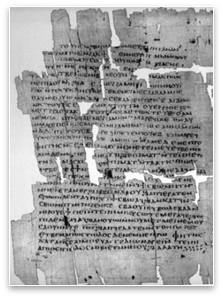
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**Editorial**

There are three reasons why academics seek publication in journals. Firstly, academics seek publication to further their career. This might sound mercenary but it is simply a fact of the trade – if you want a job in academia then you have to get published, if you want promotions then you have to get published, if you want research funding then you have to get published. Secondly, academics seek publication out of academic interest – they want to know stuff, they want to know the stuff that other people know (and they quite like to show other people how much they know). Thirdly, academic publication serves a purpose for the laity. Not directly, of course, because academic journals are not written for a popular level, but indirectly, academic research trickles down to popular level. This is not, necessarily, a good thing. The conclusions of critical scholars were the basis of the liberal theology of Anglican seminaries. But, all other things being equal, researching something leads to better conclusions than not researching something; academic research can have a positive influence on the laity. And whenever one has influence, one also has responsibility.

This raises interesting questions for the Christadelphian scholar. Anyone attempting an academic career will have to try to get published. And anyone who has persevered long enough to be in any sense a “scholar” is probably the sort of person who will pursue academic interests for their own sake. But does a Christadelphian scholar also have a responsibility to influence the laity?

The EJournal is one outlet for the Christadelphian scholar. It will not help him or her achieve an academic career. But it is a useful forum for pursuing academic interests and trying out ideas and hypotheses. Yet the EJournal is not just a talking shop for a handful of people who really, really, need to get out more. The EJournal is also a way of sharing academic research, with a Christadelphian perspective, with those non-scholars who have a scholarly interest.

However, more than that, can the Christadelphian scholar hope to influence those outside the community? Can he or she, in some small way, input into the academic discourse through publication in mainstream journals and thus, in some small way, have some influence? The answer to this question has to be tempered with humility. Even a titan of his or her field does not have unilateral influence and there aren’t many academic titans in our community (the late Brother Wilfred Lambert was genuinely a leading light in his field – Assyriology). But even a meagre influence is still influence. And where there is influence, there is responsibility. What that responsibility corresponds to in practice is a far more complex question. **TG**

**Articles**

# 

# The Myth of the Solid Dome (Part 2)

**Andrew Perry**

**Introduction**

ANE mythology is interesting for how it differs from Genesis and for what it has in common. This is obviously a vast topic and we are only going to select one point of interest: **the firmament**. This element of the Genesis narrative is held to be a clear example of ‘myth’ in the account, it being a term of reference for a ‘solid dome’. Some conservative evangelicals of more liberal persuasion say that, unless we are going to reject Genesis altogether, we should accept that there are such mythical elements in Genesis and just regard them as the language of the day which God used to teach the truth for all time that he is a creator.

Our counter-argument in this paper is against the ANE comparative analysis offered by scholars who take this approach; their analysis is methodologically flawed.

**Firmament**

P. H. Seely, one such scholar, states of the firmament (Gen 1:6, *rāqîa*‛),

The historical evidence, however, which we will set forth in concrete detail, shows that the *raqia*‛ was originally conceived of as being solid and not a merely atmospheric expanse.

The basic historical fact that defines the meaning of *raqia*‛ in Genesis 1 is simply this: all peoples in the ancient world thought of the sky as solid.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Our first point would be that the argument here depends on texts other than Hebrew ones to determine Hebrew linguistics. Comparative Philology[[2]](#footnote-2) is a discipline which notes correspondences between related languages. On the basis of these, a philologist may assert loan relationships or use a related language to suggest a meaning for a rare word in Hebrew. However, Seely’s argument is not one based in the sort of things comparative philologists say, but in the detail of mythopoeic texts.

A second (more serious) point to note about the argument is that it is about what the *peoples* of the world believe as illustrated in their texts. Is the Genesis text just an expression of what is believed by one of the peoples of the world at the time of its conception? The alternative and competing hypothesis is that it is not such an expression, but rather it **teaches** some people through the revelation of a prophet (i.e. it teaches the Israelites).

Seely summarizes the sort of things ancient peoples around the world expressed in their texts,

It is within the context of geography, astronomy, and natural science that they really believe that if they would travel far enough they could “touch the sky with one’s fingers,” that migrating birds live “on the other side of the celestial vault,” that an arrow or lance could “fasten in the sky,” that the sky can have “a hole in it,” that at the horizon “the dome of the sky is too close to earth to permit navigation,” that where the sky touches the earth you can “lean a pestle against it” or “climb up it,” that the sky is “smooth and hard…of solid rock,…as thick as a house,” that the sky can “fall down” and someday “will fall down crushing the earth.[[3]](#footnote-3)

What is interesting to note by way of contrast is that the biblical text has *hardly any information* compared to the wealth of ideas in the mythopoeic texts from which Seely draws and combines his data. This raises the question as to whether the biblical text is the same genre or anything like these other texts. We might well think that the biblical text is minimalistic *precisely to avoid* reflecting the beliefs of the people of its day and thereby function as **correcting revelation** by God. More importantly, as R. J. Clifford affirms,

Myths from outside the ancient Near East are not part of the world of ideas of Genesis; they did not contribute to Genesis as did *Atrahasis* nor do they illustrate Near Eastern ideas as do *Enuma Elish* and Philo of Byblos.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Clifford’s point is not a contrast between myth and fact, as if ANE people believed their ideas represented the facts and other people believed myths. Rather, it is the obvious point that there is no *influence* bearing upon Genesis from outside the ANE. Accordingly, we need only consider the ANE texts. So, we can ask with J. H. Walton: Is it the case that, “We have no reason to suppose that the Israelites thought about the composition of the sky any differently than those around them”?[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Sumer**

If we hold to the traditional Mosaic authorship of Genesis, the premise for looking at Sumerian texts in relation to Genesis is the possibility that the writing of the traditions underlying both creation ‘accounts’ lies in Abraham’s Mesopotamia.[[6]](#footnote-6) Equally, as Sumerian myths are developed by the later Babylonians, we can also surmise that they have contextual relevance for a (more conventional) late-dated Genesis account.[[7]](#footnote-7)

There is no single Sumerian text that gives a comprehensive and canonical view of ‘how the world began’. Scholars construct an overall ‘Sumerian view’ from different texts. S. N. Kramer, a leading Sumeriologist of the 20c., summarizes Sumerian cosmology as follows:

1. First was the primeval *sea*;[[8]](#footnote-8) it is not unlikely that it was conceived by the Sumerian as *eternal* and *uncreated*.

2. The primeval sea engendered a *united heaven and earth*.

3. Heaven and earth were conceived as *solid* elements. Between them, however, and *from them*, came the gaseous element *air*, whose main characteristic is that of expansion. Heaven and earth were thus separated by the expanding element *air*.

4. Air, being lighter and far less dense than either heaven or earth, succeeded in producing the *moon*, which may have been conceived by the Sumerians as made of the same stuff as air. The *sun* was conceived as born of the *moon*; that is, it emanated and developed from the moon just as the latter emanated and developed from air.

5. After heaven and earth had been separated, *plant*, *animal*, and *human* life became possible on earth; all life seems to have been conceived as resulting from a union of air, earth, and water; the sun, too, was probably involved. Unfortunately in this matter of production and reproduction of plant and animal life on earth, our extant material is very difficult to penetrate.[[9]](#footnote-9)

For our topic, this summary presents a two-element conception: heaven and ‘air’. If we compare this to Genesis 1, what we have there is a **one-element conception**—the *rāqîa*‛. Kramer thinks that ‘air’ is what separates and is a gaseous expansion; heaven is solid. This is a rather ‘scientific’ reading of Sumerian mythology. It is more faithful to Sumerian thinking to see the relevant god, Enlil, as personifying ‘storm and wind’ and think of these as what separates heaven and earth.[[10]](#footnote-10) In the light of this, Kramer’s later work, *The Sumerians*, comments of the Sumerian notion that “its most significant characteristics seem to be movement and expansion”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The Hebrew linguistics of *rāqîa*‛ (‘expanse’) have no obvious correlation to ‘air’, ‘wind’ or ‘storm’, but the Sumerian story of separation can be correlated to the function of the *rāqîa*‛. However, given that the Genesis schema comprises one element—the *rāqîa*‛ is ‘the heavens’, this may be a notion that allows for (and modifies) what Sumerians associated with **both** their concepts. The point here is that there is no simple correlation to be made, let alone assumed, and nothing by way of comparative philology to help. Seely’s handling of the data is therefore flawed. He says,

Sumerian literature, like the Rig Veda, distinguished between the firmament and the atmosphere. The Sumerians made this distinction by attributing to their air god, Enlil, the original act of separating heaven from earth. Hence Kramer noted the Sumerians believed that between heaven and earth was a substance called *lil* or wind which “corresponds roughly to our ‘atmosphere,’” while they thought of **the firmament** as solid, possibly composed of tin since the Sumerian word for tin is literally “metal of heaven.”[[12]](#footnote-12) (My emphasis)

Seely’s description of the Sumerian data follows Kramer,[[13]](#footnote-13) but the assumption he makes is clear: there is no *evidential reasoning* offered by Seely **to equate** the English term ‘firmament’ with the Sumerian ‘heaven’, let alone the Hebrew *rāqîa*‛.

There are similarities and differences to note between Genesis and Sumerian mythology. A point of comparison is that the waters are presupposed, but a difference is that the mother-god (Nammu), who personifies the waters, gives birth to a *united* heaven and earth (*COS*[[14]](#footnote-14), p. 516; *ANET*[[15]](#footnote-15), p. 58). Heaven and earth united, conceived as a mountain,[[16]](#footnote-16) and personified as the gods, An and Ki, gives birth to the air-god, Enlil, who separates them. Enlil unites with his ‘mother’, Ki (‘earth’) which then leads to the creation of flora and fauna, mankind, and civilization.

This information is enough to point up a similarity and a difference with Genesis. Enlil separates just as the *rāqîa*‛ separates; but Enlil separates heaven and earth and not the waters below and above—and this is a critical difference.

The Sumerian myths have a **local and parochial character**; they are not about the universe or the planet as we might think of creation today. For example, the *Song of the Hoe*[[17]](#footnote-17) opens in this way:

Not only did the lord who never changes his promises for the future make the world appear in its correct form, — Enlil who will make the seed of mankind rise from the earth — not only did he hasten to separate heaven from the earth, (…) and earth from heaven, but, in order to make it possible for humans to grow “here the flesh sprouts,” he first affixed the axis of the world in Duranki [Enlil’s temple complex in Nippur]. (*COS*, 511)

Creation notices are about the temples and cities of Sumer, like Nippur;[[18]](#footnote-18) they are about the animals of the local region (‘The Eridu Genesis’ *COS*, 513); they are about sheep and grain (‘The Disputation between Ewe and Wheat’, *COS*, 575); they are about the beginning of time when cities were given to the gods in the land of Dilman (*ANET*, 38);[[19]](#footnote-19) and they are about fields and farming tools (*Song of the Hoe*). Hence, in discussing creation myths centred on the god, Enki, Clifford states, “The three myths just discussed imply rather than state in detail that Enki created human society in the course of making the earth fertile”.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**Egypt**

A conservative rationale for looking at Egyptian creation myths is the tradition of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and Moses’ Egyptian up-bringing. Scholars also offer other rationales depending on their view of the dating of Genesis, for example, that there has been Egyptian influence through Phoenician channels.[[21]](#footnote-21) The myths vary according to their regional location of origin and we will select features relevant to our contextualization of Genesis and which are common to all the cosmogonies.[[22]](#footnote-22) J. P. Allen summarises their picture as follows:

To the Egyptians, the world of experience was a finite ‘box’ of light, space, and order within an infinite expanse of dark, formless waters. The limits of this space were defined by the earth below and the surface of the outer waters above, held off the earth by the atmosphere. Earth is the domain of the mortal: man, animals, plants, ‘fish and the crawling things.’[[23]](#footnote-23)

J. A. Wilson observes a link between Egyptian cosmology and geography when he notes,

Throughout the Near East there is a contrast between the desert and the sown land.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The remark is pertinent to appreciating the concerns of the Genesis account which are agricultural and set in opposition to the initial uninhabitable and wilderness state of the land. We might expect the creation account to reflect this context of understanding since we have found it also in Sumerian myths. Thus Wilson characterizes Egyptian cosmology as follows:

The Egyptian conceived of the earth as a flat platter with a corrugated rim. The inside bottom of this platter was the flat alluvial plain of Egypt, and the corrugated rim was the rim of mountain countries which were the foreign lands. The platter floated in water.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The point for our study here is not that the Egyptians believed in a flat earth, but rather that they had a **parochial** view of creation.

*City Localisation*

S. G. F. Brandon notes that,

Our studies of Egyptian and Mesopotamian cosmogonies have shown us that such accounts of the origin of the world were not generally motivated by a desire to speculate about the beginning of things: instead they were designed to promote the interests of some sanctuary or city.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Thus, Wilson says,

Every important cult-center of Egypt asserted its primacy by the dogma that it was the site of creation.[[27]](#footnote-27)

What is interesting about this comment is that, a) it claims **localism** was a feature of Egyptian creation myths; and b) the mythology serves the city and the temple interests.

In the Thebes Creation Myth (c. 1300), the beginning reads,

Thebes is normal beyond every (other) city. The water and land were in her from first times. (Then) sand came to delimit the fields and to create her ground on the hillock; (thus) earth came into being. Then men came into being in her, to found every city with her real name, for their name is called “city” (only) under the oversight of Thebes, the Eye of Re. (*ANET*, p. 8)

It’s easy to see the local concerns of a river flood plain society here and it is interesting to note the elements of water and land and the concern to delimit fields. The city has an interest in its agricultural hinterland. The city itself is on the primeval hillock (not a mountain).

The point of contrast with Genesis 1 and 2 is that the biblical account is **not city or temple centred[[28]](#footnote-28)** (it is just agricultural), but the agreement is that Genesis has a local focus *on Eden*.

In the Pyramid Text 600, ‘The Creation by Atum’ (c. 2400), the city of Heliopolis is named,

O Atum-Kheprer, thou wast on high on the (primeval) hill; thou didst arise as the *ben*-bird of the *ben*-stone in the *Ben*-House in Heliopolis; thou didst spit out what was Shu, thou didst sputter out what was Tefnut. Thou didst put thy arms about them as the arms a *ka*, for thy *ka* was in them.(*ANET*, 3)

Shu was the god of the air and Tefnut was the god of the atmosphere, so that what we have here is the creation of the lesser gods who personify these two elements of nature. The association with the temple in Heliopolis is clear, and this is because this was the location from which creation spread abroad. The Pyramid text Spell 527 makes this latter point:

Atum evolved growing ithyphallic, in Heliopolis…and the two siblings were born—Shu and Tefnut. (*COS*, 7)

While the theogony here is alien to Genesis, the idea that creation has a ‘centre’ from which it cascades is clear. The location implicit in Gen 1:2 is identified as Eden in Genesis 2. We misread Genesis if we strip out this aspect of localisation.

Another city for the centre of creation was Hermopolis,

I am Atum when I was alone in Nun; I am Re in his (first) appearances, when he began to rule that which he had made.

Who is he? This “Re, when he began to rule that which he had made” means that Re began to appear as a king, as one who was before the liftings of Shu had taken place, when he was on the hill which is in Hermopolis… (*ANET*, 3-4)

What adds to the local setting is the repeated mention of the ‘hill’ from which creation took place, this time not Thebes but Hermopolis. The artistry in the story is not descriptive of the planet; the narrator is not looking down upon the earth. Rather, the experience informing the theology is that of seeing emergence of hills after the inundation of the Nile.[[29]](#footnote-29)

*Cosmology*

There are cosmological features to note in the Egyptian texts that compare and contrast with Genesis; we are interested in those that **compare or have a correlate** with the firmament.

(1) The ‘waters’ (Nun) have prior existence and are not the subject of creation (*COS* Coffin Texts Spell 714 (p. 6)), ‘I am the Waters, unique, without second’);[[30]](#footnote-30) this bears comparison with Sumerian ideas and the Genesis account. The difference is that the Sumerian conception is “primarily the body of sweet water which the Mesopotamians believed lay below the earth” (Jacobsen, ibid.) whereas the Egyptian conception is of a surrounding sea.[[31]](#footnote-31) However, with Genesis, the waters are *just there* on the horizon (‘the face of the deep’).

Scholars correlate the elements of Gen 1:2 with ANE myths. For example, J. K. Hoffmeier states “four cosmic phenomena are mentioned that are apparently present when creation formally begins”.[[32]](#footnote-32) The question for us is whether ‘the deep’ is meant to be thought of as a ‘primeval sea’ or whether it is just *the deep*. One point is that the description in Genesis is not focused on the deep but on the *darkness* that is upon the **face** of the deep. The problem for any correlation with the Egyptian conception of a primeval sea is the lack of information in Genesis other than the expression ‘the deep’. The immediate use of this expression elsewhere is of ‘fountains’ of the deep (Gen 7:11; 8:2; cf. Ps 104:6), and these are associated with **subterranean waters**.

The conception of ‘the waters’ (as Nun) in Egyptian texts includes a parochial aspect of ‘floodwaters covering the land’. For example, Atum says to Osiris,

I shall destroy all that I have made, and this land will return unto Nun, into the floodwaters, as (in) its first state. (*ANET*, 9)[[33]](#footnote-33)

The interesting point here is that the waters have a local and geographical aspect and that the ‘first state’ was likewise a flood over a land. The text envisages a return to the primeval state but this begs the question as to how we envisage the extent of ‘the waters’ of Genesis 1.

Localisation of creation myths is further seen in the *Shabaka Stone* (*ANET*, 4) and the theology that elevates Ptah, the god of Memphis, as personified in the united land of Egypt, a land that arose of the primeval waters.[[34]](#footnote-34)

This point can obviously be generalised. For example, for the element of darkness, is this a cosmic darkness or just a narrative observation about what can be seen in the distance? One text describing the cosmic darkness is the ‘Book of Nut’ (c. 2055-1650 BCE):

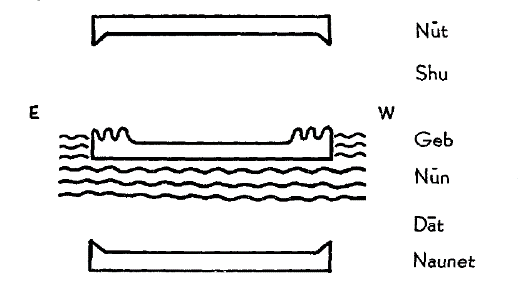
The uniform darkness, ocean of the gods, the place from which the birds come: this is from her northwestern side up to her northeastern side, open to the Duat that is on her northern side, with her rear in the east and her head in the west…The upper side of this sky exists in uniform darkness, the southern, northern, western and eastern limits of which are unknown, these having been fixed in the waters, in inertness. (*COS* ‘Book of Nut’ (p. 5))

This cosmic darkness is different to the Genesis conception because it is on the upper side of the sky whereas in Genesis it is upon the *face* of the waters.

(2) Nut the sky goddess is supported by Shu the god of the air, who is her father and whose name means ‘emptiness/void’. He separates Shu from her twin, Geb, who personifies the earth. Nut has waters (‘ocean’) under her, open to the darkness (Pyramid Texts 802b; 1720c); she also has support in the waters below; she is also supported by Shu, the God of Air, who is ‘exhale-like of form’ and who ‘touches for him [Atum] the height of the sky’ (*COS*, Coffin Texts Spell 75 (p.9), Spell 76 (p.10), Spell 80. (p. 12)). Shu says, ‘I lifted my daughter Nut atop me that I might give her to my father Atum in his utmost extent’ (*COS* Coffin Texts Spell 76 (p.10)).

In relation to Genesis, what we have here is a **two-element conception** of Nut and Shu, which is similar to the Sumerian view, whereas in Genesis we have a **one-element conception** of ‘the firmament’ which is called ‘the heavens’. Another difference is that the heavenly waters are *under* Nut and not above her, which is different to the role of the firmament in Genesis.

This is partly illustrated below,



The Egyptian Coffin Texts have a lot of detail about Shu, identifying him with atmospheric phenomena:

My clothing is the air of life, which emerged for it around me, from the mouth of Atum and opens for it the winds on my path. I am the one who made possible the sky’s brilliance after darkness. My skin is the pressure of the wind, which emerged behind me from the mouth of Atum. My efflux is the storm cloud of the sky, my fumes are the storm of half-light. The length of the sky is for my strides, and the breadth of the earth is for my foundations. (*COS* Coffin Texts Spell 80 (p.12))

Nut is here seen arching over the earth. Shu has the functions of ‘being between’ and ‘separating’ the sky and earth:

I am the soul of Shu, from whom Nut was placed above and Geb under his feet, and I am between them.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The function of ‘being between’ compares to that of the firmament, but in the case of Shu, it is the function of being between *earth* and sky and not being between earthly and heavenly waters. In other drawings of Shu, he is seen holding up the sky.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In view of this data, it is surprising that Seely offers no *evidential reasoning* **to** **correlate** the firmament with Shu and/or Nut. In his unexceptionable review of the Egyptian evidence, his use of the word ‘firmament’ comes in twice,

…the Egyptians apparently believed the firmament was made specifically of iron.

Also clearly showing that the Egyptians thought of the sky as solid is the fact that they like the Sumerians and Indians in the Rig Veda distinguished between the sky (firmament) and the atmosphere.[[37]](#footnote-37)

It isn’t enough to just drop the word ‘firmament’ into a sentence to make a connection with the sky when the only functional detail we have about the firmament in Genesis is that it is ‘between’ waters. Shu is not given this function and neither is Nut. Instead, Nut

…is defacto the regulator of the passage of days and nights, the movement of the sun and stars, therefore of time, a function normally established in the ancient world by male deities…[[38]](#footnote-38)

Two comparisons can be made to support a correlation between *rāqîa*‛ and the sky. First, there is the comparison that the sky is made of metal in Egyptian conception. Hoffmeier avers that in PT 305, the resurrected king takes possession of the sky and splits or separates the metal. Seely is more cautious, citing S. A. B. Mercer, who thought that PT 305 was more figurative than literal, and states,

Whatever the case may be as to exactly what material the ancient Egyptians thought the sky was made of, they certainly believed it was solid.[[39]](#footnote-39)

If we follow Hoffmeier, the question becomes whether *rāqîa*‛ has a metallic connotation. His argument is that the Hebrew noun comes from the root *rq*‛ which means to beat, stamp, or spread out “and frequently applies to metal”.[[40]](#footnote-40) This is a weak argument because the verb applies to spreading out the earth (Ps 136:6; Isa 42:5; 44:24), stamping one’s feet (Ezek 6:11; 25:6); treading down people (2 Sam 22:43); as well as metalworking (Exod 39:3; Num 17:4; Isa 40:19; Jer 10:9). This is the database of usage except for Job 37:18, which is a *comparative* figure of speech,

Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass? Job 37:18 (KJV)

This is an insufficient basis upon which to match up *rāqîa*‛ with the Egyptian conception of a metallic sky. It is also worth noting that the Babylonians had two traditions concerning the composition of the heavens: that they were made of water or stone.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The second comparison to consider is whether the association of the sun, moon and stars with the sky (Nut[[42]](#footnote-42)) means that we should correlate *rāqîa*‛ with the Egyptian conception of the sky. The problem here is that such a correlation founders on the different **structure** of the Genesis conception: a) *rāqîa*‛ is a relational concept (‘between’), unlike the Egyptian concept of the sky; b) its relational objects are two bodies of waters and not just a heavenly ocean; c) the nearest Egyptian relational concept is Shu, the atmosphere; and d) Genesis has a one-concept picture (‘firmament’) whereas Egyptian myths have a two-concept picture (Shu, Nut). In addition, we should observe that Genesis does not use the words for ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ in relation to the firmament but ‘the lamp-lights’. Our counter-proposal therefore is that **Genesis is offering a competing cosmic geography** of the heavens to any Egyptian view.

**Mesopotamia**

The main ANE context to which Genesis has been compared by scholars is that of Mesopotamia. This is noted by Hoffmeier, who offers critical remarks on this bias in order to habilitate instead his comparison with Egyptian cosmology. He says,

In all the debate over the possible connections between Babylonian mythology and Genesis, there has been very little consideration given to literary influence from Egypt.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The main creation myth to which Genesis has been compared is *Enūma Elish* (late second millennium BCE[[44]](#footnote-44)). The premise upon which the comparison has proceeded is an exilic or post-exilic date for Genesis. Seely quotes[[45]](#footnote-45) this text to establish the Babylonian conception of the sky as a solid roof and the relevant text is,

He [Marduk] split her [Ti’âmat] open like a mussel (?) into two (parts); Half of her he set in place and formed the sky (therewith) as a roof. He fixed the crossbar (and) posted guards. He commanded them not to let her waters escape.[[46]](#footnote-46)

W. G. Lambert’s translation is,

He split her into two like a dried fish; one half of her he set up and stretched out as the heavens. He stretched a skin and appointed a watch, with the instruction not to let her waters escape.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The description here is in terms of a conflict between the gods that personified the elements with Marduk constructing the sky from the body of Ti’âmat. In A. Heidel’s translation it is a ‘roof’, in *COS* it is a ‘cover’, in *ANET* we have ‘ceiled it as sky’, and for Lambert is a ‘skin’. However, whether this is relevant to Genesis is doubtful.

*Waters*

Heidel reflects the common suggestion that in the *Enūma Elish*, two kinds of water are noted in the beginning: Apsû representing the primeval sweet water ocean and Ti’âmat the salt water ocean.[[48]](#footnote-48)

When on high no name was given to heaven, nor below was the netherworld called by name, primeval Apsu was their progenitor, and matrix-Tiamat[[49]](#footnote-49) was she who bore them all, they were mingling their waters together… (*COS*, 391)

Clifford, relying on research by S. Godfless, affirms that Ti’âmat is a “personified doublet of Apsu, created for the sake of creating rival kingships”;[[50]](#footnote-50) accordingly, there is no saltwater-freshwater duality. Whatever the correct interpretation is, Ti’âmat is made a correlate of ‘the deep’ in Genesis.[[51]](#footnote-51) The obvious difference is that Genesis does not have the battle story of *Enūma Elish* or the deities inherent in the natural elements.

*Enūma Elish* may not be typical for Babylonian cosmology. Lambert thinks that “It is a sectarian and aberrant combination of mythological threads woven into an unparalleled compositum.”[[52]](#footnote-52) He affirms that the ‘earth’ is more commonly considered as the source of all things and this is the older idea in Babylonian thought. More significantly, he notes that the division of waters, rather than the more common idea of the separation of heaven and earth, is a motif **only shared** **in** **this text**[[53]](#footnote-53) with Genesis and this is significant. Another feature not in *Enūma Elish* is that of a ‘darkness’ connected with the primeval waters. However, according to Berossus, this was a feature of Babylonian cosmology.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Lambert considers whether Genesis could have directly borrowed from *Enūma Elish* and his conclusion is expressed in this way:

To sum up discussion of the second day, there is one close parallel between Genesis and *Enuma Eliš,* but no evidence of Hebrew borrowing from Babylon.[[55]](#footnote-55)

The close parallel is the splitting of Marduk, which Walton calls the only “substantial similarity”.[[56]](#footnote-56) The name Ti’âmat also has some shared Semitic ancestry with the Hebrew word for the deep (*tehōm*).[[57]](#footnote-57)

Accordingly, Lambert says,

All water known to man either comes down from the sky or up from the ground. Hence, the sky must be water. The first chapter of Genesis provides the closest parallel to the division of cosmic waters. On the second day of the week of creation, God put a ‘firmament’ between the upper and lower waters, which corresponds to the ‘skin’ in *Enūma Eli*š IV 139.[[58]](#footnote-58)

As Lambert notes, this is different to Egyptian cosmology in which “no dividing of the cosmic waters is known.”[[59]](#footnote-59) It is also different to other Babylonian texts in which a joined heaven and earth is separated and conceived as a solid mass and not a body of water.[[60]](#footnote-60)

What is the nature of this parallel? Does it give us grounds for saying that the firmament is the same conception and/or is solid?

*Firmament*

The making of the sky in *Enūma Elish* is brief and amounts to the clause ‘and formed the sky as a roof’. The function of the sky-roof, supported by a crossbar, is not clear; guards are posted with the command to not let the waters escape. Heidel suggests that Ti’âmat’s body is used to form the sky-roof and the guards are to ensure that the waters that were contained in her half-body are kept locked away.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The differences with the Genesis conception of ‘the firmament’ are plain. First, Ti’âmat is a conception to do with waters, whereas the ‘firmament’ is not—it is a conception to do with separation (‘what is between’). Secondly, the concept of the ‘firmament’ is a two-way relation—it pertains to waters below as well as above; in *Enūma Elish* the sky-roof relates only to the waters, the location of which is unclear. Thirdly, there is a *material body* in the figure of Ti’âmat with which to form the solid sky-roof. The Genesis account has no corresponding detail and uses the common verb for ‘to do/make’—‘God made the firmament’. Lastly, there are the mythopoeic details of the crossbar and the guards for which there is nothing in Genesis.

Our argument is therefore that *Enūma Elish* does have a solid sky, but that the significance of this text for Genesis has not been established. Structurally, the Genesis conception is not a good fit with the half body of Ti’âmat; the firmament is introduced in contradistinction to the waters, whereas the sky in *Enūma Elish* is constructed out of Ti’âmat. In the end, our data in Genesis is too slight upon which to draw a comparison and it is not elaborated in a mythopoeic way.

Lambert has a more complex understanding of the structure of Babylonian cosmology:

The idea of a vault of heaven is not based on any piece of evidence[[62]](#footnote-62)…Thus to the Babylonians the universe consisted of superimposed layers of the same size and shape separated by space.[[63]](#footnote-63)

The Assyriologist, W. Horowitz is in substantial agreement that Mesopotamians believed in a series of heavens set out in flat planes.[[64]](#footnote-64) He comments,

Although the clear sky seems to us to be shaped like a dome, rather than a flat circle, there is no direct evidence that ancient Mesopotamians thought the visible heavens to be a dome.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Walton is correct when he avers that “In summary, then, it is difficult to discuss comparisons between Israelite and Mesopotamian literature concerning creation of the cosmos because the disparity is so marked.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

**Canaanite and Other Texts**

On the contribution of Canaanite literature to our understanding of biblical cosmogony, Clifford comments that it is “disappointing” because of its paucity and randomness.[[67]](#footnote-67) Clifford’s review of texts offers nothing to our topic of the firmament and the waters above the firmament. Texts have cosmic elements, like that of ‘waters’ and ‘darkness’, but there are no undisputed cosmogonies.

Seely comments in relation to Hittite views,

We have no description of the Hittite cosmology, but we do know they thought of the sky as solid, for a recovered text speaks of a time when they ‘severed the heaven from the earth with a cleaver.’[[68]](#footnote-68)

The problem however is that this is not enough information to determine whether the Hittites had the same conception as Genesis.

The first century historian, Philo of Byblos (c. 64-141 CE) wrote about Phoenician history, quoting the Phoenician historian, Sakkunyton, and included an account of their cosmogony. Clifford, however, notes that the accuracy of Philo is questioned by scholars.[[69]](#footnote-69) The cosmogony we have through this source is eclectic, according to Clifford, but it offers nothing in the way of a conception of a solid sky; it does speak of waters, darkness, air, wind, and cloud.[[70]](#footnote-70)

**Interpretation**

Down the ages, the interpretation of Genesis 1 has followed prevailing world-views. Second Temple texts, later rabbinical comments, and early church theologians (‘the fathers’) refer to the sky as solid.[[71]](#footnote-71) Whether they thought of the sky as a hemi-spherical dome is less certain. Greek thought was of heavenly spheres surrounding the earth from as early as the 6th century BCE.[[72]](#footnote-72) Second Temple works are more likely to have been influenced by Greek ideas of spherical heavens than by Babylonian flat planes or the Egyptian idea of a dome/vault.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Similarly, the early church fathers sought to marry Greek ideas to the Bible “but they could not identify which sphere was the biblical firmament so they tended to add a few spheres to accommodate the Bible to Greek thinking.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Jerome’s use of the Latin term *firmamentum* in the Vulgate reflects the Greek idea of hard celestial spheres and not a solid dome.[[75]](#footnote-75) On early medieval interpretation, R. W. Younker and R. M. Davidson comment,

…unwillingness to commit to a hard-sphere theory is reflected in the common tendency by most Christian scholastics to translate the Hebrew *rāqîa*‘ as *expansium*, *expansion*, or *extension*, rather than *firmamentum*—the former expressions all convey the meaning of expanse and do not commit one to an understanding of something hard.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Younker and Davidson identify the origin of the Accommodationism advocated by theistic evolutionists in the ‘Introduction’ to Galileo’s work, *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems*, by the Benedictine scholar, Antoine Augustin Calmet. However, they observe that this did not become “a widespread view and did not gain a consensus among critical biblical scholars until the nineteenth century.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Their conclusion on the modern origins of the ‘solid dome’ interpretation is therefore as follows:

Thus it appears that the biblical critics of the 1850s built their ideas about ancient Hebrew cosmology upon the incorrect flat-earth concept of twenty years earlier. Further, they seem to have confused ancient and medieval discussions of hard celestial spheres with the hemispherical solid-dome/-vault and flat-earth myths, which were two quite unrelated concepts![[78]](#footnote-78)

The ‘accommodationist’ interpretation is popular today, but it is as much a cultural product as the hard or soft sphere interpretations of the Medieval Scholastics.

**Conclusion**

Our conclusion from the ANE evidence is that **the structure of ANE conceptions of the sky is different to that in Genesis 1**. There is no one-to-one correlation to be had in any analysis of the different traditions. The differences with Genesis are too great. This raises the question as to why Genesis is not *more like* ANE mythology. The straightforward theological answer to this question is that, as God chose the nation of Israel above all other nations, so too he **taught them** in a singular way.

The historical point here though is that the evidence from Sumerian and Egyptian texts has both concepts of the sky *and* the atmosphere. If we judge that the concept of a solid sky is “scientifically naïve”,[[79]](#footnote-79) the lack of a corresponding concept in Genesis shows that the text is more *phenomenal* in its description. Exactly what the people believed at any one time might have varied; the *text* of Genesis is not itself scientifically naïve. Seely’s method of interpretation makes ‘the people’ the determining factor for settling questions of meaning, but this does not give sufficient respect to the integrity of the text. We might also add that the text has a teaching function which might very well be countering the ideas of the people of its day.

The triumvirate of ‘author-text-audience’ determines meaning. If we only emphasize the audience and its needs, we neglect the intentions of the author (including God) and fail to respect the integrity of the public language in which the text is written.[[80]](#footnote-80) If we control meaning through the device of the original audience, we fail to give primacy to the text as our only data. The data for constructing the background knowledge of the original audience, supposing it to be an Iron Age one (1200-500 BCE?), is presumably the OT texts, but these are through a prophet, which puts authorial meaning and the text centre-stage. We don’t have independent data on the original audience and their linguistic usage. We need such data for assertions about the original audience. We cannot just presume their linguistic habits from the usage we have in the OT for the prophets.

For example, we can infer that the prophet used *rāqîa*‛ in relation to the ‘sky’ but the texts carry no information on the audience as to their linguistic writing and speaking practice. Any comment about linguistic practice (a ‘used by’ the audience claim) of what is a fairly rare and narrowly used word is just presumption. We do not have any evidence whatsoever about the original audience and it is methodologically unsound to project such usage data from the prophet onto an audience. The soundest method is to follow the prophet’s pattern of use rather than invent imaginary audience usage on the basis of no data. Necessarily, we have no independent evidence of audience understanding about Genesis, only data that is the linguistic usage of the prophets.

Seely makes the mistake of giving the putative background knowledge of the audience too much weight when he says,[[81]](#footnote-81)

Considering that the Hebrews were a scientifically naive people who would accordingly believe the *raqia*‛was solid, that both their Babylonian and their Egyptian background would influence them to believe the *raqia*‛ was solid, and that they naturally accepted the concepts of the peoples around them so long as they were not theologically offensive, I believe we have every reason to think that both the writer and original readers of Genesis 1 believed the *raqia*‛ was solid.

What generalisations like this fail to take on board are such factors as—how you determine influence when the date of all the texts and their traditions is so indeterminate;[[82]](#footnote-82) how you decide influence in the different social groups of society; how the competing religious groups in a society viewed indigenous traditions over against those of other cultures; the effect of different education levels in modulating influence; and the level of respect accorded to sacred writings, i.e. who was true to God and who was syncretistic in their beliefs. We don’t have the kind of data about the people/peoples of the time in which Genesis 1 was written that we need for such a generalisation; all we have are the texts.

Seely’s conclusion from his historical review of ANE texts is,

In the ancient world the sky was not just phenomenal. The ancients did not just refer to the appearance of the sky as being solid. They concluded from the appearance that the sky really was solid, and they then employed this conclusion in their thinking about astronomy, geography, and natural science. The *raqia*‛ was for them a literal physical part of the universe, just as solid as the earth itself. Solidity is an integral part of its historical meaning.[[83]](#footnote-83)

However, it is because ANE cosmologies have multiple elements of a solid sky, air, an atmosphere, clouds, and wind that it is not historically out of place to read the reference to a *rāqîa*‛ in Genesis in terms of what was apparent from the ground and **in phenomenal terms**. The historical meaning of *rāqîa*‛ should and can be established from the Hebrew texts alone without referring to ‘the ancients’ of other ANE cultures. When we give proper priority to the Hebrew text and the literature of which it is a part, it is clear that the balance of argument favours ‘expanse’. We should do this against the prevailing world-view of both today and former ages.

**Hezekiah’s Recovery**

**Andrew Perry**

**Introduction**

When was Hezekiah’s recovery? One scholarly view is that he became sick in 705-704 and recovered by 703. This view is based on the fact that Merodach-Baladan[[84]](#footnote-84) was resident on the throne in Babylon for 703 before being forced into exile by Sennacherib by the end of the year. J. H. Walton presents the historical case for this view and observes it is ‘commonly accepted’.[[85]](#footnote-85) Since Merodach-Baladan is called ‘king of Babylon’ in the biblical record (2 Kgs 20:12; Isa 39:1), and he was on the throne in 704-703, Hezekiah’s sickness must have been over by this date, with Merodach-Baladan’s envoys visiting perhaps in 703.

At that time Berodach-baladan a son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 2 Kgs 20:12 (NASB)

This translates the Hebrew Perfect tense into the English Pluperfect suggesting that Hezekiah was no longer sick by the time of the letters and present were sent. We can equally translate the tense as an English Simple Past ‘for he heard that Hezekiah **was** sick’ as in 2 Kgs 20:1 ‘In those days **was** Hezekiah sick unto death’. However, Isaiah adds an extra detail:

At that time Merodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered. Isa 39:1 (KJV revised)

This certainly justifies the ‘had been sick’ of 2 Kgs 20:12 (NASB) as a matter of history. Nevertheless, we do not know when Hezekiah became sick or how long the sickness lasted or when it was judged terminal. We are merely told that Merodach-Baladan’s letters and present came after Hezekiah’s recovery. This fact creates a problem for Walton’s common view because **the biblical text coincides Hezekiah’s recovery with the siege of Jerusalem**.

And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 2 Kgs 20:6 (KJV); cf. Isa 38:6

This assertion joins the healing of Hezekiah with the deliverance of Jerusalem,[[86]](#footnote-86) and presupposes that the city (not just Judah) is under *a siege or blockade*, i.e. metaphorically it was already in the *hand* of the king of Assyria. Hezekiah connects **peace** with his sickness in his prayer after his recovery when he says,

Behold, for peace[[87]](#footnote-87) I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. Isa 38:17 (KJV)

In some sense, Hezekiah saw his sickness as ‘for’ peace. Hezekiah’s recovery is thus most likely to have occurred at the same time as the siege of Jerusalem and this data counts against Walton.

**Special Pleading**

We have set up a conflict in data for the date of Merodach-Baladan’s letters and present. Should we read 2 Kgs 20:6 as a **prediction** from the politics of 703 presupposing that Sennacherib was bound to attack Judah and that God would deliver Hezekiah and Jerusalem? Or should we read it as a prediction from the politics of 701 with Sennacherib in the land and besieging Jerusalem?

The expression ‘from/out of the hand of’ requires analysis. Is this used to describe a current situation, i.e. one where you are **presently** in the hand of your enemies; or is it used to describe what will obtain in the near or distant future? The same conjunction+comparison+noun form is found elsewhere in two places:

And David spake unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul… 2 Sam 22:1 (KJV)

So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.

2 Kgs 16:7 (KJV)

These examples show that ‘from/out of the hand of’ is used for a **current or recent** plight. The same comparision+noun form (without the conjunction) is used in several places for the current and pressing threat of an enemy including Gideon and the Midianites (Jud 6:14); the Israelites and the Philistines (1 Sam 4:3; 2 Sam 19:10); and David and Saul (2 Sam 22:1). For example, the following text is typical:

Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The Lord our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 2 Chron 32:11 (KJV)

The expression ‘from/out of the hand of’ is used for **immediate and proximate** threats (see also 2 Sam 14:26; Pss 18:1; 71:4; Jer 15:21).

This is how Chronicles reports the deliverance of Jerusalem in 701:

Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side. 2 Chron 32:22 (KJV)

This ‘thus’ refers directly to the action of the Angel of the Lord (2 Chron 32:21) and the metaphor of the ‘hand’ of Sennacherib is used to describe the blockade.

We do not know the politics of 703; Sennacherib is occupied in Mesopotamia. How would he deal with the West? What was the intelligence suggesting? In 703, the threat of a western campaign by Sennacherib is likely but the biblical prophecies about this campaign are in terms of his coming up against the land, the nation or the people (e.g. Isa 8:7-8; 10:6-7; 14:24-25) rather than against the city Jerusalem. The point here is that the **catalyst** for general prophecies of the Assyrian threat is there in 703 and even earlier in the reign of Ahaz, but the catalyst for the **specific prediction about defending Jerusalem** does not emerge until she is directly threatened by a blockade.

Walton doesn’t offer an analysis of the intertexts of ‘from/out of the hand of’, nor does he consider what catalysts might lead to the prediction of 2 Kgs 20:6/Isa 38:6; instead he just avers that Isa 38:6 “mentions that Jerusalem will be delivered from the hand of the king of Assyria—thus suggesting that the siege of Jerusalem is still future”.[[88]](#footnote-88) However, the database of usage for ‘from/out of the hand of’ suggests proximate and immediate threat and/or conflict and therefore the year is 701 rather than 703.

Walton does not plead for us to treat Isa 38:6/2 Kgs 20:6 as a special case of ‘from/out of the hand of’ and therefore as part of a general prediction about the near future, but he is assuming that we can read it in this special way. In saying this, we are unpacking Walton, noting what he does not do, and offering some special pleading on behalf of his view.

As we have noted, the biblical text refers to Merodach-Baladan as the king of Babylon, but after Hezekiah’s recovery in 701 and in 700, the likely date of the Babylonian letters and present, he was not the **resident** king of Babylon according to Assyrian records; he had been ousted from Babylon by 702. Was he therefore a ‘king in exile’?

Sennacherib’s fourth campaign in 700 against Babylon was necessary because his first campaign in the region, which had taken place in 703, and which had deposed Merodach-Baladan for an Assyrian puppet—Bêl-ibni, had not secured stability. Merodach-Baladan and the Elamites were agitating to usurp Assyrian control and replace Bêl-ibni as the king of Babylon. This met with success, as their own puppet king, Shuzubu, was nominated king of Babylon(*Annals*,[[89]](#footnote-89) 34-35, 71).

Sennacherib’s campaign in 700 was successful, and Merodach-Baladan packed up his gods, loaded them onto ships and fled to the Elamite city of Nagitu. Sennacherib placed his own son on the Babylonian throne and returned to Nineveh:

That (same) Merodach-Baladan, whose defeat I had brought about in my first campaign, and whose forces I had shattered, —the roar of my mighty arms and the onset of my terrible battle he feared and he gathered the gods of his whole land in their shrines, and loaded them into ships and fled like a bird to Nagite-rakki… *Annals*, 35

His brothers, the seed of his father-house, whom he abandoned by the sea-shore, the rest of the people of his land, I carried off as spoil from Bît-Yakin, out of the marshes and swamps. *Annals*, 71

These records resonate with the text of Isa 43:14; Merodach-Baladan’s flight by ship is noted in both records.

While Sennacherib’s annals record his various military campaigns, **inscriptions** abbreviate his achievements. The Nebi Yunis inscription records,

In open battle like a hurricane I cast down Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylonia, the Chaldeans and Aramaeans, together with the armies of Elam, his ally. That one fled to the Sea-land and the gods of his whole land…he loaded on ships and crossed over to Nagitu… *Annals*, 85; cf. 35

This inscription abbreviates the first and fourth campaign and presents the Sennacherib’s achievement against Merodach-Baladan as if it occurred in one campaign. Merodach-Baladan is referred to as king of Babylon *retrospectively* even though he was not the resident king of Babylon during Sennacherib’s fourth campaign. Another reference to Merodach-Baladan after the success of the fourth campaign is the following:

…on my return, I placed my son Assur-nâdin-shum on his royal throne. *Annals* 71

On the basis of this evidence, we can see that the biblical record is accurate **by Assyrian standards** in recording Merodach-Baladan as ‘king of Babylon’, even though in 700 he was no longer resident on the throne. Walton’s comment on this treatment of the data is,

Some might claim, however, that perhaps the envoys came to Jerusalem while Merodach-Baladan was a fugitive and that he was called king of Babylon because that was a title he at one time held, currently aspired to, and for which he was the only legitimate contender. Not only would this be special pleading, but it would not make historical sense.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Walton is therefore mistaken here in his characterization of our argument as ‘special pleading’ because we have cited **data** from Assyrian records covering the 700 campaign that speak of Merodach-Baladan as ‘king’ and having a ‘royal throne’.

Walton says that our case for a post-701 visit does not make historical sense. He gives three reasons:

Consider the following: (1) Merodach-Baladan would have been very occupied keeping himself hidden and mustering support in his own region; (2) Merodach-Baladan would certainly not expect manpower help from Hezekiah, and having just been defeated, Hezekiah’s willingness to enter an alliance would be open to great doubt and it is unlikely that he could even create a diversion; (3) why would Hezekiah seek to impress Merodach-Baladan with his treasury if the latter were nothing more than a fugitive? And what treasury would Hezekiah have to show if he had just paid Sennacherib a massive tribute? So while this scenario is theoretically possible, historically speaking it is highly unlikely.[[91]](#footnote-91)

With these reasons, we are in the realm of historical reconstruction. Our hard information is little to go on; we don’t know the ebb and flow of Merodach-Baladan’s fortunes in 701-700; we cannot just rely for our history on what is written by the victor—Sennacherib; the Babylonian Chronicle is more positive in its reports of Elamite/Babylonian fortunes. Thus, we have no basis to doubt that he would have had the time to initiate sending envoys to Hezekiah. Hence, Walton’s first point is weak.

Critical scholars do not accept the account of the decimation of the Assyrian army.[[92]](#footnote-92) However, if we accept the biblical record, this provides an explanation for why Merodach-Baladan would seek an alliance with Hezekiah. He might well have thought that Hezekiah could occupy the remaining Assyrian forces in the West and force Sennacherib to divert resources to the West. So, Walton’s second consideration is too dismissive of the biblical evidence when he says Hezekiah had “just been defeated”.

Finally, did Hezekiah have much of a treasury to show the Babylonian delegation? This depends on what booty he had taken from the decimated Assyrian camp and what tribute had been brought to him immediately afterwards when the surrounding city-states heard of the destruction of the Assyrian army. So, again, if we follow the biblical record, the likelihood of Merodach-Baladan sending envoys as a ‘king’ and they being shown treasure by Hezekiah is a consistent account for post-701.

**Conclusion**

The date of Hezekiah’s recovery is important to the interpretation of Isaiah 40-66. Scholarship since the 1950s has settled on 701 as the date for the Assyrian invasion of Judah but in older dating schemes for Hezekiah’s reign, it is placed before 710. If we assume the modern framework,[[93]](#footnote-93) 701 rather than 703 is the more likely date for Hezekiah’s recovery with the Babylonian envoys visit in 701-700.[[94]](#footnote-94)

**The Songs of Degrees (Part-1)**

**P. Wyns**

**Introduction**

The “Song of Degrees”, or the “Songs of Ascent” or otherwise the “Songs of Steps”[[95]](#footnote-95) is a title given to fifteen short Psalms (120–134) characterized by use of a key-word, or by epanaphora (i.e., repetition), and by their epigrammatic style. More than half of the fifteen Psalms are joyful, and all of them hopeful. Four of them (122, 124, 131 and 133) are linked in their ascriptions to David, and one (127) to Solomon. They were well suited for being sung, by their poetic form and the sentiments they express. These fifteen Psalms stand together as a short collection – the question is why? Why were they written and who wrote them? Are they post-exilic or from the early or late monarchical period? What were they used for? To answer the latter question first, we can safely assume that they were composed for liturgical purposes. They were used for temple worship.

**Liturgical setting**

During the time of Christ these psalms were connected with the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth) in Jerusalem.[[96]](#footnote-96) At the **water-drawing ceremony** (cf. John 7:37) there, the Levites stood “upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the Women’s Court, corresponding to the fifteen Songs of Ascent in the Psalms; upon them the Levites used to stand with musical instruments and sing hymns” (*Mishnah, Sukkah* 5.4). At some stage these fifteen Psalms were associated with “fifteen steps” that linked the temple courts, but does this traditional ascription reflect their original usage?

Rabbi Akiva asserted that the water libation was based on the famous verse from Isaiah 12:3. On the morning of the first day of the feast, after the daily sacrifice and daily libation of wine, a procession went from the Temple mount to the spring of Shiloah (Siloam). A priest drew the water and returned to the Temple through the Water Gate that led to the inner court. There he chanted the words of Isaiah: “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3), and poured out the water on the altar as a libation.[[97]](#footnote-97) A text from the Talmud states: “He who has not witnessed the joy of the water drawing has never in his life experienced real joy.” (*B.Suk* 5:1-3)

The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths or Sukkoth) is associated with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt but it is *also* an agricultural feast specifically allied with **rainfall and water**. Arthur Schaffer points out that all four of the plant species (Lev 23:40) used at Tabernacles are symbols of water.[[98]](#footnote-98) Sukkoth was then an appeal to God to bless the land with the former rain without which the earth could not be prepared for crops.

The Pharisees claimed that the water libation was a tradition handed down orally from Moses, but this is obviously a ploy to give the practice Mosaic legitimacy. The practice was of much later origins than Moses. This custom became a controversial issue between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. When Alexander Jannaeus, who was both king and high priest and a follower of the Sadducees, publicly refused to pour the water on the altar, the congregation became so enraged that it pelted him with etrogim (fruit) (Sukkah 48b; *Ant*. 13.13) In the aftermath of this incident, he is said to have massacred more than 6,000 of his fellow Jews. This occurred approximately 95 BC. Therefore, the water libation was definitely established at least a century before Christ but do its origins lay further in antiquity?

This article argues that the water libation was added to Sukkoth (including the singing of the fifteen Psalms) during the reign of Hezekiah. It is important to know something about this water. It was taken from a spring just east of Jerusalem called the Spring of Gihon. This spring *may* have been used to anoint David’s son, Solomon, King of Israel (1 Kings 1:45) and that anointing was symbolic of the Holy Spirit coming upon an individual (1 Sam. 16:13), the living waters of Siloam became associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It was probably during this feast that the Solomon’s temple was dedicated and the Shekinah descended (1 Kgs 8:2, 10). What the author may have meant is that the celebration of ‘the Feast’ during the last seven days of the Jewish month Ethanim continued into a celebration of the temple[[99]](#footnote-99) inauguration during the first seven days of Bul.

The waters of Siloam (Shiloah) feature in the Immanuel prophecy given to Hezekiah’s father Ahaz. Isaiah found Ahaz standing by “the end of the conduit of the upper pool” (7:3) and the prophet offered a sign concerning the *establishment of the Davidic dynasty* (which Ahaz refused),

Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly…Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, *even* the king of Assyria… (Isa 8:6-7).

King Hezekiah later redirected the water of this spring into the city of Jerusalem through a long underground conduit known as Hezekiah’s Tunnel. Within the walls of Jerusalem, the waters of Gihon ran into a pool named the Pool of Siloam.

The waters of Siloam were therefore connected (both literally and figuratively) with the survival of the Davidic dynasty. Figuratively by God (through the prophet Isaiah) and literally when Hezekiah hid the source of Siloam by digging a tunnel to ensure the survival of his dynasty,

So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying: Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water? (2 Chron 32:4)

It is then highly likely that the water drawing ceremony celebrated in Isa 12:3 was added to Sukkoth during the reign of Hezekiah and that the Psalms of Degrees (steps/ascents) were composed/redacted to be sung on this festal occasion.

Therefore, with joy ye shall draw water out of the wells of salvation. (Isa 12:3)

The Hebrew intensive plural is used in Isaiah (wells of salvation), but there was only **one well**[[100]](#footnote-100) and it had been detoured by Hezekiah’s tunnel inside the cities defences. It seems then that the traditional rabbinical memory that associates the water libation with Isa 12:3 is correct. Hezekiah instituted this addendum to Sukkoth to celebrate the deliverance from Assyrian aggression and to pray for the blessing of water (rainfall) on the devastated and burnt land:

A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, And behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them. (Joel 2:3)

Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you -- The former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. (Joel 2:23)[[101]](#footnote-101)

For the Lord will comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. (Isa 51:3)

Joy and thanksgiving was found again....and the voice of melody;

The Lord *was ready* to save me; therefore we will sing my songs (Hezekiah’s songs) with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord. (Isa 38:20)

**The Fifteen Steps**

James W. Thirtle[[102]](#footnote-102) proposed that the fifteen *Psalms of Degrees* come from the Hezekiah period and are written to celebrate the fifteen years of extension granted to him. On this occasion the sign given was the reversal of the shadow on the “sundial” by ten *degrees* (2 Kgs 20:8-11),

And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What *shall be* the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day? And Isaiah said, this sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, it is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees.And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz. (2 Kgs 20:8-11)

The same Hebrew word is employed in the Psalm title “Song of Degrees” as for “degrees” [[103]](#footnote-103) in 2 Kgs.20:8-11 *and* the same word is employed for **sundial**. When he died, Hezekiah was buried in “the **upper** (same word) tombs” (2 Chron 32:33/NKJV), thus, even in death, associating Hezekiah with his miraculous sign. The sense of the word is “to go up” or “ascend” in a literal sense by using steps (i.e., by increments) or by “degrees” as in the old English of the KJV. The “sundial” of Ahaz was therefore a staircase leading up to the temple and the hour of worship would probably have been determined by the interplay of shadows cast on the steps by adjacent walls etc. For example, we might expect that a certain act of worship might be scheduled to take place when the shadow was on the fifth step (degree).

In his dissertation on time measurement in ancient Israel, David Miano[[104]](#footnote-104) proposes that the “dial of Ahaz” or the stairway (steps) of Ahaz is a structure built on the roof chamber of his residence (cf. 2 Kgs.23:12) he bases this on the Cairo model of a shadow clock noted by Yadin in which two opposite pyramid staircases (facing east and west) function as a “shadow clock”. However, there is no such evidence for such a structure, “the staircase of Ahaz” was probably connected with that *“covered way for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king’s entry without”*, which Ahaz turned *“round the house of Yahweh, because of the king of Assyria”* (2 Kgs 16:18 the Revised Version, margin). This staircase, called after Ahaz because the alteration was due to him, may have been substituted for David’s “*causeway that goeth up*,” which was “*westward, by the gate of Shallecheth*” (1 Chron 26:16), or more probably for Solomon’s “*ascent by which he went up unto the house of Yahweh*” which so impressed the queen of Sheba (2 Chron 9:4).

However, it is more likely to refer to the steps ascending from Siloam or the steps between the temple courtyards en route from Siloam. Ahaz probably began the construction work on water security (Isa.7:13 cf.8:6) that was later completed by Hezekiah and no doubt Ahaz repaired the damage caused by the earthquake, [[105]](#footnote-105) so it is not improbable that access to Siloam was the work of Ahaz and therefore “Ahaz’s stairs”. The royal palace is understood to have been placed southeast of the Temple, and it is therefore probable that it was some part of the Temple buildings that had cast its shadow down the stairway in full view of the dying king, as he lay in his chamber.

**Objections Considered**

Some commentators presume that the interpretation of “Songs of Ascent (Degrees)” indicate a pilgrimage upwards (to Jerusalem) and therefore paraphrase the Hebrew as “A Pilgrimage Song.[[106]](#footnote-106) Another common interpretation is that, since these psalms are likely post-exilic, they may come from the time of Nehemiah, and thus the tAl[]M;h (‘degrees’) refer to those in exile returning, that is, going back up to Jerusalem. As the Psalms specialist, M. D. Goulder, says,

The word hl'[]m; is common for a step; but it is also used at Ezra 7.9 for an expedition of exiles returning to Palestine.[[107]](#footnote-107)

The songs, according to this view, are meant to accompany pilgrims as they approach and eventually stand inside the city (cf. Ps 122:1-2). Apart from the superscriptions, though, the theme of pilgrimage is simply not part of many of these psalms.

The Hebrew of the Songs of Ascents is thought to display late (post-exilic) features (e.g. the relative pronoun *še* instead of *’ášer* and other Aramaisms[[108]](#footnote-108))and, because of this, the collection is given a late date. Goulder, for example, endeavours to link them directly to the first person narrative of Nehemiah. His four (characteristically bold) propositions are worth stating in full:

(1) The Songs of Ascents are a unity, coming from the hand of a single author.

(2) The author of the Songs composed them to celebrate the achievement of Nehemiah.

(3) Psalms 120-27 follow the stories in the original, first-person, so-called Nehemiah memoir, Neh 1.1-7.5a, in sequence, as do 133-34 its continuation in Neh 12.27-43; 128-32 follow that part of the original Nehemiah ‘memoir’ for which Neh 7.5b-12.26 has been substituted—principally Neh 13.4-31, which has been displaced.

(4) Nehemiah’s ‘memoir’ was in fact his testimony, proclaimed to the people evening and morning through the feast of Tabernacles in 445; and the Songs of Ascents were responses to those testimonies, sung at the fifteen services through the week.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Zenger does not find his evidence compelling and remarks that Goulder’s proposals (along with others) suffer from two fundamental methodological deficits:

(1) They do not reconstruct the history of the psalms’ origins from the psalms themselves but import them into the text from outside. That, of course, is the general problem involved in the historical dating of texts when there is no existing external evidence.

(2) They extract individual aspects of the psalms and use them as the basis for a general hypothesis.

The OT scholar, J. Day, employs the same linguistic argument to determine a late date for many of the Songs of Ascent;

An interesting example concerns the use of the Hebrew relative particle *še* instead of the normal classical Hebrew form *’ášer*. Whilst this can be early, as its presence in Judges 5 suggests (cf. v.7), the fact that it became the regular relative particle in Mishnaic Hebrew proves that it could also be a late form, and such it surely is when it occurs in the Psalter. It appears there in some of the Psalms of ascent or steps (Pss 122.3; 123.2; 124.1, 2, 6; 129.6, 7; 133.2, 3), as well as in Pss 135.2, 8, 10; 136.23, 137.8, 9 and 144.15. Of these Psalms 124, 133 and 144.12-15 already appear in Hurvitz’s list of indubitably late psalms and Psalm 135 has been adjudged post-exilic above on the basis of its reference to the ‘house of Aaron’ in v.19 (cf. Ps.133.2), whilst Psalm 137 clearly reflects the experience of exile. Add to this the observation that all the instances of *še* in Psalms occur in the last third of the Psalter, where cumulative evidence indicates that a large number of late psalms are concentrated, and the case becomes overwhelming that all psalms containing *še* are no earlier than the exile, and apart from Psalm 137[[110]](#footnote-110) are very likely post-exilic.[[111]](#footnote-111)

The same linguistic argument is used to accord a late (post-exilic) date to Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes; however, we noted in an earlier article that *linguistic evidence alone* cannot be decisive for late dating, especially since some OT scholars, such as Gary Rendsburg, have identified northern linguistic Hebrew features in some of these Psalms (e.g. Pss 132, 133). In that article, it was proposed that the influx of northern refugees and pilgrims during the reign of Hezekiah could explain the inclusion of northern Israelite linguistic characteristics.[[112]](#footnote-112)

Leon Liebreich believes that these Psalms are related, directly or indirectly, to four key words of the Priestly Blessing[[113]](#footnote-113) but Zenger remarks;

Liebreich’s observation that Psalms 120-134 are related to the Aaronic blessing is correct in principle, but it by no means explains the overall program of their composition. Above all, the close linking of the collection to the course of the Temple liturgy posited by Liebreich is rather implausible. In contrast to Num 6:24-26, Psalms 120-134 also lack the theologoumenon of “YHWH’s countenance,” which speaks against a direct correlation of the two texts.[[114]](#footnote-114)

**Composition**

The fact that four of these psalms (122, 124, 131 and 133) are linked in their ascriptions to David, and one (127) to Solomon would seem to weigh against common authorship—either by a single person or a “school” of inspired composers.[[115]](#footnote-115) However, the number of unifying features in this small collection leads Kevin Haley to remark that,

The links between these psalms are so pervasive that if these do not come from the pen of a single author, or perhaps school, then they certainly have a common redactor.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Haley reproduces Hendrik Viviers diagram (Figure 1, below),[[117]](#footnote-117)

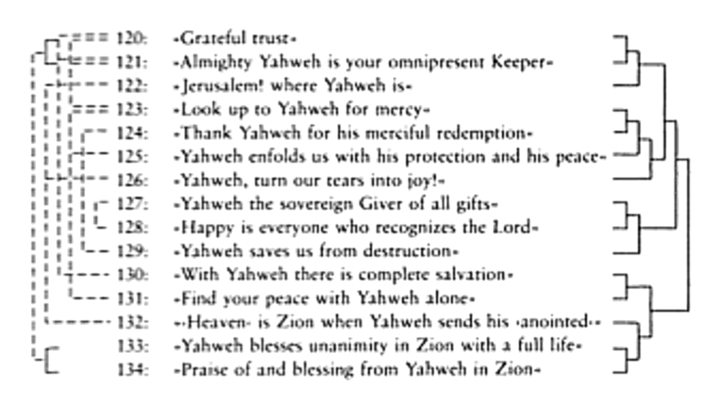


Figure 1: Thematic and Verbal Connections in the Collection

His comment is,

In his article “*The Coherence of the Ma‘alot Psalms*,” Hendrik Viviers has done a great service by distilling enormous amounts of research, including much of Seybold’s monograph, into a single article. He notes several of these other unifying factors including the noticeably shorter length of these psalms, a network of word repetitions, similar figures of speech, and the pervasive theme of trust in YHWH.[[118]](#footnote-118)

Whether or not some of these fifteen Psalms were originally composed by David, or whether they were dedicated to him,[[119]](#footnote-119) the intertextual connections between these Psalms point to intensive redaction to adapt them as a collection suitable to the reign of Hezekiah.

**Conclusion**

The ascription “Songs of Ascent” (Degrees/Steps) points to the reign of Hezekiah and the singing of Psalms on the Temple court steps leading up from Siloam during the feast of Sukkoth. Linguistic evidence is not decisive for dating these Psalms to a later period. The “Songs of Ascent” present themselves as an integrated collection. Part two in this series will continue the investigation.

**Cain’s Wife**

**A. Perry**

**Introduction**

The question ‘Whom did Cain marry?’ is a hoary old chestnut. When we look at Genesis 4-5 for an answer to this question, we are immediately struck by the fact that people read into these chapters a lot of assumptions. For example, some read the mention of Cain’s wife as ‘evidence’ that Adam and Eve were not the first humans and that their family was only one of many and it was one of the other families from which Cain secured his wife. It is further assumed that it was these other human beings of which Cain was afraid. These two reading assumptions are made by theistic evolutionists and it is these we shall examine.

**What does the story say?**

The first text to consider is Gen 5:3,

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat *a son* in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth (Gen 5:3 KJV)

This text tells us two things: First, there is no mention of Cain and Abel and Seth is ostensibly presented as Adam’s ‘first’ son. Clearly, the genealogy is not about presenting first sons but *significant* sons. The significance consists in the son being an ‘appointed’ seed (Gen 4:25). Second, Adam had Seth when he was 130 but the command given to him on Day Six was to be fruitful and multiply (straightaway). Clearly, many children can be born and then they themselves have children (and so on) in 130 years.

We do not know how old Adam was when Cain and Abel were born. We do not know the extent of their extended family. We can however calculate a range of sizes based on a number of hypothetical birth rates.

The second text to consider is Gen 4:16-17,

16 And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. 17 And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch. (Gen 4:16-17 KJV)

This text does not tell us when Cain married or how big his family was when he had Enoch. He might have been married before he was expelled and already have a big extended family (or not). We can however say that within the terms of the story of Genesis, he married within the extended family of Adam and Eve. This follows from the data we have in the text which is that Adam and Eve were given a command 130 years before the birth of Seth to be fruitful and multiply; other children (i.e. Cain and Abel) are noted as their children before the birth of Seth; and Adam did beget sons and daughters (Gen 5:4).

The third text to consider is Gen 3:20,

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. (Gen 3:20 KJV)

It is often assumed that this naming is prospective, i.e. Eve is so-named because she *would be* the mother of all living. But, this is not how the narrator is telling the story. The narrator has already mentioned a man’s mother and father (Gen 2:24) from his own point in time, and this naming of Eve could equally be the narrator’s comment that Eve was so-named when she already **was** (Hebrew Perfect tense) a mother and a mother, moreover, of ‘**all** living’. The concept of ‘Eve’ in Gen 3:20 precludes there being more than one extended human family and the language of ‘all’ implies an extended family and a naming of her by Adam sometime well into the 130 years.

There is a further point. The concept of a ‘wife’ is used first in relation to Adam and second in relation to Cain. This use is by the narrator and not by Adam or Cain. Adam uses the expression ‘woman’ without a possessive pronominal suffix ‘*my* wife’ and instead says, “This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23 KJV). It is the narrator who makes the deduction ‘Therefore…*his* wife’ (Gen 2:24). Likewise, the narrator uses the expression ‘*his* wife’ for Cain and thereby implies that she was “bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh”. This tells the reader that Cain’s wife is of the extended family of Adam and Eve.

The fourth text to consider is Gen 4:14,

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the ground (*adamah*); and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the land (’*erets*); and it shall come to pass, *that* every one that findeth me shall slay me. (Gen 4:14 KJV)

It is said that this implies that there are other humans, not of Adam and Eve, of whom Cain is afraid. It is not difficult to calculate a maximum and a minimum size for the extent of the population that has descended from Adam and Eve. We just have to set a frequency of births, infant mortality and age for Cain and Abel. For Cain to be afraid of his fellow-humans in the land requires the extended family of Adam and Eve to be spread abroad and to be interested in justice for one of their own family.

**Conclusion**

The story of Adam and Eve, and then Cain and Abel, is a **family** story. As such it falls under the radar of anthropology. When Christians try and use biblical data to inform the science of anthropology by offering a biblical ‘proof’ in Cain’s wife that there were other humans besides those descended from Adam and Eve they make a mistake with the interpretation of the Bible because **the terms of its story** is precisely the opposite: **these characters are of the same extended family**. Rather, the definition of a ‘human’ in biblical terms is in terms of an ‘image and likeness of God’, a definition which is not used in anthropology. The emergence, migration and dominance of those descended from Adam and Eve in Mesopotamia is not *discriminated* in anthropology which instead works with concepts such as ‘anatomically modern human’ and ‘behaviourally modern human’ (Wikipedia) when tracking the Neolithic stage of evolution. The starting point for harmonizing the Bible and Science is not the misuse of the detail about Cain’s wife but the proper *discrimination* of God’s creation of his image and likeness and then the angelic supervision of the emergence, migration and dominance of *that* image and likeness.

**First Century Expectations**

**P. Wyns**

An often neglected subject is: What were the prophetic expectations of first century Christians? Many believers were “eyewitnesses” to the events surrounding the ministry and crucifixion of the Lord. They underwent a period of persecution coupled with an exponential growth of the gospel, especially in the *Diaspora* of Asia Minor. In the meantime they experienced an inexorable breakdown of the Jewish nation state with increasing acts of “terrorism” and collaboration between the priesthood and imperial Rome. It is pertinent to ask what these Christians expected and if their expectations differed from their Jewish counterparts. However, first we must qualify our distinction as many “Christians” were also “Jews” and therefore both parties held the Old Testament in esteem.

**The Return of Jesus**

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” And he said unto them, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” (Acts 1:6-7).

Even a casual reading of the gospels demonstrates that first century Christians expected three things to occur:

1. The destruction of Jerusalem
2. The return of Christ
3. The establishment of the Kingdom

First century Christians expected these events to occur *quickly*, without any delay between the events and for them to happen *within their lifetime* (not sometime in the distant future). As we know, the first event (the destruction of Jerusalem) occurred within the lifetime of many first century Christians but the other events did not. The belief that the return of Jesus was imminent was widespread among the churches and was also held by the Apostles:

* ...for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. (Rom. 13:11-12, NASB)
* ...Do not seek a wife. (1 Cor. 7:27b)... This is what I mean...the appointed time has grown very short..... For the present form of this world is passing away. (vv. 29-31)
* ...we who are alive, who are left until the coming of ....the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep..... we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed (1 Cor. 15:51b)
* Now these things ...were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages has come. (1Cor.10:11)
* ......encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb. 10:24-25)
* For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. (Heb.10:37)
* ...the coming of the Lord is at hand. ...the Judge is standing right at the door. (James 5:7-9)
* ...the Judge is standing right at the door. (James 5:9)
* The end of all things is at hand...(1Pet.4:7)
* For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God... (1Pet.4:17)
* Children, it is the last hour... (1 John 2:18)
* The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place... (Rev.1:1)
* ...for the time is near. (Rev.1:3)
* ... He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him...(Rev.1:7)
* I am coming quickly...(Rev.3:11)
* Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. (Rev.3:10)
* ...things which must shortly take place. (Rev.22:6)
* ...I am coming quickly. (Rev.22:7)
* ...Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. (Rev.22:10)
* Behold, I am coming quickly.(Rev.22:12)
* Yes, I am coming quickly. (Rev.22:20)

Despite the admonition by Jesus that it was not for them to “know the times or the seasons”, it is quite clear from the above texts (I have only quoted a few) that first century Christians saw themselves as living in the “end times” and the general expectation was for a first century return and establishment of the Kingdom. Even the disciple’s questions regarding the end of the age in the Olivet Prophecy are flexible and open to more than one interpretation.[[120]](#footnote-120)

**Jewish Expectations**

The expectations of first century Christians should be placed in the wider context of Jewish messianic expectations. This should not be surprising, as many Christians were Jews and both Christians and Jews sprouted from the same belief system. Although many Jews refused Jesus as the Messiah they still held messianic expectations. There was a general understanding that the Messiah would establish His kingdom on earth near the first century B.C. or the first century A.D. The historical records reflect this belief. Josephus mentioned that it was found in the “sacred writings that about that time one from their country [Judaea] should become governor of the habitable earth” (Josephus, *Wars*, VI, 313). The Roman historians of the first century were also aware of the prophecy: “A firm belief had long prevailed through the East that it was destined for the empire of the world at that time to be given to someone who should go forth from Judea”(Suetonius, *Vespasian*, iv). Tacitus also said: “The majority of the Jewish people were very impressed with the belief that it was contained in ancient writings of the priests that it would come to pass that at that very time, the East would renew its strength and they that should go forth from Judaea should be rulers of the world” (Tacitus, *History*, v. 13). Even the Roman Emperor Nero was advised by one or two of his court astrologers that it was prudent for him to move his seat of empire to Jerusalem because that city was then destined to become the capital city of the world (Suetonius, *Nero*, 40).

**Why was a first century advent expected?**

Why did both the Jews *and* Christians expect a first century advent? The Roman historian Tacitus says that, “it was contained in ancient writings of the priests” and this concurs with Josephus’ statement that it was found in the “sacred writings” an obvious reference to the Jewish Scriptures. The only prophecy that refers to the destruction of the Sanctuary and the coming of an anointed one (messiah) is the seventy weeks prophecy of Daniel. It is certainly not coincidental that when faced with questions concerning “the end” and the destruction of the Temple Jesus both alluded to and quoted Daniel in the Olivet Prophecy.[[121]](#footnote-121) It is also not coincidental that Jesus specifically refers to the “son of man” of Dan 7:13 when responding to the high priest: “Hereafter *shall ye see* the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the *clouds of heaven*” (Matt 26:64), a theme which Jesus repeats in his Revelation: “Behold, he cometh *with clouds*; and every *eye shall see him*” (Rev 1:7), with the added note of urgency, “things which must shortly come to pass” (Rev 1:1).

**What went wrong?**

Why was the Kingdom not established in the first century? Is there a precedent for God delaying or interrupting his promise?

After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, *even* forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, *even* forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. (Num 14:34).

The Hebrew for “breach” (ha'WnT.) is translated as rejection (NKJV), displeasure (JPS) and breaking off (YLT) and most probably stems from an Akkadian root with the meaning turn back/away.[[122]](#footnote-122) The context is clear, “Surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it” (v. 23). Disobedience caused God to *delay* his promise (to that generation) they would die in the wilderness and would not enter the Kingdom.[[123]](#footnote-123)

The epistle to the Hebrews picks up on this theme and employs it as a warning to first century Christians:“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb.4:1) and, “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). It is not just that a particular individual would be refused entry into the kingdom because of disobedience, but disobedience by the whole congregation (the church and the nation) would cause the kingdom (his promise) to be delayed.

Where is the promise of his coming?The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet 3 vv. 4, 9).

However, the warning stood that even tearful repentance would not change God’s mind if, like Esau, they “sold their birthright” (Heb.12:16). Peter remarks that turning back to Judaism (de-converting) is like a dog returning to eat its own vomit (2 Pet.2:22). So, if the nation and the church turned away/back God would turn/away back from his promise and the kingdom would be delayed. Divine punishment came upon *the church and the nation* because Judaism successfully orchestrated a deliberate campaign to corrupt the church and bring Jewish-Christians back into the embrace of the Mosaic dispensation. The only course of action to prevent this calamitous outcome and to avoid the disappearance of Christianity altogether was the destruction of the Mosaic system.

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not* we *escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God *is* a consuming fire.(Heb.12:25-29)

Jesus informed his disciples that there would not even be enough time to preach in all the cities of Israel “till the Son of man be come” (Matt 10:23). The expectation was that the kingdom would arrive in the first century. However, we forget at our peril that even though God has foreknowledge he allows for the waywardness of human freewill. Who are we to limit the Holy One of Israel?

God has more than one way to achieve his purpose and fulfil his prophecies. Let us suppose for one moment that the whole nation had converted and repented at the preaching of the apostles. Let us suppose that the high priest had ripped his garments and put ashes on his head and had appealed to Jesus as God’s appointed king when the Roman armies began the destruction of the Sanctuary. Let us suppose that the whole nation appealed to God in genuine repentance at that point in time. Would not Jesus have returned to claim his throne and expel the Romans? If that had occurred (and it should have) then Daniels 490 prophecy and Daniels image would have been fulfilled **in the first century**.

Our problem is that we understand history and prophecy as deterministic and continuous when that is clearly not the case. God can interrupt (or speed up) his timetable at any point and has multiple ways of fulfilling his objectives. God can follow route (a) or route (b) or route (c) and still be true to his promises, and yet we may only see route (a). Moreover, God adjusts his plans according to human response.

**Manipulating Prophecy**

In Matt 18:22 Jesus instructed Peter to keep forgiving his brother, “*until seventy times seven*” (490 times) which is a direct reference to Daniel’s “seventy” prophecy. In other words, to keep forgiving until “an end is made of sin, reconciliation is made for iniquity and everlasting righteousness is brought in” (Dan.9:24). So, keep forgiving your brother **until the kingdom arrives**, until that ultimate great Day of Atonement arrives of which Daniel spoke. During his ministry Jesus himself expected the kingdom sometime in the first century, however, only part of Daniel’s prophecy was fulfilled (the destruction of the Sanctuary and removal of temple sacrifice on the altar). The Jews were unrepentant and continued to sacrifice even during the siege when people were dying of famine. God did not heed their sacrifice as he had already provided his own, which they had rejected.

Daniel’s 490 Prophecy was necessitated because Daniel could not understand why the return from the seventy years of exile and the rebuilding of the temple were delayed. God responds by informing Daniel that the revelation of the true temple (Christ)[[124]](#footnote-124) and the true destination (not just return to the Promised Land but “everlasting righteousness”) was not just seventy years away but seventy times seven years away. The 490 Prophecy itself constitutes a delay and is characterised by further delays (the 21 days of Daniel 10:13 representing the 21 years between Cyrus and Darius Hystapsis *who did* restore the temple). Moreover, men have always attempted to force or derail the divine timetable, we think here of the exiles who agitated for an early return or the Maccabees who rededicated the temple and established a dynasty (kingdom) exactly 420 years after the destruction of the first temple (6x70) and approximately 490 years after Daniel’s captivity - no doubt they understood themselves as the legitimate fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy. In the first century the people attempted to crown Jesus king by force (John 6:15) and later Jesus remarked that, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt.11:12). Even now “Christian-Zionists” want to restore the temple in order to force God’s hand.

**Divine Grace**

God is able to turn human waywardness and disobedience into an opportunity for divine grace. Towards the end of his ministry Paul understood that Jesus would not return during his lifetime, nevertheless he saw the casting off of Israel as a time of opportunity for the gentiles. Before the final reconciliation of Israel the gentiles would be grafted into the hope. The “times of the gentiles” saw the expulsion of Israel and the vindication of *faithful* first century Christians. The interruption of the divine prophetic timetable would therefore result in the extension of universal salvation. This was indeed a great “mystery” to Paul (Rom 11:25) but this “mystery” is soon to be completed; “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, *the mystery of God should be finished*, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets” (Rev 10:7). This “mystery” is finished with the final prophetic witnessing to Israel which completes the last *half-week* (1260 days) of Daniel’s prophecy (Rev.11:2).

**Conclusion**

The divine timetable cannot be forced or manipulated by man (but God does hear the prayers of his saints). The “Seventy Sevens” prophecy of Daniel found a *partial fulfilment* in the first century with Christ “coming in judgement” but did not inaugurate the promised kingdom. Disobedience and unfaithfulness causes delay and frustration but also allows God to adjust his prophetic programme in a “mysterious” way that further extends grace. First century events form a “template” through which we can view the final consummation. God is not bound by our understanding of prophecy or by our misinterpretation as he can act in unexpected ways and still achieve his goals and be true to his promises and his prophecies.

**Inspiration and Interpretation**

**A. Perry**

It is an indisputable fact that sincere believers throughout history have disagreed about the interpretation of Scripture. Does this mean that God has **chosen** **to inspire the Bible** in such a way that mistakes by men and women are allowed? If this is so, we should accept one another’s differences of view and be tolerant. We do not have to rely on Christian history for our examples of disagreement. In Jesus’ day, the people did not understand the Prophets and how they pointed to him. Our question here is not about errors of transmission in the text of the Bible, nor about whether there are discrepancies, contradictions and factual errors. Our question is about the phenomenon of misunderstanding the text.

How do we answer this question? The obvious answer might be to say that we are to blame and the Bible itself is perfectly clear. The counter to this quick answer is that surely God knows our fallibility and shouldn’t he have inspired the Bible to cater for this fact – i.e. made it so clear that there would be no possibility of our making mistakes? This is certainly a point that agnostics would make.

When we say something like ‘God has chosen’ we refer to his intentions and we should therefore supply evidence from his speech that his intentions are ‘thus and so’. We have little direct evidence of God’s speech to draw upon in this matter and we have to infer God’s intentions from what material we have to hand. So, Paul says that Scripture is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works”. There is nothing obvious here about any intention to be clear, but it is reasonably implied if these other objectives are to have a realistic chance of being fulfilled. (Note also there is nothing about historical readings of Scripture in Paul’s statement.)

Another consideration is this: since the Bible is material conveyed through languages used by human beings, the implication of this is that its text was understandable in its original context. This in turn suggests that the sincere disagreements that believers have had since are at least partly the result of **cultural distance**. The question then becomes whether God has so inspired the Bible **that it can be understood** **across time**. This question is at the heart of a doctrine of Scripture.

There is historical distance between us and the text and the text did originate in a specific socio-historical context. This does not make the text inherently unclear for us unless **the data to settle its meaning has been lost**; this data (if it has *not* been lost) will exist in the text itself, the wider literary co-text and the socio-historical context. Has the data been lost and is some part of the text therefore inherently unclear? Perhaps here we might think of, say, a unique Hebrew word for which we have no comparative linguistics – the word is inherently unclear and we will inevitable disagree on its meaning.[[125]](#footnote-125) Consequently, we might say that there will be parts of the Bible here and there - a word, a phrase, a sentence - where the data we need has been lost. The question here is all about **the sufficiency of Scripture**. Does the interpretation of Scripture require data for its interpretation that has been lost?

While we are talking about ‘the Bible’ as a whole, it is obviously sensible to recognise that we are actually only talking about what sincere believers have disagreed about in the Bible; much of the Bible is well understood without significant disagreement. But has God failed to **providentially preserve** his text and the data needed to understand it down the ages? It would appear that this is the case if our disagreements are caused by our not having enough data to make the right interpretative decisions. But, we might ask, does the disagreement matter?

Of course, we are discussing this topic as if the disagreements have been *the same* down the ages and we only have to decide between this or that cause for these disagreements. In reality, the disagreements vary in nature and have different causes. While we might say that we have some disagreements because of the vagaries of history and what is lost to us, this doesn’t mean God has been at fault. He may have preserved the text and the data needed for its interpretation in a fairly full way but not completely. So, we might say that there is all we need for doctrinal understanding and Paul’s other goals (2 Tim 3:16) but some of the Bible is historically obscure.

*It is worth emphasizing again that our question is about God choosing something. Has God given us a text that is so clear that any misunderstanding is entirely our fault? What other choices are in play?*

God could have chosen to inspire the Bible in such a way that men and women have to **search all the Scriptures**. One way to encourage a reading practice of searching would be to **hide** things. The corollary is that you might get lost and not find what it is for which you are looking. Is this a fair thing to have done? The relevant text here is “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”

This complicates our discussion. In texts things are hidden and this makes the texts unclear to us; we get a sense of this in our reading. This is not unique to the Bible and hiddenness makes us look for answers. Choosing this kind of reading experience and practice for men and women is not choosing an absolute indeterminacy in the text; rather, it is just that men and women may be uncertain about the text when starting out and thus motivated to seek out its meaning. Talking about ‘hiding things’ might be uncharitable. Instead, we might think of the rights of an author to layer meaning in a text and that therefore our disagreements concern deeper levels of meaning. The deeper levels are intentionally hidden; they are necessarily at lower levels underneath the surface grammar of the text. One reason for such a structure in the text would be the need to teach, not just about the needs of the moment, but about a distant future (Christ).[[126]](#footnote-126)

There is no necessary relationship between **uncertainty and mistakes**. We may be uncertain about something and yet not be mistaken; certainty is a state of mind that can wax and wane. Just because we have to search the Scriptures does not mean that we will make mistakes. But, given that we have to search out answers, we may fail to find them and make mistakes in thinking that we have found them. Our tentative conclusion is that God has chosen for us to be uncertain about things in his Word and to go looking for answers; but he hasn’t chosen to inspire the Scriptures in such a way that we will inevitably make mistakes.

Is hiding (layering) and searching then a reasonable choice for an author? It will keep us reading and it helps us to read all of the Scriptures. It seems to have pedagogic merit. This changes the kind of conclusion we can draw from our opening question: this is simply that the difficulty we might see in a biblical text and our disagreements over interpretation are not the fault of God; we cannot pass the blame to God. Our sincere disagreements arise because in our endeavor to search out answers as to what the text means, we are making different mistakes amongst ourselves at the same time as, hopefully, having the right answer within the wider community.[[127]](#footnote-127)

People might still say that the Bible is just inherently ambiguous and lacking a clear meaning. This is why there are disagreements. There is a further problem with this view. Certainly, there is ambiguity here and there, but such ambiguity is an aspect of meaning and part of the careful **determinate design** of an author unless, that is, the author is a careless and inattentive writer, which is not the case for the Bible. The same point applies to whatever it is that we do not know about a text in the Bible, provided the answer has been intentionally placed within the Bible rather than it being in the broader socio-historical context. With an omniscient God as the author, it is difficult to find fault with the text except insofar as men have corrupted it through its transmission.

Someone might say that the **scale and the character** of the misunderstandings that sincere men and women have had about the Bible shows that there is something wrong with God’s choice of text; we can’t just say that this is all down to us or socio-historic data that is lost to us. The problem, so it could be said, lies in the use of symbol, typology, parable, allegory, and other literary devices that are perhaps not plain and literal. For example, doctrinal disagreements exist based on different readings of Paul’s use of typology. To make this point in a different way, someone might also say that the prevalent use of poetry and figures of speech is a causal factor in our misunderstanding.

These features of the Bible are well in evidence in other literary texts and dealt with in school education. It is therefore an odd complaint to say that they are the cause of our misunderstanding. The same general answer applies that we have already given: they are reasonable features that an author might include in his/her text, especially if the searching of that text for layers of meaning is the aim. We might add that if **repeated reading and discussion** of the text is also God’s aim, then there will be a liberal use of these kinds of features. Further, given that God understands his audience**s**, there is every reason to suppose that he has not sought to be obscure in his use of language. If someone complains about the unclear literary features of a text, they are probably failing to search out the relevant meaning in the wider literary context of the Bible. A text with the more advanced uses to which language can be put (allegory, typology, figure, poetry) is inevitable if it is to be dense. Layers upon layers of meaning are likely in a text written with genius and inspired by the divine Mind.

We have said that a different point that gets made in this topic is that our misunderstandings arise because there are numerous discrepancies and contradictions in the Bible. This is often the sceptic’s charge. One example of a book in this area has 473 pages of explanation of such alleged discrepancies and contradictions.[[128]](#footnote-128) Maybe there are some examples here, and we would have to look at specific cases, but in general we actually understand the alleged discrepancies and contradictions – it is just that we don’t know how to reconcile the conflicting information. The fact is that there are plenty of books that purport to ‘explain’ such alleged discrepancies and contradictions.

*To sum up what we have argued for so far: there may very well be socio-historical data now lost to us that explains some texts in the Bible, but the majority of disagreements we have and the mistakes we make arise from failures on our part to search the Scriptures and make the right comparisons of spiritual with spiritual. We cannot blame God for this because it is not unreasonable for an author to require his/her readership to search their writing for answers to questions of interpretation.*

This area of thinking that we are considering is a deep one, although it may not look that way. It’s about subjectivity and objectivity in interpretation.

A final facet of our problem is the nature of religious language. Some philosophers say that religious language is inherently metaphorical and not literally true. A traditional problem in theology is to explain how talk about God is meaningful and the usual answer is to say that we use metaphor, simile and analogy in our God-talk. However, if we are an image of God, our description of ourselves with regard, say, to our action, is an ‘image’ of what it is for God to act. Ascribing intentional action to God is therefore validated by this fact. This takes away the charge that all talk of God is meaningless or needs to be understood metaphorically.

If we are an image, then our talk of ourselves is ‘imaging’ talk; there is therefore a **correspondence** in such talk to the reality of God (manifest in angels[[129]](#footnote-129)). We ourselves are in a relationship of correspondence to God, as we might say that truth is correspondence to reality. Our capacity for language is part of this image, and insofar as our words pick out us—such as our intentions, thoughts, and actions—they also pick out God. So, for example, ‘love’ as it is used of us, can equally be used of God, even if we want to say that our love is a pale reflection (image) of God’s love.[[130]](#footnote-130) It is a moot point whether we then say that our language is *literally* applied to us but only *metaphorically* applied to God. It is arguable instead that an image is subordinate to the original and that our language is metaphorically applied to us and that we are a **live metaphor** of God. It depends on what you want to do with the terms ‘literal’ and ‘metaphor’ - we are doing theology here and not linguistics.

To sum up our discussion, we can say that we have been concerned with whether something is missing for our Bible understanding and whether *this* is the cause of disagreement down the ages between Bible readers and students. Anything that God has put into the Bible for understanding is *ipso facto* not missing, but the Bible books were not written in a vacuum. Maybe there is socio-historical data that is now missing which ***we*** need to understand some of the things written in the Bible. However, given that God intended Scripture for different audiences down the ages, and given that the original socio-historical data needed for a contextual understanding of a text can be subsequently lost, it makes sense for an author to have included **some framework(s) for understanding Scripture** within the body of Scripture. This implies that such a framework would have hermeneutical priority for ***us*** as we go about understanding a text, with the external socio-historical data that has come down to us taking a second place. The deeply rooted mistake in the historical-critical method is to have set aside this priority. What shows this to be the case is the example of the NT which does not offer historical interpretation of the OT beyond what can be read from the surface of the text; it offers, rather, Christ-centred interpretation. The method of interpretation employed by the Christian prophets is not an historical one, sensitive to socio-historical contextual information, but an **intertextual** one in which Scripture is combined with Scripture in the illumination of the Christ-event.

**Columnists**



**Exegesis/Analysis**

**Benedict Kent**

*The Nazareth sermon (4.16-30)*

The Nazareth sermon is the second pericope with an intriguingly high concentration of servant song references. Again, Luke’s reworked ‘song’ will be our focus. As with Simeon’s song, the pericope of the Nazareth sermon is structured in four sections and follows a very similar pattern:

* Introduction (4.16-17)
* Reading (4.18-19)
* Additional comments (4.21-27)
* Audience reaction (4.28-30)

Whilst Simeon’s song dealt with the Isaianic themes of the presence of God’s salvation and a message for all people, Jesus’ ‘reading’ in the Nazareth pericope deals with the theme of reversal of statuses (4.18-19). Luke then evokes the presence of God’s salvation (4.21) and the message to both Jews and Gentiles (4.25-27) in Jesus’ additional comments. As with Simeon’s pericope, Luke also uses the additional comments to add a further, more haunting Isaianic theme: the rejection of the Servant. As with Simeon’s song, here Luke reworks Isaianic imagery and lexical webs to construct his own programmatic servant narrative.

Like Simeon’s song, Jesus’ Isaiah reading can be structured into six lines and as three couplets. Whilst each line does not have a regular number of syllables, each couplet does. Luke 4.18a and 18b have 24 syllables accumulatively, 4.18c and 18d have 22 syllables, and 18e and 19 have 24 syllables. Like Simeon’s song, Jesus’ Isaiah reading is a carefully crafted passage, whose metre gives it an elegant, rhythmic quality.

18a Πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπʼ ἐμέ,

18b οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς,

18c ἀπέσταλκέν με κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν

18d καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,

18e ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει,

19 κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν.

(Luke 4.18-19)

In consideration of the phonetics of Jesus’ Isaiah reading, the reading is less musical than Simeon’s song, but the existing assonance and consonance does help in holding the passage together as a tight unit. 18a and 18b use assonance in the repeated ‘e’ vowels to hold the two clauses together, and alliteration of the rough breathing sound in οὗ εἵνεκεν (18b) to elegantly link the two clauses. In 18c and 18d the repeated consonance of the ‘εν’/ ‘ιν’ sounds function to seal the clauses of the couplet together. In 18c, 18d, 18e the repetition of ‘α’ vowels combined with the assonance of ‘αι’ sounds in the repeated infinitives contributes to the growing momentum of the passage, helping the reading to crescendo towards the emphatic final clause. Whilst the passage is not as musical as Simeon’s song, its phonetics do function to hold the unit together, as well as to influence the dynamics of the reading.

The musical quality of this text makes categorizing it as a ‘reading’ a little misleading, and even more so because Luke combines multiple quotations and allusions from the servant discourse of Isaiah 61 within it.[[131]](#footnote-131) Charles Kimball’s work has demonstrated that Luke seemingly uses a lexicon from the two traditions preserved by the LXX and the MT.[[132]](#footnote-132) Luke 4.18a is from Isa 61.1a (LXX), 18b (including ἀπέσταλκέν με from 18c) is from Isa 61.1b (LXX), and 18c and 18d are from Isa 61.1d (LXX). However, 18e is from Isa 58.6d (LXX) replacing Is 61.1c. Luke 4.19 is from Isa 61.2a (MT). Kimball uses the *gezerah shawah* technique to demonstrate that Jesus’ exegetical methods contain an implicit midrash based on the catchword connection of ἄφεσιν. This explains how Jesus could read two passages together as one unified passage. Unlike F. Godet, who argues that Luke probably left out Isa 61.1c (‘to bind up the broken hearted’) by an act of negligence,[[133]](#footnote-133) it seems far more likely that Luke purposefully left it out for stylistic reasons, such as enhancing the parallelism between ἄφεσιν and ἀφέσει.[[134]](#footnote-134) Another possible stylistic decision is evidenced by a change made from ἀποστελλε (LXX) to ἀποστεῖλαι to fit with the other infinitives of the text.[[135]](#footnote-135) This combining and editing of multiple passages (i.e. Isaiah 58/61) demonstrates Luke’s interest in poetic style and in crafting his own servant song text.

Unlike in Simeon’s song, Luke selects quotations more weighted with messianic expectation for his Nazareth reading. While the servant and the messianic agent are not mutually exclusive figures, they do show a shift in emphasis. The figure in Jesus’ reading is anointed with the Spirit of the Lord (vv. 18a, 18b). This is a royal as well as prophetic appointment, as in the Jewish scriptures the kings were famously anointed for their reign.[[136]](#footnote-136) In ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι and ἀπέσταλκέν με κηρύξαι Luke’s lexical choices also allow for Jesus’ Isaianic figure to be perceived as a herald or messenger. However, unlike the herald alluded to in Luke’s depiction of Simeon, this herald emphasises his divine appointment.

Luke uses repetition in the Nazareth reading to emphasise that the medium of God’s salvation is in fact the messenger Jesus himself. The repetition of the first person pronoun με in ἐπʼ ἐμε (18a), ἔχρισέν με (18b) and με κηρύξαι (18c) draws attention to the Isaianic figure during the first half of Jesus’ reading. This provides a neat counterpart to Simeon’s song in which the speaker emphasises his addressee with σου. However, it is also consistent with the Lukan theme of God’s salvation, as in each passage the repetition draws attention to the source of salvation (God is emphasised in 2.29-32 and Jesus in 4.18-19). In this passage the herald figure is shown to be not only the messenger but also the medium of God’s salvation.

Repetition in the second half of the passage changes the dynamic of the reading. Repetition of infinitive forms in εὐαγγελίσασθαι (18b), κηρύξαι (18c), ἀποστεῖλαι (18e) and κηρύξαι (19) shifts the emphasis from the authority of the Isaianic figure to the **ministry** of the Isaianic figure. The change in positioning of the infinitives from secondary verb in the clauses of 18a and 18b to the primary verbs in 18e and 19 contributes to this shift in emphasis. As with Simeon’s song, Luke’s possible structuring of the passage into couplets allows for parallel concepts in each phrase. Thus ἔχρισέν με – ἀπέσταλκέν με mirror each other, as do εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς – κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν. The change from starting the phrases with aorist active verbs (ἔχρισέν, ἀπέσταλκέν) to starting with infinitives creates a lucid movement from authority to ministry.

This ministry that Luke appropriates from Isaiah and that he emphasises through his word ordering, conceptually and linguistically parallels the Jubilee instructions in Leviticus 25. ἄφεσιν is the link word to Leviticus 25 (alluded to in Isa 58.6 and 61.1) and ‘proclamation’ the linking concept as the Levites are instructed to proclaim the Jubilee across the land.[[137]](#footnote-137) This allusion to the Jubilee within the allusions to Isa 58.6 and 61.1, 2 employs the Isaianic imagery of reversal of statuses, describing a restoration for the wronged.[[138]](#footnote-138) In Leviticus 25, the Jubilee is a year of a national reversal of statuses as slaves are set free and leased property is returned to its original clan’s ownership. Luke’s allusion to the Jubilee year is also strongly programmatic of Jesus’ own healing ministry, as is later reiterated to John the Baptist (Luke 7.22). The fulfilment of this programme is immediately demonstrated in the following pericope as Jesus exorcises an unclean spirit in Capernaum and heals their sick, thus releasing the captives and giving sight to the blind.

Whilst Jesus’ Isaiah reading primarily emphasises the theme of reversal of statuses, the following ‘additional comments’ contain two other Lukan themes revealed in 3.5-6: the presence of God’s salvation and its availability to both Jews and Gentiles. In Jesus’ concluding comment to the Isaiah reading Luke emphasises the immediate presence of God’s salvation. ὅτι Σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφὴ αὕτη ἐν τοῖς ὠσὶν ὑμῶν (4.21). ὅτι Σήμερον functions in the same way as Simeon’s opening Νῦν drawing attention to the immediate present. It also echoes the immediacy of Simeon’s follow-up warning to Mary that begins Ἰδοὺ (2.34). Luke’s lexical choice communicates the emphatic immediacy of prophetic fulfilment of God’s salvation.

As in Simeon’s pericope, the servant’s rejection and suffering motif is not dealt with in the actual Isaiah reading. Like Simeon, Luke’s Jesus introduces the concept as an additional comment, instigating a foreboding mood that runs counter to the uplifting one created by the initial reading. Luke introduces the theme of rejection by describing Jesus as declaring οὐδεὶς προφήτης δεκτός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτου (4.24). Jesus’ statement is both programmatic of the way his immediate audience will react to him and ultimately how the people will reject him in Jerusalem. Just as Luke ‘packaged’ the rejection motif with the motif of reversal of statuses in 2.34, here Luke associates the rejection motif with, or even as a result of the salvation for Jew and Gentile motif (4.24), as Jesus continues to preach the historical precedents of God’s salvation being ministered to Gentiles (4.25-27).

The Nazareth sermon is shown to be immediately programmatic as the episode ends with a fulfilment of two of the Isaianic themes. Luke’s rejection motif is immediately fulfilled by Jesus’ audience’s angry reaction as they cast him out of the city (4.28-19a). Luke also develops, less overtly, an immediate fulfilment of the status-reversal motif as the audience’s immediate reaction and judgement of Jesus employs the same lexical web as previous reversal passages (3.5, 1.52-53, 2.43). The audience are filled with wrath (ἐνέπλησεν – Luke 1.52-53), they rise up (Luke 2.43) and they take him to the brow of the mountain (ὄρος – Luke 3.5). As well as lexical links, the passage also matches the conceptual movement of the undulation themes from earlier passages. The people ‘rise up’ in order to ‘cast down’ Jesus, strongly echoing Simeon’s earlier words to Mary that her son ‘is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel’ (2.34). Jesus passes through the midst of his aggressors leaving them empty of a victim, as God sends the rich away empty in Mary’s song (1.53).



**Exposition**

**Richard Benson**

**Lexical Patterns in the Jacob-Esau Narrative**

The story of Jacob and Esau is recorded in Genesis in three sections. The first concerns their birth and family life (25:19-24); the second, their rivalry (26:34-28:22), and the third, their reconciliation (32:1-33:17). The narrative contains a number of word plays and recurring words and phrases, some which are evident in English translations and others which are effectively untranslatable. This article highlights some of these lexical patterns and makes some suggestions about their narrative purpose.

**Naming**

Records of name-giving are common in the lives of the patriarchs, usually accompanied by an explanation of their significance. The Jacob-Esau narrative is no different, containing seven naming incidents. In each case, the occasion of the naming is recorded, not simply the significance of the name.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Birth names | Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy [*śê‘ār*] garment; and they named him Esau [*‘êśāw*]. (25:25) |
| Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau’s heel [*ba‘ăqêḇ*], so his name was called Jacob [*ya‘ăqōḇ*] (25:26) |
| Given names | “Please let me have a swallow of that red [*hā’āḏōm hā’āḏōm*] stuff there, for I am famished.” Therefore his name was called Edom [*’ĕḏōwm*]. (25:30) |
| He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel [*yiśrā’êl*]; for you have striven [*śārîṯā*] with God and with men and have prevailed.” (32:28) |
| Place names | “[…]This is none other than the house of God [*bêṯ ’ĕlōhîm*] […]He called the name of that place Bethel [*bêṯ’êl*] (28:17,19) |
| Jacob said when he saw them, “This is God’s camp [*maḥănêh*].” So he named that place Mahanaim [*maḥănāyim*]. (32:2) |
| So Jacob named the place Peniel [*pənî’êl*], for *he said*, “I have seen God face to face [*’ĕlōhîm pānîm ’el- pānîm*] yet my life has been preserved.” (32:30) |

The namings of Jacob and Esau have a clear proleptic function. Jacob’s heel-catching continues in his relationship with Isaac and Laban; Esau’s hairiness is a key part of Jacob’s deception. The naming of Israel and Bethel have particular significance in the history of the nation of Israel. The reason for recording the naming of Mahanaim and Peniel/Penuel is less clear; they appear later in the Biblical record, but no explicit links are made to Genesis. They do, however, both contain motifs (‘camp’ and ‘face’) which recur in the Jacob-Esau narrative.

The naming motif is especially prominent in 32:27-30:

So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”

The patriarchal family have been “the namers”: Isaac and Rebekah (ch 25, 26), Leah and Rachel (ch 29, 30), Jacob and Laban (ch 31, 32). Now a nameless one bestows a name on Jacob, recalling the divine naming of Abraham and Sarah in chapter 17, and the accompanying promises.

**Names, characteristics and places**

The connection between name and characteristics mentioned above extends to place names. Esau is so named because he is hairy [*śê‘ār*], and then settles in mount Seir [*śê‘îr*] (32:3, 36:8). His other name, Edom, recalls his colour at birth, the red stew, but also becomes the name of the land where he and his descendants live (32:3, 36:1). Esau himself comments on the relationship between Jacob’s name and his character: “Is he not rightly named Jacob [*ya‘ăqōḇ*], for he has supplanted me [*ya‘qəḇênî*] these two times?” (27:36). Later, Jacob [*ya‘ăqōḇ*] wrestles [*yê’āḇêq*] with the angel at the Jabbok [*yabbōq*] (32:22-24).

**Birthrights and blessings**

The relationship between Jacob and Esau is first seen in the selling of the birthright:

When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, “Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.” Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?” And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (25:29-34)

The story of the birthright, in advance of Isaac blessing his sons, makes Jacob the legitimate heir, by indicating Esau’s contempt for the birthright, and by presenting a transaction through which Esau renounces it.

This incident is immediately followed in the narrative by God’s bestowal of the Abrahamic blessing on Isaac and his descendants (26:3-5); the blessing is confirmed by Isaac’s growing prosperity (26:12). After a second Abrahamic blessing (26:24), even the Philistines acknowledge that “You are now the blessed of the Lord” (26:29).

This sets the scene for the second section of the Jacob-Esau narrative. The twenty-three occurrences of ‘bless’ and ‘blessing’ make it clear that this is a key theme of this section.

Esau sees the birthright and the blessing as separate:

“Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright [*bəḵōrāh*], and behold, now he has taken away my blessing [*bərāḵāh*].” (27:36)

However, the birthright/blessing word-play may be used to suggest that the two are intrinsically linked. Either way, the blessing on Jacob fulfils God’s declaration that the older would serve the younger (25:23). That this blessing includes the Abrahamic promises is confirmed by Isaac when he blesses Jacob a second time (28:3-4) and by God himself in the vision at Bethel (28:13-15).

The blessing motif continues in the third section of the Jacob-Esau narrative. On his way to meet Esau, Jacob wrestles with an angel and demands a blessing (32:26). Decades previously, he had sought to gain the blessing through deception; now he tried to get it by force. Yet, as before, he succeeded and received the blessing (32:29, compare 27:23). The recurrence of the concept of ‘the blessing’ thus illustrates the angel’s comment that Jacob had striven with God (typified in his wrestling with the angel, and seen throughout his attempts to control affairs), and with men (typified in his holding of Esau’s heel, and seen in his supplanting of Esau in the place of the firstborn).

In his reconciliation with Esau, Jacob acknowledges that God has blessed him: “Please take my gift [*bərāḵāh*] which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty” (33:11). Jacob had taken Esau’s blessing, but now he is able to offer him some of the fruit of that blessing as a present. Here, perhaps, was a taste of God’s promise to him that “in you […] shall all the families of the earth be blessed (28:14).

**Angels and messengers**

On his way to meet Esau, Jacob meets, apparently for the first time, the angels [*mal’aḵim*] of God who he has previously seen only in dreams (28:12, 31:11). Immediately afterwards, he sends his own messengers [*mal’aḵim*] to Esau (32:3, 6). This may be an illustration of Jacob’s striving with God: Jacob arranges his own messengers, rather than relying on those from God.

**Camps, companies and presents**

Nevertheless, Jacob seems to recognise in the angels a promise of divine protection. On his first encounter with the angels, God promised that “I am with you […] I will not leave you” (28:15). Here was evidence that this was still true. Recalling his words at Bethel, “This is none other than the house of God” (28:17), he says “This is God’s camp” (32:2). As Jacob had travelled from his father’s house, so God had ‘camped’ with him, travelling from ‘the house of God’. Thus, there were two camps (Mahanaim): the camp of Jacob, and the camp of God.

The camp [*maḥănêh*] of God is not sufficient to assuage Jacob’s fear, however. He divides his people and livestock, to make two companies [*maḥănêh*], “for he said, ‘If Esau comes to the one company [*maḥănêh*] and attacks it, then the company [*maḥănêh*] which is left will escape’” (32:8; *maḥănêh* also occurs in v. 10). The *maḥănāyim* established by God are supplanted by one established by Jacob.

Jacob then selects from his company a present [*minḥāh*] for Esau, and sends it in advance (32:13-20). Thus one of the *maḥănêh* (companies) becomes a *minḥāh* (present), while Jacob “spent that night in the camp [*maḥănêh,* i.e the other of the two companies]”. God’s company is not sufficient protection against the wrath of Esau. Jacob sends his own company as a present to appease him. When Jacob finally meets Esau, the word play appears again:

And he [Esau] said, “What do you mean by all this company [*maḥănêh*] which I have met?” And he said, “To find favour in the sight of my lord.” But Esau said, “I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own.” Jacob said, “No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present [*minḥāh*] my hand” (33:8-10a)

**Faces and favour**

Jacob has reasons for sending a present in advance:

“I will appease him [*Heb.* cover his face] with the present that goes before [‘face’ used as an adverb] me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me [*Heb*. lift my face].” (32:20)

The encounter centres found the face of Esau and the face of Jacob. Will Esau’s face be covered by Jacob’s present? Will Jacob’s face be lifted when Jacob sees Esau’s face? But the next face in the narrative is not Esau’s but God’s. After wrestling with the angel, Jacob says “I have seen God face to face yet my life has been preserved” (32:30).

Jacob has relied on his messengers rather than God’s, and on his company rather than God’s. Yet Jacob had prayed that God would deliver him from Esau (32:11). If he can see God’s face and be preserved (the same word as ‘deliver’), he can see Esau’s face and be accepted.

And so it happens. Jacob meets Esau and is welcomed by him, and Jacob alludes to his encounter with the angel: “take my present from my hand, for therefore I have seen your face like seeing God’s face, and you have received me favourably” (33:10, NASB margin). The apparent flattery perhaps conceals Jacob’s claim to have already seen God face to face.

**Conclusion**

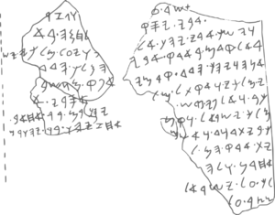
The lexical patterns discussed supplement the explicit message of the Jacob-Esau narrative, namely that Jacob and his descendants are the rightful heirs to the Promises, despite (or because of?) Jacob’s attempts to strive with God and man. The repetition of key words highlights dominant themes, and suggests contrasts between Jacob and Esau, and between the two brothers and God.

This is also a useful case study for considering approaches to translation. It raises the question of how idiom can be translated to preserve lexical patterns, while still being accessible to an English reader. Only hyperliteral translations such as Young’s Literal Translation succeed in conveying the face motif in Genesis 32:30, but do so at the expense of comprehensibility. The KJV translates *bərāḵāh* consistently as ‘blessing’, but *maḥănêh* variously as ‘host’, ‘bands’, ‘company’, and ‘drove’. The NASB does somewhat better with *maḥănêh*, settling for ‘company’ or ‘camp’, but translates *bərāḵāh* as ‘gift’ in 33:10.

Word-play, of course, is notoriously difficult to translate, and indications are usually only found in translations or study Bibles with detailed footnotes. The ESV Study Bible, for instance, discusses all of the examples above with the exception of the *maḥănêh / minḥāh* word-play.

Doubtless the plain meaning of a narrative will be clear in most translations, but more literal translations will preserve a higher degree of lexical patterning. Attention to footnotes, commentaries and original words may reveal an additional richness which enhances our understanding of Scripture.

*All quotations from NASB*



**Archaeology News**

**Kay McGrath**

* In *Times of Israel* an article headlined - “Temple Mount Archaeological Project Yields Treasure, Unearths Conflict: Sifting through earth removed from holy site gleans rare artefacts going back thousands of years, but Prof. Gabriel Barkay’s methods stir controversy”[[139]](#footnote-139) – for a response to the article see the Temple Mount Sifting Project blog.[[140]](#footnote-140)
* On the *Archaeology of the Orient* website a French article on “Nebuchadnezzar in Lebanon: Registration of Brisa in Their Historical Context”*.*[[141]](#footnote-141)
* A new downloadable electronic book: *Divination, Politics and Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, Edited by Alan Lenzi and Jonathan Stökl[[142]](#footnote-142)
* On the *Israel Hayom* website an article entitled, *A Heart of Stone:*“The Antiquities Authority has uncovered some 60 meters of Western Wall foundations, leading to an exciting discovery: One unique smooth stone, unlike any other in the wall. The stone may be left over from the construction of the Second Temple.”[[143]](#footnote-143) For a comment by Leen Ritmeyer, see “A Smooth Stone Found in the Western Wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem”*.*[[144]](#footnote-144)
* For an update on the excavations at *Tell es-Safi/Gath 2013* – in preparation for the 2014 season.[[145]](#footnote-145)
* In the *Haaretz Daily* there is a report entitled, “Archaeologists find 2,000-year old chisel used to build the Western Wall”.[[146]](#footnote-146)For a comment by Leen Ritmeyer, see “2,000-year old chisel found near the Temple Mount”.[[147]](#footnote-147)
* Leen Ritmeyer discusses *“*Does the Byzantine Church at Maqatir Reflect the Sacred Architecture of the Temple in Jerusalem?*”*[[148]](#footnote-148) Presiding: Jeff Green, Dean, HBU School of Christian Thought.

**Reviews**

**Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee.* HarperOne, 2014. 404pp., ISBN 978-0-06-177818-6**

**Michael F. Bird (ed.), *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus’ Divine Nature.* Zondervan, 2014. 236pp., ISBN 978-0-310-51959-1**

From the title Christadelphians might get the mistaken idea that Bart Ehrman’s new book, *How Jesus Became God,* would be sympathetic to the biblical unitarian position, exposing the doctrine of the deity of Christ as a later deviation from the apostle’s doctrine. And Ehrman does believe that the deity of Christ was a later development, but he also believes that Jesus was only an apocalyptic prophet, that he never claimed to be the Son of God and that he didn’t rise from the dead. Ehrman is not seeking to restore the apostle’s doctrine but to give a historical account of how a mere man could come to be regarded, eventually, as God.

In this sense, Christadelphians may find more common ground with the five authors who respond to Ehrman in their book *How God Became Jesus* (edited by Michael Bird). Of course, Christadelphians will not be sympathetic to the overall purpose of the book - to defend the doctrine of the deity of Christ - but these five scholars, who accept the authority of scripture, ably challenge many of the errors made by Ehrman. Once again, Christadelphians find themselves somewhere between critical and conservative scholarship.[[149]](#footnote-149)

Ehrman’s main thesis is that Jesus was a Jewish apocalyptic prophet whose followers, in response to visions of Jesus after his death, came to believe that he had been exalted into heaven and thus become a divine being (Ehrman calls this “exaltation Christology”). Later Christians began to reflect on this and came to the belief that Jesus must have been divine during his lifetime, initially believing him made divine by adoption, later believing him divine due to miraculous birth, and later still believing him to be pre-existent divine being who was incarnated (Ehrman calls this “incarnation Christology”). Only after centuries more did Christian theology develop from incarnation Christology to Nicene Christology, with Jesus as very God.

Ehrman’s thesis rests on the idea that the ancient world did not have a sharp demarcation between humanity and divinity, but that there was a spectrum from humanity to divinity with God at the top. In his first two chapters, he explores both pagan and Jewish beliefs about divine beings, arguing that both accommodated numerous lesser divinities. This is essential to Ehrman’s thesis as it would allow Jesus’ earliest followers to form the belief that Jesus was a god without compromising their Jewish monotheism. Both Michael Bird and Chris Tilling respond to Ehrman’s categorisation, arguing that the Jewish monotheism made a sharp distinction between God and everything else. This is essential to Bird and his collaborators’ response as they, following Richard Bauckham and others, want to argue that by ascribing any divine attributes or prerogatives to Jesus the early Christians incorporated him into the unique divine identity. I wonder if both these analyses fail to do justice to the originality of the Christian message. The apostle affirms both one God and one Lord (1 Cor 8:6) without any concern that the reality of the latter might question the uniqueness of the former. Paul could affirm an exalted Christ without believing in two gods or believing that Jesus had been subsumed into the identity of God. Since both books set out with a misjudged categorisation of what it means to be God, it is unsurprising that both books reach the wrong conclusion.

The next stone in Ehrman’s construction is his chapter “Did Jesus think he was God?” in which he aims to show that Jesus in no way thought of himself as divine. And this means not only denying that Jesus claimed to be God, but also Son of God or even Son of Man because any of these identities would, according to Ehrman’s categories, amount to Jesus being a divine being. To get to this conclusion Ehrman has to do some pretty drastic redaction criticism because Jesus’ self-identification as the Son of Man occurs in all four gospels, in the hypothetical Q source, and even in some hypothetical unredacted reconstructions of the hypothetical Q source. Ehrman has to deny that all these are inauthentic, claiming instead that Jesus believed the Son of Man was someone else, a divine figure who would bring God’s Kingdom. And here Ehrman’s analysis is odd. He believes that Jesus self-identified as the Messiah (he never tries on the ridiculous attempts of previous generations to claim that even that claim was inauthentic) but Ehrman wants to deny that Jesus is the regent of God’s Kingdom. One wonders how Ehrman squares the circle of Jesus believing himself to be the future king and yet also not being.

Michael Bird’s response, defending the reliability of the gospels and the authenticity of Jesus’ claims, is a useful riposte to Ehrman. Yet Bird wants to go further, claiming that the divine prerogatives Jesus claims in the gospels, such as authority on Earth to forgive sins, were, in effect, claims to be God. This rests on the idea that there is no middle ground.

Ehrman spends two chapters exploring the historical evidence for the resurrection. Ehrman formerly affirmed the two key facts that many scholars take to be strong historical confirmation of the resurrection: the empty tomb and the appearances. Ehrman now denies the former. Yet his grounds for doing so seem flimsy. First, he believes Joseph of Arimathea should be mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 and takes that absence to be terribly significant, and second, he argues that the Romans didn’t respect the Jewish burial customs, especially when it comes to criminals.

Craig Evans demonstrates, through multiple examples, that Ehrman has misrepresented the evidence - some Jews were buried in tombs after crucifixion and the Roman authorities allowed them dispensation to do so. It was even a responsibility of the Sanhedrin to ensure that the bodies of crucified criminals were interred in a family tomb. There is, therefore, nothing unlikely about Jesus having been buried in a tomb, and given all the positive evidence indicates that Jesus was buried in a tomb, it seems a strange kind of historian that would seek to deny it. Ehrman does not deny the resurrection appearances; indeed he believes one cannot explain early Christianity without the conviction of its early adherents that Jesus was alive again.

It is worth reflecting on the gap in Ehrman’s argument. He thinks that the conviction that Jesus was alive convinced his followers that Jesus had been exalted to heaven without any prior claims from Jesus that this would be the case. Yet for Jews resurrection meant bodily resurrection, not ascension into heaven. If Jesus was alive again, it was because his body had been reanimated not because his soul had flitted off to heaven. Perhaps this is why Ehrman is so keen to deny the empty tomb, because if his argument is to be sustained, Jesus has to appear from heaven, as to appear exalted. Now, of course, at least one of those who claimed that Jesus appeared to him did see him exalted in heaven, i.e. Paul. Yet Ehrman claims that Paul does not adopt an “exaltation Christology” but affirms a form of “incarnation Christology”, arguing that Paul believed Jesus to be an angel who was incarnated as a man (from Gal 4:14, Phil 2:6-11, and not much else). Chris Tilling argues that Ehrman has overlooked much of Paul’s writing in favour of very little evidence. (He also argues that Paul’s writings, taken as a whole, point towards the deity of Christ).

Here again Ehrman’s proposal is odd. He believes that Paul, twenty years after the crucifixion, affirms that Jesus pre-existed (as an angel) and was incarnated. But he also believes that Mark, forty years after the crucifixion, still thought Jesus was an ordinary man adopted by God at his baptism. Ehrman struggles with trying to make the evidence fit with his chronological framework. He wants to show that within the twenty years between Jesus and Paul’s letters that Christianity has passed through several iterations of Christology but his evidence for each step is out of sync. One might think it would be better if Ehrman argued more strongly against interpreting Paul as affirming Christ’s pre-existence yet, despite rejecting half of Paul’s letters as inauthentic, he still ends up in favour of that interpretation. His interpretation of John’s gospel is even less critical, agreeing that John presents Jesus as God.

Throughout his book Ehrman includes anecdotes about his own journey to agnosticism or other comments where he implies some duplicity by Christians. His commentary turns really sour towards the end of the book when he argues that the Christian belief in the deity of Christ led to anti-Semitism and the persecution of the Jews. This feels like a cheap shot. Charles Hill counters with historical evidence that Constantine and his successors actually increased toleration for Jews.

In summary, Ehrman’s book is original and readable, but also flawed and ultimately unsuccessful in its attempt to account for Christianity in some other way than what actually happened. Bird’s response book is a little more dense but is still readable and an appropriate counter to Ehrman. Yet both books seem to miss the point. One cannot crop Jesus into an apocalyptic prophet or inflate him into God, the evidence will not bear either reading. The only credible option is to affirm, as the early Christians did, that Jesus is Lord.

**TG**



**Marginal Notes**

**Isa 52:11-12**

One of the necessary things that the lone Bible student needs to do is read commentaries, preferably several. The reason for this is simply to have someone else (the commentator) to check and balance what s/he might be thinking. So…

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean *thing*; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearguard. Isa 52:11-12 (KJV revised)

Commentators generally point to several exodus allusions in this text, including ‘not go out with haste’ which is said to be picked up from Exod 12:11 and Deut 16:3; the reference to God being a ‘rearguard’ (Exod 14:19; cf. Num 10:25); and also in the taking of ‘vessels’ (Exod 12:35). It is said that these exodus allusions do not mean that the place of departure is once again Egypt, but rather they characterize the return of the exiles from Babylon in 538/7 as a ‘second exodus’. The question is, why not? Why can’t it be Egypt? At least one commentator has said it was Egypt (C. C. Torrey, 1928). Why couldn’t it have been the case that some of the vessels of the Lord were acquired by Egyptians in the war of 701, held in a border city, and then exchanged through mutual agreement for Egyptian prisoners of war with Judah?

What data might suggest such a scenario? First, we would need data that Hezekiah had sent vessels of silver from the temple along with their Levitical attendants to Sennacherib as tribute (2 Kgs 18:14). Second, we would need a record in Sennacherib’s *Annals* that it was his practice to distribute booty to his governors in vassal city-states and to his army as well as taking such booty back to Nineveh (*Annals*, 60-61). Third, we would need historical evidence that during his campaign in Philistia and Judah, Sennacherib went as far as the border of Egypt and engaged the Egyptians where such booty might have been lost (Herodotus, *Histories* (II, 141)). Fourth, it would help if we had an earlier prophecy in Isaiah to the effect that Judahites would come out of Egypt thereby allowing us to see Isa 52:11-12 as a fulfilment of such a prophecy (Isa 43:3). Fifth, we would need a prophecy in Isaiah showing that Judah might have Egyptians to hand over for the vessels and Levities (Isa 45:14, Egyptians and Judahites were both defeated at Eltekeh and Egyptians may well have fled the battle to Jerusalem). And finally, we should have other mentions of Egypt in the immediate context of Isaiah 51-52 (like Isa 51:9; 52:3) suggesting an Egyptian focus. Such a focus also appears in a pun in Isa 53:1,

Who hath believed our report? And to whom (ym l[) is the Arm of the Lord revealed? (KJV)

The prepositional expression ym l[ occurs eight times in the Hebrew Bible, occurring twice in the account of the Assyrian invasion of 701 and five times overall in Isaiah.

The prophecy in Isa 10:3 anticipates that Judah will flee ‘to’ Egypt for help and this is reflected in 2 Kgs 18:20/Isa 36:5,

And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? To whom (ym l[) will ye flee for help? And where will ye leave your glory?[[150]](#footnote-150) Isa 10:3 (KJV)

You say (but they are only empty words), ‘I have counsel and strength for the war’. Now on whom (ym l[) do you rely, that you have rebelled against me? 2 Kgs 18:20 (NASB); cf. Isa 36:5

This linkage establishes that we have two questions in Isa 53:1. The ‘to whom’ refrain of the Jerusalemites’ reliance on Egypt is being picked up here with the ‘to whom has the Arm of the Lord been revealed’, i.e. giving the answer that the Arm of the Lord has been revealed in Egypt and reported (revealed) to the Jerusalemites. This has happened in the retrieval of the vessels of the Lord from the borders of Egypt by the Arm of the Lord, the Anonymous Conqueror. This action has been the underlying event for the three ‘Awake, awake’ calls.

The question ‘to whom has the Arm of the Lord been revealed’ is addressed to those leaders in Jerusalem that had sought help from Egypt and who had seen the Egyptians defeated at Eltekeh. The question, ‘Who has believed our report?’ is challenging the Jerusalemites to either confess or deny that they have believed the report from Egypt. The retrieval of the vessels of the Lord thus becomes the catalyst for their confession of sin and wrongful behaviour towards the Servant (Hezekiah) in respect of the Egyptian alliance during the Assyrian Crisis.

**News**

Three bits of news, rather different.

First, Tom Gaston has had his book *Historical Issues in Daniel* accepted for publication by Paternoster. Tom had previously released the book via LULU and the new book will be an expanded version.

Second, the Department of Biblical Studies is to close at Sheffield University. It is to be ‘replaced’ by an interdisciplinary research institute for Biblical Studies and its staff distributed among other departments. The reason given for this is the interdisciplinary nature of the subject in today’s world. The department led the world in the 1980s and 1990s..

Third, for those interested in whether Jesus spoke Hebrew, there is a new book of essays: Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley (eds.), *The Language Environment of First Century* Judea (Leiden: E J. Brill, 2014). The list of contents can be found at http://www.jerusalemperspective.com/12254. A sample essay on the question whether ‘Hebraisti’ means ‘Aramaic’ is also available online through an article at http://www.biblicallanguagecenter.com/more-jesus-hebrew-speaker.

**New Book: More Reasons**

(www.lulu.com/willowpublications)

In many respects the case for faith has never been stronger. The discoveries of modern physics have provided strong indication that there is an intelligence behind the universe. A renaissance in Christian philosophy has provided robust and respected defences against traditional challenges to theism. Scholars find they can no longer justify the hasty dismissal of the biblical text as either legendary or outdated. And yet despite these positive changes religious believers find their sincere convictions dismissed as ill-founded and irrational. In this book a number of authors bring together their various expertise and experience to continue laying out reasons for believing in God, Jesus and the Bible. Arguments are drawn from human rationality to the divine character of the Bible, providing additional support for faith in the modern world.

*More Reasons* has been published under the auspices of the Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation and royalties after costs are added to the EJournal Book Fund.

**Postscript**

A person might ask: why has Christ remained away for 2000 years? The answer does not lie in an appreciation of prophetic time periods. An understanding of prophecy merely postpones tackling the question. A slightly deeper question is: why is God absent/away at all for long periods of time? The answer to this question has to do with free-will – the fact that God has created us as free creatures. This means that having given us his commands, he must step away and allow us to freely obey him. This is nothing more than parents do with their children.

We can now see where the answer lies to our opening question. God through Christ gave a substantial group of new commands and doctrines in the first century. Necessarily, he stepped away to allow us to freely act with this new revelation. This revelation was to be the last before the kingdom and for all the world to freely accept or reject. Accordingly, Christ has been away for 2000 years because this is how long it has taken for the gospel, its doctrine and all its commands to go to all the world. The invention of the printing press, the creation of European empires with their associated missionary bodies, and now the Internet, has seen the light for the Gentiles spread worldwide.

We should have no difficulty with Christ being away for 2000 years. The Law was until John and it had been around for 1500 years or so by the time of John. However, this is not quite the same as the last 2000 years because, during the dispensation of the Law, God was away from Yehud after Malachi for about 400 years. The point here is that the restoration prophets had finished their revelation and God withdrew to see what his people would freely do with that completed revelation. How would they prepare for the messiah?

Sin and death is dealt with in the Law; the kingdom is the concern of the Prophets. Jesus’ ministry is the same. He spiritualized aspects of the Prophets so that they became relevant to his teaching about sin and death and the realization of the kingdom was placed in the future. Compared with the records of Jewish teaching in Jesus’ day, Jesus’ teaching was unique. This revelation of the Spirit is why God has been away but the return of the Jews to the land in this day and age shows that God is about to come to the cities of Judah once again (Isaiah) and it shows that a kingdom on earth centred in Jerusalem was not spiritualized by Jesus. That was a mistake made by Christendom.

**AP**

**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.

**Submission of Articles**: Authors should submit articles to the editors. Presentation should follow *Society of Biblical Literature* guidelines (www.sbl.org).

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**EJournal Book Fund**: A fund exists for small book grants for baptised young people who are unwaged. Details can be found on the EJournal website: www.christadelphian-ejbi.org.

1. P. H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I: The Meaning of *raqia‛* in Gen 1:6-8” *WTJ* 53 (1991): 227-240 (238, 239). [Available online.] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), for an introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 230-231. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East* *and in the Bible* (CBQMS 26; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. J. H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For an outline of how Mosaic authorship might be consistent with the use of existing Mesopotamian traditions, see P. J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis* (4th ed.; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 322-326, notes that “The reuse and reinterpretation of creation accounts or cosmogonies is not uncommon in other ancient Near Eastern civilizations.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. W. G. Lambert, “The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon” in *Ancient Cosmologies* (eds. C. Blacker and M. Loewe; London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), 42-65 (50), notes that Earth and Time are competing first principles. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (Rev ed.; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 73-74. For qualification and correction of Kramer’s original edition, see T. Jacobsen, “Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article” *JNES* 5/2 (1946): 128-152 (138f). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Jacobsen, “Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article”, 151,—“There is, as far as we know, no term for ‘air at rest’ in either Sumerian or Akkadian: all those we have denote ‘air in motion,’ i.e., they symbolize concepts limited approximately as are those suggested by our words ‘wind’ and ‘storm,’ and only thus may they be rendered.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 232-233. He is citing S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 77. Seely has been followed by others such as Walton, see *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Clifford comments that Kramer “does not, however, present much evidence for his thesis” of “a primeval sea begot the cosmic mountain of heaven and earth united, from which the air god Enlil was begotten.”— *Creation Accounts*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (3 vols; Leiden: E J Brill, 1997-2000); volume 1 is cited as *COS*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. J. B., Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (3rd ed.; New Jersey: Princeton, 1969); cited as *ANET*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kramer saw this as a cosmic ‘mountain’ but Jacobsen shows that the conception is more locally based, having “reference to the range of mountains bordering the Mesopotamian plain on the east”— “Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article”, 141 and Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The song is called ‘Praise of the Pickaxe’—see the discussion in Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 25, cites a text about the ‘first day’ that recounts a storm over the shrine at Nippur. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Jacobsen, “Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article”, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 114. See also J. K. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 & 2 and Egyptian Cosmology” *JANES* 15 (1982): 39-49 (40), who notes research that casts doubt on traditional exilic or post-exilic dates for Genesis 1:1-2:4a in order to habilitate Egyptian comparisons. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 101f. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (Yale Egyptological Studies 2; New haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. J. A. Wilson, “Egypt” in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (ed. H. Frankfort; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 31-124 (31). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Wilson, “Egypt”, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. S. G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 120-121; see also Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 100, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In his commentary on Egyptian texts in *ANET*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The qualification here is that the temple theme is **typological** rather than overt, *contra* Walton, *The Lost World*, 71f. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Brandon, *Creation Legends*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Brandon, *Creation Legends*, 17; Wilson, “Egypt”, 45—“There were the abysmal waters below, on which the platter rested, called by the Egyptian, “Nūn.” Nūn was the waters of the underworld, and according to one continuing concept, Nun was the primordial waters out of which life first issued…In addition to being the underworld waters, Nun was the waters encircling the world, the Okeanos which formed the outmost boundary...”. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts”, 42; J. H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Culture in its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1989), 33, calls the connection “highly speculative”. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Brandon, *Creation Legends*, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Brandon, *Creation Legends*, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Coffin Text Spell 77; cited from Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Brandon, *Creation Legends*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. S. T. Hollis, “Women of Ancient Egypt and the Sky Goddess Nut” *The Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1987): 496-503 (498-499). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 233. The relevant phrase in Mercer’s translation is “he cleaves its firmness”. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts”, 45; [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The goddess is regularly depicted with stars on her body— Hollis, “Women of Ancient Egypt and the Sky Goddess Nut”, 498. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts”, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Phoenix Edition; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Lambert, “The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon”, 55; see also Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The *COS* text has ‘matrix’; *ANET*, 61, suggests that the epithet has the sense of ‘mother’. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 18, sees a reference to Mummu, the vizier-god, and that therefore there is a third type of ‘waters’ in the text. In an article, “The Meaning of Mummu in Akkadian Literature” *JNES* 7/2 (1948): 98-105 (104), he says, “I would say rather that Mummu was the personified fog or mist rising from the waters of Apsû and Ti’âmat and hovering over them.” If this is correct, it has obvious resonance with Genesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis” *JTS* NS 16/2 (1965): 287-300 (287). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Lambert, “A New Look”, 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Lambert says, “No other tradition of a watery beginning involves a separation”—“A New Look”, 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Lambert, “A New Look”, 296; Westermann agrees, *Genesis 1-11*, 89, “we cannot accept a direct dependence”; see D. W. Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 100; see also G. F. Hasel, “The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels” *AUSS* 10 (1972): 1-20 (5); D. T. Tsumuru, *Creation and Destruction* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 36-38; and Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. He attributes the idea of a vault to mistranslation of *Enūma Elish* Tablet IV line 145 by the German scholar P. Jensen in his *Die Kosmologie der Babylonier*. See R. W. Younker and R. M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew [;yqir' (*rāqîa*‛)” *AUSS* 1 (2011): 125-147 (127). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Lambert, “The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon”, 61-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, xii-xiv; Younker and Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome”, 127, note that Assyriologists have to construct a unified Babylonian cosmology from different texts. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 172, 180 makes the same point and this is acknowledged by Seely, “The Geographical Meaning of ‘Earth’ and ‘Seas’ in Genesis 1:10” *WTJ* 59 (1997): 231-255 (234). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 117, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 233; this is the *Kumarbi Myth*: “When heaven and earth were built upon me [Upelluri, an Atlas figure] I knew nothing of it, and when they came and cut heaven and earth asunder with a copper tool, that also I knew not.” O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (2nd ed.; London: Penguin, 1964), 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Younker and Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome”, 128, and see the scholarship they cite. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. S. Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. For a brief discussion see Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, 35-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. The standard history of Merodach-Baladan is J. A. Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II” in *Studies Presented to A. O. Oppenheim* (eds., R. D. Briggs and J. A. Brinkman; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), 6-53 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. J. H. Walton, “New Observations on the Date of Isaiah” *JETS* (1985): 129-132 (129). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. M. Barker, “Hezekiah’s Boil” *JSOT* 95 (2001): 31-42 (31). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Other translations do not see the connection and render *shalom* (‘peace’) as ‘welfare’ or similar. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Walton, “New Observations on the Date of Isaiah”, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. D. Luckenbill, ed., *The Annals of Sennacherib*, (repr. Wipf & Stock, 2005; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1924). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Walton, “New Observations on the Date of Isaiah”, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Walton, “New Observations on the Date of Isaiah”, 131-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. See the essays in L. L. Grabbe, ed., *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2003). The case for doubting Assyrian records is made in A. Laato, “Assyrian Propaganda and the Falsification of History in the Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib” *VT* 45/2 (1995): 198-226. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. The modern framework will be discussed in a later article. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. There are other arguments in favour of 701, but we have covered the cutting edge of the issue in this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Another way of interpreting the superscription translates tAl[]M as “steps” instead of as “ascents”; See, for example, 2 Kgs 20. Loren D Crow, *The Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134): Their Place in Israelite History and Religion*, (SBLDS 148. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. E. Zenger wonders “whether the sequence Psalms 113-118, 119 and 120-36 is indeed not inspired by the succession of the three great feasts of the Jewish calendar, Pesach (Pss 113-18), Shabuoth (Ps 119) and Sukkoth (Pss 120-36)”—“The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107-145,” *JSOT* 80 (1998): 77-102 (100). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals: A Guide to Their History and Observance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 181; see also *B.Taanit* 2b and 3a. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Arthur Schaffer, “The Agricultural and Ecological Symbolism of the Four Species of Sukkot” *Tradition* 20/2 (1982): 128-140. [Available Online.] [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. On this, see Håkan Ulfgard, *The Story of Sukkot: The Setting, Shaping, and Sequel of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 102 and footnote 101. [Available Online.] [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. The source of the pool of Siloam (inside the city) was the Gihon spring (outside of the city). The Gihon spring later became known as the “Virgin Spring” through a legendary association with the Virgin Mary. Surely it is the height of irony and coincidence (sic) that the Immanuel prophecy was given here! [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. [Ed AP]: The relationship of the Joel texts to Isa 51:3 needs to be explored in historical terms. The Assyrian hegemony over the region saw several slash and burn devastations and these texts may refer to different occasions. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. James W. Thirtle, *Titles of the Psalms* (Morgan & Scott: London, 1904) and *Old Testament Problems* (Morgan & Scott: London, 1907). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Literally “in the steps”; tAl[]M;B (Ba|mma`álôt) and “A Song of Ascents”; tAl[]M;h ryvi (šîr ha|mma`álôt) from hl'[]m; (ma`álôt) ; ascend/steps/degrees etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. David Ringo Miano, Shadow on the steps: time measurement in ancient Israel, (diss., University of California: San Diego, 2006). Miano prefers the longer LXX reading of Isa.38:8 which mentions “the sun going down on the house of thy father” and believes that the MT phrase has been shortened by haplography. However, even if this is the case the LXX phraseology may simply mean that Ahaz had fallen out of divine favour rather than indicating the location of the “shadow clock”. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. The earthquake during Uzziah’s reign caused much damage, Josephus may well be exaggerating when he recounts some of the damage but apparently the king’s gardens were spoilt and roads were obstructed. (*Antiq.,* 9. 10. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. For variations on this, see Charles A. Briggs and Emilie G, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Psalms* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1906/7), 2:444f; Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), 235ff; Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, (Trans. R. Graeme Dunphy, Edinburgh; New York: T & T Clark, 1990), 422ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Michael D. Goulder, *Psalms of the Return: Book V, Psalms 107-150* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. On which, see, Loren D Crow, *The Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134): Their Place in Israelite History and Religion*, (SBLDS 148. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 148; M. D. Goulder, “The Songs of Ascents and Nehemiah” *JSOT* 75 (1997): 43-58 (45); Pss 122:3-4; 123:2; 124:1.2.6; 129:6-7; 133:2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Goulder, “The Songs of Ascents and Nehemiah,” 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Day considers that Psalm 137 was written during the exile not afterwards. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. John Day, “How Many Pre-Exilic Psalms Are There?” in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (ed. John Day; London: Continuum, 2004), 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. For a fuller discussion of linguistic evidence, see P. Wyns, “Songs (Part 1)” *The Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation* **7/3 (2013): 4-11.** [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Leon J. Liebreich, “The Songs of Ascents and the Priestly Blessing” *JBL* 74 (1955): 33-36 (33). [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 291-292. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. The “men of Hezekiah” (Prov.25:1); these were scribes from Judah and Northern Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Kevin Joseph Haley, *The Reinterpretation of the Psalms of the Individual in Judaism*, (Dissertation, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2012), 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Hendrik Viviers, “The Coherence of the ma’alot Psalms, (Pss 120-134)”, *ZAW* 106 (1994): 275-289 (287). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Haley, *The Reinterpretation of the Psalms of the Individual in Judaism*, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. The meaning of the Hebrew phrase *“ledawid”* (for/of David) has been much discussed. Traditionally, it was taken to denote Davidic authorship. In modern scholarship, it has often been taken to mean “belonging to the Davidic collection,” while a third view is that the phrase was meant by those who added it to denote authorship, but that these editors were not guided by any reliable tradition. There is probably some truth in all three of these views. See, W. McKay and J. W. Rogerson, *Psalms 1-50*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. See P. Wyns, “The Olivet Discourse” *CeJBI* **5/3 (2011):**  4-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Jesus **never** referred Daniel’s “Seventy” Prophecy to the crucifixion but always to the destruction of the temple (and Jerusalem) and to the arrival of the kingdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* N2:198-200 sub *nê’u* ; see also *NIDOTTE* entry 9481. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. [Ed AP]: Another example of deferment is Isa 48:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. For an explanation of Daniel’s Prophecies and the delays incurred see the commentary, P. Wyns, *God is Judge*, (Biblaridion Media, 2011; www.lulu.com). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Another more prevalent example would be the absence of historical data underlying much of the Prophets – both for understanding the catalyst and the initial application. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Teaching about two things, needs two layers; teaching about three things, needs three layers, *and so on*. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. The ‘wider community’ could include church commentary and scholarship, but it would be a mistake to de-value or have a low opinion of Christadelphian intertextual exegesis in past or current generations and promote only ‘the Church’. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. J. Haley, *Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. This qualification is based on the presence of the divine council in Gen 1:26 – the standard reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. H. Palmer, *Analogy* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 16; this is the classical view of analogy in theology. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. [Ed AP]: Whether Isa 61:1-3 is a servant song is contested in scholarship; it is less controversial to say it is a servant discourse, but this can also be challenged. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Charles A. Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 99-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Godet, *St. Luke*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1881), 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the OT*,107. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the OT*,100. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. See 1 Sam 10.1; 16.13. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the OT*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Ben Witherington also observes the same thematic interest in *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1990), 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/temple-mount-project-yields-treasure-but-unearths-conflict/> [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. <http://templemount.wordpress.com/2014/06/08/response-to-article-in-times-of-israel/> [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. <http://archeorient.hypotheses.org/2929> [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. <http://sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9781589839984_OA.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. <http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=17255> [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. <http://www.ritmeyer.com/2014/05/02/a-smooth-stone-found-in-the-western-wall-of-the-temple-mount-in-jerusalem/> [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2014/05/mae388020.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. <http://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/.premium-1.586670> [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. <http://www.ritmeyer.com/2014/04/22/2000-year-old-chisel-found-near-the-temple-mount/> [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=X3C4MC2Tmek> [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. [ED AP]: There are many ideas waiting for original scholarly development that could be undertaken outside academia and within the Christadelphian community. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. The two questions of Isa 10:3 are mirrored in the two questions of Isa 53:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)