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**Editorial**

There are many wonderful characteristics of Yahweh, the God of Israel, and we would also readily agree that these can be seen in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. A disciple will immediately think of qualities such as compassion, patience, kindness, empathy, forgiveness and love. These qualities cannot be diminished. The EJournal would be described as ‘intellectual’, so the question arises as to what intellectual characteristics God displays.

This question might be a shock for many of a practical way of thinking. But here are some intellectual characteristics of God based solely on describing his inspired written output—Scripture: concern for knowledge; interest in words; love of language, word-play, pun; love of literary structures; a desire to express yourself in writing; concern for truth and a passion for opposing false thinking; persuading and using rhetoric; a love of poetry; an interest in writing history; an interest in Law and legal precision; and an interest in social and political commentary (prophecy).

We might seek to be like God in terms of qualities like compassion, patience, kindness, empathy, forgiveness and love; this goal cannot be gainsaid. Equally, we may be overlooking the intellectual qualities that God has displayed about himself in his writing. No doubt we often fail in all our endeavours to align our character with that of God, but we should not overlook anything that he has revealed about himself.

For example, speakers most often give positive practical exhortation; they do not often give **close textual reading** as a form of exhortation. Paying close attention to the text manifests a love for the Word and reflects the love that God evidently has for his Word as shown in the character of the writing. Speakers who only give positive practical exhortation may justify this decision by saying that exhortations should not be ‘academic’. However, anyone who reads academic writing will know that this justification is misguided. Close reading of the text and paying attention to the detail of the text, moving from exegesis to exposition, is not ‘academic’. The spiritual self-justification “exhortation should only be practical” can be a species of ‘justification by works’ because it is centred on human social life and those priorities. It manifests a disdain for the actual writing and intellectual qualities of God.

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This issue begins a new year for the EJournal and we must sadly report the loss of Bro. Adey from the editorial panel for health reasons (with our thanks to him for his help over the last few years). We have co-opted Bro. Levin and Bro. Cox to act as a review panel for material in respect of Hebrew and Greek. The ‘panel’ is part of the evolution of the EJournal to include reviewers who have particular areas of expertise.

As a further evolutionary step for the EJournal, it is proposed that the ‘Subscriptions Page’ of the website be amended from,

“The EJournal is also available free to members of other churches who recognise the monotheistic (non-Trinitarian) and Jewish Christian emphasis of the gospel.”

to…

“The EJournal is also available free to members of other churches who realise that it is produced by a community that preaches the monotheistic (non-Trinitarian) and Jewish Christian emphasis of the gospel.”

The effect of this change is to open up the subscriber list (albeit, still with a password). In the last six years we have had a few requests from non-Christadelphians to subscribe and we have let a handful do so because, on further enquiry, they were either ‘interested friends’ or held the same faith within a different church. Because the EJournal does not advertise or actively seek subscribers (even among its home community), relying on word of mouth, and people coming across the website, it is not envisaged that this change will add many subscribers.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, it does allow the EJournal to re-position itself more generally as an open journal for the Biblical Unitarian and Abrahamic gospel, and make itself more readily available to communities and individuals that recognize that the Truth lies in the pages of Scripture rather than in the creeds of men.

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What you think of Christ is central to the difference between Jew, Christian and Muslim. It is fundamental. The same point also applies within Christianity and the difference between Trinitarian and Biblical Unitarian views of Christ. Within Christianity, the difference raises the question of truth and tolerance: is God tolerant of false thinking when it is a structural choice in life (such as what framework of worship to choose – Trinitarian or Biblical Unitarian); or does he require instead a continuing intellectual behaviour that is inherently true—a thinking that there is one God the Father?

**Articles**

**Natural Disasters: The Cost of Creation**

**J. Burke**

**Introduction**

Since the earliest Christian commentators, two main approaches have traditionally been taken to the problem of natural disasters: they are divine punishments for sin, or they are the product of a fallen world:

When such evils as disease or natural disasters are discussed, they are viewed as **God’s just judgment against sin** (Tertullian’s “penal sin”), or as “ambassadors” which direct us toward God (as such, Basil the Great prefers not to call them evils), **or as the result of the fallen world order**.[[2]](#footnote-2) [[3]](#footnote-3)

The latter remains popular in mainstream theology,[[4]](#footnote-4) but both these approaches fail under scrutiny. The most simplistic view of natural disasters (a punishment for sin), finds only superficial support in Scripture. It is true that there are numerous cases of God using natural disasters as a punishment, either on His covenant community or on those responsible to His commandments; God Himself takes responsibility them (Isaiah 45:7).

However, in Luke 13:1-5 Christ teaches that not all who perish (either at the hands of others or by disaster), are being punished for sin, and in Matt 5:44-45 he teaches that God provides environmental benefits to both the just and the unjust. This shows natural disasters should not be interpreted simply as a punishment for sin, and we should appreciate that God has arranged certain natural weather patterns for the benefit even of the wicked. It is true to say that there is some connection to be made between human sin and natural disasters insofar as sinful human activity may disrupt existing ecosystems, but these disasters are not caused by God:

Some floods are ‘freaks’ of nature, but increasingly it is evident **that so-called ‘natural’ disasters are directly the result of man’s mis-management of the earth’s economy**, his pollution of rivers and seas, his exploitation of forests and farmland.[[5]](#footnote-5)

As for the view that natural disasters are defects resulting from the fall which will be ‘fixed up’ in the Kingdom age, Scripture never characterizes them either as the product of the fall[[6]](#footnote-6) or as flaws in the natural creation to be ‘corrected’ at Christ’s return. On the contrary, the storms, lightning, and hail which heralded destruction for an Israelite farmer are presented to Job as superlative expressions of God’s power and glory (Job 38:24-37). The *ad hoc* nature of this argument is revealed when it is asked what the earth looked like before the fall, and how this can be reconciled with the earth’s own account of itself; there is no evidence for a post-fall renovation of the entire planet in the 4.5 billion years of the earth’s geological record.

Rather than post-fall defects, natural disasters are the direct products of laws which God instituted at the beginning of creation to govern the various dynamic features of the earth. The rain, the wind, and the actions of the sun on the earth are all ordained by God (Gen 8:22; Ps 74:16-17; 104:10-13, 19-23; Ecc 1:6-7; Isa 55:10); natural disasters are simply extraordinary demonstrations of these systems acting precisely as originally designed:

One must make room for **the natural processes God has set in place**. For the most part it would seem that He allows these processesto operate according to **fixed patterns and laws (Jer. 33:25) that modern meteorology can identify and explain**.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This places such disasters in perspective; they are natural expressions of the way God has designed the earth to function, and are typically not referred to as ‘disasters’ except when they involve the loss of human and animal life, and destruction of human property.

**The best of all possible worlds?**

Could God have created a world without evil, or at least without natural disasters? A common evangelical response is that He did:

*Couldn’t God have created a world without evil?* The short answer is: **yes, God could have created such a world. And in fact, we already know of such a world:** **it’s called Heaven**. And we know the Bible says it is God’s will that every person join Him in Heaven.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Such heaven-going is clearly incompatible with Scripture, and solves nothing. An alternative response, represented most famously in “Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal”[[9]](#footnote-9) (1710), by Gottfried Leibniz, has been to argue that since God is omnipotent He must necessarily have had unhindered capacity to create any world He chose, and that since God is perfect He must necessarily have created the best of all worlds from which He had to choose.

On what basis can this theory be advanced? Here Leibniz and his followers typically took refuge in an argument from the inscrutability of God’s infinite knowledge. God alone understands the basis of the choice He made, and He alone can see and comprehend the manner in which the evil of the world is balanced by the greater good. This approach finds no support from Scripture, and is completely without empirical evidence.

The solution advanced in this article is that natural disasters are the ‘cost of creation’; they are the price which God necessarily paid in order to create the world which was optimal for His purpose. This argument contradicts Leibniz by denying that God’s omnipotence gave Him a choice of an infinite number of worlds which could have been created. Rather, God’s own aims in creation restricted the number of possible created worlds to one specific form.

Additionally, this argument differs from Leibniz in that it does not view disasters only as sources of evil. On the contrary, it argues that these very events provide benefits which are essential to life on earth, despite the danger and destruction they also entail.

**The cost of creation: God constrained by His aims**

The concept of an omnipotent God being constrained in His choice of creation appears counter-intuitive until it is realized that God’s own purpose necessitated a specific kind of creation.

God intended the earth to be filled with life; Isaiah 45:18 says He ‘formed it to be inhabited'. In Gen 1:11-26, having filled the earth with plant and non-human animal life, God had not yet completed His work. It was only when man and woman were formed that God declared creation ‘very good’ (verse 31), and ceased.

Most importantly, Gen 1:26 tells us God formed a highly specific kind of life, a man and woman in His own image and likeness. The Hebrew here is typically understood as a reference to God deliberately creating individuals as His counterparts in some way; they correspond to Him at least in terms of their ability to reflect His thoughts and emotions, and communicate effectively with Him.

Many passages of Scripture (especially Heb 12:7-11), indicate God desired a parent-child relationship with these individuals, involving them learning through the natural process of hardships and discipline a father permits and exercises in order to develop optimally his children’s character. Adam and Eve’s testing in Genesis 3 supports this, also demonstrating God wished His children to be free moral agents developing their own consciences, as they chose to obey or disobey His commandments.

These passages identify the constraints operating on God’s choice of creation: a universe capable not only of supporting simple life, but of supporting complex, intelligent life; independent moral agents able to reflect His character, comprehend and communicate with Him, and develop their own conscience; children whose character would be developed by the challenge of struggle and discipline.

Such a form of life requires extremely specific environmental conditions, not only on a terrestrial scale, but on a cosmic scale. It has been argued by a number of scientists that intelligent life actually requires a universe with at least three dimensions, ordered as our universe is:

It seems clear that **life, at least as we know it, can exist only** in regions of space-time in which **three space and one time dimension are not curled up small**.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Hence intelligent life can arise only if gravity has the l/r or l/r2 form, and so, if gravity and dimensionality connect as Kant claimed, **intelligent life can exist only if space has two or three dimensions**.[[11]](#footnote-11)

More than three dimensions and gravitational forces would be inadequate for the solar systems necessary to support intelligent life.

If the universe were to hold more than three space dimensions, the gravitational force would not be such as to allow stable orbits of planets about a sun and the constant temperature required for life.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Less than three dimensions, and the neural and circulatory systems necessary specifically for human life, could not exist:

The end result of this complex network **is a nervous system that is sufficiently complex to support the existence of intelligent life**. However, had space possessed only two spatial dimensions, these complex neural **connections would have been impossible**, because any two non-parallel connections would have automatically crossed each other, thereby ruining the connection.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Three dimensions are also required for proper blood flow**, for had space possessed only two dimensions, venous blood would invariably have become intermingled with arterial blood, with catastrophic results for the body. It is clear, then, that **the existence of three spatial dimensions is absolutely mandatory for the proper functioning of both our minds and our bodies**.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Moving from the cosmological to the terrestrial scale, we find a significant range of additional factors necessary for the kind of intelligent life required by God’s purpose:

**Complex, multicellular life relies on too many planetary factors** – even after clearing all the chemical roadblocks – **to be common**. (For example, **a large moon** to stabilize the planetary axis tilt and **hence the seasons**, **a magnetic field to shield off radiation, plate tectonics to remix surface and ocean chemistry** that helps regulate CO2 levels, etc.).[[15]](#footnote-15)

The Earth benefits from the presence of **plate tectonics**, a process that acts like a global thermostat by reprocessing greenhouse gasses. Life on Earth benefits dramatically from a **single large moon that produces exceptional tides** and helps to stabilize the tilt of the Earth and the length of its days.[[16]](#footnote-16)

We must look beyond the mere presence of water to **the presence of volcanoes, plate tectonics and oxygen**.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Note in particular the following requirements for complex multi-cellular life; a single large moon, a magnetic field, volcanoes, and plate tectonics. All of them are necessary for the specific form of life required by God’s purpose, and yet all of them are significantly responsible for the earth’s natural disasters.

**The cost of creation: natural disasters essential to life**

Leibniz was wrong; constrained by His own purpose, God had in fact little choice when He created the universe. The form of life He required to fulfill His purpose necessitated an earth with specific systems responsible for the disasters which threaten and even destroy life. The disasters they cause are the inevitable ‘cost’ of their benefits; they promote, protect, and maintain life on our planet:

The more we understand the process of the world **scientifically**, the more it seems to be a package deal in which **processes interrelate in mutual entanglement**. The idea that it would be possible to create a world with all the nice features of this one and none of the nasty ones **seems more and more implausible** (Polkinghorne 1989, Chapter 5; Ruse 2011, Chapter 7).[[18]](#footnote-18)

Movement of the Earth’s liquid interior causes earthquakes and volcanoes, but also creates the magnetosphere, a magnetic field shielding life on Earth from destruction:

**Were it not for the two natural barriers that stand between the Sun and the surface of the earth, life itself would soon disappear**. These essential shields - t**he magnetosphere and just beneath it, the gaseous atmosphere of the Earth** - protect us from the full fury of the highly variable star with which we live. [[19]](#footnote-19)

Without the protection of the magnetosphere, **ionizing radiation would destroy all life exposed at the earth's surface**.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Volcanoes are part of the Earth’s carbon cycle, regulating temperature and carbon balance so life can survive and flourish:

“It is remarkable how exact the balance is between the carbon input from volcanoes and the output from rock weathering” said Dr Zeebe. “This suggests a natural thermostat which helps maintain climate stability.” The delicately balanced carbon thermostat has been a key factor in allowing liquid water, and life, to remain on Earth, he said.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**Volcanoes play a critical role in biogeochemical cycling**. It is fair to say, in fact, that Earth's life as we know it **might not exist without volcanic activity**.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Movement of the Earth’s tectonic plates creates earthquakes and tsunamis, but is also essential to life:

It is not the mountains as such that are so important to life on Earth, but the process that creates them: plate tectonics.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Thus, plate tectonics seems to be **a crucial requirement for any planet on which life can thrive**.[[24]](#footnote-24)

In addition, it causes the weathering of rocks which removes CO2 from the atmosphere, maintaining a life-promoting climate:

Weathering of silicate minerals also removes CO2 from the atmosphere. **Hence, carbon dioxide is “scrubbed” from the system**.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Tropical storms bring significant environmental benefits:

Increased rainfall in coastal areas from tropical cyclones, fixing of atmospheric nitrogen by thunderstorms, the germination of many native plant species resulting from bushfires and the maintenance of the fertility of the basin soils due to river flooding are some of the positive impact [sic] of extreme meteorological events.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**Like other hazards, tropical cyclones bring benefits as well as losses**. For example, there is a tendency for tropical cyclones **to end drought in Australia and elsewhere**.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Such storms also prevent large earthquakes by releasing plate tension in slow quakes:

The researchers speculate that the reason **devastating earthquakes rarely occur in eastern Taiwa**n is because the **slow quakes act as valves**, frequently releasing the stress along small sections of the fault, **eliminating the situation** where a long segment sustains continuous high stresses **until it ruptures in a single great earthquake**.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The moon’s tides play a vital role in the marine ecology, yet can combine with storm fronts or rain flooding to produce large scale floods. In 1988, 122,000 km2 in Bangladesh was flooded in less than 48 hours after the moon’s high tide combined with three to four days of rain.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The value of this approach to theodicy is becoming increasingly recognized. During a British TV programme in 2005[[30]](#footnote-30) former Dominican friar Mark Dowd asked Christian theologians to explain why God permits natural disasters. The answers used the argument from the ‘cost of creation’ principle discussed here. Comments made were the following:

If we didn't have a crust that moved, ultimately, with erosion, the whole surface of the planet would be basically smooth. … And so you could have simple forms of life, **but you certainly couldn't have complex animals like us**. …if there were no recycling of the crust, **basically the whole planet would become infertile after a certain period of time**. *Nancey Murphy (Fuller Theological Seminary)*

The hurricane that happened in New Orleans **was absolutely necessary in order to have heat exchange** ... from one part of the continent to the other, **otherwise the earth would not be habitable**.

*Friar George Coyne (Vatican Observatory)*

[*Dowd*: ‘But couldn’t a supreme intelligence have fashioned things according to entirely different laws of nature which would still allow for the evolution of complex human creatures with free will, like ourselves?’]

Even Dawkins, who is no friend of Christianity, would say there’s probably no other way by natural processes to have evolved creatures who have these capabilities.

*Robert Russell (Centre for Theology and Natural Sciences)*

**The Jacob Cycle**

**A. Perry**

**Introduction**

Story-cycles often display symmetry. We can distinguish two kinds of story-cycle in biblical narrative:

* story-cycles based around individuals
* story-cycles based around events

All that we mean by talking of a ‘story-cycle’ is that this is a *way* of grouping stories. The stories are independent stories that share something in common. For example, the stories that we have about Jacob are ‘independent’ in that they are from different stages in his life; but they go together in that they are about Jacob—they are a collection of stories told about Jacob.

**Jacob**

Take the case of Jacob. In one sense, the cycle of stories about Jacob begins with his birth and ends with his death. However, placing the various stories in a continuous sequence doesn’t produce an overall symmetry. It is only when Jacob moves centre-stage that we begin to see symmetries in the choice, arrangement and description of his history. It is only when Jacob moves centre-stage that we speak of a collection or cycle of Jacob stories.

Jacob is the son of Isaac, and the story of his birth is embedded in with the stories about Isaac. As such, it is a ‘barren birth’ story and follows a common biblical pattern. Immediately following the birth story, there is the story of Esau[[31]](#footnote-31) selling his birthright, some twenty years on. We might choose to include both of these two stories in our cycle of Jacob stories, but we are still very much in the middle of Isaac’s history, as is shown by the following account of Isaac and Abimelech, king of Gerar. Moreover, when we look for a pattern in the stories about Jacob, we find that a definite pattern begins with the later story of Jacob’s deception of Isaac. For these reasons, we suggest the cycle of Jacob’s stories begins at this later point.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The beginning of the story of Jacob starts in Genesis 27. We don’t know when the deception of Isaac occurred, because the narrative opens using a common starting phrase, ‘And it came to pass that when Isaac was old’ (v. 1). This phrase shifts our focus from the old generation to the new generation. Jacob and Esau are more than 40 (Gen 26:34), and Jacob moves to the centre-stage. In this way the narrator moves the story forward.

It is obvious that Jacob has moved centre-stage, because the next few chapters are dominated in one way or another by him. However, what we can miss in the excitement of the story is the symmetrical arrangement of the story elements. This symmetry marks out the beginning and end of the main story about Jacob, which concerns his conflict with Esau. It is not difficult to see why we have this symmetry—the denouement of the story is fixed by the way it began—Jacob deceived his father, and the consequences of that deception resulted in a particular kind of blessing and the wrath of Esau. So then, Esau’s anger and the terms of the blessing naturally fix the character of the story end - see Table I.

|  |  |
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| **Deception and Flight** | **Return and Dealings** |
| **Jacob the Lord** | **Esau the Lord** |
| **Blessing** (Gen 27:29,37) | **Reversal of Blessing** (Gen 32:4, 5, 18; 33:8, 13, 14(x2), 15) |
| A People serve thee (Gen 27:29) | Jacob the servant (Gen 33:5, 14) |
| Nations bow down to thee (Gen 27:29) | Jacob bows down (Gen 32:3) |
| Thy mother’s sons bow down (Gen 27:29) | The mothers and children bow down (Gen 33:7) |
| Taken away thy blessing (Gen 27:35-36) | Take...my blessing (Gen 33:11) |
| **Fear of Esau and flea from land** | **Fear of Esau but return to the land** |

 Table I: Jacob and Esau

Within this story, episodes from Jacob’s life are narrated. Again, there are symmetrical patterns, see Table II.

|  |
| --- |
| Hatred between Jacob and Esau |
| And Jacob went (Gen 28:10) | Jacob goes to Isaac (Gen 31:17-18) |
| Jacob’s Dream | Laban’s Dream (Gen 31:24) |
| Covenant with God of Bethel and stone pillar | Covenant with Laban and stone pillar (Gen 31:44-45) |
| And Jacob went on his journey Gen 29:1 | And Jacob went on his way (Gen 32:1) |
| Reconciliation between Jacob and Esau |

 Table II

This pattern is one where something happens on Jacob’s journey—his journey to Haran is in two steps, and his return home is in three steps—the extra step being taken up with his reconciliation with Esau. However, if we look at the story, not from the point of view of ‘what happens on the journey’, but from the perspective of its motifs, another pattern emerges.

Wages, sin (in the form of deception) and death[[33]](#footnote-33) (or the fear of death) characterize these episodes from the life of Jacob; and in the middle of this maelstrom, children are born. The pattern has a resonating typology; see below, Table III.

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| --- |
| Isaac, Canaan, Padan-aram, wife, children, people (Gen 28:1-3) |
|  Dream of **God of Bethel**—message (Gen 28:13, 19) |
|  Deception over **wages—**Leah |
|  Birth of Children |
|  Deception over **wages—**cattle |
|  Dream of **God of Bethel—**message (Gen 31:3, 11) |
| Isaac, Canaan, Padan-aram, wives, children, people (Gen 31:17-18; 32:7) |

 Table III

The repetition of the same words in Gen 31:17-18 that we find in Gen 28:1-3 shows that Jacob’s departure from Haran closes a part of his life which the narrator sees as beginning with his intention to leave Beersheba. The chiastic pattern reinforces this reading.

When we put the patterns from Table II and Table III together, we would lose the sense of pattern in Jacob’s stories because of the lack of a ‘fit’. We would fail to see how there are two patterns intersecting. Alternatively, we may see one of the patterns and force details into the pattern we that we have identified. We need instead to be sensitive to the overlapping and intersecting character of such biblical literary patterns. There is no simple A-B-C-D-D’-C’-B’-A’ pattern in the Jacob Cycle.

One final pattern in this cycle—a simple one—might be noted (see Table IV). Jacob experiences an angelic theophany during the flight to Haran, and he experiences an angelic theophany on his return home. These two encounters are clearly linked and centred on the re-iteration of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob.

It is also worth observing that the blessing which Isaac bestows on Jacob when he is deceived, is minor compared to the blessing that he bestows when he sends Jacob away to Haran. The Abrahamic promise is passed on *only when* Jacob is sent away. This promise is then confirmed in a theophany on the way to Haran.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| went (*yalak*) toward Haran (Gen 28:10) | went (*yalak*) on his way (Gen 32:1) |
| met (*paga*) a certain place | met (*paga*) (Gen 32:1) |
| angels of God (Gen 28:12) | angels of God (Gen 32:1) |
| God of thy father Abraham, God of Isaac  | God of my father Abraham, God of Isaac |
| multitude of seed | multitude of seed |

 Table IV

The Abrahamic promise relates to land, fruitfulness and children. When Jacob comes back from Haran, he has children and a multitude of people and goods. God asked Jacob to return home, but Jacob is clearly anxious about the old threat from Esau. This is why he experiences an angelic theophany. This theophany is an assurance that God is with him, and that he need not be afraid. Nevertheless, Jacob still prays to the God of Bethel invoking the terms of God’s promise to him.

**Conclusion**

There is a great deal of symmetry in the Bible. The structures of the stories are laid out in patterns that are a delight to the ear and the eye. We can discern symmetry in the way that episodes and scenes are described, and we can discover symmetry in the way that everything is arranged.

# Theodotus of Byzantium

**T. Gaston**

### Introduction

It has often been said that “history is written by the victors”.[[34]](#footnote-34) Given the ultimate victory of Trinitarian theology, it is unsurprising that the early Christian writings preserved by the Church were those that were at least consistent with that theology. It is also unsurprising that the remaining records of early anti-Trinitarians are negative. One such anti-Trinitarian is Theodotus of Byzantium. Variously categorised as an ‘adoptionist’ or a ‘dynamic monarchian’ by modern scholars, he is condemned as a heretic in all extant reports. But is this portrayal accurate? In this article I will reconsider the evidence relating to Theodotus of Byzantium to reconstruct what can be known about this early anti-Trinitarian.

### Sources

The earliest sources for Theodotus are those written by Hippolytus (d. 235), a brief reference in *Against Noetus* (3) and a more detailed description in his *Refutation of All Heresies* (also called *Philosophoumena*), previously attributed to Origen. Hippolytus considers Theodotus orthodox in part, because he acknowledges that all things were created by God, but associates his Christology with the Gnostics, Cerinthus, and the Ebionites (Ref 7.23).[[35]](#footnote-35) In *Against Noetus,* Theodotus is briefly mentioned as having a one-sided approach to scripture to support his Christology (3).

Slightly later than Hippolytus is *Little Labyrinth,* a work known through several quotations by Eusebius (HE 5.28). The two main candidates for the author of *Little Labyrinth* are Gaius, based on the testimony of Photius, and Hippolytus, since the tenth book of *Refutation* is called “Labyrinth” (cf. *Ref* 10.1). Both these candidates seem unlikely. The testimony of Photius is, at best, uncertain, and the author of *Little Labyrinth* alludes to the Gospel of John, which is inconsistent with Gaius’ rejection of it. Hippolytus differed with the author over the orthodoxy of Tatian and in his characterization of Zephyrinus. Following the work of J. T. Fitzgerald, it is preferable to view *Little Labyrinth* as anonymous;[[36]](#footnote-36) I shall refer to its author as LLA. *Little Labyrinth* is primarily a polemic against Artemon and his followers and so may be reasonably dated to 240s or 250s, prompted by the arrival of Artemon in Rome.[[37]](#footnote-37) The writer recounts how Victor excommunicated Theodotus, the ‘father’ of Artemon’s following. LLA accuses the Theodotians of using pagan sources, of corrupting scriptures, and of repudiating some OT books.

Three later sources are *Against Heresies* wrongly attributed to Tertullian, *Panarion* by Epiphanius (c.375), and *Diversarum Heresean Liber* by Philastrius (c.385). These three works are often considered to be mutually dependent on Hippolytus*.*[[38]](#footnote-38) Pseudo-Tertullian describes how Theodotus was arrested for being a Christian and denied Christ; after this he began his “blasphemies”, i.e. his Christology. (Haer 7.2; cf. 10.19). Epiphanius expands the report (Pan 54.1.3-7) and also asserts that the Theodotians “fabricate spurious books for their own deception” (Pan 55.1.1-5).

Epiphanius also seems to have access to a work by Theodotus, which seems to be a series of proof-texts for his Christology. Epiphanius does not say where he got this work. D. A. Bertrand has noted the parallels between these fragments and a similar selection of texts used by Tertullian in *De Carne Christ.*[[39]](#footnote-39) It is possible that Theodotus and Tertullian were dependent on some earlier work on the humanity of Christ. There does not seem to be any plausible reason for assuming that Epiphanius invented the work, though it is possible he knows this only from an earlier source (e.g. *Syntagma*).[[40]](#footnote-40) I present the Greek text and English translation of these fragments in an appendix.

Finally, Philastrius, a 4c bishop, remembered now for his work on heresies, and used by Augustine, adds little to the other sources (50.1-3).

### Biography

Theodotus is described by Hippolytus as being a native of Byzantium (Ref 7.23) but he was clearly active in Rome. LLA records that he was excommunicated under Victor, bishop of Rome (189-199; HE 5.28.4). He is not mentioned by Irenaeus, which may suggest he was not active in the mid-170s, though it is possible he was not considered heretical at this time. P. Carrington suggests that Theodotus may have been a refugee from Byzantium following the destruction of its fortifications by order of Emperor Severus (196),[[41]](#footnote-41) but he may have come to Rome for other reasons at an earlier date. LLA describes him as a σκυτεύς (leather worker or shoe maker). P. Lampe characterizes these craftsman as freeborn men, working in stalls and unlikely to be rich.[[42]](#footnote-42) Epiphanius describes Theodotus as “very learned” (Pan 54.1.3).

Hippolytus implies that Theodotus had followers, but only names one – Theodotus the banker – who, he says, introduced a new doctrine (Ref 7.24). The later sources give the same picture, though they describe the followers of this second Theodotus as a separate sect; Epiphanius styles them ‘Melchizedekians’ (Pan 55.1.1). LLA names an additional disciple of Theodotus as Asclepiodotus. He records an incident during the episcopacy of Zephyrinus when Asclepiodotus and Theodotus the banker persuaded Natalius to become bishop of the sect, who later relented and was readmitted into communion by Zephyrinus. The implication of this is that the followers of Theodotus had a church of their own that was not in communion with the ‘orthodox’ church. We do not know who separated from whom, though it is conceivable that Natalius was the first bishop of the ‘Theodotion’ church and that was the moment of separation.

### Charges against Theodotus and his Followers

Various charges were made against Theodotus:

1. **Apostasy**

Pseudo-Tertullian, Epiphanius and Philastrius all report that Theodotus denied Christ under pressure, something not mentioned in the earlier sources. Pseudo-Tertullian says that he was apprehended for being a Christian and apostatized (Adv. Haer. 8.2); Philastrius writes similarly (Div. 50.1). Epiphanius greatly expands the report, saying that Theodotus was arrested along with others by the governor of Byzantium during a persecution of Christians. Whilst others went to martyrdom, Theodotus denied Christ. Moved with shame at his denial he fled Byzantium and came to live in Rome. The Christians in Rome, recognizing him, charged him with losing his grip on the truth. In response he creates the excuse that he did not deny God but denied a man (Pan 54.1.4-7).

Whilst Pseudo-Tertullian dates his adoption of his Christology from after his apostasy, Epiphanius considers it to be the cause, but the story of Epiphanius is leaky – he cannot identify the persecution during which Theodotus is meant to have been arrested or any of the particulars of the story. It seems probable that Epiphanius has imaginatively created this story out of a single line from an earlier source. K. Holl suspects the story was spun out of fragment 2 (see Appendix), which is based on Matt 12:31-32 where Jesus seems to make a distinction between blasphemy against him and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.[[43]](#footnote-43)

We can probably disregard most of the apostasy story. Given it is mentioned in three sources, it is possible that Theodotus did deny Christ following his arrest by some authority. However, since it is not mentioned in *Refutation* or *Little Labyrinth,* despite it being perfect fodder for their polemics, we must consider this story to be suspicious.

1. **Excommunication**

LLA states that Victor excommunicated Theodotus “when he became the first to declare that Christ was merely human”. He is responding to the claims of the followers of Artemon that their Christology was taught by the church until the times of Victor. His argument is that Victor cannot have agreed with the views of Theodotus since he excommunicated him.

Whilst our other sources do not mention the excommunication of Theodotus, there is no good reason for doubting that it occurred. The establishment of a separate church by his followers implies a break from communion with the rest of the church at Rome. The excommunication of Theodotus would explain the need for a separate church. Our other sources regard Theodotus as a heretic which, whilst not necessarily entailing formal excommunication, would certainly imply it.

The other recorded instance of excommunication enacted by Victor relates to the quartodecimanism controversy. Eusebius records that following conferences on the issue, a rule was proposed by leading bishops that Easter should always be celebrated on Sunday regardless of the date of Passover (HE 5.23). The Asian bishops responded with a letter from Polycrates to Victor stating their intention to continue with the tradition that they had received. Victor reacts by attempting to excommunicate all the Asian dioceses on the ground of heterodoxy. Several others, including Irenaeus, intervened on behalf of the Asian churches arguing that the churches should not be divided over this issue. Eusebius does not record the outcome of this intervention (HE 5.24). The order of events is, perhaps, illustrative. Whilst the Asian churches had a different tradition, no action was taken until a rule was adopted and, significantly, until the Asian bishops made open declaration of their intention to excuse themselves from this ruling. It would appear that it was this open variance that prompted Victor’s action. As Irenaeus, a determined combatant of heresy, notes, the date of Easter had never previously been a prerequisite for communion.

It is possible that Victor, and the Roman church, simply regarded the views of Theodotus to be beyond the pale. The quartodecimanism controversy prompts an alternative explanation, that Theodotus was excommunicated not so much for his views but for his open disagreement with Victor and/or the Roman church.

1. **Scriptures**

LLA claims that some of the followers of Theodotus have “repudiated both Law and Prophets” (HE 5.28.18) and Epiphanius claims that “they also fabricate spurious books for their own deception” (Pan 55.1.5). From the proof-texts dossier preserved by Epiphanius it seems likely that Theodotus accepted Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Matthew, Luke, John,[[44]](#footnote-44) Acts and 1 Timothy. The ‘new doctrine’ of Theodotus the Banker regarding Melchizedek seems based upon Hebrews (cf. Ps-Ter, *Adv. Haer.* 8.3), which presumably was also accepted. This sampling from OT and NT is almost certainly not exhaustive, and we may assume Theodotus accepts other books generally received by the wider church at this time, but this would be at odds with the claims of LLA and Epiphanius.

The claim of LLA may be correct as it is only applied to some followers rather than Theodotus himself. On the other hand, it may just be LLA’s spin, equating their doctrines with a rejection of the scriptures (that is, the doctrine he believed was contained within them). The claim is unsubstantiated by reference to any group titles; Epiphanius is unsure whether the “Theodotians” still exist, so his testimony on this point is dubious. Given the repeated associations with the Ebionites, Cerinthus and the Gnostics, it is possible that Epiphanius simply assumes that the “Theodotians” also created rival scriptures like these other heretics. The fact is that there are no known pseudepigrapha ascribed to Theodotus or his followers. Finally, neither claim is repeated by Hippolytus, which makes both unlikely.

1. **Arts of Unbelievers**

LLA accuses the followers of Theodotus of “putting aside the sacred word of God” in favour of Euclidean geometry, Aristotle and Theophrastus; he claims “to some of them Galen is almost an object of worship”. Galen, who wrote on philosophy and medicine, was physician to Commodus and consequently lived in Rome from the reign of Marcus Aurelius till his own death (c.199). He knew about Christians and compared their continence and contempt for death with that of philosophers.[[45]](#footnote-45) It is likely that he was acquainted with Christians[[46]](#footnote-46) and is not inconceivable that there was some contact between Galen and the followers of Theodotus.[[47]](#footnote-47) Galen set store by the propositional geometry of Euclid, and praised the work on logic by Aristotle and Theophrastus.[[48]](#footnote-48)Galen is also known for his use of textual criticism on the Hippocratic writings, perhaps something the followers of Theodotus were attempting to emulate.

Reading beyond the rhetoric, it seems likely that the followers of Theodotus made reference to pagan writers in their works. LLA writes “when people avail themselves of the arts of unbelievers to lend colour to their heretical views, and with godless rascality corrupt the simple faith of Holy Writ, it is obvious that they are nowhere near the Faith”. This would indicate that what LLA is complaining about is the use of geometry, logic and, perhaps, the citation of pagan sources in the writings of the followers of Theodotus. When he says Galen was “almost an object of worship”, he presumably means that they cite him often. Contact between Galen and the followers of Theodotus would also explain their use of Euclid, Aristotle and Theophrastus. “When the Theodotians set out to explain the Christian faith in the terminology of post-Aristotelian Hellenistic logic ... they are attempting to apply precisely Galen’s program of logic to their theology”.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Without sight of their texts, we cannot know to what purpose the followers of Theodotus put these pagan sources. However the selection of pagan authorities makes it probable that it was syllogistic logic that was being utilised, rather than citing texts on metaphysics to support their theology. This would contrast with the use of pagan sources made by apologists like Justin and Theophilus of Antioch. It is telling that LLA regards Justin as orthodox; was Justin “corrupting the simple faith” when he cited pagan sources or had not LLA read the *Apologies*?

1. **Syllogistic Logic**

LLA writes, “if anyone challenges them with a text from divine scripture, they examine it to see whether it can be turned into a conjunctive or disjunctive syllogistic figure”. Attempts have been made to read the fragments of Theodotus as syllogisms, though most to do not fit this form. For example, ‘The apostles said, “a male approved among you by signs and wonders”, and did not say, “a God approved”’ (fr.7; cf. Acts 2:22) is not a syllogism but presents a simple challenge: why do the scriptures refer to Christ as a man in passages where one might expect reference to him as God?

One fragment (fr.3) does read like a syllogism, which might be presented as follows:[[50]](#footnote-50)

1. The coming prophet was to be like Moses (Deut 18:15)
2. Moses was a man
3. Therefore Christ was a man

Of course, the syllogism has a hidden assumption that Christ was the coming prophet, though this was probably not controversial amongst Christians by this time (cf. John 1:45).

A second fragment that might imply a syllogism is fr.2 (cf. Matt 12:31), which might be reconstructed as follows:[[51]](#footnote-51)

1. Blasphemy against Jesus is pardonable
2. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not pardonable
3. Therefore Jesus is not divine

Again, there are hidden assumptions here such that the Holy Spirit is identified as God, or at least as having divine nature.

This attempt to conform these fragments to formal syllogisms may be too crude an approach. W. A. Löhr suggests that the ‘school’ of Theodotus may have used logic as a preliminary exercise before exegetical study, in a similar way to the philosophical schools of the second century.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Whatever the case with these fragments, LLA implies that syllogistic logic was being used to interpret passages that implied Jesus was God, not the passages that state Jesus was a man as are the extant fragments. We can only speculate about how these syllogisms went. Perhaps they sought to demonstrate some contradiction between divine and human nature (e.g. God cannot be tempted (James 1:13), Jesus was tempted, therefore Jesus was not God), or perhaps they pulled apart proof-texts for Christ’s divinity (e.g. “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), an image is different from the thing it represents, therefore Jesus is not God). LLA seems to think this use of logic to be inappropriate, believing that “simple faith” in Jesus as God is the clear reading from scripture.

1. **Textual Criticism**

LLA also writes that the followers of Theodotus claim to have corrected the scriptures, making emendations to the text. He says that they have produced numerous copies but that these texts do not agree with one another. He equates this process with the falsification of the text. LLA does not give us any examples of these emendations or of the inconsistencies between their various versions so we are unable to judge the degree of these changes.

In a series of commentaries on the works of Hippocrates, Galen manifests his critical method for discerning the ‘real’ Hippocrates from the large collection of materials ascribed to him. This method not only involved deciding which books were authentic and which were spurious, but also diagnosing interpolations in authentic books. The general procedure seems to have been to identify an authentic core of Hippocratic doctrine and judge other passages against that core. Whilst Galen does deal with a few textual issues, his approach is largely literary-critical.[[53]](#footnote-53)

It is possible that Theodotus and/or his followers adopted their critical method from Galen. If this is the case then it might imply that they did not restrict themselves to trying correct faulty passages but sought to identify spurious books and interpolations.[[54]](#footnote-54) Yet, from what we can deduce from their ‘canon’ (see above), it seems they accepted a good number of NT books as authentic. This is in contrast to Marcion who rejected a large number of NT books based upon his view of what the authentic doctrine was. It is also worth noting that according to LLA, the followers of Theodotus attempted to re-interpret proof-texts for the divinity of Christ, which implies that they did not simply dismiss texts that they found problematic as spurious.

Comparison of the fragments with the NT text does not reveal a large number of changes. Bertrand identifies only one intentional change in fragment 4, where “Holy Spirit” has been changed to “Spirit of the Lord”. The motivation, according to Bertrand, was to guard against a Trinitarian reading by emphasizing that the Spirit is a power of God rather than a discrete person.[[55]](#footnote-55)However, “Holy Spirit” and “Spirit of the Lord” were effectively synonyms in Christian usage (cf. Luke 4:18), so this may only reflect a paraphrase rather than an emendation.[[56]](#footnote-56) A second variant is the change from angel (ἀγγελος) to gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) but this may be due to copyist error; there certainly seems no plausible motivation for this change. R. M. Grant asserts that Theodotus also omitted the “therefore” from Luke 1:35, separating the overshadowing the Spirit from a prediction of being called the Son of God.[[57]](#footnote-57) This seems to be a misreading of Epiphanius’ report, who seems to be setting up straw men to knock down. In this fragment, Theodotus is actually defending the received reading (ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ) against a potential variant (γενήσεται ἐν σοί). We have no evidence of a manuscript containing such a variant and it seems more likely that Theodotus is rejecting a certain Christology, nevertheless it testifies to his interest in establishing the correct text.

LLA claims that he has seen the copies made by the followers of Theodotus and compared them. Further he asserts that he has compared earlier copies with later ones and this demonstrates that they have undergone further manipulation. Grant proposes that this represents a genuine attempt by the followers of Theodotus to address the issue of textual variants amongst extant manuscripts.[[58]](#footnote-58)Without being able to compare the copies for ourselves it is impossible to assess whether their methodology was sound and their conclusions valid.

Whatever the merits of their critical approach to this or that passage, Theodotus and his followers, in contrast to other heretics, seem concerned to establish the authentic texts rather than rejecting or replacing them. Unlike the Ebionites, they did not create their own gospel; unlike Marcion, they did not choose their own canon; presumably one of the things their critics found so frustrating was that they shared the same scriptural basis but had reached a different conclusion.

### Theology

**1. General Theology**

Hippolytus credits Theodotus with partly keeping to the doctrine of the ‘true church’ because he acknowledges God as creator, unlike the Gnostics (Ref 7.23). From the testimony of Hippolytus we may also deduce that Theodotus accepts the virgin birth of Jesus, his baptism, his miracles and his resurrection from the dead. The suggestion that some of the followers of Theodotus might have thought that Jesus was ‘made God’ after the resurrection is perhaps best understood as a reference to the ascension and exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God, which presupposes they also accepted this doctrine. Pseudo-Tertullian, describing the ‘new doctrine’ of Theodotus the Banker, implies that they regarded Christ as the advocate of human beings (Adv. Haer. 7.3), which would also seem to imply the ascension of Jesus and his continued existence as advocate before the throne of God.

LLA might be taken to imply that Theodotus rejected the identification of Jesus with the Logos (cf. John 1:1f), when he attempts to rebut him by citing hymns to Christ as the Logos (HE 5.28.4; cf. Epiphanius).[[59]](#footnote-59) However, since Theodotus accepts the Gospel of John, it may be he believed Jesus to be, in some sense, the Word made flesh whilst not considering this to be same as identifying Jesus as God. After all, commentators have read John 1:1-13 without concluding that the Logos was a personal being prior to becoming flesh in v. 14. Indeed, the use of the neuter pronoun in v. 5 might recommend an impersonal reading. Theodotus probably rejected LLA’s assumption that being the Logos is the same as being God.

**2. Adoptionism**

Theodotus has generally been categorised as an Adoptionist. By definition, Adoptionism implies that Jesus became the Son of God by adoption, perhaps in the same sense that the Israelite king was a son of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7)[[60]](#footnote-60) or Paul described believers being sons of God (Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26). Since the work of A. Harnack it has commonly been asserted that this was earliest Christology, based upon texts like Acts 2:36; 13:33 and Rom 1:3-4. Whilst Harnack, and others, included within his definition of Adoptionism the indwelling of the Spirit,[[61]](#footnote-61) this seems unhelpful as leaves us unable to distinguish Adoptionism from forms of Spirit-Christology.

The Ebionites, though often classified as Adoptionists, claimed that the Holy Spirit entered into Jesus at his baptism and that the heavenly voice declared “today I have begotten you”.[[62]](#footnote-62)This may imply that they regarded the Holy Spirit as the Son, which entered into Jesus as his baptism. M. Goulder has distinguished the Ebionites from Adoptionists by labelling their Christology “Possessionist”,[[63]](#footnote-63) i.e. Jesus was possessed by the Spirit (=Son) rather than adopted as Son. The concept of Jesus as a vessel for the Holy Spirit is also found in the *Epistle of Barnabas*(7:3) and in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Sim 5.2.1-11; 5.6.5-7), where the Holy Spirit is identified as the Son of God.

A third Christology that entailed Jesus was fully human is that of Cerinthus and the similar views of the Gnostics. According to Cerinthus, Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph but Christ was a spirit-being that descended into Jesus at his baptism and remained with him until the crucifixion (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.26.1). This view differs from the Ebionites in that the Christ-spirit is clearly a distinct personal being whereas the concept of the Holy Spirit as used by the Ebionites is unclear.

Hippolytus claims Theodotus appropriated his views from the Gnostics, from Cerinthus and from the Ebionites (Ref 7.23). This is not a claim repeated by Pseudo-Tertullian or LLA. Like Irenaeus before him, Hippolytus is attempting to interconnect the various heresies and, noting the similarities in Christology, attempts to connect Theodotus with other heretics. It is important be aware of this fact when evaluating the testimony of Hippolytus as he may well be manipulating the views of Theodotus to make them appear closer to Cerinthus.[[64]](#footnote-64)

What Hippolytus records is that Theodotus held that Jesus was a man born of a virgin by the will of God. This coheres with his use of Luke 1:35 in fragment 4. This immediately differentiates Theodotus from Cerinthus who denied the virgin birth.[[65]](#footnote-65) Next, Hippolytus ascribes to Theodotus the view that the Christ-spirit descended on Jesus as his baptism. It seems unlikely that Theodotus held such a view since in our other sources his view is described as being that *Christ* was merely human. Also in the extant fragments Theodotus writes “Christ is a man” (fr1) and “Christ whom God raised up was also a man” (fr3), which makes it unlikely that he viewed Christ as a separate spirit-being. However, it is conceivable that some of Hippolytus’ account is correct, and Theodotus claimed that Jesus was unable to perform miracles until he received the Holy Spirit at his baptism. It seems unlikely that Theodotus could have identified the Holy Spirit as the Son (cf. Hermas) since he places so much weight on the distinction between Christ and the Holy Spirit (fr2).

**3. Spirit-Christology**

Theodotus seems to explicitly reject (at least) one form of Spirit-Christology when he writes of Luke 1:35 “it did not say, ‘the Spirit of the Lord shall enter into you’” (fr4). Here, Theodotus is rejecting the view that the Spirit was incarnated in Mary. Epiphanius accuses Theodotus of stupidity since the orthodox view is that it was the Son, not the Spirit that was incarnated, so of course it does not say “the Holy Spirit shall enter into you” (Pan 54.3.9). However, Justin seems to hold the very view that Theodotus is rejecting because he identifies the spirit in Luke 1:35 with the Logos (1 Apol 33.6). It is possible that Justin understood Luke 1:35 as speaking of a holy spirit rather than identifying the Logos with the Holy Spirit; neither Justin nor Luke uses the definite article.[[66]](#footnote-66) For Justin, the Logos both causes the incarnation and is himself incarnated. Theodotus objects to this, saying that were this the case, the gospel should speak of the Spirit entering into Mary. Grant proposes that the implication of this fragment is that the Spirit did not enter into Mary but did enter into Jesus at his baptism (cf. Mark 1:10).[[67]](#footnote-67) In this Grant is influenced by the assumption that Theodotus was an Adoptionist (as defined by Harnack). In fact we do not know how Theodotus understood Mark 1:10, or even whether he considered this a text in need of emendation, based on a comparison with the other Synoptic gospels.

In a curious piece of analysis Hippolytus reports that some of the followers of Theodotus do not think that Jesus was “made God”, not even when the Spirit descended, whilst others think that Jesus was “made God” after the resurrection (Ref 7.23). The implication is that, in the view of Hippolytus, one might reasonably expect someone to believe that Jesus could have been “made God” by the descent of the Spirit. Here ‘God’ cannot be mean an uncreate and eternal being, but divine in some lesser sense. This being the case, we can propose how the descent of the Spirit might have made Jesus divine if, for example, he was possessed by a divine spirit. The fact that, according to Hippolytus, the followers of Theodotus did not follow such a train of thought is further indication that they were not Possessionists.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Theodotus, whilst rejecting the incarnation, accepts the virgin birth and consequently believes that Jesus had no earthly father. Did he therefore conclude that Jesus was the Son of God by virtue of his birth? This seems entirely plausible but it is impossible to substantiate from the available evidence. If this were the case then Theodotus cannot correctly be categorized as an Adoptionist. The idea that Jesus was “made God” (cf. Hippolytus) following the resurrection presumably refers to his exaltation, which it is likely the followers of Theodotus believed.

We conclude that Theodotus may be categorised as a **dynamic monarchian** inasmuch as his Christology would have preserved the unity of God by denying the deity and pre-existence of Jesus.

### Origins of Theodotus’ Thinking

When considering the significance of the Theodotians in the history of Christian doctrine the important question is: Was Theodotus an isolated aberration or a recipient of a more primitive tradition?

**1. Ancient Views**

Our sources propose a number of scenarios for the origin of Theodotus’ views. From the preceding analysis we can see these explanations are unlikely and are motivated by polemical concerns.

Hippolytus claims he appropriated his views from other heretics, such as the Gnostics (Ref 7.23). Theodotus was not a Gnostic but was close to the Hippolytian orthodoxy. His views on creation, the virgin birth, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and also his canon, seem to have been consistent with those of the Roman Church (and with later orthodoxy). His Christology, though sometimes categorised as Adoptionist, differed from Cerinthus in several important respects and would seem to rule out any influence from Gnostic sources.

Epiphanius claims he invented his views as an excuse for denying Christ during persecution (Pan 54.1.3-7). Whilst we cannot rule out the possibility that Theodotus apostatised at one point, the story of his creating a Christology to legitimize his apostasy is most likely an invention of Epiphanius.

LLA claims Theodotus was the first to declare that Christ was merely human, which is demonstrably not the case and indicates a blinkered view of Christian history. The Ebionites and Cerinthus also denied the deity of Jesus, though they approach the question from different positions. As we shall see, it is plausible that Theodotus was not alone in holding the Christology ascribed to him.

**2. Apologetic Development**

A number of scholars have attempted to explain Theodotus as a development away from orthodoxy in response to a certain theological milieu. For example, Carrington writes “it was a serious attempt to form a Christian theology out of traditional materials, preserving the monarchian idea of the indivisibility of God, and dispensing with the idea of the incarnate deity”.[[69]](#footnote-69) Similarly M. Peppard argues that the pagan milieu recommended this Christology development; “but we can say that the adoptive imagery of the Theodotians would have been especially resonant in urban areas of the second-century Roman Empire because of the established adoptive imperial ideology”.[[70]](#footnote-70) Walzer suggested that Theodotion Christology was an attempt to restate Christian doctrine in a way that might appeal to the pagans like Galen.[[71]](#footnote-71) Justin acknowledged that giving “second place after the unchangeable and eternal God ... to a crucified man” was a stumbling block for pagans (1 Apol 13.4). Similarly, many of the second century apologists are coy regarding the incarnation, for instance, Theophilus of Antioch does not even mention Christ in *To Autolycus.* One might suspect that denying the deity of Christ might be a useful apologetic strategy for Christians of this period.

I have questioned to what extent Theodotus and his followers made use of pagan sources. It is entirely plausible that Theodotus and/or his followers had a special interest in the works of Galen and even were personally acquainted with him. Nevertheless, it is appears that their interest was primarily in logic and textual criticism, neither of which necessarily imply heresy. Any use of pagan sources would need to be contrasted with that by ‘orthodox’ writers, like Justin. Yet it is not clear whether denying the deity of Christ would be a sufficient concession, even for a sympathetic pagan like Galen. Galen’s criticisms of Christianity were that they relied on faith rather than demonstration and that they believed God could create out of nothing. Denying the deity of Christ does not address either of these concerns. Nor does Theodotus seem to have been influenced by them; as far Hippolytus is concerned Theodotus’ account of creation was orthodox. Galen, whilst accepting a designing providence, was unwilling to make specific claims about whether providence was a god (PHP IX.9.2); in one place he identifies providence with Nature (PHP IX.8.27). Theodotus seems to have made no attempt to accommodate such agnosticism within his theology. Justin is aware that the virgin birth is also a potential embarrassment (1 Apol 21:1ff) but Theodotus affirms it. Theodotus believed in the ascension of Jesus and some of his followers equated this with the divinisation of Jesus; it is not clear that this would be any more acceptable to pagan audience than the deity of Christ.

**3. Pre-existing Tradition**

Theodotus was originally a member of the Roman church and his views differed from (what would become) orthodoxy only significantly with regards to his Christology. One might suppose that his views were a development away from a pre-existing orthodoxy. However, such a view implies that the Roman church of this period was uniform in affirming the deity of Christ. This is unlikely to have been the case. Justin refers to some “of our race” who denied the deity of Christ (Dial 48). Whilst he states that he does not agree with them, the fact that Justin describes them as being of the “race” of Christians, rather than in the unfriendly terms he uses against Marcion (for example), implies that he did not regard them as heretics. It is probable that the Christian community in Rome included such views as were held by Theodotus.[[72]](#footnote-72) We do not know whether Theodotus came to his views whilst already in Rome, or whether there were those with similar views in Byzantium, but in either case there is little justification for regarding Theodotus as the “father” of this Christology.

According to LLA, the followers of Artemon claimed that “the apostles themselves received and taught the things they say themselves, and that the true teaching was preserved till the times of Victor”. We do not know on what basis they made this claim. It is possible that they regarded the apostles (as represented by the NT) as teaching the same as Theodotus and simply assumed there was continuous tradition in the intervening period. However, it is possible that they had access to sources no longer extant which would broaden our knowledge of Christology in the second century. As we have seen, it is possible that Theodotus was excommunicated for open dissension, rather than for any of his specific views.

## **Conclusion**

Reading behind the polemics against Theodotus, we find a man who had beliefs similar to modern Socinian Unitarians. There is no evidence that he was influenced in his views by either pagan philosophy or by Gnosticism. Rather, his views seem similar to those ‘orthodox’ Christians, except regarding the deity of Christ, which he denied.

If, as Harnack believed and others have repeated, the earliest Christology was adoptionist or something like that, then we should not be surprised to see remnants of that Christology expressed in the second century even though many prominent Christians had moved away from that position. The Ebionites and Hermas, whom I have described as Possessionists, may be examples of this continuing tradition from the earliest Christology. However if, as is generally supposed, the Gospel of the Ebionites was a redaction of the Gospel of Matthew, then the Ebionites might be seen as one step removed from the more primitive Christology of the Synoptics. Theodotus seems to represent a different form of Christology, based on the NT as generally received, but maintaining that Jesus was a man but not God.

If this picture is correct then the excommunication of Theodotus by Victor represents **a shift in the history of Christianity as the Roman church began to decry certain Christologies**. Carrington writes, “at the end of the episcopate of Victor, therefore, the theology of incarnation had won a resounding victory over the theology of adoption; and when Zephyrinus succeeded him, a ‘monarchian’ theology of this type became the official theology of the Roman church”.[[73]](#footnote-73)At this point the followers of Theodotus became heretics as defined against the official orthodoxy of the Roman church. This heresy did not quickly die, being revived by Artemon in the third century and Paul of Samosata in the fourth, yet it was the position adopted by the Roman church that was to prevail.

## **Appendix: Fragments**

The Greek text for the fragments is taken from K. Holl, *Epiphanius II: Panarion haer. 34-64.* Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980. The Greek text for the NT texts is taken from United Bible Societies fourth revised edition.

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.1.9**

ὅτι, φησίν, ὁ Χριστὸς ἔφη· νῦν δέ με ζητεῖτε ἀποκτεῖναι ἄνθρωπον, ὃς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑμῖν λελάληκα. ὁρᾷς, φησίν, ὅτι ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν.

He asserted that ‘Christ said “But now you seek to kill me a man, one who has told you the truth”. You see’, he asserted, ‘that Christ is a man’.

Cf. John 8:40

νῦν δὲ ζητεῖτε με ἀποκτεῖναι ἄνθρωπον, ὃς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑμῖν λελάληκα

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.2.3**

αὐτοῦ, φησί, τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰπόντος· πᾶσα βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἄνθρώποις, καὶ ὁ λέγων λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ· τῷ δὲ βλασφημοῦντι εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.

He asserted ‘Christ himself said, “All blasphemies shall be forgiven men”, and “Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but he who blasphemes the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven”’.

Cf. Matt 12:31

πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἄνθρώποις, ἡ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται. καὶ ὅς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τὸῦ υἱὸῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ· ὅς δ᾿ ἄν εἴπῃ κατὰ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.3.1**

καί ὁ νόμος περὶ αὐτοῦ ἔφη· προφήτην ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ἐγερεῖ̣̔υμῖν κύριος ὡς ἐμέ· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσατε. Μωυσῆς δὲ ἀνθρωπος ἦν· ὁ οὖν ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγειρόμενος Χριστὸς οὗτος, φησίν, ἦν, ἀλλά ἀνθρωπος, ἐπειδή ἐξ αὐτῶν ἠν, |ὡς καί ὁ Μωυσῆς ἄνθρωπος ἦν.

‘The Law also said of him, “The Lord will raise up to you a prophet of your brothers who is like me; listen to him”. But Moses was a man. Therefore the Christ whom God raised up’, he asserts, ‘was also a man, for he was descended from them. As Moses, he was also a man’.

Cf. Deut 18:15 [LXX]

προφήτην ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου, ὡς ἐμέ, ἀναστήσει σοι Κύριος ὁ Θεός σου· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.3.5**

καί αὐτὸ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἔφη τῇ Μαρίᾳ· πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ, καί οὐκ εἶπε· πνεῦμα κυρίου γενήσεται ἐν σοί.

‘The Gospel itself said to Mary, “The Spirit of the Lord shall come upon you”, and it did not say, “The Spirit of the Lord shall come to be in you”’.

Cf. Luke 1:35

καί ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἀγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ, πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.4.1**

ὅτι καί ὁ Ἱερεμίας περί αὐτοῦ ἔφη ὅτι ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν, καὶ τίς γνώσεται αὐτόν

‘Jeremiah also said about him, “He is a man, and who will know him?”’

Cf. Jer 17:9 [LXX]

ἄνθρωπός ἐστι, καὶ τίς γνώσεται αὐτόν

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.5.1**

καὶ Ἠσαΐας περὶ αὐτοῦ ἔφη ὅτι ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν, οὕως εἰπών· ὅτι ἄνθρωπος εἰδὼς φέρειν μαλακίαν·καὶ εἴδομεν αὐτὸν ἐν πληγῇ καὶ ἐν κακώσει καὶ ἠτιμάσθη καὶ οὐκ ἐλογίσθη.

‘Isaiah also said about him he is a man, because he said, “A man acquainted with bearing infirmity; and we knew him afflicted and abused and despised and not esteemed”’.

Cf. Isa 53;3 [LXX]

ἄνθρωπος ἐν πληγῇ ὢν, καὶ εἰδὼς φέρειν μαλακίαν, ὅτι ἀπέστραπται τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, ἠτιμάσθη, καὶ οὐκ ἐλογίσθη.

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.5.9**

εἶπαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι ἄνδρα ἀποδεδειγμένον εἰς ὑμᾶς σημείοις καὶ τέρασι, καὶ οὐκ εἶπαν· θεόν ἀποδεδειγμένον.

‘The apostles said, “a male approved among you by signs and wonders”, and did not said, “a God approved”’.

Cf. Acts 2:22

ἄνδρα ἀποδεδειγμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς δυνάμεσι καὶ τέρασι καὶ σημείοις

1. **Epiphanius, Panarion 54.6.1**

ἔφη περὶ αὐτοῦ ὁ ἀπόστολος ὅτι μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων, ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς

‘The apostle said about him, “the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”’.

Cf. 1 Tim 2:5

μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων, ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς

**Wells of Salvation**

**P. Wyns**

**Introduction**

Water has always been scarce in the Middle East and therefore a source of conflict. This article will examine the theology of water conflict in the Biblical narrative – particularly in the patriarchal accounts. Genesis 21:22-34 recounts the dispute between Abraham and Abimelech and Gen 26:12-33 between Isaac and Abimelech.

**Duplications or Literary Art**

Older German higher-critical scholarship saw the composition of the Pentateuch in ‘source’ or ‘documentary’ terms. On this approach, Gen 26:12-33 is usually assigned to a J source (apart from vv. 15 and 18 which is assigned to an E source) and Gen 21:22-34 is mostly assigned to an E source (apart from vv. 28-30 and 33 which is assigned to J).[[74]](#footnote-74) Under this methodology our narratives are considered duplications and this is explained as due to the use of separate J and E sources which had two independent versions of an old folk-story. According to this approach, a reviser of the J narrative inserted an altered version of E’s story into the narrative of Isaac, and introduced the anachronism of making Abimelech a Philistine king. It is said that the composition of the Pentateuch as we have it is due to a final priestly editor after the Exile, who allowed the different versions to stand side by side as independent episodes.

More recently, (since the literary turn in Biblical Studies in the 1980s), some scholars have suggested that what was previously thought to be duplicate sources are in fact literary compositions based on and presupposing the knowledge of the original source.[[75]](#footnote-75) The inadequacy of the criteria employed for assigning the various stories to sources has received a renewed critique since the 80s. The literary scholar R. Alter, writing in 1981, remarked,

Different repeated episodes have elicited different explanations, but the most common strategy among scholars is to attribute all ostensible duplication in the narrative to a duplication of sources, to a kind of recurrent stammer in the process of transmission, whether written or oral.[[76]](#footnote-76)

However, Alter applies a literary approach to narrative episodes which he terms ‘Biblical Type-Scenes’.[[77]](#footnote-77) This approach leaves one open to the charge of ‘historicized-fiction’, but this is only the case if one equates history with the mere reportage of facts. A. R. Millard observes:

Let all who read remember that the patriarchal narratives are our only source for knowledge of the earliest traditions of Israel, that traditions can be correct reflections of ancient events, and that they do not pretend to be textbooks of ancient near-eastern history or archaeology.[[78]](#footnote-78)

T. D. Alexander, commenting on the sister-wife episodes, remarks that,

While there is evidence that the later accounts have been shaped to some extent by the process of their inclusion within a larger literary work- something which might naturally be expected –it cannot be confirmed that they are merely fictional narratives based on 12:10-13:1.[[79]](#footnote-79)

His conclusion is as valid for the sister-wife episodes as it is for the chapters under discussion. The occurrence of supposed anachronisms to discount the historicity of the accounts is based on dubious evidence and is open to several other plausible explanations.[[80]](#footnote-80)

**The Wells of Contention**

All the patriarchal narratives share a common theme, namely, that of **legitimacy**. Who is the legitimate heir—Isaac or Ishmael? Who is the legitimate husband of Sarah (Rebekah); is it Abraham (Isaac) or Abimelech? Who has legitimate ownership of the wells; is it Abraham (Isaac) or Abimelech? Who is the legitimate recipient of the patriarchal blessings, Jacob or Esau? The theme of legitimacy is duplicated with subtle variations throughout the Genesis narrative.

The formulaic incorporation of themes that are coupled with particular type-scenes should be placed in a worldview where the medium for revelation is history itself; not necessarily history as a causal-effect continuum or even a repetition (with subtle variations), but as rudiments of a larger theological picture—an historical harmony, whose teleology extends both forwards and backwards; and whose eschatological purpose will only be fully comprehended right at the end—and that only through divine revelation and intervention. Alter observes:

The type-scene is not merely a way of formally recognizing a particular kind of narrative moment; it is also a means of attaching that moment to a larger pattern of historical and theological meaning. If Isaac and Rebekah, as the first man and woman born into the covenant God has made with Abraham and his seed, provide certain paradigmatic traits for the future historical identity of Israel, any association of later figures with the crucial junctures of that first story –the betrothal, the life-threatening trial in the wilderness, the enunciation of the blessing –will imply some connection of meaning, some further working-out of the original covenant.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The next section will demonstrate that the wells of Genesis 26 served as a model for covenantal relationships with the ‘Gentiles’ during the reign of Hezekiah and that, in turn, this has been adapted in the NT as a paradigm for covenantal relationships.

**The Wells as a Paradigm for Covenantal Relationships**

The narrative in Genesis 26 has parallels with the prophetic pronouncements of Isaiah 49 as the following table demonstrates:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Genesis 26** | **Isaiah 49** |
| Isaac’s sacrifice (Genesis 22) | …and I will give thee for a covenant of the people. (v. 8) |
| …and Rebecca lifted up her eyes when she saw Isaac (Gen 24:64) [Rebekah=to fetter or tie] | …lift up thine eyes (v. 18)…gird thyself with them, like a bride (v. 18) |
| Isaac unblocks Abraham’s wells | …even by the springs of water shall he guide them (v. 10) |
| **Esek** = contention **Sitnah**=enmity (vv. 20-21) | I will contend with them that contend with thee (v. 25) |
| **Reheboth**= to enlarge/broad places (v. 22) | …the place is too straight for me give me place that I may dwell (v.20)…who have begotten these? ...who have brought up these? (v. 21) |

The Prophecy of Isaiah can be firmly placed in the reign of Hezekiah. The prophecy concerns the reforming king Hezekiah, who re-established covenantal relationships with *Yahweh* (unblocking Abraham’s wells),[[82]](#footnote-82) and who extended the covenant to ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’,[[83]](#footnote-83) thereby enlarging or broadening the covenant to fulfill its original intention (“In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed” Gen 22:18). After 701, Hezekiah endured the hostility of the nations (“I will contend with them, that contend with thee”) bringing back Judahites and Gentiles to Judah. The work that he had done to establish a safe water supply for the defence of Jerusalem (2 Chron 32: 1-4; *cf.* Isa 36:1-37) became symbolic for the ‘wells that Isaac unblocked’ and is commemorated (as well as anticipated) in the **wells of salvation** of Isaiah 12:

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isa 12:2, 3 (RSV)

The story of Isaac is paradigmatic for the extension of the covenant into a new arena in the face of unrelenting hostility.

**The Well of Living Water**

The Genesis narrative also has parallels with John. The Fourth Gospel commences with a prologue that parallels the Genesis ‘creation account’ followed by a ‘patriarchal narrative’ shaped around Jacob, even incorporating the ‘betrothal convention’ of a type-scene set at ‘Jacob’s well’ in Samaria. Jesus is a new well with ‘living water’ (John 4:10; 7:38) which he offers to those of the north (Samaria). This new well is not the Abrahamic well that had been blocked and was now being unblocked by Isaac’s servants (Jesus’ disciples); it is the well that complements the Abrahamic well.

In typological terms, the patriarchal wells had been blocked by the Jews (the Law and the Prophets). Not only did these wells need to be re-dug but a new well was needed. This new well produced a hostile reaction on the part of the Jews. The hostility of the Pharisees, who had ‘shut up the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt 23:13), mirrors that of the herdsmen of Gerar who had ‘blocked Abraham’s wells’ and is ascribed to the same motive of envy (Gen 26:15; Matt 27:18).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Genesis 26** | **John 4** |
| Abraham digs wells and wells blocked | Traditions of the Jews |
| Isaac re-digs wells | Ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus[[84]](#footnote-84) |
| New well of **living water** found (v. 19 mg.) | Jesus a new well of **living water** (v. 10) |
| Herdsmen of Gerar contend (v. 20) | Opposition by the Pharisees |

Jesus transforms the water for *‘*purifying the Jews’ (John 2:6) into the wine of the communion (John 2:10) and the baptism of the Spirit (John 7:38); for the ‘woman at the well’, he teaches her that the Samaritans (those of the tribal ‘north’) could share the new well.

**The Well of the Oath—Beersheba**

The treaty between Abraham and Abimelech is believed by some scholars (Van Seters for example) to display signs of disunity and the joining of separate traditions. There are two explanations for the name Beersheba – the ‘Well of Seven’ or the ‘Well of the Oath’ and the narrative in Gen 21:22-32 supposedly consists of two accounts describing two separate treaties. In the first treaty Abraham and Abimelech swear to live in peace with one another; to seal this covenant Abraham gives Abimelech sheep and oxen. In the other treaty, the dispute over the ownership of the well is resolved by setting aside seven ewe lambs as a witness to the fact that Abraham had dug the well. Since the days of S. R. Driver, (the commentator mainly responsible for cementing German Higher Criticism at the beginning of the twentieth century through his popular *Introduction*), however, this has not been a problem:

The two explanations resolve themselves into one: for the Heb. Word for ‘to swear’ (*nishba’*, the reflexive of the unused *shaba’*) seems to mean properly (as it were) *‘to seven oneself’*, i.e., to pledge oneself in some way by *seven* sacred things, so that, if it might be assumed that the ‘seven lambs’ were used for this purpose, only one ceremony would be described in this passage.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Alexander views the entire passage as a unity, compromising firstly of a ‘friendship’ treaty and only then a treaty over the outstanding dispute over the well (of which Abimelech was ignorant). Alexander observes:

Once the [friendship] treaty is concluded Abraham is in a position to settle the dispute over ownership of the well. Having acted in a gracious manner towards Abimelech, Abraham now asks him to recognize his claim to the well.*[[86]](#footnote-86)*

As with all the patriarchal narratives, and indeed even the Exodus, the question of historicity looms large for scholars. It is not because of a lack of archeological evidence, but because of problems over the dating. The dating of the archaeological finds seems to indicate, for example, that the cities conquered by Joshua did not exist at the time when Israel conquered the land (but are of a later origin). The same type of ‘problem’ is encountered in scholarly treatment of the patriarchal narratives. The Philistines certainly existed but, according to the evidence, supposedly did not inhabit the land in the time of Abraham. D. W. Manor’s comments on the well at Beersheba in the standard academic dictionary reflect the general consensus:

It is not possible to determine when the well was dug, although it appears from the building that surrounded the well in stratum VII, and the fact that the well stood almost exactly in the centre of the courtyard of this building, that the well existed during stratum VII. Because the stratigraphy of the well area has been disrupted in antiquity (due to the collapse of the upper walls of the shaft), it is impossible to determine stratigraphically the date of the well. The only possibility available to determine its date is to excavate to the bottom of the well, but after excavating through 28 m of accumulation without reaching bottom, it was deemed necessary to abort the operation. **On the basis of the orientation of nearby stratum IX architectural features, the excavators suggest that the well was dug in stratum IX (Herzog 1984:4-6). There is, however, no evidence to attribute any part of this well to the patriarchal period.**[[87]](#footnote-87)

Without being an archaeologist, it is difficult to comment on such findings, but other scholars[[88]](#footnote-88) have criticized the methodology that leads to such conclusions; they have also pointed out, for example, that in the case of Beersheba the well was never excavated to the lowest strata, that there is even uncertainty if it is the correct well (there are many wells in the vicinity), that although the patriarchal narratives name places they rarely name cities (it is possible, for example, that Beersheba and Gerar were transient settlements before cities were established) and that many of the anachronisms are difficult to prove or disprove by archeological finds as they are perishable (an example is the mention of camels in the patriarchal accounts, a supposedly late addition but notoriously difficult to ‘dig up’ as they are perishables that are often scavenged by wild animals).

**Beersheba in the New Testament**

Luke makes intertextual allusions to the Beersheba narratives in Zechariah’s hymn of praise at the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:67-79).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Luke 1** | **Genesis 26** |
| 71. That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us. | 27. Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? |
| 73. …the oath which he swore to Abraham our father. | 18. Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father.33. **Beersheba** –well of the oath. |
| 74. …being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear. | 24. …fear not, for I will bless thee… |
| 76. …the prophet of the Most High… | 28. We saw plainly that the Lord was with thee… |
| 79. …to guide our feet in the way of peace | 31. ...they departed from him in peace. |

The correspondences are clear, but the objection might be voiced that the terms of the hymn (and indeed the typology of Isaac), are more appropriate to the Messiah than to John the Baptist. Luke 1:69 refers to a ‘horn of salvation’ (a mighty saviour) – ‘horn’, suggests the strength of a fighting animal. It is used in Ps 132:17 of a successor to David, but the language here reflects Ps 18:2. The reference to the house of David his servant (Luke 1:27; Acts 4:25) identifies the horn as the Messiah. Although the hymn praises the privilege of the preparatory role played by the Baptist (vv. 76-77), it recognizes that the full import of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants is in the Messianic role played by Jesus (vv. 68-75; 78-79).

**Isaac and Messianic Typology**

It is perhaps fruitful to include Alter’s insightful commentary on the life of Isaac before investigating the typology:

This chapter [Genesis 26] is the only one in which Isaac figures as an active protagonist. Before, he was a bound victim; after, he will be seen as a bamboozled blind old man. His only other initiated act is his brief moment as intercessor on behalf of his wife in 25:21. Textual critics disagree about whether this chapter is a ‘mosaic’ of Isaac traditions or an integral literary unit, and about whether it is early or late. What is clear is that the architectonics of the larger story requires a buffer of material on Isaac between Jacob’s purchase of the birth-right and his stealing of the blessing – a buffer that focuses attention on Isaac’s right to the land and on his success in flourishing in the land. All the actions reported here, however, merely delineate him as a typological heir to Abraham. Like Abraham he goes through the sister-wife experience, is vouchsafed a covenantal promise by God, prospers in flock and field, and is involved in a quarrel over wells. He remains the pale and schematic patriarch among the three forefathers, preceded by the exemplary founder, followed by the vivid struggler.[[89]](#footnote-89)

Isaac is indeed the “typological heir” to Abraham; his Messianic foreshadowing shows him as the covenantal sacrifice and the one who ‘unblocks’ the promises in the face of growing hostility. He resolves all the old disputes over ‘legitimacy’ and declares a **Messianic banquet**. Interestingly, once the perpetual quarrels over wells have been eternally laid to rest, his servants arrive (**the same day**) with more good news – ***we have found water*** (Gen 26:32). This seems both superfluous and extraneous; superfluous because everyone now has their own legitimate claim to a water source; extraneous because Isaac’s servants were digging a new well (which we are not informed about) while the negotiations were still ongoing. This new well represents the outpouring of the Spirit in the Messianic age:

**In that day** (the same day) there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness. Zech 13:1 (KJV)

The Messianic age is one where all covenantal relationships are restored, where there is room enough for everyone to live peaceably; where the nation of Israel and the Gentiles live in covenant relationship with the same God through the means of his son who ‘unblocked’ all the wells and dwells in their midst.

**Conclusion**

The patriarchal narratives, like the Bible itself, stubbornly refuse to be classified; is it history masquerading as theology, or artful literature? What are the sources and dates of composition? How can type-scene and convention reflect historical reality? In a perverse twist the same questions surround the ‘living word’; where did he come from? Who was his author? Who is the historical Jesus? Ultimately these are questions of faith—and both the written and the ‘living word’ will be shown to come from the same source—a unique interaction between God and man through the Spirit.

Scholarship should recognize its limitations in understanding how God works, “for now we see through a glass darkly”*.*  Our concept of ‘inspiration’ is not necessarily the same as God’s; nor is our understanding of history the same as the One who knows “the beginning from the end”. What is clear, however, is that the collective experience of Israel is somehow also the individual experience of Israelites. So, Abraham can be both a historical reality and at the same time act as a federal representative for the community of faith; the NT writers had no problem understanding the Levites paying ‘tithes’ through the loins of Abraham. Scholarship must somehow resolve its schizophrenic attitude to the Bible, attempting to force it into their agenda. The NT authors can take the example of Isaac and shape it under the inspiration of the Spirit to reflect the historical reality surrounding the hostility towards Jesus in the first century.

Water conflict has always troubled the Middle East and will probably contribute to the next war, but more importantly it masks a deeper enmity; a hatred born out of envy and a spiritual dispute over legitimacy and ownership. This is particularly relevant to the current claims of ownership related to the Palestinian question and appeals to being the legitimate heirs of Abraham. It also relates to Christ himself, who is claimed by the Muslims as a prophet, by the Jews as an itinerant exorcist and by the Gentiles as their God (**a claim never made by Jesus**). Water conflict in the patriarchal narratives allegorizes the covenants and typifies the Messiah as the only legitimate source of water. It is only through him that all the disputes can be resolved and it is likely that we have here a pattern for the last days.

**The Blind Servant**

**A. Perry**

**Introduction**

Isaiah refers to a ‘blind’ servant in Isa 42:19,

Who *is* blind, but my servant, or deaf, as my messenger *that* I sent? Who *is* blind as *he that is* perfect, and blind as the Lord’s servant? Isa 42:19 (KJV)

Today, this individual is mostly taken to be a personified Israel/Judah,[[90]](#footnote-90) but some older commentators have thought that the Servant was the prophetic author of these oracles and some have said that his name was Meshullam.

This ‘collective’ reading arises from the fact that the Servant Song of Isa 42:1-4 is a glowing recommendation of an individual, and commentators do not see how such a figure can be accused of blindness a few verses later in the text. They observe the plural in v. 18 (‘ye’) and bring that reference to the people (or their leaders) forward into v. 19 as a ‘collective’ singular, although the LXX and the Targum paraphrase v. 19 with the plural ‘my servants’. In this essay we examine this reading.

**Background**[[91]](#footnote-91)

A new oracle unit begins in v. 18 with ‘Hear, ye deaf (~yvrx); and look, ye blind (~yrw[)’. This injunction alludes to prior prophecies:

And in that day shall the deaf (~yvrx) hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind (~yrw[) shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. Isa 29:18 (KJV)

Then the eyes of the blind (~yrw[) shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf (~yvrx) shall be unstopped. Isa 35:5 (KJV)

The prophecies of Isa 29:18 and 35:5 index two days in which ears and eyes will be opened—one that is after the defeat of Assyria (Isa 29:6, 14) and one that is after the (but still future) Edomite campaign (Isa 34:6-8; 35:4-5[[92]](#footnote-92)). It is the first occasion which Isaiah 42 presupposes,[[93]](#footnote-93) because the order of the words ‘deaf-blind’ is the same and there are two verbs in common (‘hear’ and ‘see/look’). Thus,

Hear, ye deaf (~yvrx); and look, ye blind (~yrw[)

is indexed to the aftermath of the deliverance of Jerusalem but before the Edomite Campaign.

The exhortation to ‘hear and see’ in Isa 42:18 is delivered after the raising up of the One from the North (Isa 41:25) and the rehabilitation of Hezekiah (Isa 39:8; 42:1). There may have been victories in the east liberating Judahites; the town of Sela is the example given of a centre that was liberated (Isa 42:11, KJV ‘rock’, [ls). The injunction is for the people (plurals in v. 18) to *see* that Yahweh is redeeming them. This exhortation is set against the fact that they were still blind and deaf, for they had quickly put aside the lesson of the deliverance of Jerusalem. The exhortation is especially directed towards the princes of Judah who sought alliances with the nations and city-states (cf. Jesus’ description of the Pharisees in John 9). There is censure in the exhortation and the oracle unit goes on to record the cut of the dialogue between Yahweh and the people as he pleads with them to be faithful to him.

**The Servant**

There is a difficulty with the normal ‘collective’ interpretation. Since, the previous verse is plural, ‘ye are blind’, Yahweh is presumably talking to a ‘them’, the people or their leaders. He asks the question of them, ‘Who is blind but my Servant?’, shifting to the singular. It is awkward to read this as God asking of them a **question about themselves as a group**, taking them to be the reference of a collective ‘my Servant’. It is more natural to read ‘my Servant’ as an individual about whom God is talking to them.

Elsewhere, where we have ‘my Servant’ used of Israel/Jacob, it is used in a direct address (‘you are my Servant’ (Isa 41:8-9; 44:21); ‘Yet hear now, O Jacob my Servant’ (Isa 44:1-2)), or they are being spoken to about an individual (Cyrus, Isa 45:4). There is no example of God talking to Israel/Jacob about Jacob/Israel as ‘my Servant’. Rather, the pattern is that God talks to Israel/Jacob about *an individual* ‘my Servant’ (Isa 42:1; 52:13; 53:11).

While the Messiah is never a blind servant this does not mean the initial eighth century referent of ‘my Servant’ (the initial application) has not been or is not blind. The fact that the individual servant of Isa 42:1 is evidently not blind is not a sufficient reason to adopt a ‘collective’ reading. We know that Israel is a ‘my Servant’ (Isa 41:8) and from v. 18 we know they are blind (cf. Deut 29:1, 3), but what is v. 19a doing if it is not a contrast between them and a ‘my Servant’ who is an individual who is precisely not blind? Instead of taking the Servant to be blind, the question could equally be rhetorical and sarcastic; if so, this removes the motivation for the ‘collective’ reading.

If the leaders of the people think the Servant is blind (and are saying so), but he is not, and they are, this is the right question to pose to them, ‘Who is blind but my Servant?’ as if to say ‘So, only my Servant is blind, really?’ God has used sarcasm and satire in his attack on idols (Isaiah 44), and sarcasm is a device in disputation. Isaiah could have been engaging the leaders of the people at court, in the temple or in the gate when making this point as God’s spokesman.

The translation of v. 19 is not without difficulty,[[94]](#footnote-94) and some of the translations are,

Who is blind except my servant, or as deaf as my aide whom I am to send? Who is blind like one in a covenant of well-being, blind like the servant of Yhwh? (Goldingay)

Who is blind except my servant, and deaf like my messenger whom I shall send? Who is blind like the covenanted one, and blind like the servant of the Lord? (Oswalt)

Who is blind but my servant and deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like *mešullām*, and blind like the servant of Yahweh? (Westermann)

Who is blind except my servant? Or deaf like my messenger (that I send)? Who is blind as Meshullam? Or as blind as YHWH’s servant? (Watts[[95]](#footnote-95))

The first question has a construction (~a yk) which conveys the idea of a contrast.[[96]](#footnote-96) The construction is common (156x) and an example with the implied verb ‘to be’ would be, ‘for they *were* no gods, but (~a yk) the work of men’s hands’ (2 Kgs 19:18; Isa 37:19). Generally, the construction is used between contrasting clauses that depict actions or states, for example, ‘I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but (~a yk) of hearing the words of the Lord’ (Amos 8:11). The clause that follows ~a yk may rely on the verb of the main clause for its sense, or it may include its own verb. For example, the subordinate clause might just be a name as in ‘Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but (~a yk) Israel’ (Gen 32:28; 35:10).

The reason why the Hebrew construction is difficult in Isa 42:19 is that it is part of a **question** rather than linking contrasting assertoric clauses of a similar form. It is easy to see a contrast, even with implied verbs, in the assertions of ‘for they *were* no gods, but the work of men’s hands’. It is not easy to see how the contrast is being struck in a question about identity; the syntax of ~a yk…ym is unique to our text.

Our text is the only simple interrogative sentence with a ~a yk construction in the Hebrew Bible. As this construction can introduce a clause that restricts non-assertoric preceding material,[[97]](#footnote-97) it could be restricting the answer to the question of identity here being posed. For example,

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but (~a yk) we will have a king over us… 1 Sam 8:19 (KJV)

There is no assertion here: the people are reported as saying ‘No, but we will have a king over us’. An assertion could be implied in the speech of Samuel to which the people respond with the ‘No’; the preceding verses are such a speech that describes (asserts) the disadvantages of having a king. Alternatively, a command or some counsel on the part of Samuel could be implied, to which the people respond with ‘No’; the text does say that they ‘refused to obey’. Either way, what is interesting in this example for our text is the coupling of a simple ‘No’ with ‘but we will have a king over us’. It shows the use of the construction giving an exception to non-assertoric preceding material.

Another example, this time assertoric, is the following:

Wherefore the king said unto me: Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This *is* nothing else but (~a yk) sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid… Neh 2:2 (KJV revised)

What is interesting here is the use of the construction to make a statement of identity with the usual implied verb ‘to be’ signaled by italics: ‘This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart’. Our text has a rhetorical question designed to elicit an answer about an identity and this example would support the reading that the expected answer is that the Servant **is** blind.

The tone of the speech and the point of the question are crucial to any interpretation: ‘Look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who *is* blind but my Servant?’ How do we derive information about tone from a written text? First, the words belong to Yahweh and not to Isaiah; he is speaking on God’s behalf. Secondly, the people and/or their leaders are openly addressed as ‘blind’—the question is therefore not designed to bring about a self-realization of blindness on their part. Thirdly, they are commanded to look, see and *hear*; they are not being asked to ‘hear themselves’ and realize that they are deaf—they are being asked to ‘look’ outwards and ‘hear’ a message external to themselves. This injunction to ‘look in order to see’ complements the earlier command to ‘Behold, my Servant’ (Isa 42:1).

If the tone and point of the question is to elicit agreement that God’s Servant is blind, it doesn’t cohere well with the commendation of the Servant in v. 1. If the tone is sarcastic, then the point of the question is reversed: Israel/Jacob think the Servant is blind, but he is not. The point of the question is precisely to *call out* those who are ‘blind’ like the Servant and ‘deaf’ like God’s messenger—their so-called blindness and deafness (so-called by the leaders of the people) are the qualities that God seeks.

To determine the tone and point of the question, we have to take the context into account—v. 20. This requires us to first consider the identity of the messenger.

**The Messenger**

The next clause refers to a messenger and commentators divide on whether this is a separate individual to the Servant. The clause does not have an exceptive construction and it is a comparison: Who is deaf *like* my messenger that I am sending? The verb ‘to send’ is Imperfect, so we can see the action as on-going and incomplete (RSV, ‘I send’). Recognising that two individuals are referenced begs the question as to who is the messenger.

* It would be unusual to refer to Hezekiah as one who was *sent* (or being sent), as he is the king resident in Jerusalem.
* The One from the North, as one raised-up by God, would be properly described as someone *sent* by God (cf. Isa 43:14; 48:16; 61:1[[98]](#footnote-98)), but he is not elsewhere configured as a ‘messenger’.
* Equally, the ‘collective’ reading of the messenger does not work; we do not have corresponding support for equating Israel as the messenger.[[99]](#footnote-99)
* Rather, we should see in this figure a reference to a messenger who is sent before the One from the North, i.e. the voice of the one crying in the wilderness of Judah. This follows the lead of Mal 3:1 as an application of Isa 40:3;[[100]](#footnote-100) this intertext sees a messenger sent before a ‘lord’.

The immediate point of difference between the commentary translations given above is the representation of the Hebrew word ~lvm (MT: *mešullām*). Westermann transliterates the word; Watts represents it as a proper name, while Goldingay and Oswalt translate the word. The problem for commentaries is that the word occurs *everywhere* *else* as a proper name (17x, e.g. 2 Kgs 22:3).

Commentators would naturally resist reading a proper name in an oracle because it is a very particular detail (compare commentary treatment of Joel 2:20—the Zephonite). Nevertheless, Isaiah has a number of proper names in his oracles (Shebna, Hephzibah, and Eliakim). The form of the word would allow a reading as a participle, perhaps meaning ‘covenanted one’ (~lv, BDB, 1002-23), but then the participle would be unique to this text in the Hebrew Bible. As we have no prejudice against proper names in oracles, we read the word as the proper name, ‘Meshullam’.[[101]](#footnote-101) Our proposed translation of the Hebrew is therefore,

Who *is* blind but my Servant? And deaf like my messenger I send? Who is blind like Meshullam? And blind like the servant of Yahweh?

The two sets of questions confirm that we have two individuals in focus and the chiastic structure illustrates this,

Who *is* blind but my Servant?

Who is deaf like my messenger I am sending?

Who is blind like Meshullam?

Who *is* blind like the Servant of Yahweh?

The threefold stress on comparison—God wants his audience to think of comparisons[[102]](#footnote-102)—is because God is **seeking people like his Servant and his messenger**. The last question brings out the intention of the first question, which is to elicit a response of identification. However, the construction ~a yk is used in the first question rather than the simple comparison k precisely because the Servant was being singled out[[103]](#footnote-103) as ‘blind’ in the ongoing debate by the people/leaders. Hezekiah was the one who responded first to Isaiah’s admonition over the matter of the Babylonian envoys—the leaders in Jerusalem thought that he was being blind to the facts of their situation. The Servant had been blind, but he had listened to Isaiah and God’s messenger and he was now (again) no longer blind (Isa 42:1); the Servant was now to be a light to the Gentiles.

God does not send blind and deaf messengers but the people might accuse his messengers of being deaf and blind in their rejection of their message. The tone therefore becomes more obviously sarcastic in the next verse:

You (sing.) have seen many things, but you do not observe *them*; opening ears, but he does not hear. Isa 42:20 (NASB revised)

The people are addressed with a plural in v. 18 (‘ye’) but here the MT has the singular ‘You have seen many things’ in the main text and the infinitive ‘Seeing many things’ in the margin. The sarcastic tone is clear: they were blind and yet thought themselves insightful. The statement has the same ‘blind-deaf’ polarity of v. 19. The messenger was ‘deaf’[[104]](#footnote-104) and so the sarcasm here is conveyed by the statement, ‘The messenger was opening ears, but he does not hear—really?’ The messenger did hear and this is shown by the fact that he was opening ears. His success in point was that of the Servant whose ears had been opened (Isa 50:5).

The idea of ‘opening ears’ is unusual since the verb would normally be used for the opening of the eyes. The reason for this choice of verb is the condition of ‘closed ears’ (Isa 48:8, lit ‘not opened’). This condition was a state in which the leaders of the people were not listening to God’s way of doing things and were instead following diplomatic policies of alliance. The role of the messenger was to open the ears of the people to God’s message of liberation (Isa 40:3).

‘Meshullam’ is a name chosen for its meaning. While Goldingay and Oswalt opt for ‘covenanted’ as the basic idea, the idea of a ‘recompensing one’ is more probable.[[105]](#footnote-105) The pointing of the name is the same as that used for the passive Pual participle of ~lv and the corresponding active Piel for ~lv has the sense of ‘recompense’ in Isaiah (e.g. Isa 19:21; 59:18; 65:6; 66:6).[[106]](#footnote-106)

This meaning nicely fits the historical circumstances: Hezekiah had been ‘recompensed’ (against Assyria) in Yahweh’s deliverance of Jerusalem, but he had not returned that recompense in executing the vengeance of the Lord upon the nations (2 Chron 32:25); he had behaved as someone who was blind and deaf. Hence, the Lord has raised-up the One from the North to execute his recompense. Meshullam, God’s messenger, carries the symbolic name (‘Recompensing One’) to go with his message; God will give the recompense. This would come through the One from the North who will become prominent in Isaiah’s later chapters, (Isa 59:18; 65:6; 66:6).

There is an allusion in the third Servant Song (noted in the KJV mg.) that reinforces this reading.

The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. Isa 50:5 (KJV)

They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods. Isa 42:17 (KJV)

There is an obvious connection between Isa 50:5 and v. 20—the opening of ears. The reference to an incident of ‘turning back’ in v. 5 also connects to Isa 42:17. The historical allusion is to the turning back of the children of Israel by Amalek after the people had refused to take the land, believing instead the report of the spies (Num 14:25, 43).

In Isaiah, ‘turning back’ is a metaphor for what will happen to those who trust in the divination and policy direction coming from the false prophets associated with idols. The leaders in Jerusalem and the people who supported them would be ‘turned back’ from inheriting the land. When the Servant in Isa 50:5 says that he was ‘not rebellious’ and he was ‘not turned back’, he is making a difference between himself and those leaders of Judah who were rebellious and who had been ‘turned back’ from being part of the restoration of Judah.

It is not difficult to imagine how in the situation underlying Isaiah 42 some were to be literally ‘turned back’—God’s disapproval of them could be shown by their estates being plundered and put to the torch; or it could be that their diplomatic embassies were going to be turned back. Similarly, the estates of the king could have escaped the attention of bandits. The Servant’s claim to not being rebellious refers to Hezekiah’s acceptance of Isaiah’s admonition in the wake of the Babylonian envoy’s visit. Hezekiah drew back from the rebellion implied in his courting of their proposals, but the rest of the Jerusalem leadership did not repent as quickly.

In Isa 42:18-25 **we have moved on in the development of events**: Hezekiah had shown himself to be blind with regard to returning God’s recompense and in the matter of the Babylonian envoys—but he repented in response to Isaiah’s admonition and the proclamation of God’s messenger, the voice in the wilderness. The mistake that commentators make is twofold: first, they do not read Isaiah 40-48 against the historical record which has been supplied in Kings and Chronicles; accordingly, they take the blind servant to be Israel; and secondly, they read the tone of the text with a conciliatory tone rather than a sarcastic one.

The historical record in Isaiah 36-39 narrates the faith of Hezekiah in his prayer for the deliverance of Jerusalem and then, in the course of the next year, his blindness in the matter of the Babylonian envoys. His diplomatic decisions at this time, no doubt influenced by those at court[[107]](#footnote-107) who favoured alliance, were his blindness[[108]](#footnote-108)—but he is no longer ‘blind’. God’s choice of words, his rhetorical questions, are sarcastic and aimed at getting the people to see that the Servant is not blind and nor is his messenger. In fact, he is actually seeking those who are *like* his Servant and his messenger.

The NASB or the KJV could be right for the next statement in how they render the Perfect form of the verb ‘to be pleased’; it depends on how we read the historical point being made by Isaiah.

The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable. Isa 42:21 (KJV)

The Lord was pleased for his righteousness’ sake; he will make the law great and glorious. Isa 42:21 (NASB revised)

Both translations are consistent with our individual reading of vv. 19-20: the singular pronominal suffix (he/his) identifies the Servant as someone who has acted in a righteous way. Following the KJV, we would say that God is pleased with his Servant because he has repented and he has shown this with the bestowal of the Spirit (v. 1). Taking the NASB, we could say that God was pleased because the Servant had obeyed God during the blockade of Jerusalem and prayed on behalf of the people for deliverance.

On either reading, the Servant will make (Imperfect) the Law great and glorious. The term for ‘glorious’ that is used here (rda) is rare (3x; the corresponding adjective is more common) and only used elsewhere in the Song of Moses,

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. Exod 15:6 (KJV); cf. v. 11

The deliverance allusion to the Exodus sets the meaning of ‘righteousness’, a vindication of the covenant between Judah and God before the nations. Motyer usefully observes[[109]](#footnote-109) that ‘The Lord was pleased’ (#px hwhy) occurs elsewhere in the Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53 (v. 10), which supports our application here to Hezekiah.

On balance, we would say that v. 21 is a reference to the time when the Servant *was* righteous, and the past tense here turns the Imperfect form of the following verb into something like an infinitive: ‘The Lord was pleased for his righteousness’ sake *to make* the Law great and glorious’.[[110]](#footnote-110)

**Conclusion**

The interpretation of the Prophets is difficult. A consensus of commentators is not a sure guide to Isaiah 40-66 because they mostly work with a Babylonian framework (Whittaker is the exception). We therefore need to go back to basics and re-think issues of reference and also of the tone in an utterance, especially in the case of Isa 42:19.

**When did the NT become Scripture?**[[111]](#footnote-111)

**T. Gaston**

**Introduction**

The earliest extant list (or ‘canon’) of books considered to be authoritative is ‘The Muratorian Canon’ (late second century). The first part of this text is missing but given it enumerates Luke and John as ‘third’ and ‘fourth respectively, it is likely to have begun with reference Matthew and Mark. It subsequently lists all the books of the NT as received by the Church, except Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter and one of the epistles of John.[[112]](#footnote-112) Works that are considered useful but not received are also listed including the Apocalypse of Peter, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Shepherd of Hermas.

Whilst this is earliest surviving list of NT books, this does not mark the point when the NT books were first recognised as Scripture. The fact that Marcion (c.140) rejected all but ten of Paul’s epistles and Luke’s gospel is a strong indication that the wider Christian community already recognised certain books as authoritative.

The following is a short historical study intended to show what historical evidence is available that witnesses to the authoritative status of NT books.

**Early Christian Understanding of OT Scripture**

In Greek, ‘Scripture’ is the noun grafh, (graphē) and literally means ‘a writing’; it was used in Greek texts to refer to any piece of writing. However, in the NT, this noun is used exclusively to refer to special sort of writing: Scripture. This exclusivity does not mean an early Christian could not have used γραφή to refer to an ordinary text. What primarily determines whether grafh, refers to Scripture or some other ordinary text is absence of any complement (i.e. ‘the writings’, rather than ‘the writings of x’).

The NT witnesses to a developed understanding of what Scripture is – an understanding inherited from Jewish precursors. Scripture, though given through humans, was spoken by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6; 2 Tim 3:16) and not the result of subjective speculations (2 Peter 1:20-21). It was not only held to be useful (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16) but also unbreakable (John 10:35). The NT writers not only believed Scripture to contain unshakeable predictions of future events (e.g. Matt 26:54; Luke 22:37; John 13:18, 19:24, 28, 36-37, 20:9; Rom 1:2; Gal 3:8; James 2:23; Acts 1:16) but to be an authoritative source of information (e.g. Matt 22:29; Mark 12:24; Rom 10:11; Gal 3:22; 1 Tim 5:18; 1 Pet 2:6).

The NT also refers to Scripture using the related verb gra,fw (graphō). This is not used exclusively of Scripture but, again, the way the word is used in context determines its meaning. When a quotation is introduced with the words ‘it is written’ without any further marker (e.g. ‘in the books of x’) then the quotation comes from Scripture.

Looking at the way NT writers use both noun and verb to introduce scriptural quotations we can sketch out which books they held to be Scripture:

Genesis (Gal 3:8; James 2:23)

Exodus (Matt 22:29; Rom 9:17)

Leviticus (James 2:8)

Numbers (John 19:36)

Deuteronomy (Matt 4:4; Rom 11:8)

2 Samuel (Rom 15:9)

1 Kings (Rom 11:2)

Nehemiah (John 6:31)

Job (1 Cor 3:19)

Psalms (Rom 15:4; John 13:18)

Ecclesiastes (Rom 3:10)

Isaiah (Rom 10:11; 1 Pet 2:6)

Jeremiah (1 Cor 1:31)

Ezekiel (Rom 2:24)

Micah (Matt 2:5)

Amos (Acts 7:42)

Habakkuk (Rom 1:17)

Zechariah (Matt 26:31; John 19:37)

Malachi (Matt 11:10; Rom 9:13)

This list is a good sampling of the OT but is by no means exhaustive. Luke 24:27 refers to Scripture as including the books of Moses and all the Prophets; further down v. 44 refers to “the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms”, which would appear to be a reference to the three sections of the Hebrew Bible. We have good reason to suppose that the early Christian understanding of Scripture, like that of their Jewish contemporaries, included the 39 books of our OT.

**Inclusion of NT as Scripture**

Having demonstrated that the early Christians, as witnessed by the NT writers, had a specific understanding of Scripture, we can apply the same analysis of grafh, and gra,fw to early references to the NT. Other early Christians shared with the same understanding of Scripture with the NT writers. For example 1 Clem 45.2 says that the Scriptures were given “through the Holy Spirit” and contain nothing “unjust or counterfeit”. Similarly, the Preaching of Peter says that the OT prophecies are Scripture and were decreed by God (fr.2). Reasonably, when a NT text is described as being Scripture or a quotation from a NT text is introduced as scriptural then this is evidence that (some) early Christians included this text in their conception of Scripture, that is, as given by the Holy Spirit and authoritative.

(A) 1 Timothy

For the Scripture (h` grafh,) says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The labourer deserves his wages”. 1 Tim 5:18

Paul introduces two quotations as Scripture; the first is from Deuteronomy 25:4; the second is from Luke 10:7. If 1 Timothy is written by the apostle Paul, then it must date before 66/7 AD, which is the likely date of Paul’s execution. J. A. T. Robinson, connecting 1 Tim 1:3 with Acts 20:1, assigns it to autumn of 55 AD,[[113]](#footnote-113) but this would date it earlier than the composition of Luke.[[114]](#footnote-114) Conservative scholars have sometimes speculated that Paul was released from prison and travelled to Spain prior to his final imprisonment and execution; on this basis, A. D. Norris dates 1 Timothy to the autumn 66 AD.[[115]](#footnote-115) The current critical consensus is that 1 Timothy is pseudepigraphal and it is consequently dated late. Even if this is the case, it is likely to have been written before the end of the first century since it is known to Polycarp (c.110; Pol. *Phil* 4.1, 12.3). If we assign 1 Timothy to the range 60-100 (taking most options on board) and Luke to the range 60-80 (again, taking on most options) then Luke is acknowledged as Scripture (by one writer, at least) no more than 40 years after composition, probably much sooner.

(B) 2 Peter

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures (grafa.j). 2 Pet 3:15-16

Peter refers to Paul’s letter as Scripture. The phrase ‘all his letters’ may not refer to the full number of Pauline letters in our NT but just those known to Peter. If 2 Peter is written by the apostle Peter then it must date before 66/7 AD, which is the likely date of his crucifixion. Robinson dates it to 61/2 AD.[[116]](#footnote-116) Scholarly consensus considers 2 Peter to be inauthentic and late; it is acknowledged that the external testimony for 2 Peter is, arguably, the weakest of any NT book. However, the dependence of the Apocalypse of Peter (c.110) and 1 Clement on 2 Peter require that it be dated at least within the first century.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Again, taking on board the various options for the sake of argument, if we assign 2 Peter to the range 60-100 and Paul’s letters to 50-66 then (some of) the Pauline letters were acknowledged as Scripture (by one writer, at least) no more than 50 years after composition, probably much sooner.

(C) Epistle of Barnabas

And all the more attend to this, my brethren, when ye reflect and behold, that after so great signs and wonders were wrought in Israel, they were thus [at length] abandoned. Let us beware lest we be found [fulfilling that saying], as it is written (ge,graptai), ‘Many are called, but few are chosen’. *Barn*. 4.14

This anonymous epistle, wrongly ascribed to Barnabas, introduces the words of Jesus (cf. Matt 20:16; 22:14) with the formula ‘it is written’. This indicates both that the author was dependent on a written gospel (not an oral tradition), almost certainly Matthew, and that he regarded that gospel as Scripture. Since the letter mentions the temple laying in ruins (*Barn*. 16.3-4), it must date between 70-135 AD. The expectation that the temple may be rebuilt could reflect the circumstances leading up to the Jewish revolt (132-135);[[118]](#footnote-118) Robinson dates it much earlier (c.75).[[119]](#footnote-119) If we assign the Epistle of Barnabus to the range 70-135 and Matthew to the range 60-80 (following majority opinion) then the gospel was acknowledged as Scripture within 75 years of its composition.

(D) Polycarp to Philippians

For I trust that ye are well versed in the Sacred Scriptures, and that nothing is hid from you; but to me this privilege is not yet granted. It is declared then in these Scriptures [*scripturis*], “Be ye angry, and sin not,” and, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Pol. *Phil* 12.1

Polycarp quotes Eph 4:26 as Scripture. Polycarp wrote to the Philippians responding to their request for copies of the letters of Ignatius and so this is a covering letter for the collection he sends. This letter is therefore contemporary with the Ignatian letters (c.110). It has sometimes been proposed that the extant text is compilation of two letters, the first twelve chapters coming from second letter of Polycarp written in the mid-130s.[[120]](#footnote-120) Ephesians, though sometimes considered inauthentic, may be reasonably dated c.60. It was acknowledged as scripture by Polycarp within 75 years of composition.

(E) 2 Clement

And another Scripture [γραφή] saith, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners”. 2 Clem 2.4; cf. Matt 9:13; Mark 2:17

The homily, known as Clement’s second letter to the Corinthians, is neither a letter nor can it be credibly assigned to Clement.[[121]](#footnote-121) It cites the words of Jesus as Scripture, though it could derive from any of the synoptic gospels (cf. Matt 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). It can be reasonably dated to the 140s.[[122]](#footnote-122)

**Other NT Scriptural Quotations**

Though used frequently in the NT, not all scriptural quotations were introduced with the formula “it is written” or “the Scripture says”. Sometimes quotations are introduced with a simple “for” (e.g. Rom 10:18) or “again” (Rom 15:11); others form part of a narrative (e.g. Luke 4:17; Acts 8:32). We may diagnose several other ways of introducing scriptural quotations. “God says” (e.g. 2 Cor 6:16) and “God through x says” (e.g. Rom 9:25) denote scriptural quotations because Scripture is regarded as the word of God. Similarly, the introduction “the Holy Spirit says” (e.g. Heb 3:7) and “the Holy Spirit through x says” (e.g. Matt 22:43) also denote scriptural quotations because Scripture is regarded as given through the Spirit. Lastly, quotations introduced as the words of a prophet (e.g. Acts 7:48), or a prophecy (e.g. Matt 13:14), would normally be taken to scriptural because prophets spoke by the Spirit (2 Pet 1:20), excepting those cases where a false prophet is quoted (cf. Tit 1:12).

We can contrast these indicators of scriptural quotations with cases of non-scriptural quotations. We have three examples in the NT of quotations from sources that were certainly not considered to be Scripture. These are the quotations from Epimenides and Aratus that Paul used in his speech on Mars Hill (Acts 17:28) and the quotation from Epimenides about Cretans in Paul’s letter to Titus (Tit 1:12). The former quotations are ascribed to “some of your own poets”, the latter to “a prophet of their own”; in both cases something about the source of the quotation is stated which indicates that it is not to be taken as Scripture.

**Other Early Christian NT Quotations**

Using the indicators of scriptural quotations discussed above, we can diagnose some more cases of early Christian writers citing the NT as Scripture. In some cases, the manner in which the quotation is introduced leaves it uncertain whether it is considered to be a scriptural quotation. For example, there are many instances of quotations introduced as the words of Jesus (1 Clem 13:2, 46:8; 2 Clem 3:2, 4:2, 5:2, 4, 6:1, 9:11; Ign. *Smyrn*. 3.2; Pol. *Phil* 2.3, 7.2; *Did*. 9.5). These quotations are clearly treated with reverence as sayings of the Lord but that, of itself, does not mean that the source of the quotation was treated as Scripture. For example, Acts 20:35 quotes words of Jesus which are not known from any gospel; Paul considers them authentic words of Jesus but if there was a written source then it presumably never received scriptural status. Arguably, on the basis of these quotations alone these early Christians might have regarded the words of Jesus as authoritative and the gospel records as merely reliable history. However there are some other examples which are stronger indicators of scriptural status.

(A) 1 Clement

Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you. 1 Clem 47.1-3

Clement writing to the church at Corinth reminds them of a letter written to them by Paul “under the inspiration of the Spirit”. By definition, acknowledging 1 Corinthians as inspired by the Spirit is recognition of 1 Corinthians as Scripture. 1 Clement has been traditionally dated to the mid-90s,[[123]](#footnote-123) though it has been dated earlier (c.70). [[124]](#footnote-124) 1 Corinthians is usually dated to c.55.

(B) 2 Clement

For, on the one hand, they hear from us that God has said, “it is no great accomplishment for you to love those who love you; it is great if you love your enemies and those who hate you. 2 Clem 13.4

Here the writer quotes words of Jesus from Luke 6:32, 35 as though they were words of God. It is vastly improbable that the writer means to identify Jesus as “God”; neither Ignatius (c.110) nor Justin (c.150-160) call Jesus “God” in this unqualified way. It is more probable that the writer is referring to Scripture.

(C) Didache

In the Didache, we find a NT quotation introduced as “the Lord says in the gospel” (Did 8.2; cf. 2 Clem 8.5). If the word ‘gospel’ means ‘recognised account of Jesus’, then this might be an indicator of Scripture. However it is, perhaps, more probable that ‘gospel’ means a proclamation of the good news.

(D) Diognetus

In the Epistle to Diognetus, the author quotes 1 Cor 8:1 as the words of “the apostle” (*Diogn*. 12.5). It is possible that introducing a quotation as having apostolic authority was equivalent to introducing a quotation as having prophetic authority, and thus an indicator of scriptural status. However, this example is complicated by the fact that it is generally recognised that chapters 11 and 12 do not belong to the Epistle of Diognetus but were wrongly combined at some later date.[[125]](#footnote-125)

**Summary**

The table below presents the evidence considered above along with the possible range for the period between composition and recognition as Scripture.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **NT Text** | **Cited** | **Years to Recognition** |
| Luke | 1 Tim 5:18 | 0-40 |
| Matthew | *Barn*. 4.14 | 0-75 |
| Paul’s letters, (some of) | 2 Pet 3:15-16 | 10-50 |
| 1 Corinthians | 1 Clem 47.1-3 | 15-40 |
| Ephesians | Pol. *Phil* 12.1 | 50-75 |
| Luke | 2 Clem 13.4 | 60-80 |
| Matthew or Mark or Luke | 2 Clem 2.4 | 60-90 |

This analysis is necessarily impeded by the paucity of the evidence, and so cannot be taken to represent the full extent of scriptural recognition. It does demonstrate that NT texts were recognised as Scripture very early; Luke, Matthew and some of Paul’s letters were acknowledged as Scripture within a generation.

But this analysis almost certainly under-represents what was regarded as Scripture. J. Barton notes that the apostolic fathers quote the NT far more than the OT.[[126]](#footnote-126) He suggests that this demonstrates the inadequacy of judging scriptural status through quotations introduced as Scripture. Clearly the NT was considered authoritative by the early Christians even when not introduced as Scripture.

There are limitations to this analysis. Whilst it demonstrates what was considered Scripture, it gives us no indication what was not considered Scripture; there is no early canon to which we can refer. Barton describes three categories based upon the available evidence: a core of frequently cited texts (4 gospels and major Pauline letters); an intermediate class of infrequently cited texts (Acts, shorter epistles and Revelation); and a third class of texts occasionally cited (e.g. Shepherd of Hermas). This distribution suggests that a significant part of our NT was treated as authoritative by subsequent generations of Christians, but also suggests some fluidity around the edges.[[127]](#footnote-127)

**Reviews**

David P. Levin, *The Creation Text: Studies in Early Genesis.* Livonia: Christadelphian Tidings, 2011.

*The Creation Text* is a set of 49 studies that sequentially explores the text and structure of Genesis 1 to 5. The studies vary in style: some are close textual exposition; some offer intertextual analysis; some consider broader compositional issues. In this sense the genre of the studies also vary from biblical studies to theology to homilies. The mastery of these varying approaches to the text is a testament to the author’s wide knowledge, analytical rigor and thoughtful insight.

This is not a book about science. The author avoids all externalities, including any implications these chapters might have for the age of the earth, the origin of species or the nature of humanity. This is welcome relief from much that has been written on Genesis and an opportunity to explore the text on its own terms. This does not mean that the author avoids complicated questions such as the relationship of Gen 1:1 to the rest of the chapter, the relationship of Gen 1 to Gen 2, or the literality of some or all of what was written. But the author approaches these, not as some difficulty to be reconciled with the results of secular disciplines, but as features of the text to be understood through the text itself.

The joy of this book is the fresh insights that the author brings to chapters of the bible that are all too familiar. It should remind readers that the bible is not a problem to be explained away but a message to received and enjoyed on its own terms.

**TG**

**Columnists**

**Intertextuality**

**R. Dargie**

# “.....the Waters of Shiloah that go softly…”

For the purposes of this column we will consider the incident of Jesus and the man born blind in John 9, and look into the intertextual background to this event, with all quotations in this article taken from the King James Version. We will learn that whilst John’s record appears to be a simple tale of healing, there is within this chapter, a complex subtext which contains a veritable ‘flood’ of deeper spiritual meaning. These deeper matters concern God’s plan of reconciliation with man through his Son Jesus Christ, a matter upon which the Apostle Paul has much to say (2 Cor 5:18-19). So, John 9 draws upon OT themes which are brought to a focal point in NT times by the teaching of Jesus.

In looking into this matter, we will also discover *inter alia,* that what is recorded in the OT is effectively,

* A data-bank of ‘spiritual collateral’, gathered together for the purposes of the ministry of one man—Jesus Christ.
* Jesus makes use of this data-bank to create a set of instructive and interpretive ‘tableaus’ in the form of his sayings, parables, miracles, and other actions which are enacted by Jesus for the benefit and education of those of NT times and, (through the Gospel record), beyond the first century CE, to the faithful of every age.
* This OT ‘spiritual collateral’, generated over centuries of human history and spanning many incidents and deeds both good and bad, was written down by holy men of God and held in suspense as it were, awaiting the appearing and ministry of Jesus to unlock the true meaning of these OT prophetic hints and dark sayings.
* The Gospels then provide a set of final and definitive interpretations of OT themes, some originating from the dawn of time, which Jesus used to great effect in his ministry, as he sought to witness to his generation and provide the catalyst to divide the faithful from the faithless, and to warn the latter of the impending doom in the outworking of the covenant curses in 70 CE.

The incident of the man born blind is the apex of just one spiritual aspect which Jesus quarries from this vast mine of spiritual collateral. It concerns living waters—we shall trace the source of the concept of living waters and see how this theme flows across the centuries touching various individuals in its course and, fittingly, in the hands of Jesus, culminates in the eddying waters of the pool of Siloam where a man born into darkness receives sight for the very first time, and experiences a mid-life theophany.

## **Israel in the Wilderness**

It is apparent that the journeying of Israel in the wilderness had multiple divine objectives. First, it was to remove Israel from the corruption and near death conditions of the ‘Iron Furnace’ of Egypt (Deut 4:20; Ezek 16:4-9[[128]](#footnote-128)); secondly, there was to be a period of cleansing and purification; and thirdly, there was a three-part preparation of the people, (1) in God’s self-revelation; (2) in an exchange of oaths given at Sinai, resulting in the divine covenant or, more correctly, a marriage contract; and (3) in the setting up of formal structures of worship, leadership and a judicial system—i.e. a ‘nation’.

None of this, however, would have been accomplished in the hostile environs of a desert place without the provision for the essentials of life, i.e. copious quantities of water and food. Israel was of course sustained by divine providence and the visible hand of God which is attested to by a number of OT writers. The provision of water and food was, however, administered on divine principles, and whilst the primary object was to provide daily sustenance, the close secondary objective was to teach the ordinary Israelite, (1) spiritual lessons (“man doth not live by bread alone” Deut 8:3); and (2) about the tender care and loving nature of the God with whom they were now in ‘contract’. The lessons were obvious, God is a loving god who provides life through the giving of water and food, but the water and food (manna) which God gave were symbolic of something spiritually much deeper (John 6:31, 49, 58). Hence, Moses was directed to strike a rock to provide water for a thirsty people (Exod 17:6).

However, as we know from the NT (1 Cor 10:4), this rock pointed forwards to the crucified Jesus. The water would only flow from the rock once it had been struck by the rod of Moses. So the atoning work of Jesus could only be achieved by a divinely appointed ‘striking’ of Jesus. The blood of Jesus would prove more effective than “the blood of bulls and goats” (Heb 10:4) to atone for the sin of Adam. So, whilst the water from the rock sustained life for a few days, the spiritual Israelite was being challenged to discern in the sparkling cascade, a source of water which would meet the real need of man i.e. the removal of the curse of sin in the flesh once and for all time.

The raising of Jesus on the third day by the power of the Holy Spirit sealed this work of salvation for mankind. It is significant that subsequent to the striking of the rock, the Sinai covenant is formed and the Law of Moses is given. That the work of the Holy Spirit is central to the ‘living water’ concept is evidenced by the fact that at the time of covenant making and law giving, men like Bezaleel were energized by the Holy Spirit to provide the means and method of acceptable worship (Exod 31:1). It is interesting to note the similarities between the Exodus and the early days of the first century church, and the key part played by the power of the Holy Spirit in both dispensations.

Our first conclusion then is that ‘living waters’ stands as a metaphor for **the power of the Holy Spirit deployed in the work of salvation for mankind but more specifically in the raising of Jesus (the Immanuel) from the dead**. This concept, established early in the life of the fledgling nation of Israel, will appear again in both Old and New Testaments.

## **Isaiah and Immanuel**

The next significant sighting of the ‘living water’ theme is in the days of Isaiah and the threat to Judah from the alliance of Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria. With the ‘Christ-rock’ of the Exodus now centuries behind them, the ‘living waters’ were now manifested in the small Gihon spring which percolated from beneath the mountain of Zion on the south eastern side of the Kedron valley to form the brook of Shiloah.

This quiet, unassuming, and largely unseen little brook was of vital strategic importance to the existence of the city of Jerusalem, particularly under siege conditions. The waters of Shiloah were also a fitting symbol of God’s quiet, unseen, and yet eternal presence in the life of the nation, symbolising the salvation and life rejuvenating mercies in Jesus Christ.

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high. God is in the midst of her she shall not be moved: God shall help her and that right early. Ps 46: 4-5

The prophet Isaiah uses this feature to drive home a lesson to King Ahaz and the nobles of Judah (Isaiah 7-8). Isaiah upbraids them for seeking help from the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser, rather than seeking help from Yahweh their God. The metaphors used by Isaiah are chosen carefully:

Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son, now therefore, behold the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river strong and mighty, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory, and he shall come up all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall pass through Judah: he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck: and the stretching out of his wings shall fill thy land, O Immanuel. Isa 8:6-8

He compares the ever present sweet and softly flowing waters of the ‘Shiloah’, (with all the resonances of a deity who loves, protects and provides a way of salvation for his people), with the cold, hard and ultimately destructive tidal-surge of the inhuman Assyrians as they would sweep down as a wild river over the Promised Land.

But whilst the polemic of Isaiah was lost on King Ahaz and his cronies, it was not lost on his faithful son Hezekiah. Ultimately, the tidal surge of the Assyrian would in the days of Hezekiah reach to the neck of Judah itself (701 BCE) when Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem. But, as the record shows, the faithful attitude of Hezekiah was in complete contrast to that shown by his father Ahaz.

Indeed, Hezekiah, with the eye of faith looked to the “sweet and softly flowing waters of Shiloah” in a number of ways. First, he diverted the waters of Shiloah into the protecting walls of Zion via a conduit, thereby strengthening the city against a long siege and denying sustenance to the enemy; and secondly, by this act of faith, he demonstrated to the world he would look only to the power and presence of God for his salvation. He would eschew worldly alliances. By implication he identified his temporal and eternal destiny with the life and work of Jesus Christ, and accordingly at the time of the great crisis, the power of the Holy Spirit raised him from his death bed, and through the Angel of the Lord annihilated the Assyrian force which surrounded Jerusalem.

The prophet Joel, in his remarkable prophecy also speaks of the Assyrian tide coming upon Judah and Jerusalem, and exhorts the people to reformation and a renewal of faith. In Chapter 2:28-32, Joel predicts that following God’s pity for his people (2:18) and his miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem (2:20), he will “pour” out his Holy Spirit upon the people – akin to a cascade of refreshing rain on a desolated land and people. Of course these words are also related also to the events of Acts chapter 2 and the happening of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, an event which Jesus had already predicted as recorded in the Gospels.

In John chapter 7, the Gospel writer records[[129]](#footnote-129) the incident in the life of Jesus which took place during the feast of Tabernacles and looked forward to the Pentecost out-pouring.

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit that they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified). John 7:37-39

The rivers of living waters flowing from the belly clearly represents the coming first century apostolic ministry, supported by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, a ministry in which the pure doctrine of God was preached.

The brook Shiloah which emptied itself into the pool of Siloam (created by Hezekiah), was central to the ordinances undertaken in the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast replete with salvation symbology was a joyous affair and celebrated at the end of the agricultural year. It looked forwards to the refreshing winter rains to rejuvenate the recently harvested earth and prepare the ground for winter seeding. Jesus used this fact to appeal to his nation that they should rally to him, the true Immanuel. If men heeded his call, they would be blessed with the Holy Spirit, but more they would hear and understand importantly the true and pure life giving doctrine of God, and be saved from falsehood and the vain repetitions of men.

## **The Man Born Blind**

So, we come to the man born blind in John 9. That he represented and stood as a symbol of the nation of the Jews is apparent for two reasons. First, he was born blind—he was in darkness from the cradle as were the people. The nation suffered under a religious system that professed to deal with eternal Godly truths, but was in fact a counterfeit religion, which observed the ritual of the Law but not its spirit, and indeed multiplied burdens upon the ordinary Israelite by adding a plethora of man-made observances. These added rules, enforced by a ruling caste, which was mired in political intrigue with the Roman rulers of the day, caused Jesus to affirm, “This people honour me with their lips but their heart is far from me”.

Secondly, when this blind man eventually meets Jesus, his blindness is compounded by the Messiah making clay of the dust of the earth with his spittle, which is daubed on eyes that had never seen light. The man is thus doubly blind. The use of clay by Jesus to compound the blindness of the man born blind is significant (fulfilling Isa 6:9-10). This blind man was then directed (sent) to goto the waters whose very name means ‘sent’by an Immanuel who had himself been ‘sent’. He is directed to these waters but in this we see an enacted parable of the Jews being directed to Jesus as the true source of the ‘living waters’.

The blind man having felt and struggled his way down to the Pool of Siloam washed his clay covered eyes with the living water sent from God (with all the echoes implicit within that term for the rite of baptism), and for the first time in his life he can now see. Later we know, having been excluded from the Synagogue by the Jews, he meets the Lord Jesus Christ who specifically seeks him out to complete the work of salvation commenced through the power of the Holy Spirit, which also incidentally addresses the failure of the nation as a whole and concludes some wonderful prophecies set out in Isaiah (Isaiah chapter 35:5, 42:7, and 42:16-19)

In conclusion, the visible work and power of the Holy Spirit in the world of men died out when the last of the Apostles ceased their labours as the ambassadors of Jesus Christ towards the end of the first century CE. So, have the ‘living waters’ ceased to be seen in the lives of men and women? In one sense the power of the Holy Spirit is still outworking today, as evidenced by the fact that there is still a steady stream of those seeking baptism. As Jesus himself said,

No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me[[130]](#footnote-130) draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:44

In this article we have reviewed in outline the concept of ‘living waters’ as the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of the salvation of men, manifest by the rock in the wilderness and in the brook of Shiloah. We in this dispensation however, can look forward to the day still future in a reconstituted earth when as the book of Revelation tells us (22:1):

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

**Archaeology**

**J. Burke**

**Is the Biblical chronology of the king of Israel accurate?**

In the late 19th century, critical scholar Julius Wellhausen claimed the Biblical chronology of the kings of Israel was a literary invention for religious purposes, which had been edited and revised several times from a variety of different sources, rather than a genuine historical record.

That a process of alteration and improvement of the chronology was busily carried on in later times, **we see from the added synchronisms of the kings of Israel and Judah**.[[131]](#footnote-131)

For the next 70 years, critical scholars continued to treat the chronology as historically worthless and irreconcilable.[[132]](#footnote-132) However, in 1951, Biblical scholar Edwin Thiele published ‘The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings’, a harmonization of the Biblical record of the kings of Israel (originally as a doctoral dissertation). By the time of the second edition (slightly revised), it was recognized that Thiele’s work was a significant breakthrough in establishing the historical validity of the Biblical chronology.

**Scholarly reception and criticism**

Many criticisms have been made of Thiele’s chronology, [[133]](#footnote-133) and it is still resisted by some commentators. [[134]](#footnote-134),[[135]](#footnote-135) Biblical scholar Galil Gershon has raised objections to several of Thiele’s suppositions, as well as to his interpretation of the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III, his dating of the death of Menahem, and his understanding of the regnal counting methods of Israel and Judah.[[136]](#footnote-136)

Nevertheless, the value and general validity of Thiele’s scheme have been acknowledged throughout the scholarly community, and it is the most commonly accepted chronology.

The chronology most widely accepted today is one **based on the meticulous study by Thiele**.[[137]](#footnote-137)

**Increasingly his chronological scheme has come to dominate the majority of scholarly works** and it is unlikely that his system can ever be overthrown **without altering some well-established dates in Near Eastern history**, for Thiele’s chronology is now inextricably locked into the chronology of the Near East.[[138]](#footnote-138)

Thiele’s initial chronology remains the typical starting point for study of the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Thiele’s system of chronology has been well received over the past 40 years **and is now accepted as the basis for Israel’s chronology in a growing number of standard scholarly works**.[[139]](#footnote-139)

The original model has been improved over time by several modifications,[[140]](#footnote-140) but the core premise has resisted almost half a century of scholarly analysis and criticism.

After 40 years Thiele’s **chronology has not been significantly altered or proved to be false in any major area** except in the matter of Hezekiah’s coregency.[[141]](#footnote-141)

**Archaeological evidence**

Due to its strong agreement with the archaeological evidence, Thiele’s chronology has also been applied successfully in other fields of Ancient Near East study, such as the chronologies of Assyria and Babylon.

In a 1996 article, Kenneth Strand wrote, “What has generally not been given due notice **is the effect that Thiele’s clarification of the Hebrew chronology of this period of history has had in furnishing a corrective for various dates in ancient Assyrian and Babylonian history**.” The purpose of Strand’s article was to show that Thiele’s methodology accomplished more than just producing a coherent chronology from scriptural data. His chronology, once produced, **proved useful in settling some troublesome problems in Assyrian and Babylonian history**.[[142]](#footnote-142)

The reliability of the chronologies in 1-2 Kings has also been supported by archaeological evidence; hence, L. L. Grabbe notes that the chronology in these books “agrees with what can be gleaned from extra-biblical sources” and that “even if we had no external sources we could have reasonable confidence in the biblical sequence”.[[143]](#footnote-143)

**![C:\Documents and Settings\User 1\Local Settings\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\R9U4LTTU\MP900444315[1].jpg]()Marginal Notes**

**Luke 23:43—AP**

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (KJV; similar in many versions)

The ‘Thief on the Cross’ is a hoary old chestnut. Jesus went to the grave after his death; likewise the thief. Paradise is not the grave. Christadelphians have often explained the verse by shifting the comma so that ‘today’ is attached to ‘Verily I say unto thee today, you shall be…’ which makes Jesus’ statement into an acceptable future promise of life in the kingdom.

In the absence of Greek punctuation in the early uncial manuscripts, the placement of a comma must be inferred from the context and precedent. However, textual and linguistic evidence is inconclusive.

1. The Greek manuscripts do not all have the syntactic order ‘to you I say’ (soi le,gw); in fact the majority Byzantine tradition (BYZ) does not; and of the Egyptian tradition, neither do the Siniaticus or Alexandrinus codices. The GNT and UBS[[144]](#footnote-144) go with the Egyptian tradition, but Hodges and Farstad[[145]](#footnote-145) go with the Majority Text.

2. In the GNT le,gw soi (13x) is more common than soi le,gw (6x), and in particular, all cases with ‘truly’ go with le,gw soi—thus suggesting that this arrangement is correct. Interestingly, GNT and BYZ agree for five of the six cases of soi le,gw, differing only in Luke 23:43.

3. The Curetonian Syriac version of the NT has the comma placed after ‘today’, and this language is closer to the original Aramaic of Jesus’ speech than Greek and may therefore preserve the correct punctuation.[[146]](#footnote-146)

4. The adverb ‘today’ doesn’t have to be first in the order of words in the clause to which it belongs—see Luke 2:1; 5:26; 22:34; etc. It could go with ‘I say to you today, you will be…’ or ‘I say to you, today you will be with me’.

5. In Acts 20:26 we have a use of ‘today’ that goes with the verb of utterance, i.e. ‘Therefore I testify to you this day’ (RSV). Compare also Deut 5:1; 27:1.

In the light of (1)-(5), there is no obvious syntactic ‘rule’ to call upon; the Greek can bear either punctuation, so the matter comes down to interpretation.[[147]](#footnote-147)

**Heb 2:14—AP**

New Testament texts can have multiple types embedded in them. In Heb 2:14, there is an obvious type centred on ‘Jacob and his Children meeting Esau’. Another strand of typology is based on the Exodus. This is shown by the use of the noun ‘bondage’ and the verb ‘to deliver’ (v. 15), which are obvious allusions to the captivity of Israel in Egypt.

It is attractive to read the events of the Passover behind Heb 2:14. At that time Pharaoh was the one who had the ‘power of death’ over the firstborn of Israel. And they were subject to bondage all their *lifetime* through fear of death from Pharaoh, which makes Pharaoh ‘the Devil’. However, the ‘children’ of Is­rael were ‘delivered’ from their bondage (Exod 12:21-23) by the Lord, who hovered over their houses, and made ‘the destroyer’ to pass­-over their houses and of ‘no effect’.

We can also read the type with ‘the Devil’ matching the Destroy­ing Angel which the blood of the lamb ‘made of no effect’. There is no contradiction between this view and the one above, since the destroying angel was *a Pharaoh* to Pharaoh when he destroyed *his* firstborn.[[148]](#footnote-148) The Lord delivered Israel from both Pharaoh and the Destroy­ing Angel. The two facts are present in this type. This makes ‘the destroyer’ perform the role of ‘the devil’ i.e. Pharaoh.[[149]](#footnote-149)

As a third type, we might observe that the same Greek word for ‘bondage’ is used in four other places in the NT by way of allusion to the bondage of the children of Israel (Rom 8:15, 21; Gal 4:24; 5:1). Paul uses this concept in a *typical* sense to describe the status of those who are content to remain under the Law of Moses—they were slaves in bondage (Gal 4:9; 5:1). The law was bondage because it led to death and en­gendered fear of death. If the law could have given life, then it would not have enslaved.

The purpose of the Law was to lead to faith in Christ. It would be this faith that would save those under the Law. However, the Law was used by the Scribes and the Pharisees to enslave the people. This slavery is like the slavery of Egypt,[[150]](#footnote-150) it lasts a lifetime, and there is a dragon or ser­pent that is the enslaving power.

Jesus Christ sets people free from this Law, by destroy­ing the Serpent who is the power behind the Law (Rom 7:8-9). The Law was essentially good, but it was used (and inverted) by ‘the devil’ to exercise the power of death.

**2 Thess 2:3—AP**

The word ‘apostasy’ (avpostasi,a, KJV, ‘falling away’) occurs once in the NT in 2 Thess 2:6,

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition… 2 Thess 2:3 (KJV)

Our note is not an explanation of this prophecy about the ‘Man of Sin’. Rather, our observation is about Judas; ‘Man of Sin’ is a title applied to Judas. So how would the terms of 2 Thess 2:3 apply in type to him?

* The betrayal of Christ would not come unless Judas was revealed, and this required him to fall away.
* Christ was ‘head over all’ as the firstborn of creation; he was also called ‘God’ and he was worshipped.
* Judas’ betrayal saw him go to the priests in the temple and in effect exalt himself above Christ.

This is just one application of the words, but it illustrates the point that prophecy is based on events being typical of later events. Moreover, the language of the prophecy doesn’t have to relate to only one event—but rather aspects of the prophecy fit[[151]](#footnote-151) enough of several events so that we can see them as part of the typical sequence leading up to the final event.

**Heb 9:12—AP**

The KJV renders Heb 9:12 as,

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*.

The expression ‘*for us*’ is in italics, but the question arises—are the italics justified? In this short note I deploy two arguments against accepting italics.

The Greek underlying eu`ra,menoj (‘having obtained’) is an Aorist Middle, which would *normally* mean that the subject of the verb had in the past done something *to* himself or *for* his own benefit. H. P. V. Nunn in his *Syntax of New Testament Greek* writes[[152]](#footnote-152) that there are three senses:

(1) the subject acts upon himself,

(2) the subject acts for himself,

(3) the subject allows something to be done to him or for him

Nunn further observes that while many Greek verbs share the same conjugation for the middle or passive voices, this is not so for the Aorist tense. He also observes that many middle and passive forms of the verb are *deponent*, meaning that they carry an active sense.

These observations help us with regard to Heb 9:12. They suggest that the form of the verb is a middle form because we *have* an aorist. They also suggest that the sense might be one where the subject acts *for* himself, rather than *upon* himself. For example, a priest would act for himself in making an offering for himself; he would not be acting *upon* himself. A person would *obtain or find something for himself*.

These points made by Nunn pose the question: In what sense did Christ obtain or find eternal redemption *for* himself. There are two initial points to be made here: firstly, at the *point of entry* to the Holy Place, eternal redemption has *already* been obtained; secondly, the eternal redemption was obtained for the benefit of the one who entered the holy place. Let us examine the question of whether the eternal redemption *was* obtained or found for the one entering the holy place, or whether it was obtained for others.

The mention of the blood of bulls *and* goats is one of a number of allusions to the Day of Atonement in this part of Hebrews. The two types of blood pertain to the fact that the High Priest entered the Holy Place ***twice*** on that day. On the first occasion he entered with the blood of calves or bullocks, on the second occasion he entered with the blood of goats. On the first occasion of entry the blood of the bullock is sprinkled **for himself and his family**, and on the second occasion the blood of the goat is offered for the people.

Christ didn’t enter the Holy place with either kind of blood, but rather with his own blood. In the case of the High Priest, his atonement was obtained as a result of his sprinkling a bullock’s blood on the mercy seat at the first entry, and the same is true for the people; their atonement was obtained as a result of the blood of a goat being sprinkled on the mercy seat at the second entry. In both cases no man was in the tabernacle. The High Priest went in alone (Lev 16:17).

Hebrews mentions that Christ entered into the Holy Place *once* at the end of the Jewish world. This one entry is typed by the High Priest entering *once a year* into the Holy Place. Here it is possible to mis-interpret the text in view of what we have just said, viz. that the High Priest entered the Holy Place *twice*. The fact that the High Priest entered the Holy Place once a year doesn’t preclude the High Priest entering the Holy Place twice on that *one* day. The Greek adverb a[pax (‘once’) is qualified by the expression ‘every year’ (Heb 9:7) and this shows that what happens *twice* on that *one* day *once* every year is not in view. The point and stress in v. 12 is on a contrast with ‘once every year’ (v. 7). The contrast is that Christ has entered once *in the end of the world* and needs not to enter once every year.

*Accordingly, we can infer that Christ entered heaven* ***twice*** *in keeping with the pattern of the Day of Atonement, once for himself, and then again for the people.*

The KJV has Heb 9:12 mean ‘obtained eternal redemption *for us’*. I have made the point that this goes against the *statistically* *normal* use of the Greek Middle voice, but this is not sufficient to discard the possibility. I have made a further point against this view, which is that the atonement has already been obtained prior to entry into the holy place. But the atonement for us is made by sprinkling blood *in* the holy place on the mercy seat. If the redemption in view in Heb 9:12 is *ours*, it would follow that the eternal redemption was already obtained and *yet about to be* obtained once the holy place had been entered. It follows therefore that the redemption of Heb 9:12 is not *ours* but the redemption of the High Priest. The High Priest has now entered heaven *for us* and is now in the presence of God. We still await the High Priest to come out of the second tabernacle.

This proposal makes sense of the words of Christ to Mary Magdalene, ‘Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to the Father’ (John 20:17). Had Christ been touched at this point in time, just after resurrection, and prior to his ascension into heaven, it would have been the touch of an unclean member of the congregation of Israel.

Christ had washed his flesh in water (a baptism which fulfilled all the righteousness of the Law). He had put on the garments of white linen in his life of perfect righteousness. His life blood was then given by himself when he submitted to death on the cross. This blood was then sprinkled upon the mercy seat, in that ascension of which he speaks of to Mary.

In this short note I have sought to give an exegesis of Heb 9:12. I haven’t sought to discuss the doctrine of the atonement. It is important to that doctrine that we collect accurate exegeses of individual texts.

**Survey Report**

Thanks to those who returned the survey. The figures speak for themselves and we have included some of the comments made by respondents at the end of this report. It is interesting to note a strong preference for articles on the origin of church doctrines and a deeper treatment of doctrine as well as apologetics. The EJournal can only give out what its writers write, and fortunately two of the editors do have some background in these areas. So, this area should get more articles. Otherwise, it is down to more readers to fill up the shortfall. On this point, while we agree that there is a need for more apologetics material, we do not have a ‘Science’ editor or brief. It is not part of our remit to ‘do Science’; we have no expertise. However, there are philosophical, theological and interpretative issues for the Bible that are raised by Science and these do fall within our brief. We are, however, uncomfortable handling these issues as ‘Humanities’ people without a Science editor on board to make sure that we do not stray outside our remit and comment unintelligently on these issues. If and when we have such an editor, this area will be better represented.

It is surprising to see that the articles we have done are not too narrow and that the verdict is split as to whether they are too complicated and too intellectual. The EJournal has just a small role in the community and can’t be a fully-fledged academic journal. It can however facilitate the publication and circulation of deeper textual studies, more technical material, and scholarly researched articles, material that would not be accepted by our mainstream magazines. This is the reason it came into being. But alongside this there remains a need for more introductory material and writers are needed for this kind of article.

We appreciate the comments that people have sent in with the survey. While we think there is a need for the kind of writing in the EJournal within the community, whether the EJournal becomes viable as a project depends on the willingness of writers. The day may come when it is judged that the EJournal has run its course and its pool of writers is not going to become viable; what will remain are the annuals which house the articles. These should remain a useful resource for advanced Bible study after the EJournal has ceased.

Meanwhile, the editorial in this issue explains the next step in the evolution of the EJournal—opening up the subscriber list to those in other churches who are interested in the Biblical monotheistic and Abrahamic Christian faith that the EJournal promotes.

**AP**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  Question |  |  |  |
| Is the EJournal providing a resource? | **Yes** | **No** |  |
|  | 100% |  |  |
| Should the EJournal continue to run or be folded? | **Run** | **Fold** |  |
|  | 100% |  |  |
| Are the articles bad in any way... | **Yes** | **No** | **Some** |
| a) Too complicated? |   | 52% | 48% |
| b) Too intellectual? |  | 45% | 55% |
| c) Too easy? |  | 96% | 4% |
| d) Too narrow? |  | 82% | 18% |
| Do you file the issue away on disk or discard after review? | **File** | **Discard** |  |
|  | 89% |  11% |  |
| Are there areas that need more coverage? | **Yes** | **No** |  |
| a) Apologetics e.g. the Bible and Science? | 85% | 15% |  |
| b) Analysis of past ecclesial controversies like the atonement? | 42% | 58% |  |
| c) Ancient Near East? | 65% | 35% |  |
| d) Inter-textual exegesis? | 40% | 60% |  |
| e) Engagement of scholars? | 35% | 65% |  |
| f) Origins of church doctrines? | 76% | 24% |  |
| g) Deeper treatment of doctrine? | 85% | 15% |  |
| h) Latter day prophecies and Revelation? | 69% | 31% |  |
| Should articles be shorter - longer? Issues bigger - smaller? | Bigger | Smaller | Same |
|  | 4% |  | 96% |
| Should articles be shorter - longer? Issues bigger - smaller? | Bigger | Smaller | Same |
|  | 4% |  | 96% |
| Would you like a Kindle edition? | Yes | No |  |
|  | 40% | 60% |  |
| Would you like an eBook edition? | Yes | No |  |
|  | 42% | 58% |  |
| Would you like an iPad edition? | Yes | No |  |
|  | 27% | 73% |  |
| How often do you look at the website in a year? | Few Times | Often | Never |
|  | 81% | 6% | 13% |

**Comments**

Try looking at the scriptural basis for : Preaching – the balance between preaching and good works; Care in the family / ecclesia; Conflict resolution – between individuals, groups and ecclesias; Ecclesial organisation and administration – the role of sisters; Judgement – scriptural models – and preparing for it.

I have found many of the articles to be of interest, but I have problems in finding enough time to read them properly. Some of the articles tend to assume specialist knowledge in particular areas, which I often do not have – it would be better if one could explain some of these, which would, of course, lead to longer articles. As an example, the recent article on the importance of Ephesus presumes that John’s Gospel was written there, but I have no understanding of why this should be supposed to be true (or false).

The e-journal is probably something whose greatest value will be different for each reader. I will probably read only one or two articles and will file the rest away for possible future use. Book reviews will definitely be read and appreciated, especially if it's a review of a book or books I am interested in. Even though I am semi-retired I have a very busy schedule, I am not a particularly intense person and don't stick with a particular subject for long. A lot of the articles represent subjects I have little or no interest in. On the other hand a number of subjects will catch my attention and I am willing to give them time and appreciate the efforts put into them. I would like to see more fairly intensive book reviews like the one in this month's edition of Kermit Zarley's book.

Didn’t realize there was a website! I get the e-journal delivered directly to my email box. Love it and look forward to receiving it. Thanks for all the work that goes into it.

As regards your survey, the following are my responses:

Yes, the Journal is providing a resource - and an excellent one at that!!

Yes, it should certainly continue.

None of the articles are bad - they are all of interest to me.

No, I do not file the issues away, much preferring to purchase and keep the printed annual volume.

On areas that might need more coverage, my only suggestion would be to increase the number of book reviews, which I always find very helpful.

The length of the articles is fine with me - keep them broadly as they are, in my view.

I do no use the various editions that you mention, nor do I look at the website during the year. Basically, I read the articles in each issue, and await publication of the annual printed volume.

Keep up the excellent work, as the journal fills a very important niche. Please don't even think of discontinuing!!

Thanks you for all the hard work and some very interesting articles.

Send out e-mail announcements when new material is added [to website]. Thanks for all your effort. If you decide to discontinue, can the archives still be made available?

For me CEJ provides a unique service. It has Editors who are able to engage with the world of Scholarship on equal terms. There are few in the Brotherhood who can do this important work.

The articles and books issued by the editors are groundbreaking for an ordinary Christadelphian like me.

So whilst I wouldn’t say CEJ is 100% perfect - it certainly scores highly for me in terms of satisfaction level— 90-95%.

I wouldn’t change much about it.

One problem I have with some of the articles in the EJournal is that they present arguments based on references to material to which I have no access.

For example, last month there was an article on the importance of Ephesus which I found interesting, but was unable to follow up because it rested on conclusions from papers to which I have no access. Among these was the idea that John’s Gospel was written in Ephesus. While I agree that the idea that John’s Gospel was written in Ephesus would be of considerable importance in dating the Gospel's writing, I couldn't follow it up because I have no access to the journals cited. For me this spoiled the usefulness of an article which could have been of great assistance as I am currently working on a paper on dating the writing of the Gospels.

I will be open with you—I have not read through every word of the few issues I have received, so do not feel in a position to comment on the detailed questions you ask. My feeling is that the journal should continue in its current format unless the overwhelming consensus is for change.

Thank you and all the contributing brothers so much for what you do in distributing this journal. This ‘scholarly’ approach is edifying and stimulates the mind to the things concerning the name of our Lord and the soon to come Kingdom of God.

I think I see what you are trying to get at with this survey and the best way to convey my thoughts and reactions to the EJournal is to just take a few minutes and tell you about the things that are of interest to me. Even though I am semi-retired I have a very busy schedule, I am not a particularly intense person and don't stick with a particular subject for long. A lot of the articles represent subjects I have little or no interest in. On the other hand a number of subjects will catch my attention and I am willing to give them time and appreciate the efforts put into them.

The e-journal is probably something whose greatest value will be different for each reader. I will probably read only one or two articles and will file the rest away for possible future use. Book reviews will definitely be read and appreciated, especially if it's a review of a book or books I am interested in.

Thanks for all your work with EJournal it is appreciated.

Thanks for your work, I do appreciate the EJournal, wish I had more time to study the articles....

**News**

**Academic Jobs Report**: The *Society of Biblical Literature* ([SBL](http://sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/CAW_portrait_2012.pdf)) and the *American Academy of Religion* ([CAW](http://www.academicworkforce.org/survey.html)) have released a report on the jobs market for the years 2001-2010. A number of findings have some interest. The so-called ‘Credit Crunch Banking Recession of 2008’ has had a major impact reducing the willingness of institutions to take on tenure-track academics from 81.6% in 2008 to 51.1% in 2009. This is perhaps understandable given the financial situation, and there was also a reduction in jobs advertised of nearly 50% from 2008 to 2009.

The report has no data for the number of new posts created since 2008 (as opposed to replacements), but prior to the 2008 recession, 37.9% of jobs advertised were for new posts, which shows healthy growth during 2001-2007. As for qualifications, the trend has been for a PhD to become ‘essential’ rather than just ‘desirable’ over the decade.

Fields of study required were diverse but were of three major categories: modern religions and their histories, including comparative and world religions, accounted for 31.6% of adverts (with positions in Islam Studies being the growth area); positions in Biblical Studies and related disciplines—including Ancient Near Eastern languages and literatures, Second Temple Judaism, and early Christianity—accounted for 29% of adverts; and positions in theology, philosophy, philosophy of religion, and ethics accounted for 21.9% of adverts.

The data for the report covers 28 countries (where English dominates), but with 90% of it being for the USA.

**AP**

**The Bible on TV Conference Report (Kings College, London, 11/12/2012)**

“The Bible on TV” was the subject of a one day conference at Kings College London in December (attended by about 200 people). This was the first time such a conference topic had been staged in the UK. It featured the top person from the BBC in charge of commissioning religious programmes, producers from the independent production companies behind recent religious programmes on the BBC and Channel 4 in the UK, as well as academics and presenters involved with such programmes. It was a useful and informative conference on current cultural attitudes to the Bible on the part of those who actually make the decisions and devise and present the content of programmes about the Bible. On the basis of the talks given, the conclusion of this reporter is that the general public is badly served.

The first talk was by Dr. Robert Beckford (Pentecostal) on ‘Who Controls the Storytelling?’ and it was highly entertaining. The speaker is an academic-turned-TV-presenter of religious programmes and chiefly known for the (in my opinion-lamentable) 2007 documentary on ‘Who Wrote the Bible?’ His topic was control and the question of shaping public opinion. As a presenter and writer for the documentaries he fronts, he was concerned that his voice be heard but he outlined that there are competing voices in the mix including those of producer, director and background researcher or consultant. His priorities were to relate the Bible to political/current issues as he saw them; he was of Caribbean origin and so he explained that his concerns were to extract from the Bible a message about the exercise of power. He was also interested in presenting the more ecumenical and inter-faith aspects of the Bible message. He saw his task as one of taking the Bible text apart and then reconstructing it for today’s audience.

The speaker was concerned about who controls the storytelling and he illustrated how he did so using clips from his documentary. It was clear that the Bible did not control the storytelling. He emphasized the lack of knowledge on the part of the general public and this governed what and how much could be said; the documentary had to be simple, but he thought it unfair to accuse documentary makers of ‘dumbing-down’. This was a concern of all the academics giving talks at the conference – they were all keen to justify their role in the face of the dumbing-down accusation. This was telling, as clearly the documentaries are dumbed down as far as possible (as well as one-sided).

The speaker admitted he was a liberal critic and started from the presumption that their ‘consensus’ was correct; his task was to do the interviews and make the points that brought out that approach in a simple and plain way for the main audience—which was not the ‘religious’ but the general public. Listening to him, you gained the impression that what was being fed to the general public was controlled by an extraordinarily few people (perhaps half a dozen) and that the presenter/academic had the most control. If a religious documentary gets, say, a couple of million viewers on Channel 4, then the general public is getting the ‘information’ of one person (mainly) and perhaps half a dozen at most. If that person is of a liberal critical persuasion, then that is the ‘information’ the public gets as ‘fact’. The danger in this is that the popular perception of the ‘documentary’ is one of presenting information—getting at the truth of the matter. Given that the general public is not given a range of views on the matter in hand (in this case, ‘Who Wrote the Bible?’), they do not know that they need to be critical of the liberal critic. They will think that the documentary is ‘true’ because documentaries in general have that reputation.

Dr. Beckford was at least a very funny speaker (he should be on the telly). This was not true of the rest of the speakers. The next speaker was David Batty, a TV producer, who talked on the subject, ‘The Challenge of the Bible on TV’. His concerns were all about audience and viewing figures, producing TV programmes that would be commissioned by TV channels and be successful in terms of audience figures. His preoccupation explains why documentary titles are often sensationalist, like the recent ‘The Bible’s Buried Secrets’ and why the genre is often one of exposure or controversy. He too emphasized that if documentaries were at all complex, they would lose the audience. He also brought to our notice the role that the print media plays in determining the content of a documentary: the producer has to think of the marketing of a documentary prior to it being shown on TV and this affects the up-front slant of the documentary – again, giving it a ‘controversial’ aspect is important to sales.

The third talk was about the ‘art’ in TV religious programming – how do you tell the story. Prof. Ben Quash spoke on ‘How do you tell the Greatest Story Ever Told?’ He illustrated his points with clips from the ‘Testament’ series of animations and the recent (2010) BBC drama ‘Nativity’. He tackled the problem of how you present the ‘mythical’ elements in the Bible’s ‘history-like’ story, such as creation or miracle. He illustrated how this was done in way that would be acceptable to the viewing public. In the case of the Genesis creation, he showed that the Testament series ‘got round’ the problem of the modern prejudice against myths by having later Bible characters (ironically, Noah) talk about *their* reading of the Genesis creation.

In the afternoon session, there was a panel responsible for the upcoming (2012) documentary ‘In the Footsteps of Paul’. The presenter of this programme is the actor David Suchet, so we got his views (he is a practising Christian). The main point of interest to emerge here was the influence of the target channel on a documentary. ‘In the Footsteps of Paul’ is scheduled for BBC1 and this affects what can be presented and how things can be done (i.e. it needs a ‘big name’). Using an actor to present means that s/he reads a script written by a researcher/writer, but they have to be comfortable with the script. In this case, Suchet was concerned that Paul be presented as a tolerant individual.

The fourth talk was by the head of religious programme commissioning at the BBC, Aaqil Ahmed, who told us that he was a Muslim and had been in the job for three years, having previously done the same thing at Channel 4. He has the most power in the ‘Bible on TV’ chain. He told us of what he had been most proud in his recent commissioning work—documentaries on Islam and other faiths, but he acknowledged that Christianity was central to the BBC’s religious output. It was interesting to hear that his decisions were affected by internal BBC politics. One of his goals (ambitions) was to get religious programming on prime time slots instead of drama or comedy, i.e. he had an eye on his competitors for prime time – the relevant commissioning editors of those divisions of the BBC. So, he was quite pleased that David Suchet’s documentary was coming out at Christmas in a primetime BBC 1 slot – this was one reason it had been commissioned. He explained the dynamic between the Commissioning Editor who has a schedule to fill and the producers who have ideas for programmes to pitch – and how the two trade off each other to bring about the documentaries that we end up seeing. For example, he knew that the documentary ‘The Bible’s Buried Secrets’ would be successful and enable him to get other religious documentaries into primetime.

A final panel of academics closed the day. They talked about their role as consultants and/or presenters. Oddly, all of the panelists were women, a fact which they noted. Their concerns were accusations of dumbing down, academic reputation, and what they described as the great gulf between what academics know and what the general public know (how to bridge the gap).

The presenter of ‘The Bible’s Buried Secrets’ (Prof. Francesca Stavrakopoulou) did not think that her academic reputation had been affected (rather the contrary), nor did she think that she had been chosen as a presenter because she was an attractive woman. She was an atheist and did not feel that she was obliged to present a religious viewpoint, but rather the evidence as she sees it. She usefully noted that the presenter’s visual role in documentaries is not part of the academic content and beyond their control. This is an important point as documentaries on the Bible are typically a kind of travelogue with tourist sites and attractive scenery to see; the academic presenter’s visual role is part of this but determined by the programme director.

Dr. Helen Bond, another panelist, had been a consultant on the BBC drama, ‘The Nativity’. She discussed drama as opposed to documentary and the different role of the consultant in each genre. She had not been happy with the choice of interleaving the Matthean and Lukan nativity stories in ‘The Nativity’ because she did not attach the same historical value to all the details. However, for an earlier consultancy job on the birth narratives, she had been happy to give advice on the story as ‘story’.

The final panelist, Prof. Joan Taylor, told us about her experience of the ‘cutting room’. A presenter has no control over the editing and can often be shocked at what is chosen from all that has been said. She also made some incidental remarks about the gravitas of the male voice for documentaries, lamenting the lack of female voiceovers, and the issues of dress and make-up that face women as presenters.

*Concluding Thoughts*

The Bible itself has no voice on TV; it has no control. It is a commodity in the hands of the industry and the various players of that industry have their own goals. If mainstream TV is the one and only medium that introduces the Bible to the general public, then there is no reason to see this as a good thing. The people involved in commissioning and producing have the power, but the academics and the presenters are not powerless; there is a trade off in what is said. A liberal approach to the Bible is the only viable one that can be presented—and in a dumbed-down manner. Getting the Bible onto TV is not a matter of what you know; truth or gospel; it is matter of *who* you know, and the religious programming world in the UK is a small group of people making the decisions for the public.

**AP**

**Society for Old Testament Studies Winter 2013 Conference, Cambridge**

Just over 100 scholars assembled at Fitzwilliam College in mild weather for this conference on the 2nd-4th January. Prof. Eryl Davies of Bangor University opened the conference with a talk on post-modernism, objectivity and ideology as these have affected how scholars have approached biblical history. The talk lacked a philosophical discussion of the relevant notions, and was of little value, but it was interesting to note that a scholar nearing retirement was still fighting the minimalist/maximalist debates of the 1990s.

The next talk was by Dr. Janet Tollington of Cambridge on “Reading Ruth in Dialogue with Torah”. Her view was that Ruth highlights aspects contrary to the Law or action beyond the Law. The first point noted was the favourable picture of Moabite women—this contrasts with Numbers’ portrayal of such women leading Israelite men astray. She then noted that Ruth’s gleaning was broader than that which the Law allowed (the whole field). After this she discussed the wider responsibilities of the ‘redeeming kinsman’ in Ruth—the Law does not extend these to taking on board a childless widow. She made the point that the author of the book does know of the Principle of Levirate Marriage because Naomi expresses this principle in the first chapter. She concluded her talk by discussing the ending of Ruth: she puzzled over the son being given to Naomi because this would imply that the loss of her sons and lack of a husband was the point of the book—to carry on her husband’s name. All in all this was the best talk of the conference.

The next speaker was Dr. Jenni Williams of Oxford who spoke on “Childlessness in the Hebrew Bible”. Her concern was that the Bible stories do not allow a woman the right to choose to have children. Discussing the usual stories, she observed, for example, that Elkanah thinks Hannah should be happy because he already has children. She concluded her talk by looking at the puzzle of the indifference of the husband of the Great Woman of Shunem (2 Kings 4).

A change of tone followed with the next talk, “On Lovers and Labyrinths: Revisiting Space in the Song of Songs” by Dr. Christopher Meredith. This was a discussion of the symbolic values that could be assigned to the ‘spaces’ in Songs—private, public, intimate, masculine, feminine, threatening, safe, *and so on*. It was high on structuralist jargon and low on intertextual content.[[153]](#footnote-153)

The morning talks closed with a presentation of some dreary oratorios that had been written based on the Book of Job. The presenter, Dr. Helen Leneman (Bethesda), was evidently enthused about them.

A couple of seminars in the afternoon on “Downloadable Resources on the Internet” and “Wikipedia” were interesting. The top three searches on Wikipedia for Bible topics are “God of the Bible”, “Michael the Archangel” and “Lilith”. Given the prominence of Wikipedia, the Society is setting up its own ‘Wiki’ in conjunction with Wikipedia to ‘guarantee’ the quality of articles. (The problem with Wikipedia is editorial control—those who have it for a given article don’t like to be corrected or re-balanced—those who don’t have control are locked out.) There is obviously an opportunity here for an enterprising group to set up www.christadelphianwiki.com as a preaching/Bible resource and benefit from the traction that ‘wiki’ has as a search term in Google.

Not all talks can be reported, simply because they are either well beyond your reporter, or they have little interest for him, or he was too tired. So I pass over Professor John Healey (Manchester) “Aspects of Late Aramaic Epigraphy and Law”, because I switched off at the beginning of the talk when the first Aramaic ostracon went up on PowerPoint. I also pass over Professor George Brooke (Manchester) “Some Issues behind the Ethics in the Qumran Scrolls”, because, although we were all given a two page handout, it was the evening, it had been a long day, and I was past caring.

The first talk on day two was by Dr. Katharine Dell (Cambridge) on “Reject or retrieve? Feminist Readings of Ecclesiastes 7:23-9”. It was a feminist approach looking at the ‘seemingly’ misogynist aspects. Her approach, (after reviewing recent feminist commentary), was theological rather than intertextual, but it was still a set of exegetical claims. The goal was to ‘rehabilitate’ the text for today. The text is a quest for wisdom. The main ‘feminist’ problem is the statement that ‘the woman is a trap’ which is usually taken in the sense that she can be a ‘folly’ to a man. The next problematic statement is the ‘one in a thousand’ point and the failure to find a woman among a thousand. Is this a negative statement? What is the author looking for? She did not seem to have an answer of her own for this question. But she made the point that, if we cannot know what the author is looking for, we cannot accuse him of misogyny. Overall, though, her reading was that there is a negative appreciation of ‘woman’ in the text. The underlying unexplored assumption in the talk was that there actually is an agenda in the text that is sexist, but given that any text can criticize men and/or women, why should any text that criticizes men and/or women be dubbed misogynist or misanthropic on that basis? There was naïve stereo-typing in her talk with little deeper analysis. On a final wider note, it is perhaps a cause for concern that so many women scholars in the Biblical Studies field are focused on feminist criticism rather than other methodologies.

The second talk was by Dr. Mary Mills (Liverpool) “City-space and Cosmic Determinism in texts from the Minor Prophets”. Her unexceptionable point was that the destruction of cities is related to God’s will. She discussed the cosmic/meteorological figures of speech for this theme in various texts. Why are the threats and disasters that befall cities configured in cosmic/meteorological terms? Is there a concept of the city in the Bible that is ‘of creation’ – ‘of heaven and earth’ that is a basis for such figures? She did not explore this line of enquiry, but rather reviewed the cosmic/meteorological figures in a somewhat descriptive way. The point of the talk was to give an abstract and sociological theoretical framework to the figures – her treatment did not try and relate the figures to the ‘history on the ground’; her texts were such ‘Day of the Lord’ prophecies as those of Amos 5 and Joel 1-2. In short, the talk was more about abstract sociological-religious categories and their application to urban life under threat.

The last talk of the conference was by Professor Ronald Clements (Cambridge) on “Solomon and the Regulation of Kingship in Deut.17.14-19”. The office of the king in the Psalter is highly exalted, but in the history books, things are more critical. Reviewing scholarship, he noted that in the 1950s, a distinction was drawn between ‘divine sonship’ kingship and ‘sacral’ kingship in order to preserve the distance of kingship but preclude divinity. He asked whether the language about kingship in the Psalms was hyperbolic. Deuteronomy sets the king below the rank of Moses and the Law. Is this significant? Clements did not think that Deuteronomy 17 was original to Moses and so he sought to situate the text in late seventh century history. This he did because the law is couched in terms that ‘reflect’ Israelite history (e.g. kings should not multiply their wives) and also because the law has an aspect requiring the kings to rule under a superior power – i.e. Assyria. However, the terms of the law are not exceptionable for kings in the Near East in the second millennium and the relationship of king to God in terms of the extant documented legitimization rituals. He was reluctant to put aside the texts (e.g. Isaiah 9) that spoke of divine sonship in relation to the kings and their accession to the throne, since this idea was common to the Near East. Consequently, he just sought to explain how texts such as Deuteronomy 17 could have co-existed with the ‘divine texts’ – he tried to sketch this out in terms of the ‘development’ of ideas in Israelite religion. All in all, the talk was fairly standard critical material positing problems where none exist.

So ends another SOTS conference. These are really about networking for professional academics rather than the talks. There may be one or two snippets of information to take away from the talks, but it is what you chat about over coffee that matters. So it was that your reporter had a useful exchange with Ken Kitchen about Cyrus and Isaiah. And, of course, he did buy a few books on discount.

**AP**

**Postscripts**

**Desert Island Books**

Well, I have just been washed up on a deserted island. Lucky for me, I packed for just such a contingency! Knowing that I was going to be travelling in inhospitable climes and uncivilized territory, I packed my small solar power array and computer into a waterproof case and this is the first thing I grabbed when my ship sunk. My foresight ensures that I have no need to lug about huge dictionaries, reams of paper or extensive concordances. I have my trusty BibleWorks already installed on my computer enabling me to compare all the different versions in the original languages and I had already burned a number of books to CD in case I got bored during my travels.

When exploring the island I found a number of books abandoned by the previous occupant who had either been rescued or drowned trying to escape on a bamboo raft. I noted that they were all excellent book choices and I have many of them in my own library at home. It is a good thing that I did not choose the same ones as now I am fortunate enough to have doubled my resources. I especially like the books by Alter and the Psalm studies as well as the Gospels, all of them carefully preserved and left behind in good condition.

The eight books that I have burned to CD are the following:

J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976) is a book that presents the argument that the whole of the New Testament was written before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Although it is rather scholarly and ‘dry’, in sections it is well argued and presents a wide survey of historical positions held by scholars on the dating of New Testament books. If nothing else it demonstrates how much the ‘consensus’ on the dating range has changed on some of the NT books (it will have probably changed again by the time I am rescued!).

H. A. Whittaker, *Bible Studies:* *An Anthology* (Cannock: Biblia, 1987), is a great eclectic collection of different materials that contains some real gems! It has often provided the starting point for further fruitful research. Another book by this author would be *Seven Short Epistles*, (Cannock: Biblia, 1989), a collection that is helpful for understanding the Johannine idiom and particular poignant on the contextualization of James, written by the disciple (the brother of John) and therefore probably the earliest NT writing.

A. Perry, *Job* (Sunderland: Willow Publications, 2009) is a book that understands Job as a parabolic narrative on the life and times of Hezekiah – I will need this book as I believe that much of our Bible was written during the period covered by the reigns of Uzziah to Hezekiah (certainly, Isaiah, Joel, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes as well as the compilation of Proverbs by “Hezekiah’s men”).

J. J. Collins, *Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). This book is a critical edition with extensive references to scholarly interpretations (both ancient and modern) and comparisons of the text in the MT and LXX versions. It is an indispensable resource for anyone contemplating a serious study of Daniel.

P. N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel And the Quest for Jesus* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006); this book engages critically one of the most pervasive sets of assumptions within modern biblical studies: namely, that because John is theological and different from the Synoptics, it cannot be historical.

K. L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell, Dating the Book of Revelation: An Exegetical and Historical Argument for a Pre-A.D. 70 Composition* (Fort Worth: Institute For Christian Economics, 1989). He presents the full Preterist argument for Revelation being written before AD 70. Although I do not find myself in agreement with ‘full Preterism’, there is plenty of useful information that suggests that the book of Revelation had at least a *partial fulfilment* in the period leading up to the fall of Jerusalem; a good read and plenty of material to analyze and contemplate.

# R. L. Fox, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible* (London: Penguin, 2006) is the type of book that I detest. It is a book written by a historian who is critical of the Bible and attempts to piece together how the Bible was written using the critical methodology of the nineteenth century. It is opinionated and wrong despite a superficial academic gloss and it is a book that can do a lot of damage in the hands of those who are easily influenced. I would add this book simply for the times when I want to be challenged or feel like ranting at the world for being stuck on a desert island!

Pondering my fate my mind naturally turns to the apostle John who was banished to the island of Patmos where he received his awesome revelations. No doubt he was allowed to select certain ‘desert island scrolls’ and use papyrus and ink, but at some stage he was released from his island prison. I will send a message in a bottle as we are all to some extent shipwrecked in a world imprisoned by sin and even the creation of our own little “island” cannot escape the ebb and tide of our own human frailty – so this is my SOS: “You number my wanderings; put my tears into your bottle; *are they* not in your book?” (Ps 56:8).

**PW**

**Unlearned men**

A couple of years ago I was out on my bike and bumped into four Jehovah’s Witnesses giving out leaflets at the local train station. I stopped and asked them why it was that I had never come across Jehovah’s Witnesses in academic Biblical Studies (as students or lecturers; I have come across Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, etc.). They replied that it was a belief of their community that this was not right for a disciple because the original disciples were ‘unlearned men’ (Acts 4:13). It was a sincerely expressed position and my comment was not that it was wrong but that it was not the only choice for a disciple.

Jesus himself had engaged the scholars of his day as early as the age of 12 in the temple, and he debated with them from the Scriptures throughout his ministry. Further, he chose Paul, a highly educated Pharisee (Acts 22:3; Phil 3:5), as an apostle. I said to the Jehovah’s Witness that it seemed to me that a Christian community (i.e. some in that community) had a duty to follow the example of Jesus and engage those who misused Scripture at all levels, including those who would be regarded as the academics ‘of the day’; if, that is, they were to follow Jesus. He did not reply and I went on my way.

In this vein, someone remarked to me the other day that the Internet had made available to people far more and a greater level of sophisticated information on the Bible. Previously, new ideas, arguments, and doctrinal controversy were mediated through pamphlets, booklets, talks as well as books (a slow and controlled process). In the last fifteen years, since the 1990s, all of this has happened online, fast and in contexts other than the ecclesia—Twitter, Facebook, forums, e-mail, websites—as academic, non-academic and pseudo-academic writing. There is now easy access to a vast amount of scholarship and theology online, all of it purporting to guide you in how to think about the Bible in one way of another. This is now being disseminated and refracted through the ecclesia (particularly the younger generations) as a matter of course. The Internet is, as they say, a ‘game-changer’, and particularly for the younger generation; it is a major factor in the loss of young people to the Truth. It may have been possible, say in the 1980s, to decide to run a magazine that was only simpler; it may be tempting now to put your head in the sand—the first would have been an unperceptive mistake in the 1980s and the second would be a mistake now. Indeed, both kinds of mistake are still around today. Instead, more of the ecclesia’s ‘apostles and elders’ need to look to Isaiah 40-48 or to Paul on Mars Hill and engage with the sophisticated arguments that draw people away from the Truth. It is not difficult but it does require work and effort on the part of speakers and writers.

**AP**

**Supplement**

**Intertextuality and Revelation**

In this supplement, we present a discussion that is part of a large and deep issue in interpretation and not just of Revelation. What is God’s view of the last two thousand years and is Revelation about this history. The discussion is centred on the ‘Letters to the Seven Ecclesias’. Comment is invited from readers.

**Intertextuality as a Hermeneutical Key to Revelation**

**J. Burke**

**Introduction**

The book of Revelation is well known for the breadth and depth of its intertextual connections with other canonical books, most commonly those from the Old Testament. It is argued here that the use of Old Testament passages and symbols in the letters to the ecclesias in Revelation 2-3, provide an important guide to their use elsewhere in the book. These early chapters demonstrate the application of Old Testament symbols in a Christian context, providing a hermeneutical key to the rest of the book.

**The letters as a hermeneutical key**

Use of Old Testament imagery, symbolism, and themes from the Old Testament is ubiquitous throughout Revelation. Do these references retain their original Old Testament context and subject when used in Revelation, or are they placed in a different context? Their use in the first three chapters of Revelation with explicit reference to ecclesias and the saints, demonstrates that these references comprise Old Testament passages which have been re-applied in a Christian context, with Christian referents. Should we consider subsequent uses in Revelation of Old Testament texts to follow this pattern of usage, or should we read such references in a manner differently to the way they are used in Revelation 1-3?

The usage of such references in the first three chapters gives us warrant for understanding them in the same way when we see them later in Revelation. In the letters a lampstand is a witness to God, not a physical piece of furniture in the earthly temple (Revelation 1:20, 2:5), manna is the reward of faithful Christians, not of natural Israel (Revelation 2:17), the temple of God is the body of Christians, not the earthly temple in Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12), and the holy city is the spiritual dwelling place of God, not the earthly city of Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12). We thus have a precedent which gives us warrant for interpreting these symbols in the same way later in Revelation. To assume instead that from chapter 4 onwards these symbols have completely different, non-Christian referents, is to advance an interpretation of the symbols which has no precedent in the book itself. The choice is between an interpretation which is attested by precedent in the first three chapters by Jesus himself, and an interpretation which is not attested by any precedent in the book at all.

For those symbols that appear later in Revelation, their explicit identification in these early chapters provides an intertextual key to understanding them in later chapters. Thus the teachings of a false prophet are used to represent teachings held by Christians leading other Christians astray (Revelation 2:14), a harlot and false prophet (Jezebel) is an apostate Christian and false teacher who corrupts the belief of other Christians (Revelation 2:20-22), and satan (also 'the devil') is the enemy of Christians who is currently persecuting them in their local area (Revelation 2:9-10, 13; 3:9). The following table summarizes such references.

|  |
| --- |
| **Symbols in the letters to the seven ecclesias** |
| **Symbol** | **Initial context in the letters** | **Later context** |
| Lampstand | A Christian congregation: ‘the seven **lampstands** are the seven churches’ (1:20), ‘remove your lampstand’ (2:5) | ‘the two olive trees and the two **lampstands** that stand before the Lord of the earth’ (11:4) |
| Teaching of Balaam | A corruption of a Christian congregation: ‘some people there who follow the teaching of Balaam’ (2:14) | ‘the false prophet’ (16:13; 19:20; 20:10) |
| Prostitute | A spiritually corrupt Christian leading others astray: ‘that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants’ (2:20), ‘her **sexual immorality**’ (2:21), ‘those who commit adultery with her’ (2:22) | ‘the great prostitute who sits on many waters’ (17:2), ‘a golden cup filled with detestable things and unclean things from her **sexual immorality**’ (17:4), ‘the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her **sexual immorality**’ (19:2) |

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| **Symbols in the letters to the seven ecclesias** |
| **Symbol** | **Initial context in the letters** | **Later context** |
| Book of life | The reward of the faithful in Christ: ‘I will never erase his name from the **book of life**’ (3:4) | ‘written in the **book of life**’ (13:8; 17:8; 2-:15), ‘another book was opened – the **book of life**’ (20:12), ‘written in the Lamb’s **book of life**’ 21:27) |
| Rod of iron | A powerful rulership, first identified as belonging to Christians: ‘he will rule them with an iron rod’ (2:27) | ‘rule over the nations with an iron rod’ (12:5) |
| Temple of God | The spiritual dwelling place of God, first identified as the body of Christians: ‘The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God’ (3:12) | ‘his temple’ (7:15), ‘temple of God’ (11:1, 19), ‘’the temple’ (11:2; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 17), ‘the Lord God – the All-Powerful – and the Lamb are its temple’ (21:22) |

A number of these symbols are drawn from a Jewish context in the Old Testament, but appear in Revelation in a Christian context and are applied explicitly to Christians. Our understanding of the meaning of these symbols in later chapters should be dependent on their explicit identification with Christian referents in the first three chapters; reading the lampstands in Revelation 11:4 with a Jewish referent therefore would violate the use of the symbol with a Christian referent, established in 1:20 and 2:5. The contrary would require use to interpret the same symbol in two different ways in the same book, without any precedent in Revelation itself as a warrant for doing so.

Notable in the letters to the seven ecclesias is the complete absence of any reference to Judea, Jerusalem, or Judaism, and the only use of the word ‘Jews’ is a reference to those who aren’t Jews at all, ‘those who call themselves Jews and really are not’ (Revelation 2:9). The pressing concerns Christ expresses in each letter make no mention at all of any places or events literally 1,000 kilometres away in Judea; local issues in Asia Minor are consistently his focus.

**The letters as microcosm**

An important feature of the letters is the way in which they introduce in microcosm, enemies of Christ who appear later in the book in macrocosm. With the exception of the beasts in Revelation 11, 13, and 17 (all of which are derived from Daniel 7), the major enemies in Revelation all appear first in the letters to the ecclesias. In each case the enemies are identified in the letters as a danger to a local ecclesia (twice identified as apostate Christians), and identified later Revelation as a danger to the whole earth. The following table demonstrates these parallels.

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| **Enemies in the letters: microcosm to macrocosm** |
| **Symbol** | **Initial context: local ecclesia** | **Later context: the earth, the world** |
| Teaching of Balaam | A corruption of a Christian congregation: ‘**some people there** who follow the teaching of Balaam’ (2:14) | ‘unclean spirits… out of the mouth of the false prophet… to go out to **the kings of the earth**’ (16:L3, 14) |
| Satan | A corruption of a Christian congregation: ‘synagogue of Satan’ (2:9; 3:9), ‘**your city** where Satan lives’ (2:13), ‘the so-called “deep secrets of Satan”’ (2:24) | ‘that huge dragon – the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, **who deceives the whole world**’ (12:9), ‘the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan’ (20:2), ‘Satan will be released’ (20:7) |
| Jezebel | ‘You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants’ (2:20) | ‘the great prostitute who sits on many waters’ (17:2), ‘a golden cup filled with detestable things and unclean things from her sexual immorality’ (17:4), ‘the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality’ (19:2) |

In the case of ‘those who follow the teachings of Balaam’ (2:14), and ‘that woman Jezebel’ (2:20), the enemy starts as a problem in a local ecclesia and develops into a foe endangering all the ecclesias, as if to show that ecclesial problems which are not dealt with when small will eventually become catastrophically large. The two exceptions are the Nicolaitans, who are mentioned twice in the letters but never again in the rest of the book (2:6, 15), and satan, who is identified as external to the ecclesia and already foe for more than one ecclesia (2:9, 13, 24; 3:9). However, both the prostitute and the teachings of the false prophet emerge from the context of the early ecclesias. Their identity in the later chapters therefore must be sought within the context of apostate Christianity, as in the early chapters.

**Conclusion**

In Revelation, Old Testament characters, figures, and symbols are removed from their original Jewish context and placed explicitly in a Christian context; initially and most clearly, in the first three chapters. This guides expositor to read them throughout the book with Christian referents, rather than Jewish referents.

Additionally, two key enemies of Christ and the saints in Revelation are described initially in microcosm at the ecclesial level, before being identified later at a ‘global’ level. The conclusion to which this leads is that these are foes which emerged from within the ecclesia rather than from an external source.

These facts are fundamental to understanding the use of symbols in Revelation, and must be the starting point of any hermeneutical approach to the book. Interpretations failing to take these facts into account will lead inevitably to inaccurate conclusions.

**The context of the seven letters of Revelation**

**P. Wyns**

**Introduction**

Can we state with any confidence that the letters to the seven churches of Revelation have been removed from any explicitly Jewish context and placed solely within a Christian context? In other words, should we say that the symbolism and warnings of the OT should be viewed as warnings against apostate Christianity and not as a warning against reverting to Judaism?

Such a view goes along with a late (post-70) date for Revelation—i.e. when the Temple was already destroyed, the Jewish nation dissolved, and the apostles (with the exception of John) were already dead. In order to explore this position, we will accept the premise of a late date (although we believe internal Scriptural evidence demonstrates the opposite) and adopt the premise *ad hominem* to demonstrate the weakness of the argument that in Revelation OT symbols are ‘Christianized’.

This argument pre-supposes that the Jewish nation no longer exits—therefore there is no danger of Jewish-Christians reverting to Judaism. Judaism and Christianity have parted ways—first-century Christianity is vindicated and the threat from Judaists has disappeared. Therefore, the use of OT symbol holds no direct reference to the Jews but should be understood in the sense of a contrast such as ‘the Jews played the harlot with the Old Covenant/Christians are now playing the harlot with the New Covenant’. The language and symbol of the OT has therefore been reconfigured and adapted to address the new threat—false Christianity.

**‘The blasphemy of those who say they are Jews’**

This is a strange turn of phrase to use against false Christians at Smyrna especially when we add the observation that they belong to the ‘Synagogue of Satan’. Interestingly, the same writer (the apostle John) notes that the ‘Jews’ made similar claims in John 8:39, “Abraham is our father” (i.e., we are real Jews and you {Jesus/Christians} are not) and Jesus replies (v. 44), “You are of *your* father the devil” (i.e., the Synagogue of Satan). It is hardly credible that John echoes the same polemic against two different groups, especially as Christians were already familiar with his Gospel which was a polemic against the ‘Jews’.

**‘Which say they are Jews but are not, and do lie’**

These ‘Jews’ were antagonistic towards the church at Philadelphia, they were ‘liars’ or ‘deceivers’, who practised guile (note John 8:44, where Jesus says to the Jews who claim Abraham as father; “…*your* father the devil… he is *a liar* and the father of it”). However, the New Israel consists of those in whose “mouth was *no guile*” (Rev 14:5), a play on the name of Jacob and a reference to Nathaniel in the Fourth Gospel,“Behold an Israelite in whom is *no guile*” (John 1:47). Faithful Jews were those who (like Nathaniel) acknowledged Christ as the messiah—the twelve tribes of the New Israel **follow the Lamb** (Rev 14:4; cf. John 1:24, 36-37, 43); they are protected/sealed (Rev 14:1; cf. Rev 3:10) and bear the Father’s name (Rev 14:1; cf. Rev 3:12). Note the time frame, “I come quickly” (Rev 3:11). This is hardly a message against ‘false Christians’ particularly considering how much of Revelation echoes the polemic of the Fourth Gospel (by the same writer) where false Jews are the enemy.

**The church at Ephesus**

It is accepted by most scholars that at some stage John lived in Ephesus and had close contact with the church there. In previous EJournal articles the case has been made that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to the church at Ephesus and has been demonstrated that the warnings in Revelation are echoed throughout Hebrews.[[154]](#footnote-154) Let us accept the premise (for the sake of argument) that Hebrews was written before Revelation (i.e., that Revelation was written post-70 and is ‘echoing Hebrews’). To what was the church at Ephesus in danger of falling away? They had lost their first love (Christianity) and were in danger of reverting back to Judaism: “If they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame” (Heb 6:6). They were warned not to do this because they had not come to Mt. Sinai but to Mt. Zion (Heb 12:18-23) and to “better” things. Why warn the church at Ephesus (here we think particularly of the Jewish-Christian element) against reverting to Judaism if the Temple was already destroyed and the nation dissolved?

**The Doctrine of Balaam**

Pergamum is warned against the doctrine of Balaam which specifically involved “eating things sacrificed to idols and committing fornication”. However, this was not a new doctrine, as it is already condemned by Peter as “following the way of Balaam” (2 Pet 2:15), and by Jude as “the error of Balaam” (Jude v. 11). The prophetess Jezebel at Thyatira obviously taught the doctrine of Balaam, “to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Rev 2:20). So the doctrine of Balaam was pervasive (found in more than one church) and early (found in pre-70 epistles). It was also a deliberate wresting of the apostle Paul’s teaching about liberty in Christ: “And whynot *say, ‘*Let us do evil that good may come? (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say). ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just.” (Rom 3:8).

These opponents of the Gospel were Jews (Gal 2:4) who followed the strategy of Balaam in promoting promiscuity with the ultimate aim of encouraging pious Jewish-Christian converts back to Judaism; “And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage).” Idol worship and fornication were an abomination to the Jews, and Jewish-Christians would soon revert back to Judaism. Of course, Paul preached no such thing!

However, the point needs emphasising that the doctrine of Balaam (also preached by Jezebel) was not a heresy promoted by Christians but a heresy promoted by ‘Jews’ (false brethren) in order to damage early Christianity and discredit Christianity in the eyes of Jewish-Christian converts and pious Jews. Such a strategy was underway long before 70 and would not have been necessary after 70—after all, once God had removed the Temple and the nation, the Jews could hardly claim to be the chosen ones by right of their heritage (and they were too busy trying to preserve Judaism to bother with Jewish-Christian converts).

**Conclusion**

While it is true that the messages to the seven churches contain local elements such as warnings (to gentile converts) against reverting to paganism, or the danger of materialism, they also embrace an overarching theme, namely, warning Jewish-Christians that Judaists would soon get their just rewards (so don’t go back to Judaism like a dog to vomit). Even if we accept a late date for Revelation (which I do not) there are no specific warnings in Revelation against a systematic false teaching of Christianity (such as we find in the Catholic Church). In the Epistle of John we have a warning against docetic Christianity, but here is the rub—those false prophets left the true church (“they went out from us”).

The situation in Revelation is **one of enmity and persecution by those who lay claim to a Jewish heritage**. It is not Christian-on-Christian persecution such as we find in later centuries but problems between Jews and Christians. All this would become largely irrelevant if Revelation were written after 70. Advocates of a late post-70 date and a ‘false Christianity’ agenda must not only explain Revelation’s obsession with Jews but also why this continued after 70. Advocates of an early date do not need to do this; Revelation continues the theme of the whole NT where the Jews stirred up trouble all over Asia Minor, so much so that Paul despaired; “….that all those in Asia have turned away from me”(2 Tim 1:15), nor do early date advocates need to reconfigure OT symbols—the meaning is consistent across the Testaments.

**Editorial Policies**: The **Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation** seeks to fulfil the following objectives: offer analytical and expositional articles on biblical texts; engage with academic biblical studies that originate in the various Christian confessions; defend the biblical principles summarised in the common Christadelphian statements of faith; and subject the published articles to peer review and amendment.

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1. Of course, because there are no costs in distributing an online magazine (except the small annual web hosting cost), the EJournal will remain free to subscribers through Google Groups and Yahoo Groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. D. R. Stoffer, “The Problem of Evil: An Historical Theological Approach” *Ashland Theological Journal*, 24 (1992): 55-75 (55). [All emphasis in quotes is mine.] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Ed AP]: Stoffer seems to identify a third approach here—that of natural disasters as ‘ambassadors’. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Moreover, it is also argued that the natural world was perfect **until the Fall, which somehow threw nature off balance and made the earth vulnerable to disasters** such as earthquakes and floods (cf. Rom 8:20-21)”, J. McKeown, *Genesis*, *The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Editor, “Signs of the Times: ‘In the Whirlwind and in the Storm’”, *The Christadelphian*, 125/1492. (1988): 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “The OT, however, does not specifically describe the sin of Adam and Eve as a Fall, **and it does not link natural disasters to their first sin**”, McKeown, *Genesis*, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. R. B. Chisholm Jr., “How a Hermeneutical Virus Can Corrupt Theological Systems”, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 166/662 (2009): 259-270 (256). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. T. Hines, “The Atheistic Explanation for Evil: Houston, We Have A Problem”, *Conservative Theological Journal*, 7 (2003): 326-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “Essays of theodicy on the goodness of God, the freedom of man and the origin of evil”. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. S. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1998), 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. N. Huggett, *Everywhere and Everywhen: Adventures in Physics and Philosophy* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.), 54; Huggett disputes this argument, which he cites from cosmologist Gerald Whitrow and theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. R. K. Adair, *The Great Design: Particles, Fields, and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. M. Corey, *God and the New Cosmology: The Anthropic Design Argument* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. M. Gleiser, “From Cosmos to Intelligent Life: The Four Ages of Astrobiology”, *International Journal of Astrobiology* 11/4 (2012): 345-350 (350). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. H. E. McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. N. Lane, *Oxygen: The Molecule That Made the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. W. A. Dembski and M. Ruse, *Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 258-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. J. A. Eddy, *The Sun, the Earth, and Near-Earth Space: A Guide to the Sun-Earth System* (Washington, D.C.: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2009), 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A. H. Strahler and A. N. Strahler, *Modern Physical Geography* (New York: Wiley, 1992), 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. BBC, “Nature’s carbon balance confirmed”, interviewing R. Zeebe, [Available online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7363600.stm; cited 11 October 2012]. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. J. Lockwood and R. W. Hazlett, *Volcanoes: Global Perspectives* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 399. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. P. D. Ward and D. Brownlee, *Rare Earth: Why complex life is uncommon in the universe* (New York: Copernicus, 2000), 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. J. O. Bennett et al., *The Cosmic Perspective* (San Francisco: Pearson Addison-Wesley, 2004), 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Lockwood and Hazlett, *Volcanoes: Global Perspectives*, 399. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. M. Datta, N. P. Singh, and D. Daschaudhuri, *Climate Change & Food Security* (New Delhi: New India Publishing Agency, 2008), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. K. Smith and D. N. Petley, *Environmental Hazards: assessing risk and reducing disaster* (5th ed.; Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Academia Sinica, “Earth Scientists show Slow Earthquakes Triggered by Typhoons, Publish in Nature” [Cited 11th October 2012: Available online at http://newsletter.sinica.edu.tw/en/news/read\_news.php?nid=1275. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. D. E. Alexander, *Natural Disasters* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1999), 545-546. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Transcript of “Tsunami: Where Was God?”, Channel 4, aired 25 January 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. It is worth noting that Esau and Jacob are equally balanced in this account, but the point of the story seems to be: Esau’s selling of his birthright. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Some commentators (M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 40-63) have taken the first story of the Jacob Cycle to be the birth story. As a result they impose an artificial pattern on the sequence of stories that pairs the birth of Jacob and Esau with the birth of Benjamin, and pairs Isaac’s sojourn in Gerar with the destruction of Shechem. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Hence, Paul would echo Jacob’s story in the words, ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Rom 6:23). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. [Ed AP]: Given the role of Pope Victor in this story, this appears to be a pun. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Later, he describes a second Theodotus, commonly dubbed ‘the banker’, as introducing a new doctrine of Melchizedek as the greatest power (Ref 7.24). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. J. T. Fitzgerald, “Eusebius and *The Little Labyrinth”* in *The Early Church in Its Context: Essays in Honor of Everett Ferguson* (eds. [A. J. Malherbe](http://www.google.co.uk/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Abraham+J.+Malherbe%22), [F. W. Norris](http://www.google.co.uk/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Frederick+W.+Norris%22)& J. W. Thompson; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 126-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Fitzgerald, “*The Little Labyrinth”,* 136-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. W. A. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter und Theodotus der Bankier – ein Beitrag zur römischen Theologiegeschichte des zweiten und dritten Jahrhunderts”, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 87:1/2 (1996): 101 n1. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. D. A. Bertrand, “L’argumentation scripturaire de Théodote le Corroyeur”, *Cahiers de Biblia Patristica* 1 (1987) : 161-3; cf. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. P. Carrington, *The Early Christian Church* (2 vols; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 2:415. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. P. Lampe, *Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries: From Paul to Valentinus* (London: Continuum, 2006), 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cited in Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Epiphanius claims that Theodotus arose as an offshoot of a previous sect that denied the Gospel of John (Pan 54.1.1). He equates the denial of the Gospel of John with denial of “the divine Word who it declared was in the beginning”. Epiphanius takes the prologue of the Gospel to be a proof-text for the divinity of Christ and so equates the denial of the divinity of Christ with the denial of the Gospel. This need not imply that the Gospel was rejected. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Arabic fragments cited R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. R. M. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism: The Search for Authenticity in Early Christian Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Lampe, *Christians at Rome,* 347; cf. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 103 n6. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism,* 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Lampe, *Christians at Rome,* 347-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Cf. Bertrand, “L’argumentation de Théodote le Corroyeur”, 157-8; Grant, *Heresy and Criticism,* 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Cf. Bertrand, “L’argumentation de Théodote le Corroyeur”, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 103 n6. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism,* 61-67, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 104 n8. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Bertrand, “L’argumentation de Théodote le Corroyeur”, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. [Ed AP]: Thinkers could certainly take such a view, but whether they are synonyms is worth further study. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism,* 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism,* 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Cf. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. J. C. O’Neill, *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 16, has objected that Israel had no law of adoption. [Ed AP]: Nevertheless, whether ‘adoptionism’ is the right concept, the enthronement ceremony involved a declaration of sonship (Isa 9:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. A. Harnack, *History of Dogma* (2 vols; London: Williams & Norgate, 1894) 1:190. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Fr.1 = Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* 30.13; J. K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. M. Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 107-134; cf. M. Goulder, “The Pre-Marcan Gospel”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47:4 (1994): 453-471 (456-7); M. Goulder, “A Poor Man’s Christology”, *New Testament Studies* 45:3 (1999): 332-348. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. D. Minns & P. Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173 n6. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism,* 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cf. Löhr, “Theodotus der Lederarbeiter”, 115-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Carrington, *Early Christian Church,* 2:416 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. M. Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians,* 75-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Carrington also cites Hermas as a precursor to Theodotus. However, as detailed above, I think Hermas holds a Spirit-Christology that Theodotus would have rejected (Carrington, *Early Christian Church,* 2:416) [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Carrington, *Early Christian Church,* 2:416-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. A digest of older higher-critical views can be found in *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (rev. ed.; M. Black and H. H. Rowley, eds.; New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962); for our topic, see p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See the discussion of the ‘sister-wife’ episodes (Genesis 12, 20, 26) in J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 167-91 and C. Westermann, *Genesis* *12-36* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1985), 161, 318-320, 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Alter is at his best when challenging source-critical preconceptions with the literary concept of ‘type-scenes’ which he defines as recurring patterns for episodes. The ‘betrothal scene’ is such a ‘pattern’ or ‘convention’ and variations of the scene are used when finding a bride for Isaac, for Jacob and for Moses, who also met his wife by a well. This ‘type-scene’ is even appropriated in the NT when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman by a well. Type-scenes are a literary device or convention for presenting certain events (such as a betrothal scene) in a fixed format; it is the subtle variations on the standard format that alerts the reader to significant points. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. A. R. Millard, “Methods of Studying the Patriarchal Narratives as Ancient Texts” in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (eds. A. R. Millard & D. J. Wiseman; Leicester: IVP, 1980), 43-48 (56). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. T. D. Alexander, *Abraham in the Negev, A Source-critical Investigation of Genesis 20:1-22:19* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See J. P. Holding “Are the Philistines in Genesis an Anachronism?” It is available Online [Cited Nov 2012] at http://www.tektonics.org/lp/oldphilistines.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. In the first month of his reign, Hezekiah; “opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them” (2 Chron. 29: 3). This was the beginning of an extended reformation and rededication; “now it is mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel…”(v. 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. ‘Galilee of the nations’ (Isa 9:2) is a term (of contempt) and it is interchangeable with ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ (cf.1 Macc 5:15). The northern tribes had been intermingled with Gentiles. These tribes were issued an invitation by Hezekiah to celebrate the Passover at Jerusalem (2 Chron 30:1). ‘Galilee of the Nations/Gentiles’ is a type of the ‘Gentiles’ expressing the expansion of the covenant to include the Gentiles (cf. Matt 4:14-16) – the prophet Isaiah warmed particularly to the theme of Gentile inclusiveness: “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not…” (Isa 65:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Interestingly, the controversy with the Pharisees had repercussions for the relationship between the disciples of John the Baptist and those of Jesus. The Pharisees attempted to drive a wedge between the two parties by provoking envy (Jesus’ baptizes more disciples than the Baptist) and by questioning the efficacy of Jesus’ baptism (questions about ‘purifying’ in John 3:25, 26). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. S. R. Driver, *Genesis* (Westminster Commentaries; London: Methuen, 1904), 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Alexander, *Abraham in the Negev*, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. D. W. Manor, “Beersheba” *ABD*, 1.642 [My emphasis]. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. R. Alter, *Genesis, Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co Ltd, 1996), 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 326; J. Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 180; J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 131; G. W. Wade, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (London: Methuen, 1911), 274; H. A. Whittaker, *Isaiah* (Cannock: Biblia, 1988), 378; C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (OTL; trans. D. M. G. Stalker; London: SCM Press, 1969), 110; [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. For background see A. Perry, *Isaiah 40-48* (Sunderland: Willow Publications, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. The oracles of Isaiah 34 and 35 are all about the day of vengeance (~qn) and the year of recompense (~wlv), which refers to a year after the deliverance of Jerusalem in which the cities of Judah would be liberated (Isa 34:8); it is ‘then’ (za, Isa 35:5) that eyes and ears will be opened as the program of re-taking the land proceeds. This is described as God coming in vengeance (~qn, Isa 35:4). [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Goldingay, 180; R. Nurmela, *The Mouth of the Lord has Spoken* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55* (AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), 218, says that “the thread becomes difficult to follow”. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* and *Isaiah 34-66* (WBC 24, 25; 2 vols; Waco: Thomas Nelson, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. B. T. Arnold and J. H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 144-145. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. B. K. Waltke and M. O’Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 671. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. These three references are in the Perfect tense. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Motyer’s Babylonian reading acknowledges that this would be the only text where Israel were a messenger, *Isaiah 40-55*, 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. The argument here is that Mal 3:1 gives us a ‘messenger’ that prepares the way of a ‘lord’ who is coming; the one who is coming and whom the ‘Voice in the Wilderness’ proclaims is the One from the North. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Some critical commentators have thought it to be the name of Second Isaiah—Watts, 667. In typological terms, the naming of the messenger is duplicated in the naming of John the Baptist. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Hence, we reject the attempts of critics to amend the verse because of the threefold repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. The people and their leaders knew Hezekiah to be a ‘my Servant’ (Isa 37:35; 42:1; 52:13; 53:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. The messenger has been sent to Jerusalem; he is not part of the society in which there is intrigue and the hearing of evil (Isa 33:15). Hence, the record is not making the positive assertion that the messenger does not hear evil—*contra* Thirtle, 162, who cites Isa 33:15 to argue that there is a good purpose in the deafness and blindness of the Servant in Isa 42:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Hence, the typology of the Exodus does not extend from vv. 15-17 into v. 18-25—there is a development in circumstances between vv. 13-17 and vv. 18-25 so that we need to look for a different catalyst for vv. 18-25, *contra* Whittaker, 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Westermann, 110; *contra* Motyer, 328, who opts for ‘reconciled’ without citing texts. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. This sin is again referenced in Isa 43:27 in the expression ‘thy teachers have transgressed’. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Hence, we do know what the deafness and blindness is in Isa 42:18-20, *contra*, Goldingay, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Motyer, 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Oswalt2, 128; GKC 120c. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. [Ed AP]: The possible assumptions here are worth noting. They are (i) that God intended that there be a body of writing that is the ‘New Testament’ instead of his just inspiring writings for inclusion in the Jewish Scriptures; (ii) that there is a ‘when’ to answer beyond the time of when a particular piece of writing came into being; and (iii) that the NT ‘as Scripture’ is an historical question. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. The text mentions “two belonging to the above-named John [i.e. the gospel writer], or bearing the name of John”. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976) 82-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. [Ed AP]: Luke is usually dated post-70 AD because Jesus’ description of the destruction of Jerusalem is held to be too accurate for reasonable prognostication around 30 AD. Further, Luke’s date is also made dependent on Mark’s date, so that if Mark is post-60 AD, Luke’s gospel has to follow later in time. However, recent research [J. G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark’s Gospel* (JNTS; London: T & T Clark, 2004)] dates Mark prior to 50 AD and if this is correct, Luke can be dated prior to 55 AD; indeed, the earliest ‘we’ passage is Acts 16:10-17 which places Luke on the scene with Paul in the early 50s. This allows an early date for 1 Timothy, following Robinson’s ‘pre-70 AD’ example (who himself prefers a 60s date), and for the Gospel of Luke to be regarded as Scripture at the point of writing. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. A. D. Norris, *Acts and Epistles* (London: Aletheia Books, 1989), 645. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Robinson, *Redating,* 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. M. J. Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42.4 (1999): 645-671 (654-655). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. B. D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2:6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Robinson, *Redating,* 313-319. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.324-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.157-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.159-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1:23-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Robinson, *Redating,* 327-334. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2:124. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. J. Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early* *Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 18-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. [ED AP]: History can only give a limited answer on this topic. For any piece of writing, if it is inspired then it is Scripture—this logic means that the status that is ‘Scripture’ is not dependent on recognition in the church (epistemology) but the relationship of God to the writing (metaphysics). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ezekiel 16:4-9 is a parabolic account of the practice of the Egyptians to murder Israelite children by placing them on an open field exposed to the elements and wildlife to perish unattended. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. The waters from the Pool of Siloam had a ceremonial role in the Jewish practices at this feast. See further Dr Edersheim “The Temple” *The Religious Tract Society*,pp. 277-284. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Sent = the Shiloah name. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. “That a process of alteration and improvement of the chronology was busily carried on in later times, **we see from the added synchronisms of the kings of Israel and Judah**”, J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 278. [Emphasis in all quotes is mine.] [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. E. Thiele, “Synchronisms of the Hebrew Kings – A Re-evaluation: I”, Andrews University Seminary Studies 1 (Andrews University, 1963): 121-138. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. “**but his harmonizing approach has not gone unchallenged**, especially because of the many shifts in the basis of reckoning dates that it requires (e.g., Jepsen 1968: 34–35)—shifts which were unlikely in actual practice. The numerous extrabiblical synchronisms he invokes do not always reflect the latest refinements in Assyriological research (cf. E.2.f below). **In many cases, he posits an undocumented event in order to save a biblical datum** (e.g., the circumstances surrounding the appointment of Jeroboam II as coregent; Thiele 1983: 109)”, M. Cogan, “Chronology (Hebrew Bible)”, *ADB*, 1:1066. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. “Despite that fact of scholarly dedication, **neither Thiele’s carefully argued University of Chicago dissertation, nor anyone else’s,** **has achieved as yet universal acceptance**”, W. Kaiser, *A History of Israel: From the bronze age through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. “**Not all scholars are convinced by this solution**, and commentators on the prophetic books often accept that dates can only be approximate”, J. McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament, Volume 4: The Prophets* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. G. Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. D. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. L. McFall, “A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148/589 (1991): 3-45 (42-43). [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Ibid., p. 42; see also for example: T. Mitchell, *Israel and Judah until the Revolt of Jehu (931-841 B.C.*, Cambridge Ancient History, volume 3, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 445; J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Rev. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 249; R. Hess, “Chronology (Old Testament)” in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation* (ed. S. Porter; New York: Routledge, 2007), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. “**It remained then for others to complete the application of principles that Thiele used elsewhere**, thereby providing a chronology for the eighth-century kings of Judah **that is in complete harmony with the reign lengths and synchronisms given in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles**. The most thorough work in this regard was Leslie McFall’s 1991 article in Bibliotheca Sacra. McFall made his way through the reign lengths and synchronisms of Kings and Chronicles, and using an exact notation that indicated whether the years were being measured according to Judah’s Tishri years or Israel’s Nisan years, **he was able to produce a chronology for the divided monarchies that was consistent with all the scriptural texts chosen**”, R. Young, “Inductive And Deductive Methods As Applied To OT Chronology”, Master’s Seminary Journal 18/1 (2007): 99-116 (105-106). [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. McFall, “A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles”, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. R. Young, “Inductive And Deductive Methods As Applied To OT Chronology”, 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. “Grabbe suggests that the names and sequence of kings in Israel and Judah, and their approximate chronological placement, a**grees with what can be gleaned from extra-biblical sources**. To this extent the biblical framework (meaning primarily 1 and 2 Kings) **is reliable: even if we had no external sources we could have reasonable confidence in the biblical sequence** of Jeroboam I, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Omri, Ahab, Jehu, etc. in Samaria, and David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijam, Asa, Jehoshaphat, etc. in Jerusalem, along with their interrelationships. Beyond that it starts to get more and more tricky, with decreasing reliability in the biblical narrative as the detail increases (this is a general statement, and there are sometimes exceptions in specific instances)”, L. L. Grabbe, “Reflections on the Discussion” in *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty* (ed. L. L Grabbe; London; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 331-340 (337). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. *The Greek New Testament* (eds. K. Aland, M. Black, B. M. Metzger and A. Wikgren; Stuttgart, United Bible Societies, 1966-). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (2nd ed.; eds. Z. C. Hodges and A. L. Farstad; Nashville: Nelson, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 181-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. See P. Boyd, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” *CeJBI* 6/1 (2011): 7-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. The blood of the lamb delivered Israel from the destroyer, but the destroyer destroyed the firstborn of Egypt. Pharaoh had attempted to destroy the seed of the woman in issuing his decree to kill all the firstborn of Israel; but this enmity was turned on its head and the firstborn of Pharaoh, the seed of the Serpent, was destroyed. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. A similar relationship between ‘the Lord’ and ‘the destroy­er’ exists at the time when Israel suffer a pestilence as a result of David’s sin in numbering Israel (2 Sam 24:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Egypt is a well-known type for sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Prophecy fits events as a rough template, but it fits all events in a typical sequence as a precise template. If only one event is the subject of a prophecy, then the fit is precise. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. H. P. V. Nunn, *A Short Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 63-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. I was reminded that the best Bible Class I had ever heard was by a Llandudno brother of no reputation as a speaker whose talk on Song of Songs had the greatest volume of intertextual insights squashed into a forty minute compass that I have ever encountered. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. See the following articles in *The Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation*, (eds., A. Perry, D. Burke, T. Gaston, J. Adey, P. Wyns; Willow Publications online @ http://www.christadelphian-ejbi.org): “The Importance of the Ecclesia at Ephesus”, (**Vol. 6, No. 3, Third quarter 2012**); “The Destination and Purpose of the Fourth Gospel”, (**Vol. 3, No. 2, Second quarter 2009);** “The Fourth Gospel and Hebrews, *and* The Fourth Gospel and Revelation”, (**Vol. 3, No. 3, Third quarter 2009**). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)