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INTERPRETATIONS OF GENESIS 1:1

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This study presents the three major interpretations of, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1, NKJV) prevalent among Seventh-day Adventists in order to help distinguish between each interpretation, clarify its tenets, and evaluate its theological implications.

Key Words: Genesis 1:1, creation, gap theory, active gap, no gap, passive gap

1. Introduction

Adventists understand the first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (NKJV) as "the foundation for all that follows."¹ Recent debates have swirled around the translation of this verse² leading to diverging interpretations.³ This study will review and analyze the three major interpretations, all of which hold that the Genesis

¹ "An Affirmation of Creation," Report of the International Faith and Science Conferences 2002–2004 (Organizing Committee; Silver Spring, Maryland, October 11, 2004), 1. See <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat54.html> (accessed 28 August 2011).

² Gerhard F. Hasel, "Recent Translations of Gen 1:1: A Critical Look," *The Bible Translator* 22 (1971): 154–167; idem, "The Meaning of Genesis 1:1," *Ministry* (January 1976): 21–24; H. M. Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of Gen 1:1–3," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (1983): 207–209; Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Gen 1:1–3; Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 25–36; E. J. Young, "The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verse Two and Three," in *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia & Reformed, 1976), 1–14.

³ Ferdinand O. Regalado, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1: Our World Only or the Universe?," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13/2 (2002): 109.

creation account must be read literally,⁴ and then provide some considerations for evaluation.

2. Three Major Interpretations of Genesis 1:1

Neils-Erik Andreasen, observes that the opening sentence of the Bible is as plain so that “even a child can understand it, and yet every single word in it has been the object of interpretative disagreement.”⁵ Thus, several interpretations of Gen 1:1 have been proposed by interpreters who understand God as Creator and the Bible as His inspired word. This section examines the three major interpretations of Gen 1:1.⁶

2.1 Active Gap Interpretation

The active gap interpretation holds that “Genesis 1:1 refers to a creation of this physical world and all life upon it” taking place some unknown years

⁴ All three interpretations of Gen 1:1 belong to literal interpretations of the Genesis creation account. The interpretations that view Gen 1:1 from a non-literal perspective, are not considered in the study. Scholars who hold to a non-literal view approach the interpretation of Gen 1:1 in different ways: as mythology based upon ANE parallels, as poetry, as a symbolic text, or as “literary [theological] framework.” For examples and names of each interpretive approach, see Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *Journal of the Adventist Society* 14/1 (Spring 2003): 10–11. Although there are different approaches, the interpretations are based upon but two influences. One influence comes from outside the biblical text and the other from scientific hypothesis or the modern theory of evolution. Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘periods/epochs’ of Time?,” *Origins* 21/1 (1994): 3.

⁵ Niels-Erik Andreasen, “The Word ‘Earth’ in Genesis 1:1,” *Origins* 8 (1981): 13.

⁶ Gerhard Pfandl, “Does Genesis Teach that the Earth Existed in an Unformed State Prior to the Creation Week?” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers* (ed. Gerhard Pfandl; vol. 2; Biblical Research Institute Studies; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 110–111, briefly presents five different interpretations of Genesis 1:1. These five are (1) Genesis 1:1 as a Title; (2) The Ruin-Restoration Theory; (3) The “Passive Gap” Theory; (4) Creation of the Universe on Day One; and (5) The Traditional Creation Theory. Richard M. Davidson, “In the Beginning: How to Interpret Genesis 1,” *Dialogue* 6/3 (1994): 9–10, presents four different interpretations and their variations under the division between the non-literal and the literal interpretations, i.e., (1) Non-literal interpretation; (2) “Active-gap” view; (3) Precreation “unformed-unfilled” view with its three variations; and (4) Initial “unformed-unfilled” view with its two variations (the “no-gap” and “passive-gap” interpretation).

ago (millions or billions of years) "at a time long before the seven days of creation week, but that an appalling cataclysm obliterated every trace of life upon it and reduced its surface to a state."⁷ In other words, Gen 1:1 refers to an old creation of this earth that had been destroyed before the recent creation, which then happened in six literal, contiguous days.⁸ Between the destroyed creation and the six-day creation exists a gap of time, a theory which is based on the interpretation of the first and second verses of Gen 1, and is termed as active gap interpretation (theory).⁹

The active gap interpretation claims that the phrase "the earth was without form and void" (Gen 1:2) should be translated as "the earth *became* without form and void" or "the earth was *caused* to be without form and void," which means that a change occurred from its original condition.¹⁰ Thus for the proponents of the active gap interpretation, Gen 1:3–31 is an account of the recent creation in which God restores what had been ruined previously.

Regarding the gap of time between the so-called old creation of Gen 1:1 and the recent creation in Gen 1:3–31, some proponents claim that (1) Satan was the ruler of the old world; (2) because of Satan's rebellion sin entered the universe; (3) God judged this rebellion and reduced the world to the ruined, chaotic state described in Gen 1:2; (4) the destruction of the old world might have been due directly to Satan's activity or the results of a war between Satan and God; and (5) there might have been repeated creations, each followed by a cataclysm. In this sense, the active gap interpretation (theory) is also called the ruin-restoration theory.

- 7 Gerhard Pfandl, class handouts for CHIS 642 History of the Modern Church: Issues in Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silnag, Cavite, Philippines, 2009.
- 8 In this sense the theory is a form of Old Earth Creationism that posits that the six-day creation involved literal 24-hour days, but that there was a gap of time between two distinct creations, i.e., the first creation in Gen 1:1 and the second creation in Gen 1:2–31. The theory differs from Day-Age Creationism that posits that the "days" of creation were not literal 24-hours, but much longer periods of thousands or millions of years. The theory differs also from Young Earth Creationism that does not posit any gap of time although it agrees concerning the six literal 24-hour days of creation.
- 9 See, for example, Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void: A Study of the Meaning of Genesis 1:2* (Ottawa: Doorway, 1970); and the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1917, 1967).
- 10 H. Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 27–28.

Jack W. Provonsha, a Seventh-day Adventist physician and theologian, seems to favor the active gap interpretation of Gen 1:1.¹¹ Provonsha seems to suggest that Adventists may consider the ruin-restoration theory as propounded by the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Regarding Provonsha's proposal, James L. Hayward observes as follows:

One solution to this knotty problem was proposed by Loma Linda University's theologian and physician Jack Provonsha who . . . was unwilling to skim over the implications of the bulk of scientific data. Instead he resurrected the once-popular "ruin and restoration" theory, suggesting that when Lucifer was cast to earth from heaven he was given "a long period of time" to work out his principle. This included genetic experimentation resulting in the evolutionary process which ultimately led to the development of human-like apes. At some more recent time, Provonsha suggested, God stepped in and created the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.¹²

Provonsha's proposal was the most serious attempt to harmonize the conservative (traditional) Adventist creation theology with scientific data. Nonetheless, this view has received little support from Seventh-day Adventist scholars.

2.2 No Gap Interpretation

Traditionally, the majority of Jewish and Christian interpreters throughout history have believed that God created the original matter called "heavens and earth" (Gen 1:1) out of nothing at the point of their absolute beginning.¹³ Some Evangelical interpreters, who maintain such a traditional way of interpretation of Gen 1:1,¹⁴ see in the first verse of

¹¹ Jack W. Provonsha, "The Creation/Evolution Debate in the Light of the Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan," in *Creation Reconsidered* (ed. James L. Hayward; Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 303–311.

¹² James L. Hayward, "The Many Faces Advent Creationism: '80–'95," *Spectrum* 25/3 (1996): 22. See also Gary Chartier, "Jack Provonsha on Fundamentalist Geology: More needs to be said," *La Sierra Criterion* 57/6 (1985): 1, 4, 8.

¹³ Richard M. Davidson, "The Biblical Account of Origin," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/1 (Spring 2003): 20, lists a number of names such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, C. F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, J. Wellhausen, E. Konig, G. Ch. Aalders, H. Leupoid, Alexander Heidel, B. S. Childs, Derek Kidner, E. j. Young, E. Maly, and others. For a list of major supporters of the no gap theory, see Hasel, "Recent Translations of Gen 1:1: A Critical Look," 163.

¹⁴ See, for example, Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), 17–104; and idem, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984). Among many, Mark F. Rooker has done some of the best research in defense

Genesis the creation of the whole universe on the first day of the creation week.¹⁵ They claim that the six-day creation week begins in Gen 1:1, and not in Gen 1:3. For them there is no gap of time between Gen 1:1 and v. 2. In this sense, this theory is known as the no gap interpretation.

The no gap interpretation understands (1) Gen 1:1 as a declaration that God created "the heavens and the earth," the original matter, out of nothing, (2) Gen 1:2 as a clarification that when it came from the Creator's hand the original material ("the heavens and the earth") was originally "unformed" and "unfilled" (*tōhū wābōhū*), and (3) Gen 1:3–31 as a description of the divine process of forming the unformed and filling the unfilled.

The key difference between the active gap interpretation and the no gap interpretation is that while the former translates Gen 1:2 as "the earth became unformed and unfilled" the latter translates it as "the earth was unformed and unfilled." In other words, the no gap interpretation interprets Gen 1:2 as a state or condition of the earth when it was first created, not as a sequence or action that the earth underwent.¹⁶

Among Seventh-day Adventists, the no gap view has been modified to hold that it was not the universe as a whole that was created on the first day of the creation week but the earth and the planetary system to the

of the traditional view, and presented a fine counter-argument to the gap theory as well as the precreation chaos theory advanced by Waltke. See Mark F. Rooker, "Genesis 1:1–3: Creation or Re-Creation? Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149/595 (Jul–Sep 1992): 316–23; and idem, "Genesis 1:1–3: Creation or Re-Creation? Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149/596 (Oct–Dec 1992): 411–27.

For a more thorough defense of the traditional view, see James B. Jordan, *Creation In Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1999); Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1:1–2.4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1997); Joseph A. Pipa and David W. Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999).

- ¹⁵ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1942), 1:14; R. K. Harrison, "Creation," *The Zandervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (M. C. Tenney, ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975–1976), 1:1022; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, (vol. 1; The New American Commentary; Broadman & Holman, 2002), 140–142.
- ¹⁶ F. F. Bruce, "And the Earth was Without Form and Void," *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 78 (1946): 21–23. See also Weston W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory of Genesis 1:1, 2* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life, 1973), 105; and Randall W. Younker, *God's Creation: Exploring the Genesis Story* (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 1999).

earth.¹⁷ This interpretation harmonizes with the great controversy theme between Christ and Satan and Satan's activities in connection with the creation of the present world.¹⁸ Thus, the expression "the heavens and the earth" in Gen 1:1 refers to the earth's solar system and *tōhū wābōhū* is a description of the condition of the earth immediately after its creation and before the creation of light on the first day of the creation week.¹⁹ Regalado, for example, concludes:

When we closely examine Gen. 1, especially such words as "in the beginning" and "heavens and earth," contextually and linguistically, we can say that the creation narrative is talking only about our world and is silent about the creation of the entire universe, as we understand the universe today. Moreover, in our study of the Hebraic understanding of the world in the framework of creation, we discover that there is no hint whatsoever that Gen. 1 is concerned with the creation of other planets or other worlds.²⁰

The *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* maintains the same interpretation:

An examination of those occurrences [occurrences of the phrase "the heavens and the earth" in the creation narrative] shows that the word "heavens" does not focus upon the universe, but rather upon the atmospheric heavens that surround this earth. Those were the "heavens" that God addressed when He divided the firmament on the second day of Creation week. Those were the heavens in which the birds flew after their creation on the fifth day (Gen. 1:20). Thus the focus of the use of the phrase "heavens and the earth" in Genesis 1 is upon this earth, not the universe or the starry heavens.²¹

¹⁷ Pfandl, Class handouts for CHIS 642 History of the Modern Church: Issues in Seventh-day Adventist Theology, 38.

¹⁸ See Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (4 vols.; Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1945), 3:36–38; and idem, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1947), 13–18.

¹⁹ Pfandl, "Does Genesis Teach that the Earth Existed in an Unformed State Prior to the Creation Week?" in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, 111.

²⁰ Regalado, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1: Our World Only or the Universe?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 120.

²¹ William H. Shea, "Creation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; vol. 12; Commentary Reference Series; Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 420.

Furthermore, Roberto Ouro writes:

To conclude, considering OT and ANE literature, the expression *tōhû wābōhû* in Gen 1:2 must be interpreted as the description of a “desert, uninhabited, arid and unproductive” place. The earth of Gen 1:2, which “was” *hāy’tā tōhû wābōhû*, refers to the earth in an “empty” state with no vegetation, animals, or people. . . . The concept that appears in Gen 1:2 is an abiotic concept of the earth: i.e., Gen 1:2 describes an earth in which there is no life; it presents the absence of life-vegetable, animal, and human. . . . In no case does the phrase describe a chaotic state of the earth as the result of mythical combats between the gods of the myths and legends of Israel’s neighbors.²²

It can therefore be summed up that the no gap theory holds that the creation of the heavens and earth has to do with the creation of this present world and its firmament. There is no gap between the creation of this earth but Gen 1:2 is an explanation of v. 1.

2.3 Passive Gap Interpretation

Within Adventism, there exists an interpretation of Gen 1:1 that is known as the passive gap or soft gap interpretation. According to this view, Gen 1:1 is a reference to the creation of the universe including the earth in its *tōhû wābōhû* (Gen 1:2) state at a certain time before the creation week took place. The creation week then took place several thousand (approximately 6,000) years ago.

The main distinction between the passive gap interpretation and the no-gap interpretation is due to the question *when* did the absolute beginning of “the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1) occur. While the latter interprets Gen 1:1–2 as part of the first day of the seven-day creation, the former interprets Gen 1:1–2 as a chronological unity separated by a gap in time from the first day of creation as described in Gen 1:3. In other words, the former claims that the present earth with its *tōhû wābōhû* (Gen 1:2) state was created before the seven days of creation week while the latter claims that the *tōhû wābōhû* state belongs to the first day of the creation week.²³

²² Robert Ouro, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part I,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35/2 (1998): 276. See also idem, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part II,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 37/1 (1999): 39–53; and “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part III,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38/1 (2000): 59–67.

²³ Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 21.

The passive gap interpretation has a long history in Adventism. An article titled "The Creationist Model of Origins" in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* reports as follows:

Since 1860 the literature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has presented more than one viewpoint concerning creation of the elementary matter from which the physical structure of living organism is formed (Smith 1860). Some scholars and church leaders have taken the position that all elementary matter in our planet came into existence at the beginning of creation week. Others have understood the testimony of Scripture to suggest, or at least allow, that the substance of earth and solar system is the result, at least in part, or creative activity before creation week.²⁴

The *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* also says that "almost from the first, some SDA's have allowed that the Genesis account can be understood to mean that God spoke into existence the substance of the earth sometime prior to the events of the six literal days of creation."²⁵ That is to say there were some materials in existence prior to the six-day creation.

Representing the passive gap interpretation, J. P. Henderson wrote, "the creation of the material substance of the heaven and the earth may have been ages prior to the six day's work."²⁶ In 1898, M. C. Wilcox wrote that "when this 'beginning' was, how long a period it cover, it is idle to conjecture: for it is not revealed. That it was a period which antedated the six day's work is evident."²⁷

The passive gap interpretation is accepted by many Seventh-day Adventist scientists as well as theologians.²⁸ Richard M. Davidson is one

²⁴ "The Creationist Model of Origins," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (rev. ed.; Francis D. Nichol, ed.; Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 1:48. Gerhard Pfandl, however, says that "among our pioneers this was the predominant view," and calls it as the "Adventist-Gap" Theory. See Pfandl, *Class handouts for CHIS 642 History of the Modern Church: Issues in Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 36-37.

²⁵ *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (rev. ed.; 1976), s.v. "Creation,"

²⁶ J. P. Henderson, "The Bible-No. 7," *Review and Herald* 64/27 (July 5, 1887), 418.

²⁷ M. C. Wilcox, "The Gospel in Genesis One," *The Signs of the Times* 24/27 (July 7, 1898), 16.

²⁸ For example, Clyde L. Webster, Jr., former associate director of the Geo-Science Research Institute, in his book *The Earth* writes, "There is no reference in Scripture within creation week that addresses the creation of water or the mineral content of dry land. . . . The only reference made to their creation is 'in the beginning.' It seems possible then that the elementary inorganic matter is not bound by a limited age as

of the well-known advocates of this view. After presenting seven reasons why he prefers the passive gap interpretation over the no gap interpretation²⁹ Davidson expresses:

I conclude that the biblical text of Gen 1 leaves room for either (a) young pre-fossil rock, created as part of the seven days of creation (with appearance of old age), or (b) much older pre-fossil earth rocks, with a long interval between the creation of the inanimate "raw materials" on earth described in Gen 1:1-2 and the seven days of creation week described in Gen 1:3ff (which I find the preferable interpretation).³⁰

3. Considerations for Evaluation

This section provides considerations for the evaluation of the three major interpretations of Gen 1:1 that have been reviewed. The principles for evaluation include the importance of the interpretation of Gen 1:1 in the Seventh-day Adventist church and theology, the *sola scriptura* principle, and the theological relationship between sin and death.

is the living matter." See Clyde E. Webster, Jr., *The Earth* (Silver Spring: Office of Education, NAD, 1989), 43.

²⁹ Davidson, "The Biblical Account of Origins," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 21-24, presents seven considerations for the passive gap interpretation. First, he quoted John Hartley's observation, "The consistent pattern used for each day of creation ['and God said...'] and 'there was evening and there was morning'] tells us that verse 1-2 are not an integral part of the first day of creation (vv. 3-5). That is, these first two verses stand apart from the report of what God did on the first day of creation." See John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (The New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 52. Second, pointing that the phrase "the heavens and the earth" in Gen 1:1 includes the entire universe he concludes that "If 'heavens and earth' refers to the whole universe, this 'beginning' (at least for part of the 'heavens') must have been before the first day of earth's creation week." Third, he argues that the dyad "heavens and earth" (entire universe) of Gen 1:1 are to be distinguished from the triad "heaven, earth, and sea" (the three earth habitats) of Gen. 1:3ff. Fourth, quoting John Sailhamer, "Genesis," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 38, he points out that the Hebrew word for "beginning" in Gen 1:1, *rēšit*, "does not refer to a point in time, but to a period or duration of time which falls before a series of events." Fifth, he points out God's creating by differentiation or separation involving previously-created materials. Sixth, such a "separating" creation concept is supported by the creation account of Gen 2. Seventh, such a pattern of two-stage divine creation activity is seen in other parallels.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

3.1 Importance of Genesis 1:1 for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Theology

The Genesis creation account is the *sine qua non* of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³¹ The interpretation of Gen 1:1 occupies an important article of faith on which Seventh-day Adventist theology as well as its message and mission stand. The reason for this is twofold: (1) Adventists believe in a fiat creation; and (2) they are committed to proclaim the three angels' message of Rev 14.³² The report of the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee to the 2004 Autumn Council of the General Conference made a statement about the significance of Gen 1:1 to the Seventh-day Adventist message and theology as follows:

The very first words of the Bible provide the foundation for all that follow. . . . From this view of the world flows a series of interlocking doctrines that lie at the core of the Seventh-day Adventist message to the world: a perfect world without sin and death created not long ago; the Sabbath; the fall of our first parents; the spread of sin, decay and death to the whole creation; the coming of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to live among us and rescue us from sin by His death and resurrection of all that was lost by the Fall.³³

Thus, it can be said that each of the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is somehow tied to the Genesis account of creation.³⁴ The "Statement on Creation" approved and voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on June 23, 2010, and released at the General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia, June 24–July 3, 2010, states:

Belief in creation is foundational to Seventh-day Adventist understanding concerning much more than the question of origins. The purposes and mission of God described in the Bible, human responsibility for stewardship of the environment, the institution

³¹ Moskala, "The President's Page: Creation-The Sine Qua Non of Adventism," *Journal of the Adventist Society*, 1.

³² Marco T. Terreros, "The Adventist Message and the Challenge of Evolution," *Dialogue* 8/2, 11.

³³ "An Affirmation of Creation," Report of the International Faith and Science Conferences 2002–2004 Organizing Committee, 1.

³⁴ Moskala, "The President's Page: Creation-The Sine Qua Non of Adventism," *Journal of the Adventist Society*, 1.

of marriage and the sacred meaning of the Sabbath and find their meaning in the doctrine of creation.³⁵

Therefore, it is necessary to consider the Seventh-day Adventist message and theology as a whole as essential to and affecting the understanding of Gen 1:1.

3.2 Sola Scriptura

Scripture interprets Scripture. This *sola scriptura* principle lays at the foundation for the understanding of the Gen 1 creation account. That is to say, what the rest of Scripture says about creation is not only important but also necessary to a proper interpretation of Gen 1:1.³⁶ The *sola scriptura* principle also means that conscience, reason, feelings, experiences, as well as scientific knowledge are subordinate to the authority of Scripture in the process of interpretation.

Adventists firmly maintain the *sola scriptura* principle that "Scripture is its own interpreter."³⁷ They "acknowledge that for a correct interpretation of Scripture the Scripture itself is foundational."³⁸ This means that external methods from the twentieth and twenty first centuries cannot be read back into the Bible, but that the Bible must be allowed to speak for itself.³⁹

³⁵ "Statement on Creation: The Bible's Worldview," *Official Statements of Seventh-day Adventist Church*, from <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/bible-worldview.html> (accessed 4 September 2011).

³⁶ Norman R. Gulley, "Basic Issues between Science and Scripture: Theological Implications of Alternative Models and the Necessary Basis for the Sabbath in Genesis 1–2" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/1 (Spring 2003): 196.

³⁷ Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; vol. 12; Commentary Reference Series; Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 64. Don F. Neufeld, "Biblical Interpretation in the Advent Movement," in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (ed. Gordon M. Hyde; Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, 1974), 117–122, shows that Seventh-day Adventists have maintained the *sola scriptura* principle. See also Alberto R. Timm, "A History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on Biblical and Prophetic Inspiration (1844–2000)," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10/1 (Spring 1999): 513–524; and C. Mervyn Maxwell, "A Brief History of Adventist Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/2 (Autumn 1993): 212–217.

³⁸ Frank M. Hasel, "Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture?" in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (ed. George W. Reid; vol. 1; Biblical Research Institute Studies; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 36.

³⁹ This principle does not deny various styles of writing or their historical and chronological contexts, but rather relates them to one another within the whole framework of Scripture.

In applying the *sola scriptura* principle to the doctrine of creation, especially to the interpretation of the Genesis creation account, the question must be asked: "What do other parts of the Bible say about creation?" or "How do other parts of the Bible interpret the Genesis creation account?" The primacy and the sufficiency of Scripture are to be maintained not only in the process of interpreting Gen 1:1, but also in evaluating the interpretations of Gen 1:1.

3.3 Sin and Death

Before choosing a particular interpretation of Gen 1:1, the theological relationship between sin and death needs to be considered. The essential question is, if death existed in the created world before sin came or if death was the result of the fall into sin. As considered earlier, the active gap interpretation postulates that an indefinite span of time exists between Gen 1:1 and v. 2 and that a cataclysmic judgment (including death of animals or other creatures) was pronounced upon the earth during this period. Furthermore, advocates of the active gap interpretation insist that v. 2 describes a changed or destroyed earth of the first creation, and that v. 3 starts the account of the recent creation of the present earth as a re-creation or reforming of the earth from its chaotic state. Therefore, a proper understanding of the relationship between sin and death is critical to the interpretation of Gen 1:1 within the context of Scripture.

The Bible insists that death is an enemy (1 Cor 15:26) and a curse (Gen 3:14–17) pronounced on all creation. The divine judgment came as a result of Adam's sin (Gen 3:17; 1 Tim 2:14), and is not part of God's good creation. Adventists hold that "the Bible attributes the origin of death to sin."⁴⁰ Death is a punishment for sin; death must have come into existence because of Adam's sin.⁴¹ The Bible conveys that there was no death of humans or animals before Adam sinned.⁴² If there were eons of pain,

⁴⁰ Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, "Death: Origin, Nature, and Final Eradication," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Rauol Dederen; vol. 12; Commentary Reference Series; Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 318. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned"(NASB).

⁴¹ See Randall W. Younker, "A Look at Biblical and Ancient Extra-Biblical Perspectives on Death," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 16/1–2 (2005): 30–42. Jacques B. Doukhan also maintains that the Bible denies any death before Adam's sin. See Jacques B. Doukhan, "Where Did Death Come From? A Study in the Genesis Creation Story," *Adventist Perspectives* 4/1 (1990): 16–18.

⁴² Both Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–26 clearly present the fact that death results from Adam's sin.

suffering, destruction, and death before Adam's sin,⁴³ then much of biblical teaching will be questioned or interpreted allegorically. Hence, the entrance of death into the created world must be understood as happening after the fall into sin. Otherwise, the Genesis creation account becomes theologically meaningless.

In conclusion, any attempt that holds that death was a part of God's original creation does not fit with the biblical text. Andreasen notes, "In the light of Bible teaching regarding its origin, death never can be seen as a natural, inevitable consequence of God's creation or as a normal segment of life."⁴⁴ Thus, the active gap interpretation poses a grave theological difficulty.

4. Summary and Conclusions

Considerable debates over the understanding and translation of Gen 1:1 have contributed to the three interpretations as discussed above. This brief study pointed out the distinctions between the different interpretations and offered some principles in evaluating the theological implications from an Adventist perspective.

Some conclusions drawn from this study can be summarized as follows:

1. Three interpretations of Gen 1:1 co-exists among Seventh-day Adventist scholars, the no gap, the passive gap, and the active gap interpretation.
2. The co-existence of the three interpretations of Gen 1:1 calls for a thorough study of each in order to understand which interpretation is coherent with Seventh-day Adventists theology.
3. The principles used in the process of evaluating the different interpretations of Gen 1:1 show that the active gap interpretation does not seem coherent and acceptable to Seventh-day Adventist theology.
4. Genesis 1:1 leaves a possibility for either the passive gap or the no gap interpretation in the context of Seventh-day Adventist theology.

⁴³ Some seem to believe that there was death of animals or humans, or, at least, of plants, before the Fall, i.e., Adam's sin. See Glenn R. Morton, "Death before the Fall: The Theology." <http://home.entouch.net/dmd/death.htm> (accessed 4 October 2011) and Greg Neyman, "Creation Science Issue: Death before the Fall of Adam." <http://www.answersincreation.org/death.htm> (accessed 4 October 2011).

⁴⁴ Andreasen, "Death: Origin, Nature, and Final Eradication," 320.

5. The passive gap and the no gap interpretations do not undermine the authority of the Bible as God's revelation and the superiority of the Bible over scientific knowledge, but call for further theological consideration for a proper interpretation of Gen 1:1.

SAVIOR AND CREATOR

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In the current creation-evolution debate, this article studies the Christological hymn of Col 1:15–20, exploring what it means that Jesus is called creator. The study looks at how the different attributes of Jesus Christ mentioned in the passage relate to the creation theme and how the creation theme affects the concept of Jesus as sustainer and savior. It argues that creation and salvation belong together inseparably.

Keywords: creation, evolution, sustainment, divinity

1. Introduction

During the year 2009, people around the world celebrated the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his most important book, *On the Origin of Species*. Here are some opinions on the evolution versus creation debate and on related concepts such as the Fall. All of the following quotations come from scholars who consider themselves to be Christians:

Francisco J. Ayala, scientist and philosopher writes: "The evidence for evolution is overwhelming."¹ "That evolution has occurred . . . is a fact."² "It was Darwin's greatest accomplishment to show that complex organization and functionality of living beings can be explained as the result of a natural process, natural selection, without any need to resort to a Creator or other external agent."³

On the other hand, scientist Cornelius G. Hunter holds: "How then can evolution be a fact if even the positive evidence does not support it very well? The answer is that evolution is considered to be a fact because

¹ Francisco J. Ayala, *Darwin and Intelligent Design* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), x.

² Ayala, 73.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

Darwinists believe they have disproven the alternative: divine creation."⁴ "Darwinism depends on religion, but only to overrun the opposing theory. . . . Evolution, by default, becomes the explanatory filter for all we observe in nature, no matter how awkward the fit."⁵

The British scientist-theologian Arthur Peacocke takes a different position. He states: "Biological death can no longer be regarded as in any way the *consequence* of anything human beings might have been supposed to have done in the past, for evolutionary history shows it to be the very *means* whereby they appear. . . . The traditional interpretation of the third chapter of *Genesis* that there was a historical 'Fall,' an action by our human progenitors that is the explanation of biological death, has to be rejected. . . . There was no golden age, no perfect past, no individuals, 'Adam' or 'Eve' from whom all human beings have descended and declined and who were perfect in their relationships and behaviour."⁶

Theologian Christopher Southgate talks about "a spurious and equally unscientific appeal to a historical fall."⁷ And philosopher-theologian "Patricia A. Williams objects to fall narratives. . . . From her perspective they are a misreading of Gen 2-3, which [according to her] was misread long ago by Paul in order to provide the 'catastrophe' from which the Christ-event is our 'rescue'."⁸ At least she is clear enough with regard to the implications: If there was no creation, there was no fall, and the coming of Jesus did not mean salvation from sin for humanity. Many Christians are inconsistent by believing in Jesus as savior while denying Jesus as creator.⁹

In Col 1:15-20 Paul records a majestic hymn focusing on Jesus Christ. This is one of the most outstanding christological hymns in the NT:

⁴ Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin's Proof: The Triumph of Religion over Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶ Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine and Human* (enlarged ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 222–223.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸ Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 29.

⁹ Many Christians still use the term "creator" and speak about "creation," however, they when talking about creation they mean theistic evolution or a related concept, not biblical creation. God has "created" through evolution. Biblical words are filled with new meaning, oftentimes against clear intentions of the biblical text. Such a procedure leads to misunderstandings and confusion. It has also been called category translation. See, Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *The Journal of Religion* 41 (July 1961): 204.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

2. Context

2.1 The Historical Context

Colossae was a city about eleven miles from Laodicea and thirteen miles from Hierapolis with its hot springs. Although no modern city was built on top of the ruins, now covered with sand and dirt, Colossae has not been excavated. The Christian church in Colossae was probably founded by Epaphras. Here also played the famous story involving Philemon and his runaway slave Onesimus converted by Paul in Rome.

The church in Colossae was confronted with one or more strange teachings. This may have triggered Paul to send a letter to the Colossian Christians. We do not know the precise nature of the problem but find elements of this teaching by looking at Paul's refutation. Obviously, it was detracting from the person and status of Christ. The letter to the Colossians portrays Jesus in highest terms showing his preeminence. So we can assume that the importance of Jesus must have been downplayed. Dunn writes:

There is general agreement that one reason [why the letter was written], probably the primary reason, was to counteract teaching that might become or already was either attractive or threatening to the baptized in Colossae, particularly with regard to their appreciation of the full significance of Christ. Beyond that, however, views vary quite considerably.¹⁰

¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 23. He deals with the Colossian problem intensively on pages 23–25 as does Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 44 (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), xxx–xxxviii. For further discussion see also D. A. Carson, D. J. Moo, L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 335–337; Guthrie, 546–551; and

In Col 2:8 Paul warns against “philosophy and empty deception.” Angel worship is found in Col 2:18, and “the elements of the world” occur in Col 2:8, 20. These elements of the world can be understood as elementary spirits, namely “the powerful spirit-world” or elementary teaching, which “would presumably describe a purely materialistic doctrine concerned only with this world.”¹¹

Furthermore, extreme forms of asceticism associated with mystical experiences may have been present (Col 2:16),¹² associated with Jewish elements such as circumcision (Col 2:11; 3:11) and references to feasts, new moons, and the Sabbath/Sabbaths (Col 2:16). The “human tradition” of Col 2:8 may have also been a Jewish element. Therefore, it seems best to understand this teaching as a form of syncretism that was attractive to many people including some church members at that time and in the setting of Asia Minor. O’Brien notes: “This is not to suggest, however, that (1) Paul’s language (even when quoting the phrases of his opponents) has been fully comprehended, or that (2) the false teaching was simply Jewish without any admixture of pagan elements such as appear to have been prevalent in Phrygia.”¹³

How to help the church? Paul’s struggle for the Christians in Colossae is recognizable right from the beginning of his letter when he talks about truth (Col 1:5, 6), about Epaphras’ faithful teaching (Col 1:7), and his own desire that the Colossian Christians may be filled with and grow in the knowledge of God (Col 1:9, 10). For Paul the solution to the problem of false teaching is found in Jesus. “A firm grounding in Christology, then, and in its practical implications for the daily life of believers was the best defense against the illusory attractiveness of the Colossian heresy.”¹⁴ Therefore, the christological hymn as well as other statements about Jesus

Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1980), 7:184.

¹¹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 548.

¹² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 26, holds: “The Colossian heresy evidently encouraged the claim that the fullness of God could be appreciated only by mystical experiences for which ascetic preparation was necessary. Paul’s answer to such a claim is that the fullness of God is embodied in Christ, so that those who are united to him by faith have direct access to him to that fullness and have no need to submit to ascetic rigor . . .”

¹³ O’Brien, xxxviii.

¹⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 28.

(e.g., Col 1:26–28; 2:2–3, 6–15, 19; 3:1, 11, 23–24; 4:3) throughout the epistle are of great importance.¹⁵

The christological hymn in Col 1:15–20 portrays Jesus' all encompassing greatness as creator, redeemer, and sustainer of the entire cosmos so that "indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister" (Col 1:23).¹⁶ Again in Col 2 adherence to false teaching is contrasted with life in Jesus. Having received Jesus (Col 2:6), being rooted in him (Col 2:7), having been made complete in him (Col 2:10), having been circumcised in him with a spiritual circumcision (Col 2:11), having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with him from the dead (Col 2:12), having been made alive with him, and having experienced forgiveness (Col 2:13) is to rule out all involvement with contradictory teaching.

2.2 The Literary Context

After a short opening salutation (Col 1:1–2) Paul engages in thanksgiving and, beginning with v. 9, in a prayer for the church in Colossae (Col 1:3–14) stressing in a remarkable way the present reality of the church members' salvation (Col 1:12–14). Then follows the hymn praising the importance and magnificence of Jesus (Col 1:15–20).

In Greek vv. 9–20 consist of one long sentence which makes it somewhat difficult to tell where the prayer ends.¹⁷ Since a poetic section begins with verse 15 and since Paul's prayer for the Colossian Christians to be filled with knowledge, wisdom, and understanding in order to live worthy of the Lord is followed by four present participles describing the actions and the experience of the believers, namely bearing fruit (Col 1:10), increasing in knowledge (Col 1:10), being strengthened (Col 1:11),

¹⁵ Cf. Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 29.

¹⁶ Marianne Meyé Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 28, states that the hymn "contains a number of affirmations about Christ that lay the theological foundation for challenging the Colossian heresy. Specifically, the passage asserts the complete adequacy of God's revelation and salvation in Christ in order to show the futility of trying to gain deeper understanding of or relationship to God through any other means."

¹⁷ Cf. Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 190.

and giving thanks to the Father (Col 1:12), we assume that the prayer reaches up to verse 14.¹⁸

The hymn is clearly linked to and grows out of this section on intercessory prayer. For instance, the mention of God the Father is followed by a participle in the dative and a relative pronoun in the nominative. The mention of the Son is followed by a prepositional phrase in the dative and a relative pronoun in the nominative.

[J]ust as there is movement from 'you' to 'us, where the latter included Gentile and Jew together, so also there is movement from the role of the Father to that of the Son. Thus vv. 12–13 are all about what the Father has done. . . . With the mention of the Son at the end of v. 13, the focus then shifts altogether to what the Son has done (v. 14) and finally to who the Son is in relation to the whole created order (vv.15–16).¹⁹

Verses 21–23 are also related to the hymn, because they apply reconciliation achieved by Jesus to the church members in Colossae.

3. The Structure

A syntactical diagram of Col 1:15–20 seems to indicate that the section consists of three parts, a central piece and two other parts that correspond with each other.²⁰

- ¹⁸ "we have not ceased praying and asking (1:9)
 that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will . . .
 to walk worthy of the Lord . . . (1:10)
 ▪ bearing fruit in every good work (1:10)
 ▪ increasing in the knowledge of God (1:10)
 ▪ being strengthened with all power . . . (1:11)
 ▪ giving thanks to the Father (1:12)
 having qualified you to share in the inheritance . . . (1:12)
 ▫ who has rescued us from the domain of darkness
 ▫ and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son
 (1:13) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of
 sins" (1:14)

¹⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 294.

²⁰ For a discussion of the form of the hymn see Steven M. Baugh, "The Poetic Form of Col 1:15–20," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 227–244.

15 ὅς ἐστινεϊκῶν { τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,
 { πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,

16 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη { • τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς
 { • καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
 { • τὰ ὀρατὰ
 { • καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,
 { • εἴτε θρόνοι
 { • εἴτε κυριότητες
 { • εἴτε ἀρχαὶ
 { • εἴτε ἐξουσίαι
 τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται·

17 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
 καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,

18 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας·

ὅς ἐστιν { ἀρχή,
 { πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
 ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων
 19 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν
 • πᾶν τὸ πλῆρωμα κατοικῆσαι
 20 • καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν,
 εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ,
 • εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
 • εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

From the diagram above, the following outline is derived:

A the image of the invisible God
 the firstborn of all creation.
 For in Him all things were created...
 all things have been created through Him and for Him.

B And He is before all things,
 C and in Him all things hold together.
 B' And He is the head of the body, the church;

A' He is {the beginning
 the first born from the dead
 For in Him it was His Father's good pleasure for all the
 fullness to dwell,
 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself

This hymn has an interesting structure, which may even be a chiasmic structure. The first and the last part seem to correspond, while the first part stresses Jesus as creator (vv. 15–16):

1. The opening phrase *ho estin* in v. 15 is repeated in the beginning of the third part (v. 18b). Both times it refers to Jesus and introduces his supreme status and quality.
2. The term *prōtotokos* follows the opening phrase in v. 15 and the same phrase in v. 18a.
3. As in v. 15 Jesus is characterized in a twofold way, he is the image of God and the firstborn, so in v. 18b, he is the beginning and the firstborn. These two pairs of two seem to be parallel.
4. Verse 16 begins with the phrase *hoti en autō*. Verse 19 uses the same phrase right at its beginning.
5. *Ta panta en tois ouranois kai epi tes ges* occurs in v. 16 and in a slightly modified and inverted form in v. 20, namely *ta panta . . . eite ta epi tes ges eite ta en tois ouranois* pointing to the cosmic and universal dimension of Jesus' activity as creator and redeemer.²¹

²¹ Cf. Larry L. Helyer, "Cosmic Christology and Col 1:15–20," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/2 (June 1994), 235–246. He emphasizes that "Colossians 1:15–20 is a statement of the cosmic significance of Jesus Christ" (246). Vincent A. Pizzuto, *A Cosmic Leap of Faith: An Authorial, Structural, and Theological Investigation of the Cosmic*

6. *Di' autou* and *eis auton* is found at the end of v. 16. All things have been created through Jesus and for him. The same phrases reoccur in v. 20 now relating to reconciliation.²² Actually, in both parts the same prepositional phrases occur in the same order: *en autu, di' autou, eis auton*.
7. The term *pas* is found three times in vv. 15–16 and again three times in vv. 18b–20. *Ta panta* is employed in v. 16 (twice) and 20. It stresses the all-inclusiveness of Christ's work.

The middle section, consisting of vv. 17 and 18, is not disconnected from the other two parts. On the contrary, it shares with them the prepositional phrase *en autu*. It also shares with them the auxiliary verb *estin* in the phrase "he is." And it shares with the other sections the term *pas* and even its neuter plural form including the definite article, namely *ta panta*.

Part 1 All things (*ta panta*, twice) were created through him and for/to him.

Part 2 All things (*ta panta*) hold together in him.

Part 3 All things (*ta panta*) are reconciled through him to him.²³

This central part, also called part 2, consists of three lines which point to three aspects of Jesus' nature and work:

1. He was preexistent, being before all things.
2. He is the sustainer of all things.
3. He is the head of the body, the church.

Christology in Col 1:15–20 (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), comes to a similar conclusion, however, rejects Pauline authorship of this "cosmic εἰκὼν-christology" (249).

- 22 Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (The New International Greek Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 104. Due to textual ambiguity there is, however, some discussion whether the phrase *eis auton* in verse 20 refers to God the Father or Jesus Christ. The majority view is that it refers to God the Father. See, Patzia, 34; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (rev. ed.; Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 76; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 64. However, Fee, 309–313, shows convincingly that *eis auton* in v. 20 refers also to the Son. Among others, he argues that otherwise the personal pronoun must be converted into a reflexive which "was not once done in the long history of the textual tradition" (310) and that the flow of personal pronouns in v. 20 (*di' autou, eis auton, autou, di' autou*) would be destroyed by introducing God the Father and having to revert back to Christ.
- 23 Fee, 312, notes, "we should probably understand the *ta. pa,nta* of this strophe to be identical with the *ta. pa,nta* of the first strophe, so that the 'all things' of both strophes refer to the whole creation."

While preexistence refers back to creation, i.e., to the first part of the hymn, because as the creator of all things Jesus must have been preexistent, headship of the church points to reconciliation through his death on the cross being mentioned in the third part with its implications being described in vv. 21–23. Those who are reconciled form the church whose head Jesus is.²⁴ On the other hand, reconciliation through the shedding of his blood requires his incarnation,²⁵ and his being the firstborn from the dead requires his resurrection. Jesus is the head of the church because of his incarnation, death on the cross, and resurrection.²⁶

The hymn's OT background has been widely discussed. The creation account and Adam, Israel and David as firstborn, and biblical as well as extra-biblical wisdom tradition as possible backgrounds have been proposed.²⁷ Although the OT background cannot be limited to a single passage, it undoubtedly includes creation.

This christological hymn contains many aspects of and deep insights into the life and ministry of Jesus. No wonder that G. Fee declares: "A higher Christology does not exist in the NT."²⁸ Jesus is the creator of the

²⁴ The concept of the church as a body is found also in other Pauline letters, e.g., 1 Cor 12:12; Rom 12:4–5. Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44; Waco: Word Books, 1982), 49, observes: "In Colossians (and Ephesians) there is an advance in the line of thought so that the relationship which the church, as the body of Christ, bears to Christ as head of the body is treated." Patzia, 32, adds: "Only in Colossians and Ephesians is Christ designated as *head* over *the church*. The reason for this surely lies in Paul's intention to proclaim the lordship of Christ over all things." Thompson, 32–33, states: "The church is the body of which Christ, rather than any other lord or deity, is the head; in him the church has its origins, and hence it also finds its identity and unity in Christ. . . The church is a body drawn from every people and social class (3:11), because the head of the church is one whose work is universal and cosmic in its scope, not only in redemption, but already in creation." Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 402, suggests: "At this point [verse 18] the hymn shifts from creation to new creation. Christ as 'the head of the body, the church.' moves well beyond earlier Pauline conceptions of the local congregation as the 'body of Christ' (cf. 1 Cor 12:12, 27; also 10:16–17; Rom 12:5). In view is the universal church and Christ's 'headship'."

²⁵ Fee, 313.

²⁶ Cf. Holladay, 402.

²⁷ Cf. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 58–60, 62; Dunn, 87–90; Fee, 295, 299–301; 521; O'Brien, 43–44; Petr Pokorný, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Epheser* (Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 5; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 62–64.

²⁸ Fee, 303.

cosmos. He is its sustainer²⁹ and “the cosmic glue that holds everything together.”³⁰ He is the reconciler and redeemer who brings about a new creation. These aspects of Jesus’ work cannot be separated from each other.³¹

4. Jesus as Creator

4.1 The Unique NT Perspective

The NT adds a unique dimension to the topic of creation in the OT. Students of Scripture are typically used to have in view both the OT and the NT when it comes to a biblical teaching. And this is good. But let us assume for a moment one had the OT only. What one would hear about creation would be impressive. One would be informed that God created everything including humanity. According to a close reading of the text, this creation was quite recent, several thousand years ago, and took only a few days to be completed. Later the fall changed not only humanity’s relationship with God and introduced death to creation, but also altered the entire ecosystem.

However, without the NT some aspects of creation would not be completely clear. Although the OT points to Christ as the creator in a hidden way,³² it is the NT which clearly spells out that Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, is the creator of all things—John 1:3; Col 1:15–16; Heb 1:2,10. These texts exclude Jesus from the realm of created beings. His role is not exhausted in bringing about salvation. He has also created humankind and has a personal interest in each human being. In addition, the cosmic perspective, which includes more than the creation that we encounter, is spelled out quite clearly in the NT.

The Gospel writers left us also with Jesus’ own statements about creation, for instance, when he said that the Sabbath *was made* for humanity (Mark 2:27–28), or when he confirmed the creation account: “from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For

²⁹ “The world is not part of God nor is God part of the world, but neither does the world exist independently of the sustaining power of God,” writes Thompson, 30.

³⁰ Holladay, 402.

³¹ Thompson, 28, notes: “In its structure, it sets creation and redemption parallel to each other. Each has its focal point in Christ, who is the firstborn, agent, and goal of both creation and new creation.”

³² E.g., the plural in Gen 1:26 and wisdom in Prov 8. Cf. Richard M. Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17/1 (2006): 33–54.

this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh" (Mark 10:6–8). In another place, he talked about "the creation that God created" (Mark 13:19). He also mentioned Abel, the son of Adam of Eve and understood him to be an actual person that lived on earth (Matt 23:35).

The NT authors followed Jesus' example and again and again connected creation, fall, and salvation. One is dependent on the other. No creation, no salvation. According to the last book of Scripture in a time of crisis God's end time people call the human race back to the worship of God as creator (Rev 14:7).

4.2 Jesus in Col 1:15–20

Colossians 1:15 begins with a relative pronoun followed by the auxiliary verb "to be." Its antecedent has to be found in vv. 13 or 14.³³ Undoubtedly, it is God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ. The hymn is thus closely related to Paul's prayer. In addition, the Son is closely linked to the Father who is said to have rescued us (*ruomai*, Col 1:13) while the Son has set us free/delivered us/redeemed us (*apolutrōsis*, Col 1:14). Thus, Father and Son are involved in the process of salvation.

Therefore, the phrase "who is" in verse 15, which is oftentimes translated as "he is," brings along a context pointing to the unity between Father and Son, who share the same concerns, actions, and privileges and thereby point to the divinity of Christ. "[T]he Son who redeems through his own blood is the ultimate expression of God's love for us."³⁴

4.2.1 The Image of God

Colossians 1:15 calls Jesus "the image of the invisible God." The term *eikōn* can be translated as "likeness," "image," "appearance" or "form." It can point to likeness or representation or both.³⁵ The term is used only once in Colossians to refer to Jesus as he relates to God the Father.³⁶

³³ Fee, 297, notes: "What is especially significant for the rest of the narrative is that 'the Son of his love' is the antecedent to all the subsequent pronouns through v. 22."

³⁴ Fee, 142.

³⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 117, mentions Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 3 and the image of the beast in Rev 13.

³⁶ According to Col 3:10, the believer is to be "renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." Cf. O'Brien, 43.

Thompson points out that an image is something visible, while God is invisible.³⁷ This sounds almost like a paradox. On the other hand, "How then can God be known, if he is invisible?", asks Dunn and points to the "image" as bridging "the otherwise unbridgeable gulf."³⁸ "[T]o say that Christ is the *image* of God means that, in some way, the unseen or invisible God becomes visible, moves into our sphere of sense perception, in the life of this human being."³⁹ Patzia explains:

By image, Paul does not mean mere resemblance or similarity, because the Greek word used is *eikon*. This communicates the idea that Christ participates in and with the nature of God, not merely copying, but visibly manifesting and perfectly revealing God in human form (in 2 Cor. 4:4 Paul talks about 'the glory of Christ, who is the image of God').⁴⁰

Vaughan is probably right when he states that the concept of image should not be limited to part of the existence of Christ, whether preexistence, incarnation, or exaltation only.⁴¹ It includes all these, and certainly the incarnation which is presupposed in our passage. The major OT background for the image of God is most probably Gen 1:26–27, the creation account.⁴² In v. 27 the phrase "image of God" is used. Originally, humankind was created in the image of God, but humanity failed in truly representing God. However, Jesus is God's true representative (John 1:18). Through him God can indeed be known. Yet Jesus surpassed Adam and Eve by far in that he became also the one into whose image believers are now being transformed in a kind of new creation. By becoming like Jesus they become in some way like God. "In other words, 'Christ is not only

³⁷ Thompson, 28. The invisibility of God is confirmed in other places such as Rom 1:20; 1Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27.

³⁸ Dunn, 87–88.

³⁹ Thompson, 28.

⁴⁰ Patzia, 30. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 57–58, supports this suggestion: "To say that Christ is the image of God is to say that in him the nature and being of God have been perfectly revealed—that in him the invisible has become visible." He points among others to the Johannine literature and texts such as John 1:18 and 14:9. In the latter Jesus claims: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Wright, 70, goes so far as to say: "From all eternity Jesus had, in his very nature, been the 'image of God', reflecting perfectly the character and life of the Father. It was thus appropriate for him to be the image of God as man."

⁴¹ Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 181.

⁴² Cf. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 58. On page 57 he also points to Eze 1:26. Cf. Moo, 117; Pokorný, 62–63; and Thompson, 28–29.

eikon tou theou, as was Adam, but also king over creation in a way vastly different from the first man."⁴³

4.2.2 The Firstborn of all Creation

Jesus is also the firstborn of/over/before all creation (Col 1:15).⁴⁴ Now creation appears directly. In the LXX, the term *prōtotokos* (firstborn)⁴⁵ occurs about 130 times. Typically, the term *prōtotokos* in the OT is used in the literal sense. There were firstborn among humans, which at least sometimes included females.⁴⁶ The firstborn belonged to God but were replaced by the tribe of Levi.⁴⁷ There were firstborn of animals⁴⁸ which were included in some of the regulations concerning the firstborn of humans.⁴⁹ The human firstborn enjoyed the birthright (Gen 43:37) and a double portion of the inheritance (Deut 21:16–17). According to 2 Chron 21:3, the firstborn son of the king received the kingdom while various gifts were given to the other sons.

However, the term was also used in different ways:

1. Israel as God's people (Exod 4:22) was called "my son, my firstborn." Israel was neither directly and in a literal sense born by God nor was Israel the first of all peoples. According to 2 Sam

⁴³ Tompson, 29.

⁴⁴ The phrase can be understood in a distributive way ("of every creature") or in a collective sense ("of all creation"). Larry R. Helyer, "Arius Revisited: The Firstborn over All Creation (Col 1:15)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31/1 (1988): 62–63, shows that the collective sense is to be preferred. He also discusses the various kinds of genitives that have been proposed for the translation of *prōtotokos pasēs ktisēōs* coming to the conclusion that an objective genitive fits best the text and context (63–65).

⁴⁵ Cf. K. H. Bartels, "Prōtotokos," in *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament 1. Abraham-Israel* (eds. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard; Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag R. Brockhaus, 1977), 280, suggests that *prōtotokos* was formed by using the term *prōtos* and the aorist stem *tek-*. The letter is derived from the verb *tiktō*.

⁴⁶ Gen 10:15; 22:21; 25:13, 25; 27:19, 32; 35:23; 36:15; 38:6, 7; 41:51; 43:33; 46:8; 48:18; 49:3; Exod 6:14; 11:5 (2x); 12:29, 29; 13:13, 15 (2x); 22:29; 34:20; Num 1:20; 3:2, 12, 13, 40, 41, 45, 46, 50; 8:16, 18; 18:15; 26:5; 33:4; Deut 21:15, 16, 17; Josh 6:26 (2x); 17:1, 2; Judg 8:20; 1 Sam 8:2; 14:49 (daughter); 2 Sam 3:2; 13:21; 1 Kgs 16:34; 2 Kgs 3:27; 1 Chron 1:29; 2:3, 13, 25 (2x), 27, 42, 50; 3:1, 15; 4:4; 5:1 (2x), 3, 12; 6:13 (LXX); 8:1, 30, 38, 39; Ps 77:51; 88:28; 104:36; 136:10; Mic 6:7; Zech 12:10.

⁴⁷ Num 3:12, 41, 45; 8:16, 18.

⁴⁸ Gen 4:4; Exod 11:5; 12:29; 13:15; 34:19 (2x), 20; Lev 27:26; Num 3:41; 18:15, 17 (3x); Deut 12:6, 17; 15:19 (3x); 33:17; Neh 10:37.

⁴⁹ Exod 11:5; 12:12, 29; 13:2, 13, 15; Num 3:13; 8:17 (2x).

19:44, the ten tribes contrasting themselves with the tribe of Judah claimed to be the firstborn and have a better claim to David. God declared that he would be "a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (Jer 31:9).

2. A number of times the second born was put in the place of the firstborn and received his position so that a reversal took place. In these cases, the time element was no longer important. Ephraim, the younger brother of Manasseh, was raised to the rank and position of the firstborn (Gen 48:18–20; Deut 33:17; Jer 38:9). Although Shimri was not the firstborn, his father made him first (1 Chron 26:10).
3. According to 1 Chron 5:12, the firstborn named Joel was the chief. Virtually, all English translation render *prōtotokos* in this text as chief, head, or leader. This is due to the fact that the MT uses *rōš*, "head"/ "chief," which the LXX translated with *prōtotokos* indicating that an important element in being the firstborn is leadership.
4. In 1 Chron 11:11 some versions of the LXX use *prōtotokos* while others employ *prōtos*. This may indicate that in some cases the terms were considered exchangeable.
5. Very enlightening is Ps 89 (Ps 88 in the LXX) which takes the concept of leadership one step further. This Psalm describes God's lovingkindness and faithfulness toward David. He had made a covenant with him promising that David's throne would endure forever. David is mentioned by name in v. 3 and again in vv. 20, 35, and 49 (English Bibles),⁵⁰ while God's speech concerning him is not limited to these verses. In v. 27 an incomplete parallelism is found:

I also shall make	him [David]	firstborn,
-	-	the highest of the kings of the earth.

David who was the eighth child of his parents (1 Sam 16:10–11) would be made the firstborn. What this means is expressed in the second half of the verse: David as the firstborn would be the highest of the kings. The covenant with David was finally fulfilled in the Messiah, the antitypical firstborn and the King of kings. Psalm 89:27 does not stress the issues of being born or being the

⁵⁰ English translations and the Hebrew text agree in the numbering of chapters, while the LXX and the MT agree in the numbering of verses.

first chronologically, but emphasizes the special honor, greatness, and authority of the firstborn.⁵¹

Obviously, Zech 12:10 is a messianic prophecy which was understood as such by John in his gospel (John 19:37). The Messiah who would be pierced is compared to a firstborn.⁵² The context seems to suggest that Yahweh is speaking about himself, first in the first person singular and then in the third person singular. Here the issue of being born as well as the time element are irrelevant.

In the NT *prōtotokos* occurs eight times.⁵³ Apart from Heb 11:28 and 12:23 the term always refers to Jesus Christ or, stated differently, all places in which *prōtotokos* appears in the singular talk about Jesus: Jesus was the firstborn of Mary (Luke 2:7), but he is also the firstborn among many brothers (Rom 8:29), the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15), the firstborn from/of the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5), and the firstborn whom the angels worship (Heb 1:6).

As in the OT the NT uses the term literally or figuratively.⁵⁴ Michaelis holds that Luke 2:7 "is the only instance in the NT where . . . *prōtotokos* refers unequivocally to the process of birth, and this in the natural sense."⁵⁵ Spicq, however, considers all NT references to *prōtotokos* apart from the plural found in Heb 11:28 as figurative pointing to "honor, dignity, or preeminence."⁵⁶ In Heb 12:23 the "church of the firstborn" may describe the true members of the invisible church.⁵⁷ This text must also be

⁵¹ W. Michaelis, "prōtotokos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Friedrich; Grand Rapids: Publishing, 1982), 6:874, suggests that in Ps 89 adoption is implied. Earlier he stated that "as an equivalent of בְּכֹרִית this might become increasingly remote and even detached altogether from the idea of birth or the whole question of origin."

⁵² Francis D. Nichol (ed.), *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2002), 4:1113, states: "Looking upon the 'pierced' Messiah . . . perceiving as never before the marvelous love of God in the gift of His Son, men would deeply mourn over their past defects of character. . . John notes that this scripture was fulfilled when one of the Roman soldiers pierced the side of Jesus (John 19:37)."

⁵³ Luke 2:7; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; 11:28; 12:23; Rev 1:5.

⁵⁴ Bartels, 281, distinguishes between *prōtotokos* "im wörtlichen Sinn" and *prōtotokos* "in übertragenem Sinn als Würdeprädikat Jesu."

⁵⁵ Michaelis, 876.

⁵⁶ Cf. Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 211–212.

⁵⁷ Cf. Francis D. Nichol ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2002), 7:487; Bartels, 282.

understood figuratively, because “obviously the church does not consist only of literally firstborn human beings. The expression ‘firstborn’ emphasizes their preeminent status among the ‘sons of God’.”⁵⁸

In Colossians the issue is not whether Jesus was born or created.⁵⁹ The issue is that he is the one through whom creation has become possible. This is stressed in the very next verse: He has created all things. If he created all things, he himself is not created. He is not part of creation. But neither is he born in eternity past. A beginning should not be assigned to Christ. Paul parallels the “firstborn of creation” in v. 15 with the “firstborn of the dead” in v. 18. As Jesus is the firstborn of creation, so he is the firstborn of the dead.⁶⁰ Again the issue is not birth. Jesus was raised from the dead, but not literally born from the dead. But even as the firstborn of the dead he was not the first in a temporal sense. Others were raised before him. He was first in the sense that all resurrections whether past or future were and are dependent on his resurrection.⁶¹ Without his resurrection no other resurrection is possible.

Verse 18 shows what it means that Jesus is the firstborn, namely “that he himself will come to have first place in everything.” As in Ps 89 so here too, being the “firstborn” is associated with being exalted as the supreme

⁵⁸ Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2002), 99. Among scholars there is widespread agreement that the firstborn of Col 1:15 should be understood figuratively. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 243–244, suggests: “Colossians 1:15 means that Christ has the privileges of authority and rule, the privileges belonging to the ‘first-born,’ but with respect to the whole creation.” Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (second ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 714, states: “the expression ‘first-born’ does not primarily mean first in time, but first in rank or preeminent.”

⁵⁹ In his article on wisdom in Prov 8, R. Davidson has investigated the birth language applied to wisdom and has shown that in Prov 8 as well as in Ps 2 birth language has been used to talk about installment into an office. According to Heb 1:3–4, a passage which has various connections to Col 1, Jesus has taken his place at the right hand of God the Father, has become superior to the angels and has inherited a more excellent name. These statements and their contexts suggest that when applied to the Messiah birth language including the term *prōtotokos* points to installment into his heavenly office which took place after Christ's resurrection and ascension.

⁶⁰ Cf. O'Collins, 35. In addition, another element is added to each of the two occurrences: “The image of God”—“the firstborn of creation,” “the beginning”—“the firstborn from the dead.” The two double titles correspond with each other.

⁶¹ Cf. Pokorný, 70; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 71; O'Brien, 51.

king and ruler of the universe. Jesus is the king of creation,⁶² and he is the king of resurrection, another form of creation. Both creation and resurrection are only possible through him.

4.2.3 The Creator of All Things

Jesus as creator has created all things (Col 1:16). The term "all" is stressed throughout the Christological hymn in Col 1:15–20 and occurs eight times, three of the eight occurrences being directly connected to creation.

Verse 16 begins and ends with the statement that all things were created in him (*en autu*), and through him (*di' autou*).⁶³ Later "for him" (*eis auton*) is added. We have already pointed out that these phrases occur in the same order in vv. 19–20. That may be a reason for employing them. How should *en autu* be understood? The phrase can be translated "by him" or "in him." "In him" may suggest that Jesus is the Father's agent in bringing about creation.⁶⁴ However, that would be a repetition of the idea already expressed with the mediatorial role of the firstborn. This is possible, but it is also possible that *en* expresses the same thought that *dia* communicates. Moo suggests that we might be "seeking a specificity that Paul does not intend. He wants to make the very general point that all of God's creative work took place 'in terms of' or 'in reference to' Christ."⁶⁵ Creation did not take place independent of Jesus. It took place in him. He is the originator.⁶⁶

The list of created realities in verse 16 is all inclusive and presents a cosmic picture: heaven and earth, the visible and the invisible, and all the rulers and authorities. This leaves no room for Jesus to be a created being.⁶⁷ "Heaven and earth" is a well-known merism describing the entire universe. It goes back to Gen 1:1.⁶⁸ "The visible and the invisible" may parallel the previous statement. The visible would be what is in the reach of humans, the invisible what transcends our perspective. The four

⁶² Moo, 120, talks about "Christ's mediatorial role in all of creation." O'Brien, 45, stresses that Jesus is "distinguished from all creation (cf. Heb 1:6). He is both prior to and supreme over that creation since he is its Lord."

⁶³ Pokorný, 64, talks about a chiastic structure of verse 16. O'Brien, 45, points out that "in the first clause the aorist tense is employed to draw attention to the historical act, while the second reference uses the perfect to focus on creation's continuing existence." Cf. Wright, 73.

⁶⁴ Wright, 71.

⁶⁵ Moo, 121.

⁶⁶ Cf. O'Brien, 45; Vaughan, 182.

⁶⁷ Cf. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 59.

⁶⁸ Cf. Moo, 121.

elements "thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities" seem to point to personal beings. "Rulers and authorities" (*archai kai exousiai*) appear also in Col 2:10, 15. At least in Col 2:15 they seem to be understood negatively. In Eph 3:10; 6:12 they are spiritual powers, whether good or evil.⁶⁹ "Dominions" (*kuriotēs*) appear also in Eph 1:21 and may likewise refer to spiritual powers. Are these humans and angelic-like beings or just supernatural entities? The latter seems to be the case.⁷⁰ What about the question whether they are both positive and negative or just negative? Since Paul uses "all" heavily, we may assume that they encompass all spiritual powers, although negative powers were not originally created as evil powers.

Since all things are created by Jesus, he cannot be created, or he must have created himself. But the latter option is not feasible because it would require a conscious part of him to exist prior to his self-creation, which in turn would not be a real creation. "He [Jesus Christ] is not simply part of the created world itself."⁷¹ "He [the Son] is not a creature, not even the first creature; he is creator. That places him on God's side of the line ontologically: creator not created."⁷² On the other hand, since Jesus has created all powers and authorities, he surpasses them as the firstborn of all creation. Jesus is presented as the cosmic creator and Lord. "No power structures are . . . independent of Christ."⁷³ Elsewhere in the NT the creator is also clearly portrayed as being God (John 1:1-3). That everything and everyone are created for Jesus means that the entire creation finds its goal, purpose, and destiny in him.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ For a more detailed discussion see Thompson, 36-39, and Pokorný, 66-68.

⁷⁰ Cf. O'Brien, 46.

⁷¹ Wright, 71.

⁷² Talbert, 193. Fee, 504, writes: "So intent is Paul in placing Christ as supreme, and thus above 'the powers,' that he elaborates the Son's role in creation in two ways: first, by using two of the three prepositions that in Rom 11:36 he had used of God the Father . . .; and second, by twice using the all embracing *en autu* (*in him*) regarding the Son's role both in creation itself and in its currently being sustained. Christ the Son is thus both the Creator and the sphere in which all created things have their existence." Cf. Thompson, 31.

⁷³ Wright, 73.

⁷⁴ Moo, 124, states: "Christ stands at the 'beginning' of the universe as the one through whom it came into being, and he stands at its end as the goal of the universe." O'Brien, 47, points out that Jesus Christ as the goal of creation "finds no parallel in the Jewish Wisdom literature or the rest of the extant Jewish materials for that matter." Cf. Vaughan, 182. F. F. Bruce, "Colossian Problems Part 2: The 'Christ Hymn' of Colossians 1:15-20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141/562 (April-June 1984), 103,

4.2.4 The Preexisting One

Jesus is before (*pro*) all things (Col 1:17). Most likely this statement talks about his preexistence. Although it is possible to understand *pro* in terms of rank, in his letters Paul uses it always in a temporal sense.⁷⁵ This is also true for the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11:5) where Pauline authorship is disputed. Probably based on these data Melick declares: "Clearly this comment has a time orientation, and it teaches that before creation Jesus existed."⁷⁶ Not only did he live prior to his incarnation, but he also existed before any other thing. As far as we would like to go back into eternity, there is no time when Christ was not. He is not created or born but is the Creator God. Some scholars point out that this verse may be associated with Jewish wisdom tradition according to which wisdom existed before the creation of the universe (Prov 8:22–31; Sir 1, 4).⁷⁷ Although Paul's statements surpass wisdom tradition, it is evident that in this context Christ's preexistence is linked to his activity as creator.

4.2.5 The Sustainer of All Things

The center of the hymn depicts Jesus as the sustainer of "all things" (Col 1:17). The term *ta panta* used twice in connection with Christ's creation activity links the previous verse to verse 17. "All things" that were created by Jesus are now sustained by him who was before all things and who is the head of his church. The verb "to hold together" is used in the perfect tense underlining Jesus' continuous sustaining activity of all things. "Apart from his *continuous* sustaining activity . . . all would disintegrate."⁷⁸ While Wright concludes that "no creature is autonomous,"⁷⁹ Moo

states: "The concept of Christ as the Goal of creation plays an essential part in Pauline Christology and soteriology."

⁷⁵ The references are Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 2:7; 4:5; 2 Cor 12:12; Gal 1:17; 2:12; 3:23; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9; 4:21; Tit 1:12 apart from Col 1:17. Cf. Moo, 125. Vaughan, 183, holds that the statement primarily has a time reference but may in our context also denote status.

⁷⁶ R. R. Melick. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, (The New American Commentary Nashville, vol. 32; TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 220.

⁷⁷ Cf. Dunn, 93. Talbert, 188–189, discusses Logos and Wisdom. See also Jeffrey S. Lamp, "Wisdom in Col 1:15–20: Contribution and Significance," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41/1 (1998), 45–53. He states on page 53: "[T]hose who seek to understand the passage in terms of its flow of thought from Christ's role in creation to Christ's role in redemption have best retained the integrity of a wisdom interpretation."

⁷⁸ O'Brien, 47.

⁷⁹ Wright, 73.

describes what that means in practical terms: "Without him, electrons would not continue to circle nuclei, gravity would cease to work, the planets would not stay in their orbits."⁸⁰ How it was possible for Jesus to maintain and sustain the universe even during his incarnation surpasses our understanding but this is to be expected, when we talk about God. Being the creator and the sustainer of all creation places Jesus on the divine side.

4.2.6 The Head

The concept of headship (Col 1:18) underlines among other things—such as a relational and organic model and the concept of union—supremacy and rule.⁸¹ The term *kephalē* occurs in Col 1:18; 2:10, 19. The notion of Jesus being the head of the body, the church (Col 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15; Eph 1:23; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30) is a further development of what we find in 1 Cor 12:21, where the head is just a member of the body. Here the head is Christ who governs the entire body. This is an important christological contribution.⁸² The body as the church is now also understood in a wider sense. The church is no longer just a local congregation but the worldwide church of God.⁸³

Again headship is widened in Col 2:10. There Jesus is the head over all rule and authority. He is also seated at God's right hand (Col 3:1). The phrase *pasēs archēs and exousias* (Col 2:10) returns to the *eite archai eite exousiai* of Col 1:16 that were created and therefore also to the creation theme. In the related letter to the Ephesians Jesus is described as the one who has created one church out of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:15), being its head (Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23). Undoubtedly, Christ's headship is connected to the concept of creation.

The headship of Christ, as the last segment of the middle section of the hymn, prepares for the last major part of the hymn (Col 1:18a–20). "[T]he thought moves from creation to new creation."⁸⁴

4.2.7 The Beginning

Jesus is the beginning (Col 1:18). *Arche* can mean "beginning" (Luke 1:2), "beginner"/"domain"/"realm" (Jude 1:6), "principle" (Heb 5:12), and

⁸⁰ Moo, 126.

⁸¹ Talbert, 189, declares: "If verse 17 praised the son as the unifying factor in the cosmos, verse 18a's praise lauds the Son's unifying role in human community."

⁸² Cf. Bruce, "Colossian Problems Part 2," 104. See also footnote 24.

⁸³ Cf. Dunn, 96; Moo, 127; Wright, 73–74.

⁸⁴ Wright, 73. Dunn, 96, talks about "the church as the greenhouse in and by means of which the green shoots of God's purpose in and for creation are brought on."

"corner" (Acts 10:11). In order to determine the right meaning the context must be consulted. Probably, the most important shades of meaning are "beginning," "originator," and "ruler."⁸⁵

The term occurs four times in Colossians. According to Col 1:16, Jesus has created all rulers (*archai*). According to Col 1:18 and context, he is the beginning (*arche*), the ruler that has supremacy over all other rulers. Therefore, the term points to Christ's primacy and sheds light on *prōtotokos* found in the immediate context.⁸⁶ This is confirmed by the other two texts dealing with *arche* in this letter. According to Col 2:10, Jesus "is the head over all rule (*arches*) and authority." Colossians 2:15 teaches "that God has, in Christ, 'stripped' the rulers (*archas*) and authorities and held them up to contempt."⁸⁷ Possibly, the letter to the Colossians uses *arche* consistently in the sense of "ruler." Consequently, Jesus is the supreme ruler.⁸⁸

According to Rev 3:14, Jesus is the origin or ruler (*arche*) of God's creation.⁸⁹ The idea of originator may be important to Revelation. This text is not irrelevant to our discussion. The message of Rev 3:14–22 is addressed to the church in Laodicea, the neighboring town. Obviously, a close connection existed between these two churches. They shared letters written to them (Col 4:16). John may have defined the beginning of Col 1:18 as the originator of creation. In John 1:1 *en archē* is not identified with Jesus but associated with him as the creator God (John 1:3). The same phrase is found in the very beginning of Gen 1:1, the context of creation. It is also found in wisdom tradition.⁹⁰ So it may well be that *archē* with its important creation associations in OT and NT does not only point to the supreme ruler but also to the creator, consequently also to the founder and Lord of the church, his new creation.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Vaughan, 183, calls it "(1) supremacy in rank, (2) precedence in time, or (3) creative initiative." He opts for the last possibility.

⁸⁶ Cf. O'Brien, 50.

⁸⁷ Wright, 115.

⁸⁸ Cf. Pokorný, 70.

⁸⁹ Cf. Dunn, 97. According to Rev 21:6; 22:13 both, God the Father and Jesus, are the beginning (*arche*). Beginning must therefore be understood in an active sense such as "beginner," "originator," or ruler.

⁹⁰ Cf., Moo, 129, who mentions Prov 8:22 and Philo who calls "wisdom 'the beginning.'"

⁹¹ Moo, 129, suggests: "But more than simple temporal rank is surely intended. Christ stands at the head of new creation as *the firstborn from the dead*."

4.2.8 The Firstborn from the Dead

The firstborn has already been discussed above. Some short remarks may suffice here. The term *archē* defines the following *prōtotokos* as does the term that follows "firstborn." Talbert points out that *archē* and *prōtotokos* are both found in Gen 49:3. Reuben is Jacob's firstborn and the beginning of his strength. "This suggests the firstborn is the founder of a people."⁹²

As the firstborn from the dead Jesus guarantees that a great number of people will share his resurrection and eternal life. Romans 8:29 talks about him as "the firstborn among many brethren." In Revelation Jesus is again "the firstborn of the dead" (Rev 1:5). That means, not only the term "beginning" occurs in Colossians and Revelation, also the phrase "firstborn of the dead" does. This may indicate that the exalted Christology of Jesus as creator and Lord is not restricted to Paul and his communities but may have been well-known in early Christianity.⁹³

In any case, the firstborn in Col 1:18 must definitely be seen in close parallel to the firstborn of all creation in Col 1:15. Creation and redemption are set in relation to each other. Redemption and resurrection are a kind of re-creation. And Jesus is the one who spans "all time and creation from beginning to end, from primal time to final time."⁹⁴

4.2.9 The One Who Has First Place in Everything

The second part of Col 1:18 is interesting, because it explains by the somewhat related term *prōteuō* how *prōtotokos* should be understood.⁹⁵ The firstborn is the one who "will come to have first place in everything." That means he will have supremacy. Again the term "all" occurs. Jesus who has created all things and sustains all things will have supremacy over all things. This term "all" clearly links the various aspects of the work of Jesus and suggests that they are all interrelated. Salvation must be seen on the background of creation.

Wright suggests that "this part of the poem refers particularly to Christ's rule over the final great enemies of mankind, sin and death. . . . That which he has by right he became in fact."⁹⁶ Jesus who has created all things and sustains all things will have supremacy over all things. This

⁹² Talbert, 190.

⁹³ Cf. Bruce, "Colossian Problems Part 2," 106–107.

⁹⁴ Dunn, 97.

⁹⁵ O'Brien, 51, notes: "The words 'be the first' (*prōteuō*) resume the double reference to 'firstborn' (*prōtotokos*, vv. 15 and 18), as well as the phrase 'he is before all things'."

⁹⁶ Wright, 74, 75.

includes "the final great enemies of mankind, sin and death"⁹⁷ that are encountered for the first time in Gen 2–3.

4.2.10 All Fullness Dwelling in Him

Colossians 1:19 is difficult to translate.⁹⁸ Nevertheless we can say that it ascribes fullness to Jesus Christ. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him." Bruce notes: "No doubt the word πλήρωμα had a special sense (or senses) in Gnostic terminology, but it does not follow that the present occurrence originally bore that special sense (or senses)."⁹⁹

Nevertheless, this term is hotly discussed. While some take it as a reference to Jesus' complete power and righteousness, others interpret it in the light of the Deity.¹⁰⁰ What that means is further developed in Col 2:9: "For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." "[T]he word translated 'Godhead' is the Greek *theotōs*, which literally means the very essence of divinity. . . . And this very essence of divine nature dwells 'bodily' in the incarnate Christ, the 'firstborn!'"¹⁰¹ Therefore, he has the ability to create through his word and speak things into existence. He also had the right and was able to redeem us.

4.2.11 The Reconciler

Reconciliation presupposes ruptured relations. Reconciliation of all things through Jesus and to Jesus is stressed in Col 1:20 and applied to the Colossian Christians in v. 22.¹⁰² Ephesians 2:16 employs the same term

⁹⁷ Wright, 74.

⁹⁸ Cf. Moo, 131–132.

⁹⁹ Bruce, "Colossian Problems Part 2," 108.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Vaughan, 185.

¹⁰¹ Whidden, 100. Wright, 75–76, commenting on Col 1:19 states: "The full divinity of the man Jesus is stated without any implication that there are two Gods. It is the one God, in all his fullness, who dwells in him." Cf. Fee, 308–309; Patzia, 32. Eph 3:19 speaks about the fullness of God and Eph 4:13 about the fullness of Christ.

¹⁰² For a discussion of the different views on what reconciliation means see the extensive treatment by O'Brien, 53–57. Dunn, 103, expresses his view stating: "The implication is that the purpose, means, and manner of (final) reconciliation have already been expressed by God, not that the reconciliation is already complete." In any case, the issue of reconciliation and pacification envision—according to Thompson, 33–34, "a cosmic conflict, in which 'principalities and powers' are arrayed against God. Moreover, human beings are estranged from and hostile toward both God and each other (Col 1:20–21). Through the death of Jesus, God has made peace, overcoming the alienation, and bringing an end to hostility. And yet we do not now see the reconciliation of all things in its fullness [sic!]. As Wolfhart

apokatalassō to describe the reconciliation brought about by Jesus which unites Gentiles and Jews that believe in Jesus in "one body." In Rom 5:10 and 2 Cor 5:18–20 the same term, however without prefix, *katalassō*, describes the reconciliation of humanity with God, a restoration of fellowship. The Father's saving activity mentioned in Col 1:13 and the Son's saving activity, although described with different terms, refer to the same reality.

The *ta panta* and the sphere of reconciliation encompassing *epi tes ges* and *en tois ouranois* reflect precisely creation in verse 16.¹⁰³ The same phrases occur in vv. 15 and 20 with the exception that heaven and earth are reversed. In other words, reconciliation is not limited to humanity. This does, however, not suggest universal salvation of everyone. Paul and the NT must be seen as a whole. There will be those that are saved, and there will be those that are lost. Even some heavenly powers will be lost. What Paul seems to stress is that according to the pattern of already and not yet all rebellion has been and will be overcome and Christ's rule and peace be completely established.¹⁰⁴

Jesus the creator God is Jesus the savior God. "The Colossian vision sets forth the incarnate Son in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily, who effects a universal reconciliation, and who exercises a universal reign."¹⁰⁵

5. Summary

Colossians' remarkable christological hymn emphasizes Jesus as creator. Somehow the creation theme permeates the entire hymn and yet is enlarged to describe Jesus also as sustainer and savior. While most of the designations used for Jesus in Col 1:15–20 have some relation to creation, some directly, others indirectly, the term *pas/ta panta* links the various aspects of the hymn and create a unified whole from which none of the

Pannenberg phrased it, "the reconciliation of the world has been accomplished, but by anticipation."

¹⁰³ Patzia, 33, notes: "In other words. It is not just the church (humanity) that has been reconciled; the reconciliation wrought by Christ extends to the entire cosmic order. . . every part of the universe is included in the reconciling work of Christ." Talbert, 196, asks the question, if reconciliation means "ultimate reconciliation of all people and all hostile powers as well." He answers this question by saying: "All things may be reconciled, but in Pauline thought the powers are reconciled through subjugation (1 Cor 15:24–28; Phil 3:21; Col 2:15)."

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Moo, 135–137.

¹⁰⁵ Talbert, 197.

elements can be omitted. Creation is the canvass on which salvation and other topics are painted. Jesus as creator is foundational to Jesus as savior. In this hymn and its context Paul follows the Genesis account which moves from creation (Gen 1–2) to the fall (Gen 2) and to the promise of salvation (Gen 3:15).

The concepts of creation, constant care, and salvation are linked inseparably. Therefore, it is illogical to give up Jesus as creator or to reinterpret his creative activity into an evolutionary process and yet maintain him as savior. The different roles cannot be separated. In addition, to claim that Jesus has saved us through his once and for all death on the cross, a short event in history, but maintain that he has created us through a process, which takes millions or billions of years and involves death as crucial mechanism, is inconsistent. "The God who made the world in Christ will redeem it through Christ, for God has not abandoned the cosmos and its inhabitants."¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, Jesus' creative power is seen in the fact that his followers are spiritually recreated (Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 5:17) and that Jesus has created his church (Eph 2:15). In Rev 21–22 we even hear about a new heaven and a new earth that will be created with the Father and Jesus dwelling among his people. None of these creative acts which depend on Christ's sacrifice on the cross requires long-term evolutionary processes.

On the other hand, if it is true that Jesus is the creator, he should know by which process he has accomplished creation. It is obvious that Jesus supported a literal understanding of Gen 1–2 and took the creation account at face value. This would also include the account of the fall in Gen 3. Therefore during his earthly ministry Jesus could freely talk creation, about sin and forgiveness, and about giving his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28). Because Jesus actually is our creator and savior his words carry a weight that surpasses all human knowledge. Since Jesus is the creator God, we cannot talk about the topic of creation and the problems related to faith and science without focusing on him and taking him and his words seriously.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, 28.

OVERTONES OF THE JUBILEE IN THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL 9:24-27

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The study of the prophecy of Dan 9:24–27 has usually focused on the grammatical, historical and chronological elements associated with the text. While affirming the importance of these elements, the article attempts to show how the Sabbatical and the Jubilee provide a major theological and numerical foundation for the chapter. This messianic prophecy finds its fulfillment in the anointed ministry of Jesus who comes as the kinsmen redeemer to release the captives as recorded in Luke 4:16–30.

Key Words: Daniel, Daniel 9, Luke 4, prophecy, 70 weeks, sabbatical, jubilee

1. The Historical and Chronological Swamp of Daniel 9

The Advent movement of the 19th century focused on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation for its mission and self-understanding.¹ Grown out of this 'prophetic' past, current Seventh-day Adventist ministry such as public evangelistic and personal Bible study series include among others the prophetic texts of Daniel and Revelation.² In an attempt to explain these texts many historical³ and chronological⁴ complexities arise, which

¹ See especially Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1911), 409. "The scripture which above all others had been both the foundation and the central pillar of the advent faith was the declaration: 'Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed'. Daniel 8:14." For a thorough study of the historical and theological foundation for the mission of the Adventist Church see F. Gerald Darmsteegt, *The Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).

² For a sample of a Seventh-day Adventist study in this area please see an online study of Dan 8 and 9: <http://www.amazingfacts.org/free-stuff/bible-studies/study-guides/ct/viewmedia/mid/453/tid/2-18/lng/en/sc/r.aspx?7=right-on-time!-prophetic-appointments-revealed>, accessed, November 25, 2011.

³ The historical complexity includes the beginning and ending of the 70 weeks of Dan 9:24, the details surrounding the last week of the prophecy of Dan 9:25, its

may leave one rather bewildered than illuminated.⁵ This attempt is not restricted to popular preaching and teaching but is also demonstrated in some of the writings of biblical and historical theologians.⁶ The Adventist interest in this area was especially evident in the 1980s in response to several challenges to the traditional viewpoint of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment.⁷ The Adventist church at this time attempted to reaffirm the historical and chronological veracity of the prophecies with such articles as "Interpretation of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks" by Gerhard F. Hasel,⁸ "Commencement Date for the Seventy Week

connection with the longer 2300 evening-morning prophecy of Dan 8:14 and the events of October 22, 1844 as related to the experience of the Advent people pictured in Rev 10.

- 4 The chronological complexity includes explaining the literal year/prophetic time language of Dan 8:14; 9:24–27, the various mathematical computations needed to arrive at the right historical date and the necessity to explain the addition of one year when transitioning from the B.C. to the A.D. time frame because of no "0" year.
- 5 I have personally witnessed this several times when the efforts of our best evangelists to explain the many complexities of these texts has at times overwhelmed the audience so they do not grasp the significance of the important truths explained. In my opinion, the explanation of these prophecies either needs to be greatly simplified or given more time so their proper significance can be understood.
- 6 Just one example of the complexity can be found in the published dissertation of Owusu-Antwi Brempong from Andrews University. In the second chapter entitled "Chronological Data in Daniel 9:24–27" he has 80 pages of endnotes with 792 references. Owusu-Antwi Brempong, *The Chronology of Daniel 9:24–27* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1995).
- 7 This challenge was especially made by Desmond Ford who was a professor at Pacific Union College in California one year after I graduated as a theology student there. As a result of a forum presentation entitled "The Investigative Judgment: Theological Milestone or Historical Necessity?" on October 27, 1979, Ford was given an opportunity to write his views and present them at Glacier View, Colorado, before church officials. In response to the questions he had raised, the Theological Seminary at Andrews University revamped its MDiv program (which I took from 1982–1984) to focus more on the sanctuary and salvation issues. In addition, the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference published seven influential volumes in a Daniel and Revelation Series to clarify the teachings of the church.
- 8 Gerhard F. Hasel, "Interpretation of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks," in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1990).

Prophecy"⁹ by Arthur J. Ferch, and the "Year-Day Principle–Part 1" and "Year-Day Principle–Part 2" by William H. Shea.¹⁰

Note however, that Adventists have not been alone in their attempt to explain the meaning of the complex passage of Dan 9:24–27. James A. Montgomery, in his magisterial commentary on Daniel in 1927, called Dan 9:24–27 "the dismal swamp of Old Testament criticism"¹¹ and a "most vexed passage."¹² Montgomery notes that "Calvin, who claimed 'not usually to refer to conflicting opinions,' regretted the fact that he could not 'escape the necessity of confuting various views of the present passage.'¹³ In his *New American Commentary* on Daniel, Miller observes that Dan 9:24–27 contains "four of the most controversial texts in the Bible."¹⁴

It is with a bit of foreboding then that this article attempts to wade into the swamp. The intent is not so much to restudy or evaluate all the arguments that have been set forth for the various positions but to go beyond the historical and chronological aspects of the text and attempt to uncover additional theological insights. This article assumes the historicist view of the messianic fulfillment of Dan 9:24–27.¹⁵

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ William H. Shea, "Year-Day Principle–Part 1" and "Year-Day Principle–Part 2," in *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1992).

¹¹ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927), 386.

¹² Ibid., 400.

¹³ J. Calvin, *Daniel* (ed. and trans. T. Myers; London: Banner of Truth, 1966), 2:195–96. As quoted in Tim Meadowcroft, "Exploring the Dismal Swamp: The Anointed One of Daniel 9:24–27," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120/3 (2001): 429–449.

¹⁴ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (The New American Commentary; vol. 18; E. Ray Clendenen, ed.; Nashville, TN; Broadman and Holman, 1994), 252.

¹⁵ For a good recent overview of the messianic position based on a survey of the historicist position from the early church onward see J. Paul Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166/662 (2009): 181–200 and "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166/663 (2009): 319–335. For an Adventist perspective of the amillennial, dispensationalist, historical-critical and historicist interpretations see Hasel, "Interpretations of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks," 3–63.

2. Daniel 9 and the Sabbatical and Jubilee Legislation

The focus of this section is an attempt to link the Sabbatical and Jubilee components found in Lev 25–26 with its counterparts in Dan 9. It will be shown that 2 Chr 36:21 is an important passage that links both the numerical and theological concepts of the levitical legislation with its historic and prophetic counterparts in Daniel.

2.1 The 70-Year Captivity and the Sabbatical Legislation

“In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years” (Dan 9:1–2). Here Daniel is focused on the seventy-year Babylonian captivity, which had been predicted by Jeremiah. Because the people had not listened to Jeremiah’s preaching for “twenty-three years” (Jer 25:3) and had not heeded the warnings of “all his servants the prophets” (v. 4), “this whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (v. 11).¹⁶

A critical text for discussion is 2 Chr 36:20–21 providing additional insight into both the chronological and theological aspects of the exile.¹⁷ According to v. 21, Israel was to be in exile “until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate, it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.” This text is linked with the violation of the levitical legislation through the common word desolate:¹⁸ “Then the land shall

¹⁶ Jeremiah links the exile of the people with their disregard of the messages delivered by God through His servants the prophets for many years. Because of their persistent disobedience, the threatened curse of Deut 28:36–68, which warned that a persistently disobedient people would go into exile, was finally executed.

¹⁷ There is a very clear linkage between 2 Chr 36:20–21; Jer 25:11 and Dan 9:2. All three of these passages have clear historical figures or events, which speak of a similar time period. Jeremiah’s prophecy was given at the beginning of the exile: “The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah (that was the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon)” (Jer 25:1). Daniel 9 is written at the end of the captivity: “In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans” (v. 1). And 2 Chr 36:20 mentions the entire period: “He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia.”

¹⁸ “Grelot bases his interpretation upon 2 Chr 36:20–22, where the 70 year prophecy of Jeremiah is interpreted in terms of the levitical principle of the sabbatical year. This passage quotes Lev 26:33, 43, the common theme word being שָׁמָּה, “desolate.”

enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate (שמם), while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbath years. As long as it lies desolate (שמם), it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it. For the land shall be deserted by them, and enjoy its sabbath years by lying desolate (שמם), without them, while they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they dared to spurn my ordinances, and they abhorred my statutes (Lev 26:34–35, 43).¹⁹

There has been some discussion as to whether Israel had kept the Sabbatical in either the first or second Temple era.²⁰ The NRSV translation of 2 Chr 36:21 seems to point to unfaithfulness in keeping the Sabbatical because it states that the land would lay desolate “until the land had ‘made up’ for its sabbaths.”²¹ Since Israel had not allowed the land to rest voluntarily, the exile allowed it to rest involuntarily.²² In the legislation found in Lev 25:1–7, the Israelites were to work the land for six years and rest the seventh year: “The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land

Jacques Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9: An Exegetical Study,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 17 (1979): 7.

- ¹⁹ Doukhan notes (p. 7): “It is also significant that this word is one of the key words of Dan 9, appearing five times in the chapter (once each in vv. 17, 18, 26; twice in v. 27).”
- ²⁰ Yehuda Feliks notes that there was evidence from Lev 26:34–35, Jer 29:10 and 2 Chr 36:21, “that it was not observed during the period of the first temple” in “Jewish Farmers and the Sabbatical Year,” in *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility?* (ed. Hans Ucko; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 165. See the unpublished paper of S. Douglas Waterhouse, “Is it Possible to Date the Sabbatical-Jubilee Years?” Citing evidences from both biblical and extra-biblical sources this former professor of Old Testament of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich. states that Isa 37:30 (“This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit;” cf. 2 Kings 19:29) points to a Sabbatical-Jubilee sequence of events in the time of Hezekiah in 701 BC. For a discussion of the second temple and the early rabbinic period see the article by Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 153–196.
- ²¹ The word translated here as “made up” is from the Hebrew רצה, which means “to restore, make amends.” In the levitical legislation it can mean either the acceptance (Lev 1:4; 7:18) or the rejection of an offering (Lev 19:7; 22:23) by the Lord. In this particular instance it carries the meaning of restoration.
- ²² Similar to their forefathers who had not kept the Sabbath day by gathering manna and were rebuked by Moses (Exod 16:27–29) Israel was now rebuked by the Lord through the exile.

that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.”

There is an obvious and strong parallel relationship between the seventh-day Sabbath legislation found in Exod 20:8–11, Deut 5:12–15, and the seventh year Sabbatical of Lev 25:1–7. Both specify the six days/years work–seventh day/year rest paradigm. “It is clearly implied in Lev 25:1–7 that the Sabbatical year is modeled after the Sabbath day, that is, the weekly Sabbath.”²³ The Sabbatical year not only looked back to the seventh-day Sabbath but also looked forward to the celebration of the Jubilee.

2.2 The Sabbatical and Jubilee Legislation

The provisions marking out the observance of the Jubilee, which is built upon the Sabbatical both numerically and theologically, are outlined in Lev 25:8–12. The Jubilee was to occur at the end of the “seven weeks of years” (Lev 25:8) after the loud blast of the trumpet²⁴ at the conclusion of “the Day of Atonement” (v. 9), which would proclaim “liberty” (ἄφεσις, LXX) throughout the land (v. 10).²⁵ The Jubilee is not only linked to the Sabbatical numerically in the “seven weeks of years” at the beginning of its legislation (v. 8), but also conceptually at the end of its terms of reference by words, which echo those found in vv. 5–6. Notice the parallelism between the Sabbatical legislation and the Jubilee legislation:

Sabbatical legislation: “You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine. . . . You may eat what the land yields” (Lev 25:5–6).

²³ Shea, “Year-Day Principle—Part 1,” 84.

²⁴ The Hebrew word for Jubilee is יָבֵיבָה (Lev 25:10) and refers to the blowing of a ram’s horn.

²⁵ The Jubilee was to be celebrated after the Day of Atonement, which occurred on the “tenth day of the seventh month” (Lev 25:9) after the seventh “sabbaths of years” (Lev 25:8) in “the fiftieth year” (v. 10). For a detailed discussion of this point see *The Sabbath and Jubilee Cycle* (Garden Grove, CA: Qadesh La Yahweh Press, 1992), 19–26.

Jubilee legislation: "You shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. . . . You shall eat only what the field itself produces" (Lev 25:11-12).

The Lord was gracious enough to answer the unspoken question in Lev 25:20: "Should you ask, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?'," the Lord had promised to miraculously bless the sixth year so it would provide "for three years" (Lev 25:21). These three years would span the Sabbatical year as well as the subsequent time when the new crops would be planted and reaped in the eighth and ninth year (v. 22).²⁶ Leviticus 25:20-22, which deals with the question of adequate provisions, is itself sandwiched between the question of the compensation for property (vv. 13-19) and redemption (v. 55) as it related to the Jubilee. As it is not the purpose of this article to give a detailed account of the legislation given here, a brief overview of the parallelism will suffice:

- | | |
|-----|---|
| A | <i>Sabbatical</i> (Lev 25:1-7):
Every seven years
Begins at the end of the sixth year
A year of Sabbath rest
Eat what grows on its own |
| B | <i>Jubilee</i> (Lev 25: 8-12):
Every seven weeks of years
Begins at end of the forty-ninth year
Proclamation of liberty
Eat what grows on its own |
| B' | <i>Jubilee</i> (Lev 25:13-19):
Compensation of property |
| A' | <i>Sabbatical</i> (Lev 25:20-22):
God's provision for food during the seventh and eighth year |
| B'' | <i>Jubilee</i> (Lev 25:23-55):
Redemption of property/people |

From the above brief overview, it is apparent that the legislation and the provisions for the Sabbatical and Jubilee are closely intertwined both numerically and theologically. The Sabbatical-Jubilee cycle was to be kept once Israel would "enter the land" (Lev 25:1). Just as in the Deuteronomic legislation the promised blessing was conditional upon obedience.

²⁶ The manna that fell in abundance on the sixth day and did not rot on the seventh (Exod 16:22-30) is perhaps echoed here in the merciful provision by the Lord to provide enough for the Sabbatical.

2.3 Theological Observations of the 70 Years

The text in 2 Chr 36:21 and its relationship to the Sabbatical legislation in Lev 25–26 is often overlooked in even the most careful study of Dan 9:2 and Jer 25:11.²⁷ Although 2 Chr 36:21 does not provide any additional insight into the length of the seventy year captivity, it does shed light into the theological meaning behind the number 70 as predicted by Jeremiah and reflected on by Daniel. Some scholars, however, although seeing the numbers used in Dan 9:24–27 as symbolic with some historical fulfillment recognize that the numbers are not arbitrary but “are intentionally used, in line with theological and schematic understandings current at the time.”²⁸

The tendency of the biblical and extra-biblical writers in the exilic and post-exilic period was to take the number 7, which stood for the Sabbatical year, and make it cyclical in nature. This had already been done with the Sabbatical years itself as it related to the longer Jubilee period. One seven-year Sabbatical period had been multiplied by 7 to make “seven weeks of years” (Lev 25:8). Just as there was a close connection between the seven years (week) of the Sabbatical and the seven weeks of years of the Jubilee in Lev 25, there may be a strong relationship between the seventy years of captivity mentioned in Jer 25:11 and Dan 9:2 and the seventy weeks prophesied in Dan 9:24. According to Shea, “since the land rested every seventh year, it is evident that the inspired writer viewed the 70 years of captivity as the sum of ten sabbatical-year periods.”²⁹ Collins cites several sources from the second century B.C., which used Jubilees and Sabbaticals to construct a

²⁷ See Brempong, on pages 80–81, he does not mention 2 Chr 36:21 in his brief introductory remarks to the chapter.

²⁸ Meadowcroft, “Exploring the Dismal Swamp,” 433. Note also the following remarks: “The applicability of Lev 25–26 with its jubilee theology and 2 Chro 36:18–21 with its schematic reinterpretation has been amply demonstrated. Devora Dimant also notes the Second Temple habit of calculating time in sabbatical cycles, in the light of which her argument is a convincing one that the periods of time should be read sequentially and that the proportions of time also have some meaning,” 433. Although I disagree with how Meadowcroft views the fulfillment of the prophecy related to the anointed One as non-messianic, I do concur with his observation and others that the numbers used in the pericope have a theological meaning.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 93. See also Richard Davidson’s article, which agrees with Shea’s point when he states, “The four hundred and ninety years decreed upon Daniel’s people are ten jubilee periods of 49 years each,” in “In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2/1 (1991): 103.

“chronological framework for historical chronologies.”³⁰ In addition, Collins states that, “periodization of history is a standard feature of the ‘historical’ apocalypses and often uses ten as the schematic number.”³¹

As the table below illustrates, Shea sees a dynamic connection between the Sabbatical period of seven years of Lev 25:1–7 and the seventy years (7 x 10) of Dan 9:2 with the Jubilee period of seven weeks in Lev 25:8–17 and the seven weeks x 7 x 10 years of Dan 9:24.³² The relationship between the Sabbatical/Jubilee in both numeric and theological constructs, which had been closely established in Lev 25, now appears to be echoed in Dan 9 (see Table 1).³³

Sabbatical Period		Jubilee Period	
Lev 25:1–7	7 years	Lev 25:8–17	7 weeks of years x 7 = 49
Dan 9:2	7 years x 10 = 70 years	Dan 9:24	7 weeks of days x 7 x 10 = 490

Table 1: *Time in Leviticus 25 compared to Time in Daniel 9*

Besides the numerical relationship between Sabbatical-Jubilee of Lev 25 and prophecy of Dan 9, Shea also sees meaning between the actual structure of the Sabbatical (Lev 25:1–7) and Jubilee (Lev 25:8–10) legislation and the seventy years (Dan 9:2) and seventy weeks (Dan 9:24) prophecy.

³⁰ John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; vol. 27; ed. Frank Moore Cross; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 352.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 352–353. He shows this from the Book of Enoch and other historical apocalypses.

³² Shea, “Year-Day Principle–Part 1,” 93.

³³ An extended quotation by Collins who has written extensively on Daniel links the Sabbatical number 7 to both biblical and extra biblical accounting of historical events: “That the period of Seventy Weeks probably forms part of the larger sequence of history is suggested also by the nature of the Sabbatical cycles. An attentive reader of the Torah, as was the author of Dan 9, would assume that the counting of sabbatical years and jubilees was as old as the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The author of the *Book of Jubilees* believed that it was initiated with the creation of the world” (see p. 353). Although I would not agree with the second century authorship of Daniel, this principle is well worth noting.

Insomuch as the 70-year period (referred to by Daniel in verse 2 just prior to his prayer) was understood to relate to the sabbatical-year legislation (Lev 25:1–7), it may be expected that the 70-week period (at the close of the prayer) would be related to the jubilee period. This is the sequence in Lev 25:1–17 (sabbatical year-jubilee). Thus the 70 weeks, or 490 years (on the year-day principle), may be seen as ten jubilee periods even as the 70 years were seen as ten sabbatical year periods.³⁴

What might be added to the above relationship between Lev 25 and Dan 9 is that the prayer of confession of Daniel on behalf of the nation in Dan 9:3–19 could function as a Day of Atonement-type of prayer that has its foundation in Lev 25:9. For just as the people were instructed to “practice self denial” (Lev 23:27) during that Day of Atonement, Daniel seeks the Lord “by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes (Dan 9:3). Just as this solemn day of convocation immediately preceded the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:10), Daniel’s heartfelt prayer is uttered just prior to the revelation of the 70 weeks.³⁵ Table 2 brings out these possible relationships in an abbreviated form.³⁶

³⁴ Shea, “Year-Day Principle–Part 1,” 93–94. Shea tells us that Lev 25:1–7, “is the earliest biblical text which the year-day principle is reflected.” *Ibid.*, 83. He points out that the parallelism in Lev 25:4–5 which first uses the phrase “a sabbath of solemn rest for the land” in v. 4 is echoed by the phrase “a year of solemn rest for the land” in v. 5. So the Sabbatical year, which is based on the weekly Sabbath can stand for both the seventh year and a seven-year time period.

³⁵ Gerald H. Wilson, “The Prayer of Daniel 9: Reflection of Jeremiah 29,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 48 (1990): 91–99. “The prayer of Dan. 9.5–19 has long presented a puzzle to readers of Daniel. Most have considered the passage a secondary insertion that makes an imperfect fit with its larger literary context” (p. 91).

³⁶ Furthermore, note the close correlation between the prayer found in Dan 9 and the promised restoration connected to the Sabbatical law in Lev 26:40–43: “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them.”

Leviticus 25		Daniel 9	
Lev 25:1-7	The Sabbatical Law	Dan 9:2	The Sabbatical Broken (2 Chr 36:11)
Lev 25:8	The Day of Atonement	Dan 9:3-19	The Atonement Prayer
Lev 25:9-10	The Jubilee	Dan 9:24	The Jubilee

Table 2: *Leviticus 25 Structure and Daniel 9 Structure*

In addition to the above discussion, there are several commentators who allude to the fact that Dan 9 might be based on the Jubilee. As already noted, one modern Jewish scholar sees a relationship between the seventy year exile prophesied in Jer 25 (cf. 2 Chr 36:21) and the breaking of the Sabbatical law of Lev 26:34–35.³⁷ This remark is made in the context of his discussion on how Jewish farmers kept the Sabbatical in ancient times.

Jacques Doukhan has shown how the French exegete P. Grelot recognized that the use of the number 70 in Dan 9:2 and the seventy weeks of Dan 9:24 referred "to the sabbatical year (7 x 10) and to the Jubilee (7 x 7 x 10), respectively."³⁸ Citing both Montgomerie and Grelot, van der Woude states that, "the influence of the sabbatical theology of Lev 25–26 has been widely noted."³⁹ He makes a further observation that, "Daniel 9 extends the duration of the desolation to seventy weeks of years, or ten jubilees."⁴⁰ In discussing Lev 25:8 Shea states that, "the Sabbath day and the six days that preceded it came to be used as the model by which the occurrence of the jubilee year was calculated."⁴¹ He finally links the Jubilee found in Lev 25:8 with Dan 9:24–27 and states, "one could almost say that the time period involved in Dan 9:24–27 was modeled after the jubilee legislation."⁴²

³⁷ Feliks, "Jewish Farmers and the Sabbatical Year," 165.

³⁸ Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9," 6–7.

³⁹ A. S. van der Woude, *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 106; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 352.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 352. Although I concur with the concept that the seventy weeks can be seen as 10 Jubilees as already discussed by Shea and others, I do not agree that this was an extension of the 70 years of exile. The seventy weeks can be seen as a blessing and a direct contrast to the curse of the Jewish people, its land and temple during the seventy-year exile.

⁴¹ Shea, "Year-Day Principle—Part 1," 85.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

Doukhan is even more direct in his affirmation that Dan 9 is based on the Sabbatical-Jubilee theology when he states, "the association of 70 years with 70 weeks makes clear that our text points to the levitical principle of the Jubilee."⁴³ In addition,

Daniel sets forth his prophecy from the perspective of the Jubilee. Moreover, since Daniel places his prophecy in the perspective of Jeremiah's historical prophecy, it means that Daniel also sets forth an historical event. . . . The event to which the 70 weeks point receives a *theological* dimension; it has something to do with the Jubilee, just as the prophecy of Jeremiah had something to do with the sabbatical year.⁴⁴

3. Jubilee Overtones in the Nazareth Pericope of Luke 4

The focus of this section is an attempt to link the chronological and theological components of the Jubilee to the inauguration of the ministry of Jesus in Luke 4:16–30. There are four areas that will be studied. The first will briefly discuss the messianic fulfillment of Dan 9:25–27. Next, a relationship will be drawn between the "Anointed" of Dan 9:25–26 and the Christ of Luke 4:16–30. Third, the word ἄφεσις, "release," will be studied as it is used in the Jubilee legislation and the Nazareth pericope. Finally, the law of the kinsman-redeemer will be discussed as it applies both to the Jubilee and the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth. Throughout the study our aim is to show how themes of the Jubilee legislation permeate the prophecy of Dan 9 and its fulfillment in Luke 4:16–30.

⁴³ Doukhan, 21.

⁴⁴ Doukhan, 8. A further evidence of the influence of the Jubilee in the prophecy is the rather singular dividing of the sixty-nine weeks into seven "weeks" and sixty-two "weeks" found in Dan 9:25. Could it be that the seven "weeks" or 49 years were meant to not only to delineate the chronological time between the command to restore the temple and the messiah but also to invest that time with Jubilee overtones as well?

3.1 The Messianic Fulfillment of Daniel 9:25–27

As was noted in the introduction, this paper assumes the messianic fulfillment of the seventy weeks of Dan 9:24–27. In a recent overview of the view of the early church fathers, Tanner observes that, “there was a strong consensus among the early church fathers (a near unanimous position, in fact) that Daniel’s seventy-weeks prophecy was fulfilled in Christ, that is, they held a generally messianic interpretation of the passage.”⁴⁵

According to Hasel, the historical messianic view was held by ancient sources such as the Septuagint and the Essenes. Although this view “has been eclipsed almost completely by the historical-critical scholarship . . . there are still stout supporters of the Messianic interpretation to the present among both Catholic and Protestant scholars on both sides of the Atlantic.”⁴⁶ Adventist scholarship has made extensive efforts to establish 457 B.C. as the beginning of the seventy weeks prophecy of Dan 9:24.⁴⁷ According to this view, “the seven weeks and sixty two weeks” of Dan 9:25 extends down to A.D. 27 and applies to the baptism or anointing of Jesus as the Messiah. “In the midst of the week” Jesus is “cut off” by His sacrificial death in 31 A.D.⁴⁸ The seventy weeks end with the martyrdom of Stephen in A.D. 34 as described in Acts 7.⁴⁹

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to give a detailed analysis of the chronological debate that has swirled around Dan 9:24–27, a few remarks regarding the Anointed One (מָשִׁיחַ) found in Dan 9:25–26 might prove helpful in providing a possible link between that prophetic passage and Luke’s writing about Christ. The masculine noun מָשִׁיחַ is

⁴⁵ Tanner, “Is Daniel’s seventy-weeks prophecy messianic? Part 1,” 200.

⁴⁶ Hasel, “Interpretations of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks,” 47–48. Of course it is noted here that, “they varied greatly in how they understood the details and how they based their calculations.” Cf. Tanner, “Is Daniel’s seventy-weeks prophecy messianic? Part 1,” 200.

⁴⁷ See for instance, Brempong, *The Chronology of Daniel 9:24–27*, 290–299. Arthur J. Ferch, “The Commencement Date for the Seventy Week Prophecy,” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), 64–74; Hasel, “Interpretations of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks,” 47–63.

⁴⁸ For an overview of the dates and justification that the anointing of Jesus at His baptism in A.D. 27 fulfilled Dan 9:25 and the death of Jesus in A.D. 31 fulfilled Dan 9:27 see Brempong, *The Chronology of Dan 9:24–27*, 305–325.

⁴⁹ For an overview of the terminus ad quem of the seventy weeks of Dan 9:24 at the stoning of Stephen in A.D. 34 see Brempong, 330–332.

used 38 times in the Old Testament, mostly to designate kings such as Saul, David, Cyrus and others. The term appears twice in the book of Daniel, once with מַלְאָךְ, "prince" in Dan 9:25 and once in v. 26. Only in Daniel is the term in the absolute, without article or suffix and may be considered a proper name.⁵⁰ Brempong cites the analysis by Doukhan, Shea and Hasel and shows how the tight poetic structure of Dan 9:25–26 argues strongly that these two verses focus on the close interrelation between the one historical figure, "Messiah Prince," and the rebuilding and destruction of Jerusalem. He further shows the close thematic and terminological connection between Dan 9 and the Suffering Servant figure of Isa 52:13–53:12.⁵¹

3.2 Jesus as the Anointed

Although recently questioned⁵² there has been a general consensus that Luke 4:16–30 is of programmatic significance in Luke-Acts.⁵³ This pericope has attracted a great deal of attention because of the major themes Luke encapsulates in the story and repeats elsewhere.⁵⁴ Thus Luke 4:16–30 has been seen as a "preface"⁵⁵ and a "condensed version"⁵⁶ of Luke-Acts. After His baptism (Luke 3:21–22) and temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1–13), "Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 162–163.

⁵¹ Ibid., 164–166.

⁵² Verheyden reports disagreement over the exact nature of the programmatic discourse by scholars in the late 1980s has resulted in "skepticism about the programmatic status of the discourse." J. Verheyden, "The Unity of Luke-Acts: What are we up to?" in *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. J. Verheyden; Lueven-Louvain, Belgium: Lueven University Press, 1999), 55.

⁵³ The basis for the next two sections comes from a prior article entitled, James Park, "The Proclamation of Release in Luke 4:16–30," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 7 (2004): 27–37.

⁵⁴ In a major article Neiryneck states that "there are a number of good reasons to justify the choice of Lk 4:16–30, widely held to be programmatic for Luke-Acts." F. Neiryneck, "Luke 4:16–30 and the Unity of Luke-Acts," in *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. J. Verheyden; Lueven-Louvain, Belgium: Lueven University Press, 1999), 357. The major reason given by Neiryneck is that a number of themes introduced in Luke 4:16–30 reappear a number of times throughout Acts.

⁵⁵ Hugh Anderson, "Broadening Horizons: The Rejection of Nazareth Pericope of Luke 4:16–30 in Light of Recent Critical Trends," *Interpretation* 18 (1964): 260.

⁵⁶ Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 20.

returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone" (Luke 4:14–15). Jesus then travels to his hometown of Nazareth on the Sabbath and reads from Isaiah. "When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me'" (Luke 4:16–18a).

In an article entitled, "Does Luke Also Portray Jesus as the Christ in Luke 4,16–30?" Robert O'Toole addresses an ongoing discussion of whether Jesus was portrayed as a prophet or the Christ in the Nazareth pericope.⁵⁷ O'Toole states that, "any claim that Luke also views Jesus as the Christ in Luke 4,16–30 will naturally have to attend to the meaning of "anointing" in Luke 4,18."⁵⁸ After showing that the Nazareth pericope is bracketed by a summary of Jesus' teaching and healing in Luke 4:14, 44, he points out that v. 41 clearly states that Jesus as the Son of God is Christ, the Messiah: "Demons also came out of many, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah."

The words of the demons in Luke 4:41 are an echo of the words of the Father including the presence of the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus: "The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:22). O'Toole states that, "most scholars grant a connection between Luke 3,21–22 and Luke 4,18–19."⁵⁹ He further says that the aorist verb ἐχρίσεν found in Luke 4:18, "comes from the verb χρίω, from which also derives the title, χριστός, and so it could very naturally point to Jesus as the Christ. Already in the OT we find this relation between 'anointing' and 'Spirit', precisely with reference to kings (1 Sam 10,1–7,10; 16,13)."⁶⁰

It is of interest to the current study that O'Toole cites the references relating to the kingly anointing of Saul and David. There is a harmony in the Hebrew root (מָשַׁח) and the Greek LXX (χρίω) terms in these two

⁵⁷ Robert F. O'Toole, "Does Luke Also Portray Jesus As the Christ in Luke 4,16–30," *Biblica* 76/4 (1995): 498–522. While our study is not focused on that particular debate, the article does speak directly to the topic of the anointed in Dan 9 and Luke 4:16–30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 504.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 506.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 509.

passages and the words which relate to the "anointed" of Dan 9:26.⁶¹ Thus it could be said that the anointing of Jesus as the Messiah by the Spirit not only points back historically to the christening of kings but also prophetically fulfills the expectations sounded from Dan 9:24–27.

From the very beginning of his gospel Luke has highlighted the theme that Jesus is the Christ. The first time the word "Christ" is used in Luke it is connected with the announcement of the angel to the poor shepherds, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).⁶² This attestation that Jesus is indeed the Christ is immediately challenged by the devil in the wilderness (Luke 4:3).

Christ's conquering of the devil in the wilderness invests His preaching and ministry with authority. These divine testimonies and events are clearly connected with the Spirit (Luke 1:17, 35; 2:27; 3:16; 3:22; 4:1, 14) and the themes of the good news of redemption (Luke 1:68; 1:77; 2:10, 14; 2:30–32, 38; 3:6).⁶³ The proclamation of the Spirit-filled Messiah is thus woven into the very fabric of Luke until it rises to a wonderful crescendo in Luke 4:18–19. Sloan's description is quite appropriate here:

Since the time of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi the Holy Spirit was believed to have departed from Israel, silencing the prophetic voice. Not until the Messianic time of the end, when the eschatological prophet would appear with the anointing of the Spirit, would Scripture again be fulfilled, the voice of revelation once more speak, and the Spirit return to Israel. Therefore, when Luke writes that Jesus 'returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee' (4:14), and then immediately proceeds to the incident in which 'he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up' the crescendo of Messianic anticipation has by Luke's skillful hand reached its finest swell.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Note the remarks from the end of the previous section which dealt with the anointed of Dan 9:25–26.

⁶² Note the use of the terms "today" and "Christ" which are echoed again in Luke 4:18, 21.

⁶³ The theme of redemption itself has overtones of the Jubilee.

⁶⁴ Robert E. Sloan, "The Favorable Year of the Lord" (M.A. thesis; Abilene, Tex.: Hardin-Simmons University Library, 1977), 53. Sloan, initially points out that Judaism placed more an emphasis on Messianic functions "than it did upon either the person or the proper noun title therewith associated," *ibid.*, 45. Although the word itself as used in later Jewish literature and the OT link the anointing of the Spirit with the Messiah, it "is most clearly seen precisely in relation to kings," *ibid.*, 5. Furthermore, a Judaic tradition in the first century encapsulated in 11Q Melchizedek, ascribed to the Messiah the task of proclaiming the glad tidings of the new eschatological age.

3.3 Luke 4:16–30 and the Theme of Release

The underlying theme of Luke 4:16–30 is release, which had its roots in the feast of the Jubilee and has already been discussed in connection with Dan 9. In one of the few extended studies of the Jubilee theology in the gospel of Luke, Robert Sloan has noted that “though not universally noticed, or, at best, not often pointed out by commentators of recent years, the jubiliary background of this passage was widely recognized by commentators of bygone years.”⁶⁵ Further, the Jubilee theme in Luke 4:16–30 has been studied from a variety of different aspects such as the theological aspects of the Sabbath,⁶⁶ Jesus’ role as a liberator,⁶⁷ and His ministry for the poor.⁶⁸ Although most commentators affirm that Jubilee themes are present in Luke 4:16–30, some question whether Luke was speaking literally about the Jubilee.⁶⁹

Probably the most important term in the whole pericope is the catchword ἀφεσις, “release,” which Luke has underscored by the insertion of Isa 58:6 and 61:1–2. This insertion has been discussed in several places⁷⁰ including Tannehill who observes that the insertion of Isa 58:6 could not

⁶⁵ Ibid., 19. Sloan cites a number works which have noted the connection between Luke 4:16ff with the Jubilee including Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896); George B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (Pelican Gospel Commentary; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963); John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 5.

⁶⁶ Samuele Bacchiochi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1980). Bacchiochi incorporates and broadens Sloan’s research by including a more foundational OT understanding of the Jubilee’s relationship with the Sabbath.

⁶⁷ See Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 139–140. Prior devotes an insightful section to the Jubilee aspect of Jesus’ proclamation and ministry in Luke 4.

⁶⁸ Paul Hertig, “The Mission of the Messiah and the Year of Jubilee: A Comparison of Luke 4 and Isaiah 61” (Th.M. thesis; Pasadena, Cal.: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989). Hertig builds on a portion of Sloan’s research, especially as it relates to Jesus’ ministry to the poor.

⁶⁹ While Tannehill observes that it “seems clear” there are themes from the Jubilee in Isa 61:1–2, “it is not so clear that the author of Luke-Acts was aware of the connection between the passage and the Law of Jubilee. This remains a possibility but has not yet been proved.” Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 68. Robert O’Toole also notes that although not many have been convinced that Luke was speaking literally of the Jubilee, “most would grant that themes associated with the Jubilee appear in Luke 4:16–30.” Robert F. O’Toole, “Jesus as the Christ in Luke 4:16–30,” *Biblica* 76 (1995): 512–513.

⁷⁰ See Bacchiochi, 142; Hertig, 73–77; Sloan, 36–38; 177–194 and Tannehill, 66–71.

have come from an accidental reading of the LXX.⁷¹ Hertig maintains that the insertion is intentional and is placed here to highlight the significant OT theological meaning of ἄφεσις and make it “an important theme in the book of Luke.”⁷² The term ἄφεσις is used seventeen times in the gospels, primarily by Luke⁷³ for the concept of forgiveness (Luke 1:77; 7:47; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18).⁷⁴

The term ἄφεσις is also used in the LXX of the OT and is “certainly related to the Jubilee year.”⁷⁵ At the heart of that legislation is the proclamation to “proclaim ‘liberty’ (ἄφεσις) throughout the land” (Lev 25:10). The Hebrew word for Jubilee (יובל) is based on the word for “ram’s horn”⁷⁶ and is probably associated with the blowing of the trumpet (שופר) on the Day of Atonement, which inaugurated the Jubilee (Lev 25:9).⁷⁷ Except in Lev 25:15 where the word Jubilee does not appear, the LXX uses the word ἄφεσις every time to translate יובל which stood for the Jubilee.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Tannehill, 67.

⁷² Hertig, 73. Of the approximately fifty times ἄφεσις appears in the LXX, twenty-two are found in Lev 25 and 27 where it translates in most cases as “year of Jubilee” and in other cases it translates as “release” (cf. Lev 25:10; Isa 61:1). ἄφεσις also translates the complex of Sabbath-year passages (Exod 23:11; Deut 15:1ff; 31:10). In a unique sense, it is used in the “sending away” of Azazel on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:22).

⁷³ ἄφεσις is used ten times in Luke-Acts, twice in Matthew, once in Mark and never in John.

⁷⁴ According to Sloan, ἄφεσις is the key word that “ties together the quotation of Isa 61:1–2a and 58:6 in Luke 4:18–19, “the programmatic Lukan rendering of the ministry of release,” (p. 178). Patrick D. Miller concurs with this idea when he writes: “The tie that binds Isaiah 61:1–2 and 58:6 together in Luke 4 is the small word ἄφεσις, the word translated ‘release’ for the captives and ‘liberty’ for the oppressed. . . . It is the catchword binding the two quotations together.” Patrick D. Miller, “Luke 4:16–21,” *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 419.

⁷⁵ O’Toole, “Jesus as the Christ in Luke 4:16–30,” 511.

⁷⁶ The Hebrew word “yovel” means “ram” and “ram’s horn.” Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus* (The JPS Torah Commentary; ed. Naham N. Sarna and Chaim Potok; Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 3:172.

⁷⁷ The term “yovel” also denotes the literal function of blowing a horn in Exod 19:13, which summoned the tribes to Sinai and the blast of the trumpets connected with the conquest of Jericho (Josh 6:4, 5, 6, 8, 13) perhaps had its roots in Gen 4:21 where it is mentioned that Jubal (Hebrew “yuvval”) “was the father of all who play the harp and flute.”

⁷⁸ Leviticus 25:10, 11, 12, 28 (two times), 30, 31, 33, 40, 50, 52, 54; 27:17, 18, 31, 23, 24 and Num 36:4.

ἄφεσις not only translates the word Jubilee but the Hebrew word דָּרוֹר used in Lev 25:10 that has “conventionally been rendered ‘freedom, liberty’.”⁷⁹ Baruch A. Levine, comments that “Hebrew דָּרוֹר is cognate with Akkadian *anduraru*, which designates an edict of release issued by the Old Babylonian kings and some of their successors. . . . The biblical laws of the Jubilee year thus incorporate Near Eastern legal institutions of great antiquity.”⁸⁰ Thus the usage of ἄφεσις in the LXX has a very strong etymological, theological and historical link with the Jubilee legislation.

Forgiveness or release (ἄφεσις) was an integral part of the mission of Jesus as well as His disciples.⁸¹ Just as Jesus predicted that the repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations (Luke 24:47), Peter stood up in front of the nations on the day of Pentecost and proclaimed, “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

The influence of the Spirit is clearly mentioned in both the promise of Jesus and the ongoing proclamations of Peter to the Jews (Acts 5:31) and the Gentiles (Acts 10:43). In addition, Paul in his missionary work echoes Peter by saying, “that through Jesus the forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of sins is proclaimed” (Acts 13:38). This forgiveness or release is accomplished only through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is constantly mentioned alongside this theme in almost every instance in Luke-Acts (cf. Luke 4:18–19; 24:47–49; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43 and 26:17).

According to Sloan, the central concept of ἄφεσις is rooted in the Sabbath and Jubilee and represents “in the Old Testament virtually every aspect of that particular legislation.”⁸² Sloan notes that the twice-repeated verb “to proclaim” in Luke 4:18–19 also has clear “jubiliary connections.”⁸³ This strongly connects the heralding concept of the Jubilee year in Luke 4:19⁸⁴ with the proclamation to the prisoners and the oppressed that they have been released from their bondage.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Levine, 171.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:171–172.

⁸¹ Hertig, 73–74.

⁸² Sloan, 177.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁴ Cf. Lev 25:10, “proclaim throughout the land.” Sloan (p. 36), further notes that although three different Greek words underlie the word “proclaim” in the LXX of Lev 25:10 and Isa 61:1–2a, they all translate the same basic root which in itself has clear Jubilee overtones.

⁸⁵ While the word for prisoner literally means “prisoners of war” it can also have a broader meaning (cf. 2 Cor 10:5; 2 Tim 3:6) such as “those shackled by pauperizing

Thus the theologically rich term “release” is closely linked with the mission of Jesus and His disciples. Robert Tannehill states in his summary: “All this material demonstrates the fulfillment of the commission which Jesus announced in Nazareth, the commission to preach good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives and oppressed.”⁸⁶ The good news of salvation must be proclaimed.⁸⁷ This divine message of release does not occur in a historical vacuum but is closely linked in Luke 4:16–22 to a very specific time.

3.4 The Time of the Kinsman Redeemer

Christ’s announcement of messianic fulfillment through the reading of the texts in Isaiah echoed the contemporary sectarian and mainstream Jewish expectation that such an event would soon take place. David E. Aune states that an early first century fragment from Qumran, 11Q Melchizedek, “provides the first piece of conclusive evidence before A.D. 70 that the proclamation of glad tidings could be considered a significant aspect of the messianic task.”⁸⁸ A. Strobel argues that behind Christ’s proclamation lay an actual historical jubilee year, which is dated in A.D. 26–27.⁸⁹ Writing contrary to this view is Prior, who regards any literal or liturgical reckoning of years to account for the Jubilee as “indulging in interesting speculation.”⁹⁰ Shea, who has researched about ancient calendars,⁹¹ cites a Jewish source that maintained that “the years 457 B.C. and A.D. 27 and 34 were sabbatical years.”⁹²

economic and social condition” (ibid., 38). The somewhat parallel expression is taken from Isa 58:6, a chapter which itself contains strong Jubilee/Sabbath motifs. Although Sloan notes that Isa 58:6 has both a Jubilee history of interpretation in Judaism and a thematic connection with Isa 61, its particular character is manifested in “the jubilee charged term aphesis” (ibid., 40).

⁸⁶ Tannehill, 139. It is most important to note that once “released” individuals did not go their separate ways but were “released” from their sins and old ways of life in order to follow Jesus in the way of discipleship

⁸⁷ A good case in point is given in Acts 3 where Peter not only heals the beggar, but then uses the occasion to proclaim the good news of Christ’s resurrection.

⁸⁸ David E. Aune, “A Note on Jesus’ Messianic Consciousness and 11Q Melchizedek,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (1973): 165.

⁸⁹ August Strobel, *Kerygma und Apokalyptic* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 105–111.

⁹⁰ Prior, 141.

⁹¹ See Shea’s rather complicated but insightful reckoning of the Oct. 22, 1844 date as the end of the 2300 evenings and mornings of Dan 8:14 in William H. Shea, “Day of Atonement and October 22, 1844,” in *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (ed.

While it is not essential to the theological import of the passage to know whether it was a Sabbatical or Jubilee year, we do know that it was the Sabbath day that Jesus visited his kinfolk in Nazareth. As we have alluded to earlier, both the Sabbatical and Jubilee legislation was built numerically and theologically on the seventh-day Sabbath. By applying the Jubilee text of Isa 61:1–2 to Himself on the Sabbath, Jesus has brought the prophetic future of the messianic ministry of release into the theologically rich foundation of the Sabbath-Jubilee.

While Jesus ends his reading of Isa 61:2 by announcing “the year of the Lord’s favor,” the OT text actually ends with the negative phrase, “the day of vengeance of our God.” The fact that Jesus ends the reading from Isaiah proclaiming the Lord’s favor instead of His wrath has “evoked varied explanations from the scholarly community.”⁹² The main focus of

Frank B. Holbrook; Biblical Research Institute; Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1990), 165–171. For an alternative reckoning of the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle, which favors the dates of A.D. 28 and A.D. 35 see Chart A, *The Sabbath and Jubilee Cycle*, 49. While a chronological reckoning of the years more be somewhat tentative, I believe the theological foundation of the linking of the Jubilee with the Nazareth pericope to be sound, despite the remarks of Tannehill (and others) that “this remains a possibility but has not been proved.” Tannehill, 68.

- ⁹² Shea, “Year-Day Principle,” 94 cites Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Calendar of the Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 153–196. See also Davidson’s article cited earlier in which he states, “The 490 years decreed upon Daniel’s people are ten jubilee periods of 49 years each. If indeed this period is counted with reference to the Jubilee, it is natural to expect the beginning and ending dates to be jubilee years. Recent analysis of literary evidence has now made it possible to determine the precise sabbatical and jubilee dates in Biblical times. Strikingly, the date of the decree of 457 B.C. alone, not of the other possible dates is a jubilee year,” (p. 103). Davidson bases this comment on an unpublished article by Daniel Waterhouse who argues that the Jubilee occurred at the beginning of the exile (604–603 B.C.), the return from the exile/beginning of the 70 weeks of years prophecy (457–456 B.C.) and the end of that same prophecy in (33–34 A.D.). See the unpublished paper of Waterhouse, “Is it Possible to Date the Sabbatical-Jubilee Years?”
- ⁹³ Sloan, 32. Sloan reports that B. Reicke “puts forward the two elements of significance relative to the omission: (1) the reference in 61:2b to God’s wrath was not in keeping with the primary theme of the reading (i.e., the year of God’s grace) as applied by Jesus and hence was abandoned; and, (2) it was out of his sense of prophetic authority—that Jesus was free to effect both the omission of 61:2b and the addition of 58:6.” Bo Reicke, “Jesus in Nazareth,” in *Das Wort und die Wörter: A Festschrift in Honor of Gerhard Friedrich* (Stuttgart, 1973), as quoted in Sloan, 93. See also Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 44–46.

the closing part of Christ's citation of the text focuses on announcing the apparent sudden and immediate historical reality of God's favor.

This positive and climatic nature of Luke 4:19 is defined by the terms "favorable"⁹⁴ and "year." The word "year" (ἐνιαυτός) is a term that captures "the desired verbal flavor of a celebrative era, season, or anniversary, and thereby indicates a time of special note."⁹⁵ It is a definite time used here in Luke 4:19 (as well as Isa 61:2 and Lev 25:10–11) in order to convey the special Jubilee time of release. Through the structuring of the key time elements in the pericope, Christ's proclamation is not only grounded on the year of the Lord's favor but even more specifically on the Sabbath day. "Today" on "the Sabbath day" the reality of Jubilee rest and redemption has come.⁹⁶

Although the kinsmen initially speak well of Jesus, their rhetorical question about His mysterious past can be seen as the first hint of hostility, which would lead to driving Him out of the town "to the brow of the hill . . . so that they might hurl Him off the cliff" (Luke 4:29). Jesus' pronouncement of salvation to His kinsmen has in itself obvious Jubilee overtones. For according to the law the redemption of the land could only happen by "the nearest relative" (Lev 25:24–25). The question in Luke 4:22, "Is not this Joseph's son?" is perhaps meant to stifle the startling conviction that they had been depicted as in bondage and in need of release. "Who does he think *He* is?" catches the flavor of the Nazarenes who reject the message by casting doubt on his familial connection with them. Just like Elijah raised the widow's son (Luke 4:25–26; cf. 1 Kings 17:17–24) and Elisha healed Naaman the leper (Luke 4:27; cf. 2 Kings 5), Jesus is sent to release the widow's son from the grave (Luke 7:11–15) and the leper from his disease (Luke 5:12).⁹⁷

The proclamation of release or forgiveness on the day of Pentecost by the apostles (Acts 2:38) also has Jubilee connotations. Pentecost, which is also called the Feast of Weeks (Exod 23:16; 34:22; Deut 16:9–10, 16; 2 Chr

⁹⁴ This term is again repeated in Christ's important rejoinder in Luke 4:24: "no prophet is accepted in his hometown."

⁹⁵ Sloan, 34.

⁹⁶ For an extended discussion of the chiasmic structure of Luke 4:16–20 see again my article, "The Proclamation of Release in Luke 4:16–30," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 7 (2004): 27–37. There I attempt to show that the unique structure of the chiasm highlights both anointing of Jesus and the time element within the chiasm which could then be linked to the prophecy of the Anointed One coming at a certain time in Dan 9:24–27.

⁹⁷ Stephen would follow in the footsteps of Jesus by caring for the widows and face the same rejection.

8:13), occurred fifty days after the Passover and was associated with the end of the harvest. It was significant because “on it the Jews celebrated the gifts of the grain harvest, thanking God for the blessings so received.”⁹⁸ With the very name Pentecost meaning “fifty” it could also be said to carry a Jubilee motif as well.

It appears that Luke intentionally constructed this closely knit pericope in order to highlight time as a major component in Christ’s and the disciple’s mission of release. Although it might be said that the opportunity for God to bring about redemption is always present, these verses seem to point to a specific time when the Messiah’s salvation will especially be exercised.⁹⁹ During this last week of the seventy weeks prophecy of Dan 9:24 it might be said that, “in the coming of Jesus Christ, who lived among us and who was called Immanuel—‘God with us’—we find a re-Sabbatization. . . . The time Christ lived on earth represents a kind of long Sabbath day.”¹⁰⁰

4. Conclusion

This study has attempted to wade through the historical and chronological swamp of Dan 9 by showing the influence of the key text found in 2 Chr 36:21 that links the seventy years of punishment predicted in Jer 25:11 and contemplated in Dan 9:1–2 to the Sabbatical and Jubilee legislation found in Lev 26:34–35, 43 and Lev 25:1–55. Possible overtones of the Jubilee have been linked to the historical, theological, and prophetic elements of Dan 9 to its messianic fulfillment in the baptism and ministry of Jesus.

We have noted the central importance that Luke gives to Christ’s proclamation of release on the Sabbath day in the synagogue in Nazareth. While it is true that the catchword ἀφεςις, “release,” is often translated in terms of forgiveness in Luke, the term is also connected to the Old Testament Jubilee legislation of release, which itself rests upon the concept of liberty of the seventh-day Sabbath. Further, the concept of release forms a nexus with the Jubilee material found in Lev 25:10; Isa 58:6; 61:1–2 and Luke 4:18–19.

⁹⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 233.

⁹⁹ This apparent emphasis of time in Luke 4:16–22 gives added support to the hypothesis that the divinely appointed times of the Sabbath and Jubilee are an integral part of the Messiah’s mission.

¹⁰⁰ Sakae Kubo, *God Meets Man* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1978), 17.

As such, Luke 4:16–30 provides a number of important themes for Luke's understanding of the disciples and their mission. The Nazareth pericope shows both the profound christological and universal character of their community. Their ministry was to be imbued with the same Spirit that prompted Christ to proclaim the release of the prisoners of all nations and ages. The theological themes of the Sabbath and Jubilee informed and directed the understanding and practice of redemptive release and forgiveness in the life and ministry of the discipleship community.

Thus it could be argued that the highly recognized programmatic discourse in Luke 4:16–30 not only has strong prospective elements but retrospective characteristics as well. As such, the Nazareth pericope may well be grounded not only in the Jubilee of Lev 25 but more foundationally in the Sabbath commandments of Deut 5:12–15; Exod 20:8–11; the story of the manna in Exod 16 and ultimately point back to the creation story itself in Gen 1–2.

PAULINE UNIVERSALISM: ANACHRONISM OR REALITY?

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Are we able to attribute a modern concept such as universalism (in the sense of the opposite to particularism) to Paul in the formation of his communities, or is such an idea hopelessly anachronistic? This paper suggests that although Paul's universalism does not fully conform to modern definitions, there is a universalistic dimension to his formation of the ἐκκλησία that was radical within his own culture in both Jewish and Hellenistic terms. Nevertheless, there were some first-century social and philosophical currents that would have provided some implicit support for his application of universalistic principles. However, the roots of Paul's approach are to be found not so much in Hellenistic philosophical currents, but rather in his understanding of divine convenantal condescension. These considerations allow us some insights to understanding the status of different genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic classes in the Pauline communities.

Keywords: Paul, universalism, particularism, diversity, equality, egalitarianism, gender, ethnicity, social class

1. Introduction

It has become popular in recent years to refer to Paul's universalism.¹ In the context of this paper, universalism does not refer to universal salvation. Rather, it is a modern term that may be defined as follows: "All human beings, regardless of race, gender, sexual preference, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious background . . . [being] . . . considered moral equals and . . . therefore . . . [being] . . . treated as equally entitled to

¹ See, for example, Kathy Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 176–194; James G. Crossley, *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches* (Abingdon; NY: Routledge, 2010), 107–108; and Michael Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas's Philosophy of Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 24–26.

moral respect."² Are we able to attribute this modern concept to Paul, or is such an action hopelessly anachronistic? In practical, evidence-based historical terms did Paul reflect a universalistic approach to the formation of his communities? If so, to what extent did this reflect the attitudes of society and culture of Paul's time? This paper seeks to adopt a broad-based approach in responding to these significant questions.

The classic statement of Paul's universalism is found in Gal 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In view of the rules of first-century society, to quote J. M. Bassler, "[t]hese were extraordinary words for the first century, daring to proclaim and difficult to actualize even within the walls of the church."³

It may be initially useful to note the following explanation by Aristotle, which provides some context in terms of the basic classical and Hellenistic views of the issues at hand:

[I]t is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. . . . Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind.

Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals . . . the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. . . . It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.⁴

- 2 S. Benhabib, "Universalism in Contemporary Philosophical Debates", in *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 27. In this regard, universalism is usually discussed in terms of standing against the concept of particularism. Universalism is a preferable to the term equality, since it need not necessarily imply equality in every sense, and it is also preferable to the term egalitarianism, which has political connotations.
- 3 J. M. Bassler, "The Widow's Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim 5:3-16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103/1 (1984): 24.
- 4 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1. 1254b-1255a, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes* (vol. 21; trans. H. Rackham; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Heinemann Ltd., 1944).

2. Paul and Modern Universalism

Paul arrived on the scene when these attitudes were widespread. It is no wonder that modern scholars have struggled to understand him in this regard. On the one hand, Lesley Massey is of the view that there was a pre-Pauline Christianity where equality prevailed between the sexes, and that Paul was the great subjugator of women.⁵ In other words, Jesus treated women well, but Paul started the repression of women that has continued to this very day.

On the other hand, we have Alain Badiou, who in 2003 wrote a book entitled *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Alain Badiou is one of the world's most prominent Marxist philosophers and an atheist. How could he then write a book in which he essentially praises Paul's theology? It is because he sees Paul as the literal founder of the Western philosophical tradition of universalism that in some societies today is reflected in the notion of human rights and in others as communism.

It should be noted that a key challenge is avoiding arbitrary superimposition of a twenty first century philosophical term and its definition onto the writings of a first century Christian who was rooted in Judaism. The inclination to make Paul fit the definition must be carefully avoided. Paul's universalism is certainly not identical to Alain Badiou's universalism, and this calls for caution.⁶ Furthermore, exactly what is meant by moral equality and moral respect in Benhabib's definition, as quoted above also requires clarification.

Even at face value, it is evident that Paul explicitly fails the modern definition of universalism cited above. Paul's letters clearly show that he would not consider those with specific sexual preferences or religious backgrounds⁷ as being equally entitled to moral respect. Yet we may grant Paul some tolerance on these points, given that he lived in the first

⁵ Lesley Massey, *Women in the Church: Moving Toward Equality* (Jefferson: Macfarland & Co., 2002), cited in Gail J. Stearns, "Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition, and: Women in the Church: Moving Toward Equality, and: Women and World Religions, and: Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader," in *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 115/2 (2003): 185-191.

⁶ Indeed, Badiou's work has been sharply criticized by Mark Lilla for its anti-Jewish implications. See Mark Lilla, "A New, Political Saint Paul?" in *The New York Review of Books* 55 (2008): 75-79; and *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 55-103, 308. However, rather than agreeing with Lilla's reasoning, I would simply suggest that these implications arise from Badiou's own inadequate understanding of Pauline universalism, given his lack interest in the Biblical text itself, and in its cultural context.

⁷ Rom 1:26-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Cor 8:5-7.

century A.D., and that his mission was clearly religious in nature. Indeed, it is worth noting that Paul never used the term universalism; rather, we are left to deduce it from his letters. We will therefore continue to use the modern universalism, for want of a better term, recognizing that its ancient manifestations do not necessarily fully conform to its modern meaning.

3. Universalism in the First Century

The Graeco-Roman world of the first century evinced what we may call detectable universalistic trends. These universalistic trends were influenced by the philosophical rationale provided by Stoicism and reinforced by middle Platonism.⁸ McLean and Aspell attribute the formulation of the universalism found in the theology of all later Greek writers to the philosopher Xenophanes (c. 540 B.C.).⁹ Xenophanes strove "to purge god of particularity and to make him universal."¹⁰ In the late Hellenistic period, philosophical and political ideas converged. McLean and Aspell comment that:

The vast and radical forces at work in society and in the individual during the post-Aristotelian era gave birth to its critical reconstruction of philosophy. The all-pervading political cause of this development was the gradual transition of the center of both Greek and Roman life from the city to the universal-state. . . . Within the changing political scene, there was also a growing intellectual tension between the poles of universalism and individualism.¹¹

This intellectual tension, and indeed a nascent universalism, permeated the Graeco-Roman world:

The advance of the spirit of universalism was manifested in many ways: . . . Roman architectonic visions of world-states composed of heterogeneous territories; the great military and commercial plans to extend, strengthen, defend, and sustain the unity of the whole empire at the expense of the small city-state; and the systematic organization of philosophical works.¹²

⁸ P. F. Esler, *The Early Christian World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 65.

⁹ G. F. McLean and P. J. Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy: The Hellenic Emergence* (2nd ed.; Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1997), 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹² McLean and Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy*, 241–242.

3.1 Pauline Adaptability

Many scholars have seen Pauline universalism as being closely related to Pauline adaptability. The classic passage illustrating Pauline adaptability is found in 1 Cor 9:20–23 within which Paul states: “I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some” (v. 22). Barbara Hall does not mince words on this: “Paul’s description in 1 Cor 9:19–23 of the way he habitually functioned in response to God’s call is not just problematic; it is outrageous, quixotic, impossible. As a general guideline or principle of behavior, it is hopeless. . . . We use the expression as a criticism. . . . We imply failure in the attempt.”¹³

Paul is not merely criticized by modern scholars for his adaptability; it appears that he constantly faced charges of fickleness in his own lifetime. He vigorously defended himself against these charges: “Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time? But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no” (2 Cor 1:17–18).

There have been many suggestions for the sources of Paul’s adaptability, and many of them have been based on the teachings of Greek philosophy. Clarence Glad has influentially suggested that the source of Pauline adaptability may be found in Epicurean psychogogic theory and practice.¹⁴

Surely, however, it is worthwhile asking Paul himself from where he derives his concept of adaptability. While his letters may not specifically answer all aspects of this question, they are sufficiently explicit, and in other areas sufficiently implicit, as to guide us to the most likely sources of his concept of adaptability. While Paul’s adaptability is rooted in an interplay of a range of contemporary Hellenistic influences, it is clear that the concept of divine condescension is key. He expresses this numerous times. A clear example may be found in Phil 2:6–8: “who [Christ], although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

¹³ B. Hall, “All Things To All People: A Study of 1 Corinthians 9: 19–23,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (eds. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 149.

¹⁴ C. E. Glad, “Paul and Adaptability,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. J. Paul Sampley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 17–41.

Philippians 2:1 is also worthy of note, since Paul here urges the church to follow Christ's example of condescension. Paul also elsewhere uses the term ταπεινος, "humble," to his own practice.¹⁵ Paul therefore bases his own source of adaptability on his understanding of divine condescension as reflected in the teaching and example of Jesus. Ziesler identifies evidence of an underlying Semitic church tradition regarding Jesus in the writings of Paul.¹⁶ In this regard, Bruce notes that "while none of our canonical Gospels existed at this time, the teaching of Christ recorded in them was current among the churches."¹⁷

Enquiring further, we might ask, which influences would have helped Paul shape his understanding of divine initiative as condescension. Paul ultimately, and perhaps naturally, grounds his understanding of divine condescension within his own Jewish tradition. In this regard, Berman's recent work¹⁸ is highly significant. Berman convincingly argues that ancient Israelite society, as reflected in the Pentateuch, reflected a profound shift towards a non-hierarchical, egalitarian society, in contrast to the nations around it.¹⁹ Berman notes, for example, that "Deuteronomy is a document in which heredity and class play little role in government—a document that has no word for class, caste, noble, or landed gentry."²⁰ Berman affirms this major theological and social shift by reference to the covenant narratives, in which the whole of Israel, rather than the king or the priests, "bear[s] the status of a subordinate king entering into treaty with a sovereign king, God."²¹

Paul identifies the Abrahamic covenant, in effect, as a covenant of condescension.²² In this regard, God's condescension to Abraham is pervasive in Paul's writings, as in this classic example from the fourth chapter of Romans: "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the

¹⁵ See examples in 2 Cor 11:7; 12:21; see also Phil 2:8.

¹⁶ J. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1989), 301–302.

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 213.

¹⁸ J. A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² Gen 15:1–21; 18:1–22.

Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'."²³

Subsequently, in v. 6, the example of divine condescension to David is also mentioned. Indeed, throughout the epistle to the Romans, Paul emphasizes the role of divine condescension in Israel's salvation.²⁴ Paul sees the concept of divine condescension as the pattern of God's dealings with His people throughout history. Furthermore, because of God's dealing with the world through the cross, divine condescension in turn becomes the model for relations both within the church, and with the world (Phil 2:5–8).

3.2 Unity or Equality?

Banks cautions us that the recognition of Paul's assertion of unity in Christ should not lead us into a false impression: "Paul's stress is not so much upon the equality of Jews and Greeks, free and slave, and men and women with one another as upon their unity in Christ. . . . Paul is no advocate of a universal, classless and unisexual society—he merely affirms that these differences do not affect one's relationship with Christ and membership in the community."²⁵

With regard to the Pauline churches, Elliot states that non-discriminatory inclusion, rather than equality, is the point.²⁶ For this reason, 1 Cor 12:14–17 mention "inferior" and "superior" members with "lesser" and "greater" honour, who, although they are unequal, are all united in service in the body of Christ.²⁷ Paul's enumeration of the various functions in 1 Cor 12:28–31 does not presuppose equality, but rather variation in the quality of these gifts.

3.3 The Cross and Universalism

The cross is central to Paul's theology (1 Cor 1:23). Within Paul's agenda of creating a new community in Christ, the cross is correspondingly central. Christ crucified defines the identity of the community and its members, and indeed, defines the boundaries of the community:

²³ Rom 4:1–3; see also Gal 4:21–28.

²⁴ D. J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 727.

²⁵ R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Surrey Hills: Anzea, 1979), 133–134.

²⁶ J. H. Elliot, "The Jesus Movement Was Not Egalitarian But Family-Oriented," *Biblical Interpretation* 11/2 (2003): 181.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

The cross—*o stauros*—was offered here as the primary identity marker for those in the Christian *ekklesia*. . . . For Paul, the cross created a new all-encompassing dichotomy that effectively reconstituted the Corinthians' relational universe, replacing the more familiar dichotomies of Jew and Greek (1.23–24), foolish and wise (1.26–27), weak and strong. Instead of multiple overlapping networks . . . now there were only two mutually exclusive ones: 'those who are perishing' and 'those who are being saved'.²⁸

For Paul, it is the cross that matters; everything else matters because of the cross. Boyarin for example, regarding Paul's attitude to food, can say that "Paul's declarations that observances of the Law are *adiaphora*, matters of indifference, represent 'a cultural tolerance'."²⁹ His argument is precisely against those who think that what one eats is of significance. There may be differing views on what exactly Paul means by law in differing contexts. However, Boyarin's assessment of Paul's argument, regarding a range of issues with which Paul dealt, is substantially correct.

For Paul, it is the cross that represents the death of the old and the familiar, and which is the means of a new creation that relativizes all other distinctions. It is the cross that establishes the boundaries of the New Israel of God: "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."³⁰

3.4 Immorality and the Boundaries of the Pauline Churches

While many things lose their importance in the light of the cross, one thing that matters to Paul is the betrayal of the cross. For Paul, the cross is betrayed particularly by sexual immorality. Note 1 Cor 6:15–20, which commences with Paul asking, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!" (v. 15).

Paul's argument here is that because of the cross (v. 20) the bodies of the members of the *ἐκκλησία* have been bought by God so that they no longer have authority over them (v. 19). When a person "joins himself to

²⁸ C. K. Robertson, *Conflict in Corinth: Redefining the System* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 136–137.

²⁹ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 9.

³⁰ Gal 6:14–16; see also Eph 2:12–17.

the Lord" (v. 17), he or she becomes part of the "body of Christ."³¹ Indeed, the "body of Christ" is the εκκλησια itself, so that the boundaries of the εκκλησια are the boundaries of the "body of Christ."

For Paul, sexual immorality means to "take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute." In other words, the issue of sexual immorality is an issue which deals with the heart of one's identity as a Christian; it has to do with the very boundaries of the Christian community. The one who is sexually immoral has effectively crossed the boundaries of the εκκλησια. For this reason, Paul describes immorality as a sin of a different order, in that "the immoral man sins against his own body" (v. 18). It is a sin against the whole body of Christ, the entire εκκλησια. Immorality is a repudiation of the cross, which Paul presents as the prime identity marker for the Pauline communities, as well as the basis of God's presence within the community.³²

Paul therefore scrupulously emphasizes sexual purity in his letters, as in 1 Cor 6:9–10 and Gal 5:18–20. For Paul, to cross over this boundary of the community was, in the definition of Morgan et al., a second-order change.³³ It was not to be countenanced; in Paul's words, "May it never be!" (1 Cor 6:15). Accordingly, Paul protects the homeostatic balance of the community by safeguarding it from any association with sexual impurity or adultery.

3.5 Race in the Pauline Churches

With regard to the issue of race, the ancient world was clearly and irrevocably segmented. The challenge that Christianity faced has been famously expressed by Fustel De Coulanges:

Christianity was not the domestic religion of any family, the national religion of any race or community. From its first appearance it called to itself the whole human race. This principle was so extraordinary, and so unexpected, that the first disciples hesitated for a moment. We may see in the Acts of the Apostles that several of them refused at first to propagate the new doctrine outside the nation with which it had originated. In this there was something quite new. For everywhere, in the first ages of

³¹ Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27.

³² M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 104.

³³ D. D. Morgan, D. H. Levandowski, and M. L. Rogers, "The Apostle Paul: Problem Formation and Problem Resolution from a Systems Perspective," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 9/2 (1981): 136–143, 137–138, cited by Robertson, 119.

humanity, the divinity had been imagined as attaching himself especially to one race.³⁴

Modern research has borne this out, with Mason observing that the term *Ioudaioi* was in the main a racial, rather than religious designation.³⁵ It meant, essentially, "Judean" with the religious connotations principally derived from its racial categorisation. Cohen highlights that there is significant evidence that Jewish proselytes were not considered full Jews in many places and times.³⁶ One did not simply change one's religion; it belonged to your race. You were born that way. Christianity, however, shattered the paradigm by announcing the creation of a new race, indeed, a whole new creation, in Christ. Paul conceived of a church where the lines that had divided humanity based on race no longer existed.

One of the reasons why Paul could do this was because he started with what united humanity, rather than with what separated it. The Stoic and Middle-Platonic philosophers had started by attempting to deal with what separated humanity. For Paul, the problem was not that people all belonged to different races, what separates us, but rather in what unites us: that is, that we are all sinners. Therefore, Paul can write: "there is no distinction; for all have sinned" (Rom 3:22–23).

3.6 Socio-Economic Status in the Pauline Churches

Here, we will consider the issue of socio-economic status. The new consensus on this is that the socio-economic make-up of Paul's churches reflected that of the broader society.³⁷ If Gehring's estimate that 99.5% of the population of the Roman Empire belonged to the lower classes is correct,³⁸ this would have been reflected in the composition of the Pauline churches. This is reflected in 1 Cor 1:26 (NIV): "Brothers, think of what

³⁴ Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religions, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (1874), 391; cf. S. J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82/1 (1989): 13–33; and S. Mason, "Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 457–512.

³⁵ Mason, "Jews."

³⁶ Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary."

³⁷ Werner Eck, "Das Eindringen des Christentums in den Senatorenstand bis zu Konstantin d. Gr.," *Chiron* 1 (1971): 381–406, cited in W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 214.

³⁸ R. W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 166.

you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."

Paul's statement indicates that the reverse was also true. While not many were influential, some were. While not many were of noble birth, some were. Regardless, what is clear is that the membership of the Pauline communities comprised people of different social status. Paul's emphasis on unity rather than on strict equality meant that the advantages of people with higher socio-economic status appear to have led to their contributing to the Christian community in ways which others could not. In this regard, Banks comments that "differentiations of a social kind were not treated as if they did not exist; nor were they subjected to an indiscriminate leveling process. Social privileges, no longer a mark of *distinction between* members of the community, could become an occasion for *service* to them."³⁹

3.7 Gender in the Pauline Churches

Cotter notes that "Roman and Greek culture agreed in the exclusion of women from the public and/or political arena; not only were women denied public offices, they were expected to refrain from any formal 'public' behaviour."⁴⁰ This exclusion included public worship, with the exception of some of the female-oriented mystery cults such as the cult of Isis. However, in line with the spirit of universalism which was emerging in the Hellenistic world, Bassler observes that "[i]n the centuries immediately preceding the advent of Christianity, a gradual liberation of women occurred in the Greco-Roman world. Yet this liberation seems to have been somewhat stronger in theory than in practice, and it aroused as much reactionary animosity as support."⁴¹

What we see, particularly in the Pauline communities, is that women appear to have held positions of honour and authority,⁴² they held a higher status than pagans,⁴³ they outnumbered men,⁴⁴ and had higher

³⁹ Banks, *Community*, 137.

⁴⁰ W. Cotter, "Women's Authority Roles in Paul's Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?," in *Novum Testamentum* 36/4 (1994): 350-372, 366-367.

⁴¹ Bassler, "Widow's Tale," 25.

⁴² Found throughout the Pauline epistles. See also Jerome, *Commentarii in Jesaj* 3:2 (trans. R. M. Berchman, in *Porphyry Against the Christians*; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 156.

⁴³ R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 128; M. Walsh, *The Triumph of the Meek: Why Early Christianity Succeeded* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 114-116; and Cotter, "Authority Roles," 369-371.

⁴⁴ See the greetings in Rom 16.

primary conversion rates than men.⁴⁵ Where Paul does appear to place restrictions on women, his concerns go both ways, and impact on both males and females. Indeed, it is not only interesting, but also significant, to note how Paul always balances his advice to females with corresponding advice to males. Badiou called this “subsequent symmetrisation.”⁴⁶ What this demonstrates is how Paul clearly differentiates between males and females, yet gives them equal consideration within the Christian community. Here are some examples:

“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does” (1 Cor 7:4a)	“and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor 7:4b)
“Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head” (1 Cor 11:4)	“But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved” (1 Cor 11:5)
“the man is the head of a woman” (1 Cor 11:3a)	“as God is the head of Christ” (1 Cor 7:4b)
“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22)	“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25)
“Therefore I want men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension” (1 Tim 2:8)	“Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves . . . modestly and discretely” (1 Tim 2:9)
“if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do” (1 Tim 3:1)	“Women must be likewise dignified, . . . temperate, faithful in all things” (1 Tim 3:11)

Table 1: Subsequent Symmetrization

⁴⁵ Acts 16:13, 17:4; see also Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.50–55 (trans. H. Chadwick; Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

⁴⁶ A. Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (trans. Ray Brassier; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 104.

4. Conclusion

An understanding of Paul's universalism within its first century Graeco-Roman context has much to contribute to modern discussion in a variety of contexts. In significant ways, Paul lived in a culture that was remarkably similar to ours, with its contradictions between theory and practice with regard to emerging ideas about freedom and equality, and the social and economic realities. Within the first-century culture of nascent universalism, the Pauline communities actually operationalized radical universalistic principles based on Paul's understanding of the gospel. These were radical in comparison to other available social and religious structures of the time. To the extent that the Pauline communities survived, flourished, and grew, they were successful. Indeed, within the culture of Paul's day, the universalism of the Pauline communities may have been a significant source of competitive advantage. Dunn notes that Paul's contribution to Christianity was that he

. . . stretched the diversity of infant Christianity, preventing it from falling back into a Jewish sect, and leaving developing Christianity the challenge of addressing wider culture in meaningful language. . . . the diversity of his theological assertions helps prevent his successors succumbing to a narrowly consistent Christology, a monochrome concept of salvation or a uniform concept of community. And the vision of principled adaptability remains a model for sensitive and flexible pastoral practice. In a word, Paul the apostle is the apostle of Christian diversity.⁴⁷

Although Paul's thinking was molded by his culture, Paul was able to stretch this diversity to which Dunn refers beyond its boundaries. He was able to do this because his universalism was based on a new and radical conceptualization of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One senses that Alain Badiou is right, and that Paul's radical universalism was a major contribution to human culture. One must hasten to add that this was not, however, the boundaryless egalitarianism that Badiou may envisage. It was, rather, a universalism that was shaped fundamentally by Paul's understanding of his ministry, operationalized within the context of the culture of his own time.

⁴⁷ J. D. G. Dunn, "Diversity in Paul," in *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World: A Survey of Recent Scholarship* (ed. D. Cohn-Sherbok and J. M. Court; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 107-123, 123.

VICTORY, FAITH, AND CHRIST'S SECOND COMING IN REVELATION

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The book of Revelation presents God's people as being involved in the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. The involvement includes their continuous battle over sins from the time of John up to the Second Coming. There is no guarantee for the people of God to have victory over sins unless they respond positively to the grace of God by accepting Jesus Christ and the redemption by His blood. This is called faith, the key factor to be courageous and victorious over sins.

Key Words: Faith, second coming, great controversy, victory over sins

1. Introduction

More than ten years ago an article on Jesus and the Second Coming in the Apocalypse was published by Ekkehardt Müller straightforwardly highlighted passages in Revelation containing the theme of the Second Coming, terms related to the Second Coming, and the evaluation of those passages. As a result of the evaluation Müller came up with conclusions regarding the manner of the Second Coming, the result of the Second Coming, and the preparation for that event.¹ According to Müller the book of Revelation highlights three aspects of preparation required from the people of God for Christ's second coming: (1) Watching and waiting, (2) taking the words of God seriously, and (3) good works deriving from faith in Jesus.² While his conclusion is all-inclusive, one may expect to see aspects of preparation expressed more connectedly to the war language in Revelation.

The expectation is not without reason. The significant number of the use of the verb *νικάω*, "to overcome," that occurs seventeen times (2:7, 11,

¹ Ekkehardt Müller, "Jesus and His Second Coming in the Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11/1-2 (2000): 205-215.

² *Ibid.*, 214-215.

17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 (2x); 5:5; 6:2 (2x); 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7) suggests that there is a battle to fight. Its consistent occurrence in the messages to the seven churches signifies that Christ's church is being involved in a battle. The fact that the term "coming" occurs five times in the section of the seven churches (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11),³ where the verb *νικάω* occurs eight times, indicates that there must be relevancy between the coming of Christ and overcoming.

Another relationship in search is the connection between overcoming and faith. In Revelation, the concept of faith is presented by the occurrences of the noun *πίστις*, "faith" (2:13, 19; 13:10; 14:12), and the adjective *πιστός*, "faithful" (1:5; 2:10, 13; 3:14; 17:14; 19:11; 21:5, 6). If overcoming has something to do with the Second Coming, and if overcoming is related to faith, then the three themes are interrelated: overcoming, faith, and the Second Coming. It is the task of this paper to highlight that connection. First, I will present each of the three themes in Revelation to see their function in their contexts. The next step is to see the relationship among the three themes and the function of victory and faith in the preparation for the Second Coming.

2. Victory over Sins

As introduced above, the book of Revelation is rich of war motifs. Of the eighteen occurrences of the word *πόλεμος*, "war, battle, strife, conflict," in the New Testament, nine times it occurs in Revelation. The cognate verb *πολεμέω*, "wage war, fight," occurs six times in Revelation out of ten times in the New Testament (2:16; 12:7 [2x]; 13:4; 17:14; 19:11). These two words are used to describe two parties involved in a battle or conflict as presented in the diagram below:⁴

Verses	Verb	Parties Involved in the War
2:16	<i>πολεμήσω</i>	Jesus against unrepentant Christians
11:7	<i>ποιήσει πόλεμον</i>	The beast against the two witnesses
12:7	<i>πολεμήσαι</i>	Michael against the dragon

³ There are two terms conveying the idea of "coming" in the message to the seven churches: *ἔρχομαι* (2:5, 16; 3:11), and *ἔξω* (2:25; 3:3).

⁴ The word *πόλεμος*, "war, battle," is considered only when it is the object of the verb *ποιέω*, "to make." Thus the pairing of the two conveys the active notion of "to make war" or "to fight." It is in this sense we may see at least two involved parties. For this reason, the word *πόλεμος* in Rev 9:7, 9 and 20:8 is excluded from the diagram above. Also, since the word *πόλεμος* in 16:14 is elaborated in Rev 19:11, 19, it is excluded.

12:7	ἐπολέμησεν	The dragon against Michael
12:17	ποιῆσαι πόλεμον	The dragon against the remnant
13:4	πολεμήσαι	Who against the sea-beast?
13:7	ποιῆσαι πόλεμον	The sea-beast against the saints
17:14	πολεμήσουσιν	The beast against the Lamb
19:11	πολεμεῖ	The faithful and true against wicked nations
19:19	ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον	The wicked nations against the faithful and true

The diagram above indicates that Jesus and Satan have been the two contenders in the conflict. Jesus is presented as both the one making war and the object of war and so are Satan, the sea-beast, and the wicked nations. The case is different with the people of God.⁵ The diagram does not present them as the ones making war. Instead, the two witnesses, the remnant, and the saints are always the target of war. The beast of Rev 11 makes war against the two witnesses because of their prophecy and testimony (11:7). Satan makes war against the remnant of the woman's seed that they may stop keeping the commandments of God and disregard the testimony of Jesus Christ (12:17). The sea-beast makes war against the saints that they may worship the sea-beast (13:7, 8). This picture seems to suggest that the people of God are merely a target of war. One may ask if they have an active part in the war. An exegetical logic below may explain.

Some of the references of the table above include the result expected from the battle—a victory. This is described by the use of the verb νικάω, "to overcome, conquer," after the verb πολεμέω or the phrase ποιῆσαι πόλεμον: the beast coming out of the abyss makes war and overcomes the two witnesses (Rev 11:7); the sea beast is given power by the dragon to make war and to overcome the saints (13:7); the wicked kings and nations make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb overcomes them (17:14). This

⁵ The designation "people of God" in this paper is also understood as the church. Ekkehardt Müller, "Introduction to the Ecclesiology of the Book of Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 12.2 (2001): 199–200 lists down the various designations of the church in Revelation: "(1) fellow servants, brothers, servants (1:1; 2:20; 6:11; 7:3; 12:10; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6), (2) the church (*ekklēsia*; 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16), (3) priests and a kingdom (1:6; 5:10; 20:6), (4) lampstands (1:20), (5) the overcomer (2–3; 15:2; 21:7), (6) the remnant (2:24; 12:7), (7) those in white clothes (3:4–5; 6:11; 7:9, 13), (8) the saints (5:8; 8:3–4; 11:18; 13:7; 14:12; 16:6; 17:7; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 29:9), (9) the 144,000 (7:4–8; 14:1–5), (10) the great multitude (7:9; 17), (11) the holy city (11:12), (12) the woman (12; 19:7; 21:9), (13) those that are called, chosen, faithful (17:14), (14) my people and his people (18:4; 21:3), (15) the bride (21:9; 22:17), and (16) the twelve tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Lamb (21:12, 14).

connection indicates that the use of the verb νικάω in Revelation should be understood in the context of war or battle even without the verb πολεμέω. On this basis, the people of God are also actively making war for ten of the seventeen occurrences of the verb νικάω in Revelation present the people of God as the subject (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7).⁶

Being the target of a fight does not necessarily connote a passive position. For example, although Rev 17:4 presents the wicked kings making war against the Lamb, it is the Lamb that shall overcome them (τὸ ἄρνιον νικήσει αὐτούς). It means the Lamb also fights against them. In this line of understanding, the people of God also make war against the dragon and the beast. In what way do the saints make war? While for a spiritual reason, namely to gain worship from the saints, the dragon and the sea-beast involve oppression and persecution (13:10, 15, 17), the people of God have their own way of making war against the enemy. To know the weapon of God's people, the nature of the war should be further clarified.

To each of the seven churches the promises to the overcomer are given. Interestingly, only five of them Christ calls for repentance: Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea.⁷ Also, it is only in the messages to these five churches that Christ exposes the sins of each of them. The Christians in Ephesus forsake their first love (2:4); those in Pergamum and Thyatira are involved in adultery and idolatry (2:14, 20); the many in Sardis do defile their white garments (3:4); Christians in Laodicea suffer from spiritual poverty, blindness and nakedness (3:17). Apparently, the Christians of these five churches are involved in a battle against sins in the sense of struggling to come out from those sins. How about the other two churches? To them is also given the promise if they overcome. Although there is no mention of specific sins they are struggling, their battle is that they may not give up their faith and fall into sins alluring them. God's reward of eternal life will be theirs only if they have victory over sins.

To understand further the battle over sins, it is necessary to see the overall picture of the Great Controversy outlined in the central piece of Revelation: Rev 11:19–15:4.⁸ The intensity and the continuity of the battle are described here. This section may be structured into three parts:

⁶ Seven occurrences of the verb in the section of the Seven Churches (chaps. 2 and 3) is in singular substantival participles connoting that any individual of the church members can be overcoming.

⁷ The call for repentance is evident from the use of the verb μετανοέω, "to repent" (2:5, 16, 21; 3:3, 19).

⁸ Joel N. Musvosvi, "The Issue of Genre and Apocalypse Prophecy," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 5 (2002): 54. He calls this passage "Cosmic Conflict." Some time later he includes 11:19 and 15:1–4 with chaps. 12–14, and establishes 11:19–15:4 as

- A The great conflict: From heaven to earth (11:19–13:18)
 - B The eschatological victory (14:1–5)
- A¹ The great conflict: From earth to heaven (14:6–15:4)

The main theme in Part A is worship. In this part, the verb προσκυνέω, “to worship, bow down, kneel,” occurs six times (13:3, 4, 8, 12, 15). The dragon puts forth all his efforts in order to get himself worshiped. His efforts include: war against Michael (12:7–9); war against the “male child” (12:4, 5); war against the woman (vv. 6, 13–16); war against the remnant of the seed of the woman (v. 17). This has been a continuous battle to gain worship from the time the battle took place in heaven up to the period after the 1260 years. All the efforts of the dragon bring a result that he has expected. Excluding the woman and the remnant of her seed (12:6, 14–17), the entire world “worshiped the dragon” (13:4), “and they worship the beast” (13:3, 4), “And all who dwell on the earth will worship him [the sea beast]” (v. 8).

Part B of the structure above seems to interrupt the flow of the apocalyptic narrative. It does not chronologically continue the previous narrative. While the conflict continues in 14:6 with the messages of the three angels, 14:1–5 presents the end result of the conflict, the victory of the Lamb with those who have been following Him faithfully.

Next, Part A¹ (14:6–15:4) presents the great conflict from another perspective and in a new stage. While in part A Satan seems to dominate the conflict on the earth, the scene changes in part A¹. Here the dragon, in this case, his sea-beast, and those who worship the beast receive a threat of judgment through the messages of the three angels. The conflict continues on the earth (14:6–20) and ends with the harvest on the earth (vv. 14–20), and a great victory that is celebrated in heaven (15:1–4).

Worship is the issue in the messages of the three angels.⁹ The word προσκυνέω appears considerably in the section of the three angels (14:6–13),

the center of the chiasmic structure. Joel N. Musvosvi, *Syllabus for NTST 670 The Book of Revelation*, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2004. William Shea, “The Controversy Over the Commandments In the Central Chiasm of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11/1–2 (2000): 217, also seems to suggest Rev 11:9–15:4 as the central section of Revelation. He says, “Rev 11:19 is the fourth sanctuary scene and introduces the prophecy of Rev 12:1–15:4, the main prophecy in the center of the book.”

⁹ See also William G. Johnsson, “The Saint’s End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium on Revelation* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vols. 7; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 2:35. He says, “The first angel issues a call to worship God the Creator in the setting of

namely three times (vv. 7, 9, 11). The target of the three beasts is “every tribe and people and tongue and nation” (Rev 13:7), which is the inhabitants of the earth (v. 8), particularly the saints (v. 7) or “the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17). In counteracting the dragon and his allies, the three angels preach the eternal gospel to “those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (14:6): “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (v. 7). The description above indicates that the inhabitants of the earth are in the position of “choose ye this day” (Josh 24:15), and the saints are in the position of “hold on to what you have” (Rev 3:11). This is their battle.

The message of the second angel announces the fall of Babylon (14:8), and God’s people are called to come out of her that they “may not partake of her sins (ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις αὐτῆς)” (18:4). Here is one of three places in Revelation where the word ἁμαρτία, “sin,” appears (Rev 1:5; 18:4, 5). This indicates that the battle fought by God’s people both those that are still in Babylon and those that are outside is a battle against sins.¹⁰ Oppression, persecution, and threat of death are only means to defeat God’s people and make them give up their faith.

It is in the continuous great conflict between Christ and Satan that the people of God take part. They have to choose whom they shall worship while their battle is continuing. Moreover, if the seven churches are understood to be representing a historical timeline since the period of the

the judgment hour; the second declares and exposes the system of false worship; the third issues a dire warning against the worship of the beast and its image.” Ibid.

¹⁰ William Shea also observes that since the introductory sanctuary scene highlights the Ten Commandments in the Ark of the Covenant, “the controversy in the end time described in Rev 12:1–15:4 should, therefore, involved the Ten Commandments.” Jon Paulien elaborates on Rev 13 that the beasts counterfeit the first four commandments in the effort to gain worship from the inhabitants of the earth and, not impossibly, from God’s people: “In Rev 13 the beasts not only counterfeit the persons of the godhead, but counterfeit each of the first four commandments of the Decalogue, as well. The first commandment says, ‘You shall have no other gods before me,’ but the sea beast takes the place of God by receiving worship of itself (Rev 13:4, 8). The second commandment warns against the worship of images, yet the land beast raises up an image to be worshiped (Rev 13:14–15). The third commandment says, ‘You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God,’ but the sea beast has the names of blasphemy written all over it (Rev 13:1, 5, 6).” Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9/1–2 (1998): 185. Since “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4), the battle described in the central section of Revelation is, on the part of the saints, a battle over sins.

early church up to the eschaton¹¹ then the battle over sins is continuous. In any given period of time, victory over sins is indispensable for entering heaven.¹² At the end, the group of people who are saved is described as those who are victorious over the beast and the image of the beast (Rev 15:2). Only those who overcome sins will inherit the new heaven and the new earth (21:7)

3. Battle over Sins and the Second Coming

The messages to the seven churches indicate that the second coming of Jesus is the ultimate event being promised by the Lord. Five of the seven messages to the churches contain explicitly the term "coming" referring to both the Second Coming and the judgment.

Although the term "coming" does not occur in the messages to the other two churches, Smyrna and Laodicea, the concept of the Second Coming implicitly exists there.¹³ It should be noted that in the messages to the five churches Christ's coming is always mentioned before the mention of the promises of reward to the overcomers.¹⁴ It seems to suggest that Christ's coming is the finish line, and if a Christian reaches it he/she will receive the promised rewards.

Two aspects need to be highlighted in regard to the connection between "overcoming" and the Second Coming. First, the present participles "overcoming" give clue that a Christian should be continuously overcoming or at least that the battle over sins is a continuous one.¹⁵ Second, the fact that Christ's second coming is the finish line to reach indicates that the battle against sins has a time limit. Thus, the battle against sins is continuous but not everlasting. While the battle

¹¹ I argue in one of my papers that the seven churches do not only describe what happened in the time of John, but also represent the Christian church from the time of John up to the eschaton. See Richard Sabuin, "Historicism: An Adventist Approach?—A Response to the Challenges to Historicism" *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 11.2 (2008): 159–74. See also Clinton Wahlen, "Heaven's View of the Churches in Revelation 2 and 3" *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9.2 (2006): 146–156, who presents the apocalyptic nature of the seven churches.

¹² John Henry Bennetch, "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ for the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 96 no 383 (J1-S 1939): 364, says "No church was excused from gaining victory over sin. In the life under grace foes confronted the seven churches on every hand under the leadership of the Archenemy."

¹³ Müller, "Jesus and His Second Coming," 209.

¹⁴ This is obvious particularly with the positive overtones of the term "coming" in the messages to the churches of Thyatira and Philadelphia. *Ibid.*

¹⁵ τῶ νικῶντι (Rev 2:7, 17), ὁ νικῶν (2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21)

seems to be raging, there is hope that it will come to an end. The Second Coming marks the end of the saints' battle over sins.¹⁶

The connection between the victory over sins and the Second Coming in the messages to the seven churches may help to see the same connection in other Second Coming passages in Revelation: the sixth and the seventh seal (6:12–8:1); the seventh trumpet (11:15–18); the harvest of the world (14:14–20); the seven last plagues (16:1–21); the marriage supper and the rider on the white horse (19:1–21).¹⁷

The sealed and saved ones, that is the great multitude (Rev 7:9), are those who have come out of the great tribulation (θλίψις) (v. 14). While the great tribulation may refer to a physical persecution, the cause of the persecution is the faithfulness of the saints. The case of the church in Smyrna may serve as an example. The saints of this church suffer tribulation (θλίψις) because of their unceasing faithfulness to Christ (2:10). They are commanded to keep on being faithful until death (γίνου πιστός ἄχρι θανάτου). The present imperative γίνου commands for a consistent faithfulness of those Christians. They are not commanded to be faithful from the time they are thrown into prison. Instead, they are instructed to remain faithful as they have been although they will go to prison. It is in this setting that the promise to the overcomers is given. Hence, coming out from a great tribulation may be understood as coming out victoriously from the battle over sins, and only those victorious over sins are ready for the Second Coming.

The picture of Christ's coming in the seventh trumpet contains the element of reward that refers back to the messages to the seven churches. To the seven churches, the promises of reward are given in future forms.¹⁸ When the seventh trumpet is blown, "the time has come . . . for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great (Rev 11:18). Here, the use of the aorist ἦλθεν indicates that the time has come for the fulfillment of what was

¹⁶ Müller, "Jesus and His Second Coming," 214, based on Revelation 19, summarizes the connection between Christ's second coming and the victory of the saints as follows: "Jesus returns as the rider on the white horse. His heavenly army follows Him. Armageddon takes place. The evil powers are judged. God's people are liberated and are able to participate in the marriage supper."

¹⁷ I thank Dr. Müller who demonstrated that these passages are clearly presenting the Second Coming. *Ibid.*, 211–214.

¹⁸ δώσω, "I will give" (Rev 2:7, 17[2x], 26, ; 3:21), ποιμανεῖ, "he shall reign" (2:26); περιβαλεῖται, "he shall be arrayed" (3:5); οὐ μὴ ἐξαιρέσω, "I shall never remove" (3:5); ὁμολογήσω, "I will confess" (3:5); ποιήσω, "I will make" (3:12); γράψω, "I will write" (3:12).

previously promised.¹⁹ Since the promises of reward are given to the overcomers, it is only them who may enjoy the rewarding at the Second Coming.

Now, when the Second Coming in Rev 14:14–20 is discussed, the presentation of the overcomers in 15:1–4 should be also considered for at least two reasons. First, the passage presents the people “who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name” (v. 2). These are the saints who struggle in the battle over all kinds of oppressions initiated by the beast (13:1–10), by his image (13:11–17), and by the number of his name (13:18). They are oppressed so that they may transgress the law of God or do sins. Second, the song sung by these people (15:3–4) resembles the message of the first angel. The three imperatives of the first angel’s message to fear, give glory, and worship (14:7) are echoed in the same order in the song to fear, glorify, and worship the Lord (15:4). They praise the Lamb who has made them victorious. They have refused to worship the beasts and been determined to worship only the Creator. They have gone through a battle over sins before the Second Coming (14:14–20). Therefore, the reference to this group mentioned in 15:2–4 suggests that only those who overcome sins are considered ready at the Second Coming.

Revelation 15:1–4, particularly verse 1, introduces the seven last plagues wherein the Second Coming is described (16:12–21). Before the pouring out of the first plague, a significant momentum takes place: no one is allowed to enter the heavenly temple (15:8).²⁰ This signals the absence of intercessory ministry in the sanctuary. No one was able to enter into the place where the intercessory ministry was held. The absence of intercessory ministry indicates no reconciliation for sin.²¹ This is

¹⁹ In the construction ἦλθεν ἡ ὀργή σου καὶ ὁ καιρὸς the verb ἦλθεν may be ecliptically understood as the verb for ὁ καιρὸς also. The same verb is also used in Rev 14:15 in the context of the Second Coming: ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα θερίσαι, “the hour to reap has come.”

²⁰ This is different from the setting of the seven trumpets. The seven trumpets are blown when “the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand” (8:4). There is an intercessory ministry in the sanctuary. In the OT “incense” is used for the sin offering, in which the priest was to “put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense which is before the LORD in the tent of meeting” (Lev 4:7). By doing this, the priest “shall make atonement for him in regard to his [the sinner’s] sin, and he shall be forgiven” (v. 26). It is also used on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12,13). In the context of the sin offering and the Day of Atonement, no intercessory ministry means no forgiveness of sin.

²¹ See further discussion on the OT background to Rev 15:8 in Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 480. Willim Shea puts it this way: “After they (the angels) have departed on their mission of pouring out the plagues on earth, the glory of God flares up in such a way that no one can enter the temple until the

evident from the fact that despite of the great terror of the plagues, the wicked do not repent (16:9–11). On the other hand, the saints have been declared victorious (15:2).²² Sin still exists but it does not have power over the saints any longer. The time for vengeance upon the oppressors has come (16:5, 6).²³ Jesus is coming.

It has been demonstrated above that the battle over sins is continuous but has a limit. At the Second Coming, at the close of probation just before Christ's return, the saints are declared victorious over sins. Each of them has won his/her personal battle over sins. One question remains: How do they overcome?

4. Victory over Sins and Faith

The victory of the saints cannot be separated from the victory of Jesus Christ. He says, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:21). He overcame the dragon in heaven (12:7–9); He overcame at the cross (5:5–7); He overcomes the evil power and the wicked nations (17:13–14); He overcomes the beast and the false prophet (19:19–21); and finally, He overcomes the devil at the end of the millennium (20:7–10). The victory of Jesus should not be considered merely as a motivation for the saints to overcome. It is the source of their victory. If Jesus and His victory is the source of the victory of the saints over sins, there must be something that binds or attaches the saints to Jesus. This is to be seen from two sides: (1) what Jesus has done for the saints, and (2) how the saints respond to what He has done for them.

mission of the plague angels is completed. This is another way of saying that all redemptive ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is now concluded. Probation for the human race has closed, and now it remains only to pour out these judgments before Christ comes a second time." William H. Shea, "The Cultic Calendar for the Introductory Sanctuary Scenes of Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11/1-2 (2000): 128.

²² I agree with Shea that Rev 15:1–4 is the climax of Rev 12–14 and that "the chapter division is in the wrong place" (*ibid.*). However, I would posit that Rev 15:1–4 has an additional role, to introduce the seven last plagues. Verse 1 mentions about the seven angels with seven last plagues, and vv. 2–4 about the saints harvested at the Second Coming (14:14–20). It seems that the early introduction of the plagues in 15:1 followed by the mentioning of the victorious saints indicates that the saints are declared victorious as the plagues begin.

²³ Joel N. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse* (vol. 17; Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993), 238. He particularly points out that "the third plague answers the question of the fifth seal." *Ibid.*, 239.

From the beginning of the book of Revelation Jesus has been introduced as the one who “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev 1:5). Interestingly, the overcomers are described as those who have responded positively to the redemption by the blood of Jesus. “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and *made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (7:14); “*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb* and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (12:11). In this way, the victory of Jesus on Calvary by His blood is not merely a motivation for the saints to overcome, but the source of their victory over sins.

The New Testament clearly draws a connection between the blood of Jesus and faith. The saints are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect . . . Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God” (1 Pet 1:19, 21). Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). This is the unquestionable formula of salvation. In the case of the apocalyptic narrative of Revelation, the saints are saved because they receive the grace of God through the death (blood) of Jesus Christ, and in their struggle against sins they overcome because of their faith in Jesus Christ who has redeemed them by His blood.

For John, this is not a new concept. In one of his epistles he says, “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).²⁴ In this context, overcoming the world means overcoming sins because “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (2:16 NAS) are in the world. At the beginning of chap. 2, John has indicated the purpose of his writing: “I write this to you so that you will not sin” (2:1). Moreover, in this chapter victory over the evil one is repeated twice using the verb *νικάω* (vv. 13, 14),²⁵ and faith is the secret for victory (5:4).

In Revelation, faith is presented as a characteristic of the saints. After presenting the effort of the beast to force God’s people to worship the beast, an encouragement is given: “This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints” (Rev 13:10). The genitive construction *ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων* must be a subjective genitive: the faith that the saints have; the saints believe. This text presents only the subject (the saints) and the verbal noun (faith). What/who is the object?

²⁴ I assume common authorship of the gospel of John, the epistles of John, and the Apocalypse.

²⁵ Interestingly, it seems that the term “overcoming” expressed in the verb *νικάω* in the NT almost exclusively belong to John: twenty four out of twenty eight times (John 16:33; 1John 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4[2x]; 5:5; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21[2x]; 5:5; 6:2[2x]; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7).

Revelation 14:12, reemphasizes this encouragement: Ὡδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, "Here is the patient endurance of the saints, those keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (my translation). The text explains two things: First, it identifies the saints as "those keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."²⁶ Second, it suggests the object of the verbal noun πίστις. The genitive construction τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ should not be seen as a subjective genitive because 13:10 has presented the subject of the verbal noun ἡ πίστις, namely, the saints. What is needed is the object. Therefore the τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ is to be read as an objective genitive. Hence, the verbal noun ἡ πίστις in the central piece of Revelation appears with both the subject and the object conveying the message that the saints should believe in Jesus.

Syntactically, the participle οἱ τηροῦντες has two direct objects: τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ and τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ. In the writings of John the phrase "the commandments of God" is a common direct object of the verb τηρέω (John 14:15, 21; 15:10 [2x]; 1John 2:3, 4, 3:22, 24; 5:3). The verb, however, never takes "the faith of Jesus" or even "the faith" as its direct object, neither in the writings of John nor in the entire NT except in Rev 14:12. The message is clear. In the midst of the Great Controversy wherein the saints are involved in a battle over sins they should have patient endurance and remain identified as those keeping the commandments of God and keeping their faith in Jesus Christ. It is not only the matter of having faith in Jesus but also to maintain the faith in Jesus. This is a concept of faithfulness.

In the NT Greek the word ἡ πίστις and πιστός are in one group of words.²⁷ This being the case, the use of the adjective πιστός in reference to God's people does not only indicate a state of being faithful but also having faith. For example, Rev 17:14 hints at the importance of faith in the battle over sins. Those who are with the Lamb will win. These are those who are called, chosen, and faithful. They are not only called but also chosen (cf. Matt 22:14), not only chosen but faithful. The condition to win together with Jesus is being faithful, namely being loyal in faith.

²⁶ The antecedent of the masculine plural article οἱ must be τῶν ἁγίων, the only possible one in the context.

²⁷ R. Bultmann, "The pistis Group in the NT," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged edition; eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 853, suggests that in a case like Rev 2:10 and 13, πιστός is understood as the loyalty of faith. Therefore, given a similar context of the great controversy as in Rev 2:10, this adjective may also convey the meaning of loyalty of faith in 17:14.

5. Overcoming, Believing, and the Second Coming

After looking at the relationships between the victory of sins and the Second Coming, and the victory over sins and faith, let us now connect all three together. The place of Rev 14:12 just before the eschatological narrative of the Second Coming (vv. 14–20) suggests that the saints may come up victorious at the Second Coming if they should keep their faith in Jesus Christ. Even if they die before the return of Christ they should die in their faith in Jesus Christ. Only with that condition this promise applies to them: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on . . . they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (v. 13). In this context, to “die in the Lord” must mean that they die while they are keeping their faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, while the battle is continuing faith in Jesus Christ must also be continuously kept.²⁸

The three related components, overcoming, believing, and the Second Coming, are portrayed together in Christ’s message to the Christians in Smyrna. To the Christians in Smyrna Christ says, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer . . . Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10). There are two imperatives in this text: *μηδὲν φοβοῦ*, “Do not be afraid (stop being afraid of anything),” and *γίνου πιστός*, “be faithful (continue being faithful). Christ encourages the Christians to stop being afraid in facing tribulations. One of the functions of the phrase “do not be afraid” is to give encouragement for God’s people in facing a battle. No less than thirty OT references testify it.²⁹ To the Christians in Smyrna this is an encouragement for not being afraid of the oppressions designed to make them give up their faith. Moreover, the promise given to the one who overcomes (*ὁ νικῶν*, 2:11) confirms that the saints in Smyrna are in a battle. This is not a physical battle because there is no guarantee that they will escape the first death. Although they may experience the first death, the second death will not be theirs if they overcome. Thus it is a spiritual battle, the battle over sins.

The imperative “be faithful” implies a command to continue holding fast the faith. This is their weapon in their battle over sins. They have to remain faithful “until (*ἄχρι*) death” (2:10). The preposition *ἄχρι*, “until,”

²⁸ The present participle *οἱ τηροῦντες* implies a continuous keeping of both the commandments of God and the faith in Jesus.

²⁹ The following OT references contain encouragements to God’s people not to be afraid in facing their enemies: Exod 14:13; Num 14:9; 21:34; Deut 1:21, 29; 3:2; 3:22; 7:18; 20:1, 3; 31:6, 8; Josh 8:1, 10; 10:25; 11:6; Judg 6:23; 2Sam 13:28; 2Kings 6:16; 2Chron 20:15, 17; 32:7; Neh 4:14; Isa 7:4; 10:24; 35:4; 37:6; Jer 40:9; 42:11; 46:27; 51:46; Joel 2:21.

indicates “the continuous extent of time up to a point.”³⁰ In the case of the Christians in Smyrna, they are encouraged to remain faithful from the point they receive the message through a period of time and up to the point of their death.³¹ What does it mean?

The mention of the crown (of life) for the saints is found only twice in the messages to the seven churches (2:10; 3:11). In both places the same word στέφανος is used. To the church of Smyrna στέφανος is related to the death of the saints, and to the church of Philadelphia it is related to the coming of Jesus. This parallel suggests that the Christians in Smyrna are encouraged to remain faithful until death or until the second coming of Jesus, and the Christians in Philadelphia are to remain faithful until the Second Coming or until death (cf. 2:25, 26).³² While the battle is continuously going on, the saints should continuously hold fast their faith in Jesus until two possible points of time: their death or the Second Coming. The apocalyptic narrative of the great controversy outlined in the central piece of Revelation supports this idea. As discussed above, the beatitude about those who die in the Lord (14:13) and the portrayal of the Second Coming (vv. 14–20) are presented right after the mentioning of the importance of faith in Jesus Christ on the part of the saints (v. 12). This means the saints are to hold fast continuously their faith in Jesus either until they die or until Jesus comes the second time.

While the two imperatives in Rev 2:10, “do not be afraid” and “be faithful,” are encouragements for the saints that they may not be injured

³⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), s.v. “ἄχρι.”

³¹ Several uses of the preposition ἄχρι in Revelation, such as Rev 2:26; 12:11; 20:3, 5 also indicate a temporal sense.

³² Connecting the message to the church at Smyrna and the message to Philadelphia is supported by the parallels between the two churches below:

Smyrna (2:8–11)	Philadelphia (3:7–13)
Μετανοέω is absent (it occurs in the messages to all other churches)	Μετανοέω is absent
“those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (2:9)	“those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not” (3:9)
“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested (πειρασθήτε)” (2:10)	“I also will keep you from the hour of testing (τοῦ πειρασμοῦ)” (3:10)
“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς)” (2:10)	“hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown (τὸν στέφανόν σου)” (3:11)

by the second death, Rev 21:8 presents the opposite of the two as the characteristics of those whose ultimate destiny is the second death: "the cowardly (δειλός) and unbelieving (ἀπίστος)" (21:8). This is a set of negative attitudes that Jesus used to describe the reaction of His disciples toward the raging sea. He asked them: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40; cf. Matt 8:26). Being the first two on the list of the evil characteristics (Rev 21:8), "the cowardly and unbelieving" are mentioned just after the summary of the promise to the overcomers: "He who overcomes will inherit all this" (v. 7). This seems to present adjacently the contrast between the overcomers and the ones who do not overcome. At the same time, the contrast between the two groups highlights the tight connection between victory over sins and faith and the importance of faith in bringing victory over sins.

5. Conclusion

The book of Revelation presents a picture of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. God's people are involved in this controversy in their battle over sins, which is continuously going on from the time of John up to the present. Each Christian is being involved in the battle to come out from sins and/or to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. There is no guarantee for the people of God to have victory over sins unless they respond positively to the grace of God by accepting Jesus Christ and the redemption by His blood. This is called faith, the key factor to be courageous and victorious over sins. The fact that the saints are instructed to keep on holding fast their faith in Jesus suggests that faith is their initial response in accepting Jesus Christ as their Redeemer. Just like the battle is continuous, the Christians should also maintain their faith in Jesus continuously. Those coming out victorious are those maintaining their faith until they die or until the second coming of Jesus Christ.

This study was limited to looking at the correlations between victory over sins, faith, and the Second Coming. Terms such as justification by faith and sanctification by faith were not explicitly discussed. They were implicitly hinted on in the discussion about the connection between victory over sins and faith. Others are encouraged to continue this discussion by highlighting the connection between justification, sanctification, faith and works, and the close of probation in the book of Revelation.

THESIS AND DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

Theological Seminary, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

"The Doctrine of the Human Nature of Christ: Developments of the Views Regarding the Human Nature of Jesus Christ Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church Between 1957 and 1988"

Researcher: Sang-hoon Jee, Ph.D. in Religion, 2010

Advisor: Woodrow Whidden, Ph.D.

The main purpose of this study is to trace and describe the historical developments of the (three major) views regarding the human nature of Jesus Christ with the Seventh-day Adventist Church between 1957 and 1988. The subsequent purposes, which this study tries to pursue, are to identify major views, to define their main theological points, and to classify their respective proponents or advocates.

This study is structured to accomplish the purposes outlined above. Chapter 1 is devoted to an introduction to the dissertation.

Chapter 2 traces the developments of the views of the human nature of Jesus Christ prior to 1957. The "New Theology" View, which taught the sinless human nature of Jesus Christ, developed through certain preliminary, expansive, and decisive developments and events between 1949 and the release of *Questions on Doctrine* in November 1957. This period can be identified as the era of the debate between the sinful and sinless human nature views.

Chapter 3 focuses on the developments of the views from 1957 (after the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*) to 1971 (the year of the release of *Movement of Destiny*). This period can be identified as the era of the debate between the Traditional ("Post-Fall") View, as thesis, and the "New Theology" ("Pre-Fall") View, as antithesis.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the period from 1971 (after the publication of *Movement of Destiny*) to 1988 (the year of the publication of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*). This period can be identified as the era of the debate between the Alternative ("Uniqueness") View, as thesis, and the Traditional ("Identical") View, as antithesis.

Chapter 5 summarizes the development of the views regarding the human nature of Jesus Christ and provides clarification of the three major

views. This chapter presents the conclusions of the study and close with suggestions for further study.

“The Significance of Moses’ Staff Turning Into a Snake Before Pharaoh”

Researcher: Larry Windewani, M.A. in Religion, 2011

Advisor: David R. Tasker, Ph.D.

The first miracle that God did before the ten plagues was to turn Moses’ (Aaron’s) staff into a snake and the staff swallowed the Egyptian magicians’ staffs (Exod 7:9-12). In connection with the ten plagues that happened in Egypt, this sign gives the setting to the plagues as judgment to Pharaoh and deliverance to the Israelites. Scholars have different views regarding the significance of Moses’ (Aaron’s) staff turning into a snake and swallowing the Egyptian magicians’ staffs. A question may be raised, “Why did God use a staff that turned into a snake to convince Pharaoh?” After investigation the study shows that

1. The word *!yNIT*; that is used in Exod 7:9-12 is also used in other texts in the OT to describe the life of nations, human beings, and kings, especially Pharaoh the king of Egypt. In addition, according to Egypt’s mythology, there were some of their gods who manifested themselves in the form of a snake. Furthermore, Egyptians believed that every Pharaoh in Egypt was a manifestation of those gods. Therefore, based on the use of the word *!yNIT*; in the OT and Egyptian belief toward snake, the snake in Exod 7:9-12 may symbolize Pharaoh the king of Egypt.
2. The immediate context of Exod 7 shows that at that time, God dealt with Israelite and Pharaoh through His servants, Moses and Aaron. The exegetical investigation found out that a situation of judgment is revealed in this prologue narrative. Furthermore, in this judgment, God is the subject who executes the judgment and Pharaoh is the object who receives the judgment. Thus, this miracle symbolically reveals that Pharaoh is under judgment and the subject executing judgment is the powerful God of Moses. Thus, the significance of Moses’ (Aaron’s) staff turning into snake in this context was to show the object of judgment whom God dealt with that was Pharaoh and all his power.

"Universality in the Book of Micah: An Exegetical-Thematic Study"

Researcher: Victor C. Montaña, Ph.D. in Religion, 2011

Advisor: Carlos Mora, Ph.D.

This study investigates the theme of universality in the book of Micah through exegetical analyses. A review of pertinent literature has shown that in spite of the scholarly treatment on the theme of universality, the book of Micah receives little attention. Some scholars hold that the oracles for the nations were nationalistic and redactionally interpreted. No agreement exists as to how the concept of salvation for the nations is revealed in Micah. Because of these factors, it is the object of this dissertation to pursue its investigation.

The discussion on the backgrounds shows that in the narrative, writings, poetic, and prophetic literature of the OT, God makes redemptive benefits available for all. In the OT, God's relationship is open to the Gentiles and is demonstrably universal with regards to His unending love and intention for all His creation and He makes all human beings equal in dignity and worthy of His eternal care. The basis for the nations' inclusion in God's promised blessing is both textually and theologically linked to the motifs of covenant, election, mission, deliverance, worship, and prayers.

Chapter 3 analyzes the pertinent passages dealing on universality in the book of Micah (4:1-5; 5:7-8; 7:11-12,17-20). The findings reveal that these hopeful passages for the nations are set in the context of judgment and hope oracles. In Micah, the nations are included in judgment and most especially in the promised coming hope. Gentiles are objects of God's mercy rooted in His covenant promise to save humankind. It was found that the presence of several terminological citations, imageries, parallelisms, verbal analyses and other rhetorical features in Micah along with the inter-textual passages provide the background and avenue by which the promised transformation and redemption for the Gentiles can be elaborated and explained. This gives the integral setting to explain the promise hope made by God to the Gentiles in the book of Micah.

<p>“The Justification Debate Between N. T. Wright and John Piper”</p>

Researcher: Joseph Olstad, M.A. in Religion, 2011

Advisor: Woodrow Whidden, Ph.D.

Movements within Judaic studies over the past decades have spilled over to a number of reevaluations of Paul’s historical context. As “legalistic” appraisals of Judaism became more and more unpopular, the traditional view of Paul’s teaching on justification was called into question.

Among the many voices proffering their revised interpretations of Paul’s theology in general and justification in particular, N.T. Wright emerged as an early advocate for a fresh appraisal of Paul. Capitalizing on what is now called the “new perspective on Paul,” Wright has constructed a massive and intricate Pauline theology that redefines, shifts, and in some cases, dispenses with traditional concepts. Justification as a central Protestant teaching is redefined in the wake of some of these bold revisions. Though not denying the lawcourt metaphor, Wright subsequently has sought to ground justification in God’s covenant with Abraham, Israel’s purpose for the world, and Gentile inclusion into the Messianic Jewish community. Not to be out done, John Piper has risen to the occasion to defend the traditional view of justification against Wright’s interpretations. He does not do so simply as an unreflective adherent to orthodoxy or tradition, but in the end, he and many others believe the traditional Reformation view aligns most closely with what Paul actually wrote in his epistles. So, despite the fascination with the narrative approach Wright brings to Paul, Piper is unconvinced that these new perspectives aid in a clearer understanding of the apostle.

Piper and Wright have written book length responses to each other over the subject of justification and therefore provide their readers with a debate format. The present paper seeks to compare and contrast their debated positions and to offer introductory analysis as to the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

<p>“Critical Factors that Facilitated the Conversion of Muslims in the Garut District, West Java Province, Indonesia”</p>

Researcher: Sonny M. Sipayong, Ph.D. in Religion, 2011

Advisor: James H. Park, Ph.D.

The central focus of the study is to determine the critical factors that facilitated the conversion of Muslims in the Garut District, West Java

Province, Indonesia. The study was conducted among 280 Garut Seventh-day Adventist church members. They were asked to respond to a self-constructed instrument validated within the context of Garut community. Descriptive statistics were used to find out the level of agreement to the factors such as barriers to their conversion, internal and external influences that led to their conversion, evangelism and contextualization, and church growth strategies used by pastors and church members to enhance and nurture the spiritual growth of the newly converted Garut SDA church members.

The study showed that Garut people give more emphasis on informality and openness. They are friendly, show a sense of respect to other people, very cooperative and accommodating. Although many obstacles impeded the path of evangelism concerning Garut people, however, it is evident that many open doors also existed for the Gospel. The study discovered that there are specific contributing factors and mission strategies which have contributed to the significant growth of SDA church in Garut. Of first importance is the role and work of the Holy Spirit as a driving force for Garut conversion and growth. Furthermore, cultural approach, community services such as charity clinic and micro-economic development, training for pastors and laymen, and contextualization strategies, were among the very effective and applicable strategies.

Furthermore, based on the finding of the research, the Garut conversion and growth model is proposed as effective factors and mission strategy for winning the Garut people for Christ and how they can be nurtured in their new found faith.

The recommendations of the study include the equipping and training pastors from other ethnic groups before deploying them into the mission field. Community services like charity clinics, health programs, nutrition seminars including micro-economic development program can be integrated with other mission strategies. Increased contextualization and more nurturing strategies should be employed to ensure authentic conversion and spiritual growth.

"Utilizing the Internet as a Potential Tool to Spiritually Nurture
Christian Young Adults in Hyderabad, India"

Researcher: Jesin Israel Kollabathula, Ph.D. in Religion, 2011

Advisor: James H. Park, Ph.D.

In the New Testament, Paul's missionary commitment for nurturing the believers is directly demonstrated by the existence of the letters that he wrote. Paul's ministry was significant because he ministered to his congregations both when he was present with them as well as when physically separated from them. When present, he personally nurtured their faith but when separated, he wrote letters and sent them through his messengers. As Paul exerted his spiritual influence through his written Epistles delivered over the Roman road system of the 1st century, youth leaders and church administrators can exert similar spiritual influence bi-directionally using the Internet in the 21st century.

Exploring the history of the Christian church in general, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular, reveal the use of media-based communication through the printing press, radio, television, and satellite to fulfill the great commission of Jesus Christ. It also revealed that the ministry through the old and traditional means always continued while new means and methods were added. This shows that using the Internet for spiritual purposes in the 21st century is acceptable, legitimate, and necessary.

This research examined the perceptions of 263 young adults, 6 youth leaders, and 15 church administrators in Hyderabad, India. The results of the survey showed that 95 percent of the respondents were using the Internet. The pattern of Internet use per day showed that more than 50 percent of their time spent online was for email, social networking and chatting which indicated that the Internet is being used as a good tool for building relationships regardless of educational attainment, gender, age, and marital status.

The older and married respondents showed higher perceptions than the young and the single about the use of Internet for personal spiritual growth and as a tool to share their faith with others. This study recommends that seminars and workshops be conducted to create awareness, clear misconceptions, and to furnish ideas about the responsible use of the Internet as one of the potential tools for nurturing the spirituality of the young adults.

"Basic Components of a Training Program on Biblical Preaching for Young Seventh-Day Adventist Pastors of Korean Union Conference"

Researcher: Chang Jong You, D.Min., 2010

Advisor: Reuel Almocera, D.P.S.

Seventh-day Adventist churches in South Korea are demanding better quality of biblical preaching in their pulpits. The demand is far greater than the current ministerial workforce can supply. This crisis comes about because there seems to be a lack of a consistent Homiletical Training Program (HTP) for young pastors in the Korean Union Conference (KUC).

This study aims to provide a systematic and regular HTP for nonordained pastors in KUC. Particularly, the study identifies the basic components and a training model for the nonordained (unordained) ministers on biblical preaching. Examination of this study was based on documentary research and field research methods which involved the interviews with church administrators and survey questionnaires with 138 nonordained pastors. This study uncovered three basic areas that the HTP addressed. These were (1) spiritual training, (2) skill training (homiletic), and (3) evangelistic preaching training.

This study also designed a training model, which integrated classroom teaching (trainer's role) and field mentoring (field supervisor's role). It was envisioned that a 3-way partnership of trainers, field supervisors, and trainees be developed.

The study culminates with a curriculum designed for the classroom teaching components utilizing the suggested training strategies: (1) 6 lectures on spiritual training, (2) 7 lectures on preaching skills training, and (3) 5 lectures on evangelistic preaching training. Other useful tools such as the sheet of preaching evaluation, the trainee's learning covenant, and the field supervisor's learning covenant are listed in the appendixes. As a result, this HTP will help to increase the effectiveness of young pastors' preaching ministry in KUC.

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

Conklin, Blane, <i>Oath Formula in Biblical Hebrew</i> (Felix Ponyatovsky)	103-105
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Oath Formula in Biblical Hebrew, by Conklin, Blane. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we have been experiencing a revival of interest in Ancient Hebrew language researches in recent times. More and more dissertations are published and books are written on different aspects of the Hebrew syntax. Thus, in 2007 the book *Promises to Keep: The Oath in Biblical Narrative* written by Yael Ziegler was published by Brill and in 2011 the book of Blane Conklin *Oath Formula in Biblical Hebrew* was released by Eisenbrauns. Although these two books are devoted to the same topic, they do not duplicate each other. While Ziegler's study is more concentrated on the question about how different types of asseverative statements are used in their narrative contexts, Conklin's concern is to consider the syntactical structure of oath formulas.

Conklin's book has a clear structure, therefore it is easy to follow his logic. The author starts by defining what an oath is. According to him, every oath should have two essential elements: an authenticating statement and the actual content of the oath (p. 4). The author devotes the second chapter of his book, the first one is an introduction, to the analysis of different authenticating elements. The following chapters deal with the ways of how the content of different oaths can be introduced.

The author makes several important conclusions as a result of his study. He rightly observes that there are two ways of expressing oaths in Biblical Hebrew. One is with the help of conditional clauses. Conklin demonstrates that all of the 74 occurrences of conditional oaths follow the same syntactical pattern as ordinary conditional sentences. The author shows that even when a swearing formula contains only the protasis of the conditional clause, the omitted apodosis is always implied (pp. 37-45). According to Conklin, the reason why the apodosis is absent in many cases is because it is supposed to contain a self-imprecation, and in many

cultures, including the ancient Hebrew culture, the pronouncing of any curse was a language taboo (p. 4).

The other way to express the content of the oath is with the help of the particle *ki*. The syntactical function of this particle in oath formulas is a matter of debates, as the author has demonstrated in his problem statement section (pp. 1-2). Having analyzed many examples of oaths introduced by *ki*, Conklin comes to the conclusion that in most cases, this particle is used as a complementizer, and such construction is usually employed when the content of the oath has a complex syntax (p. 59).

Another conclusion of the author is about the function of the compound particle *ki-'im*. Conklin challenges the well-established consensus that this particle introduces a positive oath-clause and should be translated as "surely" or "indeed." He suggests to treat *ki-'im* as two separate particles where *ki* could be understood as a complementizer and *'im* as a conditional particle. I agree with the author that in some cases, this reading fits the context well. However, his argumentation has not convinced me completely. It should be noted that the reading of the particle *ki-'im* as two separate entities where *'im* introduces the protasis creates some kind of uncertainty regarding the fulfillment of the oath. For example, Conklin suggests the following interpretation of Jer 51:14 "Yahweh of Armies swears by his soul that, if I fill you with men like locusts, (then) they will chant a war cry over you" (p. 74). It is not clear from this reading whether Yahweh intended to fill Babylon with people or not. The presence of the protasis brings some doubt. Any oath is supposed to be a powerful assertion. However, Conklin's reading diminishes the strength of the whole statement. In my opinion, the reading attested in NAS: "The Lord of hosts has sworn by Himself: 'Surely I will fill you with a population like locusts, and they will cry out with shouts of victory over you'" fits much better the context and looks like a real oath.

Moreover, I cannot agree with Conklin's definition of the oath. As has been mentioned above, he suggests two necessary elements of oath formulas: the authentication and the oath itself. According to him, without the authentication, the statement can be considered as a promise but not as an oath (p. 4). However, he himself mentions at least three examples which do not have the authenticating component and which he identifies as oaths (Job 17:2; 22:20; 1 Kgs 20:23 (pp. 41-43). The boundary between an oath and a promise seems elusive. Every oath is a promise by its nature. The difference between them usually lies in the solemn occasion at which the oath is made.

Finally, I did not understand why the author transliterates all Hebrew characters. Usually, it is done when a book is addressed to an audience which is not familiar with the Hebrew language or when publishing

Hebrew characters creates some technical problems. In our days, the latter could hardly be the case, and it is obvious that the book can be of a little help for those who do not know Hebrew at all. Furthermore, the author does not mention which system of transliteration he uses. It makes the reading of the book difficult.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the author successfully accomplished the task of his research. His analysis and classification of different types of Hebrew oath formulas could be of great help for those who want to understand better the Hebrew Bible and the world of ancient Israelites.

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Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John, by Susan E. Hylen. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009.

Imperfect Believers by Susan Hylen is a recent addition to the growing corpus of literary studies on the Fourth Gospel. Hylen's special interest is in the characterization in John's book. In the introduction she compares the Gospel to other ancient works of literature, including the Old Testament, and argues that characters in these works are not "'flat,' 'static,' and . . . 'opaque,'" (3) as some scholars had suggested. The author discusses such aspects of John's language as dualism, symbol and metaphor that are important for evaluation of the characters. She also argues that the plot of the Fourth Gospel is broader than just revelation and belief, and that the characters' relation to it is more complex than usually understood. Hylen also describes the principles of literary characterization she employed in her book.

The book itself is divided into two parts. The first part deals with some ambiguous characters of the Gospel of John such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the disciples, Martha and Mary, and the Beloved Disciple. The second part, being "less exegetical and more conceptual" (16), analyzes 'special' characters such as the Jews and Jesus.

Nicodemus is "one of the Gospel's most ambiguous characters" (23), because he demonstrates both understanding and misunderstanding of Jesus (the latter being understood by Hylen as an example of Johannine irony). The story of Nicodemus in the Gospel is open-ended: he remains ambiguous, and it shows that "there is more to discipleship than belief in Jesus" (37).

The Samaritan woman is presented as sinful and not completely understanding Jesus; yet, this is only one side of the coin. The woman seems to follow Jesus' metaphor of the living water and her understanding, however imperfect, seems to be better than that of the disciples. In addition, she acts as a witness to Jesus and, "even without a full belief . . . becomes a well that brings living water to others" (55).

Jesus' disciples, seen as a group, demonstrate both belief and unbelief; they abide with their Master and, at a certain moment, they are scattered. Their faith is in progress: although now they may be "confused and unbelieving. . . . John nevertheless views the disciples from a standpoint of hope" (74).

Martha and Mary, who are often understood as the most faithful characters in the Gospel, also have their problems. Martha, as it seems, does not fully comprehend her own confession to Jesus, as she demonstrates at Lazarus' tomb. As for Mary, since John never says directly that she believes or comprehends she is ambiguous too, and this ambiguity remains even after she anoints Jesus in Bethany.

The Beloved Disciple, as Hylén admits, receives a highly positive characteristic in the Fourth Gospel; yet, she still sees him as ambiguous for several reasons. He is an anonymous character; "it is not clear what the Beloved Disciple believes or understands" (92); his role at the last supper, the crucifixion, the empty tomb, and the resurrection is not completely obvious. Therefore he can be viewed as "exemplary but not perfect" (106).

The Jews in the Fourth Gospel are usually seen as negative characters, but the author prefers to view them as a "conflicted" (119) one, as they both believe and disbelieve. John uses irony to show "the incongruity between the Jews' understanding and misunderstanding" (125). Hylén warns against separating John from Judaism and against supersessionist readings of the Gospel.

Although Jesus is "the least ambiguous of all John's characters" (135), He is not completely unambiguous. The Gospel presents the person of Jesus in various metaphors, which can be interpreted differently, and, therefore, makes Jesus' character complex and ambiguous. It is impossible to narrow this character to a single doctrinal point, but makes it vivid and living.

Hylén's study is an excellent contribution to the field. Her points are well argued and supported by the text of the Gospel. She pays much attention to the details of the narrative, which are often being ignored or underestimated. The easily readable and inviting language of the book does not diminish its great scholarly value but makes it accessible for a large audience of biblical students. Comprehensive bibliography at the end of each chapter shows acquaintance with the literature on the topic

and provides a great tool for further studies. *Imperfect Believers* appreciates the Gospel of John as a bright work of literature, at the same time upholding its historical reliability by arguing that John does not flatten or simplify the description of his characters in order to subordinate them to the plot of his book.

A few things need to be mentioned in conclusion. While it may be true that there is more to discipleship than belief in Jesus, it is also true that belief is one of the most important or even the most important components of discipleship. Therefore, its effect on the characters of the Gospel should not be underestimated. Sometimes the extent of the ambiguity of a character can be debated, as in the case of the Beloved Disciple, where the arguments seem a bit strained though it does not really affect the conclusion. Finally, Hylan is selective in her choice of characters that she discusses. There is a point in treating the disciples as a group, but a discussion of Peter who is an excellent example of an ambiguous character would not have harmed the study. Peter is referred to only in relation to the Beloved Disciple, but taking the importance of his character for John, a separate chapter would be appropriate. Another interesting character of the Gospel, which is worthy of more attention, is John the Baptist.

Imperfect Believers by Susan Hylan is a book to read for every student of the Forth Gospel who wishes to look deeper in its text, to search between the lines, and to appreciate the richness of its characters.

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