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Ellen G. White's Insights into Scripture Affirm the Original Biblical Languages*

Richard M. Davidson

As a college student with a theology major, I wrote my first theological research paper. The passages I chose to consider were Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28—passages which Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally regarded as referring to Satan and the origin of evil in heaven. Following the lead of various higher-critical commentaries, I came to the unsettling conclusion that neither passage made any reference to Satan or the origin of evil in its original context. Thus, in my thinking major biblical supports for the Adventist understanding of the rise of the great controversy crumbled. Inasmuch as Ellen G. White supported the “Satan, great controversy” view of these passages,¹ I also subconsciously entertained doubts about the veracity of her interpretations of Scripture.

Since that time, to my delight I have found compelling exegetical evidence supporting the conclusion that both Isaiah and Ezekiel were indeed referring to Satan in these passages. Much of this evidence is set forth in an Andrews University dissertation by Jose Bertoluci entitled “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil.”² Bertoluci has dealt a devastating blow to the critical views that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 only describe earthly, historical enemies of Israel and not Satan. He shows how in each passage there is a movement from the local, historical realm of earthly kings to the heavenly supernatural realm describing Lucifer/Satan and the rise of the great controversy. My own study has uncovered further evidence supporting this conceptual shift in Ezekiel 28—from earthly “prince” (*nagid*, the king of Tyre, vv. 1–10) to cosmic “king” (*melek*, the supernatural ruler of Tyre, Satan himself, vv. 11–19)—and I have discovered that this judgment upon the fallen cherub comes at the climactic center of the whole book.³ I now rejoice that the origin of evil in Lucifer the covering cherub is solidly grounded in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. White’s interpretation of these passages is sound.

The approach I share in this article concerning White’s writings comes from the perspective of my academic discipline as biblical theologian and exegete. Since becoming a seminary professor at Andrews University over thirty-five years ago, I have had numerous opportunities to consider White’s insights while seeking

to understand the meaning of biblical passages in the original Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek.

Over and over again I have been surprised to find that nuances of the biblical texts detected only in my study of the original languages and not reflected in most modern translations and commentaries were embedded in White’s comments on those texts. Conversely, I have frequently come to the often-serendipitous discovery that White’s detailed insights concerning biblical passages, which I had assumed were not mentioned directly in the Scriptures, are actually supported by a close reading of the biblical text in the original languages. These experiences have repeatedly reminded me of statements which White made to the effect that since little heed is given to the Bible, her writings are a lesser light to lead us to the greater light (i.e., Scripture).⁴

Before sharing specific examples, I offer some preliminary considerations:

In this article I do *not* intend to imply that if one simply studies White’s writings, there is no further need to study Scripture. To the contrary, White’s inspired insights into the biblical text motivate us to go back to Scripture, to search deeply to see if her insights are in fact supported by biblical exegesis, and then to share the special truths of the Advent movement from Scripture alone, not from her writings. White has certainly not exhausted the meaning of these and other Scriptures. Her sampling of buried treasures to be found in the Bible should prompt us to mine the Scriptures for ourselves, utilizing all available exegetical tools to find additional riches contained therein.

It is also important to remember that White sometimes uses biblical phraseology in her writings where it is clear from the context that she is not seeking to give specific exegetical insights regarding a given biblical passage. We may compare this with the common English expression “I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.” Those of us who use this biblical allusion in ordinary conversation are clearly not trying to exegete Job 19:20, the original source of this citation. Frank Hasel well describes this pastoral use of Scripture: “Ellen White also uses words of Scripture that were familiar to her, and applied the message or encouragement of a biblical

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passage to a current situation even though the original biblical context may have addressed a different situation.”⁵

I am not suggesting in this article that it is necessary to know Greek and Hebrew in order to have a solid understanding of the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White. The main message of Scripture is plain in whatever modern-language versions one may read. But knowledge of the original languages is helpful for specialists in biblical studies, as scholars attempt to plumb the depths of meaning in a given biblical passage for all its beauty and richness.

Furthermore, I am not arguing for a theory of verbal inspiration, either for the Bible writers or for White. Both the Bible and White make clear that God inspired His prophets with thoughts, and did not verbally dictate the message to them. At the same time, both the Bible writers and White express as much dependence upon the Holy Spirit in communicating the inspired message as in receiving it, sometimes involving divine guidance in selecting appropriate words to express the truth. The Holy Spirit imbued human instruments with divine truth in thoughts and so assisted them in writing that they faithfully committed to apt words the things divinely revealed to them.⁶

Finally, I do not claim that I have solved all the difficulties related to White's allusions to biblical texts, or in areas where White presents insights into Scripture which I have not been able to verify by detailed biblical exegesis. In some cases, White may have been shown in vision details of biblical history that are not set forth in the biblical record. In other cases, apparent discrepancies have been pointed out by certain modern researchers between some of White's descriptions of historical events and the biblical record of those events. I once had a long list of these apparent discrepancies, but the list has been steadily shrinking before the light of further study. I have a “shelf” in my mind where unsolved problems like these are resting, until further light shines upon them. For some problems I no doubt will have to wait until Christ Himself explains them to me in the hereafter!

But dozens—yes, scores—of times I have encountered truth from the “lesser light” and then later have come to realize that it was part of the “greater light” already, if studied deeply. Many other times I have found some rich treasure in the Scriptures revealed only in the original languages, and then later discovered that White had captured this insight as well, apparently without any knowledge of the original languages (or of secondary sources pointing out this insight). On these occasions my heart has burned with joy (like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, Luke 24:32), as Scripture has been illuminated, and White's prophetic gift confirmed. In what follows I will share a few of these personal “burning heart” experiences, in relation to the Old and New Testaments

in the original biblical languages. I begin with some Old Testament examples.

Genesis 1:26–27: The Image of God (*Imago Dei*)

At the very beginning of the Bible one encounters the description of Adam and Eve being made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). In White's commentary on this creation account, she writes that “Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character.”⁷ There has been much discussion regarding the *imago Dei* or “image of God.”⁸ Genesis 1:27 states the divine deliberation: “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.”⁹ In my examination of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:27,¹⁰ I have found that the two words translated “image” (*tselem*) and “likeness” (*demut*), while overlapping in semantic range, tend to emphasize different aspects. A study of the usage of these two terms in Scripture reveals that *tselem* emphasizes the external, concrete form,¹¹ whereas *demut* emphasizes the inward, abstract character qualities,¹² and when juxtaposed, as in Genesis 1:27, the two terms denote the external form and inward characteristics respectively.¹³ White had no training in biblical Hebrew, and yet she was on the mark when she wrote that the image of God consisted of both “outward resemblance and character.” This reading of White is remarkable because in the nineteenth century biblical scholars were virtually unanimous in viewing God along the lines of Greek dualism as “timeless”—beyond space and time—and thus not having an outward form, and therefore any interpretation of the *imago Dei* that included “outward resemblance” was rejected out of hand.¹⁴

Genesis 2:25: Garments of Light and Glory

White describes Adam and Eve when they were created as clothed in “garments of light and glory.”¹⁵ Is this insight only in White's writings, or is it already implicit in Scripture? In Genesis 2:25, Moses depicts Adam and Eve at creation as “naked.” The word for “naked” in this verse is *arom*, which elsewhere in Scripture frequently refers to someone not *fully* clothed or not clothed in the *normal* manner.¹⁶ Genesis 2:25 does not explicitly indicate in what way Adam and Eve were without clothes in the normal sense (“normal” from the post-fall perspective).

But such further detail may be deduced from another major creation account in the Bible: Psalm 104. This Psalm moves through the seven days of creation in the exact same order as in Genesis 1, except that it fills in many details not mentioned in Genesis 1.¹⁷ Psalm 104 provides a poetic description of God's creative *work*, and also gives at least one indication of His *appearance*, or rather, his “clothing.” Note Psalm 104:1–2, which parallels the creation of light in Genesis 1: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; O LORD, my God, You are very great; You

are clothed in glory and majesty, wrapped in a robe of light" (NJPS). If God is portrayed as clothed with light and glory at creation, we may reasonably deduce that the first human beings, who were created in the image and likeness of God both in outward resemblance and in character (as previously discussed), were similarly clothed. They were not clothed in the "normal manner" from a post-fall perspective, but were rather clothed like the One in whose image/likeness they were made. White's description of the clothing of Adam and Eve before the fall thus may be logically deduced from the biblical data alone, when one examines the Hebrew terminology for nakedness and the intertextual connection between the Genesis creation narrative and Psalm 104.

Genesis 3:7: Nakedness of Soul

What is not often realized is that Genesis 2 and 3 utilize two different Hebrew words for "naked."¹⁸ As we have seen, the word for "naked" in Genesis 2:25 means "not clothed in the normal manner," and implies (in light of the *imago Dei* and Psalm 104:1–2) that they were clothed with light and glory like God. By contrast, in Genesis 3:7, 10–11 the Hebrew word for "naked" is *'erom*, which elsewhere in Scripture consistently appears in a context of total (and usually shameful) exposure, describing someone "utterly naked" or "bare."¹⁹ As a result of sin, the human pair finds themselves "utterly naked," bereft of the garments of light and glory, and they seek to clothe themselves with fig leaves.

The nakedness of Adam and Eve described in Genesis clearly involves more than physical nudity, for Adam depicts himself as still naked when God comes walking in the cool of the day, even though already covered with fig leaves (Gen 3:10). The nakedness of Genesis 3 refers not only to the loss of the robes of light and glory, but includes a sense of "being unmasked,"²⁰ a consciousness of guilt, a nakedness of soul. And this is exactly how White describes the guilty pair's nakedness:

After his transgression Adam at first imagined himself entering upon a higher state of existence. But soon the thought of his sin filled him with terror. The air, which had hitherto been of a mild and uniform temperature, seemed to chill the guilty pair. The love and peace which had been theirs was gone, and in its place they felt a sense of sin, a dread of the future, a *nakedness of soul*. The robe of light which had enshrouded them, now disappeared, and to supply its place they endeavored to fashion for themselves a covering; for they could not, while unclothed, meet the eye of God and holy angels.²¹

Once again, White's insights are in harmony with the biblical data, when viewed in light of the original Hebrew terminology.²²

Genesis 4:1: Adam and Eve's Expectation That Cain Would Be the Messiah

Another example of the correlation between Scripture in the original language and White's insights is found in her comments on the thinking of Adam and Eve when their first child Cain was born. White writes, "The Saviour's coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried."²³ Can this thinking of Adam and Eve be substantiated from Scripture? Some years ago I was rereading Genesis 4 in my Hebrew Bible and serendipitously came across something I had never noticed before in verse 1. The verse reads, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain and said, 'I have gotten a man'"—and then most English versions translate—"with the help of the Lord" (e.g. ESV, NIV, NJPS). But note that in modern versions of the Bible which place the supplied words in italics (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NASB), the phrase "the help of" is not present in the Hebrew original.

In the Hebrew of this verse, immediately after the word "man [Heb. *'ish*]" comes the particle *et*, which can either represent the preposition "with" or is an indicator that the next word is a direct object in the sentence. Translating simply as a preposition, "with the Lord," does not really make any sense in the immediate context. One must add "the help of" as many modern translations do, but an examination of other passages in Scripture using this particle as the preposition "with" reveals no clear examples where it can mean "with the help of." Thus, the addition of "the help of" seems unlikely as the best translation.

The alternative that remains is to take the particle *et* as the sign of the direct object, which in English can be represented by an em dash. In harmony with Hebrew syntax, and the allusions to *'ish* in Genesis 2–3, the direct object here should then be translated as a unique title—"the Man"—to match the definite name "Yahweh."²⁴ So the translation of this verse would be: "I have gotten [the] Man—Yahweh! This translation makes good sense, and the grammatical construction is paralleled elsewhere in Scripture.²⁵ Luther seems to take it this way in his 1545 German Bible translation: "Ich habe den Mann, des Herrn" ("I have the Man, the Lord"). Evangelical scholars such as Walter Kaiser have carefully analyzed this passage and have come to the same conclusion.²⁶ This text implies that when Adam and Eve

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were naming Cain, they were thinking he might be the promised Messianic Seed, Yahweh Himself. They hoped that the Messiah had come, only to find out that Cain was not the Messiah but a murderer.

White, under inspiration, wrote what was consistent with the biblical data as revealed in the Hebrew original.

Genesis 4:7: Insights into the Cain-Abel Narrative

Let us look at one more example in Genesis where White's insights correlate with the best (but often overlooked) understanding of the Hebrew original of a biblical passage. In Genesis 4 we find the familiar narrative of Cain and Abel. After Cain and Abel brought their respective offerings to the Lord, and the fruit of Cain was rejected while the animal sacrifice of Abel was accepted, Cain's "face fell" (v. 5). The Lord came to him, and said (v. 7, usually translated thus): "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire [Heb. *teshuqah*] is for you, but you must master [Heb. *mashal*] it" (NASB1995). According to this usual way of translation, the picture is a negative, sinister one, in which sin is compared with a demon or wild beast that desires to dominate over Cain, but Cain must master it.

A careful study of Genesis 4:7 by one of my former doctoral students has challenged this negative interpretation based upon a close reading of the Hebrew text.²⁷ My own more recent study builds upon his analysis, looking at further facets of the Hebrew original, and arrives at the same basic conclusion.²⁸ I share here only a few salient points of the research.

First, the possessive pronoun "its/his" (in the phrase "its desire") in this verse is in the masculine, and therefore, according to a fundamental rule of Hebrew grammar in which the pronoun agrees with its antecedent noun in gender, the noun to which "its/his" refers should be in the masculine. But the word for "sin" is in the feminine! The nearest possible masculine antecedent to the masculine possessive pronoun in this verse is "Abel" (v. 4)!

Second, Abel is the only one who fits in the literary flow of the overall shame-honor plot of the narrative. Abel is the one to whom Cain's anger/displeasure is implicitly directed in previous verses. In context, this displeasure is because he presumed that he had lost (or was in danger of losing) his firstborn status by his noncompliance with the prescribed ritual. Cain had been "shamed" and his face "fell" (in modern shame-honor language, he "lost face"). God promises that if he does well he will be accepted—literally, his "face will be lifted up"—his honor will be restored. All of these points are supported by key Hebrew terminology in the text.²⁹

Hence, the translation of Genesis 4:7 becomes a positive one: "His [Abel's] desire will be for you, and you [Cain] will rule over him." God promises Cain that if he does well, the "desire" (or respect) of Abel for Cain will be restored, and Cain will have the predominance of the firstborn son as before. This translation is supported by the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX): "to thee shall be his submission/turning, and thou shalt rule over him."³⁰

Even though (to my knowledge) no modern Bible versions in White's day (or even today) follow the LXX and give this positive translation implied by the Hebrew original, White favors this translation already in several of her earliest statements interpreting Genesis 4:7. She clearly regards this passage (v. 7b) as referring to Cain and Abel in the context of restoring Cain's firstborn honored status with regard to Abel. Note her citation of Genesis 4:7b in the following:

Abel's offering had been accepted; but this was because he had done in every particular as God required him to do. If Cain would correct his error, he would not be deprived of his birthright: Abel would not only love him as his brother, but, as the younger, would be subject to him. Thus the Lord declared to Cain, "Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."³¹

Three more times White either cites or paraphrases Genesis 4:7b, giving this same basic interpretation:

"And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." Abel's offering had been accepted; but this was because Abel had done in every particular as God required him to do. This would not rob Cain of his birthright. Abel would love him as his brother, and as the younger, be subject to him.³²

The angel tells Cain that it was no injustice on the part of God, or partiality shown to Abel; but that it was on account of his own sin, and disobedience of God's express command, why he could not respect his offering—and if he would do well he would be accepted of God, and his brother should listen to him, and he should take the lead, because he was the eldest.³³

There had been no injustice on the part of God, and no partiality shown to Abel; if he would do well he would be accepted of God, and his brother should listen to him, and he should take the lead, because he was the eldest.³⁴

Remarkably, White follows the biblical data in the original Hebrew and an interpretive tradition (the LXX) regarding Cain and Abel which was not represented by the modern translations of her day.

Exodus 20: The Decalogue

Another example of White's insight capturing the nuance of the original Hebrew is found in regard to the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20. White makes an astounding declaration about the Decalogue: "The Ten Commandments . . . are ten promises. . . . There is not a negative in that law, although it may appear thus."³⁵ Such a statement seems jarring, because when one reads the Ten Commandments in English (or another modern language), they seem to be replete with negatives. Eight of the ten commandments start with the words "Thou shalt not . . ." How could White say there is no negative in the Decalogue? I had always understood this in the sense of "All His biddings are enablings,"³⁶ but I now believe there is a more direct, satisfying—and yes, more biblical/exegetical—explanation.

In light of White's statements, I looked closely at the Hebrew original of the Decalogue, examining the grammatical forms that are used in each one of the Ten Commandments. To my surprise, I found that the eight commandments which begin with "Thou shalt not," according to Hebrew grammar—with the negative particle *lo'* (not) plus the imperfect—can either be translated as negative prohibitions³⁷ or can be translated as "emphatic promises!"³⁸ In harmony with the grammatical sentence structure one can translate these commandments thus: "[I promise you], you will not have any other gods before Me! . . . You will not make for yourself any carved image. . . . You will not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." "[I promise you that] you will not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet." Even the fourth and fifth commandments, which are not framed in the negative—"Remember the Sabbath . . ." "Honor your father and mother . . ."—do not use the imperative, which is the normal way of giving a positive command in *biblical* Hebrew. Rather, they use the infinitive absolute, which in Hebrew can be translated as an "emphatic imperative (command)"³⁹ or as "emphatic promises."⁴⁰ And so each of the commandments can be translated either as a command or a promise.

White's insight is further reinforced by recognizing the significance of the prologue to the Ten Commandments. One's experience (and consequent translation) of the "Ten Words" all depends on where one begins the Ten Commandments. As a child I was taught the Decalogue starting with Exodus 20:3, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." But that is not where the Ten Commandments begin. That is not where God starts speaking. The Decalogue begins in verse 2 where He says,

"I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." In effect, God says, "I have redeemed you by the blood of the Lamb. You are already saved and now I am going to promise you power to keep My law." If one starts in verse 2, the commandments that follow become promises: "I promise you, you won't have any other gods before Me. You won't take My name in vain. You will remember the Sabbath. You will honor your father and mother!"⁴¹

"There is not a negative in that law," White did not know Hebrew grammar, but under prophetic inspiration she provided a gospel-centered insight into the Word that is supported by the original language of the biblical passage.

Exodus 25:9, 40: The "Miniature Model" of the Heavenly Sanctuary

I spent nearly two years of my life writing my doctoral dissertation on the subject of typology. As a major part of my research I examined the various Hebrew and Greek words in the Old and New Testament that are translated "type" or "pattern." In the Old Testament I concentrated on Exodus 25:9, 40 where Moses was told to make everything like the "pattern" (Heb. *tabnit*) that he was shown on the mountain. I did a detailed word study of the Hebrew term *tabnit* (which the LXX translates in Exodus 25:40 as *typos* or "type"), and examined how it was used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. After about six months of intensive research on the meaning of this Hebrew term, I concluded that the word *tabnit* in the Old Testament usage of Exodus 25:9, 40 implies a "miniature model" of an original—so that what Moses saw on the mountain was a miniature model of the original sanctuary which he had seen in heaven. I documented this research in my (now-published) doctoral dissertation.⁴²

Shortly after defending my dissertation, I was urged by one of my professors who had served on my dissertation committee to present the results of this research to a scholarly meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. With fear and trepidation, I presented my findings to a room full of critical scholars, most of whom did not even believe in the reality of the heavenly sanctuary or the veracity of Scripture. After the presentation came the time for questions, and almost everyone in the room raised his/her hand! I looked for the trap door to open under my feet and release me from the imminent onslaught of criticism. But there was no escape. I prayed and began acknowledging the raised hands. To my shock and amazement (and likewise to the shock of the critical scholar moderating the meeting), everyone who made a comment not only agreed with my research but presented further evidence that he/she had discovered in favor of my conclusion!

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Shortly after returning from the Society of Biblical Literature presentation, during my devotional reading in one of White's early books, *Spiritual Gifts*, I fortuitously encountered this electrifying statement: "God presented before Moses a *miniature model* of the heavenly sanctuary, and commanded him to make all things according to the pattern shown him in the mount."⁴³ I wondered, how did White arrive at this insight into the meaning of the word *tabnit* as "miniature model" of the original, without any knowledge of Hebrew, and no modern versions or contemporary commentaries providing this translation (at least none that I have been able to discover so far)? This whole experience was a striking confirmation to me of the accuracy of my conclusion regarding the meaning of *tabnit*, of the veracity of the typological approach toward the sanctuary doctrine, and especially of the reality of White's prophetic gift.

Ezekiel 28: Satan's Celestial Slander of the Character of God

In the introduction to this article, I described how Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 clearly depict the fall of Lucifer and the rise of the great controversy. Until very recently, however, one crucial aspect of the rise of the great controversy that is familiar to Adventists from White's descriptions remained for me without direct biblical substantiation. In the books *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Great Controversy* some seventeen pages delineate how before his expulsion from heaven Satan went about among the angels slandering the character and government of God as unjust.⁴⁴ This major scene of the Great Controversy story can at best only be inferred from biblical statements about Satan as "a murderer from the beginning, and . . . a liar" (John 8:44) and "the accuser of our brethren . . . [being] cast down [from heaven]" (Rev 12:10). But is there a more explicit biblical foundation for Satan's insidious activity of celestial slander even before the creation of this world, as described by White?

By serendipity I was examining a claim by one scholar that much of the description of Satan in Ezekiel 28 is only symbolical and not literal, since—it was argued—Satan is described as engaged in "an abundance of trading" (v. 16) and obviously Lucifer was not literally a heavenly merchant.

I decided to examine the Hebrew word for "trading" (Heb. *rekullah*) and came to a surprising and revealing discovery. The verb *rakal* from which this noun derives literally means to "go about, from one to another (for trade or gossip)."⁴⁵ The noun derivative *rakil* means "slander, tale-bearer," and appears six times in the Old Testament, once in Ezekiel (22:9). The other noun derivative *rekullah*—which is the word for "trading" found in Ezekiel 28:16—appears only in the book of Ezekiel, and all four occurrences come in the section

dealing with Tyre (26:12; 28:5, 16, 18). Most modern versions translate this word throughout as "traffic, trade" or "merchandise," but since the word only appears in this section of the Bible, the context must be the final determiner of meaning.

In descriptions of the merchant city of Tyre, the meaning "traffic" or "trade" fits the context well (Ezek 26:12; 28:5). But with reference to the portrayals of the covering cherub in 28:16, 18, the notion of "trade" does not seem to naturally fit the context. This is recognized by the noted critical exegete Walther Eichrodt, who comments on this passage, "The description of the trespass is a little unexpected, since trade is here suddenly represented as the source of iniquity"⁴⁶

Since this noun is derived from the verb which means "go about, from one to another—either for trade or gossip/slander," it appears very likely that Ezekiel deliberately chooses this rare Hebrew word (instead of the more common term *sakhar*) because it has a potential double entendre. Ezekiel here seems to use a literary device known as a paranomasia or a play on words. Inhabitants of the historical mercantile city of Tyre (mentioned in the first half of Ezekiel 28) clearly "went about, from one to another" for trade among the nations. Likewise, the ultimate ruler of Tyre, Satan (vv. 11–19), in the heavenly "mountain of God" also "went about, from one to another"—not for trade of goods, but for gossip or slander among the angels. Both the earthly and supernatural rulers were literally engaged in "trafficking"—one in merchandise, and the other in slander against God.⁴⁷

The immediate context of Ezekiel 28:16 portrays the fall of the covering cherub from perfection (v. 15) to pride (v. 17). In this setting verses 16 and 18 trace his ensuing steps to perdition. We can best translate verse 16: "By the abundance of your slander [*rekullah*] you [Satan] became filled with violence within, and you sinned. Therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God." With deft brush strokes Ezekiel paints the picture of Lucifer's going about in slander against God, which eventually ripens into open and violent rebellion. Verse 18 reveals that after his expulsion from heaven the fallen cherub continues on earth his "iniquity of slander [*rekullah*]" against God, and the verse also records the divine sentence of Satan's destined fiery destruction because of his "multitude of iniquities."

A closer look at the nature of Satan's slander in the original Hebrew also corroborates White's repeated statements that Lucifer was accusing God of being unjust in His law and in His treatment of himself. For example, White states, "The exaltation of the Son of God as equal with the Father was represented as an act of injustice to Lucifer, who, it was claimed, was also entitled to reverence and honor."⁴⁸

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According to Ezekiel 28:15, the guardian cherub was “blameless” (Heb. *tamim*) in his ways until “iniquity” (Heb. *awlah*) was found in him. Although many translations render *awlah* as “iniquity,” “wrongdoing,” “unrighteousness,” or the like, the first definition of this word given by a standard Hebrew lexicon is “injustice,” and the major headings of meanings in the lexicon are “*violent deeds of injustice*,” “*injustice of speech*,” and “*injustice, in general*.”⁴⁹ I suggest that the use of this specific word for “injustice” rather than a general term for “iniquity” or “sin,” when viewed in the light of other biblical passages relating to the fall of Satan, implies that the guardian cherub cherished a sense of injustice with regard to God’s government, His dealings with him, and his exclusion from a place of equality with God.⁵⁰

Satan’s celestial slander against God’s justice during the rise of the great controversy is not an Adventist version of the story drawn from White’s extrabiblical inspiration; it is striking biblical truth!⁵¹ The lesser light once again has pointed us to the greater light!

Let us now move to some examples from the New Testament.

Matthew 5-7, Mark 3, and Luke 6: Geographical Location of the Sermon on the Mount

When one reads the Gospels that contain the same basic contents of the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt 5-7; Luke 6), it seems on the surface that they contradict one another geographically. Matthew 5:1 records that Jesus “*went up on a mountain*, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.” Luke 6:12-17 indicates that Jesus “*went out to the mountain to pray*” (v. 12), and the next morning “*He chose twelve whom He also named apostles*” (v. 13), and then “*He came down with them and stood in the plain*” (v. 17 KJV). Where was Jesus’ inaugural sermon after appointing the twelve disciples—“on a mountain” or “in the plain”? The difference in geographical details have led some commentators to posit two different sermons, the “Sermon on the Mount” and the “Sermon on the Plain.” Mark 3:13-23 further complicates the geography by stating that Christ “*went up on the mountain and . . . appointed twelve*” (vv. 13-14), and later when “*the multitude came together again [apparently near the Sea, cf. v. 7], so that they could not so much as eat bread*” (i.e., not enough room for them to gather), He “*called them to Himself and said to them in parables*” (v. 23).

A closer look at the crucial Greek phrase translated by the KJV (the version commonly used by White and most people in the nineteenth century) as “in the plain” (Gk. *epi topou pedinou*), reveals that it is best translated as “a level place” (see most recent translations), and does not refer to an expansive plain. In light of this meaning of the Greek phrase, when I read

White’s account of Jesus’ appointing of the Twelve and the Sermon on the Mount in *The Desire of Ages* while actually visiting the probable site of Jesus’ sermon, I was delighted to see how White seamlessly described the scenes, bringing together all the geographical details in the three Gospels in harmony with the meaning of the Greek original. White states that Jesus descended from the mountain where He had ordained the Twelve, came all the way down and to the seashore, found there was not room for the people who were assembling on the seashore, and so then He returned partway back up the mountain and found a level place suitable for the crowds to sit and listen to His sermon:

After the ordination of the apostles, Jesus went with them to the seaside. Here in the early morning the people had begun to assemble. Besides the usual crowds from the Galilean towns, there were people from Judea, and even from Jerusalem itself; from Perea, from Decapolis, from Idumea, away to the south of Judea; and from Tyre and Sidon, the Phoenician cities on the shore of the Mediterranean. “When they had heard what great things He did,” they “came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases: . . . there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all.” Mark 3:8; Luke 6:17-19.

The narrow beach did not afford even standing room within reach of His voice for all who desired to hear Him, and Jesus led the way back to the mountainside. Reaching a level space that offered a pleasant gathering place for the vast assembly, He seated Himself on the grass, and the disciples and the multitude followed His example.⁵²

In my various travels to Israel, I have often had the opportunity to visit the place traditionally (and most probably) identified as the Mount of Beatitudes. One finds that the Church of the Beatitudes is on a spacious level spot, partway up the mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Just below the mountain, on the seashore where Jesus apparently first went to speak (according to Mark), is located an amphitheater-shaped terrain with perfect acoustics for several thousand to hear.⁵³ Another such natural amphitheater with good acoustics for an even bigger crowd is found on the gentle slopes on the level spot partway up the mountain. The topographical data White described perfectly blends the data revealed in the accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, when viewed in light of the original Greek language used by the Gospel writers.

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Matthew 24:6, 13-14: The Meaning of the "End"

In His Sermon on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24, Jesus states, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (v. 14). In this verse, as well as in verses 6-8 and 13, the term "end" (Gk. *telos*) is commonly interpreted as primarily describing the end of the world. However, White interprets these passages as referring primarily to the end of the Jewish nation as a nation with the destruction of Jerusalem. Note her explanation of Matthew 24:6-8:

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, men wrestled for the supremacy. Emperors were murdered. Those supposed to be standing next the throne were slain. There were wars and rumors of wars. "All these things must come to pass," said Christ, "but the end [of the Jewish nation as a nation] is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."⁵⁴

Recent research has confirmed that White's interpretation is in fact the correct one.⁵⁵ The key to unlocking the meaning of this whole chapter (Matt 24) is in the terminological pattern already set forth in the historical context of verses 1-3. In verse 1 the disciples pointed out to Jesus the magnificent buildings of the Jerusalem temple, and in verse 2, Jesus responded, "Do you not see all these things [*tauta*]? Assuredly I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." In this verse the Greek word *tauta*, translated as "these things," clearly refers to the Jerusalem temple in the context of its imminent destruction. Then in verse 3, as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple, the disciples came to Him privately, and asked, "Tell us, when will these things [*tauta*] be? And what will be the sign of your coming [*parousia*] and of the end [*synteileia*] of the age?" Note that the disciples asked two basic questions: (1) regarding the *tauta* (these things), which from the context of the previous verse refers clearly to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple; and (2) regarding the sign of His *parousia* (coming) and of the *synteileia* (end) of the world/age, which terms elsewhere in Matthew always refer to Christ's second coming.

Throughout the rest of Matthew 24 Jesus remains consistent with this terminological pattern. The term *tauta* (these things) and the singular *touto* (this) are

connected with *telos* (end, not *synteileia*) and consistently refer to events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, while the term *ekeinos* (those) is linked with *parousia* (coming, and synonyms) and *synteileia* (end) and refers to events connected with the second advent of Christ.

Thus, the structural flow of Jesus' sermon in this chapter is as follows:

(A) vv. 4-20, the fall of Jerusalem (using the terms *tauta* [these], *touto* [this], and *telos* [end])

(B) vv. 21-31, the *parousia* (using the terms *ekeinos* [those] and *parousia* [coming])

(A') vv. 32-35, the fall of Jerusalem (using the term *tauta* [these])

(B') vv. 36-44, the *parousia* (using the term *ekeinos* [those] and *parousia* [coming])

Note that the Greek word *parousia* (coming) occurs in Matthew only in chapter 24 (vv. 3, 27, 37, 39) and always refers to Christ's second coming in glory. Likewise, the term *synteileia* (end) in Matthew is the term used consistently to refer to the "end of the age" at Christ's second advent (13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20). However, Matthew 24:6-8, 13-14 does not use the Greek word *synteileia*, but rather *telos*, which (in its primary application) refers to the end of the Jewish nation in AD 70 and not the second coming of Christ. This is shown by its occurrence in the context of Matthew 24:4-20, which deals (in its primary application) with the fall of Jerusalem (see the structural flow previously outlined). Throughout the rest of Matthew the term *telos* never refers to the end of the age at the second coming of Christ.⁵⁶

At the same time, because the fall of Jerusalem was presented by Jesus in this chapter as a type of the end of the world, in a secondary, typological sense, these verses can be applied in principle to the preaching of the gospel to the world before Christ's second coming.⁵⁷

This is exactly what White presents in her book *The Desire of Ages*. She quotes Matthew 24:13-14 and shows how these verses refer primarily to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem but have typological application to the end of the world:

In the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction Christ said, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." *This prophecy will again be fulfilled.* The abounding iniquity of that day finds its counterpart in this generation. So with

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the prediction in regard to the preaching of the gospel. Before the fall of Jerusalem, Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, declared that the gospel was preached to “every creature which is under heaven.” Colossians 1:23. So now, before the coming of the Son of man, the everlasting gospel is to be preached “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” Revelation 14:6, 14. God “hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world.” Acts 17:31. Christ tells us when that day shall be ushered in. He does not say that all the world will be converted, but that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”⁵⁸

White has accurately set forth the interpretation of “the end” in Matthew 24 in harmony with the meaning of crucial terminology in the original Greek language.

John 3:3, 7: “Again” or “From Above”?

In his night interview with Nicodemus, Jesus stated to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again [*anōthen*], he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The Greek adverb *anōthen* in the New Testament can mean either “again” or “above,” depending upon the context.⁵⁹ It is widely recognized that in light of the context of John 3, a play on words occurs in which both meanings are intended.⁶⁰ In the King James Version of White’s day, the translation of *anōthen* in the text of these verses is “again,” but many KJV Bibles included the marginal reading “from above.”

White captured this ambiguity of the Greek language in her commentary on these verses, sometimes translating as “born again,”⁶¹ other times “born from above.”⁶² Several references to these verses in her writings include both translations, one for verse 3 and another for verse 7, reflecting the play on words found in the biblical passage. See the following:

The great truth of the conversion of the heart by the Holy Spirit is presented in Christ’s words to Nicodemus: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born *from above*, he can not see the kingdom of God. . . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be *born again*. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.” John 3:3–8, margin.⁶³

The Saviour said, “Except a man be born *from above*,” unless he shall receive a new heart, new desires, purposes, and motives, leading to a new life, “he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3, margin. The idea that it is necessary only to develop the good that exists in man by nature, is a fatal deception. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be *born again*.” 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 3:7. Of Christ it is written, “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men”—the only “name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” John 1:4; Acts 4:12.⁶⁴

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In her various discussions of these verses, White more frequently used the KJV marginal reading “from above” than the translation “again” as found in the main text of the KJV. This comports with the fact that everywhere else where *anōthen* occurs in the Gospel of John, it clearly means “from above” (3:31; 19:11, 23), and commentators recognize this as the primary meaning intended in this context.⁶⁶ The standard New Testament Greek lexicon states that “Nicodemus thinks of physical rebirth [vs. 4], but the narrator shows Jesus with another dimension in mind.”⁶⁷ This is another example of where White’s commentary is sensitive to the play on words discernable in the original New Testament text in the Greek language.

John 12:32: “All Men” or “All”?

As Jesus came to the last week of His life before His crucifixion, He announced to the crowds around Him, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me” (John 12:31–32 KJV, emphasis added). Who will Jesus draw unto Himself? Many modern translations identify those

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drawn to Christ as only the inhabitants of this earth by translating *pantas* as “all men” (KJV) or “all people[s]” (ESV, NKJV). But in the Greek text the word *pantas* (all) occurs without any limiting noun which follows. While none would doubt that humans are included in the word *pantas*, is this terminology limited to humans? In the context of the previous verse, which describes cosmic proportions (using the Greek word *kosmos* for “world” and referring to the casting out of the prince/ruler of this world), this verse may be interpreted cosmically to include not only humans but angels in heaven and inhabitants of the unfallen worlds who rejoice as Satan is cast down.

It is precisely this larger scope of the verse which White offers in her citations of this biblical passage. First, in its application to humanity, she writes, “Christ came to manifest the love of God to the world, to draw the hearts of all men to Himself. He said, ‘And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me’” (John 12:32).⁶⁸ But she elsewhere expands the scope of this verse to include the unfallen angels and the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds:

“Now is the judgment of this world,” Christ continued; “now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die.” This is the crisis of the world. If I become the propitiation for the sins of men, the world will be lighted up. Satan’s hold upon the souls of men will be broken. The defaced image of God will be restored in humanity, and a family of believing saints will finally inherit the heavenly home. . . .

But the work of human redemption is not all that is accomplished by the cross. The love of God is manifested to the universe. The prince of this world is cast out. The accusations which Satan has brought against God are refuted. The reproach which he has cast upon heaven is forever removed. Angels as well as men are drawn to the Redeemer. “I, if I be lifted up from the earth,” He said, “will draw all unto Me.”⁶⁹

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well

as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.⁷⁰

Once again, White has grasped the fuller meaning of the biblical text which becomes evident to the interpreter in light of the original language of the New Testament.

Conclusion

I have not done an exhaustive search of White’s personal library (which I hope to undertake in the future), to determine how many of the biblical insights I have surveyed in this article are found in books to which she had access. In my limited search I have not found support in nineteenth-century scholars or Bible translations for most of the conclusions I have summarized here. But even if some ideas are found to have been drawn from these sources, this will not change my basic thesis. It would still need to be explained how White was guided to select these particular biblical insights and to leave aside the more commonly held conclusions of her time that do not stand the test of later and closer exegetical study.

This article presents only a sample of many similar “burning heart” experiences I have had as an exegete of the Bible in its original languages—instances where White has captured nuances of meaning in biblical passages that have become apparent in the original Hebrew and Greek but are not represented by modern translations, or, conversely, instances where White has provided details about the biblical narratives which I had always assumed were unique to her and not recorded in Scripture, but have later learned are supported by a close reading of the biblical text in the original languages.

A similar kind of testimony could be given regarding details of historical geography, where White’s picturesque descriptions of the localities in which biblical events took place—no doubt based upon her having seen these events in vision—are strikingly confirmed by the recent research of Old Testament geographers and archaeologists, when such information was (as far as I have been able to determine) not available in the historical geographies of White’s day.

I have shared some of the points presented in this paper with several of my colleagues in the Old

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Testament and New Testament departments at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, and have been gratified to learn that they also have had similar “burning heart” experiences with White’s writings when comparing her insights with their own research into Scripture in the original languages. They have compiled their own lists of instances where White’s detailed insights concerning biblical passages and events, which they had assumed were not addressed in the Scriptures, are in fact supported by a close reading of the biblical text in the original languages.

Such “burning heart” experiences powerfully testify to the inspiration of Ellen G. White and the value of her insights into Scripture in light of the original biblical languages.

Endnotes

* This article is a revised and significantly enlarged version of a chapter published as Richard M. Davidson, “Ellen White’s Insights into Scripture in Light of the Original Biblical Languages,” in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, ed. Alberto M. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 155–170.

1 See, e.g., Ellen G. White, “The Origin of Evil,” chap. 29 in *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 492–504, in which chapter both passages are cited repeatedly.

2 Jose Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil” (ThD diss., Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1985).

3 Richard M. Davidson, “The Chiastic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 71–93, and esp. 87–89; and Davidson, “Ezekiel 28:11–19 and the Rise of the Cosmic Conflict,” in *The Great Controversy and the End of Evil: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Ángel Manuel Rodríguez in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, and Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 57–69.

4 “Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.” Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 20, 1903.

5 Frank M. Hasel, “Ellen White’s Use of Scripture,” in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, ed. Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 311. Hasel elaborates further: “In doing so, she is not distorting or twisting Scripture; neither is she unfaithful to Scripture. Instead Ellen White applies the message and gist of Scripture to new situations, helping us to be reminded of God’s wonderful acts in history and His great faithfulness so that we realize that the same God who acted in the past is alive today and can do the same wonderful things for His people as He did in the past” (311).

6 1 Corinthians 2:10–13; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21. Ellen G. White writes, “I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that He is pleased to have me relate or write them.” *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1860), 2:292–293. “Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.” Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, October 8, 1867. “The Spirit of God works upon my mind and gives me appropriate words with which to express truth.” Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, March 10, 1907, Lt 90, 1907.

7 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 45.

8 See Richard M. Davidson, “The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning: Genesis 1–11,” in “*What Are Human Beings That You Remember*

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Them?” *Proceedings of the Third International Bible Conference of Ginosar and Jerusalem*, June 11–21, 2012, ed. Clinton Wahlen (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, Review and Herald, 2015), 17–18.

9 Biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

10 Davidson, “The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning: Genesis 1–11,” 17–18.

11 See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 215: “Aside from its two possibly figurative usages, *tselem* always refers to a physical image, having a formed body.” Waltke suggests that the two figurative uses (Ps 39:6; 73:20) may well come from another root, *il tselem*, meaning “silhouette, fleeting shadow.” John Goldingay draws the implication for the image of God: “An image is the visible representation of something, which suggests God’s image lies in humanity’s bodily nature. . . . [T]he First Testament . . . systematically presupposes a correspondence between God and humanity in its bodily as well as its inner nature.” John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 102–103.

12 See, e.g., Ilona N. Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 61, who summarizes regarding the term *demut*: [*demut*] “is generally used to signify the ‘appearance,’ ‘similarity,’ or ‘analogy’ of nonphysical traits.”

13 Rashkow summarizes, “God says that his intention is to make Adam both in ‘in our image’ (that is, physically similar, whatever that may mean), and in ‘in our likeness’ (having the same abstract characteristics).” *Taboo or Not Taboo*, 61.

14 David Carr summarizes this common notion which is still generally held today by biblical scholars: “Genesis 1 must be talking about something else—anything else—than actual physical resemblance between God and humans.” *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18. Carr counters this notion with solid biblical data from throughout Scripture (17–26). See my discussion of this in Davidson, “The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning: Genesis 1–11,” 17.

15 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 45.

16 For instance, in 1 Samuel 19:24 the term is “used of one, having taken off his mantle, goes only clad in his tunic.” Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 653. Again, in Isaiah 20:2 the reference is to one “dressed with *saq* [sack cloth] only.” Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 735; cf. John 21:7. Other passages employ the term in the sense of “ragged, badly clad” (Job 22:6; 24:7, 10; Isa 58:7; Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 653). Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm identify numerous Old Testament passages where *arom* denotes “lightly dressed” (Isa 20:2, 4; 58:7; Mic 1:8; Job 22:6; 24:6, 7, 10) and one passage where the term refers to a man without armor (Amos 2:16), in *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. under supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2001), 883.

17 Richard M. Davidson, “Creation in the Book of Psalms: Psalm 104,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald

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Klingbeil (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 149–188. Cf. Jacques Doukhan's published dissertation, *The Literary Structure of the Genesis Creation Story*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1978), 81–88, which shows how Psalm 104 follows exactly the same order as the Genesis creation account, and which analyzes the point-by-point parallels between the two passages.

18 Attention in the commentaries usually focuses upon the similarity of sound and spelling between *arummim* (naked) in Genesis 2:25 (referring to Adam and Eve) and *arum* (subtle) in the next verse, Genesis 3:1 (referring to the snake). It is usually suggested that the word for “naked” in 2:25 is used for the sake of a literary play on words. A paronomasia may indeed be involved, but this is not all that is involved! Elaine Phillips notices that in contrast to the word for “naked” in Genesis 2:25, “the word is now [Gen 3:6] slightly different in form” and suggests that “the knowledge they acquired seems somehow to have affected their perception of their nakedness.” “Serpent Intertexts: Tantalizing Twists in the Tales,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10 (2000): 237. But she does not get to the heart of the matter! The change to a different word for “naked” in Genesis 3 has more specific theological significance, as I argue later in this article.

19 See Ezekiel 16:7, 22, 39; 18:7, 16; 23:29; Deuteronomy 28:48. Cf. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 625; and Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, Edward Robinson, Wilhelm Gesenius, and Maurice Robinson, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (n.p.: Christian Copyrights, 1983), 735–736.

20 Claus Westermann, *Creation* (London: SPCK, 1974), 95.

21 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 57 (emphasis added).

22 For further discussion, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 55–58; and Gary A. Anderson, “The Punishment of Adam and Eve in the Life of Adam and Eve,” in *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays*, ed. Gary Anderson et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 57–81.

23 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 31.

24 Examples include Messianic titles in the Hebrew Bible such as “[the] Messiah” (Dan 9:25) and “[the] Son” (Ps 2:12), which have no article but are to be understood as determined nouns based upon theological/messianic context. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 240, para. 13.4c.

25 See, e.g., Joshua 8:13; Judges 7:25.

26 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 37. See also more complete discussion in chapter 6 of my textbook on the sanctuary, *A Song for the Sanctuary: Experiencing God's Presence in Shadow and Reality* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute and Review and Herald Academic, 2022).

27 Joachim Azevedo, “At the Door of Paradise: A Contextual Interpretation of Gen 4:7,” *Biblische Notizen* 100 (1999): 45–59.

28 Richard M. Davidson, “Shame and Honor in the Beginning: A Study of Genesis 4,” in *Shame and Honor: Presenting Biblical Themes in Shame & Honor Contexts*, ed. Bruce L. Bauer (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2014), 43–76.

29 See Davidson, “Shame and Honor,” 3–19.

30 The personal pronoun “his” (Gk. *autou*) is masculine in gender, and thus must refer back to the antecedent masculine noun, Abel. If it referred back to “sin” it would need to be in the feminine form, *autēs*, matching the word for “sin” (*hamartia*), which is feminine. As a matter of fact, the LXX translation of this verse does not even use the noun *hamartia*, but instead uses a verbal form of *hamartanō* (to sin).

31 Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, April 8, 1912, para. 7.

32 Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 16, 1886, para. 9.

33 Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1870), 1:55.

34 Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, February 6, 1879, para. 8.

35 Ellen G. White, *EGW SDA Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 1:1105.

36 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1900), 333.

37 Emil Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 317 (§107o).

38 Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 317 (§107o), 346 (§113ee). For examples of this construction denoting the indicative or emphatic promise, see Exodus 3:21; 14:13; 16:25; 23:26; Deuteronomy 28:12; Psalm 91:5. See

also Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 143: “The Hebrew of the [first] commandment can actually be read as indicative as well as imperative, that is, as a statement (‘You will have no other gods before me’) as well as a commandment (‘You shall have no other gods’). The former understanding would express what will be the consequence of knowing the Lord. If you know who I am and what I have done for you (‘I am the Lord who . . .’), then you will not have other gods before me.”

39 Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 346 (§113bb).

40 Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 346 (§113ee).

41 For further discussion and substantiation, see Richard M. Davidson, “Exodus,” in *Genesis, Exodus*, vol. 1 of *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary*, by Richard M. Davidson and Jacques B. Doukhan (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2025), 1044–1045.

42 See Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 367–388.

43 Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1864), 4a:5.

44 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 35–43; and White, *Great Controversy*, 493–500.

45 Brown et al., *New Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 940.

46 Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 394.

47 Revelation 18 seems to capture this double nuance of Ezekiel's usage. In a passage clearly alluding to Ezekiel 28, the angel speaks of the “merchandise” of various material things in Revelation 18:12–13, but the list concludes by shifting to the spiritual realm: “merchandise . . . of the souls of men.”

48 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 37; “The preference shown to Christ declared an act of injustice both to himself and to all the heavenly host” (40). Again, White writes, “He [Lucifer] sought to create sympathy for himself by representing that God had dealt unjustly with him in bestowing supreme honor upon Christ.” *Great Controversy*, 495.

49 Brown et al., *New Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 732.

50 Even here in Ezekiel 28, verse 17 speaks of the cherub's pride because of his beauty; Isaiah 14:14 expresses Lucifer's desire to be like the Most High; other biblical passages depict the preincarnate Christ as “the Angel of the Lord” (e.g. Gen 16:7, 13; 22:11, 16; Exod 3:2; 13:21; 14:19; Judg 6:11, 14, 22) and Michael the archangel (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; 1 Thess 4:16; Jude 1:9; Rev 12:7), apparently taking the form of an angel. Lucifer apparently became jealous of Christ who was God but appeared as an angel, and felt it was unjust that He was not included in the heavenly counsels between the Father and the Son. Such descriptions of Satan's injustice fit with the overall portrayal of the cosmic conflict in Scripture as the revelation of the justice of God, as will be the climactic exclamation of the universe when the great controversy comes to an end: “Just and true are Your ways, O King of saints” and “Just and righteous are His judgments” (Rev 15:3; 19:2). For further discussion, see Davidson, *Song for the Sanctuary*, 29–36.

51 For further discussion of Satan's slanderous activity attempting to defame God's justice, as presented in this passage, see Richard M. Davidson, “Satan's Celestial Slander,” *Perspective Digest* 1, no. 1 (1996): 31–34; and Davidson, “Ezekiel 28:11–19,” 57–69.

52 White, *Desire of Ages*, 298.

53 Acoustic experts have examined the acoustics here and several other places in Israel where according to the Bible large crowds gathered and reported this in a leading archaeological journal: B. Cobbey Crisler, “The Acoustics and Crowd Capacity of Natural Theaters in Palestine,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 39, no. 4 (1976): 128–141.

54 White, *Desire of Ages*, 628 (brackets in the original).

55 See Richard M. Davidson, “‘This Generation Shall Not Pass’ (Matt 24:34): Failed Or Fulfilled Prophecy?,” in *The Cosmic Battle for Planet Earth: Essays in Honor of Norman R. Gulley*, ed. Ronald A. G. du Preez and Jiri Moskala (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2003), 307–328.

56 Outside of Matthew 24, the term *telos* is used three more times in the book. Matthew 10:22 is given in the context of sending out the Twelve for evangelistic ministry in Israel, and in this passage *eis telos* (without the article) appears “to signify the end of the trials in question.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 256. In Matthew 17:25 the term *telos* refers to “revenue obligation, (indirect) tax, toll-tax, customs duties.” Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer,

William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 999. In Matthew 26:58 *telos* is clearly referring to the end or "outcome" of Jesus' trial (Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 998).
 57 For further discussion of this point, see Davidson, "This Generation Shall Not Pass," 325–327.
 58 White, *Desire of Ages*, 633 (emphasis added).
 59 Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, "ἀνωθεν," 92. For the meaning "again," see Galatians 4:9. For the meaning "from above," see John 19:11; James 1:17. This Greek word can also mean "from the beginning" (Luke 1:3) or "for a long time" (Acts 26:5).
 60 Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, "ἀνωθεν," 92.
 61 E.g., Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 8, 1910.
 62 White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 48; White, *Desire of Ages*, 168; Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973), 22; Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1967), 21; and Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), 70. White more frequently used this marginal reference "from above" than the translation "again" as found in the main text of the KJV. This comports with the discussion in recent commentaries concerning these verses, in which it is

suggested that Jesus intended to raise up Nicodemus' understanding from a physical being "born again" to a spiritual being born "from above." See Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, "ἀνωθεν," 92.
 63 White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 98 (emphasis added).
 64 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 18–19 (emphasis added).
 65 Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 7, 1904, para. 8 (ellipses in the original, emphasis added).
 66 See, e.g., George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 45: "In this context 'from above' in the sense of 'from God' appears to be primarily in mind (this is its meaning elsewhere in the Gospel, including 3:31), the other meaning is naturally subsumed under its primary emphasis."
 67 Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, "ἀνωθεν," 92 (brackets in the original).
 68 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:323. See also, e.g., White, *Steps to Christ*, 26–27; and Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1900), 6:449.
 69 White, *Desire of Ages*, 625–626.
 70 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 68.

ARTICLE

Yahweh Incarnate: A Christological Interpretation of the Exodus Narrative in John's Prologue*

Wilson Paroschi

John's Gospel, and especially its Prologue (John 1:1–18), has played a central role in shaping the church's understanding of the person and identity of Jesus Christ. The opening verse, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (v. 1),¹ already affirms three foundational truths about Jesus: that He is preexistent, distinct from the Father, and equal with the Father.² All these attributes are demonstrated in different ways throughout the Gospel. Yet, the third part of the Prologue (vv. 14–18) seems to make an even bolder Christological claim: that Jesus is in fact the incarnation of the Old Testament God, the God of Israel, an idea that is also found elsewhere in the Gospel. This is the subject of the present article, which is divided into four sections: the first one addresses the question of background, while the remaining three deal with the interpretation of the passage itself, though only insofar as it relates to the main topic.

The Exodus Background

Verses 14–18 of John's Prologue can be described as a passage of its own. Even if the term *logos* ensures continuity with the preceding verses, its sudden reappearance—alongside the shift to the first-person plural, the more pronounced theological tone, and the climactic nature of the argument—seems to justify to some extent a separate treatment. Another significant change has to do with the conceptual background. While in the introductory section of the Prologue (vv. 1–5) John resorts to the creation story of Genesis 1 to emphasize the Logos' divine preexistence with God and creative power,³ he now appeals to the exodus story to bring the Logos from the cosmic sphere and place Him within the realm of human history. And he does that by means of two motifs: the Levitical tabernacle as the medium of God's presence among His people and the giving of the law at Sinai, particularly the second giving following the episode of the golden calf (Exod 32).

The tabernacle imagery, used in John 1:14a–c to articulate the reality of the incarnation, arises from the combination of two key terms, *skēnoō* (to dwell) and *doxa* (glory). The former, which appears only here in the Gospel, recalls the language that the Old Testament, both in Hebrew and in Greek, uses for the tabernacle in the wilderness (*miškān*, *skēnē*),⁴ the portable prototype of the temple and the ancient dwelling place of God in Israel. The latter certainly refers here to the glorious manifestation of God's presence in the tabernacle (see Exod 40:34–38).⁵ As for the giving of the law, there are at least four points of convergence between John 1:14–18 and that story:⁶ (1) the contrast between Moses and Jesus in verse 17 explicitly refers to the giving of the law at Sinai; (2) the statement “we have seen His glory” (v. 14c), while pointing to God's hidden glory in the tabernacle, also brings to mind Moses' request to see God's glory in Exodus 33:18; (3) John's claim that “no one has ever seen God” (v. 18a) echoes God's response to Moses: “You cannot see My face; for no one shall see Me and live” (Exod 33:20 NRSV); and (4) the expression “full of grace and truth” (*plērēs charitos kai alētheias*, v. 14e; cf. v. 17) is a deliberate allusion to *rah-hésed weēmet* of Exodus 34:6.⁷

The reading of John's Prologue against this Old Testament conceptual background is now widely followed. Gone are the days in which scholars could plausibly argue that the Fourth Gospel's Christology is the result of a slow, evolutionary process that was completed only when Christianity moved away from its Jewish borders (and roots) and found itself within a radically different environment, the Greek world. Those who still operate within the constraints of the religio-historical school, thus arguing for Hellenism rather than Judaism as the main source of the Johannine Logos Christology, are definitely few.⁸ In his careful, methodical analysis of all the proposed parallels—from Gnostic and Hermetic literature, from the Old Testament, and from the Jewish interpretive tradition—to determine the cultural context of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, Craig A. Evans concludes that it is to be found entirely within the Jewish synagogal domain. Its specific antecedents, he says, are the “biblical texts relating to creation and the Sinai covenant interpreted against the OT myth of wisdom and ideas of God's dwelling in Israel.”⁹ And it was Jesus' own teaching that facilitated the application of these traditions to His own person. “At no point in this evolution,” Evans continues, “is there a missing link which only Gnostic mythology can supply.”¹⁰ Then, in line with the dominant view of modern New Testament research,¹¹ he affirms that “Gnostic myths of a redeemed redeemer evidently originated in the second and third centuries, borrowing freely from Judaism, Christianity and passages from the Old and New Testaments.”¹²

Jesus, the Revealer

Any adequate interpretation of John 1:14–18 must address the issue of the invisibility of God, which is emphasized in verse 18a: “No one has ever seen God.” Elsewhere in the Gospel (5:37; 6:46; cf. 7:28; 8:19, 54–55; 15:21), as well as in his First Epistle, John repeats the same idea (1 John 4:12; 5:20), which is also found in Paul (Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16). Interpreters in general usually take this statement in connection with the Old Testament period. They point to the fact that it was a given within Judaism of John's time that no human could see God with his or her bodily eyes except in the age to come and, convinced that there is here an allusion to Moses' experience at Sinai (cf. John 1:17), they try to downplay the significance of that experience by insisting on God's words to him, “You cannot see My face; for no one shall see Me and live” (Exod 33:20, NRSV). As for the theophany itself, the most that is conceded is that what Moses saw was nothing more than “the afterglow of the divine glory,”¹³ or “a passing glimpse of God's visible glory.”¹⁴ The next step then is to interpret the following statement (John 1:18b: “the only Son . . . He has made him known,” author's translation) with reference to the revelation brought by the incarnate Christ. In other words, according to the standard interpretation, John 1:18 conveys a contrast between two periods of history: the Old Testament times and the time of Jesus.¹⁵

Nevertheless, though it appears that Moses did not see the face of God, it could be said that for all intents and purposes he saw God when God passed before him (Exod 33:23; cf. 34:6; Num 12:8), something that is attested also in the New Testament (Heb 11:27). In addition, there are at least five other accounts in the Old Testament of people seeing God: Isaiah literally says, “I saw the Lord” (6:1); so do Manoah and his wife (Judg 13:21–22), and the prophet Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:19); Jacob certainly saw him at Peniel (Gen 32:30; cf. 28:10–17), and Abraham at Mamre (18:1–15; cf. 12:7). There could have been others (see Josh 5:13–15; 1 Kgs 19:11–18; Ezek 1:1–28; Dan 7:9–14). Coming back to Moses, the Jewish belief that God could not be seen by mortal eyes definitely did not apply to him, who was the primary hero of the Jews, someone who was regarded as “the friend of God”¹⁶ (cf. Exod 33:11) and even a “divine and holy” person¹⁷ (cf. 7:1). Several Jewish and Samaritan traditions had Moses going up to God on Sinai and actually ascending to heaven. He was thus able not only to speak with God face to face but also share all God's mysteries.¹⁸ In later Jewish midrash, not only Moses but the whole people camped at Sinai had the privilege of seeing God's face and glory,¹⁹ a probable allusion to Exodus 24:10–11, where the elders are also said to have seen God. It is important to note, however, that for John it is not only God Himself but also God's form (*eidōs*)

that has never been seen; not even God's voice (*phonē*) has been heard (John 5:37).

How does John reconcile his emphasis on the invisibility or hiddenness of God with the Exodus narrative, wherein Moses does see God? As Hartmut Gese acknowledges, there seems to be a contradiction here.²⁰ He then tries to explain this difficulty away by also minimizing the revelation to Moses and saying that the revelation was "limited to God's 'passing by' and to seeing His back," in the sense that God "was necessarily hidden by a covering which separates humans from what is transcendent."²¹ Yet, this seems to imply a denial of the Old Testament tradition on John's part. It has been suggested that John 1:18a in fact represents a polemical rejection of the Jewish claims about Moses,²² but two points must be kept in mind: though the context makes it clear that the primary reference of verse 18a is the Sinai theophany, John's statement "no one . . . ever" (*oudeis . . . pōpote*) clearly requires a broader application (cf. 6:46);²³ and John's polemic is against contemporary Judaism, not against Moses or the biblical narrative.²⁴

It is possible that John's descent/ascent motif throughout the Gospel is designed to contradict the claims of Jewish speculative mysticism that Moses ascended into heaven,²⁵ but that Moses, as well as Abraham, Jacob, Isaiah, and others saw God is well established in Scripture, and Scripture was an important ally to John in his dispute with his fellow Jews. In the Fourth Gospel, all references to Scripture are positive (see 5:39; 10:35; cf. 1:45; 7:42; 13:18; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36–37). Even Moses, when properly understood, testifies on behalf of Jesus (5:45–47).

The solution to the difficulty suggested by the statement that "no one has ever seen God" is indeed rather simple, even if far-reaching in its implications. Since there is no question that *theos* in John 1:18a refers to God the Father, as in the following clause (v. 18b) the term is linked to *patēr*, John's point seems to be that on those occasions in Israel's history when God is described as being seen, it was not really God the Father who was seen but Jesus Christ.²⁶ He says, "The only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made him known" (author's translation).²⁷ For the evangelist, therefore, Jesus Christ, the only One to come from God and to have seen God (John 6:46), is the revelation of God (John 14:8–9; 1 John 5:20), God made visible. He is not only the agent of creation (John 1:1–3) but also the agent of revelation—or, of interpretation, as John actually says in 1:18b, where he uses the verb *exēgeomai* (to explain, to interpret). As Tord Larsson declares, "all knowledge of God outside of the revelation in the Logos, both pre-incarnate and incarnate seems to be denied."²⁸ The only difference between the

Old Testament revelations and the incarnation, says Herman Ridderbos, is that the former were temporary and restricted to a few people.²⁹

The Fourth Gospel itself provides explicit evidence for this. Referring to Isaiah's vision of God in the temple, John plainly says that the glory the prophet saw was Jesus', not God the Father's (12:41). Similarly, Jesus's enigmatic statement that Abraham saw His day (8:56), whatever its precise meaning, leaves no doubt that Jesus, not God the Father, was the object of Abraham's vision, so much so that in the sequence Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). In their respective contexts, the references to Isaiah and Abraham make them witnesses to Jesus against the Jews by situating Jesus in the Old Testament era and narrative. This underscores the fact that Jesus is, and has always been, the sole authoritative self-revelation of God. In other words, apart from Jesus Christ there has never been any personal revelation of God.³⁰

Law and Grace at Sinai

With the previous discussion in mind, the distinction in John 1:17 between the law given through Moses (*ho nomos dia Mōyseōs edothē*) and grace and truth occurring through Jesus (*hē charis kai hē alētheia dia Iēsou Christou egeneto*) seems clear. In this verse, John does not mean that the Sinai event has become obsolete, being entirely superseded by the incarnation event. The traditional interpretation of this verse has been greatly impacted by the tension between law and grace in the writings of Paul, as understood by Marcion. The Marcionite influence is still present in those interpretations that assume a complete break between law and grace, as if they originally represented two different systems which were intrinsically opposed to each other and impossible to be reconciled, so that the law needed to be replaced by grace.³¹ A less radical approach views some sort of continuity between the law of the Old Testament and the grace of the New Testament, but as a rule this also ends with the exaltation of grace at the expense of the law. Frank Thielman, for example, argues that "the Mosaic law was characterized by grace; but its measure of grace pales in comparison with what has become available with the appearance of Jesus Christ."³²

There is no question, nevertheless, that John's words should be understood in light of Exodus 34:6, and none of the aforementioned interpretations do justice to the context of that passage. After the episode of the golden calf and the breaking of the tablets of the law by Moses, God asked him to cut new tablets of stone so that He could "write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets" (Exod 34:1). Moses did so, then he went up on Mount Sinai, where God had promised to pass

before him (34:4). When that happened, God Himself proclaimed among His attributes that He is *rab-ḥesed we'emet* (34:6–7). This is exactly what John says about the incarnate Logos in John 1:14e,³³ an idea picked up again in verse 16 and brought to its logical conclusion in verse 17; verse 15 is clearly parenthetical. In other words, on the basis of the Sinai episode—and contrary to what Frank Thielman says—it is not the law proper that was “characterized by grace” but God, who described Himself as a God of “grace and truth.”

Therefore in verse 17 the evangelist is describing what happened at Sinai. He is simply being faithful to the Exodus narrative, wherein the giving of the law through Moses is clearly distinguished from the revelation of God's “grace and truth” by God Himself. John is not contrasting a graceless law with the grace that is available in Jesus. It is important to keep the text as it is, without reading into it an adversative “but” that is not in the Greek text.³⁴ Likewise, it is important to note that in Exodus 34:6–7 there is no indication at all that God's *ḥesed we'emet* to Israel were only partial and thus inferior to His *charis kai alētheia* of the incarnation. Both the prefixed adjective *rab* (abounding) and the five other terms used by God to describe His character (*rahūm*, merciful; *wēhannūn*, gracious; *erek 'appayim*, slow to anger; *nōšer ḥesed*, keeping *ḥesed*; *nōšē*, forgiving) warn us against any attempt to lessen or to limit God's grace to Israel.³⁵ As Walter Brueggemann says, these terms “provide the core vocabulary of the OT affirmation of God's awesome graciousness.”³⁶ In this context they are intended “to assure Moses (and Israel) that God is deeply committed to sustaining covenant with Israel.”³⁷ The only new element introduced by John in his interpretation of the exodus story is that it was Jesus who actually appeared to Moses at Sinai, not God the Father, because for John the Father cannot be seen except through Jesus.

Covenantal Faithfulness

As already mentioned, John 1:17 is nothing but the logical conclusion of the argument which starts in verse 14e, where “grace and truth” is first applied to Jesus. But besides being how God revealed Himself to Moses at Sinai, “grace and truth” (or *ḥesed we'emet*) is how the Old Testament consistently refers to God's covenantal faithfulness (e.g., Gen 24:27; Pss 25:10; 40:10–11; 57:3; 61:7; 85:9–10; 86:15; 89:14; 117:2; 138:2; Lam 3:22–23; Mic 7:20). By applying the same expression to Jesus, John is likely making a further Christological claim: that God's covenantal promise has now been fulfilled in a way that far exceeds that of the exodus.

It is not easy to find precise English equivalents to *ḥesed* and *'emet*, particularly *ḥesed*. While *'emet* can more

simply be construed in terms of “truth” or “faithfulness,” *ḥesed* may encompass a wide variety of meanings, such as “love,” “mercy,” “kindness,” “compassion,” “goodness,” and even “faithfulness,” “loyalty,” and “reliability.”³⁸ When occurring together, the difficulty of understanding them is even greater. *Ḥesed we'emet* are sometimes taken as two separate attributes, which, in reference to God, are manifested in “active kindness and protective faithfulness respectively.”³⁹ The discussion is extensive,⁴⁰ but the conventional view that this compound phrase is actually a hendiadys, in which *'emet* describes or explains *ḥesed*,⁴¹ as received strong support from the minute analysis of Gordon R. Clark.⁴² In *ḥesed we'emet* therefore the main word would be *ḥesed*, while *'emet*, when God is the agent, would point to His genuineness, permanence, and reliability—that is, His unwavering, enduring, reliable commitment to humans in which *ḥesed* is the appropriate action.⁴³

In Exodus 34:6, the meaning of *ḥesed we'emet* must be seen in the context of the covenant and against the episode of the golden calf (chap. 32).⁴⁴ According to the book of Exodus, God announces His intent to fulfill the promise of a covenantal relationship between Himself and His people (2:24–25; 6:2–8). He then delivers Israel from Egypt and discloses to her the laws that would regulate that relationship (19:4–6; 20:1–23:33). When the people pledge to obey Him and the covenant is ratified (chap. 24), God sets forth the plans for the construction of the sanctuary (chaps. 25–31), so that the covenantal promise could come true (cf. 25:8). Before the execution of those plans (chaps. 35–40), however, the Israelites are involved in a frightful act of disobedience, the result of which is the real possibility that God will annul the covenant and destroy them (32:10). After Moses' intercession (33:12–23), God's abundant grace moves Him to forgive the people and to maintain His covenant. Granting Moses' request to see His glory as a sign of His favor towards the people, God reveals Himself, His name, and character, and states among His attributes that He is *rab-ḥesed we'emet* (34:5–7). That was a particularly solemn revelation, coming from the mouth of God Himself in the course of the theophany and highlighting divine mercy and covenantal faithfulness.⁴⁵ Next (chaps. 35–40), the tabernacle is built and God's promise to dwell among His people is fulfilled (cf. 40:34–38).

Thus, by saying that the Logos was “full of grace and truth,” John may want to emphasize God's covenantal faithfulness, loyalty, and commitment. It is important to note that the emphasis in John 1:14–17 falls exactly on *charis*, since *charis* alone is resumed in verse 16.⁴⁶ What the evangelist seems to be arguing is that the incarnation was a sort of antitypical fulfillment of God's covenantal

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dwelling among His people, and so an act of grace and faithfulness on God's part.⁴⁷ This is why he can claim that those who believed in Jesus, including himself (*hēmeis pantes*), have received from that grace, from the "fullness" (*plērōma*) of that grace (v. 16a). There is no question that *plērōma* here bears no technical, gnostic sense. It merely picks up on *plērēs charitos kai alētheias* of verse 14e and underscores that God's abundant faithfulness revealed in the incarnation was abundantly experienced by those who received Jesus.

As the Sinai covenant, after being broken, was renewed and had its promise eventually fulfilled because of God's faithfulness, so the covenantal relationship brought about by the incarnation owed its fulfillment to the same faithfulness of God as manifested through Jesus Christ. This is why John can refer to the incarnation as "grace in the place of [*anti*] grace" (v. 16b).⁴⁸ John does not mean that the grace of Christ has been received in the place of the grace of the law, or that the grace of Christ was superior to the grace of the law, or even that the grace of Christ followed the grace of the law. The law has no grace in itself. In the New Testament the law is never referred to as or containing *charis*, though there is no question that the giving of the law at Sinai was also an expression of God's grace towards Israel (cf. Deut 7:7–9). What John means is only that the grace of Sinai has been replaced by the grace of the incarnation.

The issue of continuity/discontinuity between law and grace is not raised here. Neither is there any hint of a grace available in two degrees—Old Testament and New Testament.⁴⁹ When John 1:16 is read in connection with verses 14e and 17, however, there seems to be a hint of a covenant being replaced by another, in that the symbol meets its reality and the promise its fulfillment. Only in this sense is one superior to the other, for both were covenants of grace, of the same grace, which in both instances was abundantly revealed by Jesus Christ Himself.

Conclusion

John 1:14–18 thus represents what may be regarded as the climax of New Testament Christology: the identification of Jesus Christ with Yahweh, the God of Israel.⁵⁰ This is not, of course, the only passage that affords such an identification, not even in John's Prologue, which at the very start locates the Logos with God in the *en archē* of Genesis 1 and makes Him the Creator through whom all things were made (Gen 1:1–3). It is also possible that in John 1:9–10, John is not referring to the incarnation as such, but rather to the presence of the pre-incarnate Christ in the world and His various appearances throughout Israel's history.⁵¹ As for the rest of the Gospel, passages such as 8:56 and 12:41 seem to

offer explicit support for the view that it was Jesus, not God the Father, who was seen during Old Testament times. Likewise, Jesus' claim that Moses wrote about Him (5:46) and Nathanael's confession that Jesus is the One about whom Moses and the Prophets wrote (1:45) could also be taken to refer to Jesus' actual presence in the Old Testament as the God of Israel, instead of merely portraying Him as the object of prophecy, as commonly understood.⁵² Finally, there is also the absolute *egō eimi* of 8:58 (cf. vv. 24, 28; 13:19), which in the LXX became the equivalent of a divine name, and in Johannine usage appears to indicate Jesus' self-identification with Yahweh.⁵³

Even if the precise meaning of some of these texts is open to question, John's argument in the third part of the Prologue seems clear: just as it happened at Sinai, so it has happened now. Just as Jesus appeared to Moses and dwelt among His people, so He has done now, but with the astounding difference that this has been accomplished through His being made human flesh, causing His glory to become visible to all. But the argument may carry a deeper theological insight. By referring to the incarnation in terms of God's dwelling among Israel in the past, John could be saying that Jesus brought the Sinai covenant, which was intended to be temporary and a shadow of the new era of salvation (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 37:27–28; cf. Heb 8:6–13; 9:9; 10:1), to its soteriological fulfillment, though its eschatological fulfillment is yet to come (cf. Rev 21:3–4). Therefore, to those who accept Him and believe in His name, the new covenant fulfills the typology of the old covenant, making them children of God (John 1:12) and allowing them to experience the fullness of His saving grace (v. 16).

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* Part of this material has previously appeared in Wilson Paroschi, *Incarnation and Covenant in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel*, *European University Studies* 820 (Frankfurt: Lang, 2006).

Endnotes

- 1 All Scripture quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 On the meaning of "and the Word was God" (John 1:1c), see esp. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 255–270.
- 3 There should be no question that the Prologue's opening sentence (*en archē ēn ho logos*) represents a deliberate allusion to Genesis 1:1. This claim is supported by the fact that the expression *en archē* is identical with the LXX's rendering of *bērēšit* in that passage. "That is no mere coincidence," says Ernst

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Haenchen; "the agreement is intentional." *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1–6*, trans. Robert W. Funk, ed. Robert W. Funk with Ulrich Busse, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 109. Ed. L. Miller notes two additional evidences: (1) the allusion to the Genesis creation story is entirely consistent with the Jewish tenor of the Fourth Gospel and, more immediately, of the Prologue itself, and (2) the prepositional phrases *ap'archēs* or *ex archēs* are usual throughout the Greek New Testament and are always employed in the Johannine literature, with this one exception. Ed. L. Miller, "In the Beginning': A Christological Transparency," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 588–589. In addition, there are also the references to God in the beginning (Gen 1:1–2), as well as to light, darkness, and life (vv. 4–5), and finally to creation itself (v. 3), in which *panta* summarizes the entire created order of Genesis 1; see Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 71. John's use of *ginomai* (to become, to happen) instead of *ktizō* (to create; cf. Col 1:15; Rev 4:11; 10:6) to describe the act of creation in John 1:3 not only finds parallels in biblical and extrabiblical literature (cf. Rev 1:1; *Jdt.* 9:5–6; *IQS* 11:10, 18–19; *Gos. Truth* 34:4–6, 21–23) but also is how the LXX consistently renders the Hebrew *hāyāh* (to be, to become) in the creation narrative of Genesis 1; see Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 1, *Alpha–Delta* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 570. In 1:10 John again uses *ginomai* in the sense of "to create" (*ho kosmos di'autou egeneto*). See Paroschi, *Incarnation and Covenant*, 23–30.

4 The verbal form of *miškān* is *šakan*, which also means "to dwell." This word is related to the postbiblical term *šekināh*, which literally means "residence" but most commonly refers to the glory of God present in the tabernacle and the temple. On *šekināh*, see Craig A. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 22 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1989), 71–72.

5 Leon Morris says, "That John wants us to recall God's presence in the tabernacle in the wilderness seems clear from the immediate reference to 'glory,' for glory was associated with the tabernacle." *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 91.

6 See Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 89 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 79–81.

7 In relation to Exodus 34, and echoing the dominant view among Johannine interpreters, Anthony T. Hanson affirms, "It would be impossible to find a Scripture passage which contains more fundamental elements in common with John 1:14–18. I find it inevitable to conclude that the one is the basis of the other." "John 1:14–18 and Exodus 34," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1977): 95. Additional messianic parallels with the exodus story in John include: the bronze serpent (John 3:14–15; cf. Num 21:4–9), the pillar of fire (John 8:12; 12:46; cf. Exod 13:21), the manna (John 6:31–35, 48; cf. Exod 16:1–36; Num 11:1–9), the water from the rock (John 7:38; cf. Exod 17:1–7; Num 20:1–14), the sacrificial lamb (John 1:29, 46; cf. Lev 4:1–5:13), the "signs" of Jesus (John 20:30–31; cf. Deut 34:10–12), and the Prophet like Moses (John 1:21, 15; 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; cf. Deut 18:15–19). See, e.g., Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Exodus in John," in *Exodus in the New Testament*, ed. Seth M. Ehorn, The Library of New Testament Studies 663 (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 88–108.

8 A well-known example is Helmut Koester, who as recent as 2007 still maintained that John's Prologue includes "traditions that have been shaped by a Gnostic view of salvation." *From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 140. See also Stephen J. Patterson, "The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel and the World of Speculative Jewish Tradition," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 323–332.

9 Evans, *Word and Glory*, 198.

10 Evans, *Word and Glory*, 198.

11 For a brief history of the interpretation of John's Gospel and the reasons which led to the rejection of Gnosticism as a possible background for it, see Wilson Paroschi, "Archaeology and the Interpretation of John's Gospel: A Review Essay," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 20 (2009): 67–88.

12 Evans, *Word and Glory*, 199.

13 F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 44.

14 Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 50.

15 See, e.g., D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 134; T. Francis Glasson, *Moses in the Fourth Gospel*, Studies in Biblical Theology 40 (London: SCM, 1963), 25–26; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 1:278; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 169; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 100; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 15; Marianne M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 110–113; and Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 52–53.

16 Philo, *Mos.* 1.156.

17 Philo, *QE* 2.54.

18 Philo, *Mos.* 1.158; *QE* 2.29, 40, 46; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.96; 2 *Bar.* 4:1–7; 59:3–12; 4 *Ezra* 14:3–6; and Marqah, *Memar Marqah* 2.12; 4.3, 7; 5:3. On these traditions, see the seminal discussion by Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 156–159, 205–209, 241–244; on the divine status of Moses according to Philo, see 103–106.

19 For excerpts, see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (Munich: Beck, 1926), 4:939–940.

20 Hartmut Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 208.

21 Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology*, 208.

22 E.g., J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 131n191; and Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 46.

23 Tord Larsson says, "Such passages as 1:18, 6:46, 5:37, 7:28, 8:19, 54f., and 15:21 show that the thought of some degree of hiddenness is an ingredient in the [fourth] Gospel's notion of God." *God in the Fourth Gospel: A Hermeneutical Study of the History of Interpretations*, Coniectanea Biblica 35 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 244.

24 On the hypothesis that John wrote his Gospel within the context of a polemic against traditional Judaism concerning the identity of Jesus Christ, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 1:194–228.

25 On this, see esp. the discussion by Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 44–72.

26 So, e.g., David Eaglesham, "Note on John 1:17," *Expository Times* 16 (1904–1905): 428; Nils A. Dahl, "The Johannine Church and History" in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper*, ed. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 132; Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 151–152; Hanson, "John 1:14–18 and Exodus 34," 96; Morna Hooker, "The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975): 55; Warren Carter, "The Prologue and John's Gospel: Function, Symbol and the Definite Word," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39 (1990): 43–48; and Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 58.

27 On whether the Greek text should read *monogenēs huios* (NIV, NKJV, NRSV) or *monogenēs theos* (ESV, NASB), see Paroschi, *Incarnation and Covenant*, 159n1.

28 Larsson, *God in the Fourth Gospel*, 244.

29 Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 58.

30 In this case, the expression "who is [*hōn*] in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18b, NKJV) should not be read in connection only with the pre-existent Logos or with the historical event of Jesus of Nazareth. Texts such as John 8:56 and 12:41, in addition to 1:1–2, 8:42, 10:30, 16:28, and 17:1, 5, not to mention Jesus' repeated use of *egō eimi* (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; cf. 6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:15; 14:6; 15:5), strongly suggest that the present participle *hōn* represents an ontological statement about Jesus Christ; hence, it is not limited by time. M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 2nd ed., Études Bibliques (Paris: Gabalda, 1925), 28. It is because of

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the perfect communion that exists between the Father and the Son that Jesus can say the otherwise sacrilegious words, "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

31 E.g., Jürgen Becker: "The Christian church should know that Moses and the law belong together. Grace is not to be counted on the side of Moses. It belongs to Jesus Christ, who is not the giver of the law. Christians therefore are under grace and not under the law." *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979–1981), 1:84. See also C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 86; and Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 31. The fascination within some circles of New Testament scholarship for Marcion's understanding of Paul on the relationship between law and grace can be exemplified by this statement of Hans von Campenhausen: "To the extent that Marcion experiences the Gospel once more in its true nature as the redemption of the lost, his theology is primitive Christian in the spirit of Jesus; and in his understanding of faith as freedom from the Mosaic law he is directly akin to Paul." *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1997), 149.

32 Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999), 105. So also J. Ramsey Michaels: "The 'grace' or gift of the law through Moses has now, through Jesus Christ, given way to 'grace and truth.'" *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 90. Other examples include Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 132; Hanson, "John 1:14–18 and Exodus 34," 97; and D. Moody Smith, *John*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 61.

33 It is to be noted that the parallel between John 1:14e and Exodus 34:6 does not involve only *charis kai alētheia* but the whole clause *plērēs charitos kai alētheias*, in which *plērēs* (full) would be John's rendering of the adjective *rah* (lit., abounding), a far better rendering than the LXX's *poly-* (very), as Alexander Tsutserov demonstrates in *Glory, Grace, and Truth: Ratification of the Sinaitic Covenant According to the Gospel of John* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009), 66–130.

34 In his commentary on John, Ernst Haenchen says that "in this verse 'grace and truth' are contrasted with the law that came into being through Moses in a way that does not appear elsewhere in the Gospels." *John* 1, 120. Elsewhere he also says, "This contrast between law and grace is alien to the Fourth Gospel." Ernst Haenchen, "Probleme des johanneischen 'Prologs,'" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963): 323. But why postulate an antithesis alien to John's thought if there is nothing in the Greek (neither *alla* nor *de*) that requires antithesis, and especially if the passage can satisfactorily be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the evangelist's thought? As J. N. Sanders argues, "to make law and grace mutually exclusive may be Pauline, but it does not follow that it is also Johannine," in *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, ed. and completed by B. A. Mastin, Harper's New Testament Commentaries [New York: Harper & Row, 1968], 85).

35 "The multiplication of terms is a deliberate attempt at comprehensive statement." John Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 454.

36 Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:946.

37 Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," 1:947.

38 See Lester J. Kuyper, "Grace and Truth: An Old Testament Description of God, and Its Use in the Johannine Gospel," *Reformed Review* 16, no. 1 (1962): 2–5.

39 So Alfred Jepsen, "āmān," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:314.

40 See Tsutserov, *Glory, Grace, and Truth*, 131–196.

41 In his classical monograph on the subject, Nelson Glueck says that "hesed" corresponds to the demands of loyalty and includes the concept of 'emeth. The phrase *hesed we'emeth* is then to be regarded as a hendiadys in

which 'emeth is an explanatory adjective." *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 55; cf. 102.

42 Gordon R. Clark, *The Word "Hesed" in the Hebrew Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 157 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 242–255.

43 Clark, *The Word "Hesed" in the Hebrew Bible*, 255.

44 Brevard S. Childs says that the narrative which begins with the story of the golden calf reaches its climax in chapter 34, with the restoration of the covenant which had been broken in chapter 32; chapter 33 bridges the two parts of the narrative with the account of Moses' intercession. *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 610–611). Cornelis Houtman contends that no exegesis can do justice to these three chapters if it does not start from the assumption that they form "a unified whole." *Exodus*, trans. Johan Rebel and Sierd Woudstra, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 3:605.

45 "God demonstrated His free act of grace in His choosing Israel to be His people. In that election of Israel He graciously established the covenant, and He graciously forgives the sin of His wayward people. On that foundation He comes to Israel . . . in *hesed* and 'emeth; these terms describe His faithful covenantal loyalty to His people. It is in this Israel can place her trust." Kuyper, "Grace and Truth," 10. See also the discussion by Clark, *The Word "Hesed" in the Hebrew Bible*, 247–252.

46 William J. Dumbrell, "Grace and Truth: The Progress of the Argument of the Prologue of John's Gospel," in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honor of J. I. Packer*, ed. Donald Lewis and Alister McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 115.

47 In fact, "the ultimate expression" of God's covenantal faithfulness, as Andreas J. Köstenberger says in "John," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 422.

48 The preposition *anti* can have different meanings (in the place of, in return for, in behalf of, because of, therefore) in different contexts; see Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 87–88. That in John 1:16 it should be taken as "in the place of," see Ruth B. Edwards, "Charin anti Charitos (John 1:16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988): 3–7. It has been argued that *anti* can also mean "corresponding to," and that this is the case here (M.-É. Boismard, *John's Prologue*, trans. Carisbrooke Dominicans [Westminster: Newman, 1957], 61). The meaning would then be that the grace which the Christian receives corresponds to the source of grace in Christ. Edwards, however, has convincingly shown that *anti* never actually means "corresponding to," except perhaps in certain compounds (e.g., *antitypos*, *antiphōnos*), and that "there is nothing in the context to support this obscure meaning, which must fall on linguistic grounds" ("Charin anti Charitos," 5). A number of interpreters and translators take *anti* in this passage to mean "upon," "in addition to," referring to the inexhaustible bounty of God's gifts, resulting in a constant stream of graces (e.g., Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:275; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* [London: Oliphants, 1972]), 97; and Beasley-Murray, *John*, 15). Though theologically acceptable, this meaning must, according to Edwards, also be rejected "for one very good reason: there is no parallel to this usage in all Greek literature, which uses for this sense not *anti*, but *epi*" (cf. Sir 26:15). If John meant *epi*, Edwards asks, "why did he not write *epi* like Ben Sirach?" ("Charin anti Charitos," 5). As for the alleged parallel in Philo (*Post.* 145), on close inspection *anti* betrays its normal sense, "in the place of/instead of" (Edwards, "Charin anti Charitos," 5–6; and Max Zerwick, sec. 95 in *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* [Rome: Iura Editionis et Versionis Reservantur, Rome, 1963]).

49 To argue that God's grace is available in two degrees, as Edward W. Klink III says, "is to pit Scripture against itself." *John*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 116. It seems reasonable, though, to assume with Boismard that God's grace in Jesus

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Christ “appeared to men’s eyes with an unprecedented precision and clarity.” *John’s Prologue*, 56.

50 This is a recurrent idea in the writings of Ellen G. White. She says, for example, that “in all . . . revelations of the divine presence the glory of God was manifested through Christ. Not alone at the Saviour’s advent, but through all the ages after the Fall and the promise of redemption, ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself’ (2 Cor 5:19). . . . All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ. It was the Son of God that gave to our first parents the promise of redemption. It was He who revealed Himself to the patriarchs. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses . . . held communion with the Saviour who was to come to our world in human flesh; and some of them talked with Christ and heavenly angels face to face. Christ was not only the leader of the Hebrews in the wilderness . . . but it was He who gave the law to Israel. Amid the awful glory of Sinai, Christ declared in the hearing of all the people the ten precepts of His Father’s law. It was He who gave to Moses the law engraved upon the tables of stone.” Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 366; cf. White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 182, 355; White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1900), 287; and White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 52, 500, 555; etc. She also explicitly says that Jesus is the great I AM (White, *The Desire of Ages*, 24–25,

52; White, *Testimonies for the Church* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1900], 6:20; etc.) and the God of the Old Testament (White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:341–342, 392; White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 411; White, *The Story of Redemption* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald], 132; etc.).

51 This should be understood as a departure from my position in Paroschi, *Incarnation and Covenant*, 75–95.

52 E.g., Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 144, 295; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 88, 207; and Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 119, 208. It would be tempting to interpret John 6:32a in keeping with the same concept. In this case, the passage would carry a subtle irony: it was Jesus, not Moses, who gave Israel the manna (cf. v. 31). That is, the contrast in verse 32b would not lie between Moses and God as the giver of the manna, but between the manna itself, “the bread from heaven,” and Jesus as “the true bread from heaven” (cf. vv. 33, 35). The shift in verb tense from the perfect *dedōken* (gave) to the present *didōsin* (gives) would further support this interpretation.

53 So, Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 93–96; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction Translation and Notes AB 29* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1967), 1:533–538; and esp. H. Zimmerman, “Das Absolute Ego Eimi als die neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 4 (1960): 54–69, 266–276.



Do the Wicked Burn Forever in Hell?*

Tom Shepherd

“These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” — Matthew 25:46 ESV



This text uses the word “eternal” twice. The first time it is applied to the punishment of the wicked, and the second time it refers to the eternal life of the righteous. If “eternal life” means a life without end, should not the “eternal punishment” also be without end?

The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:46 is the conclusion of Jesus’ parable or story of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46). The story depicts the Lord’s second coming wherein He divides “the nations”¹ into two clear groups—the sheep and the goats. The sheep are placed on the Master’s right and the goats on the left. Twice in the story the sheep are identified as the righteous (vv. 37 and 46). The goats are never specifically identified, though they are obviously a group opposite to the sheep. Both the sheep and the goats address Jesus as Lord and give fairly similar responses to His words to them.

Jesus addresses the sheep first, calling them blessed and inviting them to enter the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The reason they are invited to enter is that they have cared for Him in the person of the poor and needy. The goats, on the other hand, are called accursed² and are condemned to “the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (v. 41). The reason for the harsh judgment on the goats is their lack of concern for the poor and needy—which Jesus indicates is the same as not serving or helping Him.

Two Approaches to Life

We can see that Jesus presents two very contrary destinies, based on two very different approaches to life in the present world. Those who bless and help others with their time and resources are headed toward an eternal kingdom of joy and blessedness. Those who neglect to help others around them are unaware not only of the needs of these “least” individuals but also of the fact that in so doing they are neglecting Jesus Himself.³ Jesus said they are headed toward something God never intended for people—eternal punishment.

Eternal Punishment

But just what is this “eternal punishment” to which the goats are consigned? The term “punishment” used here is *kolasis*, a fairly rare word in the New Testament, used only here in Matthew 25:46 and in 1 John 4:18. It comes from a root that means “to trim,” “lop,” “mutilate,” “punish,” “chastise.” It has the idea of cutting off what is unnecessary. To be punished by God is to be cut off. It is a consistent teaching of Scripture that the wicked will be punished by the Almighty (Gen 6–9; Ezek 18; Rom 1; Heb 10:29; 2 Pet 2:9; Rev 20). It may not be this which troubles as much as the idea of a punishment that continues throughout eternity. Thus, the word “eternal” is the more crucial one in the phrase “eternal punishment.”

The term “eternal” used here is *aionios*. Its Old Testament counterpart is the Hebrew term *’olam*. Both

terms can mean “eternal, everlasting” or “for a lifetime, as long as life lasts,” depending on what they modify. In Exodus 21:6, a servant who loves his master will serve him *’olam* (forever = all his life). In Jude 7, Sodom and Gomorrah undergo the punishment of *aionios* fire (eternal fire). Obviously, Sodom and Gomorrah are no longer burning; thus the fire was eternal only in the sense of a final or ongoing result, not in the sense of a fire that is still burning or will burn into eternity.

This leads to the question of how the term *aionios* is used in Matthew. He uses the term “eternal” six times (18:8; 19:16, 29; 25:41, 46 [twice]). Three times the term is linked to “life” (thus “eternal life”), and three times it is linked to “fire” or “punishment.” Eternal life is the reward of the righteous and clearly indicates unending existence. Many assume the punishment of the wicked, “eternal fire,” to be unending existence in an ever-burning hell.

The sinners of Sodom are “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” [Jude 7]. The passage *defines* “eternal fire.” It is a fire from God which destroys sinners totally and forever.⁴

Eternal Fire

However, a closer examination of Matthew’s use of the term “fire” suggests another perspective. Matthew uses the word “fire” (Gk. *pyr*) a total of twelve times.⁵

Almost all of these occurrences are linked with the idea of judgment. Especially instructive are the agricultural metaphors used by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:10–12 and by Jesus in the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43. In both cases there is a division made between the good and the bad. The good items are preserved, while the bad items are burned up with fire. The term “burned up” in Greek is *katakaio*, which means “to consume,” “burn up.” The chaff (Matt 3:10–12) or the tares (13:36–43) are consumed by a fire that is unquenchable (3:12). It is not the chaff or tares that endures forever. Since they are combustible they are consumed. But the fire is eternal in its effects (cf. Mark

9:42–50 with the reference to the worm that does not die and the fire that is not quenched).⁶ It is instructive to note in this regard that Jesus does not call the wicked eternal, but rather the fire. The wicked are consumed by the eternal fire (just like the chaff or the tares), and the effect is eternal punishment, not *eternal punishing*.

The Issue of Immortality

The above conclusion is supported by the fact that the righteous will receive immortality only at the first resurrection (1 Cor 15:50–54). Therefore, “eternal life” will be a life without end (Rev 21:4), whereas the unrighteous, who do not have, or receive, immortality (Eccl 9:5–6; 2 Thess 2:9–10), cannot suffer eternally because they are mortal. Their punishment is the second death (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). While the righteous can look forward to a life of eternal bliss, the expectation of the wicked is the fire of judgment that will consume them (Heb 10:27).

Summary

Putting this all together, we see that the punishment the wicked receive is something they bring on themselves by neglecting the needy around them. This links them to the devil and his angels in heading toward just punishment from God. The punishment will involve destruction by fire, but the fire itself, while eternal in effect, will not burn on forever because the wicked are not immortal (cf. Mal 4:1–3).



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Endnotes

* This article was originally published as Tom Shepherd, “Do the Wicked Burn Forever in Hell?,” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 2:293–296 and is reprinted with slight changes.

1 This term in the New Testament often refers to Gentiles. However, at this point in Matthew it seems to include all of mankind, including Israel and the church. Cf. Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 742.

2 The Greek term is a form of the verb *kataraomai*, which means “to curse.” It is used only here in Matthew but also appears in Mark 11:21, Luke 6:28, Romans 12:14, and James 3:9. Compare the concept of being accursed by God in Deuteronomy 21:23.

3 We might object that the story says nothing of salvation by grace through faith apart from works (Eph 2:8–9), and indeed, it seems to suggest salvation by good deeds to the needy. But such would be a misunderstanding of both

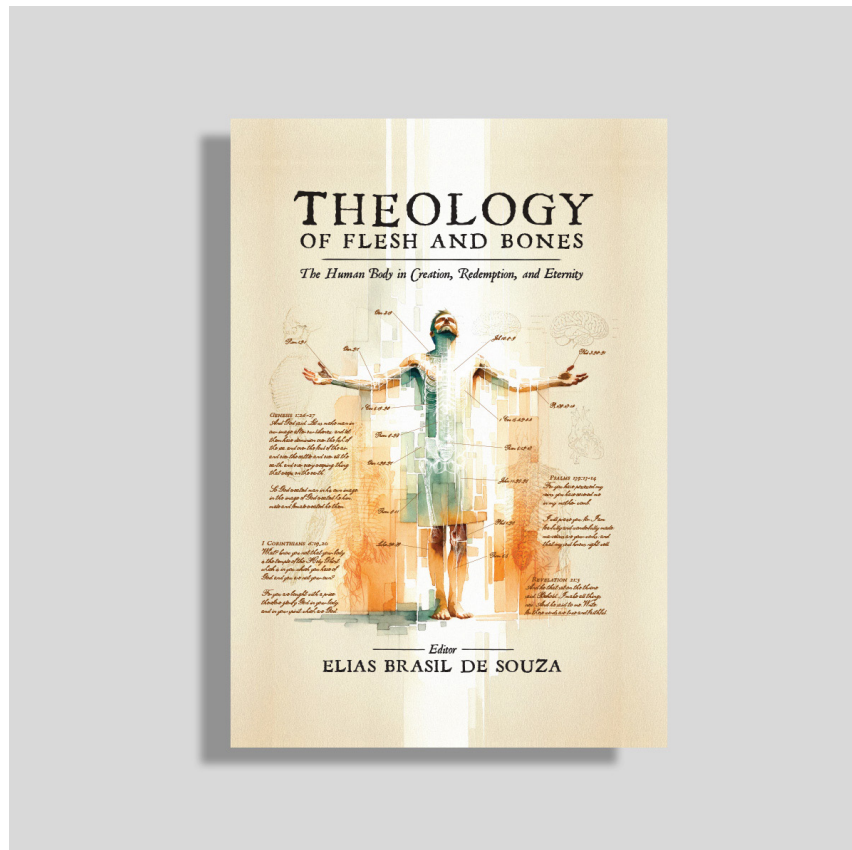
Jesus and Paul. The biblical perspective on human nature is that we act out in our life what we are inside (cf. Matt 7:15–20, “by their fruits you will know them”). Paul suggests the same in Ephesians 2:8–10 where faith is followed by good deeds which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in (cf. also Jas 2:14–26). It is a consistent teaching of Scripture that we are judged by our deeds (2 Cor 5:10; Matt 16:27; Prov 24:12).

4 Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982), 287.

5 Matthew 3:10, 11, 12; 5:22; 7:19; 13:40, 42, 50; 17:15; 18:8, 9; 25:41.

6 Jesus’ mention of the undying worm and unquenchable fire in connection with the punishment of the wicked quotes Isaiah 66:24. The two images convey the same message: the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched until the corpse is fully consumed—that is, the destruction of the wicked will be total.

Theology of Flesh and Bones



Theology of Flesh and Bones

Editor: Elias Brasil de Souza

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