demonstrates that this priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood (Heb 7:1–10). The promise of Psalm 110:4 to the one greater than David is that He will be appointed personally to the position of priest by God (just like Melchizedek was). More than that, it will be an eternal office that Messiah will hold.

Eternal Priesthood

As David wrote in Psalm 110:4, He will be a priest forever. When the author of Hebrews speaks of the superiority of Christ's priesthood to Aaron's, he cites Psalm 110:4. In the same way that Aaron and his descendants were appointed by God (Heb 5:1–4), so too Christ was appointed by God (Heb 5:5–6). But the difference is that, while every Aaronic priest died and the subsequent priest assumed the office by virtue of genealogical descent (Heb 7:1–3), Christ was appointed to the office of priest personally as an individual, like Melchizedek. Moreover, unlike Aaron and his descendants, Christ is without sin and has the ability to serve in this capacity eternally.

When the author of Hebrews suggests that Melchizedek was without a genealogy or the beginning or ending of days (Heb 7:3), he is emphasizing the fact that his ministry was unique to him. He is not suggesting that he was something other than a human priest.¹⁰ He is affirming that his priesthood was not passed on to his descendants. The promise to Messiah in Psalm 110:4 is that He will have this kind of perpetual priesthood. There is no provision for Him to pass it along to an heir. It is an appointment specifically to Him as an individual. But in the case of Messiah, it is also eternal.

The superiority of this priesthood in contrast to the Aaronic is manifold. Not only will Messiah serve as priest as a replacement for the Levitical priesthood, He will also serve in this capacity forever. Even Melchizedek died, though he was uniquely appointed by God to the office of priest. Abram recognized him as a mediator between

⁸ Adoni-zedek is identified in Joshua 10:1 as king in Jerusalem during the time of the conquest. This indicates that it may have been a dynastic name; but Adoni-zedek is clearly a distinct individual from Melchizedek. For a detailed excursus on the significance of Melchizedek, including historical issues, as well as an excellent exposition of Hebrews 7:1–3 and its application of Psalm 110:4 to Christ, see Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 237–50.

⁹ It is necessary to note that Melchizedek was a man, just as Abram. Those who suggest he was either an angelic being or a Christophany miss the mark. He is not identified as God in Genesis 14. He does not receive worship from Abram. He even states, "blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand"—as opposed to speaking as God to Abram (compare Gen 18:17, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do..."). These points from Genesis 14 alone are convincing. Beyond this, it should also be added that the promise in Psalm 110:4 is that "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." So, it is not that "you were Him and are still in that role"; rather, it is that "you are appointed to a role like his."

¹⁰ Contra those who say otherwise; see n. 9 above. See the excellent treatment of this issue in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 159–60.

himself and God Most High. Nevertheless, he too died. When Hebrews states that he had “neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Heb 7:3), it speaks of a lack of any reference as such in Scripture.¹¹ However, the Messiah actually will serve as priest forever, without end. In this way, Melchizedek is the pattern for Messiah’s priesthood.

Perfect Priesthood

As important as the eternity of Christ’s priesthood is, His perfect provision of salvation is equally critical. He is more than just a superior person in the role of priest compared with the Aaronic priesthood. Surely the fact that He is eternal makes Him a better priest on a base level. Every Levitical priest was limited in his service by both his sin and his death (Heb 7:23). But Christ lives forever and can remain in that role perpetually. He indeed always lives to intercede on behalf of His people (Heb 7:24–25).

However, even beyond this, He has made a better sacrifice for the sins of His people. A sacrifice that has once and for all paid the penalty for all our sins. He has made propitiation for sins and thereby fully and forever satisfied the wrath of God. This is infinitely superior to the countless animal sacrifices made by the Levitical priesthood that never took away sins (Heb 10:1–18).

The superiority of Christ serving as a priest after the order of Melchizedek is that He is able fully and forever to stand between His people and God and facilitate true and eternal reconciliation (Heb 7:26–28). He is holy and blameless Himself, so there is nothing that estranges Him from God. Yet He is also one of us. So, He is able to sympathize with our weakness—yet without sin (Heb 4:14–15). He has been tempted in all points as a man. But His sinless perfection made it possible for Him to offer Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. This one perfect sacrifice is a propitiation for sin. It is an offering that God has accepted. This is the part of the Messianic hope that makes it possible for His people to be included in His kingdom.

So, when Messiah returns, He will setup His divinely ordained kingdom. He will be freely and forever served by His people because He is also a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. His death reconciled us to God, permanently. His resurrection confirms His righteousness. His return will display God’s glory. His kingdom will have no end because He is both the Lord of David and his heir. He is both the priest of God Most High and the propitiatory sacrifice for our sins.

Conclusion

The Messianic hope of Israel is for a son of David to inherit his throne and establish His kingdom on this earth. That kingdom will be universal in scope and eternal in nature. It will be a kingdom wherein righteousness reigns and God’s enemies are subjugated beneath His feet. But, as Psalm 110 demonstrates, it will likewise incorporate a new and superior priesthood. A priesthood that replaces the Aaronic order and the entire Old Testament system. Like Melchizedek, the Messiah will serve as both king and priest in Zion. As priest after the order of Melchizedek, He will ever live to intercede on behalf of His people.

¹¹ For an additional discussion, see Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 159–60.

THE MESSIAH IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

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The Minor Prophets—or, The Twelve—contain an abundance of messianic prophecies that contribute to the anticipation of the coming of the Messiah in the Scriptures. Following the broader storyline of judgment and hope, one finds this thread weaving the Twelve together through the nature of the prophetic ministry to even the historical context in which the ministry of the Minor Prophets occurs. As one grasps this storyline throughout the Twelve, the role of these messianic texts becomes clear as they function to expound the coming hope for a nation that had seen God’s judgment. This paper will study these parts of the text to demonstrate the Messiah’s presence in the Minor Prophets.

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Introduction

The Minor Prophets comprise an integral part of the theology of the Messiah in the Old Testament. To overlook the Messianic texts in the Minor Prophets would be to neglect a major component of this revelation as a whole. Therefore, this paper will seek to show the presence of the Messiah in the Minor Prophets by means of the following arguments: the big storyline of the Old Testament, the nature of the prophetic ministry, the brief historical context of the Minor Prophets, and the Messiah in the Minor Prophets.

The Big Story of the Old Testament

The Old Testament’s big story is about chaos and hope. Judgment and salvation are recurring themes, and often, both are found in the same plot, building the expectations surrounding the Messiah. This is seen in the Fall (Gen 3–4), throughout

the remainder of Genesis, and in the entirety of the First Testament.¹ The fall and failures of mankind are never the end of the story; rather they are always coupled with God's acts of victory, for man is never left alone in his sin and misery. God is the judge of His people, and He is their Redeemer. In the First Testament, the big story is all about how God executes His plan to atone for fallen humanity. What mankind failed to do in keeping God's commandments, God dealt with through judgment and promises of salvation that He made to His unfaithful people. In many instances, as James Hamilton says, salvation through judgment ultimately "pointed forward to the cross, where Jesus was judged, so that His people could be saved. When He returns, the salvation of His people will come through the judgment of the serpent and his seed."² The ultimate salvation came through the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who was nailed to the cross, died and rose after three days, and finally extended salvation from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). It is in Him that judgment and salvation culminate, and that is the fundamental story of the Bible.

There is a pattern and a thread that can be traced in the Old Testament stories. That pattern is set before the reader immediately after God completes His act of creation *ex nihilo* in six literal days. In Genesis 3, after God created the world and appointed the garden as the dwelling place for His image bearers Adam and Eve, the most catastrophic event in man's history took place—the fall. There Adam and Eve disobeyed God, broke fellowship with Him, and were sent away from the Garden of Eden. But it is amid this tragic event, which provoked the judgment of God on all mankind, on earth, and the serpent, that we find a great promise of hope. As Zack Keele puts it: "The Lord God cursed the serpent, the woman, and the man, but they did not die. Sure, spiritual death infested their souls like cancer, and eventually, their bodies were swallowed by dust"; but He showed them mercy and "even gave the naked parents a sworn promise to do them good: the woman's offspring shall bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15)."³ Judgment and hope in that regrettable incident become the pattern and the archetype for the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, including the Minor Prophets. The thread found there can be followed into the New Testament and eventually to the book of Revelation, where all things are consummated. The serpent in Genesis 3 is ultimately judged by Yahweh (cf. Rev 12; 20:7–10). With that, there is a return for the people of God, both Jews and Gentiles, to full fellowship with God the Creator. It is this dual reality of judgment and hope throughout the Old Testament storyline that undergirds the messianic contributions of the Minor Prophets.

In Genesis 3:15, while God pronounces the punishment for sin that will affect all humanity, God also includes a promise of hope for His fallen image-bearers in that very pronouncement. The pronouncement and the promise, known as the *protoevangelium*, the first Gospel, is hope amid the disorder and chaos caused by Adam and Eve's disobedient act. Accordingly, Hamilton notes, "When God called

¹ Daniel I. Block uses this term to refer to the Old Testament. This is a more suitable label, since often we associate old with outdated and less relevant, which is not the case with the first thirty-nine books of the Scriptures.

² James M. Hamilton Jr, *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism and Patterns*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 40–41.

³ Zack Keele, *The Unfolding Word: The Story of the Bible from Creation to New Creation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 21.

Adam and Eve to account for their sin, words of hope came in the judgment God spoke over the snake.”⁴ God’s judgment, together with hope, set the pattern seen repeatedly in the Scriptures. So, Genesis 3, and especially verse 15, provides the reader with the first Good News and sets the template to be found and traced throughout the Old Testament: judgment and salvation, chaos and hope. These repetitive promises and acts of God point to God’s redemptive plan, as Desmond Alexander remarks, that “through it, Satan is defeated, and human beings are enabled to regain the holy, royal status Adam and Eve lost” in the Garden of Eden.⁵

The story of Noah shows the same pattern in which God sends a flood to destroy mankind—though not wholly—because “Yahweh saw that the evil of man was great on the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5).⁶ Through Noah’s three sons, God “recreated” the race of man, and through the son Shem, the seed of the woman continued (cf. Gen 9:25–27). Judgment of God was seen clearly through the flood, as destruction was executed against every living being, except those in the ark, the place of refuge, hope, and salvation.

The story of the Jewish people, which started with Abraham’s call, repeatedly shows us the same pattern seen in the fall and the flood story. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob disobeyed God innumerable, yet God remained faithful to His promises to them and their descendants. The twelve tribes and the people of Israel failed by breaking His commandments despite the numerous warnings of God’s prophets. The slavery in Egypt and the miraculous Exodus are magnificent stories of how God can and will protect His people, but also a shadow of what is to come in the Messiah, who by His blood will pass over the judgment that is deserved by sinners. Through Moses, God brought freedom to the enslaved people of Israel, who were oppressed and hopeless in Egypt. It was in their dire condition as slaves that God gave them hope through the savior-man Moses. Indeed, as God called out to Moses from the burning bush, God referred to Israel as “My people” (3:10). Ultimately, towards the end of his mission, Moses summarized all the curses that would fall upon the people of Israel if they disobeyed Yahweh, but also all the great blessings with which He would bless them if they would obey His commandments and ordinances diligently. Thus, again, God demonstrated a pattern of judgment and hope.

The book of Judges shows how disobedience and idolatry led to judgment, as nations that remained in the Promised Land would fight and enslave the people of Israel. Yet when the people cried out to the Lord and repented of their sin, Yahweh would send a judge to deliver them.⁷ The same can be observed in the era of the kings, culminating in the exile of the nation and the destruction of the temple. However, even within exile, God still made promises of return and the future rebuilding of the temple, in this way giving Israel the hope of deliverance. This fundamental storyline of judgment and hope, culminating specifically in the Messiah, proceeds into the message of the Minor Prophets.

⁴ Hamilton, *Biblical Theology*, 38.

⁵ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 138.

⁶ LSB is used throughout the paper, unless indicated otherwise.

⁷ In the book of Judges, this pattern of judgment and delivery, or sin to salvation, is repeated twelve times through the twelve judges-leaders.

The Nature of the Prophetic Ministry

Along with the general storyline of the Old Testament, the nature of the prophetic ministry supports the presence of the Messiah in the Minor Prophets. One of the emphases of the prophets was the coming of the Messiah and His redemption and atonement. In their writings, the prophets prophesied the coming, the timing, the place of His birth, and even His death and resurrection. In the Old Testament we see these prophecies as a shadow, but in the New we see them fulfilled in Christ, the substance of all the messianic prophecies.

The prophets were the mouthpiece of God, His spokesmen, proclaiming and inscribing His words for generations to come. Moses was the first of the prophets who set the standard for the rest of the prophets after them, and by writing the *Torah*, the first section of the Old Testament, he set the pattern. The prophets who came after him pointed to the ultimate Prophet, King, and Priest, bridging the time between Moses and Christ. Michael J. Williams explains that, while the prophets spoke to those who have “ears to hear – implying a verbal communication – their message was also for those who have ‘eyes to see’ – implying a communication that is acted out and therefore visible.”⁸ The first beneficiaries of the work and words of the prophets were the immediate audience who heard the Word preached to them, and or who read their words, though often, as Isaiah describes, the Word was sealed from them and they could not understand it unless God revealed it to His chosen ones (cf. Isa 29:9–12; Matt 11:25; 13:11; 16:17; Luk 24:25–26). This is seen today in Israel and among the Jewish people throughout the world, who are “the people of the Book,” and yet a veil has been put over their eyes so they cannot see or understand that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel of whom the prophets of old prophesied (2 Cor. 3:14–16).

The content of the Minor Prophets as it pertains to the Messiah is directly related to its structure; therefore, it is essential to recognize their place in the original Hebrew Scriptures.⁹ The Old Testament consists of three sections encapsulated by the title *Tanakh*—*Torah*, *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). The first five books, written by Moses, are considered the Law; the following 19 books comprise the Prophets; and the last 12 are part of the Writings.¹⁰ The Prophets, or the second major part of the Old Testament, according to the Hebrew canon, are divided into the Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—and the Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets.¹¹

⁸ Michael J. Williams, *The Prophet and His Message: Reading Old Testament Prophecy Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2003), 81.

⁹ The first English Bible translation is credited to John Wycliffe, who by 1382 completed both the New and the Old Testament. He translated his version from the Vulgate, the 4th century Latin translation of the Bible, and not from the original languages. See Paul D. Wegener, *The Journey from Text to the Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 280–83.

¹⁰ The Prophets section begins with Joshua and ends with Malachi, and it includes nineteen books since the four books of Samuel and Kings are considered two books. In the Writings, the books of Chronicles are also considered as one book.

¹¹ The Minor Prophets are referred to as *התרי עשר*, which means “The Twelve” (and is in fact Aramaic). Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1952), 9.

The prophets of the Old Testament spoke the Word of the living God.¹² The well-known and often repeated formula, “Thus says Yahweh,” indicates that they communicated the very Word of God. The prophecy of the prophets related to God’s judgment of Israel, if the people would not repent, as well as to the coming of the new era, the Messianic age. While the judgment would be harsh and painful, these were not the last words of the prophets. Rather, the salvation to come through the New Covenant that God would make with the house of Jacob would provide great hope for the nation’s future (Jer 31:31–34; Luk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). Ian M. Duguid writes, “The prophets searched. Angels longed to see. And the disciples didn’t understand. But Moses, *the Prophets*, and all the Old Testament Scriptures had spoken about it – that Jesus would come, suffer, and then be glorified. God began to tell a story in the Old Testament, the ending for which the audience eagerly anticipated.”¹³ There is anticipation found in both the Old and the New Testaments that is related to the first and the second coming of Christ. The Scriptures have a forward-looking perspective on events that would happen both in the near and far distance, though the exact timing or the manner of their fulfillment were not always known precisely. Their forward-looking perspective provided an opportunity for their hearers to act in repentance, considering their sinful acts and the judgment that would follow. It then encouraged them not to lose heart and look beyond their dire circumstances and to the time God would restore them to Himself (cf. Zech 13:9; 14:9).

Isaiah, at the outset of the latter prophets, begins by describing and condemning the sins of Judah, and yet in the middle of the first chapter, Yahweh calls them to come and reason with Him (Isa 1:18). He tells them that though their sins are as scarlet and red like crimson, they will be white as snow and be like wool, and while their land will be desolate and their cities burned with fire, afterward, Zion will be called the city of righteousness (Isa 1:7, 18, 21, 27). This message of sin and salvation, judgment and hope, can be seen as an introduction to the message of Isaiah,¹⁴ but also to the rest of the prophetic corpus and in particular the Minor Prophets. Isaiah and the rest of the prophets point us to the coming Messiah, and each of them, in his unique way and distinctive style, points us directly or indirectly to the Messiah. The very nature of the prophets’ ministry, in both content and function, is one in which each prophet speaks on behalf of God, declaring the message of both judgment and hope in accordance with the rest of the First Testament.

The Brief Historical Context of the Minor Prophets

When the Twelve are considered in light of their historical context, the trajectory toward the Messiah crystallizes: the historical context of the Twelve begins with judgment but ends with hope. Consequently, the expression of this hope requires the proper catalyst, that of the presence of the Messiah. This collection of the twelve

¹² See Homer Haoley, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 14; J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 23.

¹³ Ian M. Duguid, *Living in the Grip of Relentless Grace: The Gospel in the Lives of Isaac and Jacob*, GAOT (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), viii. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 79.

prophets was not written in one period. Rather, the earlier prophets lived in the last of the glorious days of Israel's kingdom, before the two exiles, while the latter lived just in the closing of the Old Testament history. Therefore, the earlier prophets prophesied to the Judean kingdom and Israel, while the latter prophets prophesied in the beginning days of the second temple.¹⁵ The prophets of the Twelve wrote over a period of about 400 years, roughly from about 850 B.C. to 400 B.C. The table below can be used as a chronological reference for the people or nation to which each of the prophets—both major and minor prophets—was written, and the years during which each ministered.

Table 1. Chronology and Audience of the Minor Prophets¹⁶
 Prophets Organized by Date and Direction of Ministry

Prophet	Wrote To	Ministered in the Years
Obadiah	Edom	850–840 B.C.
Joel	Judah	835–796 B.C.
Jonah	Nineveh	784–760 B.C.
Amos	Israel	763–755 B.C.
Hosea	Israel	755–710 B.C.
Isaiah	Judah	739–680 B.C.
Micah	Judah	735–710 B.C.
Nahum	Nineveh	650–630 B.C.
Zephaniah	Judah	635–625 B.C.
Jeremiah	Judah	627–570 B.C.
Habakkuk	Judah	620–605 B.C.
Daniel	Babylon	605–536 B.C.
Ezekiel	Babylon	593–570 B.C.
Haggai	Judah	520–505 B.C.
Zechariah	Judah	520–470 B.C.
Malachi	Judah	437–417 B.C.

In these four centuries, the prophets provided a wide and deep picture of Israel's religion and lifestyle as they preached a message of judgment and hope.¹⁷

As there is a unified message in the whole of the Scriptures, so also is there a thread that runs in the context of each of the Minor Prophets. The main message of the pre-exilic prophets was: Israel and Judah both broke the covenant of God; repentance is required in the face of imminent judgment; but, in the words of Daniel

¹⁵ Adin Even-Yiśra'el Steinsaltz, *The Annotated Bible: The Book of the Twelve*, 1st ed. (התנ"ך המבואר (: ספר תרי-עשר; Jerusalem: Koren, 2016), 16.

¹⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 753.

¹⁷ J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 63; and see C. F. Keil, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 365.

Hays, “there is hope beyond the judgment for a glorious future restoration both for Israel/Judah and for the nations.”¹⁸ The main message of the post-exilic prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—was: God remembers His promises to Israel, so be faithful to Him, rebuild the temple and the city, and be encouraged that the Messiah is coming to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem. Overall, the prophecies of the Twelve Prophets not only pointed to the return of the remnant from exile, but to far glorious days of the Messianic age, in which the Messiah would bring restoration to the Jews first and also to the Greek.

The time that each of the twelve books was written and the order in which they appear in their final canonical form supports a historical progression from judgment to hope. Through their writing style and literary use, the prophets reveal to us the plan of God for the redemption of the world, and it is through judgment that salvation comes to Israel and the rest of the world. Speaking more broadly of this pattern, Hamilton writes:

When the people did not repent, the prophets declared that the covenant curses would fall: the people would be exiled from the land just as Adam was exiled from Eden. But the prophets also announced hope for the future... Just as Sinai had been shaken when the covenant was made, once more he would shake the heavens and earth. Just as he had stored the people in the land of promise after the sojourn in Egypt, he would bring them back from exile. Just as people had taken the land, they would again conquer their enemies, and a new David would rule in Jerusalem.¹⁹

God used the Twelve Prophets to instruct God's people to seek Him above all and put their trust in Him. God wanted Israel to understand that the future hope that the prophets preached was as real as the past and present. The prophets wanted them to recognize that, in light of the political troubles of Israel, the proper response was to return to God and to anticipate His promises.

The Messiah in the Minor Prophets

A more focused study of the Minor Prophets leads the reader to see the Big Story of the Bible within the Minor Prophets as well—that is, the coming judgment of the Lord and the great hope in the promised Messiah. In their writings, the twelve prophets added a new facet to the mosaic of the other Old Testament writings. They assisted in understanding how Jewish people like Simeon and Hannah, when they held the baby Jesus, could know that they were seeing with their own eyes God's salvation, a light to the Gentiles, the glory of the people of Israel, and the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:25–38). A closer look at the Twelve on an individual basis reveals how their message points directly, through messianic texts, or indirectly,

¹⁸ Hays, *Message of the Prophets*, 365. The pre-exilic prophets Obadiah, Nahum, and Jonah, unlike the others, did not prophecy against Israel and Judah but rather against other nations, respectively Edom and Nineveh.

¹⁹ James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 231–33.

through the broader theme of judgment and hope, to the Messiah. Furthermore, the interplay between the messianic texts and the broader theme of judgment and hope within each book points to the Messiah as the resolution of the tension within this storyline of the Bible.

Hosea ministered to Northern Israel between the years 755–710 B.C., and his message is a court case and indictment of God on His people. They had transgressed against His law and broken His covenant (8:1), yet God calls them to return to Him. In other words, if Israel repents, God would receive them graciously, His anger would turn away from them, and He would love them freely (14:1, 4). After a very short introduction in the first verse, Hosea proceeds to verse two with accusation and judgment, and to emphasize this, Hosea uses the root of זנה “harlotry” four times, and this is a clear indication of the message the prophet has for Israel.²⁰ To showcase the depth of the offense of the people of Israel towards their God, the prophet was asked by God to do the unprecedented task of marrying a harlot named Gomer. Through this act, particularly through the children of this marriage (as indicated by their names),²¹ God presents both the judgment of Israel and, at the same time, the hope of the mercy and grace of God. In fact, the pattern of judgment and hope is evident in the entire first two chapters, in which the two themes intermingle, appearing again and again consecutively.²² Though Israel stands accused against the charges, God eventually calls the people to return to the One they had offended, so that He would receive them graciously. He has torn them, but He will also heal them; He has struck them, but He will also bandage them. Then His anger would turn away from them, and He would love them freely (Hos 6:1; 14:1–4).

However, the time of Israel’s judgment will cause Israel to realize that they need a true leader, and Hosea suggests that this leader will be a royal Messiah. In Hosea 3:4, Hosea notes that in its sinful state, Israel “will remain for many days without king or prince.” This, then, will result in Israel’s response to “seek Yahweh their God and David their king” (Hos 3:5). Duane Garrett states plainly, “The prophecy that they would seek ‘David their king’ is messianic.”²³ Through the Messiah, then, the culmination of this will result in a restored relationship with God, when “they will come in dread to Yahweh and to His goodness in the last days” (Hos 3:5; cf. 6:1–3). In this way, Hosea points Israel to Christ and shows that initially there will be judgment, but that with their repentance, this will ultimately result in salvation.

In the book of Joel, we see a similar pattern of judgment and hope, destruction and reconstruction. Joel prophesied to the people of Judah between the years 835–796 B.C. The prophet begins his message with a theme of doom and destruction, as

²⁰ Hosea 1:2 reads: “When Yahweh first spoke through Hosea, Yahweh said to Hosea, ‘Go, take for yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry [lit. committing harlotry the land commits harlotry], forsaking Yahweh.’” אִשֶׁת זְנוּנִים [וְלִבְנֵי זְנוּנִים כִּי־זָנְתָה תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ בְּאַחֲרֵי בְּאַחֲרֵי יְהוָה] (emphasis mine).

²¹ The first was called Jezreel, for God will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel and will bring an end to the northern kingdom. The second was called *Lo Ruhama*, no mercy, for God will have not have mercy. The third was called *Lo Ammi*, not my people, for they are not his people, and He is not their God.

²² In the first two chapters we are confronted with five judgements (1:4, 6, 8; 2:4–6, and 15) and five messages of hope and restoration (1:7, 10; 2:1–3, 17–20, and 21–23).

²³ Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, New American Commentary 19A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 104.

he describes the various kinds of locusts eating the crops, and a mighty nation that will invade the land, referring to the coming exile. He further speaks about the Day of the LORD²⁴ as a day of destruction and ruin. Yet, his message turns into one of hope and restoration, as the Almighty will pour out His Spirit (2:28) on all mankind. Then, in the last part of the book, Joel prophesies that the LORD who is a refuge to Israel and Judah shall dwell in Zion (Joel 3:21).

Amos, who ministered to Israel between the years 763–755 B.C., begins with eight judgment statements on eight peoples and nations, the last two being Judah and Israel. In all of them, there is a repetition of the phrase “For three transgressions ... and for four, I will not turn back its punishment...” which is God’s indictment of the people for their continuous and multiplied sins.²⁵ The indictment continues in the following chapters, and once again, there is the literary device of repetition of the exact same words as in the beginning. Again and again, Amos tells the people of Israel of the many times that God had given them the opportunity to return to Him in the midst of judgment, but God repeatedly says, “‘Yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares Yahweh” (4:6, 8, 10, 11).

But towards the end of the book of Amos, we hear a new and fresh message, one that shows that the judgment of Yahweh is not the last word from God; rather, His last word is that of hope and salvation. Accordingly, God makes a specific promise that He will “raise up the fallen booth of David” (9:11). The restoration of the Davidic dynasty is a theme that unfolds in passages on the future hope in many of the Minor Prophets and is a direct connection to the coming Messiah.²⁶ Therefore, Amos argues that the messianic line from David will be restored, solving the dilemma of judgment through the work of the Messiah.

While the short book of Obadiah is not typical of the other Twelve Prophets, since it is a prophecy of doom only against the Edomites, the book still depicts a message of judgment and hope. The one-chapter book starts with the clear declaration of doom and destruction against Edom and the Edomite kingdom. The reason for God’s destruction of that nation is due to their mistreatment of Jacob and Israel in the past. They are being judged since they did evil in the sight of the Lord against Jacob.²⁷ The judgment of God on Edom goes back to the enmity between two brothers—Jacob and Esau—from the time when the older brother gave up his birthright to the younger brother.²⁸ While the majority of the book is God’s judgment against the Edomites, there is a message of hope and prosperity for Jacob and Israel (cf. vv. 17–21). The exiles from the house of Jacob and the house of Joseph will indeed repossess the land taken from them, and the prophet’s last words are: “and the Kingdom will belong to Yahweh.” Niehaus connects this verse to Revelation 11:15, and states “that the Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord / and of his Messiah /

²⁴ Day of the LORD is a central theme in the book of Joel and appears five times (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14).

²⁵ These words are repeated in 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, and 6. By using the literary device of repetition, Amos is providing his listeners and readers an opportunity of seeing the depth of the sins of the peoples and the due judgement.

²⁶ See Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 185–88.

²⁷ Esau settled in the region near the Dead Sea, called Edom, as described in Genesis 36:8–9.

²⁸ See Jeffrey J. Niehaus, “Obadiah,” in *The Minor Prophets, Volume 2: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1993), 496.

and he will reign forever and ever.”²⁹ The judgment of Edom and the Edomites brings hope to the remnant of Israel, and ultimately the whole world, that the kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of God and His Messiah. The prospect of kingship ultimately points to the Messiah who will resolve the tension of judgment and blessing as Obadiah combines the judgment upon Edomites with the blessings upon Israel and the nations.

In the story of Jonah, we see judgment and hope in two ways—with the sailors on the boat and with the Ninevites in the city. The judgment of God is seen first in the wind and the storm that He brought upon the sea and the ship, that almost drowned the sailors and all who were on the board, including Jonah the prophet. But immediately after Jonah is thrown into the sea, the sea is calmed, the sailors are spared, and the sailors fear God. Subsequently, salvation is seen in the city of Nineveh, where God initially threatens judgment for the evil of the Ninevites, but then through the preaching of Jonah, the whole city repents and is saved. In this short narrative, we see hope not only for Israel and Judah but in a broader way for other nations, as the prophet of the Northern Kingdom is sent to the Assyrian city to bring a message of judgment and hope to its inhabitants. While it is difficult to point to specific messianic references in the book, two themes that are worthy of mention do emerge. First, the fact that salvation is brought to the Gentiles is a motif that Isaiah later attributes specifically to the Messiah. In Isaiah 49:6, God says to the Messiah, “I will also give You as a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” In a preliminary way, then, the preaching of Jonah foreshadows the redemptive work that the Messiah would bring to the nations (cf. Rom 11:11–24). Second, the language of “three days and three nights” refers to the threat of death that Jonah faced but, by the hand of God, overcame when he came out of the fish alive; and this served to depict Jonah as a legitimate prophet of God.³⁰ Thus, Jonah—though himself a rebellious prophet—portrayed a legitimate prophet of God who was affirmed by God through the unlikely survival of what would be considered a certain death. This is what Jesus later referred to when He said: “Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation” (Luk 11:30; cf. Matt 12:39–42). In the end, the book of Jonah has seminal themes that are later attributed to the work of the Messiah—that mercy, grace, and salvation extend beyond the ethnic and geographical boundaries of the people of Israel; and that only the prophet who is affirmed by God can achieve this message of salvation.

Micah, meaning “who is like Yahweh,” provides us with three miniature judgment and salvation prophecies. Each of the prophecies starts with the same expression “hear now” or “hear,” and this serves as a literary clue to the three messages. The first prophecy in 1:2 is a message of judgment to Samaria and Jerusalem due to their corrupt leaders. But this judgment message ends with hope and salvation as there is a promise of restoration for God’s remnant people.³¹ The second prophecy appears in 3:1 and relates to the failure of the leadership of Judah. In this prophecy, Micah refers to the

²⁹ Niehaus, “Obadiah,” 541.

³⁰ Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, New American Commentary 19B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 241.

³¹ Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr. and Gary E. Yates, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2016), 186–87.

“heads of Judah” and announces God’s coming destruction of Jerusalem. However, this second message of destruction also ends with salvation as it announces the future kingdom of peace and justice under the rule of the Messiah.³² The third prophecy begins in 6:1 and condemns Judah for its failure to keep God’s law and practice justice. Yet, this pronouncement of moral decay is not the last word of the prophet to the people. According to the pattern described above, these prophecies also end with a message of restoration and redemption, as Yahweh will vindicate Jerusalem and the godly and remove the sins of the people of Israel.³³

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and had a similar message to that of his colleague. They both spoke about the future exile, but they also spoke of the deliverance from the Assyrians, as well as the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, each one prophesied about the different aspects of the coming Messiah. Micah foretold the birthplace of the ruler of Israel, One whose “goings forth are from everlasting” and who would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah (Mic 5:2). This prophecy was clearly understood before the birth of Christ to be a messianic prophecy about the birthplace of the promised Messiah who will shepherd His people (cf. Matt 2:6; John 7:42). The magi from the east knew that the King Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as did the chief priests and the scribes (cf. Matt 2:1–6). Thus, at the central part of the book, Micah includes a promise concerning God’s covenant with David and reveals that the Messiah will come forth and be a ruler who shepherds His people (Mic 5:2–4). The Messiah brings about the realization of the hope that Micah delivers to the nation.

The book of Nahum is a book of judgment against Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire that had oppressed Judah, but it is also a message of hope for Judah that the good news of peace will be proclaimed, and that Judah will be able to celebrate the feasts. The prophet himself contains both of these features in his one person, since he preaches a message of condemnation, while his name actually means comfort. As regards judgment, James Montgomery Boice states that Nahum’s prophecy “is about the fall of Nineveh... and its fall is probably greater than any city in the entire history of the world.”³⁴ Nahum shows the reality of God’s judgment and that such judgment awaits those who disobey God and his commandments. At the same time, Nahum brings hope as he calls the attention of his listeners to the mountain to behold the feet of the One who proclaims good news and announces peace (1:15). These words echo the message of Isaiah in 52:7, which spoke of Israel’s deliverance, but this passage is ultimately applied to the Messiah who announced true peace as He called His chosen ones to follow Him into the eternal peace of His Father (cf. Isa 61:1; Luk 4:16–21; Eph 2:14–18; and cf. Luk 2:10; Rom 10:15).³⁵ The Messiah alone can restore the majesty of Jacob and Israel, and Nahum reveals this hope of comfort for Judah as he refers to the deliverer of good news.

³² Fuhr & Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 186–87.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets: Volume 2 An Expository Commentary Micah–Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1986), 369.

³⁵ See discussion in O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 81–84. See also passages in which Jesus told His disciples that He gives them His peace: Luke 24:36; John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19; 20:21, 26.

The theme of judgment and hope is also evident in the book of Habakkuk, particularly as Habakkuk lists two complaints to God, but then ends with praise to God. First, Habakkuk cries out to God that he perceives much wickedness around him, and yet he does not see justice prevailing. God’s response comes as a surprise, for He reveals that He will use the wicked Babylonians to bring judgment (1:11). Yet, immediately after announcing this form of judgment, God states that the Babylonians will also be punished because their power would be their god (1:11). Second, Habakkuk cries out to God in bewilderment as to how Yahweh could use a more wicked nation than Judah to punish Judah. God responds by declaring that His judgment will come heavily on the Chaldeans, and that they will not go unpunished. Finally, Habakkuk ends his prophecy with a prayer in which he praises God for being the God of salvation, thus expressing a hope that follows judgment.

It is in this doxology that Habakkuk demonstrates a messianic hope. In Habakkuk 3:13, Habakkuk states to God: “You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked to lay him bare from thigh to neck. Selah.” The language is significant here in three ways. First, the hope for salvation is emphasized inasmuch as the word “salvation” is repeated twice here in v. 13, and then also in v. 8 and v. 18 (a total of four times in the doxology). Second, Habakkuk uses the term “Your anointed” (literally, “Your Messiah” מָשִׁיחַ), which anticipates a conqueror who will be a champion for Israel, that is, the Messiah (cf. Psa 2:2; 132:10–12; Dan 9:26). Finally, Habakkuk describes this victory by using the terms “crush” (רָצַח) and “head” (רֵאשִׁית), which are the very same terms that Psalm 110:5–6 uses to describe the victory of the Messiah against His enemies. Ultimately, the combined use of this terminology in Habakkuk 3:13 echoes the Messiah’s victory of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. In the end, Habakkuk’s hope for Israel’s salvation is found in the work of the Messiah.

Zephaniah begins his oracles of judgment first against Judah and then against the foreign nations, and he ends his writings with oracles of hope as Yahweh will redeem and restore his people. The arrangement of the book, in its three chapters, is such that Yahweh’s judgment comes in circles—it comes on the earth, then on Judah and the surrounding nations, and finally on Jerusalem and all the nations. His blessings also come in circles—they first come to the nations, but they then end with great favor on Judah, such that God calls the daughter of Zion to sing for joy and to be glad. Thus, Yahweh will restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem. This occurs by the presence of the King of Israel, identified as Yahweh (3:15). The role of Yahweh as King can be traced back to Sinai when God revealed Himself as King (cf. Deut 33:2–5).³⁶ However, the Scriptures proceeded to develop God’s role as King in Israel through the Davidic throne, ultimately culminating in the coming of the Messiah (cf. 2 Sam 7:12–16; Psa 2:6–7; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11–12). Moreover, the language of Zephaniah 3:15 that King Yahweh will be “in your midst” reflects the language of Zechariah 2:11, in which the Messiah declares to Judah that He will dwell “in your midst.” Thus, the hope following judgment is dependent upon the coming King, the Messiah.

³⁶ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 337.

Haggai, a postexilic prophet, exhorts the returnees to be steadfast in their work on building the walls of Jerusalem and completing the second temple. He rebukes them for their indifference on the work of the Lord and calls them to act, even by going to the mountains to collect timber for the building project (1:8). But with the exhortation, there is also a message of concurrent and future blessing. The second temple that Haggai encouraged the people to build was the temple where the Messiah would spend much time, and preach repentance and point to the only way, truth, and life that is to be found in Him alone. In addition, in Haggai 2:20–23, there is a distinct messianic promise, in which Haggai speaks of the Messiah all the while using the name Zerubbabel. In 2:23, Haggai says, “‘On that day,’ declares Yahweh of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and I will make you like a signet *ring*, for I have chosen you,’ declares Yahweh of hosts.” Inasmuch as the context of this statement is set in the future time of the Messiah by the phrase “On that day” (cf. Zech 12–14; Rev 20), this reference to Zerubbabel must be understood as a reference to the Messiah Himself. Just like the Scriptures elsewhere speak of the Messiah by referring to Him as David (Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11), so here also Haggai is speaking of the Messiah by using the name Zerubbabel. The reason for this depiction of the Messiah is that Zerubbabel and the Messiah share a significant characteristic—just like the Messiah, Zerubbabel was not only part of the seed of the woman but also part of the Davidic royal line. In effect, this reference to Zerubbabel points to Christ with the hope that He will be the Deliverer who will bring salvation to the nation.

After revealing great judgment and bloodshed, Zechariah depicts the coming of the Messiah in humility and yet in victory, both spiritually and physically.³⁷ The fact that Zechariah’s name means “Yahweh remembers” is significant, inasmuch as it indicates that the Lord remembers all the promises that He had ever made concerning judgment and redemption. In the well-known passage of the first coming of Christ, Zechariah 9:9 describes that the Messiah will come as a humble king. In Zechariah 12:10–14, the Messiah declares that He will be pierced by His own people, and that this will result in national and individual repentance of Israel. Moreover, Zechariah depicts the Messiah in this passage as God Himself who dies on behalf of His people, as God declares: “they will look on Me whom they have pierced” (12:10). Zechariah also prophesies of the second coming of Christ. In 2:11, speaking of the Millennium, the Messiah declares that He will dwell in Jerusalem: “I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that Yahweh of hosts has sent Me to you.” Moreover, 14:9 declares that “Yahweh will be king over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be *the only* one, and His name one.” As in the discussion of the Messiah in Zephaniah, so here it is worth reiterating that the Scriptures developed God’s role as King in Israel through David, ultimately culminating in the kingship of the Messiah (cf. 2 Sam 7:12–16; Psa 2:6–7; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11–12). Thus, here also in Zechariah 14:9, as Zechariah states that Yahweh will be king, this points to the ultimate reign of the Messiah. This message brought great expectation and hope to the returnees from exile who saw the devastated city and the broken walls of Jerusalem. Thus, these prophecies concerning the Messiah provided immense hope that one day not only will the city be filled with

³⁷ In Zechariah we can see references to both the first and second coming of the Messiah, and both were used to comfort and encourage the returnees and give them hope.

people, but the Lord Himself will dwell there, and the Gentiles would want to go up to Zion with them (Zech 8:23).

Malachi is the last of the Twelve, which according to the English Bible, brings the Minor prophets and the Old Testament to a close. The collection of the twelve books ends by anticipating the Messiah and His forerunner, who would appear some four centuries later. Like the other eleven prophets, Malachi also begins his book with a message of judgment and condemnation, inasmuch as the people and the priests had failed and sinned against their Creator and against the covenant that He had made with them. They profaned and despised the Lord's name, robbed God in their tithes and contributions, and spoke strong words against Yahweh. Yet His name *will* be great among the nations (1:11). In Malachi 3:1, the Lord promises that He will send a messenger (cf. Elijah in 4:5; John the Baptist in Matt 3:3; Isa 40:3) before He Himself comes. Then in 4:5, the book ends with the great promise that God will send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh. This promise sets up a strong anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. While John the Baptist prepared the way for the first coming of Christ (Matt 3:3; Luk 1:17), Elijah (or an Elijah-like individual) will come before the great Day of Yahweh (Mal 4:5–6). With this conclusion, the Twelve establish the message that only the Messiah could unfold the future hope that was promised to the nation in the midst of judgment.

Conclusion

Like the Big Story of the Bible, the book of the Twelve contains and continues that same story, albeit in its unique style and genre. In them, we see the unrelenting judgment of God on His people, both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but also on specific nations and on all the earth. The fall of Adam and Eve cannot go unpunished before the righteous and just God, particularly since His covenant people and the whole earth continue their rebellion against Him. However, the theme of God's grace and mercy that was seen so vividly in Genesis 3 continues throughout the Old Testament and the Minor prophets, and shows that the Messiah will fulfill all the blessings and grant salvation to those whom God the Father has given to God the Son.

The Twelve Prophets, in their unique way, resolve the tension of judgment and hope through the use of direct and indirect references to the Messiah as the ultimate Deliverer of the nation. These texts pointed their original audience and the later audience to markers and events which will give them hope in the coming Messiah. This message is as hopeful and important for us today as it was for the original audience. It helps us to know the goodness and faithfulness of God to His promises and covenant. As they point to the first and second coming of the Messiah, we can be comforted in this age of confusion, uncertainty, and perversion. Indeed, we know that after judgment and hardship will come a glorious time in the new heavens and the new earth when judgment and salvation will be fulfilled totally and eternally.

Soli Deo Gloria.

ISAIAH 52: THE IDENTITY AND MINISTRY OF THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

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Of paramount importance within the latter sections of the book of Isaiah is identifying the Servant of the LORD and comprehending the nature of His ministry. This paper seeks to unfold Isaiah 52 as the necessary context that informs the content of Isaiah 53:1–12, which is often seen as the lynchpin for understanding the identity and ministry of the Servant. This article shows that as one considers the identity and ministry of the Servant, the list of possible referents is narrowed to a single person, the God-Man Jesus Christ. This narrowing takes place in a variety of ways: through the marvelous deliverance achieved by the Servant, the Servant's close relationship with Yahweh, the profound suffering to be endured by the Servant, and the Servant's ultimate subjugation of His enemies.

* * * * *

Introduction

The final servant song of Isaiah (Isa 52:13–53:12) is arguably the most contentious chapter in the Old Testament regarding the identity of the Messiah. While evangelical Christians affirm that the text unequivocally pertains to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, this interpretation has garnered criticism, particularly within Rabbinic Judaism.¹ In light of this ongoing dispute, the goal of this article is to show that the

¹ Rabbinic Jewish commentators are divided between those who teach that the servant of the LORD is the Messiah (who will come in the future, though who is not Jesus) and those, like Rashi and his followers, who believe that the servant of the LORD is a reference to the righteous ones among the people of Israel. Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel from the sixteenth century notes that there were many who held the opinion of Yonatan ben Uzziel (from the first century AD). The Book of Zohar, associated with Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai from the second century or with a Sephardic rabbi from the 13th century, indicates a reference to the Messiah (Vol. II, Rib A). The Babylonian Talmud attributes Isaiah 53 to the Messiah

Servant of the LORD must be the Messiah. However, rather than analyzing Isaiah 53, this study examines Isaiah 52:8–15, with a view to show that these verses set up the context for the work and the identity of the Messiah. Isaiah 52:8–15 demonstrates that the work of the Messiah is in fact the work of God; that the Messiah must be a divine person; and that the only person who has lived up to the description of the Servant of the LORD is the God-Man, Jesus, who has already come in His suffering and who is yet to come in His glory. Thus, this study will be divided into these four sections, each of which builds the case that the Messiah is the person of Jesus Christ:

- A. The Power of God behind the Identity and Ministry of the Servant of the LORD (vv. 8–12)
- B. The Divine and Human Identity of the Servant of the LORD (v. 13)
- C. The Ministry of the Servant of the LORD in His Suffering—First Coming (v. 14)
- D. The Ministry of the Servant of the LORD in His Glory—Second Coming (v. 15)

The Power of God behind the Identity and Ministry of the Servant of the LORD

Isaiah 52:8–12 unfolds the Servant’s identity and ministry by describing a deliverance that is achievable only by the direct involvement of God, and one that is akin to the first Exodus.² To convey these aspects of deliverance, the prophet Isaiah compares it to two major events in Israel’s past. The first one is the critical end of Moses’s song in Deuteronomy 32:43 (cf. Isa 52:8–9), which shows how Israel and the Gentiles join to worship God together; and the second is the exodus event in Exodus 12–14 (esp. Ex. 13:21–14:19; cf. Isa 52:10–12), which in effect casts the deliverance described in Isaiah 52:10–12 as the second exodus.³ Whereas the first exodus was done by God to free the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, the second exodus will free humankind from the slavery of sin. By drawing on pivotal moments in history for the nation, Isaiah argues that such a salvation can be accomplished only by the direct involvement of God and not by any mere will of man. If it required God to deliver the people from a human king like Pharaoh, all the more does it require God to deliver

(Sanhedrin 92b). In the Midrash Tanchuma 1:2 it is said: “... Rabbi Tanchuma says: There is no man who is said here but Moshiah ben David who is said: The Book of the Rolls attributes Isaiah 53 verse 13 to the ‘Messianic King.’” The sage Yefet Ben Ali Halevi from the tenth century claims that this opinion was dominant in Judaism in the tenth century. Rabbi Tuvia ben Eliezer (in the Midrash “Lekach Tov,” Psikta Zotra) joins this opinion on Isaiah 53:13. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Maimonides, also attributes Isaiah 53 (Igeret Teiman) to the Messiah but not to Jesus (see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Prophecies in the Tanach* [Jerusalem: Yanets, 2009], 163–71). For the opposing viewpoint amongst the Rabbis, see Menachem Cohen, ed., *Mikraot Gedolot: Isaiah* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 2003), 332. The major Jewish rabbis (e.g., Rabbi David Kimkhi, Rabbi Avraham Even Ezra, Rabbi Yosef Kara, Rabbi Isaiah Miterani, and Rabbi Yosef Kaspi) believe that the Servant of the LORD is not Jesus.

² Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, NAC 15B (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 427; J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 424; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 372.

³ Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham, *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Text* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 119–20, 122–24.

humankind from the dominion of Satan and from slavery to sin. Thus, this text unequivocally shows that only a messenger acting on behalf of and one who is sustained by God would be able to achieve this deliverance. At the same time, this portrayal of the Servant serves to set up for the more direct depiction of the Servant's deity in the subsequent passages. In Isaiah 52:8–12, however, the two analogies demonstrate that God Himself is behind the work of deliverance achieved by the Servant.

First Analogy: Isaiah 52:8–9 with Deuteronomy 32:43

In Isaiah 52:8, the prophet Isaiah uses words and content that Moses utilized in the last part of the song in Deuteronomy 32:43. The similar words are: יְהַדְּרוּ יְרֵגְלוּ (“together they sing for joy”) in Isaiah 52:8 and הִרְגִּינוּ גוֹיִם עִמּוֹ (“Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people”) in Deuteronomy 32:43. As the verb “rejoice, sing for joy” רָנַן connects the two texts, Isaiah envisions a time of great rejoicing in the future in which Israelites and Gentiles will shout loudly together, rejoicing in God's salvation. The original context in Moses's song is God's salvation of the people of Israel and of all the nations in the Last Days (see Deut 31:29). Isaiah recapitulates this theme in Isaiah 52:10 by predicting the coming of God's salvation “in the sight of all the nations” לְעֵינֵי כָל-הַגּוֹיִם (Isa 52:10; cf. Deut 32:43). The description of this salvation in conjunction with the experience of “sight” (לִרְאוֹ and לְעֵינֵי) should not be overlooked, for Isaiah had just described the sight of God Himself returning to Zion in Isaiah 52:8: כִּי עֵינֵי בְּעֵינֵי יִרְאוּ בְּשׁוּב יְהוָה צִיּוֹן “For they will see with their own eyes when Yahweh returns to Zion” (LSB). In other words, this manner of salvation discussed in Deuteronomy 32:43 and elaborated on by Isaiah 52:8–10 is possible only if God is directly involved; therefore, since God achieves this through His Servant, it becomes clear that God Himself is acting through the Servant.

In further support of this connection between Isaiah 52:8–9 and Deuteronomy 32:43 is Paul's writing in Romans 15:7–13. Paul understood the magnitude of this salvation very well when he exclaimed that Israel and the Gentiles will rejoice together. In Romans 15:7–13, Paul celebrates the idea of saved Jews and Gentiles serving the Lord Jesus together, and he quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 to make this point.⁴ Paul understands that God fulfilled Moses' and Isaiah's hope of salvation for Israel and for the nations through the Lord Jesus (cf. also Heb 1:2). The significance of this is that the very work that Jesus did in accomplishing the deliverance of Jews and Gentiles was sustained by and the very work of God (John 10:37–38; 14:10–11). Therefore, Paul saw the work of the Servant to be the work of God Himself (Rom 15:8).

In contrast to this assessment, rabbinic Jewish commentators offer their own interpretation of Deuteronomy 32:43—that the Gentiles will praise the Jewish nation itself, *not* that the Gentiles will worship God *with* the Jewish nation. For example, representing a standard Jewish interpretation, Rashi (an influential medieval rabbi), writes: “The Gentiles will praise the Jewish nation for trusting God through all their hardships.”⁵ Similarly, Ḥayyim ben Moshe ibn Attar (“Or Hachaim” 1696–1743) declares: “The Gentiles will praise the people of Israel, as they witness God's care for

⁴ Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 48.

⁵ Shraga Gotlieb and Haim Zvi Eizenbach, eds. *Habahir, Mikraot Gedolot: Deuteronomy* (Jerusalem: Leshem, 1996), 418.

them, delivering them from their enemies.”⁶ While the grammar of Deuteronomy 32:43 is difficult, the immediate context of the song strongly contends that the nations are called to praise God along *with* Israel, rather than that the nations praise Israel itself.⁷ First, in the immediate context of 32:43, it is God who saves Israel, and therefore it is God who deserves praise. Second, in the preceding context in 32:39–42, God repeatedly reiterates that it is He who proactively achieves the deliverance for Israel, therefore, it is God who deserves praise. Finally, in the broader context of 32:1–38, God in fact rebukes Israel for forsaking Him; therefore, it would be unbecoming to respond by praising Israel (32:1–42). In effect, the context of the song does not sustain the notion that God would call the nations to praise Israel in 32:43. In addition to this, as noted above, Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:43 in Romans 15:10 to declare that the nations are called to rejoice along with Israel, not that the nations will praise Israel. In effect, the best reading of this passage is that Israel and the nations worship God together. While this idea may seem incredible—especially since the nations had oppressed Israel so much (Deut 32:21–27)—the fact that this will become reality suggests that God Himself would have to be involved in this feat. Thus, this act of bringing Israel and the nations together in Deuteronomy 32:43 is necessarily the work of God.

Second Analogy: Isaiah 52:10–12 with Exodus 13:14 and 14:20

Isaiah’s joy does not end in Isaiah 52:8–9, however, but continues to its peak in verses 10–12, which communicates the second analogy by way of the Exodus event. In Isaiah 52:10–12, Isaiah forms a connection between the deliverance of the first Exodus and the deliverance that he describes in chapter 52 by employing language that was used in the Exodus event. First, Isaiah uses an anthropomorphism through the term “arm” זְרוֹעַ (Isa 52:10). This term “arm” is particular in the Pentateuch in that in almost every reference, when this term is applied to God, the Exodus deliverance by God is in the foreground (cf. Exo 6:6; 15:16; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 26:8; 26:8; but see the exception in Deut 33:27). Additionally, the combination of “arm” זְרוֹעַ with the adjective “holy” קֹדֶשׁ is rare in the Old Testament. This pairing occurs only one other time, where it is linked with the right hand of God, a metaphor that is prominent in Moses’s song of victory after the Exodus (Psa 98:1; cf. Exo 15:6, 12). The point is significant: the arm of God that delivered Israel in the first exodus is the very same arm of God that will deliver according to Isaiah 52. Second, the deliverance that Isaiah projects is one in which God’s presence is positionally located before and after the nation. God leads them out, “going before them” הִלְךְ לְפָנֶיכֶם יְהוָה (Isa 52:12; cf. Exo 13:21 הִלְךְ לְפָנֶיחֶם). However, at the same time, God defends the rear guard, traveling behind the nation, as Isaiah says, “the God of Israel *will be* your rear guard” וַיִּצְטַדְּקֶם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Isa 52:12; cf. Exo 14:19 וַיִּצְטַדְּקֶם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). In this way, the image runs parallel to the first exodus in which God’s presence, through the pillar of cloud, went before and behind the nation.

⁶ Gotlieb and Eizenbach, *Habahir*, 418.

⁷ See Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 425; Michael A. Grisanti, “Deuteronomy,” in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 794.

Analysis of these links suggests that Isaiah is impressing exodus imagery onto his prediction of the future deliverance achieved by the Servant. The implication of this link is that, as God was the one who led the people of Israel out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt, so will God be the one who will deliver His people and humankind from the bondage of sin. This message in Isaiah 52:8–12 is the context upon which Isaiah builds as he develops his portrayal of the identity and the ministry of the Servant in verses 13–15. If it required God to deliver the people from a human king like Pharaoh, all the more so would it require God to deliver humankind from the dominion of Satan, from slavery to sin.⁸ However, in the subsequent description of the Servant, Isaiah goes further and begins to use language that ultimately equates the Servant with Yahweh Himself.

The Divine and Human Identity of the Servant of the LORD

Isaiah begins his depiction of the Servant by pointing to His identity and demonstrating his inextricable association with Yahweh Himself. This association with Yahweh occurs in three parts: the introductory exclamation (“Behold” הִנֵּה), the surety of God’s accomplished purpose (“my Servant shall act wisely” יִשְׁכַּל עַבְדִּי), and the adjective and verb combination that describes the Servant (“high and lifted up, and shall be exalted” יָרִים וְנִשָּׂא וְנִגְבָּה מְאֹד).

Commencing the fourth servant song is the particle הִנֵּה “Behold.” By using this word at the outset of the verse to introduce the Servant, Isaiah makes a link to Isaiah 52:6 in which the speaker is Yahweh: “Therefore, my people shall know my name. Therefore, on that day, they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am [הִנְנִי].” J. A. Motyer explains the importance and purpose of the use of this word here as follows:

The הִנֵּה (*hinneh* [“Behold my Servant”]) has a threefold function: (i) By beginning this Song with *hinneh avdi*, Isaiah brings to a rounded climax the revelation of the Servant which began with *hen avdi* עַבְדִּי in 42:1. (ii) The Command to “Behold” concludes the series of commands which began at 51:1; the Servant is the awaited explanation of the predicted universal salvation with all its related blessings. (iii) *hinneh* הִנֵּה makes a contextual link with “Behold me!” in 52:6. The Lord there promised action on behalf of his people in which he would be personally present, and this was followed by his personal coming to Zion (8) after he had bared his arm in salvation (10). It is in the Servant that the Lord fulfills these promises.⁹

In other words, besides the climactic nature of the presentation of the servant, an important function of הִנֵּה (*hinneh*) is to show that the identity of the Servant is closely associated with Yahweh Himself.

In addition to the particle הִנֵּה, Isaiah highlights the identity of the Servant by announcing his successful ministry using the verb יִשְׁכַּל “will act wisely” or “prosper” (cf. Deut 29:8),¹⁰ which shows that Yahweh will successfully achieve His will

⁸ Satterthwaite, Hess, and Wenham, *The Lord's Anointed*, 124–25.

⁹ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 424.

¹⁰ “שָׁכַל,” *HALOT*, 3:1329.

through the Servant. John N. Oswalt describes in detail the meaning of יִשְׁכִּיל: "... the text is not saying that the Servant will merely be a wise man. Even more so, it is not saying that the Servant will be a rich man. Rather, it is saying that He will both know and do the right things in order to accomplish the purpose for which He was called (Isa 42:1; 49:2–3; 50:7–9)."¹¹ Oswalt also connects Isaiah 52:13 to Jeremiah 23:5 where the same verb יִשְׁכִּיל "act wisely, prosper" is used of the Davidic Messiah, who is called the Branch. In light of these references and the text of Isaiah 53, the Servant's ability to perform God's will perfectly further points to His distinctly close association with Yahweh Himself, inasmuch as the Servant's level of success is reserved only for a divine person.

This unique association of the Servant with Yahweh is developed even further when the Servant is described with words that are otherwise reserved for Yahweh (or the wicked human who aspires to displace Yahweh, which the servant clearly is not in this passage)—יָרִים וְנִשָּׂא וְגָבַהּ מְאֹד "high," "lifted up," and "greatly exalted." In order to determine with absolute certainty the identity of the Servant of the LORD (a crucial factor in understanding the Book of Isaiah),¹² a proper understanding of the statement "he shall be *high* and *lifted up*, and shall be *exalted*" must be grasped. A brief study of this language within Isaiah will show that these words can describe only God or the utterly wicked who aspire to usurp God's throne; therefore, since the Servant of the LORD is presented as God's servant (rather than one who seeks to usurp God), the use of this language to describe the Servant indicates that the Servant is in fact God.

In Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah the prophet describes a scene in which he saw God sitting on a throne that was high and lifted up (רָם וְנִשָּׂא). John the apostle notes in John 12:38–41 that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus, thus equating Jesus with God. In Isaiah 2:2, it is written: "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills [וְנִשָּׂא מִגְּבֻעוֹת]; and all the nations shall flow to it." The prophet Isaiah uses language in this passage that demonstrates the superiority of God. The house of God in Jerusalem will stand at the top of the hills (a sign of supremacy and sovereignty), and all the nations will come up to bow before Him and hear from Him. In Isaiah 57:15, the prophet emphasizes God's ability to revive and heal by indicating His rank and supremacy:

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up [רָם וְנִשָּׂא *ram ve-nissa*], who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Thus, the words "high and lifted up" are used to describe the superior status of God. Each of these passages that describe God or His dwelling place (Isa 2:2; 6:1; 57:15) illuminate the concept of "high and lifted up" as being reserved for the divine.

In contrast to these verses, the prophet mentions in other passages situations in which a human being, or even the devil himself, tried to take God's place in pride, or

¹¹ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 378.

¹² See Oswalt, 54–60.

to become equal to God. Isaiah 2:12 states: “For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up [עַל כָּל־גִּבְעָה וְגָרַם וְעַל כָּל־נִשְׁאָא] and it shall be brought low.” One will notice the connection to Isaiah 2:2 in that the one who attempts to arrive at the place reserved for God will be punished. Similarly, Isaiah 57:7 records: “On a high and lofty mountain [הַר־גִּבְהַּ וְנִשְׂאָא] you have set your bed, and there you went up to offer sacrifice.” The reference here is to mountain peaks and hills, which were considered to be a dwelling place of gods, where idolaters used to build their temples and altars. God’s complaint to His people is that they adopted the idolatry of the Gentiles and worshiped various objects as though they were gods. As Gary Smith writes, “By using this same terminology, which rightly belongs only to God, the prophet has emphasized the fact that these places of worship are a blatant rejection of God’s high-and-lifted-up status.”¹³ In other words, the people replaced the high-and-lifted-up God with their own false worship that they deemed to be high-and-lifted-up.

Furthermore, the punishment for those who try to take God’s status to themselves is extremely grave.¹⁴ Consider, for example, God’s condemnation of the pride of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:12–15:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; [אָרְיִים כְּסִאִי] I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

In this passage, the prophet describes the future punishment of the king of Babylon. He was proud and arrogant, and his manner resembled another ancient figure called *Hillel ben Shachar*, that is, Lucifer, or the devil himself.¹⁵ Since the king of Babylon adopted the characteristics of the devil (i.e., he wanted to be God, and declared himself as such), Isaiah described the fate of the devil as the same fate awaiting the king of Babylon as well.

As a whole, the passages considered above demonstrate clearly that God alone is worthy of sitting on a high and lofty throne.¹⁶ Any attempt by a human being or any other entity to take God’s place or to consider himself equal would be considered rebellion and war against God and the height of arrogance (Prov 30:13). Abner Chou builds a connection between the king who is promised to come and rule the world from Zion, the Servant of the LORD, and Yahweh Himself, stating:

The human king accomplishes everything in the vision that is ascribed to YHWH’s reign on the throne.... The connection between the two heightens

¹³ Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 553.

¹⁴ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 125–26.

¹⁵ Oswalt, 320–21.

¹⁶ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 428; John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 472.

when we consider how the Servant accomplishes those tasks related to the vision that YHWH reserves for himself. The Servant saves the people, though YHWH is the only savior (43:11). The Servant makes intercession (53:12), even when God states that no one could or did but him (59:16). Moreover, the Servant displays God's glory (49:3), even though God will not share it with another (42:8). Could all this indicate that YHWH and the Servant are one and the same?... How does all of this fit together? Does the Servant represent God in accomplishing the theology of the vision, or is he YHWH himself? Isaiah resolves all of these questions in the final song of Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. The prophet lays it before us plainly. The one who is “high and lifted up” (52:13 רם ונישא, cf. 6:1) in the vision is none other than the Servant. He is the Lord on the throne.¹⁷

The point becomes clear: when the words רם ונישא occur, they are reserved for God alone. Thus, when Isaiah unequivocally attributes them to the Servant (Isa 52:13), he is attributing divinity itself to the Servant. In light of these facts, it can be stated that in Isaiah 52:13, the Servant of the LORD is the LORD God. The implication of this is significant. Since Yahweh, the speaker in the passage, declares that the servant of the LORD is His servant, and since the Servant Himself is a divine being, we must conclude that there is a plurality of persons in the Godhead.

The Ministry of the Servant of the LORD in His Suffering—First Coming

Following the description of the identity of the Messiah in 52:1–12, and 52:13, Isaiah proceeds to verses 14–15, detailing the ministry of the Servant of the LORD. Considering these verses with the New Testament in mind, we can say that in v. 14, Isaiah refers to Jesus' first appearance as Messiah (in the first century AD), and in v. 15, Isaiah refers to the end of days when Jesus returns to earth to establish his earthly kingdom.

In the context of Isaiah 52, then, verse 14 clearly refers to the suffering ministry of the Servant. The suffering of the Messiah is magnified in this verse by both its physical description and the visceral response of witnesses to its graphic nature. From the physical standpoint, though the Servant is High and lifted up in the sight of God in v. 13, this same Servant is disfigured (משהת) and worthless in the view of many people in v. 14. The people were startled, amazed, and shocked by the sight of “You,” that is, the Servant (שְׁמִי—Ezek 12:19–20; 26,16; 27:35; 28:19). In fact, “You” (“Servant of the LORD” עֶבֶד יְהוָה) seemed so horrid that he was unworthy to be called “a man.”¹⁸

Moreover, this horrific nature of what the Messiah would endure is illuminated by the response of those around Him (שְׁמִי).¹⁹ Describing this term further in 52:14, Motyer writes:

¹⁷ Abner Chou, *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 79–80.

¹⁸ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch, Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 307.

¹⁹ HALOT translates שְׁמִי as follows: “In the face of persecution or the conviction of a crime, to shudder, be appalled” (“מִשְׁחֵתִי,” HALOT, 2:644).

חַמּוּם is a very strong word used of places devastated (49:8, 19) and a bereaved wife (54:1). *At him* is 'at you.' Such a sudden change to the second person makes difficulties for translators but is an established feature of Hebrew 'poetry and high style ... a primitive stylistic device' (cf. 54:1); hence, 'at you—one whose appearance ... and whose form ...'. So disfigured is 'such a disfigurement.'²⁰

Jewish commentator Amos Khacham writes: "שממו" means that the people were astonished from the devastated appearance of the Servant."²¹ Khacham uses 1 Kings 9:8 as an example to illustrate this point: "Jerusalem and the temple will be devastated and lose their beauty. Both will lose their former beauty and looks. All who will look at the city and temple will be astonished [כְּלִי-עֵבֶר עָלָיו יִשְׂמוּ]." For the witness of the suffering servant to have the same response as those who witnessed the desolation of the temple magnifies the Servant's travail. Explaining this suffering of the Servant further, Motyer writes:

The thought is not that the Servant suffered more than any other individual or more than other humans but that he experienced disfigurement "from [being] an individual ... from [belonging with] humankind," so that those who saw him stepped back in horror not only saying "Is this the Servant?" but "Is this human?"²²

The suffering of the Servant, in other words, will be horrific.

In considering this description of the suffering of the Servant, Arnold Fruchtenbaum applies this to Jesus, and writes the following:

The Messiah will suffer and will be humiliated before he will be high and lifted up. His body will be mutilated so that he will not be seen as a man. Jesus was brought to this condition after being stricken by the Roman soldiers.... When Pilate said: "Here is the man!" (John 19:5), Jesus's body was shuddered so much that he hardly had the form of a man.²³

Inasmuch as the suffering of the Servant was so vicious, the prophet Isaiah exclaims that many people will be astonished at Him. Thus, both the physical description of the suffering and the astonishment of the people in response to the suffering testify to the horrific extent of the suffering of the Servant.

This does raise an important question, though: Who are the "many" in v. 14 who will be astonished? Motyer writes: "*Many* is a theological term within the Song, referring to the whole company for whose benefit the Servant acts (15a, 11c, 12ae)" (cf. Mark 10:45).²⁴ Also analyzing this question, Gary V. Smith states:

²⁰ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 425.

²¹ Amos Khacham, *Isaiah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1984), 567.

²² Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 425.

²³ Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Prophecies*, 72.

²⁴ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 425.

The subject of the verb in the first line of v. 14 is “the many,” a reference to an unspecified group of people, possibly some of the same people mentioned later in 52:15 and 53:11–12. They appear to be the people who observe the Servant, but it is unclear if this term should be limited exclusively to the “many nations” of 52:15 (possibly the nations and coastlands of 42:1–4; 49:1), or if it also includes the people of Israel. Since the Servant did not justify only the sins of the foreign nations (the “many” in 53:11) or bear the sins of just the foreign nations (the “many” in 53:12), it is apparent that the many should encompass everyone, including Israel.²⁵

In other words, everyone will be astonished at the suffering of the Servant—the people of Israel and the gentile nations of the world (cf. Rev 1:7).

In contrast to this conclusion, however, some Jewish authors contend that “the many” refers solely to the Gentile nations, and *not* to the people of Israel. Shmuel Akhituv, an Israeli scholar, for example, writes: “The *Many* are the many nations mentioned in 52:15; 53:11–12 and Daniel 11:33–34; 12:3, 10.”²⁶ In addition to this, various ancient rabbis held a similar position, evidently because they contended that the Servant of the LORD was referring to the people of Israel, and therefore Israel could not be part of the many. *Mikraot Gedolot: Haketer*, a Jewish volume that collects commentary of major rabbis (Rashi, Radak, Raaba, Yoseph Kara, Eliezer from Belganzi, Isaiah Miterani and Yoseph Kaspi), shows how many of the rabbis state that the Servant of the LORD refers to the people of Israel, who suffer for the sins of the rest of the nations.²⁷ In effect, the rabbis who embraced this view concluded that the “many” in 52:14 cannot be a reference to Israel, but must be speaking about the Gentile nations.

Contrary to this view, however, the text of Isaiah favors the interpretation that “the many” includes both the people of Israel and the Gentiles. Since Isaiah 52:13 demonstrates the divinity of the Servant of the Lord, the “many” cannot be the people of Israel, for Scripture is clear—including Isaiah 53:6—that all are equally sinners and in a need for atonement of their sins (see Ecc 7:20 Rom 3:23). Therefore, it is necessary to conclude that the “many” refers to all peoples—Jews and Gentiles.

This suffering of the Servant is not without meaning or effectiveness, however. Throughout chapter 53, the prophet Isaiah explains in great detail the reason for which the Servant of the LORD suffered. His suffering and His wounds are the price He carried for sinners (53:5–6). The Servant of the LORD pays with His blood and His life the punishment that men deserve. He carries upon Himself the price to restore peace with God (53:5). The Servant of the LORD is the Lamb of God that serves as the perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of all people (John 1:29). He is the Servant of the LORD who suffers the wrath of God. He bears the curse on the tree destined for sinners (1 Pet 2:21–25). By faith in Him, sinners are able to be forgiven and to have His righteousness as their righteousness (Gen 15:6; Rom 10:9–10; 2 Cor 5:21). Since all men are sinners (Isa 53:6; Rom 3:23), all men are in need of a Savior. As Isaiah presents the Messiah, who is depicted to be the Savior of sinners, Isaiah shows that

²⁵ Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 437.

²⁶ Shmuel Akhituv, *Mikra Lelsrael, Isaiah 49–66*, vol. 2 (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2008), 364.

²⁷ Cohen, *Mikraot Gedolot: Isaiah*, 334–36.

the Servant of the LORD must be equal to God (52:13), so that He may be fit to be a perfect and sinless sin-offering; and by being a perfect sin-offering, He is able to remove the curse of sin from those who believe in Him (53:10–12), and thus to restore the fellowship of people with God.

The Servant of the LORD, that is, Jesus the Messiah, fulfilled this ministry when He first came into the world through the virgin birth—thus being sinless and able to function as a perfect sacrifice—and when He ascended to the cross to die as the Lamb of God (Matt. 26:63; 27:12, 14; 1 Pet 2:21–25; Phil 2:7–11).²⁸ In the end, His identity as the Messiah and His ministry of suffering and salvation were decisively confirmed through His resurrection three days after His death (Dan 9:26–27; John 20–21; Rom 1:1–7; 1 Cor 15).

The Ministry of the Servant of the LORD in His Glory—Second Coming

When one approaches the final part of Isaiah 52, the timing of the events in relation to the ministry of the Servant must be considered. The reference to kings speaks of the ultimate exaltation of the Servant at the second coming, when the kings of the world will be subjugated (Isa 52:15; cf. Isa. 49; and cf. Rom 15:21). In His first appearance, Christ came to be the atonement for our sins, and at His return, He will come to remove His enemies from the face of the earth and establish His earthly kingdom. Isaiah's contemporaries did not know exactly the period between the appearances of the Messiah. For them, it was like looking sideways at two mountain peaks. The observer sees two peaks but does not know the distance between them.²⁹ For example, in Luke 4:16 and following, Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1 and half of verse 2, and then He said that it had come to fulfillment. However, Jesus did not go on to quote Isaiah's prophecy in v. 3, but stopped before the words: "and a day of vengeance." Jesus did not cite v. 3 because that verse awaits a future fulfillment.³⁰ God's judgment upon those who reject His salvation will be fulfilled in the future when Jesus Christ returns to earth.³¹

Similar is the case in Isaiah 52:15, where we see a prophecy that refers to the second coming of the Messiah in which He will exhibit immense power and dominion over His enemies, and astonish many people, right after seeing a prophecy of the first coming in v. 14. Analyzing Isaiah 52:15, Gary V. Smith notes that the prophecy refers to the work of the Messiah at a later time, and that this work would stun many people.³² To make this point, he writes: "The 'so' clause opening v. 15 gives a comparative contrast [cf., Ex 1:12] with the reaction of the same group [many nations] at an earlier time and then at a later time."³³ In other words, as people were

²⁸ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1984), 1107. Walvoord and Zuck refer 52:13 to Jesus' First Advent and the glory in v. 15 to His Second Advent.

²⁹ In his comments on Zechariah 9:9–10, MacArthur writes: "OT prophets didn't see the great time period between the two comings. The church age was a 'mystery' hidden from them (cf. Eph 3:1–9; Col 1:27)." John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Word, 1997), 1350. See MacArthur's comments on Luke 4:16–21 in *ibid.*, 1520.

³⁰ Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 214.

³¹ See Charles L. Feinberg, *God Remembers: A Study of Zechariah* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1979), 129.

³² Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 438.

³³ *Ibid.*

astonished by the Servant's disfigurement in v. 14, they will likewise be astonished and overwhelmed by His power in the future.

Critical to understanding the ministry of the Messiah in v. 15 includes grasping the sense of an action expressed in the verb *yazzeḥ* (יָזַח), which generally refers to shaking, trembling, and sprinkling, but which has stimulated much discussion by commentators in regard to its specific meaning.³⁴ While some take this verb to refer to sprinkling with blood as an act of sacrifice, and others consider this verb to refer to literally startling others,³⁵ I would like to propose that the verb *yazzeḥ* (יָזַח) intends to convey the Messiah's judgment of the wicked at the end of time.

On the one hand, some hold that this verb refers to the sprinkling of blood as an act of sacrifice because this verb is frequently used in Leviticus of sprinkling blood on the altar (Lev 4:6; 5:9; 8:11, 30; 13:7; 16:14, 19).³⁶ Without explicitly stating that this verb signifies sacrifice, John Goldingay does write: "'Spatter' (*nāzāh*) denotes the splashing of blood, oil, or water over people or objects in connection with their dedication or cleansing (e.g. Lev 8:10–11, 30, where the object is 'oil of anointing'—the word in v. 14)."³⁷ Arguably, the implications of this would be that the Servant was acting as a priest on behalf of sinners for their sins. Thus, this view suggests that the Messiah achieves a sacrificial and a priestly act in carrying out the action conveyed by the verb *yazzeḥ* (יָזַח).³⁸

On the other hand, the verb *yazzeḥ* (יָזַח) could also be taken to refer to a literal startling of people by the servant. Indeed, most Rabbinic Jewish commentators explain the verb to mean that the servant "will cause the nations to jump out of amazement and surprise."³⁹ Notably, the Septuagint translates the word in that fashion.⁴⁰ Amos Khacham in his commentary to the book of Isaiah writes: "יָזַח in light of the immediate context means 'will jump', that is, the servant [The people of Israel] will cause the *nations* to tremble, to shake."⁴¹ In other words, as he explains further, "The [Gentile] nations will shut their mouth and be amazed in light of the success of the people of Israel in the future."⁴² Furthermore, *Mikraot Gedolot: Peer Vehadar* combines the commentary on Isaiah 52:15 by a few major medieval rabbis, and articulates this same notion, that the verb expresses a literal reaction of shock. Thus, Rabbi David Kimhi (Radak) writes: "The servant's speaking is as sprinkling. The nations will be amazed and literally jump on their feet due to the greatness of the people of Israel in the future."⁴³ In a similar vein, Rashi writes: "In the future, Israel's

³⁴ "יָזַח," BDB, 633.

³⁵ Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III, David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 804; and see Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 439.

³⁶ Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 439.

³⁷ John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, ed. G. I. Davies and G. N. Stanton, International Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 294; and cf. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 439.

³⁸ See MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 824; see also Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 380; Grogan, "Isaiah," 804.

³⁹ See S. L. Gordon, *Isaiah 40–66* (Tel Aviv: Galil, 1992), 98.

⁴⁰ "θαυμάζω," BDAG, 444.

⁴¹ Khacham, *Isaiah*, 567–68.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Mikraot Gedolot, Peer Vehadar: Isaiah*, Czucker Edition (Jerusalem: Mekor HaSfarim, 1998), 726–29.

hand will overcome the idol worshippers who hurt it in the past and will scatter them. The nations will shut their mouth from amazement, because they will see the glory [of Israel] which was not told to them before nor had they seen anything like it."⁴⁴ In the end, according to this view, the verb *yazzeḥ* (יָצַח) refers to a literal reaction of astonishment on the part of many people.

In contrast to the two views above, I would like to submit that when we consider the appearance of this verb in Isaiah 52:15 in light of its comparable appearance in 63:1–6, we will see that this verb refers specifically to the Messiah's judgment of the wicked at the end of time. While the meaning of the verb in Isaiah 52:15 is "sprinkle," the essential question to be answered is: Whose blood is being sprinkled? Understanding the relationship between 63:1–6 and 52:15 will aid in answering this question.

In 63:1–6, Isaiah describes the Messiah's judgment of the nations (v. 4, "day of vengeance," cf. 61:2),⁴⁵ and using metaphorical words (vv. 2–4), Isaiah states the following line in reference to the Messiah:

Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.

The specific words to be understood are in 63:3, namely, "... lifeblood spattered..." (וַיִּצְחֶם). The verb יָצַח (*yez*) in 63:3 and the verb יָצַח in 52:15 both come from the same root נָצַח (*nazah*).⁴⁶ In 63:6, the noun יָצַח (*yez*) is specifically used to describe the sprinkling and shuddering of the blood of God's enemies that will be fulfilled during Christ's return (cf. Rev 19:13–15); and the noun נִצְחָם (*nitskham*) means their blood, since life is in the blood (Lev 17:11). Explaining Isaiah 63:1–6 in some detail, Motyer writes:

The Marcher is now close enough for the watchers to observe that the "sharp" colour is not a colour at all but a stain, as in treading grapes. The Anointed One takes up their simile (2). There has indeed been a winepress—but of wrath; and a vintage to tread—but of people; with a consequent redness—but of blood! *No-one*: as in 59:16 (cf. 50:2); solitariness is stressed. *From the nations* ("peoples"): as we would say "no-one in the whole wide world"; but also "peoples" looks back to 62:10e. The recipients of the benefit (62:11–12) had no part in reaching their blessedness. The whole work of judgment (3), like the whole work of salvation (5), is exclusively, uniquely, individually his. The vigour of his action (*trampled ... trod*) is matched by the rage that motivated it: *anger* (*'ap*) is the snort of an anger personally felt; *wrath* (*ḥēmā*) is the heat and intensity of anger. *Blood* (*nēsah*), only here and in verse 6, is "spurting blood"; *stained* (*gā'al*) equally means "pollute". As to the fact, his clothing was stained; as to effect,

⁴⁴ *Mikraot Gedolot, Peer Vehadar: Isaiah, 726–29.*

⁴⁵ Grogan, "Isaiah," 338.

⁴⁶ These two passages (52:15; 63:1–6) are the only passages to contain נָצַח in the entirety of the prophetic corpus.

it was polluted: his task involved exposing himself to “defilement”, yet he returned with his *righteousness* intact.⁴⁷

The context of the passage, then, is the judgment of the wicked by the powerful hand of the Messiah. In agreement with this perspective, Smith indicates further that Isaiah 63:1–6 deals with the judgment and pouring of the blood of Christ’s opponents, and writes:

The second term for “trampling” (*rāmas*) is not usually used for crushing grapes but is found when one describes the destruction of people (16:4; 26:6; 28:3; 2 Kings 7:17, 20). As God trampled down these grapes (the nations), the “juice” (*nēṣaḥ*, NIV “blood”) from the fruit splattered on the garment of the one doing the treading. As a result of this vigorous activity, “I stained, defiled” my garments.⁴⁸

The metaphor of the winepress of God’s wrath is frequent in the prophets and comes into view through the previous revelation that 63:1–6 rests upon. For example, Keil and Delitzsch connect יַזְזֵחַ (*yazzeḥ*) in Isaiah 52:15 to יַזְזֵחַ in 63:1–6 writing the following:

It was to the nations themselves that the knife was applied. They were cut off like grapes and put into the wine-press (cf. Joel 4:13); and this heroic figure, of which there was no longer any doubt that it was Jehovah Himself, had trodden them down in the impulse and strength of His wrath. The red upon the clothes was the life-blood of the nations, which had spirted upon them, and with which, as he trode this wine-press, he had soiled all His garments... (see at 52:15).⁴⁹

More generally, the theme of God defeating His enemies under His feet appears elsewhere in the line of Biblical theology to represent the judgment of God’s enemies. For example, Kaiser connects Psalms 110:5–7 and 2:5 (which relates to Isa 52:15) and writes:

The Messiah will carry out the judgment against the nations that he has threatened (cf. Ps 72:2, 9–11) to such an extent that the earth will be heaped with the dead corpses. This will be God’s final showdown with the forces of wickedness and evil. That is exactly what was promised in Genesis 3:15 and in Numbers 24:16–19: the serpent (i.e., the devil himself), along with the king of all the earth, will have their heads shattered and crushed.⁵⁰

Kaiser’s words, moreover, echo the text of Revelation 19:11–21 and Isaiah 63:1–6. In addition, Rydelnik directly connects Psalm 110:5–6 with Isaiah 63:1–6 and writes:

⁴⁷ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 435.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 659–60.

⁴⁹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 446–47; but see also their discussion on יַזְזֵחַ in Isaiah 52:15 (502–503).

⁵⁰ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 95–96. See also James Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10 no. 2 (2006): 40.

In 110:5–6 the divine Messiah is graphically depicted defeating all those who have rebelled against God. He crushes kings and rulers, judges the people (nations), and heaps up corpses, indicating that no rebels will escape. The violence of the imagery recalls Isaiah 63:1–6, where the Messianic King tramples through the winepress of the nations, staining His garments with blood and crushing nations in His anger.⁵¹

In other words, the context of Isaiah 63:3 is that of the ultimate judgment which the Messiah will execute against the wicked. This would also, then, set the context of the verb יָזַח (*yazzeh*) in Isaiah 63:3 to be severe judgment by the hands of God Himself.

In light of the above analysis, inasmuch as there are only two appearances of the verb יָזַח (*yazzeh*) in Isaiah—in Isaiah 63:3 and in Isaiah 52:15—I suggest that the main thrust of the verb יָזַח (*yazzeh*) in Isaiah 52:15 relates to the sprinkling of the blood, but particularly of the world's leaders and their armies at the time of judgment executed by the Messiah. The future subjugation of these kings that follows (Isa 52:15; cf. Isa 49) suggests that this sprinkling is a future event.

According to this view, the statement in Isaiah 52:15 “so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings...” יְזַח בְּנֵי גוֹיִם רַבִּים עָלָיו יִקְפְּצוּ מִלְּקִים פִּיָּהֶם would be understood to describe Christ's return just before the final judgment (Isa 63:1–6; 59:15–20; Psa 2; 110:5–6; Zech 12:2–9; 14:2–3, 12–14; Rev 19:11–21). At that time, the enemies of the Messiah will certainly shut their mouth as they realize that the one they rejected, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the Messiah who is at His second coming returning in glory (Zech 14:4; Rev 19:11–13). However, all this will end with Christ judging all those who reject Him and their blood being spilled.⁵² In effect, the verb יָזַח (*yazzeh*) in Isaiah 52:15 would be understood to the sprinkling of the blood of the world's leaders and their armies at the time of judgment carried out by the Messiah in the end times.

In light of the similar context of several passages (Isa 52:15 and 63:1–6 [cf. 61:2b]; Is 59:15–20; Ps 110:4–5; Zech 12:2–14; 14:2–9; Rev 19:11–19), which all describe the events related to the Messiah's return (second coming), Isaiah 52:15 would contribute to this image of Christ judging the rebellious and remove from the earth all those who rejected Him. Cleansing the earth from all those who reject God's appointed Savior is an act of purification (Mal 3:1–3; Zech 13:1–6), while all those who will remain will be those who “Kiss the Son” (Psa 2).

Conclusion

A study of Isaiah 52:1–15 yields the result that the Servant of the LORD is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Since the Servant of the LORD is ultimately equated with Yahweh Himself, these verses demonstrate the plurality of the Godhead (Trinity). At His first coming, the Messiah Jesus came to suffer on the Cross (Mark 10:45). At His second coming, the Messiah Jesus will come to accomplish judgment and final

⁵¹ Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum, eds. *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 684.

⁵² See Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman,” 40. It is worth noting that at Christ's return, the believing remnant will be under severe persecution of the Anti-Christ (Rev 12:13–18). Thus, the leaders who are facing Christ at His return more likely represent the unsaved enemies of Christ who came against the land of Israel (Rev 15:14–20). Therefore, their end will be their judgment (Rev 19:11–21).

victory (Gen 3:15; Psa 110; 1 Cor 15:21–26). With this, Isaiah 52 achieves the narrowing of the servant's identity. Only Jesus Christ fulfilled the deliverance envisioned by the second exodus language that precedes the fourth servant song (Isa 52:1–12). Only Jesus Christ can be identified as the Servant and as God, as the New Testament further specifies (Isa 52:13; John 12:41). Only Jesus Christ underwent the profound suffering to be endured by the Servant (Isa 52:14). Only Jesus Christ will subjugate His enemies in the eschaton (Isa 52:15). Only Jesus, in effect, can be and indeed is the Servant of the LORD, the Messiah.

REVIEWS

Charlie Trimm. *The Destruction of the Canaanites: God, Genocide, and Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022. 136 pp., \$14.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Distinguished Research Professor of Old Testament, The Master’s Seminary.

Charlie Trimm is associate professor of biblical and theological studies at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. He has authored numerous articles on Old Testament (OT) warfare and OT theology, as well as several other topics.

Trimm’s goal in *The Destruction of the Canaanites: God, Genocide, and Biblical Interpretation* is not to provide the “correct answer” to the ethical problem of the destruction of the Canaanites in Israel’s conquest of Canaan. Drawing on his abundant work on warfare in the ancient Near East (ANE), Trimm summarizes various proposed solutions to this ethical dilemma and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each view.

The first section of this volume provides important background for the main issue: a survey of warfare in the ANE, the history and definition of genocide, and the identity of the Canaanites. Part two surveys four main ways scholars have dealt with this vexing question. He presents the four views according to the way they deal with one of four key propositions—Trimm’s starting points for his overview. He grants that all four of these propositions cannot be true at the same time. He does not present them as his core beliefs about the issue, but as a way to understand better the basic approach of each main view. They provide a way to categorize correctly key aspects of each view. Each “view” is not monolithic. Although the proponents of each view share the way they explain or reject a given proposition, various details of the way they articulate the specifics of their view may vary.

Here are those propositions: 1) God is good and compassionate, 2) the OT is a faithful record of God’s dealings with humanity and favorably portrays YHWH’s actions, 3) the OT describes events that are similar to genocide, and 4) mass killings are always evil. Each view denies one of those starting points. The four chapters of this section summarize and briefly analyze the main views regarding this issue in modern scholarship.

Chapter four, “Reevaluating God,” embraces the notion that God is not good. Trimm observes that for proponents of this view, divine violence in the OT leads them to reject the whole package of monotheism. This may seem like an easy and simple solution to a challenging dilemma, but in reality, it takes away any moral compass or theological foundation for adherents to this option.

Chapter five, “Reevaluating the OT,” believes that the OT is not a faithful record. Proponents of this view grant that the OT records numerous examples of extreme divine violence, but they suggest that there is no need for us to regard those texts as authoritative. They reject the idea that God actually demanded that violence. They seek to keep the OT as part of the Bible but reject the parts they find offensive. They either reject the historicity of various events or regard those passages as later additions to Scripture. Many proponents of this view introduce a massive character difference between the OT God and the NT God—Jesus Christ.

Chapter six, “Reevaluating the Interpretation of the OT,” proposes that the OT does not describe anything like a genocide. The “troublesome” events of the OT were not as violent as they appear in biblical passages. Adherents of this position minimize the alleged “genocide” through various means, suggesting that there was no racial hatred involved, and they claim that the texts described nonlethal actions—that they are metaphors for desirable conduct, or that the genocide passages are hyperbolic.

Chapter seven, “Reevaluating Violence in the OT,” contends that the mass killing of the Canaanites was permitted for that one point in history primarily. Proponents of this main view share a confidence in God’s Word, accept the biblical narratives as reliable, and regard God as the one and only true God. However, they resolve the ethical tensions caused by these narratives in diverse ways. Some scholars provide reasons why this treatment of the Canaanites was divinely justified. In the end, God sanctioning it resolves the moral/ethical question. Others present the genocide statements as hyperbolic, redefine the meaning of the Hebrew term *herem*, or minimize the wickedness of the Canaanites.

In his conclusion, Trimm recognizes the frustration his approach (no clear recommended view) might cause readers. He does state that he “emphatically rejects” the first view. He suggests that readers who struggle with the angst of this painful issue turn to lament—bring their heart struggle to God (e.g., Psa 13). His hope is that as with laments in the Psalms, we would grow in our trust of God even if we do not totally understand the issue. Trimm explains that he took this approach in this volume to help people think more deeply about the problem of genocide in the OT.

Trimm’s relatively small volume has various strengths. He writes with clarity, and its brevity and focus make its summary of key issues less daunting. His four propositions help the reader grasp the core issue for each main view. His abundant footnotes and good bibliography make the volume a solid resource for engaging scholarship on this ethical dilemma. His good indices of authors, subjects, and Scripture references add to the value of the book.

His brevity and focus serve as part of the book’s weakness as well. I often desired fuller explanation of strengths and weaknesses of each main view. The absence of any clear interpretive recommendations can cause the reader some frustration. Regardless, if someone wanted an accessible and clear presentation of key views on this vexing ethical issue, Trimm’s volume provides a great overview and introduction to the key interpretive debates.

Craig A. Evans and David Mishkin, eds. *A Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019. 354pp., \$24.95 Paperback.

Reviewed by Iosif J. Zhakevich, Associate Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

A Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith is a collection of fifty-two articles on Jewish-Christian matters, written by twenty-four authors, and edited by Craig A. Evans of Houston Baptist University in Texas and David Mishkin of Israel College of the Bible in Netanya, Israel. The names of certain authors will immediately be familiar, such as Craig A. Evans and David Mishkin, along with George H. Guthrie, Larry W. Hurtado, Andreas J. Köstenberger, Scot McKnight, Brian J. Kinzel, and others. The book is divided into four major parts and thirteen chapters (each consisting of a different number of articles), which are worth listing here to give a sense of the content of the book:

Part I: The Soil

- Chapter 1: God's Plan for Israel
- Chapter 2: God's Plan for the Nations
- Chapter 3: Messianic Prophecies
- Chapter 4: Appointed Times
- Chapter 5: Tabernacle and Temple

Part II: The Roots

- Chapter 6: The Jewish World of Jesus
- Chapter 7: The Jewish Life and Identity of Jesus
- Chapter 8: The Jewish Teachings of Jesus

Part III: The Trunk

- Chapter 9: The Jewish Disciples
- Chapter 10: The Jewish Paul
- Chapter 11: The Jewish Message: Resurrection

Part IV: The Branches

- Chapter 12: The Parting of the Ways
- Chapter 13: The Mending of the Ways

This volume, as a matter of fact, functions as a companion to a course on the Jewish Roots of Christianity at Israel College of the Bible in Netanya, Israel; however, as the editors indicate, the book is also intended to be “a stand-alone work and a scholarly contribution to the discussion” (see acknowledgments).

Overall, the book serves as a general introduction—“a comprehensive yet concise primer” (4)—to a broad variety of topics that intend to help the student of the Bible to understand the New Testament and the Old Testament, and specifically their revelation of the Messiah Jesus, in light of His Jewish background. The importance of this pursuit is articulated by David Mishkin in the very first sentences of the book. Inasmuch as Jesus was a Jew, explains Mishkin, “any discussion about Jesus of Nazareth must not only include but highlight the fact that he cannot be understood apart from his Jewish context” (1).

The primary approach implemented in this work to demonstrating the Jewish background of the Christian faith is showing how the New Testament is grounded in the Old Testament and how the Old Testament serves as the foundation of the New Testament. While not intending to speak specifically to the method of the authors in this work, Evans nonetheless articulates this principle well in his discussion on the New Testament use of the Old Testament: “Nothing demonstrates more deeply the Jewish roots of the Christian movement than the observation of the ubiquity of Old Testament passages, language, and themes in the writings that make up Christian Scripture. The Old Testament is quoted or alluded to in every New Testament book except Philemon and 2 and 3 John, three brief personal letters” (65). In reading this statement, however, the reader can hardly overlook the irony in the fact that Evans refers to the New Testament as “Christian Scripture” when the overall goal of the book is to demonstrate that the Old and the New Testaments are thoroughly Jewish in nature.

In seeking to demonstrate the Jewish roots of Christianity, the authors discuss foundational topics such as the covenants (9–33), the messianic prophecies (50–71), selected aspects of the life of Jesus (151–199), the life of Paul (226–249), and the subject of resurrection (250–272). However, there is a determined effort to present these topics in light of their roots within the Old Testament Scriptures.

In addition, this work gives significant attention to topics that are related to the specific elements of the culture and customs of Israel as presented in the Old Testament. For example, the work devotes a chapter to the appointed times, that is, Sabbath, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Shavuot, Fall Feasts, Purim, and Hanukkah (71–95); the work discusses atonement in the Old Testament, salvation in the Old Testament, and the relationship of Jesus to the Tabernacle/Temple (96–111); and this work addresses the historical event referred to as “the parting of the ways” (275–294).

While this work is tremendously helpful in its discussion of the multifarious topics related to the Old Testament foundation of the New Testament, the readers will no doubt at times find themselves disagreeing with some of the conclusions of the authors in this book. As an example, Evans considers the use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 and arrives at the following conclusion: “Matthew has not exegeted Hosea 11:1 in a strict linguistic, contextual, and historical sense. His is an exegesis of typology and ‘resignification,’ that is, finding a new element or dimension in the older tradition. This aspect of his exegesis conforms completely with what is observed in the Jewish exegesis of his day. Matthew has (re)interpreted Scripture in light of what God has accomplished (or ‘fulfilled’) in his Messiah” (67). In stating that Matthew “(re)interpreted Scripture” or that Matthew’s interpretation of Hosea 11:1 is not strictly “contextual,” Evans proposes a conclusion that would be unacceptable to those who hold to a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic.

On the other hand, one could not agree more with Evans’ conclusion about Jesus’ fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, especially in His crucifixion. In discussing the rejection of Jesus, Evans states that this rejection was a necessary fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies by Jesus: “It is not until Jesus is rejected, despite his signs, that the Scriptures are said to be ‘fulfilled.’ It is in Jesus’ rejection and crucifixion that the Scriptures find their ultimate fulfillment. Far from proving that Jesus did not fulfill the Scriptures, and so could not be Israel’s Messiah, Jewish unbelief and

obduracy specifically fulfilled Isaiah 53:1 ('Lord, who believed...?') and Isaiah 6:10 ('He blinded their eyes...'). With each action taken against Jesus, including the treachery of Judas, Scripture is fulfilled" (68). This conclusion essentially and helpfully contends that since Jesus suffered, He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies; and the contrary implication is then true by logical deduction—if Jesus had not suffered in the way that He did, then He would not have fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.

The final sentences in Evans' essay on New Testament use of the Old Testament captures well the essence of this entire work: "The vital importance of Jewish Scripture for Jesus and the early Christians is amply demonstrated by how frequently virtually every writing in the New Testament appeals to this Scripture. In short, there would be no New Testament without Israel's ancient and sacred writings. This fact above all else demonstrates how deeply rooted Jesus and his followers were in Jewish faith and Scripture" (70–71). As a whole, this work is a beneficial introduction—just as it claims to be (4)—for layperson, student, pastor, and scholar into matters concerning the "Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith."

R. L. Dabney. *Our Comfort in Dying: Civil War Sermons by R. L. Dabney, Stonewall Jackson's Chief of Staff*. Transcribed and Edited by Jonathan W. Peters. Destin, FL: Sola Fide Publications, 2021. 346 pp., \$16.00 Paperback.

Reviewed by William Varner, The Master's University

When I was asked by the editor of this notable volume to offer a review, I gladly accepted his invitation and looked forward to receiving the finished work. Since I was trained in a Presbyterian related institution (Faith Theological Seminary) and was familiar with American Reformed theology, I was very aware of R. L. Dabney's *Systematic Theology* (1887), republished by Banner of Truth Trust in 2002. I also had often heard that Dabney served as a chaplain to Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson in the American Civil War. Therefore, both because of his theology and also because of his role in the war, I anticipated with enthusiasm this volume. The following will also explain my particular personal enthusiasm.

I grew up in the South without any real devotion to my Civil War heritage, even though my state of South Carolina was the first to secede from the Union. When I relocated to the North, never to permanently return to the South, I was surprised at how many people queried me about the Civil War, and I honestly did not have much of a response. So I developed a hobby of reading about the Civil War, or "The War Between the States," as it is often called in the South. I amassed a rather significant library about the War in general and the Southern role in particular. In the decade of the 1980's, I even became a Civil War re-enactor, brigading in both a blue and a gray uniform at such important battlefields as Antietam, Gettysburg, and Fredericksburg. People thought that I would re-enact as a chaplain, but I refused to do so because I wanted to get a feel of what life was like "in the trenches"—so to speak—for "Johnny Reb" and "Billy Yank."

This collection of sermons by R. L. Dabney has long been hidden in the dusty shelves of university libraries. We owe a thanks to the editor for selecting some of

the best homiletical examples from Dabney's ministry to the troops and re-issuing them, some for the very first time! One of the most valuable aspects of this book is the excellent "Introduction" (20–37) in which the editor summarizes Dabney's role and ministry, not only during the war but before and after it as well. He is careful to mention Jackson's deep appreciation of Dabney as his staff chaplain. The collection is an essential read that places twenty sermons of Dabney and four special appendices within the historical context of his significant life and ministry. Peters has included all the main events in the life of the subject, but omits mention of one aspect of his life and writing to which we will return after celebrating the special feature of this volume, the sermons that comprise the substance of the book.

Peters includes not only the text of each sermon, but also the date it was originally preached, the location where it was preached, and any special circumstances surrounding it. The first five sermons were delivered before the beginning of the war in the spring of 1861. The following fifteen sermons were originally delivered during the war, the last one dated in February 1865 in the pulpit of a Presbyterian Church in Petersburg, Virginia. Students of the conflict will remember that Petersburg, along with its neighbor Richmond, were the last stands of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia as these two cities were besieged for many months by U. S. Grant's Union forces. Realizing this adds a bit of intense drama to the context in which these sermons were delivered. These messages were possibly the last sermons that many of these soldiers would ever hear!

What was a sermon of R. L. Dabney like? First of all, contrary to what one might assume, the messages were not extremely long. Though they were shorter than typical church sermons, Dabney did not waste words. A later comment in the book estimates that each sermon was usually not longer than thirty minutes in length. That is quite short compared to other sermons delivered in churches by nineteenth century Protestant clergymen.

Secondly, the type of the sermons, probably consistent with what Dabney would deliver elsewhere, would be that they were "textual" in nature. I mean by that term that they were based on a text of only one verse, or two at the most. We could compare that type of sermon with what could be called "expository" sermons, those being an exposition of a paragraph or longer text. If the reader is familiar with the sermons of Dabney's contemporary across the Atlantic, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, then one will recognize that the thousands of Spurgeon's sermons were almost always "textual" in nature. For example, only one of Dabney's sermons is from a text longer than two verses. It is sermon 19, titled "Faith," and the text is Romans 10:6–10. Interestingly, and to illustrate my above point, the subtitle of this excellent homily is "An Expository Sermon"!

Thirdly, Dabney's method of expounding a text was to ask a question about its meaning and then to offer a series of answers to that question. Let us illustrate what that means from the very first sermon in the collection. This message was titled "Getting without Paying: A Sermon on Exodus 20:15": "Thou shalt not steal." To summarize his points, Dabney elaborated upon the meaning of theft as using false weights and measures; laboring unfaithfully for an employer; being fraudulent in bargains; availing oneself of legal advantages; taking liberties with the public purse; heedless contracting of debts; and gambling. The last manifestation of stealing as gambling must have been one that Dabney had often witnessed among the soldiers because he elaborates on it

extensively (53–56). His later sermon on “Profaning God’s Name” from Exodus 20:9 is handled in a similar fashion. We profane His name by needless oath-taking; by irreverent uses of God’s Word; by heartless and formal worship; by irreverence in the sacraments; by exclamations and imprecations; by perjury; by false swearing; and by profane conversation (67–74). One can only imagine that this type of preaching is similar to Dabney’s teaching of systematic theology, namely by elaborating on theological propositions about God and His truths.

Furthermore, the editor has done the twenty-first century reader a service by providing a glossary of words and expressions that might need clarification (304–17). The reader might be able to discern the meaning of these terms from the context, but all should be thankful for his explaining further such terms as “accordant” as agreeing; “actuated” as motivated; “anodyne” as drug; and “aspirant” as seeker, to mention only a few.

The sermons are timely, in light of the war; applicational and not heady nor overly theoretical; and are warmly devotional and related to life. While not being morbid, they were certainly very appropriate to soldiers facing the realities of life and of death. The style of the sermons may take some getting used to, but Robert Dabney’s heart as a pastor and not just as a military officer comes through clearly in each of them.

In some ways, I am hesitant to offer any concluding critique because of my obvious delight in this collection of sermons. My critique is not so much in what is included in Dabney’s words as in what is omitted! None of the thirteen effusive endorsements (5–9) mention a “dark” side of Dabney. In his listing of Dabney’s books written after the war (36), Peters omits one of his most widely read volumes. I refer to the following: *A Defence of Virginia and Through Her, of the South in Recent and Pending Contests Against the Sectional Party*; 1867; repr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1991. Peters does include it in his bibliography (341). This book was originally published in 1867 and was by far his most widely read work at the time. In this work, Dabney not only defends the Southern departure from the Union, but also defends the Southern practice of slavery.

I will only mention a few items of significance from this volume. In 1867, the Synod of Virginia was considering whether or not black American men should be ordained to the full work of the gospel ministry. Dabney gave an impassioned address to the Synod on the “Ecclesiastical Equality of Negroes,” contending with his fellow presbyters not to approve it. In the address, he claims that a providential, “insuperable difference of race, made by God and not by man, and of character and social condition, makes it plainly impossible for a black man to teach and rule white Christians to edification” (201). For Dabney, the issue was quite crucial, and he expressed himself fervently about it (see 205 and 208).

It is quite significant and unfortunate that the theologian Dabney takes a theological approach to this issue and appeals to Providence as one of the justifications for slavery. In other words, he argued that slavery was where those who were black found themselves, so in slavery they should have accepted His providential dealings. Apart from that theological argument, however, the above quotes also point out the personal prejudice that Dabney had against black Americans, revealing that he considered them as inferior human beings.

Despite his categorically unbiblical perspective on the dignity of human beings, I still deeply appreciate Dabney's sermons and his theological writings. I also can still appreciate Martin Luther despite his virulent antisemitism, as I also can still appreciate John Calvin despite his unwillingness to oppose the burning of Servetus. My concluding suggestion is that readers still should benefit from this collection of sermons. Abraham and David had evident faults, and God did not cancel them from His program of redemption.

Stephen J. Nichols. *R. C. Sproul: A Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021. 400pp. \$34.99 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Brad Pixley, Senior Pastor, Anza Avenue Baptist Church.

A biography can be tediously boring or delightfully encouraging and challenging. Readers know this and authors should. Thankfully, Stephen Nichols seems to be keenly aware of the two possibilities, and he has stepped up to the challenge and given the Christian world a riveting account of the life of Dr. R. C. Sproul.

Stephen J. Nichols is the president of Reformation Bible College and chief academic officer of Ligonier Ministries. In addition to being one of R. C. Sproul's closest colleagues, Nichols is a highly accomplished author. He has published twenty-five books, including biographies on Jonathan Edwards (*Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*; P&R Publishing, 2001), Martin Luther (*Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*; P&R Publishing, 2002), J. Gresham Machen (*J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*; P&R Publishing, 2004), and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, for the World*; Crossway, 2013). Thus, Nichols is uniquely positioned to offer his readers an amazingly candid account of Sproul's life.

The first four chapters of Nichols' work trace a clear chronology of Sproul's life starting with his heritage and childhood (chapter one) to his college years (chapter two), seminary training and early career as a pastor and college professor (chapter three), and the birth of the Ligonier Conference Center (chapter four). These chapters are filled with interesting facts about Sproul's life. Nichols gives a heart-wrenching account of the young R. C. helping take care of his invalid father. He complements this with many fun tidbits of information that reveal details about R. C. that the reader may never have otherwise known. A few of these details include R. C.'s favorite sport and sports teams, the odd location where many of his earliest books were written, and how his smoking habit was received by his colleagues who held a more fundamentalist view of the Christian life. These specifics, however, give way to the more serious matters that R. C. Sproul was part of as an influential member of the conservative Evangelical community.

In chapter five, Nichols recounts R. C.'s key role in the battle for the inerrancy of Scripture. It was R. C. who championed the cause by gathering numerous key evangelical leaders in Chicago in October 1978 to form the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI). Furthermore, it was R. C. who penned the resultant document titled, "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," which stands today, nearly forty-four years later, as the "line in the sand" for classic inerrancy (131).

Chapter six is a very helpful section on R. C.'s view of apologetics and how he became a staunch advocate of the Classical approach to apologetics. In chapters seven and eight, Nichols explains Sproul's overwhelming compulsion to expound the character of God in his life and work, as well as R. C.'s fascination with the life and work of Martin Luther.

Nichols returns to a chronological approach to R. C.'s life in the final chapters of his book. In chapters nine and ten, he recounts the circumstances that prompted the Sprouls to relocate Ligonier Ministries to Orlando, Florida and the subsequent establishment of Reformation Bible College. And, finally, in chapter eleven, Nichols records with deep reverence the last days and passing of Dr. R. C. Sproul.

The seven appendices are a rich treasure trove of material about R. C. Sproul, including manuscripts of the last two sermons he preached, a timeline of his life, and copious bibliographical data of R. C.'s writings, conference themes, lecture titles, teaching series, and titles of sermons he preached at St. Andrew's Chapel. This material alone is worth the price of the book to any student or follower of Dr. R. C. Sproul.

While Nichols' work contains many strengths, two stand out among the rest. First, Nichols provides accounts of numerous, well-documented personal conversations he had with Dr. Sproul. This adds to the warm, affectionate tone of Nichols' writing. Second, Nichols cites detailed references to Dr. Sproul's writings. This is of immense value to the reader, for it brings one to more information about a topic than the author could have ever covered in his book. In contrast to these strengths, the only weakness one might consider is the fact that Dr. Sproul's son, R. C. Sproul Jr., is mentioned only once in the book, and that reference is to the son's resignation from the board of Ligonier Ministries, following an egregious sin issue that became publicly known. While this information could have contributed to a more complete picture of Dr. Sproul's ministry, the reader understands that this would have simultaneously resulted in a diversion from the focus on Dr. Sproul's life proper.

In conclusion, Stephen J. Nichols' biography of Dr. R. C. Sproul is an excellent account of an extraordinary life and ministry, the likes of which the Christian world witnesses only on rare occasions.