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Editor's Note

The road to Emmaus has long captured me. "Beginning from Moses and from all (πάντων) the prophets [Jesus] interpreted for them in all (πάσαις) the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Lk 24:27). All of the Old Testament scriptures testify of Christ, but the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus took perhaps two hours. So, upon which texts did Christ dwell? How did he interpret them? Of all the questions I envision asking of Christ in the life to come, this is the question that I anticipate he will answer for me. Too many other questions that fill my mind will fade in the light of eternity. But this question has eternal beauty, unending significance.

We believe, teach, and confess that Christ is the center and focus of all scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, an unbroken tapestry proclaims Christ. The church has roundly and rightly rejected Marcionism for its deficient reading of the Old Testament which is also a deficient understanding of Christ. He is not the Yahweh's first-century novelty. He was present at creation and has continued to be at work since then for the benefit of his creation. To read the Old Testament faithfully is to see Christ at work. But how do we find him? Christ is Israel reduced to one (cf. Hos 11:1; Mt 2:15). He is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) so that although no one has seen the Father (Jn 6:46), if you have seen Christ, you have seen the Father (Jn 14:9). It is a mystery—we confess it and even rejoice in it, but it eludes our comprehension. What a delightful calling to search the Old Testament scriptures knowing that in them we will find Christ.

Two articles in this volume of *Concordia Journal* illustrate that delight. Both articles show due respect to the text as given by Christ in a specific context, both its historical/cultural context as well as its literary context. Yet both also lead to a proclamation of Christ who was at work in that original historical/cultural/literary context for the benefit of his people, including us. Joel Fritsche, assistant professor of Exegetical Theology, explores the depiction of Israel as a great nation in Deuteronomy in accord with the promise to Abram in Genesis 12:3. Israel was a great nation by Yahweh's doing, yet they did not live up to that greatness. Jesus does what Israel could not so that all who are in Christ are the great nation promised to Abram. Adam Hensley, associate professor of Exegetical Theology, delves into Psalm 109, a particularly challenging imprecatory psalm. The harsh words coming from David's lips grate against our ears. In conversation with other psalms, Psalm 109 is rightly

understood, an understanding that reveals Christ for us. In addition to these articles focused upon the exegesis of the Old Testament, we are blessed by a guest article from Pastor William Fredstrom, who is currently in Concordia Seminary's PhD program. Fredstrom examines Luther's teaching regarding God's gift of marriage. This is a timely article as the 500th anniversary of Luther's marriage to Katherine arrives this June.

Kevin Golden
Dean of Theological Research and Publications

Articles

What Great Nation
Deuteronomy as the Vision of the Promise of Genesis 12:2

Joel P. Fritsche

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Concerning Genesis 12:2, God's promise to make of Abraham a great nation, Martin Luther wrote: "This is a most outstanding passage and one of the most important in all Holy Scripture. For this reason, it should not be dealt with lightly or read casually; it should be examined repeatedly and carefully unfolded and explained."[1] On the surface, one could understand great to mean large and numerous (Gn 15:6). But a careful unfolding of the meaning necessitates following the patriarchs' story and the origins of biblical Israel to the point of the promise's realization. Luther continues: "The Lord calls Abraham's descendants a great nation, not only because of temporal or physical greatness but also because of spiritual greatness, which would, nevertheless, belong to its physical life. For this people must be distinguished from all the kingdoms and peoples of the entire world, however great and powerful."[2] As Lutherans are often wont to ask along with Luther, "What does this mean?"

Moses's rhetorical questions in Deuteronomy 4:6–8 cast the vision of Israel as the great nation (גּוֹי גָּדוֹל) Yahweh promised to Abraham (Gn 12:2): not merely a people as numerous as the stars (Gn 15:5), but unique among the nations as a wise and understanding people belonging to a personal, present God. Deuteronomy does not yet place Israel in the promised land but on the brink of entering it. Building on the tumultuous past and acknowledging the urgency of the present while anticipating an abundant future, Moses envisions this great nation. Deuteronomy unpacks what Luther means by spiritual greatness manifest in the physical life of Israel. This is

particularly clear in Moses's Deuteronomy 4:6–8 ponderings and laid out in greater detail in the Torah that follows. As Moses considers Israel in the land among the nations, he acknowledges Israel's missiological purpose: drawing the nations not merely to Israel but to Yahweh himself. If Israel faithfully lives Yahweh's Torah, the nations will see a wise and understanding people and recognize that Israel's greatness is found in Yahweh, their present God, and in his Torah, and furthermore, desire the same for themselves.

This paper will consider the Pentateuch as a single narrative with Genesis and Deuteronomy as bookends, a key to recognizing the link between what Moses records in Genesis 12:1–3 and Deuteronomy 4:6–8. Next, it will analyze Genesis 12:1–3, explore the lexical understanding of the Hebrew word גָּדוֹל, and examine pentateuchal occurrences of the phrase "great nation" (גּוֹי גָּדוֹל), building up to its use in Deuteronomy. Finally, it will consider Deuteronomy 4:6–8 and the occurrences of גּוֹי גָּדוֹל throughout Deuteronomy to lay a foundation for fully understanding the "greatness," or uniqueness of Israel among the nations, which is essential to Israel's missional role as Yahweh's representative in their midst.

Genesis and Deuteronomy: The Bookends of a Single Narrative

Commenting on the state of pentateuchal criticism more than four decades ago, J. G. McConville notes that the diversity of literary styles within the Pentateuch (narrative, law, and exhortation) is "the crucial ingredient in modern debate about the Pentateuch," which has "led many scholars to suppose that the Pentateuch is also diverse in origin."[3] This diversity is characteristic of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis that the Pentateuch derived from different sources. The many scholars who went beyond him, such as Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth, pioneers of the traditio-historical method that further divides the Pentateuch into numerous other, largely oral, fragments, further support Wellhausen's premise.[4] R. N. Whybray laments the failure of both the Documentary Hypothesis and the traditio-historical methods to get behind the final texts.[5] Following a survey of his contemporaries' works, Whybray finds that the variety of their conclusions "arouses the suspicion that the methods employed are extremely subjective."[6]

Many scholars today attempt to get behind the text of the Pentateuch, their subjective methods leading to even more varied conclusions. For example, building on the work of Konrad Schmid, who argues that Genesis and Exodus are two distinct and competing traditions brought together, Megan Warner proposes that Genesis was written not as an introduction or prologue to Exodus through Deuteronomy but as a "prequel."[7] Labeling Genesis as the former might imply it was written at the same time as the rest of the Pentateuch or even by the same author, whereas a prequel "is created subsequent to the principal work, often by someone entirely unconnected with its author."[8] A prequel could ground a principal work, "de-stabilize or even

subvert it."[9] Ultimately, she concludes that the editors of the Abraham narratives engaged with existing tradition to influence it and build a new foundation tradition.[10]

Although Warner acknowledges parallel themes and perhaps even some literary unity within Israel's origin and history narratives, the posture of a diversity of origins clearly remains in play in modern pentateuchal criticism as she and other scholars move further beyond the Documentary Hypothesis and traditio-historical methodologies to subsequent far-fetched theories. McConville cites David J. A. Clines, who "contends that scholars have been so concerned with what he calls 'atomism' (concern with details) and 'geneticism' (concern with origins) in biblical literature that they have lost sight of the whole entities contained in it, and of the fact that they function as such."[11] Clines, while not rejecting the above critical methodologies, nevertheless asserts that a better approach is to get to the meaning of the texts as we have them.[12] He acknowledges that the problem with atomism and geneticism is that "the sources and pre-history of our present texts are for the most part entirely hypothetical."[13] Rather than relying on inevitability of subjective methodologies, Clines turns to the received text of the Pentateuch to find its meaning, for which traditional scholars have advocated all along.

John Sailhamer's extensive work examines the Pentateuch as a single narrative.[14] Despite belonging to divergent camps, both Clines and Sailhamer advocate for "a simple reading of the text as the primary means for determining its nature and purpose."[15] Sailhamer argues that the Pentateuch's overall purpose is to demonstrate the failure of the Sinai covenant due to Israel's disobedient heart.[16] Clines, contrastingly, sees the progression of the threefold Genesis 12 promise to Abraham—(1) a divine-human relationship, (2) posterity (great nation/descendants), and (3) land—as what drives the Pentateuch.[17] Clines notes that allusions to the promise run throughout the Pentateuch, "intensifying in Deuteronomy to such a degree that full quotation of them becomes otiose, and mere citation of the chapter and verse references must eventually suffice."[18] Thus, Yahweh's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 is crucial to rightly and fully understanding Deuteronomy.

Numerous scholars recognize Genesis as an introduction to the Pentateuch, but many see Genesis 1–11 as the proper introduction. Sailhamer explains, "The early chapters of Genesis (1–11) play their own part in providing an introduction to the whole Pentateuch; they stress the context of 'all humanity' for both the patriarchal narratives and those of Moses."[19] Horace Hummel adds, "The point is well made also that we too easily leapfrog over chapters 4–11 to chapter 12 (and sometimes virtually over the whole Old Testament directly to the 'new creation'). The flood and Tower of Babel stories are important sequels to and confirmations of chapter 3, all of them confirming the 'necessity' of the election of Abraham."[20]

Clines draws on von Rad's templated understanding of the narrative theme of Genesis 1–11: human sin, speech, mitigation, and God's punishment.[21] Genesis

Genesis 12 does not yet introduce the covenant but lays the foundation for a promise–bearing cosmic impact, which ties the whole Pentateuch together.

1–11 emphasizes sin's spread, which focuses on its mounting severity and God's corresponding punishment and grace.[22] Narratives and genealogies alike typify this theme.[23] Clines notes that only the Tower of Babel (Gn 11:1–9) lacks a mitigation element but proposes that the patriarchal narratives that follow serve as such, based on the continuity between the primeval and patriarchal history.[24]

The above points of Sailhamer, Hummel, and Clines concerning the place of Genesis 1–11 form a framework for understanding the place of Genesis 12 in the Pentateuch. While many scholars divorce the primeval history from that of the patriarchs, Wilfried Warning recognizes numerous terminological connections between them.[25] Genesis 12 introduces Abraham as key to God's salvific intervention in human history. God's dealing with Abraham is the beginning of Israel's history: Yahweh's gracious mitigation for the universal problem of sin. Genesis 12 does not yet introduce the covenant but lays the foundation for a promise–bearing cosmic impact, which ties the whole Pentateuch together. Through Abraham, the patriarchs, and eventually Israel, Yahweh will begin to chart the path of salvation back to abundant life in his presence, a new Eden. J. Richard Middleton highlights the effect of the narrative placement of Genesis12, indicating that "Abraham's God is no petty national or regional deity, but the creator of the heavens and the earth . . . with a concern for the blessing or flourishing of all people."[26]

The section title purports that Genesis and Deuteronomy bookend a single narrative. That is not to say what lies between is unimportant. In his work on Old Testament political theology, McConville notes that Genesis "establishes a relationship between Israel and creation, and between Israel and other nations."[27] He writes that Exodus "tells that archetypal story of the exodus from Egypt, places Israel in covenant with Yahweh, and in the same connection proclaims the first laws."[28] Additionally, in Exodus 19:6, Yahweh confirms Israel's missionary purpose as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. While more of Yahweh's Torah is revealed in Leviticus and Numbers, much of what follows in the journey to the promised land demonstrates Israel's unpreparedness for taking its place on the world stage and representing Yahweh before the nations. Later, after forty years of wanderings and the death of nearly an entire generation, Yahweh's covenant people are on the plains of Moab, the threshold of entering the promised land. Deuteronomy shifts from action to reflection and preparation, a significant moment for "retrospect, self-examination and preparation."[29]

Deuteronomy repeats much of what precedes it, including the Decalogue, but this is not mere redundancy.[30] The new generation, ready to receive what Yahweh has long promised, needs the Torah explained, as will subsequent generations. So Moses preaches. Much of the Pentateuch is future-oriented, but Deuteronomy hearkens back to Yahweh's promise to Abraham. The Hebrew conjunction כִּי appears often in Deuteronomy, frequently connected to the promise of land and progeny with a temporal future thrust. Take Deuteronomy 4:25, for example: "When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land."[31] The language anticipates what is to come: enjoyment of all that Yahweh promised. This anticipation is key to defining a great nation and naming its purpose.

Yahweh's Promise to Make of Abraham a Great Nation in Genesis 12:1–3

The paper's beginning provides a necessary backbone and introduction to the link between the promise in Genesis 12 and Moses's rhetorical questions in Deuteronomy 4. The greater context of Genesis 12:1–3 has been broadly covered. Properly understanding the text demands a look at its immediate context and an overview of the grammatical structure of Genesis. Genesis contains five major text units, organized around the "generations" (*toledot*), with a preface from 1:1–2:3.[32] Genesis 12:1–3 fits within the fourth *toledot* unit (Gn 11:10–37:1), beginning with Shem's genealogy.[33] It is part of a subunit that begins at 11:27 with the generations of Terah, connected by syndeton (וְ) to 11:10. This immediate context is crucial to understanding 12:1–9, revealing six important things about Abraham: (1) his birth name was Abram; (2) he was one of Terah's three sons; (3) he was from Ur of the Chaldeans; (4) he and his brother Nahor took wives; (5) Sarai, Abram's wife, was barren, a key datum considering the promise in 12:1–3; and (6) Terah took Abram and Haran's son Lot from Ur toward Canaan, but they settled in Haran, where Terah died. Gordon Wenham notes that 12:1 presupposes knowledge of Abraham's identity and homeland, which makes it "unlikely that 12:1–3 was ever an independent, self-standing introduction to the Abraham stories."[34] Wenham argues that 12:1–3 is central to understanding Genesis.[35] Based on our earlier conclusions, these verses are central to understanding the entire Pentateuch, especially as it concludes with Deuteronomy.

The *wayiqtol* verb of 12:1 is connected to a string of *wayiqtol* verbs in 11:28–12:9.[36] In 12:1a, the narrator introduces Yahweh's words (12:1b–3) to Abraham: "Now the LORD said to Abram." Derek Kidner likens this to Yahweh speaking at creation.[37] Yahweh's speech begins with an imperative, "Go!" (12:1). The call to go is a call away from Abraham's birth country and his father's house, away from idolatry.[38] Thus, it is already clear that Yahweh calls Abraham to be distinct, even before he utters the promise. The call is "to the land which I will show you" (12:1). While the land is undoubtedly in view, the concrete promise of it comes later (12:7) amidst Abraham's response. Yahweh calls Abraham to leave his land and go to another.

Andrew Steinmann asserts that the promise is implied already in 12:1.[39]

Three *weyiqtols* follow the imperative, focused on Yahweh's action toward Abraham. This paper revolves around the first clause (12:2a): "And I will make you into a great nation." Wenham notes the distinction between "nation" (גּוֹי) and "people" (עַם). A nation is a "political unit"; a people focused on "consanguinity."[40] This understanding of "nation" helps support the thesis, given that Deuteronomy is often considered Israel's constitution.[41] Additionally, Steinmann notes that this clause leads "as the most important blessing," although grammatically, the two subsequent *weyiqtol* verbs share a syndetic relationship.[42] They read, "And I will bless you" (12:2b) and "I will make your name great" (12:2c). The ESV renders 12:2d as "so that you will be a blessing," indicating a result of the blessing. However, the verb of the next syndetic clause is an imperative better translated as "So, be a blessing!" Steinmann considers this an invitation for Abraham "to receive the previous three blessings and thereby become a blessing to others."[43]

The imperative fits nicely with 12:3. Syndeton links the clauses: "*And* I will bless those who bless you, *and* the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." The final verb is a Nifal, which the ESV translates passively: "be blessed." Middleton argues that a passive translation presents Abraham (and later Israel) as an instrument of blessing, whereas a reflexive or reciprocal translation, "bless themselves" or "bless one another," makes Israel a "model or paradigm of blessing."[44] Steinman argues for an indirect reflexive with an estimative force: "consider themselves blessed."[45] Wenham argues for the reflexive.[46] Either could be correct.

If there was any question about the scope of God's purpose for calling Abraham, Genesis 12:3 confirms that it is universal, as clarified by the prior context of Genesis 12. Middleton states that the promise "will be so effective that in the end all nations will recognize Abraham's descendants as 'a model of desirable existence' (a prime instantiation of blessing)."[47] This is precisely what Moses confirms in the rhetorical questions of Deuteronomy 4:6–8, labeling Israel a "great nation." Clines's argument that the threefold promise of Genesis 12 drives the theme of the Pentateuch makes sense considering Middleton's comments. Clines notes that the "triple elements [divine-human relationship, progeny, and land] are unintelligible one without the other."[48] All three converge on Deuteronomy 4:6–8, highlighting Israel's missional role to the nations.

Before exploring further occurrences of "great nation," there is value in considering the adjective גָּדוֹל and its meaning and use within the Hebrew Bible. *DCH* defines the verbal root גָּדַל as "be great, become great, extend oneself, prove one's greatness."[49] In the Piel, it can mean "magnify, make powerful, promote."[50] It also occurs in the Hifil, meaning "increase, enlarge, magnify."[51] *DCH* defines גָּדוֹל as "great," including a mention of Genesis 12:2 in reference to "population."[52] BDB lists

several senses, including magnitude and extent, number, intensity, sound, or even importance, such as things or men.[53] *TDOT* indicates that גָּדוֹל "occurs a little over 520 times in the OT, and in about 320 of these, it is used as an attribute of an indeterminate or a determinate noun."[54] This is true in Genesis 12:2. *TDOT* helpfully adds that as a determinative in the attributive position, גָּדוֹל can describe "something great that is localized geographically."[55] This doubtfully applies to Israel as a great nation, especially in Genesis 12:2, but Deuteronomy 4:6–8 insists that Israel will not be fully "great" until settled in the promised land, dwelling with Yahweh and living by his Torah. Thus far, at first glance, עָצוּם in Genesis 12:2 appears to refer to a numerically great people with respect to population. After all, three chapters later, Yahweh tells Abraham that his offspring will be as many as the stars in the sky (Gn 15:5). This understanding fits the immediate context of Genesis 12:2. The question is whether "great nation" takes on a heavier, theological meaning as the Pentateuch progresses.

The phrase "great nation" appears in Genesis 17:20 and 21:18, referring to Ishmael. Genesis 17 includes Abram's name change, the command to circumcise infant males, the promise of Isaac's birth, and a promise to bless Ishmael. Genesis 17:20 reads: "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation." "The angel of God" repeats as much to Hagar in 21:18. The sense of "great nation" here echoes that of 12:2. Yahweh will multiply Ishmael into twelve tribes (see Gn 25:13–16) but not enter into covenant with him (17:21).

In Genesis 18:18, "great nation" interrupts three men visiting Abraham, where Yahweh again promises him a son. "Great nation" is here paired with עָצוּם, meaning "mighty" or "powerful." Steinmann notes this is the "only place in Genesis with a reference to Abraham's descendants as a powerful nation."[56] Perhaps more important is Genesis18:19, where Yahweh reveals a purpose for choosing Abraham: "that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." This strikes key themes of Deuteronomy. Walking in Yahweh's ways by doing righteousness and justice are prominent. As Israel obeys Yahweh's righteous "statutes and rules" and accordingly teaches them to their children, the nations will take notice (Dt 4:8).

In Egypt, Israel is a great nation in number, just as God promised Jacob, but Egypt is not the promised land.

In Genesis 46:3, God tells Jacob not to fear taking his family to Egypt, "for there I will make you into a great nation." Israel can be a great nation in Egypt, but

not in the same sense as in the promised land.[57] Interestingly, the "new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" feared Israel because they were too many and too mighty (Ex 1:8–9). The more the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied (Ex 1:12), echoing Genesis12:3. In Egypt, Israel is a great nation in number, just as God promised Jacob, but Egypt is not the promised land. Although God promised to be with Jacob, he also promised to bring him up again (Gn 46:4). His indwelling in the promised land among his chosen people will be key to the great nation envisioned in Deuteronomy.

The final two occurrences of "great nation" leading up to Deuteronomy appear outside of Genesis and carry a similar context. First, in Exodus 32:10, Yahweh expresses his anger to Moses over the golden calf incident: "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you." In Numbers 14:12, Yahweh does likewise because of the people's lack of faith, their skepticism of the spies' report, and their outright rebellion: "I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." Both instances involve Israel's disobedience and rebellion. No wonder Moses is fed up by the time the people reach the plains of Moab.[58] The people had experienced Yahweh's mighty hand against Egypt and his gracious provision of water and manna in the desert. They affirmed Yahweh's covenant with them at Sinai and responded, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex 19:8). Yahweh then gave the Ten Commandments, but before Moses's descent, the people were already engaged in idolatrous revelry. Nonetheless, after both incidents, Moses interceded for the people (Ex 32:11; Nm 14:13). In Exodus 32, Moses reminds Yahweh of the Genesis12 promise. In Num 14, he reminds Yahweh of his steadfast love and constant forgiveness.

One final element from the Exodus 32 and Numbers 14 occurrences bears noting: in both, Moses also reminds Yahweh that the world is watching. Particularly, in Numbers, Moses reminds Yahweh that if he destroys the people, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night" (Nm 14:13–14). Two points from that passage allude to Deuteronomy 4:6–8: Israel on the world stage and Yahweh's physical presence among them. Both are characteristic of the great nation Moses envisions in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy Envisions Israel as a Great Nation

The occurrences of "great nation" prior to Deuteronomy could be easily understood as referring merely to numerical size. However, many also hinted at themes that will become fully evident in Deuteronomy, providing a deeper understanding of the

phrase. At least two are key Deuteronomic themes central to Deuteronomy 4:6–8: righteousness and Israel on the world stage. Abraham and his descendants were to practice righteousness and justice. Additionally, Moses clarified that nations, particularly Egypt, were already watching Israel, even before their arrival in the promised land. Before exploring the significance of "great nation" in Deuteronomy 4:6–8, a brief overview of Deuteronomy's structure and the context of 4:6–8 is needed.

Many scholars recognize the similarity of the structure of Deuteronomy to ANE suzerain-vassal treaties.[59] Kline notes the following major sections: (1) Preamble (1:1–5); (2) Historical Prologue (1:6–4:49); (3) Stipulations (5:1–26:19); (4) Sanctions (27:1–30:20); and (5) Dynastic Disposition (31:1–34:12).[60] Deuteronomy could also be divided into a simplified structure of three sermons of Moses (1:6–4:40; 5:1–26:19; and 27:1–30:20), with a brief introduction (1:1–5) and an addendum (31–34). The first three chapters recapitulate the history of Israel's journey from Horeb to Moab. Moses emphasizes the people's stubbornness, God's punishment, but even more, God's presence with Israel and his persistent mercy.

All the history of Deuteronomy 1–3 leads up to the present moment of chapter 4, the climax of Moses's first address.[61] Even many critical scholars recognize the unity of chapter 4 in language, form, and content.[62] A. D. H. Mayes explains that the structure of Deuteronomy 4 is centered around "the chief commandment: the prohibition of images" and consists of six sections bound together by a prologue (1–8) and an epilogue (32–40).[63] He writes: "In content the major themes of 4:1–40 form a coherent unit: the law promulgated by Moses in vv. 1–8, the chief commandment of the revelation at Horeb: the prohibition of images, in vv. 9–31, and Yahweh alone is God in vv. 32–40."[64] The further importance of the chapter is accentuated by Moses's command that Israel must "listen (שׁמע) to the statutes and rules" (4:1) and do (עשׂה) them in order to live, enter and take possession of the land Yahweh promised.[65] McConville notes that chapter 4 "anticipates the fuller account of the law-giving at Horeb in chapter 5."[66] He also argues that the statutes and rules are the body of laws set forth in Deuteronomy 5–26.[67] This is the Torah.

In 4:1–8, a final bit of recent history from the prior generation connects to the present moment: the idolatrous event at Baal-Peor. Some Israelites forsook Yahweh to follow Baal of Peor and died. Others clung (דבק) to Yahweh and lived. Hence, the present generation must also cling to Yahweh in obedience.[68] Moses indicated that listening to and doing the statutes and rules, that is, obedience to the Torah, is fundamental to life in the land (4:1). In 4:6–8, he shows that obedience to the Torah is also fundamental to Israel's missional role in the land with respect to the nations.

Deuteronomy 4:5–6a confirms the necessity of obedience to the Torah. Yahweh placed Israel in the promised land at a major crossroad between dominant world powers to be on the world stage.[69] Keeping (שׁמר) and doing (עשׂה) the statutes and judgments is Israel's wisdom and understanding before the nations. "Wisdom and

understanding" are characteristic of OT wisdom literature, such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and even contemporary ANE literature. The nations "will hear (שׁמע) all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation (גּוֹי גָּדוֹל) is a wise and understanding people'" (4:6). As a "great nation," Israel will be unique and distinct from other nations.[70]

In 4:7–8, Moses explains how Israel is unique in the form of rhetorical questions: "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" The כִּי clause that introduces the rhetorical questions provides a ground for what the nations exclaim about Israel's greatness in 4:6. What makes Israel unique is Yahweh, a God so near and statutes and rules so righteous. Georg Braulik argues that verses 6–8 "emphasize Israel's religious and ethical greatness," "the most profound fulfillment of the promise that Israel would become a *gôy gādôl*."[71] He further writes:

> It is not the power of the Solomonic empire which represents Israel's real greatness, but the fact that its obedience depends on the nearness of YHWH and on the law he has authorized. Since ultimately it is a question of YHWH, Israel cannot abandon its claim. This is made clear by the triple repetition and the prominent position of the expression *gôy gādôl*. Yet how can this judgment by the nations be justified in the face of the magnificent temple cult and world-famous legislation of Babylon?[72]

Braulik's question is valid. What sets Israel's God and laws apart from those of dominant world powers like Babylon?

Daniel Bricker notes that the high gods of state religion in the ANE were distant from the common people, who turned to their personal gods for religious expression.[73] These gods were often deified ancestors who served merely to bring a request to a higher god.[74] The nations thought the gods were busy, even indifferent to human affairs, and that humans needed somehow to get their attention.[75] There is a sharp contrast between Deuteronomy's theology of worship and pagan worship with its shrines and its focus on images.[76] Yahweh commanded Israel to destroy the pagan shrines (Dt 7:5; 12:2–3) and worship Yahweh differently (12:4). He commanded them to "seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out

There is a sharp contrast between Deuteronomy's theology of worship and pagan worship with its shrines and its focus on images.

of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there" (12:5). Ian Wilson argues that the frequent use of the phrase "before Yahweh" (לִפְנֵי יְהוָה) in Deuteronomy 12–26 testifies to "the immediate vicinity of the Deity."[77] The point is that Yahweh was accessible to all Israel, not merely to the privileged. Access to Yahweh, present amidst his people, made Israel a truly great nation.

While many scholars argue for parallels between Deuteronomy and Hammurabi's law codes,[78] there are clear differences. Hammurabi is not a god but tends to elevate himself to god status.[79] Samuel Greengus notes that OT law is apodictic in nature, essentially imperative commands from God to Israel, as opposed to the casuistic style of ANE law codes.[80] He also notes that OT laws "include relationships between persons and deity."[81] The prologue and epilogue of Hammurabi's law code boastfully center around his own accomplishments as opposed to merciful Yahweh and his servant, Moses, in Deuteronomy.[82] S. Dean McBride writes, "While Deuteronomic Torah may be deeply indebted to such [ANE] traditions, however, it is identical in form, content, and purpose to none of them."[83] Furthermore, Terence Fretheim explains Israel's law aren't even "code" but rather a continuation of the ongoing narrative.[84] Yahweh's Torah, lived out by Israel in the promised land, truly made them a unique, great nation.

Three occurrences of "great nation" in Deuteronomy 4:38, 9:1, and 11:23 are plurals, comparing Israel to "nations greater and mightier." Yahweh indeed promised that Israel would be a great and mighty nation (Gn 18:18), but there are nations greater and mightier. This by no means indicates that Israel is not great in a numerical sense; Israel is simply not the greatest in that sense. In fact, in Deuteronomy 7:7, Moses refers to Israel as the "fewest" among the nations when Yahweh chose them. McConville explains that this contrasts with the Genesis12:2 promise but refers to Israel at its beginnings rather than at the plains of Moab.[85] The context of the three occurrences of "great nation" pertains to Yahweh dispossessing the nations from the land to give it to Israel. Gary Millar calls the wiping out of the nations a "theological necessity" for obedience to Yahweh without compromise, lest Israel be corrupted and suffer the fate of nations.[86] Only then can Israel, and ultimately Yahweh, indeed evoke such praise from other nations as Moses anticipates in 4:6–8.

Conclusion

Yahweh's promise within Genesis12:1–3 to make of Abraham a great nation certainly bears the sense of a large numerical population. Standing alone, evidence to expand that meaning is slim to none. However, throughout the pentateuchal narrative, the phrase develops a much fuller meaning. Israel became great in number in Egypt but was not truly great until enjoying the abundance of the promised land in the presence of Yahweh, bearing children and grandchildren, and living by the Torah. That's Deuteronomy! The three elements of the promise Clines identified from Genesis12

that tie the Pentateuch together—a divine-human relationship, posterity (great nation/descendants), and land—are all there. The primeval history that precedes Genesis 12 assures the reader that the three-fold promise is not merely to benefit Abraham or Israel but all sinful humanity. Genesis 12 cannot be isolated from what precedes or follows it. The Pentateuch must be read as a whole narrative so that the promise can be carefully unfolded and explained, as Luther suggested.

Two final texts have an impact on Israel as a great nation. Deuteronomy 26:5 is the last occurrence of "great nation" in the Pentateuch. As the worshiper offers his firstfruits before Yahweh, he confesses: "A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous" (26:5). Yahweh desires that all Israel, even future generations, recognize the great nation that he has made them in number, strength, prosperity, and righteousness. Israel could not be all that in Egypt. The end of Moses's third sermon on the threshold of the promised land clarifies the matter. Once again, Moses uses the word "today" to emphasize the importance and urgency of the present moment. Deuteronomy 26:17–19 reads:

> You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.

In the promised land, Yahweh, fulfilling the promise of Genesis 12:1–3, will make Israel great, high above the nations, but only if the people obey the Torah.[87]

Israel failed, but Yahweh did not fail. Jesus, Abraham's seed, righteous and just Israel, is the one in whom all God's promises are "yes" (1 Cor 1:20) and through whom he draws all men to himself (Jn 12:32). His church is the great nation, the "holy nation" (1 Pt 2:9) which he has commissioned to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations (Luke 24:48). The Holy Christian Church remains unique, having what no other nation or religion has—Jesus. Through Christ and his church, Moses's rhetorical questions from Deuteronomy 4 resound even more as the nations come to God to bask in his presence, receive his righteousness, and give him glory for all eternity (Is 2:2–4; Ps 86:9; Rv 15:4).

Endnotes

1 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6–14*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 253–254.
2 Luther, *Luther's Works*, 254.
3 J. G. McConville, "The Pentateuch Today," *Themelios* 8, no. 3 (1983): 5.
4 McConville, "The Pentateuch Today," 6.
5 R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 221.
6 Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch*, 229.
7 Megan Warner, "Back to the Future: Reading the Abraham Narratives as Prequel," *Biblical Interpretation* 25, no. 4–5 (2017): 482–483.
8 Warner, "Back to the Future," 483. In contrast, see Meredith *G. Kline, Genesis: A New Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 1. Kline, an evangelical scholar and an expert in ANE treaties, argues that Genesis is a "treaty preamble and historical prologue to the old covenant canon and indeed to the canonical Scriptures as a whole."
9 Warner, "Back to the Future," 486.
10 Warner, "Back to the Future," 496.
11 McConville, "The Pentateuch Today": 7. See also David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 10. McConville provides a helpful summary and analysis of Clines' work.
12 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 10.
13 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 11.
14 See John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1992. Sailhamer includes a commentary on the whole Pentateuch. Clines and Sailhamer are very different scholars, but both approach the received text of the Pentateuch. While this study will draw from both works, Clines' thesis that the three-fold patriarchal promise of Genesis 12 is the impetus of a "prepared and anticipated" and "purposive" progression throughout the Pentateuch is foundational to this paper's thesis. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, 28–29.
15 Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 23.
16 Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 32.
17 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 31.
18 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 32.
19 Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 66.
20 Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 65–66.
21 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 68. He proposes that the "element of mitigation or grace occupies a significant place in the pattern of these narratives," namely "that it is always to be found after the speech of punishment and before the act of punishment."
22 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 70.
23 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 72–73. Clines argues that the genealogy of Genesis 5 emphasizes death despite the continuity of life. Life spans also generally decrease, and even more so after the flood. Nevertheless, the addition of Seth's line to the Genesis 4 genealogy indicates that not all go the way of Cain; there are some who call on the name of Yahweh. In other words, there is still hope for sinful humanity.
24 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 85. Clines explains that the genealogy of Shem stands between the end of the Babel narrative and the beginning of the Abraham narrative as a transitional element, which is significant because Shem is the son whom Noah blessed (Gn 9:6), and his line leads to Abraham.
25 Wilfried Warning, "Terminologische Verknüpfungen Und Genesis 12, 1–3." Biblica 81 (2000): 386–390.

Abram, nation, the verb "bless," and the adjective "great" appear for the seventh time in Genesis 12:1–3, and the verb "go" for the twelfth time.

26 J. Richard Middleton, "The Blessing of Abraham and the Missio Dei: Reframing the Purpose of Israel's Election in Genesis 12:1–3," in *Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis: Essays in Tribute to Paul Livermore*. ed. Douglas R. Cullum and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 56.

27 J. G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology, Genesis-Kings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006), 30.

28 McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 30.

29 McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 75.

30 Sailhamer, Pentateuch as Narrative, 423. He likens Deuteronomy to a commentary on the Law.

31 Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Other examples of such כִּי clauses are found in Deuteronomy 6:10; 6:20; 7:1; 11:29; 12:20; 12:29; 17:14; 18:9 and 19:1. Further examples pertain to warfare, building houses, etc., but even those are connected to the inheritance of the land.

32 See Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2017), 107–109. DeRouchie explains that the five units are distinct, marked by asyndeton.

33 DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 108. DeRouchie argues that based on the asyndetic *toledot* structure, the patriarchal cycle begins at 11:10 with the generations of Shem rather than at 12:1, as commonly held. DeRouchie notes that this is crucial in detailing the movement from all creation to Israel, God's chosen line to represent him among the nations.

34 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 267.

35 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 268.

36 Within the new unit at 11:27, the text zeroes in on Terah in 11:27b, the second clause, marked by asyndeton, followed by syndeton in 11:27c, noting Haran's progeny of Lot. The syndetic relationship continues in 11:28 with the string of wayiqtol verbs throughout the section.

37 Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 124.

38 Kline, Genesis, 55. In Joshua 24:2, Joshua reminds Israel that Abraham's father, Terah, worshipped idols.

39 Andrew E. Steinmann, Genesis: *An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 (IVP Academic, 2019), 144.

40 Wenham, Genesis 1–15, 275.

41 See J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ApOTC 5 (Leicester, England: IVP UK, 2002), 34.

42 Steinmann, *Genesis*, 145. He also notes the irony given Sarah's barren state.

43 Steinmann, *Genesis*, 145.

44 Middleton, "The Blessing of Abraham," 49–50.

45 Steinmann, *Genesis*, 146.

46 Wenham, *Genesis* 1–15, 277. ברך more commonly occurs in the Hithpael and only occurs in the Nifal in three texts (Gen 12:3; 18:18; and 24:24). Wenham argues that the Hithpael of Genesis 22:18 and 26:4 warrants the same translation for the Nifal in 12:3. See also Kidner, 125. Kidner notes that the LXX of 12:3 uses a passive verb but also uses a passive in 22:18 and 26:4, which are Hithpael forms in the MT. Uncertainty abounds.

47 Middleton, "The Blessing of Abraham," 53.

48 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 31.

49 David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 2 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011), 322.

50 Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 322–323.

51 Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 323.

52 Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 317.
53 Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), 152–153.
54 G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, trans.* John T. Willis, et al., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 392.
55 Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary,* 395–397. In this case, it would refer predominantly to place names, such as "great oak" or "great tower." It can also be used "as an element in a geographical designation."
56 Steinmann, *Genesis*, 194.
57 Steinmann, *Genesis*, 422. Steinmann postulates that Jacob's fear may have stemmed from leaving the promised land or from leaving God's presence.
58 Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 29.
59 Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012). The debate whether Deuteronomy more closely resembles second millennial Hittite treaties or the much later Assyrian vassal treaties still rages on today.
60 Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 48–49.
61 Block, *Deuteronomy*, 114. Block specifically highlights the "and now" of 4:1 as a turning point in the address.
62 A. D. H. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy." *JBL* 100.1 (1981): 24–25. Mayes specifically points to the work of George Braulik on the language of Deuteronomy 4 as evidence of its unity, including stereotyped language and motifs and repetition of significant words.
63 Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4," 25–26.
64 Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4," 26.
65 This contrasts with the previous chapters, which demonstrate the consequences of Israel's failure to listen. "Listen" is also an exhortation Moses often uses in key sections in Deuteronomy (4:1; 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9 to name a few). The verb appears ninety-one times in *Deuteronomy*. See Adolph L. Harstad. Deuteronomy (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2022), 125–126. Harstad notes that the word can even include an understanding of heed or obey, especially when the object is Yahweh's voice.
66 McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 100.
67 McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 103.
68 McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 103. McConville maintains that Deuteronomy "has a dynamic in which the gift of land and duty of obedience are interdependent."
69 Carl G. Rasmussen, "Regions and Routes in the Levant." In *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Illustrated edition. ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 20.
70 Block, *Deuteronomy*, 104. Block notes that the terms wisdom and law are separate but related in early Israel and weren't equalized until later in the 2nd century BC. "The point here is not to make such a systematic equation between law and wisdom, but rather to demonstrate the uniqueness of Israel in the world."
71 Georg Braulik, *The Theology of Deuteronomy: Collected Essays of Georg Braulik,* trans. Ulrika Lindblad (BIBAL Press, 1994), 13. Unfortunately, like many critical scholars, Braulik dates Deuteronomy to the post-exilic period. He posits that 4:6–8 was penned to restore Israel's self-confidence. See Braulik, 8. Nevertheless, many of Braulik's comments are helpful in considering Israel's uniqueness in contrast to the nations.
72 Braulik, *The Theology of Deuteronomy*, 13–14.
73 Daniel P. Bricker, "'God so Near': An Examination of the Ancient Near Eastern Setting for Deuteronomy 4:7 and קרבים." BBR 22.3 (2012): 340.
74 Bricker, "'God so Near,'" 342–343.
75 Braulik, *The Theology of Deuteronomy*, 18.

76 Daniel I. Block, "The Joy of Worship: The Mosaic Invitation to the Presence of God (Dt 12:1–14)," *BSac* 162.646 (2005): 141. "Moses said nothing of buildings or images or cultic appurtenances. Instead he focused on the presence of Yahweh Himself."

77 Ian Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire: Divine Presence in Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 158–159. Many critical scholars argue that Deuteronomy presents a different theology of "Divine Presence" than the rest of the Pentateuch. Wilson's research is a helpful argument to the contrary.

78 Braulik, *The Theology of Deuteronomy,* 8–9. Braulik argues that Israelite exiles "probably experienced the just laws of the wise King Hammurabi as the highest achievement of any foreign culture," hence the parallels between Deuteronomy and the Code of Hammurabi.

79 "The Laws of Hammurabi," trans. Martha Roth, COS 2:351.

80 Samuel Greengus. "Law: Biblical and ANE Law." ABD 4:245.

81 Greengus. "Law," 250.

82 "The Laws of Hammurabi," 336, 351.

83 S. Dean McBride Jr., "Polity of the Covenant People: The Book of Deuteronomy," in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride, Jr.* ed. John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 25–26. McBride labels Deuteronomy a "comprehensive social charter" appropriate to Israel's covenant identity.

84 Terence E. Fretheim, "Law in the Service of Life: A Dynamic Understanding of Law in Deuteronomy," in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*. ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 191.

85 McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 157.

86 Gary J. Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy,* NSBT 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 158.

87 Daniel I. Block, "The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Dt 26:16–19)," *BSac* 162.648 (2005): 400. Block explains that Israel's high status was not for national pride but for the praise and honor of Yahweh.

Psalm 109 in the Masoretic Psalter
David Said What?

Adam Hensley

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Mention the imprecatory psalms and for most people Psalm 137's closing words about dashing infants against rocks comes to mind. Other imprecatory psalms are also intense while also prolonging their imprecations for much longer (e.g., 35:4–8, 26; 69:22–28).[1] Consider the much-loved Psalm 139, best known for its delight and wonder over God "knitting together" the psalmist in the womb (139:13–16). Later, however, David imprecates against wicked enemies for four whole verses (139:19–22). But of all the so-called imprecatory psalms, Psalm 109 takes the cake for the most sustained and shocking imprecation as David rails against the enemies for a whopping fourteen verses (vv. 6–19), leading some to describe Psalm 109 as the most difficult psalm for modern piety.[2]

Throughout the last hundred or so years scholarly interpretation of Psalm 109 has treated it in isolation, due in large part to the great influence of form-criticism and its project of determining the historical origins and settings of psalms. More recently, however, scholars have begun to take its literary context more seriously, seeking to understand Psalm 109 in the context of the Masoretic (MT) Psalter.

Editor's note

This is based on Hensley's presentation at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on November 21, 2024.

Such "canonical approaches" to Psalms study have come as a breath of fresh air, enabling modern Psalms scholars more fully to plumb theological depths of the Psalms cherished by the church for millennia. This paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of Psalm 109, whose placement at the center of a triad of Davidic Psalms (108–110) early in Book V (107–145) provides a surer interpretive context than conjectural reconstructions of the psalmist's original context and circumstances. Our major purpose is to address such questions as: How does this Psalm of David fit the Psalter's (idealized) depiction of kingship? How does Psalm 109 *function* in the mouth of the coming Christ?

The title is, however, intended as a double entendre. Psalm 109 is shocking enough to the average reader to elicit the interjection: "David said *what*?!" But as a regular question ("David said what?" or "What did David say?") it also encapsulates the main interpretive issue that has dominated modern scholarly discussion: whose words are vv. 6–19? Indeed, no exploration of Psalm 109 in its literary context can avoid this question: are these David's own words against his enemies, or a report of his enemies' words against David? This paper favors the former, traditional interpretation, arguing that within the MT Psalter's larger theological context, the ideal Davidic king prophetically announces the divine judgment in Psalm 109 that will be mediated through Psalm 110's Conquering Priest-King (110:4–6).

We shall examine these matters under five main sections. The first offers a preliminary look at this question concerning a possible quotation of enemies and distills the major issues. The second section considers how scholars on both sides of the quotation debate have explained Psalm 109 in its MT Psalter context, offering some evaluative comment. The third section explores Psalm 109 directly to consider its pragmatics and theological function in the MT Psalter more closely, whereupon follows a fourth section discussing "David" as Psalm 109's implied speaker and what that means. Fifth and finally, I will offer some concluding christological reflections.

David said what? Whose words in 109:6–19?

Major Approaches

Specific proposals vary in the details, but scholars typically follow one of three general approaches when assessing who the implied speaker of vv. 6–19 is.[3] First is the traditional view that these are the psalmist's own words concerning the wicked.[4] A second approach understands the psalmist quoting his enemies' invective against him throughout all or most of these verses.[5] Some see the quotation ending at v. 15, and vv. 16–19 as David's response.[6] Finally, it has been proposed that God is the speaker of vv. 6–19 enunciating His divine judgment against David's enemies.[7] God has indeed "not been silent" in answer to David's opening petition (v. 1)!

Major Underlying Issues and Questions

What, then, are the underlying issues that lead scholars to these different approaches? One factor may be broadly classified as a moral-aesthetic objection to David voicing vv. 6–18 as his own words. Could a pious king really pray this way?[8] Though seldom the explicit reason scholars give when advocating quotation theories, these verses' "objectionable" nature has undoubtedly played a role in the interpretation of Psalm 109 and continues to trouble modern piety.[9]

For the most part, though, quotation advocates offer textual reasons to support their view. Indeed, quotation theories rest largely on a shift from plural enemies in vv. 1–5 to the sg. referent throughout vv. 6–19, in which David is understood as the *object* of these verses' denouncements, before another shift back to the pl. in v. 20.[10] Another question accompanies this feature of the Psalm: in the absence of an explicit introductory formula like, "they say" (אָמְרוּ) in 35:21b, do vv. 1–5 adequately signal a change of speaker in the subsequent verses? The question is important, for undisputed quotations are introduced by a verb of speaking (אמר) with striking regularity in the Psalter.[11] Quotation advocates claim exceptions, but these are relatively few, especially where *enemies*' speech is concerned.[12] In Psalm 109, at any rate, the pl. to sg. shift is at best only *tacit* evidence for quotation in vv. 6–19.

Accordingly, the "dramaturgy" of the psalm adduced from a proposed legal setting factors prominently in arguments for a quotation. Scholars generally agree on the juridical nature of Psalm 109's language,[13] on which basis quotation advocates infer a specific legal *Sitz im Leben*. The psalmist has been brought to trial before a judge or priests and falsely accused,[14] and vv. 6–19 constitute his evidence of the false accusations leveled against him.[15] For quotation advocates, Psalm 109's "dramaturgy" so analyzed offsets the lack of explicit introduction to vv. 6–19 as a quotation, and has been influential also among scholars who interpret Psalm 109 in its canonical context (see below).

Another factor in the debate is the psalm's liturgical utility if vv. 6–19 are not David's own words. *Beyond* such a—presumably—"one-off" juridical setting, would the psalm have been used, or us*able*, in the liturgical life of Israel if vv. 6–19 report the petitions or machinations of enemies? Erhard Gerstenberger thinks not. He writes:

> As a rule, however, enemy quotations in the Psalms are carefully identified. . . . Being words capable of doing damage even in liturgical contexts, they needed to be handled with care. For this same reason, such bad words were usually mentioned only in passing, and given the most unobtrusive and general gist of their poisonous speech. It is almost unimaginable that ancient writers or redactors would extensively quote their hateful opponents, copying meticulously all their—presumably false—accusations against the righteous suppliant. To have such an enormous listing of serious

> indictments as in vv. 6–19, allegedly (Lohfink, et al.) directed against the psalmist, would certainly cause a liturgical disaster.[16]

We may press Gerstenberger's objection further and ask: how would such a protracted, detailed report of enemy accusations *function* during the psalm's continued use in a corporate, liturgical setting? Or did Psalm 109 never find use in Judah's corporate worship life? As Susan Gillingham observes, however, לַמְנַצֵּחַ in the superscript "implies its place in worship" as does the opening address, "O God of my *praise*" (אֱלֹהֵי תְהִלָּתִי) within the book called *Tehillim*.[17] To be sure, questions remain about how vv. 6–19 function as David's words in the context of corporate worship, but this seems more liturgically plausible at the outset than the alternative.[18]

Last but by no means least, the application of 109:8 to Judas in Acts 1:20 presupposes that these are either *David's* or *God's* words of judgement against an enemy (the first or third approach), not part of a quoted indictment of the speaker *by* an enemy.

In Search of Psalm 109's Function and Significance in the MT Psalter

Whether textual, dramaturgical, liturgical, or historical-contextual in nature, the preceding underlying issues concern Psalm 109 in isolation. But what of its *literary* context? What clues does its placement in the MT Psalter offer concerning vv. 6–19?[19] Indeed, scholarly engagement with Psalm 109 in its canonical context offers numerous valuable insights.

The MT Psalter's Appropriation of Psalm 109

First and most basically, Psalm 109 participates in Book V's positive portrayal of kingship after Psalm 89's lament. As Willem Vangemeren explains, Psalm 109's "prayer of vindication" (along with Psalm 108 before it [esp. 108:11]) resumes "the question of the position of the Davidic agent in Yahweh's kingdom" that "lingers from the charge of rejection in 89:38" [MT 89:39]. Psalm 110 then provides a "most positive" and "surprising" resolution.[20] For Ian Vaillancourt Book V does "something more grand" than simply repristinate the Davidic kingship. Psalm 110's exalted Priest-King includes but also points beyond the Davidic covenantal promises "to a greater figure of salvation to come."[21] Indeed, by the time we reach Psalm 110 the Psalter has already conflated the royal office with the priestly office and drawn Mosaic, Josephite, and even Adamic characteristics into its orbit, beginning with its opening psalms.[22]

Second, for scholars on both sides of the quotation debate Psalm 109's Davidic attribution offers an important hermeneutical lens. For example, Erich Zenger—himself a quotation advocate—describes David as "the literary-theological speaker of the psalm" and "a representative of Israel."[23] The speaker is not just anybody; he is "David." Nevertheless, further questions arise: to whom or what does the name

"David" in Psalm 109 refer in its Psalter context? Are we to think only of the sweet psalmist of Israel and head of the dynasty, or the dynasty itself as well? Does it have David's greater son and ultimate heir in view? Or, as Zenger suggests, Israel? We shall revisit this question below.

Further questions arise: to whom or what does the name "David" in Psalm 109 refer in its Psalter context?

Third, Psalm 109's immediate context assumes a crisis on a *national* rather than purely individual level. As Tucker explains, "[t]he use of "the foe" (צָר) in 108:13, 14 and "kings" (מֶלֶךְ) in 110:5 suggests that the threat is international and political in scope."[24] Zenger agrees that Psalm 109's *Sitz im Buch* envisions a national crisis, but sees the "*domestic* political dimension" on display in Psalm 109 rather than the "*foreign* political dimension."[25] In contrast to Psalms 108 and 110, the "enemies" in Psalm 109 are *within* the nation rather than outside it. On the other hand, Tucker—I think rightly—assumes *continuity* in the 108–110 triad concerning the identity of the enemies as kings of the earth, peoples, etc. (cf. 2:1–2), affording 108 and 110 their natural literary-contextual influence. Yet Zenger's explanation is instructive, for it shows an effort to retain Psalm 109's dramaturgy as he adduces it from his prior form-critical analysis.

Fourth, Psalm 109's centrality within the 108–110 group finds a counterpart in Psalm 102, which is also central to the 101–103 Davidic triad and resembles Psalm 109 in "highlight[ing] the broken Davidic petitioner," as Peter Ho describes him.[26] For Ho, Psalm 109's "*juridically* condemned figure . . . develops" Psalm 102's "afflicted figure" as one "unjustly accused by ingrate accusers with incredulous claims of crimes that demanded the death sentence of this Davidic figure."[27] Like Zenger, Ho believes that "[t]aking Ps 109:6–19 as a quotation of the psalmist's accusers best fits the psalm's context as a judicial proceeding," viewing these verses as "a vivid account of the accusations made by hostile accusers against the petitioner."[28]

The opinions of Zenger and Ho raise questions about what "context" we are talking about at any given moment, and how well Psalm 109's hypothetical "context as a judicial proceeding" (*Sitz im Leben*) transfers to its *literary* context (*Sitz im Buch*) if vv. 6–19 are deemed *enemy* verdicts and accusations. A quotation in vv. 6–19—or even just vv. 6–15—seems able to at most to *depict* falsely accused "juridically condemned" David. Accordingly, when explaining how David is *portrayed* in view of these accusations and condemnations, quotation advocates are interpreting them on a different level from these verses' essential pragmatic force as condemnations and accusations. Their pragmatic force factors in such explanations, but they primarily interpret the *mis*application of these verses *en masse.* As the "literary-theological speaker" of the psalm one wonders: what does David accomplish by quoting his

enemies calling for divine retribution and multiplying accusations against himself *at such length*? Is all this to be chalked up, simply, to "evidence" of wrongful accusation? Can that sufficiently explain their length and intensity when their real meaning, presumably, is that the enemies are wrong on all counts? Why does he not offer more protestations of innocence? That vv. 6–19 are variously grounded in *YHWH*'s torah only amplifies this issue as we shall see.

At question, then, is whether Psalm 109's dramaturgy as inferred by Zenger, Ho, and others, "works" for Psalm 109 in the 108–110 triad and the Psalter as a whole.

On the other hand, scholars advocating Davidic imprecation in vv. 6–19 afford these verses their natural pragmatic force much more straightforwardly and comprehensively. Like Tucker, Michael Snearly understands Psalm 108 as a plea for "victory over the nations" that frames Psalm 109 but differs in seeing 109:6–20 as David's own "lengthy imprecation . . . in which David lobbies for his enemies' destruction."[29] In vv. 6–19 David calls on YHWH to apply the provisions of torah to those who oppose him. Taking a similar view of these verses, James Hamilton understands Psalm 109 participating in a larger set of typological patterns involving a new exodus and new conquest in the Psalter: "When God accomplished the new exodus (Ps 107) and brought his people to the land for the new conquest (Ps 108), there would be a new traitor against whom the new David would pray (Ps 109)."[30]

Another poignant insight further informs Psalm 109's pragmatics and place in the Psalter. Following Dahood, Willem Vangemeren notes that "praise" forms an inclusio about Psalm 109 (אֱלֹהֵי תְהִלָּתִי [v. 1]; אֲהַלְלֶנּוּ [v. 30]). He concludes: "though the burden of the psalm is lament, the poet is so confident that his complaint will be heard . . . that he proleptically calls it 'a song of praise.'"[31] These observations are also significant for Psalm 109's relationship to its MT Psalter context. By framing his calls for YHWH to judge his enemies in vv. 6–19 in praise, "David" anticipates the climactic act of praise concluding the Tehillim (146–150) that he will later introduce in 145:21 (cf. 101:1; 108:1; et al.).[32]

Looking Closer at Psalm 109 in the MT Psalter

What follows is a brief examination of Psalm 109 and features that inform its meaning and function in the Psalter.

Verses 1–5

From its opening verses, Psalm 109 resonates with other imprecatory psalms in the Psalter, inclining the reader to hear David once again imprecating against his enemies rather than quoting them in the controverted verses.

In 109:3–5, David laments: "words of hatred surround me! They have attacked me without cause (חִנָּם). In return for my love *they accuse me* (יִשְׂטְנוּנִי). As for me, prayer/petition (וַאֲנִי תְפִלָּה)! But they set evil against me in return for good

(רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה); hatred in return for my love." The parallels with imprecatory Psalm 35 are particularly impressive. In 35:12 David complains about those who repay him "evil for good" (רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה; cf. 109:5).[33] In 35:7 he asserts, "*without cause* (חִנָּם) they have hidden their net for me; *without cause* (חִנָּם) they have dug [a pit] for my life," referring to them in v. 19 as "those who hate me *without cause* (חִנָּם)" (cf. חִנָּם in 109:3). In 35:10 David identifies himself as one "poor and needy" (וְעָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן) whom YHWH delivers (cf. עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן in 109:16, 22, 31). Violent, ruthless witnesses (עֵדֵי חָמָס) rise against David in 35:11—similar to the situation David describes in 109:2–5. Significantly, David imprecates against his adversaries via jussive clauses throughout 35:4–6, 8, 26. Insofar as Psalm 109 recollects Psalm 35 it is natural to read 109:8–15's jussives the same imprecatory way. Further correspondences between 35:26's jussive clause, "may they *be clothed with* shame *and dishonor*" (יִלְבְּשׁוּ־בֹשֶׁת וּכְלִמָּה), and 109:29's "may those hating me be clothed with dishonor" (יִלְבְּשׁוּ שׂוֹטְנַי כְּלִמָּה) reinforce the affinities between these two psalms.[34]

Similarly, in imprecatory Psalm 69 David says, "more numerous than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause (חִנָּם)" (v. 5). He then contrasts himself with them in v. 14, "*As for me*, my *prayer* is to you, YHWH" (וַאֲנִי תְפִלָּתִי־לְךָ יְהוָה), very like 109:4's terser equivalent (וַאֲנִי תְפִלָּה). David then imprecates against them in 69:23–29.

These correspondences support Hamilton's contention that Psalm 109 "projects" Davidic imprecation from Books I–II "into the postexilic experience of the future king from his line."[35] Furthermore, a macro-structural shift in the Psalter at the Book II/III boundary, discussed below, suggests Hamilton is on the right track.

Verses 6–7

Verses 6–7 exhibit a high concentration of legal language. A wicked accuser (רָשָׁע וְשָׂטָן) is to be "appointed" (פקד [H]) against him (עָלָיו) who will "stand" (עמד) "at his right" (עַל־יְמִינוֹ). But who says it against whom? If vv. 6–7 are the deliberations of the wicked we might expect a *cohortative* plural, "*let us* appoint," as we find in, for example, Psalm 2:3 or 83:5.[36] Instead we have a sg. imperative (הַפְקֵד) most naturally understood as David's petition to God as cosmic Judge.[37] David petitions YHWH as heavenly Judge over all (82:1–2; cf. 47:9; 89:8; 94:2; 96:13; 98:9 et al.), where all are on trial before him whose eyelids test the בְּנֵי אָדָם (11.4) and await "the judgment" (cf. בַּמִּשְׁפָּט in 1:5). Such a liturgical—and cosmic, eschatological—setting also raises questions about the referent of (רָשָׁע וְשָׂטָן) in the Psalter. Does it refer to a wicked *human* witness, prosecutor, or accuser *per* regular court proceedings, or to someone in the divine assembly who accuses and—yes—is wicked? Sharing the same vocabulary, Zechariah 3:1 may be instructive on this matter, especially in view of Psalm 109's postexilic reception and appropriation by scribes responsible for its placement in the MT Psalter.[38] Might David be handing over his enemy to *the* Accuser in Psalm 109 (cf. 1 Cor 5:4–5)?

Verses 8–15

The jussives throughout verses 8–15 lay out the imprecatory details and are said to be most difficult for "conventional piety."[39] It is well-noted that this section enacts the *lex talionis* principle (Ex 21:23–25).[40] Rather than personal (or petty) retribution, then, these verses echo YHWH's own promise to deal with evildoers in Exodus 22:23–24. From the ESV:

> 21 You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. 23 *If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry,* 24 *and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows* (וְהָיוּ נְשֵׁיכֶם אַלְמָנוֹת) *and your children fatherless* (וּבְנֵיכֶם יְתֹמִים).

When in Psalm 109:9 David declares, "let his sons be orphans (יִהְיוּ־בָנָיו יְתוֹמִים) and his wife a widow (וְאִשְׁתּוֹ אַלְמָנָה)," he thus appeals to YHWH's own commitment in *torah* to the whole community, *oppressor and oppressed* alike, in *judgment and deliverance* alike. These jussives express what God has already promised to do, putting their imprecatory details in a larger theological context. The offenders against which David imprecates are, in the first instance, offenders against YHWH and his *torah*, with which the praying Davidic speaker is aligned, counting himself also among the poor and needy.[41]

This fits the pattern of the MT Psalter, which depicts the royal office as committed to YHWH's *torah* according to the ideal of Deuteronomy 17:18–20.[42] This alone suggests these allusions to YHWH's *torah* belong in the mouth of the Davidic king rather than wicked enemies.[43] Further, the royal office is instrumental to YHWH's *justice* throughout the Psalter (e.g., Pss 2, 72, 101, 110), suggesting these jussives *announce* the divine justice to which they allude, rather than beg for it.

What is more, God's retributive wrath in Exodus 22 enacted in 109:8–15 is founded on YHWH's *graciousness*.[44] YHWH says in Exodus 22:26: "And if he cries to me, I will hear, *for I am gracious* (כִּי־חַנּוּן אָנִי)." חַנּוּן is primary to YHWH's true character revealed to Moses at Sinai in the so-called "grace formula" of Exodus 34:6–7: "YHWH, YHWH, a God *compassionate and gracious* (רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן), slow of anger and great of *hesed* and truth; keeping *hesed* for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה)." Exodus 34:7b continues, however, "yet not at all holding [the guilty] innocent (וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה), visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons and upon sons' sons—upon the third and fourth [generation]." The order and emphasis here are important. YHWH's grace and compassion are foundational to all he does, even his retributive judgment—his *alien work*—as Exodus 22:26 shows.[45]

As I have argued elsewhere, the "grace formula," Exodus 34:6–7, plays a

programmatic role in the Psalter's theology of kingship. Positively, the Psalms present "David" as a mediator and proclaimer of the Divine חֶסֶד, seen especially in Davidic Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8.[46]

In 109:12–15, however, the other "negative" aspect of the grace formulary comes into view. David declares, "let none bring to him hesed (חֶסֶד), let none be gracious (חוֹנֵן) to his orphan." Verse 14, "May the iniquity of his fathers (עֲוֹן אֲבֹתָיו) be remembered by YHWH, and his mother's sin (וְחַטַּאת אִמּוֹ) not be blotted out," recalls YHWH's word in Exodus 34:7, where he will "visit the iniquity of fathers on sons and sons' sons, etc."[47] The psalmist, then, calls upon YHWH to enact his divine retribution *per* the grace formula.[48]

Against the backdrop of "David's" royal office, through which God mediates "justice and righteousness" (cf. 72:1; 101:3–5, 8), these jussives should not be understood as merely the personal "prayer-wishes" (*Wünsche*) of a victim of slanderous accusations.[49] Rather, they assume a larger significance as invocations—even prophetic declarations—of YHWH's judgement by the king.

Several structural observations support this. First, Psalm 109 is the third Davidic lament psalm since Psalm 72 ended the "prayers (תְּפִלּוֹת) of David *ben Jesse*." Importantly, two earlier laments, "prayer" (תְּפִלָּה) Psalms 86 and 102, both contain prophetic, proclamatory elements concerned with others, namely other nations and Zion.[50] In 86:9 we read: "all the nations You have made shall come and worship before you (יָבֹאוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לְפָנֶיךָ)."[51] Then in Psalm 102, David announces the time of Divine *compassion* and favor on Zion (תְּרַחֵם . . . לְחָנְנָהּ in 102:14). The jussives in 109:8–15 arguably function in the same prophetic, proclamatory way, not narrowly as personal pleas or wishes for himself but as announcements of the divine judgment, the "other side" of the grace formula.[52] "David," though suffering, declares the divine judgement, just as he had declared the time of YHWH's grace and compassion for Zion in Psalm 102.[53]

Second, correspondences between Psalms 102 and 109 such as those observed by Zenger and Ho support this (see above).[54] But so do their following psalms 103 and 110. After declaring the time of YHWH's compassion and favor to Zion in 102 David then *proclaims* these in 103.[55] Something similar happens in Psalms 109–110. After enacting the other side of the Exodus 34:6–7 formulary in Psalm 109 through its imprecatory jussives, David declares the divine oracle of Psalm 110, whose conquering Priest-King will mediate that divine judgement by shattering and judging (2x מחץ; דין) kings and nations (מְלָכִים, גוים; 110:5–6). Moreover, YHWH's "decree" (חֹק) in Psalm 2 already anticipated all this. YHWH authorizes the royal son and messiah (מָשִׁיחַ) to "ask of Me" (YHWH) and inherit the nations and earth's ends (2:8), but also to break kings (2:9). From the beginning of the Psalter, then, he enacts *both* sides of the formulary as mediator between YHWH and the nations.

Verses 16–19

Verse 16 opens with a strong causal conjunctive phrase, יַ֤עַן אֲשֶׁר. Quotation advocates see this as either continuing the false accusations against David throughout vv. 6–19 or signaling a shift to David's own words in vv. 16–19 after quoting his enemies in vv. 6–15. Advocates of imprecation, on the other hand, understand David to be explaining what his enemy is doing to him as the "poor and needy man" (אִישׁ־עָנִ֣י וְאֶבְי֑וֹן), David identifying himself as such shortly after in v. 22 (כִּֽי־עָנִ֣י וְאֶבְי֣וֹן אָ֑נֹכִי). The latter understanding follows a well-established pattern in the Psalms, in which the king is helper of the poor (e.g., 72:4, 12–13) and identifies with them as "poor and needy" (עָנִ֣י וְאֶבְי֑וֹן) whom God delivers (35:10; 40:18//70:6; 86:1) or simply "poor/oppressed" (עָנִ֥י; 25:16; 34:7; 69:30; cf. 88:16; 102:1 [s/s]).[56]

The language of v. 16 also supports reading David as the persecut*ed* (רדף) whom others would "put to death" (לְמ֥וֹתֵ֗ת), rather than one accused persecuting "poor and needy" people. Unless the subject is God (e.g., Ps 35:6; cf. 23:6), or a divinely empowered David (18:38), it is always enemies who "persecute" (רדף) the psalmist/poor when "pursuit/persecution" is lamented in the Psalms, not an accusation made against the psalmist.[57]

The same pertains to "his" love of cursing (קְלָלָ֑ה) and disdain for blessing (בְּרָכָ֥ה) in v. 17 and vv. 18–19's reciprocation of his own curses back upon "him." The Psalter's theological landscape suggests David's *enemies* who curse him are in view here, not the other way around, in keeping with v. 28 where David says: "*they* curse, but you will bless" (יְקַלְלוּ־הֵ֭מָּה וְאַתָּ֣ה תְבָרֵ֑ךְ). Hence these verses invoke YHWH's protective blessing of Abraham in Gen 12:3a, "I will bless those blessing you, and those belittling/"cursing" you I will curse" (וַאֲבָרְכָה֙ מְבָרֲכֶ֔יךָ וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ֖ אָאֹ֑ר).[58] This is in keeping with Psalm 72:15–17, which likewise appropriates the Abrahamic covenantal promises of Genesis 12:2–3 to the king positively.[59] The king is blessed by others and all nations are blessed through him. Nor is there any thought of David being guilty of cursing in Psalm 37:22, the other clear allusion to Genesis 12:3 in the Psalms.[60]

Verse 20

The nominal sentence in v. 20a, זֹ֤את פְּעֻלַּ֣ת שֹׂטְנַ֣י מֵאֵ֣ת יְהוָ֑ה, is another focal point in discussions about Psalm 109. It is generally agreed that זֹ֤את refers to what was said in the foregoing verses, whether all of vv. 6–19 or just vv. 16–19, the verse raises numerous interpretive questions.[61] A key question is whether the construct chain, פְּעֻלַּ֣ת שֹׂטְנַ֣י, carries a *subjective* genitive sense, "this is the deed done *by* my accusers" or *objective* genitive force, "this is the recompence/reward *done to* "my accusers."

Taking the latter view, John Goldingay sees v. 20 as the speaker's wish, "May this be the payment of my accusers from Yhwh," David having just quoted his enemies' maledictions against himself in vv. 6–19.[62] Verse 20 "is a wish, that the bad things

they want for him . . . will become their deserved payment, what they themselves experience."[63] Ultimately, then, vv. 6–19 encapsulate the divine retribution for which the *psalmist himself* longs, though by way of reversal: first David quotes his enemies' wishes against *him* (vv. 6–19), then wishes "this" to be the "payment" that comes back upon *them*.

To its credit, Goldingay's interpretation accounts for מֵאֵת יְהוָה without ascribing it to a later gloss as some scholars do.[64] A simpler explanation is on offer, however; namely, that vv. 6–19 are David's own words in the first place, culminating with v. 20 "as a prophetic statement; i.e., "This is the Lord's payment to my accusers,"[65] whereupon David petitions YHWH directly for deliverance grounded positively in the grace formula: ". . . for Your name's sake, because Your *hesed* is good (כִּי־טוֹב חַסְדְּךָ) deliver me" (v. 21).

Verses 21–31

Now we come to the last verses of the psalm, undisputedly the speaker's own words, in which he petitions and laments (vv. 21–26), imprecates via further jussives (vv. 27–29), vows praise (v. 30), and confesses his confidence in YHWH's presence to save him (v. 31). Space permits just a few remarks.

Quotation theories usually include v. 21's opening וְאַתָּה יְהוִה אֲדֹנָי among their evidence for a quotation in the earlier part of the psalm. David has finished relating the enemies' accusations in vv. 6–15(16–19) and now addresses his own prayer to YHWH. Whether the pronoun וְאַתָּה signals a switch from previously reported *enemies*' words to David speaking for himself remains conjectural, however, especially if a shift of speaker has already occurred in v. 20 or v. 16 as quotation advocates hold. It is clear, however, that וְאַתָּה marks a change in *discourse*.[66] David's speech shifts focus from his enemies, with whom he has heretofore been concerned, to YHWH "from whom" (מֵאֵת יְהוָה) he expects his vindication to come (v. 20).

Numerous other features of vv. 21–31 connect Psalm 109 to its larger MT context, but here we shall highlight just a couple. First, David refers to himself "your servant" (וְעַבְדְּךָ) in v. 28, just as he had three times in the earlier discussed Psalm 86 (vv. 2, 4, 16) in Book III, where David is "YHWH's servant" and "shepherd" of his people (78:72; 89:4, 21, 40).[67] Second, 109:31 concludes with David's confident assertion that YHWH "stands at the right hand of the needy one" (יַעֲמֹד לִימִין אֶבְיוֹן). Meanwhile, either side of Psalm 109 *YHWH's* right-hand features prominently: in 108:7 as that by which he saves (יֹשׁעָה) and in 110:1 as the place David's lord (אֲדֹנָי) will sit while God subdues his enemies under his feet, effecting the reversal which David announces in these verses (e.g., 109:29). Both observations suggest that "David" in Psalm 109 ought to be read in connection with its wider Psalter context, where he is imbued with far greater theological significance than a mere individual protesting his innocence in court.

Further Remarks on "David" as Speaker of Psalm 109

Earlier we noted that the Davidic superscription provides an important hermeneutical lens through which to understand Psalm 109, Zenger describing David as its literary-theological speaker. Who or what is meant by "David" in the Psalms is no new question.[68] Here, however, we are concerned specifically with "David" as implied *speaker* of 108–110. Two considerations especially merit attention.

First, the 72:20 postscript marks the end of "the prayers (תְּפִלּוֹת) of David *ben Jesse*." Yet Psalms 108–110 are among eighteen subsequent Davidic psalms in the Psalter, the first of which, Psalm 86, is itself a *prayer* (תְּפִלָּה) of David, the same genre 72:20 said was ended (similarly Psalm 142). The implied speaker is a "David" *without* genealogical qualification, indicating someone beyond simply the founding figure of "the House of David" known from 1–2 Samuel, who embodies ideal kingship in the Psalter (e.g., Pss 1–2, 72).[69] Such a shift in literary-theological speaker underlies Hamilton's explanation of Psalm 109. Psalm 109 "projects the imprecations David prayed against his enemies in Books 1 and 2 (see, e.g., 35:4–8; 69:22–28 [MT 69:23–29]) into the postexilic experience of the future king from his line," indicating "that the historical figure who betrayed David typified the one who would betray the future king from David's line."[70] That Psalm 108 repeats 57:8–12 and 60:7–14 *without* the historical specifics of those psalms' superscripts also underscores this shift from historical to future David.

Writing in the postexilic period when the Psalter likely took final shape, the Chronicler describes David as chief petitioner and praise-giver in the temple, not directly but by means of the Levitical choir.

Second, Psalm 110 follows where "David," speaking prophetically, reports YHWH's oracle concerning "my Lord"—one greater than he and differentiated from the speaker as Vaillancourt correctly observes (cf. Mt 22:42–44). It would seem, then, that the "David" of Psalms 108–110 is broad enough to embrace the historical figure with whom Nathan spoke YHWH's covenantal promises *and* the royal office "writ large" and fulfilled in the ideal king to come.

The Books of Chronicles offer an important, though often overlooked, perspective on this matter. Writing in the postexilic period when the Psalter likely took final shape, the Chronicler describes David as chief petitioner and praise-giver in the temple, not directly but by means of the Levitical choir. According to 1 Chronicle 16:7 David "as the head" (בָּרֹאשׁ) appoints thanksgiving/confession to YHWH (לְהֹדוֹת לַיהוָה) "*by the hand of* Asaph and his brothers" (בְּיַד־

(אָסָף וְאֶחָיו).[71] *Functionally*, the royal office—David—offered praises and confessed to YHWH through psalmody "by the hand of" the Levitical choir (בְּיָדָם; 2 Chr 7:6), not for himself alone but as representative of whole nation (cf. Zenger).

This is important because it explains, historically, why "David" can mean the head of the dynasty, the whole house of David, and ideal kingship—and why these are not mutually exclusive referents for "David" in the Psalter.[72] In the Chronicler's day, the Levitical choir's liturgical performance of psalms on behalf of the Davidic office evokes David's memory and YHWH's promises to him (2 Sam 7:12–16). At the same time, it *idealizes* that office according to those same promises. The Psalter can have David ben Jesse in focus in Books I–II and shift focus to his typological Heir in Books III–V, yet without either being lost entirely to view. So when "David" sings YHWH's חֶסֶד־וּמִשְׁפָּט (101:1), intercedes and prophetically announces Zion's restoration (102), proclaims YHWH's חֶסֶד (103), and its flipside, YHWH's judgment against his enemies (109), etc. ideal kingship and David's promised Heir comes nearer to view. On the other hand, when "David" in Psalm 110 prophetically announces One who both fulfills the Davidic covenantal promises but also surpasses them (Vaillancourt), the psalm's speaker elicits the whole house of David beginning with its founding figure.

Christological Reflections

Christologically, what may we say about Psalm 109 in the mouth of the ideal king, whose royal office belongs to Christ, the Son of God who assumed human flesh? I offer the following reflections.

First, an observation: interpreters often describe Psalm 109 as a "psalm of vengeance" and attribute its "imprecations" to the speaker's "thirst for vengeance," even "malevolence."[73] Such may reflect an interpreter's *own* relationship with Psalm 109 as a fallen being. Who, after all, cannot recognize in themselves bitterness, resentfulness, self-interest, and even malevolence? It may also reflect its human author since he, too, was a sinner, though interpreters ought to exercise caution when inferring motives. But *Christ's* relationship to Psalm 109 is another matter, and I would suggest that such descriptions right out of the gate set us on the wrong interpretive foot. A better starting point is to consider what Psalm 109's words *do*, rather than guess at what they *reveal* in the speaker to uncover his motives and spiritual condition or psychoanalyze him. When we do that, we find that Psalm 109 enacts the "negative side" of the grace formula rather than indulge some self-interested, primal thirst for vengeance.

On the other hand, spiritually *we sinners* need psalms like Psalm 109 more than "conventional piety" likes to admit. In our mouths Psalm 109—to borrow from Brueggemann and Bellinger—"takes seriously the reality that many in fact thirst for vengeance, including many Christians," and "voic[es] such wishes in a safe place

Believers do not pray Psalm 109—or any psalm—solo, disconnected from Christ.

where the threat is heard, taken seriously and honored, and then left safely in God's hands."[74] None of this, however, need be imputed to Christ, who is able to sympathize with us in our weakness being tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). In *his* mouth the judgments and anticipated verdicts of Psalm 109 are more than (and different from) what they are in *our* mouths. As performative, prophetic words they bring about what they announce, Christ himself the agent of divine judgement per Psalm 110 to follow. At the same time, he leads the church in voicing her lament to the Father—indeed all the Psalms' prayers and praises. Hebrews 4:15 speaks of Christ's *present* office as Royal Great High Priest who is *now* able to sympathize with us and does so through psalms like 109 that, on his lips, assumes an intercessory function. Believers do not pray Psalm 109—or any psalm—solo, disconnected from Christ. Rather, united with Christ as his body, the church prays Psalm 109 *with* her head, certain that he is heard by the Father and therefore she is also.

Second, this raises—and begins to answer—another question: where does it "fit" in the life and ministry of Christ? At the outset, it is important to remember that Psalm 109 itself—indeed the whole Psalter—reveals the office of the Messiah compositely and prophetically; it does not set out to recount the Messiah's life chronologically as the NT does. We need to calibrate our expectations accordingly.

As the NT makes clear, Christ's first advent was not "to condemn the world, but … that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17 [ESV]). From his cross Jesus interceded for sinful humanity rather than accused: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Even the NT application of 109:8 to Judas comes in the aftermath of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, not during it, notwithstanding Christ having already uttered his "woe" concerning his betrayer (Mt 26:24; Mk 14:21). Indeed, as discussed above, Psalm 109's condemnations of the wicked in their literary context concern not only a single betrayer and accuser but all "nations" opposed to YHWH and his Messiah (Pss 2; 108; 110). It proclaims eschatological judgment (cf. Mt 25:31–46)—Christ "come to judge the living and the dead."

But Psalm 109's speaker is a *suffering* figure, so we may ask how it relates to his cross. Relevant, here, is the point made earlier that the risen, ascended Christ sympathizes with us in our weaknesses—that is, with the church amid her present sufferings—*now* as exalted Royal Son and Great High Priest. His atoning sufferings and death are complete and perfect satisfaction has been made, yet Christ remains one with his body the church that suffers as she awaits her Lord's appearing (*theologia crucis*). Taking Psalm 109 on his own lips, then, the exalted Christ identifies with the

poor and needy, thereby sympathizing with his church suffering in this world.

Yet Psalm 109 also connects to Christ's cross in another way that renders its judgments (God's *opus alienum*) into warnings that issue a call to repentance and return to the One who also mediates divine hesed (God's *opus proprium*). As Bonhoeffer observed, Christ suffers his own judgments in the so-called "psalms of imprecation." Bonhoeffer writes: "Jesus Christ himself requests the execution of the wrath of God on his body, and thus he leads me back daily to the gravity and the grace of his cross for me and all enemies of God." Bonhoeffer, then, sees Christ both as the *speaker* of vv. 6–19's accusations and condemnations and as their *object*. This revives, in a different way, the questions posed by quotation theories, for it poses the opposite "reversal" quotation theorists have in mind when they contend that David first cites his enemies' accusations against him then calls for such to be leveled back at them. Rather, Christ imprecates against the wicked, calling forth the full judgment of God *per* the "negative" side of the grace formula, only to assume that judgment and condemnation himself! Ironically, then, the view that vv. 6–19 are words directed against *the psalmist* is half true according to Bonhoeffer's Christological paradigm, though not in the way quotation theorists suggest. Quite the opposite in fact. (So too the view that vv. 6–19 are the words of *God*—insofar as the judgment the speaker invokes would be *God's* judgment against himself). The King's condemnation lands upon himself as bearer of divine wrath. He has become The Sinner, The Condemned One *for* us, now vindicated by his resurrection and exalted above all.

Conclusion

David said what? Or more precisely: Who says what about whom and why throughout Psalm 109? This paper has argued that the pragmatics and dramaturgy entailed in quotation theories do not transfer well, if at all, to Psalm 109's appropriation in its literary context, the MT Psalter. This was seen most of all these verses' allusions to torah and especially their appeals to Exodus 34:6–7, which in the MT Psalter belong in the mouth of "David," not his enemies and certainly not enemy *nations* despising YHWH' torah.

Psalm 109 does, however, function naturally in its MT Psalter context when read according to its traditional description as an imprecatory psalm. But lest that word "imprecation" predispose us to hear personal *tit for tat* prayer wishes, the Psalter casts the Davidic speaker as one who invokes divine judgment against his/YHWH's enemies, fulfilling that aspect of his royal office by which *God* mediates judgment. Psalm 109 thus completes the king's mediatory role in enacting the full grace formula (Ex 34:6 and *7*) as it complements his mediation of Divine grace/favor, compassion, and *hesed* in Psalms 102–103. At the same time, the idealized David is himself a sufferer who identifies with the poor and needy (עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן), on whose behalf he speaks. Just so, the exalted Christ, our Great High Priest and King, identifies with

the poor and needy. Accordingly, the Book of Acts and the early church recognized 109:8 as imprecation against the one who betrayed Jesus by handing him over to foreigners for execution "just as it is written," of whom Jesus said, "woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed" (Mt 26:24; Mk 14:21). Yet, paradoxically, this same exalted Christ had become *the* poor and needy *par excellence* in his humiliation and cross, suffering the very divine wrath that he invokes throughout Psalm 109. Psalm 109 ultimately leads us, then, in Bonhoeffer's poignant words, "back to . . . the gravity and grace of the cross for me and all enemies of God," back to our gracious Incarnate God, full of grace and truth (Ex 34:6; Jn 1:14), who manifested the glory of God in his cross, the last place anyone would have expected.

Endnotes

1 Psalm references follow the Hebrew versification throughout this paper where the English and Hebrew differ.

2 Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, *Psalms* New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 473–474, describe Psalm 109 as "the most difficult and most embarrassing psalm for conventional piety, for its central portion is a raw bid for vengeance from God toward one's adversaries (vv. 6–19)" whereupon "the psalmist turns from malevolence to confident trust." Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 182, calls Psalm 109 "the fiercest of the imprecatory psalms."

3 For other treatments of the issues and scholarly debate see, e.g., Leslie Allen, Psalms 101–150 (WBC 21; Thomas Nelson: Mexico City, 2002), 102–105; Frank L. Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, Psalms 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 128–130; P. D. Wright, "Ritual Analogy in Psalm 109," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 3 (1994): 385–404; Stephen Egwin, "Determining the Place of vv. 6–19 in Ps 109," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 80, no.1 (2004): 112–130; Stephen G. Jenkins, "A Quotation in Psalm 109 as Defense Exhibit A," *Tyndale Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (2020): 115–135.

4 For example, John Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series 32 (Naperville, IL: SCM Press, 1986), 81; Mitchell Dahood, Psalms 3, vol. 3, Anchor Bible 16–17A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965–1970), 3:102; Willem A. Vangemeren, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 806–809; Wright, "Ritual Analogy."

5 Hans Schmidt, *Das Gebet der Angelagten im Alten Testament* BZAW 49 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1928), 41, is usually recognized as the first modern scholar to take this approach concerning vv. 6–19.

6 More recently, Stephen Jenkins, "Quotation," has distinguished the words of enemies in general in vv. 6–7 from those of a wicked accuser they appoint against David in vv. 8–19 on their behalf.

7 Heinrich Herkenne, *Das Buch des Psalmen,* HSAT 5/2 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1936), 356–357 (quoted by Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 129).

8 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 129, cite the example of Herkenne, who believes "the wording of v. 6a is presently out of order" because "[a]sking such a thing of God seems unnatural if not offensive" if David is speaker (*Das Buch der Psalmen*, 356–357).

9 See endnote 2 quoting Brueggemann and Bellinger, Psalms, 473–474, who nonetheless favor imprecation throughout vv. 6–19. Similarly, Eaton, *Kingship*, 81, writes that there's "no justification whatever for avoiding the natural direct reading" (that is, imprecation), adding "however it may jar one's pious senses."

10 E.g., Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalm 60–150* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 338. Similarly, Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 128–130.

11 Examples abound in the Psalter in which the quoted speech of adversaries is clearly indicated by אמר . For example, אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ (10:6, 11, 13); אָמַר נָבָל בְּלִבּוֹ (14:1 // 53:2 [ET 53:1]); פֶּן־יֹאמַר אֹיְבִי (13:5); אֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ (12:5; 83:13 [ET 83:12]); [וַ]אֹמְרוּ (35:21; 64:6 [ET 64:5]; 73:11; 83:5 [ET 83:4]); אָמְרוּ בְלִבָּם (74:8); לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם (79:10; 115:2); אַל־יֹאמְרוּ (71:10–11); כִּי־אָמְרוּ אוֹיְבִי לִי...לֵאמֹר (78:19); וַיְנַסּוּ בְּאֵלֹהִים אָמְרוּ (35:25 x2); יֹאמְרוּ (41:6 [ET 41:5]); וַיֹּאמְרוּ (94:7); הָאֹמְרִים [לִי] (40:16 [ET 40:15] // 70:4 [ET 70:3]; 137:7); רַבִּים אֹמְרִים (3:3; 4:7); תֹּאמְרוּ (11:1); אֲלֵי כָּל־הַיּוֹם בָּאֳמָר in 42:4 (ET 42:3) and בְּאָמְרָם אֵלַי כָּל־הַיּוֹם in 42:11 (ET 42:10).

Similarly, the psalmist often reports his own speech or thought via such explicit introductions, e.g., אָמַרְתִּי (31:23 [ET 31:22]; 32:5; 39:2 [ET 39:1)]; 40:8 [ET 40:7]); 41:5 [ET 41:4]; 75:5 [ET 75:4]; 89:3 [ET 89:2]); 116:11; 140:7 [ET 140:6]; 142:6 [ET 142:5]); אוֹמְרֵהוּ לְאַל סַלְעִי (42:10 [ET 42:9]); [וַ]אֹמַר (55:7 [ET 55:6]; 77:11 [ET 77:10]; 91:2; 102:25 [ET 102:24]; 139:11); אִם־אָמַרְתִּי (73:15; 94:18); לֵאמֹר (119:82).

The words of other (non-enemy) figures/groups are typically introduced explicitly too, e.g., mankind: אָדָם וְיֹאמַר (58:12 [ET 58:11]); God's people/Israel: [וַ]יֹּאמְרוּ [נָא] (35:27; 40:17 [ET 40:16] // 70:5 [ET 70:4]; 107:2; 118:2, 3, 4; 124:1; 129:1; 145:6); אִמְרֵי (66:3; 96:10); וְאָמַר (106:48); impersonal subj. via *Niph.*, וְלֹצְיוֹנוֹ יֵאָמֵר (87:5), pl. ptc., בְּאֹמְרִים לִי (122:1), generic "they," יֹאמְרוּ (126:2), or "passers-by," וְלֹא אָמְרוּ הָעֹבְרִים (129:8); YHWH: יֹאמַר יְהוָה (12:6); אָמַר (50:16; 68:23 [ET 68:22]); יֵאָמֵר (90:3); אָז דִּבַּרְתָּ...וַתֹּאמֶר (89:20 [ET 89:19]); וְאֹמַר (95:10); לֵאמֹר (105:11).

12 Heinrich Herkenne, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, 356, counts 81:9 and 91:14 among such exceptions. Similarly, one may infer that 82:2's עַד־מָתַי belongs in the mouth of God who judges amid the "gods" (82:1). Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 103, lists 52:9 [ET 52:7]; 95:8; 132:14; 137:14; and 137:3. In almost all these examples God is the speaker, while only 137:3 concerns enemies.

13 Zenger (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 130) writes,

> The primary semantic referents for the judicial scene in Psalm 109 are: לְשׁוֹן שֶׁקֶר, "lying tongue" (v. 2b); שָׂטַן, "accuse" (vv. 4a, 6b, 20a, 29a); the witness who stands on the right, either as accuser or defender (vv. 6b, 31a); the call for a judge (v. 6a); judicial decision (vv. 7a, 31b). עזר, "help," can be used in a judicial context as well as having its common meaning (cf. Pss 37:40; 72:12; Job 29:12). Even the "prayer of petition" (cf. vv. 4b, 7b) can be understood as a technical juristic term for seeking justice (petition for appeal or request for mercy).

14 See Jenkins, "A Quotation," 117. Zenger (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 130) explains, that "the petitioner appeals to YHWH as the highest judicial instance to review this judicial proceeding and its sentence, to set it aside and so rescue him from death."

15 One sees this in, e.g., Egwin, "Determining," 118, who analyzes Psalm 109 in light of the Roman rhetorician Quintilian's "five parts of forensic speech," namely, "the *exordium* (introduction), the *narratio* (statement of facts), the *probatio* (proof), the *refutatio* (refutation), and the *peroratio* (conclusion)."

16 Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* FOTL 15; (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 259.

17 Susan Gillingham, *Psalms through the Ages: A Reception-History Commentary on Psalms 73–151*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), 177.

18 Though favoring a quotation in vv. 6–19, Gillingham, *Psalms,* 177, entertains the possibility "that the

curses were part of liturgy" comparing them with "the curses against foreign nations in the prophets," further remarking that this would be "odd in a psalm as personal as this." As we shall see, however, the personal character of Psalm 109 need not conflict with such an international purview.

19 W. Dennis Tucker, Jr. *Constructing and Deconstructing Power in Psalms 107–150* AIL 19 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 73, writes, "The appearance of Ps 109 within the initial Davidic collection of book 5 and the collection's relationship to Ps 107, demands reconsideration of Ps 109 as it relates to its *Sitz im Buch*."

20 Willem A. Vangemeren, *Psalms* The Expositors Bible Commentary 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 813. Similarly, Michael K. Snearly, *The Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter* LHBOTS 624 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 122, holds that Psalm 110 "continues the theme of deliverance over enemies, only this time, Yahweh does the speaking, assuring the longed-for deliverance (cf. Psalm 108–109)" and "affirms the place of the Davidic ruler, testifying that Yahweh's covenant loyalty—manifest in deliverance—is not forsaken."

21 Ian Vaillancourt, *The Multifaceted Savior of Psalms 110 and 118* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 86; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2019), 122. Vaillancourt, *Multifaceted Savior,* 180, concludes:

> In summary, my consideration of the figure of salvation in Psalm 110 turned up one whom David prophetically referred to as 'lord', who was a cosmic king at the right hand of Yhwh on the throne of the cosmos, and who, as priest in the manner of Melchizedek, will mediate between his people and Yhwh. Further, this cosmic, royal, priestly figure of salvation would also accomplish a future definitive victory for the people of God (vv. 5-7), the day when Yhwh would make his enemies his footstool (v. 1).

22 Hensley, *Covenant Relationships* (for more extensive discussion of Abrahamic, Mosaic, and priestly characterization of the king see esp. chaps. 6–14). On the Josephite themes see David C. Mitchell, *Messiah ben Joseph* (Newton Mearns, Scotland: Campbell, 2016), 49–62.

23 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 131, 136–137 (quoting Norbert Lohfink, "Drei Arten, von Armut zu sprechen: Illustriert am Psalm 109," *Theologie und Philosophie* 72 [1997]: 336). Zenger dates Psalm 109's incorporation into a "Zion Psalter" spanning Psalms 2–136 in 4th century.

24 Tucker, *Constructing*, 76. Tucker, *Constructing,* 76–77, appears to favor a quotation, concluding that "the view that verses 6–19 reflect the sentiments of the enemy remains the more persuasive position for the reasons outlined by Kraus and others." But Psalm 109's "language of a threatened, unjustly accused individual" has been transposed "to that of a powerless people surrounded, both literally and literarily, by the *Feindevölkerwelt*" (*Constructing*, 78). He explains: "To be clear, Ps 109 in its *Sitz im Leben* had nothing to do with exile, but when placed in the midst of two psalms related to foreign power, verses 8–13 might have functioned as something of a *double entendre*, alluding back to the devastation experienced at the hands of another empire."

25 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 136 (italics added). For Zenger Psalm 109 complements Psalm 107 by presenting another ""primal scene" of mortal danger from which YHWH alone can save" in the form of "legal crisis and false accusation."

26 Peter Ho, *The Design of the Psalter: A Macrostructural Analysis* (Eugene OR: Pickwick), 242. Ho, following Zenger, observes numerous lexical and thematic parallels between Psalms 102 and 109.

27 Ho, *Design*, 243, 245.

28 Ho, *Design*, 244–245.

29 Snearly, *Return*, 121.

30 James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms* ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary, 2 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 2:285.

31 Vangemeren, *Psalms*, 805, citing Mitchell Dahood, Psalms 3, 100.

32 See Wilson, *Editing*, 189 and 225–226.

33 Other psalms likewise apply such expressions to enemies. For example, shortly after Psalm 35, David says in 38:21, "those who repay me *evil for good* (וּמְשַׁלְּמִי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה) *accuse me* (יִשְׂטְנוּנִי) instead of pursuing good."

34 By contrast, Egwin, "Determining," 115, suggests structural correspondences between Psalms 109 and 7 and so deems 7:3–5 a model for understanding 109:6–19, not as imprecation but in relation others' false accusations (109:1–5 ≡ 7:1–2; 109:6–19 ≡ 7:3–5; 109:20–31 ≡ 7:6f). Psalm 7's lexical affinities with Psalm 109 are far weaker than Psalm 35's, however, and the proposed correlations between Psalms 7 and 109 seem arbitrary.

35 Hamilton, *Psalms*, 285. See discussion above.

36 Psalm 2:3, "*Let us* tear off . . . and *let us* cast away" (נְנַתְּקָה . . . וְנַשְׁלִיכָה); Ps 83:5, "They say, Come, *let us* wipe them out from being a nation" (אָמְרוּ֥ לְכ֗וּ וְנַכְחִידֵ֫ם מִגּ֥וֹי).

37 Analyzing הַפְקֵד as a Hiph *infinitive absolute* (rather than an imperative) permits other possibilities but reading it as David's own request of YHWH remains the most straightforward sense (*pace* Jenkins, "A Quotation," 124, who suggests the enemies have "deputized a single accuser to slander David in court").

38 Zech 3:1b, וְהַשָּׂטָן עֹמֵד עַל־יְמִינוֹ לְשִׂטְנוֹ replicates the same vocabulary as 109:6b, וְשָׂטָן יַעֲמֹד עַל־יְמִינוֹ.

39 Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 473. Whether such piety should be deemed "conventional" is another question. See, e.g., C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (Orlando, FL: Hardcourt, 1958), 20–33, who warns that a lack of indignation can prove "an alarming symptom" of other maladies.

40 For example, Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 104–105; Jenkins, "A Quotation," 124–125.

41 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 57, makes a similar point concerning imprecatory psalms: "The enemies referred to here are the enemies of the cause of God, who lay hands on us for the sake of God. It is therefore nowhere a matter of personal conflict. Nowhere does the one who prays these psalms want to take revenge into his own hands."

42 See, e.g., Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta: SBL, 2004).

43 For example, "cutting off" (כרת) his posterity/name/memory (109:13, 15) is a sentiment found on David's lips against enemies/wicked, not the other way around in (34:17; 37:9, 22, 28, 34; 101:8)

44 I am indebted to Tom Egger for alerting me to this insight.

45 Exodus 34:7 distinguishes between God's *opus proprium*, his proper work of forgiving and forbearing, and his *opus alienum*, his alien/other work of punishing (cf. Is 28:21). As in Exodus 22:26, *both* works proceed from *His grace and compassion*, which are primary; no further adjectives foreground the "negative" 34:7b part of the formula.

46 Cf. חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם in acrostic Pss 111:4b and 112:4b. See chaps. 9–13 in Adam D. Hensley, *Covenant Relationships and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* LHBOTS 666 (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 209–254.

47 See also Hamilton, *Psalms* 2:287.

48 Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 348, discusses Psalm 109 within his larger discussion of the Exodus 34:6–7 "formulary," saying, "As is evident from the terms, allusions, and legal topoi, this prayer was thematically inspired and organized around a traditional *theologoumenon* as formulated in the attribute formulary, that YHWH could enact vengeance even to successive generations. This *theologoumenon* of divine justice gave the psalmist the trust that his petition would not be in vain."

Gerstenberger's cult-functional objection to a quotation becomes even more compelling in light of Fishbane's remarks. It is most doubtful that the worshipping community would quote the *enemies* of David evoking the Exodus 34:7 formulary—thereby calling on YHWH to enact his vengeance according to his *torah*—against David, and by extension itself.

49 Wright, "Ritual Analogy," 395.

50 Psalms 86 and 102 are each designated a תְּפִלָּה in the MT Psalter, which in view of 72:20's genealogical qualification I contend are to be heard as prayers of a future David (see Part 4 below). Altogether the Psalter contains only five תְּפִלָּה psalms (17, 86, 90, 102, 142), four of which are Davidic or Davidized (17, 86, 102, 142), of which three come after 72:20's postscript, signaling a shift in focus from David *ben Jesse* as the founding figure of the Davidic dynasty (Psalms 3–72) to his ideal future Heir and Successor. For a more thorough analysis of 72:20 and תְּפִלָּה psalms, see Adam D. Hensley, "David, Once and Future King?

A Closer Look at the Postscript of Psalm 72.20," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46, no.1 (2021): 24–43.

51 This ingathering of nations is reinforced right away in Korahite Psalm 87, where *God* speaks concerning "those who know me" (יֹדָעָי) among the nations (Rahab, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Cush) whom he has recorded in the registers of peoples as "born in Zion" (87:4–6). See also David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (Glasgow: Campbell, 2003), 257.

52 Hamilton, Psalms 2:286, understands these jussives to convey what "must" happen. Additionally, Psalm 86 shares its own parallels with Psalm 109 (e.g., כִּי־עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן אָנִי in 109:22 // כִּי עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן אָנִי in 86:1, varying only in the form of the 1sc pronoun).

53 Rhetorically, quotation advocates accept a similar proclamatory force to these jussives, as a wicked accuser voices the anticipated verdict and outcome of the "trial."

54 Zenger (Hossfeld-Zenger, Psalms 3, 134–135) observes other parallels: "Like the petitioner in Ps 102:12, he compares (in v. 23a) the fading of his life's energy and the length of his life with the shadows that steadily lengthen at evening, announcing the disappearance of the sun (of life) and the inbreaking of night (the darkness of death)" (cf. Ho, *Design*, 234–36). On the structural parallels between the two Davidic triads see Adam D. Hensley, "One Mediator Between God and People: "David" as the Speaker of Psalms 105–106," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 25, no. 3 (2021): 131–133; and Ho, *Design*, 241–247.

55 In 103:7–14, esp. v. 8, the Davidic speaker announces what God personally had spoken to Moses at Horeb.

56 David further describes how the wicked seek the lives of those who are עֲנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן in 37:14 (cf. 74:21).

57 See 7:2; 31:16; 35:3; 69:27; 119:84, 86, 150, 157, 161; 142:7; 143:3 (note also the enemy quotation in 71:11, where *they* resolve to "pursue" the psalmist). Similar in this regard is "putting to death" (מוּת [D, H]) of the righteous or poor in 109:16 (cf. 37:32; 59:1 [s/s]).

58 Hamilton, *Psalms* 2:289, writes concerning 109:28a, "If we seek biblical basis for such a plea, we find it in the blessing of Abraham where Yahweh promises to curse those who dishonor Abraham (Gen 12:3)."

59 Note esp. the move from v. 15's "may they bless him" (יְבָרֲכֻהוּ) to "may all nations be blessed in/through him" (וְיִתְבָּרְכוּ בוֹ כָּל־גּוֹיִם). Verses 17a's desire that the king's "name endure forever" (2x שְׁמוֹ) provides a further parallel with Genesis 12:2, "I will make your name great and you will be a blessing" (וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ וְהְיֵה בְּרָכָה).

60 In Psalm 37:22 he declares that "those blessed by/blessing him (מְבֹרָכָיו) will inherit the land, but those cursed by/cursing him (מְקֻלָּלָיו) will be cut off." The LXX has οἱ εὐλογοῦντες αὐτόν and δὲ καταρώμενοι αὐτόν respectively, reading the morphologically ambiguous consonantal text as active (Piel) participles. On this reading, the antecedent of "him" is most likely the righteous one (צַדִּיק) in v. 21 who is celebrated throughout the psalm in contrast to the wicked (37:12, 16, 21, 25, 30, 32; cf. pl. צַדִּיקִים in 17, 29, 39); the alternative divine passive reading preferred by MT assumes YHWH as the 3ms pronominal suffix's referent, last mentioned in v. 18. 129:6–9 follows a similar pattern, which imprecates against Zion's enemies (כָּל שֹׂנְאֵי צִיּוֹן), "the passers-by" (הָעֹבְרִים) who do *not* bless God's people: "may they be put to shame" (יֵבֹשׁוּ).

61 Jenkins, "A Quotation," 128, observes several entwined questions including: the contextual meaning of פְּעֻלָּה, whether "deed" or "reward, recompense"; the meaning of מֵאֵת יְהוָה, "from YHWH," and to what it relates (and whether it is a scribal addition); and "the grammatical mood of the verbless" זֹאת פְּעֻלַּת שְׂטָנַי clause.

62 For Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3*, 285, the return to the pl. שְׂטָנַי "confirms that vv. 6–19 were the words of the accusers (plural) about the accused (singular)." In other words, the shift between pl. and sg. identified as the key datum on which quotation theories turn.

63 Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3,* 285. The Psalms' use of similar formulae support this "objective genitive" sense preferred by Goldingay and others. Compare, e.g., the similar expression in 118:23, "this was from YHWH" (מֵיְהוָה הָיְתָה זֹּאת מֵאֵת).

64 Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 337–339, translates זֹאת פְּעֻלַּת שְׂטָנַי, "This is the way of the accusers," omitting מֵאֵת

יְהוָה, "from YHWH," as "probably an explanatory accretion which has provided the impetus for thinking that vv. 6–20 are a curse by the lamenting petitioner of the psalm." BHS attests no manuscript witnesses omitting מֵאֵת יְהוָה, however.

65 Vangemeren, *Psalms,* 811, following Derek Kidner.

66 Zenger (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 134) takes it as both "a shift in speaker and in the direction of discourse (the petitioner now speaks for himself and to YHWH)." How the adversative waw represents a "shift in speaker" when v. 20 was likewise the speaker's own words remains unaddressed.

67 Cf. the exilic prophet Ezekiel who prophesied the restoration of Israel under "David" the "servant of YHWH" (34:23–24; 37:24–25).

68 Robert E. Wallace, "Gerald Wilson and the Characterization of David in Book 5 of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford; (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 195 summarizes some possibilities:

> Wilson's reading only works if the character "David" in the Psalter is really referring to the character David from the Deuteronomistic history, and if, therefore, the royal psalms that celebrate David and Davidic monarchy are really celebrating David and Davidic monarchy. "David" could be a metonym for YHWH's reign. Wilson would likely not accept a devalued YHWH in the text. "David" could represent an exilic Israel throughout the centuries or, more basically, Wilson could simply be reading the character of "David" wrongly. Perhaps, instead of David as YHWH's "priest," David remains "king." This is a distinct, though related, question to that of the original author of Psalm 109, whose attribution identifies as David (לְדָוִד).

69 Hensley, "David, Once and Future King?" Similarly, Christopher Seitz, *Word without end: the Old Testament as abiding theological witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 159; cf. Dempster, Dominion and dynasty, 197.

70 Hamilton, Psalms, 2:285. Hamilton observes that "[t]his is precisely the way the New Testament authors understand both the imprecations of the historical David and the Ps 109 imprecation of the future David. For instance, Acts 1:20 quotes Ps 69:22 (MT 69:23) and 109:8 with reference to Judas after he betrays Jesus."

71 ESV's temporal rendering of בָּרִאשׁ as "first" makes little sense in context. Moreover, the same phrase, בָּרִאשׁ, occurs in 2 Chronicle 13:12 where רֹאשׁ clearly takes the meaning of "head" rather than "beginning" (even the ESV renders it "at our head"!) and in similar phrases elsewhere, e.g., בְּרֹאשׁ הָעָם in Dt 20:9 and 1 Kgs 21:9, 12 (cf. Dt 1:13; 1 Sm 9:22; Jer 31:7; 1 Chr 4:42). For a fuller discussion see Hensley, "One Mediator," 123–25, 143 n. 15; John W. Kleinig, *The Lord's Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

72 This also has an important bearing on the oft-discussed communal character of individual laments, praises, etc.

73 See, e.g., Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms,* 473.

74 See, e.g., Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms,* 476.

Not a god, but a gift of God
Marriage, the Word of God, and Sanctification in Luther's Theology

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Martin Luther was a down-to-earth theologian. Luther delighted in the fact that the favor, grace, and heart of God could only be known in the incarnation of the Son of God, "who for us men and for our salvation," was born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph to shed his blood on the cross and rise as the victor over sin, death, and the power of the devil. Similarly, Luther's focus on Christian worship was oriented downward. God, the giver of all good things, delivers his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through word and sacrament to his people through the office of the holy ministry to forgive sins, unburden consciences, and empower them for a life of service to the neighbor in the world. Especially after 1520, Luther's attention and care for the earthly things of this life led him to understand and praise God's work in the temporal realm and its goodness. As Oswald Bayer writes, "After Luther, with his new understanding of Word and Sacrament, became aware of the essentially worldly—not only in the negative but also in the positive sense—mediation of the spiritual, the spiritual significance of all worldly things in the positive sense was revealed to him."[1] Among all those worldly things that Luther came to value highly was the divinely created estate or institution of marriage (*oeconomia*).

At the heart of Luther's understanding of marriage is his theology of the word of God. Through his word, God establishes the institution of marriage at creation and sustains it after the fall into sin.[2] The word of God also joins husbands and wives in

the marriage relationship during their earthly lives and is the means to sustain them during times of temptation. Given this fundamental connection between the word of God and marriage for Luther, the rest of this article has three purposes: (1) to briefly outline the maturation of Luther's teaching on marriage; (2) to describe Luther's understanding of sanctification within his theology of the word of God and "the three estates"; and (3) to apply Luther's insights to two common temptations in marriage today: trying to make one's spouse into a god and looking for someone new and better.

Luther's Maturing Reflections on Marriage

The sociocultural context in which Luther was born and raised did not have a high view of marriage.[3] One of Luther's contemporaries, Sebastian Franck, collected a book of aphorisms from antiquity that poked fun at women and marriage. The sayings included, "If you find things going too well, take a wife" and "If you take a wife, you get a devil on your back."[4] The church also held marriage in low esteem due to the medieval practice of celibacy.[5] Luther explicitly describes his adolescent view of marriage as it was shaped by the prevalence of celibacy in his Genesis lectures (1535),

> When I was a boy, the wicked and impure practice of celibacy had made marriage so disreputable that I believed I could not even think about the life of married people without sinning. Everybody was fully persuaded that everyone who intended to lead a holy life acceptable to God could not get married but had to live as a celibate and take the vow of celibacy.[6]

In 1505, when Luther joined the Augustinian Hermits and took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, marriage would have been out of the question; nevertheless, Trevor O'Reggio argues that "unlike many Catholic scholars of his time, [Luther] did not, however, denigrate marriage or see it as a lesser form of spirituality."[7] As Luther's thought on marriage matured amid his teaching, writing, preaching, and personal experiences, he came to view marriage as a divine institution, calling, and blessing where natural passions were exercised properly, society was served, children were raised, and husbands and wives received care, support, respect, and love.[8]

One of Luther's earliest writings on marriage is *A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519).[9] In this treatise, Luther focused on how, after the fall into sin, faithful marriage between husband and wife provided a godly channel for the expression of human sexuality and desire, defended against lust, and enabled the procreation and raising of children to praise, honor, and serve God.[10] In *The Judgment on Monastic Vows* (1521), Luther's teaching and reflections on marriage were explicitly connected to questions of pastoral care as he repudiated monasticism and the forced celibacy that led to an idolatrous trust in one's own works and merits, burdened consciences, and the abandonment of concrete responsibilities to families, communities, and neighbors.[11]

Over time, Luther began to focus on how marriage is a divine calling blessed by God. Jane Strohl argues that by 1522, marriage, for Luther, was "no longer chiefly about what marriage prevents; it is about what it allows to happen in terms of obedience to God and service to the neighbor."[12] A turning point in Luther's thought came in his treatise, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522). In this treatise, Luther, following Genesis 1:27, described how God has divided humanity into male and female,

Luther's recognition that spouses are to honor the other's image and body as a divine and good creation also had implications for a godly sexual ethic.

> Therefore, each one of us must have the kind of body God has created for us. I cannot make myself a woman, nor can you make yourself a man; we do not have that power. But we are exactly as he created us: I a man and you a woman. . . . [E]ach should honor the other's image and body as a divine and good creation that is well-pleasing unto God himself."[13]

Luther's recognition that spouses are to honor the other's image and body as a divine and good creation also had implications for a godly sexual ethic. As Jarret Carty notes, in this treatise, Luther emphasized "the institution and the conjugal relationship as a manifestation of God's ordinance to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28), and thus *not* an inferior status to celibacy."[14]

Luther's arguments in *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), along with his concerns about the violence and destruction of the Peasants' War, played an essential role in convincing him that he should get married either before he was killed by the raging peasants or before the end of the world, whichever came first.[15] In 1525, Luther and Katharina von Bora were married amid the turmoil of the war to "spite the devil."[16] By the time Luther wrote the Large Catechism (1529), his theology of marriage had matured significantly due to his own marriage, pastoral care, prayer, and study of God's word,

> For the following reasons [God] also wishes us to honor, maintain, and cherish [marriage] as a divine and blessed walk of life. He has established it before all others as the first of all institutions, and he crafted man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God. God has therefore blessed this walk of life most richly, above all others, and

> in addition, has supplied and endowed it with everything in the world in order that this walk of life might be richly provided for. Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God's serious concern. For it is of utmost importance to him that persons be brought up to serve the world, to promote knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, and to fight against wickedness and the devil.[17]

In the Large Catechism and other works, Luther's positive estimation of marriage comes through clearly. He recognized and esteemed it as a blessed, God-pleasing walk of life with both joys and responsibilities.

The Word of God and the Three Estates as Places of Creaturely Responsibility and Sanctification

Luther's teaching on marriage was rooted in his understanding of "the three estates."[18] For Luther, God is a speaking God (*deus dicens*) who acts through his creative and re-creative word.[19] Consequently, each of the estates, *ecclesia* (the church), *oeconomia* (the household), and *politia* (the state/civil society), and above all three the common order of Christian love is created, instituted, and preserved by God's creative and re-creative word.[20] "And whatever is constituted by God's Word must be holy," Luther writes, "for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything connected with it and involved in it."[21] Luther was confident that "these estates of God are to be found in and remain in every kingdom, as far as the world extends, and will last until the world comes to an end."[22] In each of these estates, the Creator God, through his word, defines and specifies where human creatures are to work and serve for the flourishing of the creation and human creaturely life.[23]

For Luther, the three estates are the specific locations and means of God's sanctifying work in his people's everyday world and lives.[24] As Bayer notes, "Luther talks of sanctification not merely *in* institutions but also *through* institutions."[25] In his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), Luther distinguishes between being holy and being saved: "For to be holy and to be saved are two entirely different things. We are saved through Christ alone; but we become holy both through this faith and through these divine foundations and orders."[26] Christ alone is the sole *medium salutis* as "it is impossible that there should be more saviors, ways or means to be saved," but the divinely created estates are the places of creaturely responsibility where faith is active in love in conformity to God's design and desire for human creaturely life.[27]

As Bernd Wannenwetsch puts it, "Sanctification for Luther is not just a matter of faith, but a matter of faith and created orders, or more precisely of *faith that is exercised in love within the divinely assigned spheres of social life*, politics, economics, and religion (cf. WA16 '*in talibus ordinationibus exercere ceritatem*')."[28] In summary, the three estates are the concrete places of creaturely responsibility God has created

and ordained where God's people suffer (*passio*) his divine activity as he brings them into lives of new obedience and holiness as they interact, serve, care, work, play, and rest with other human creatures in accord with his commandments.[29]

It is not difficult to observe the relationship between Luther's theology of the word and his theology of the three estates as places where God is at work to sanctify his people in various sermons and writings. In his marriage sermon given around June 8, 1531, Luther writes, "Who is there who does not know that marriage was founded and ordained by God, created in Paradise and confirmed and blessed outside Paradise?"[30] He goes on, "God has linked his Word to the estate of marriage. . . . Without [the Word of God], the state of being married would be just licentious living, not the estate of marriage. That is why the most important thing about the estate of marriage is that the brilliance of the Word of God can be seen in it."[31] The word of God makes the estate of marriage holy. It also sanctifies how husbands and wives perceive each other amid the various activities, delights, struggles, and responsibilities within the marriage relationship,

> God's word is actually inscribed on one's spouse. When a man looks at his wife as if she were the only woman on earth, and when a woman looks at her husband as if he were the only man on earth; yes, if no king or queen, not even the sun itself sparkles any more brightly and lights up your eyes more than your own husband or wife, then right there you are face to face with God speaking. God promises to you your wife or husband, actually gives your spouse to you saying: "The man shall be yours. I am pleased beyond measure! Creatures earthly and heavenly are jumping for joy." For there is no jewelry more precious than God's Word; through it you come to regard your spouse as a gift of God and, as long as you do that, you have no regrets.[32]

God's word unites husbands and wives and sanctifies their perceptions to see one another as a gift of God. This same word also shapes them to see challenging and demanding activities within the marriage relationship like child-rearing as moments of God-pleasing sacrificial service for the sake of the neighbor,

> Now observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason . . . takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labor at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of

> bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise."
>
> What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, "O God, because I am certain that thou has created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labour will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight."[33]

Natural reason may see self-sacrificially humbling oneself to change diapers, do the dishes, vacuum the house, or pull weeds in the garden for one's spouse as mundane, laborious, and unimportant, but to reason enlightened by the word of God, they are good and beautiful works done in faith. Thus, in the estate of marriage, God is at work among his Christian people to break down their sinful selfishness, narcissism, and inward-turned hearts and to align their wills with his so that they live outside of themselves in faith toward him and love for one another.[34]

God's word sanctifies and makes Christians holy as they work, pray, and serve in the three estates, including the estate of marriage. This word is the ground and foundation for Luther's understanding of marriage as it discloses the true reality of all aspects of the marriage relationship, from the most interesting to the most seemingly mundane and insignificant. So, how might Luther's theology of marriage shape how Christians deal with some common temptations in the marriage relationship? This article concludes

In the estate of marriage, God is at work among his Christian people to break down their sinful selfishness, narcissism, and inward-turned hearts.

by applying Luther's insights to two prevalent temptations facing God's people in marriage today: trying to make one's spouse into a god and looking for someone new and better.

Applying Luther's Insights to Two Common Temptations in Marriage

In his influential book *Seculosity*, David Zahl describes how many Christians and non-Christians long to justify themselves or find "enoughness" in all the wrong persons, places, and things, including politics, parenting, technology, and leisure.[35] Zahl writes, "Listen carefully and you'll hear that word *enough* everywhere. . . . You'll hear about people scrambling to be successful enough, happy enough, thin enough, wealthy enough, influential enough, desired enough, charitable enough, woke enough, *good* enough."[36] The longing for "enoughness" is a universal human longing, and one of the most common ways people long to find it is through romance, a sexual partner, a husband or wife.[37]

Zahl highlights how one of the most common temptations for people today is to imagine their partner as a savior, what Zahl calls "The Soulmate Myth." Throughout history, people have married for pragmatic and economic reasons. However, Zahl argues that this economic and pragmatic model has been replaced by a new one, "the so-called marriage of instinct in which attraction and desire drive us to the altar."[38] Some believe that while we once "sought someone to meet our material and societal needs, today we seek someone to meet our emotional needs."[39] But Zahl offers a more nuanced vision, "It could be that we haven't switched models so much as combined them."[40]

Husbands and wives often ask each other to become their savior by providing everything for them. As marriage therapist Esther Perel describes, "We come to one person, and we basically are asking them to give us what once an entire village used to provide: give me belonging, give me identity, give me continuity, but give me transcendence and mystery and awe all in one. Give me comfort, give me edge. Give me novelty, give me familiarity. Give me predictability, give me surprise."[41] Luther's remarks on the first commandment are especially salient in responding to this conception of the marriage relationship.

Luther astutely observed that each person has a god, "A 'god' is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. . . . Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God."[42] Luther's reflections help us understand that spouses can try to make one another into a god by looking to them as their source of meaning, identity, and security; however, Luther is clear that the Triune God alone is the true source of meaning, identity, and security.[43]

Instead of looking at their spouse as a god, Luther reminds God's people to

regard their spouse as a gift of God. Helping couples understand and repent of their attempts to turn their spouse into a savior is a significant way that God is at work through pastors or other godly family and friends to sanctify husbands and wives in a marriage relationship to learn to fear, love, and trust *in him* above all things as the source of all good and their refuge in all times of need. Justified by faith for Christ's sake and confidently and joyfully living under their heavenly Father's care, husbands and wives are freed to love and cherish one another as gifts of God, walking together in daily repentance, forgiveness, and mutual support and encouragement, rather than imprisoning each other under impossible expectations that cannot be met.

Another contemporary temptation in marriage that Zahl identifies is what he calls "Maximizing My Love." Zahl contends that today's world suffers from the temptation to maximize everything. Comedian Aziz Ansari describes it like this, "[The internet] doesn't simply help us find the best thing out there; it has helped to produce the idea that there is a best thing and, if we search hard enough, we can find it."[44] This cultural framework helps perpetuate the myth that your soulmate might be out there, and your true soulmate might be different than your spouse and is waiting for you to find them.

Safeguarding love and desire in the marriage relationship by the grace of God is crucial to its sustained success.

Often, when husbands and wives get married and progress through the honeymoon stage, they quickly experience the challenges and staleness in their once passionate relationship. When this experience occurs, one or both might begin to look for someone "better." Contrary to popular wisdom, Esther Perel notes, "We don't divorce—or have affairs—because we are unhappy, but because we could be happier."[45] Herein lies one of the greatest temptations for the marriage relationship today, especially in a hypersexualized and social media-driven culture.

Luther also recognized these sinful traits and temptations in his own day in the hearts and minds of his people. He is clear that passions and desires can be used by the devil and the sinful flesh to lead someone away from their spouse and into adultery, "The devil will tempt you with lust. You will not be so virtuous (unless you have a special gift from God), and you will not always love your wife so much that you don't grow tired of her or even prefer someone else. In the same way, your wife will not always love you so much that someone else won't be more attractive to her."[46]

Amid these temptations, safeguarding love and desire in the marriage relationship by the grace of God is crucial to its sustained success. Luther expresses this at greater length in his study of Matthew 5:27–30,

> Without it there is trouble: from the flesh because a person soon gets tired of marriage and refuses to bear the daily discomfort that comes with it; and from the devil, who cannot stand the sight of a married couple treating each other with genuine love and who will not rest until he has given them an occasion for impatience, conflict, hate, and bitterness. Therefore, it is an art both necessary and difficult, and one peculiarly Christian, this art of loving one's husband or wife properly, of bearing the other's faults and all the accidents and troubles. At first, everything goes all right, so that, as the saying goes, they are ready to eat each other up for love. But when their curiosity has been satisfied, then the devil comes along to create boredom in you, to rob you of your desire in his direction, and to excite it unduly in another direction.[47]

To address this common challenge, Luther directs couples back to the word of God and its constitutive role in their married life together,

> So let each man see to it that he stick to the marriage partner God has given him, and that no other one be more attractive to him. But you will not succeed in this except by the Word of God, by holding it alone before you and seeing yourself constantly in it as in a mirror. . . . If you see the estate of marriage through the Word and in the Word, and if you hold each other in such esteem, another man's wife will not attract you as much as your own, for God's Word will not allow it. And when another woman's words seem to you ever so attractive and beautiful, nevertheless to you she will be as black as pitch and covered in hellish filth. For you do not find her adorned with the Word of God. But your wife is the most beautiful and dearest, because she is the one God has adorned with his dear Word.[48]

Rooted in his theology of the word, Luther counseled husbands and wives to remind themselves of God's work in joining them together when they are tempted to look for someone new and better. With their perceptions sanctified by the word of God, they are freed to be faithful, not looking for someone new or better, but living faithfully according to their various callings, including their calling as husband or wife, trusting that their spouse is a gift of God and adorned with his dear word.[49]

Conclusion

Luther considered marriage to be a blessed estate and a holy calling but not a means of salvation. He believed that God instituted the estate of marriage through his word in the beginning and, after the fall into sin, continues to preserve it as a place

of mutual care, love, delight, sexual expression, and even sanctification. Luther's pastoral guidance about the marriage relationship continues to offer fruitful areas of application for God's people today. Pastors in Christ's church have the responsibility and joy of shepherding husbands and wives to see what a remarkable comfort and joy it is that God has joined them together through his word and that by the word, they can endure common temptations in the marriage relationship as their perceptions are sanctified to see one another for what they truly are: a gift of God.

Endnotes

1 Oswald Bayer, "Nature and Institution: Luther's Doctrine of the Three Orders," trans. Luís H. Dreher, *Lutheran Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1998): 125–159, 133–134. (Emphasis original.)

2 As the Apology states, "Marriage was not first instituted in the New Testament but in the very beginning, at the creation of the human race. It has the command of God as well as certain promises that pertain not properly speaking to the New Testament but rather to the bodily life. Therefore, whoever wishes to call it a sacrament should still distinguish it from the preceding ones, which are distinctive signs of the New Testament and testimonies of grace and the forgiveness of sins" (Ap, XIII, 14). Cited in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 221, hereafter Kolb-Wengert.

3 For a brief biographical treatment of Luther's formative years from childhood to adolescence, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1–17.

4 Cited in Mark D. Tranvik, *Martin Luther and the Called Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 91.

5 Steven Ozment, "Re-inventing Family Life," *Christian History* 12, no. 3 (1993): 22, writes, "The clergy of the Middle Ages were obsessed with chastity and sexual purity. Augustine portrayed sexual intercourse in Paradise as occurring without lust and emotion. A vernacular catechism from 1494 elaborates the third deadly sin (impurity) under the title, 'How the Laity Sin in the Marital Duty.' According to the 1494 catechism, the laity sin sexually in marriage by, among other things, having sex for the sheer joy of it rather than for the reasons God has commanded, namely, to escape the sin of concupiscence and to populate the earth."

6 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* 1-5 (1535), vol. 1, 135, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter LW.

7 Trevor O'Reggio, "Martin Luther: Marriage and the Family as A Remedy for Sin," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 51, no. 1 (2013): 39–67, 41.

8 Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 165, writes, against several medieval assumptions that "maligned marriage and personhood, [Luther] exalted the family in all its dimensions and utterly without qualification."

9 Luther considered marriage a sacrament when he wrote *A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519; LW 44:10). Yet by the time he penned *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), he no longer held this view (LW 36:94–95).

10 LW 44:12–13. See also Jane E. Strohl, "Luther on Marriage, Sexuality, and The Family," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, eds., Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'Ubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 370–382, 371.

11 LW 44:251–400.

12 Strohl, "Luther on Marriage, Sexuality, and Family," 371.

13 LW 45:18.

14 Jarret A Carty, *God and Government: Martin Luther's Political Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 136.

15 For a biographical treatment of Luther's experience of the Peasants' War and his marriage, home, and family life, see Martin Brecht, *Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, 1521–1532, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 172–211.

16 Diane V. Bowers, "To Spite the Devil: Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora's Wedding as Reform and Resistance," *Religions* 11, no. 3 (2020): 116–130, 123–124.

17 LC, sixth commandment, 206–208. Cited in Kolb-Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 415.

18 For a helpful summary of the various terminology employed by Luther on the three estates, see Bernard

Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 322.

19 See Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 129–220.

20 In Luther's theology, the three estates also serve as hermeneutical keys to read and interpret Scripture properly: "In the first place, the Bible speaks and teaches about the works of God; about that there is no doubt; but these are divided into three hierarchies: household (*oeconomia*), state (*politia*), and church (*ecclesia*). If there is a statement that does not fit for the church, then we allow it to stay in the realm of the state or the household, wherever it best fits" (LW 54:446). Cited Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation, trans.* Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 122.

21 LW 37:365. Cited in Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification, trans.* Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 60–61.

21 LW 13:369. Cited Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology,* 122.

22 LW 13:369. Cited Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology,* 122.

23 Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 140, argues that Luther's teaching on the three estates cannot be disconnected from its polemical aspects, especially the desertion of God-given obligations and responsibilities in the world by the "Enthusiasts" and "Anabaptists."

24 Michael R. Laffin, *The Promise of Martin Luther's Political Theology: Freeing Luther From the Modern Political Narrative* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 25, writes the three estates institutionally name sanctification because they "are the places for Luther where humans can expect to encounter the promised presence of God and receive and hand on God's goodness from and to one's neighbors."

25 Bayer, *Living by Faith*, 60.

26 LW 37:365. Cited in Bayer, "Nature and Institution," 144–145.

27 LW 37:364. Cited in Bayer, "Nature and Institution," 132.

28 See Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Luther's Moral Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120–136, 132. Emphasis original

29 Laffin, *The Promise of Martin Luther's Political Theology*, 153–154, 161–162. For an extended discussion of "suffering" (*passio*) God's alien and proper work, see my "Taking James K.A. Smith to the Lutheran church," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 57, no. 3 (December 2023): 128–143, 135–140.

30 *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 65 vols., eds. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.) 34/1, 52, hereafter cited as WA. Cited in Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response: Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies,* trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 171.

31 WA 34/1, 54. Cited in Bayer, *Freedom in Response,* 172.

32 WA 34:52/12–21. Cited in Scott Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2000): 335–350, 347.

33 LW 45:39. Luther goes on to describe how if another man were to ridicule a father as an "effeminate fool" for caring for and serving his children, that man would be "the biggest fool on earth" because he fails to see how this work done by the father in faith makes God, with all his angels and creatures, smile (LW 45:40).

34 LW 31:364–371.

35 Bayer, *Living by Faith*, 1-4, describes how the experience of justifying ourselves is a perennial human condition. Oswald Bayer, "The Word of the Cross," *in Justification is for Preaching: Essays by Oswald Bayer, Gerhard O. Forde, and Others,* ed. Virgil Thompson (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 189, "What is universally intelligible is the urge to justify oneself by works or deeds."

36 David Zahl, *Seculosity: How Career, Parenting, Technology, Food, Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do about It* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), xiv.

37 Zahl, *Seculosity,* 17–39.

38 Zahl, *Seculosity,* 31.

39 Zahl, *Seculosity,* 31.

40 Zahl, *Seculosity,* 31.

41 "We come to one person . . ." Esther Perel, "The Secret to Desire in a Long-Term Relationship," *TED*,

February 2013, https://tinyurl.com/nd29njx. Cited in Zahl, *Seculosity,* 31.

42 LC, first commandment, 3–4; Cited in Kolb-Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 386.

43 Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 8–9.

44 Aziz Ansari, *Modern Romance* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 125. Cited in Zahl, *Seculosity*, 33.

45 Esther Perel, "Rethinking Infidelity: A Talk for Anyone Who Has Ever Loved," *TED*, March 2015, https://tinyurl.com/y8lbr4fl. Cited in Zahl, *Seculosity* 34.

46 WA 34/1, 64f. Cited in Bayer, *Freedom*, 176.

47 WA 32.374, 1–11; LW 21:89. Cited in Strohl, "Luther on Marriage, Sexuality, and The Family," 375.

48 WA 34/1, 64f. Cited in Bayer, *Freedom*, 176.

49 While this article focuses explicitly on Luther's theology of the word of God, I also affirm the importance of using human reason, other disciplines like psychology, and theories like family systems theory in a ministerial role to care for and support couples in the marriage relationship. At Concordia Seminary, this is often called "First-Article wisdom."

Homiletical Helps

Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived
The Language of Lament

Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived is a podcast produced by the department of Theological Research and Publications at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Episodes are released on the fifteenth and thirtieth of each month. The podcast can be found on our website: concordiatheology.org and on all major podcast hosting apps. The following is a transcript of portions of the episode "The Language of Lament" by Drew Oswald and Dr. Tim Saleska. It aired on January 15, 2024, and was hosted by Jessica Bordeleau, MAR. Since the episode aired, Drew Oswald has been ordained and serves as pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church and School in Utica, Nebraska.

Bordeleau: Welcome to *Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived*. We're exploring the ways in which theology permeates all aspects of life. Through conversations with various faculty at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, we will challenge you to deepen your theology and live out your faith in Christ. I'm your producer and host, Jessica Bordeleau. I'll talk with a variety of professors on a variety of topics, something different every episode, but all pointing to the intersection of faith and daily life.

Today I'm talking with Drew Oswald. He's a student here at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. After serving as a high school teacher, he earned his Master of Divinity and now he's working on his STM. He recently gave a presentation at the Theological Symposium here on campus about the language of lament in the church and how it can move us towards hope.

I'm also glad to welcome Dr. Tim Saleska. He is professor of exegetical theology and the dean of ministerial formation here at Concordia

Seminary, St. Louis. On campus. Dr. Saleska is known as the expert on Psalms. There's plenty of lamenting going on there, so maybe that's why Drew asked me to invite him to the conversation. We'll have to see.

Drew, you've been researching the significance of lament and the ways it can lead us towards hope, but let's just start at the very beginning. What is a lament?

Oswald: In the scriptures, laments are first person cries to God about something typically tragic or horrible. They're really a type of prayer in which the lament represents or tells God about the horrible things that are going on and then really demands that God answers.

Bordeleau: It sounds like complaining. How can complaining move you towards hope?

Oswald: I think that's why people are often uncomfortable with lament because the lament say things like, why are you sleeping? Where are you? Have you abandoned me? Have you forgotten your people? You've led us like sheep to be slaughtered! What in the world is going on? God? So it does sound like complaint. I think there is a distinction between complaint and lament . . . it's the insistence on God's answer and ultimately the trust that God will one day answer the people who are lamenting.

Saleska: If you think of them as just whining, you're doing them a disservice. If you think of them as complaining, you start thinking "I'm going to suppress my complaints." And the Psalms do just the opposite of that.

Oswald: What gives us the license or what gives us the invitation to lament is the promises of God. God is promised to be our God and through baptism, he's promised that he's going to redeem us. He's promised that he's going to love us. It makes me think of how Martin Luther starts his explanation of the Lord's prayer. God is our dear father, and we are his dear children. And a lot of laments sound like the way that my kids complain to me. You can fix this. Why aren't you fixing this? Why is this going wrong? And so there's this, it's all bundled up in this relationship of love that God has created with us.

Saleska: So I think Drew raises an important point here, the psalms of lament emerge within the contradiction between the promises of God and the speaker's lived experience. The Lord made me promises he's not answering,

and it's been an awful long time I've been waiting. And so within that contradiction, the prayer comes out. In fact, the entire Psalms are the prayers and cries of God's people who are waiting for him to come.

Oswald: I think it's important to recognize that faith in the promises of God doesn't minimize the lived experience of his people. It's not like our human emotions go away when we become Christians. God invites us into a relationship where we get to enact those emotions within a relationship with him.

Saleska: So the way we teach things and sometimes the way we live is that we think that we can improve our position before God or get closer to God by what we say or don't say. And so the rituals we do, the way we pray somehow God approves or disapproves, but we forget that God reads your heart. It's out of the heart that come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries. It's the heart that he wants. The psalms give voice as Drew says, to what's in your heart. They force you into an honest examination of your own heart. You can be honest before God even in the darkest parts of your heart.

The psalms remind us that God knows your hearts and invites you to this kind of honest speaking. We need that in the church today. I think it's very helpful for parents raising their children to remind them, Hey, what's on your heart? Give voice to it. Let's get that out there. Your questions to God, your doubts to God, all those kinds of things. The psalms can help us with that.

Oswald: I spent four years as a high school teacher. I would have high school students come into my classroom before the day started and share these horrible stories of things that just weren't their fault. I think there are two main ways of dealing with suffering as Christians that the scriptures give us. They're both relational ways. One of them is repentance. Sometimes you make a real mess of things, and you cause your life to be really bad and you should repent. But a second one is that sometimes evil things happen to you and lament is an option for that. And so students come to me and say things like, "My dad is an addict. Why would God do that to my mom?" Or "My sister died in a car accident. Why would God do that?" I could have tried to answer with the why, but I don't know the mind of God. God is weaving together all things. I don't know what he's doing now. As Christians dealing with that suffering, we shouldn't simply think about it, but instead God invites us to enact that suffering to him.

Bordeleau: So it makes sense that a lament can be a cry of an individual, their heart crying out to God. But you also said they are communal. How would you lament as a community or as a church?

Saleska: I think that community lament or to lament with other people is very important so that we don't suffer in isolation. The promises of God are full bodied for the resurrection of the body and eternal life for all of us. In the here and now, as the body of Christ, we are concerned for the physical, mental, emotional, economic welfare of those in our community and in the world around us as we bring the gospel to people. The gospel is not just something we speak about cognitively, but we should embody as God's people, in our prayers, but also in our actions. I mean, you have the title of the podcast, "tangible theology." Tangible by its very nature means there ought to be a physical experience about it. That's what God's promises are. When he's not delivering on that, when everything seems to be going the opposite way, what do we have to do? We live this life of faith, that hearing is one day going to become seeing, right? That's the promise. We live by hearing the promise right now and grasping it, looking forward to the time when it will be fully tangible for all of us. And the laments remind us to keep that hope alive as we are waiting.

I've heard people say that in the midst of their pain or grief or loss, they still can say that they know God promises to love them. They find joy even in the midst of sadness. Those two can dwell together; this joy and hope in the midst of great pain and suffering. It always humbles me. It's an incredible gift and an indication of the power of the Holy Spirit to do that. He actually rescues your heart from utter hopelessness and despair. That's pretty amazing.

Bordeleau: What a relief. What freedom that gives us. We don't have to smile and pretend to be happy. We can say "this is very hard, but I'm not hopeless." What a relief that we can just be real but still have hope.

Saleska: That's the thing. People think "I wouldn't be so sad if I had enough faith." You have to realize that it's the strength of the promise, not the strength of your faith that counts, and the strength of the promise is immovable. So many people in the church think they need to put on the pretense, but the lament shows that that is certainly not the case.

Oswald: So that's great encouragement for people. Oh man, I heard that all the time from high school students: "if I just believed enough, I wouldn't be sad." I'll never forget teaching about the humanity of Christ. It was a very dry Christology lecture. I was talking about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane saying, "my soul is sorrowful even to the point of death." I said, "man, that really sounds like depression or anxiety to me," and I had these six kids in the back of class all look up with their eyebrows super high. Okay, this is a Jesus that I can understand and who can understand me.

Jesus picks up Psalm 22 on the cross and cries out to his father, "why have you forsaken me?" There's this language that we have as people of faith that's been given to us, that we can use to remind ourselves of the story, but also in the body of believers to help people recognize that all of their life experience has a home. All of their life experience has a home with Christ.

Bordeleau: If Jesus can be sad, if Jesus can say, "this is hard," then I can too. Then it's okay if I do too.

Oswald: Yeah, absolutely.

Saleska: If the church presents itself as this place where morality is central, where the law is central, then you're going to get a community that can't be authentic with each other because you have to put on airs. But if you are a community in which the gospel is the center, in which we're the prodigal with the pronouncing of forgiveness, we share that with each other. We assure people to be honest with what's in your heart with your cries. It is going to start happening. I think we forget that the whole church exists for the sake of the gospel. It's the gospel that should be at the center, not law or morality. Otherwise, the church becomes a place where you draw the moral line in these strict terms rather than welcoming broken sinners and ministering to them with the gospel and bringing people to repentance through the teaching and the work of the Holy Spirit. And that's where laments then, will start to come as people live their lives together.

Bordeleau: The last question on the show is always this; what do you want our listeners to know?

Saleska: Well, I definitely want them to know that the life of faith is a life of trust

and humble trust in the promises of God. And the psalms are just full of those and draw your attention to them. It's not as if we have to somehow get over suffering and pain and darkness on our own, but we have these promises that we hold onto. That hearing of the promise and the sharing of the promise is everything to our faith, everything to the walk that we have in this life.

Oswald: God has promised to be our Father. He's promised to take care of us. He's brought us into his family through baptism into Christ, and now God lives inside us through his Spirit. There's no experience of our lives, no matter how big of a mess we've made of our lives or what we've suffered at the hands of other people or just because of the circumstances of the world; there's none of those experiences that don't have a place in our relationship with God. There's none of those experiences that can't and won't ultimately be redeemed when Christ comes back.

Bordeleau: That's it for today. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau. Join me next time when we talk about the intersection of theology and daily life. Because it's tangible: theology learned and lived.

Reviews

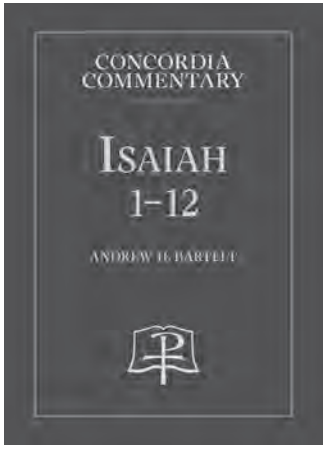
ISAIAH 1–12. Concordia Commentary. *By Andrew H. Bartelt. Concordia Publishing House, 2024. Hardcover. 896 pages. $69.99.*

In *Isaiah 1–12*, Andy Bartelt presents his magnum opus, a lifetime of Isaianic, ancient Near Eastern, literary, and theological studies crafted into an 896-page tome. Eighteen pages of Hebrew text in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* give rise to 794 pages of commentary, yet it is not just commentary on Isaiah 1–12. Bartelt masterfully introduces Isaiah as a whole, including Isaiah studies, historical background, an overview of Isaiah, reading chapters 1–12 in the context of the whole, and a careful six-part analysis of each pericope.

Bartelt approaches Isaiah as a unified whole assuming eighth-century Isaiah of Jerusalem as the author. Once standard, this is no longer a common approach in the academy; however, it is not what some might label a naive reliance on a pre-enlightenment dogmatics. Instead, Bartelt gives an accessible and clear overview of Isaiah studies, demonstrating his knowledge of the various approaches, acknowledging benefits, and critiquing the varied philosophies and methodologies. He demonstrates that scholars are finally back to a wholistic approach, though most do so with the assumption that the literary whole is a late redaction and not the work of eighth-century Isaiah of Jerusalem.

In presenting his methodological assumptions, Bartelt demonstrates that the historical and literary concerns raised by critical scholars can be answered, even without a "simple appeal to divine revelation," a tenet Bartelt fully upholds as evidenced various places in the introduction (28). He acknowledges that his argumentation will not likely change the minds of those who embrace "the dominant scholarly consensus" (32), but he has shown another way to understand the data that are often used against seeing the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah as a unity composed and arranged by Isaiah himself in the late eighth and early seventh centuries.

One tenet emphasized by Bartelt is the necessity of understanding Isaiah as a prophet of his own day, sent to God's people of that day to speak God's word to that day as well as to the future. In the section "The Prophet in His World," Bartelt helpfully sets Isaiah within the historical context of his day. This historical context is essential to understanding Isaiah's ministry and work and undergirds Bartelt's interpretive work.



Also crucial is understanding Isaiah as a literary whole and understanding the parts, especially 1–12 and its constituent parts, in relation to the whole. To that end, his section "The Prophet and His Word" consists of four subsections. First, he lays out the "big picture of the message of Isaiah in his times, for his times, and for future times" (71). He then treats the whole book again, considering blocks of chapters and observing the overall thought progression. Next. he treats the thought progression of chapters 1–12, first in a linear fashion from one through twelve and then again taking the chiastic structure into consideration. Lastly, he travels through the whole of Isaiah once again, focusing on "the key theme at the foundation of Isaiah's contribution to biblical theology, namely the reign of Yahweh on Zion as King of his creation" (102).

Like Isaiah, Bartelt gives us almost too much of a good thing. Isaiah's sixty-six chapters can feel like too much at times. Bartelt's multiple attempts to outline and summarize can feel the same way. We cannot argue with Isaiah; he worked under divine inspiration. We might argue with Bartelt, yet what he has given is all incredibly helpful, even if it is too much to be digested all at once. Like Isaiah, multiple readings may be necessary. The more one reads Isaiah, the better the whole becomes. It is the same here. And the better one knows Isaiah, the more helpful Bartelt's work. And the more one reads Bartelt's work, the better one can read Isaiah!

Following the introductory material comes the meat of the volume. For each pericope, Bartelt follows a six-part approach. "First, an introduction will provide an overview and discuss the literary structure, which also serves the thought progression. This is followed by an original translation with textual notes and comments on text-critical, lexical, and grammatical issues, as well as other translational matters. Then comes the commentary proper. That is followed by observations on how the subsection relates to the larger literary context of the entire vision, Isaiah 1–66. Finally, each pericope will conclude with some theological reflections on the interconnections with the larger issues and insights of biblical theology" (6). In this material the reader is blessed to follow along and learn from a master as Bartelt applies his considerable linguistic, literary, historical, and theological skills to the Hebrew text of Isaiah.

Limited space allows us to explore one example, the oft-contested virgin and Immanuel of chapter 7. Bartelt begins with an "Overview and Structure" of the chapter. He understands chapter 7 as an integral piece around which chapters 6 and 8 are situated. Then he demonstrates how chapter 7 consists of two episodes "which describe two closely related encounters of Isaiah as God's prophet and spokesman to the king" 469.

Then follows the "Translation" in which prose and poetic portions are differentiated in layout.

The nineteen pages of "Textual Notes" help the Hebrew reader though not only the Hebrew reader since there is much more included than just linguistic

notes. It is in this section in his notes on Isaiah 7:14 that Bartelt begins to deal with the important Hebrew term typically rendered "virgin" as well as the numerous other factors that make this text controversial. Five pages are dedicated to this verse alone!

Twenty-three pages of "Commentary" follow, treating two episodes with two pieces each. Here another four pages are dedicated to verse 14. Bartelt explicitly identifies his interpretation as typological. Taking his clues from the text he argues that "the sign must have primary *chronological* significance to Ahaz, even if the primary *theological* significance points to the greater Son yet to come." Just to be clear, Bartelt explicitly affirms and confesses "the fulfillment of the prophecy in the 'antitype' of the virgin birth of the Son of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, as Matthew attests" (505).

In three pages Bartelt handles "Isaiah 7 in Its Literary Context in the Vision of Isaiah." He connects again to the bigger picture, especially the theme of the "presence of Yahweh in the midst of his kingdom" (516). The sign of Immanuel, "with us is God," at the center of chapter 7, is crucial to this theme.

Finally, in two pages of "Scriptural and Theological Reflections," Bartelt demonstrates that the Immanuel sign is both judgment and salvation in Isaiah. He then connects this beyond Isaiah to the ultimate Immanuel, in whose life "both God's Law and his Gospel would play out" (520).

A seventeen-page excursus follows concerning "Prophecy and the Identity of Immanuel." First Bartelt explores prophecy, reiterating the tenet that the word proclaimed by Yahweh's prophet, to be taken seriously, must be observed both as a word spoken to his own day and, as appropriate, for the future. Too often the relevance to the prophet's own day is ignored. The virgin/Immanuel prophecy provides an excellent case study opportunity. Bartelt discusses prophecy in word and deed as well as typology, concluding that Immanuel in 7:14 is a type. Bartelt then considers who the eighth-century Immanuel could have been, the lesser but still important to his day Immanuel who pointed to the later and greater Immanuel, Jesus.

This magnum opus is bursting with a lifetime of learning and reflection and is not for the faint of heart or for those searching for quick nuggets. This is a serious linguistic, literary, and theological work that should be read and studied over time as one reads and studies Isaiah. As with most decent commentaries, one needs to schedule time for careful reading and processing. This would be a great summer project as one looks ahead to the coming Advent and Christmas seasons with a high percentage of texts from this portion of Isaiah. Or perhaps it becomes a part of a year(s) long devotional study of Isaiah. Pastors, seminarians, and astute lay readers who are willing to put in the effort will benefit greatly from time spent reading Isaiah with Andy Bartelt guiding and informing their reading.

I have learned a great deal from

Andy through the years. I look forward to continuing to learn from my teacher, mentor, and friend as I continue to read and teach from this commentary in the years to come.

Philip Werth Penhallegon

ISAIAH 13–27. Concordia Commentary. *By Paul R. Raabe. Concordia Publishing House, 2023. Hardcover. 562 pages. $69.99.*

In January 2024 Paul R. Raabe taught a graduate seminar at Concordia Seminary, his alma mater and institution of teaching from 1983–2018. The students expressed their gratitude for his clear articulation and demonstration of his approach to the reading and interpretation of texts. Here in book form is an excellent exposition of what he taught in that seminar and a culmination of years of work on Isaiah 13–27, material that many, as he has elsewhere commented, consider "flyover" material, material like the Midwest, bearing little interest or value to those enamored by what is on either side. As I have taught on Isaiah and the prophets, I have regularly pointed students to Raabe's various articles on this material to help them see its import and to help them read it well. After years of study, reflection, and writing, Raabe has completed a major commentary on these materials to help yet more students, pastors, and bible study leaders learn and apply God's Word through Isaiah.

Raabe's introductory material is well worth reading. In it he argues for the importance of reading this portion of Isaiah as part of the whole and as a portion that speaks specifically to Gentiles, helping "us understand how we Gentiles fit into the overall picture" (2). He informs the reader that he will be working from the Masoretic text of the Leningrad Codex in consultation with the many manuscripts from Qumran. He upholds the view that Isaiah ben Amoz of eighth-century Jerusalem wrote the entirety of the book bearing his name. He extolls Isaiah as a great poet and explains that his "translation strives to convey some sense of the feel of Isaiah's poetry," for "to appreciate Isaiah requires appreciating his poetry" (7). Especially helpful are his discussions of the functions of Isaiah as a prophet (7–9), "Isaiah's Prophetic Perspective" (10–11), his modes of discourse (17–21), his rhetorical purposes (21–23), and "Isaiah as a Theologian" (23–27). Raabe's ensuing discussion of "Practical Hermeneutics" (27–30) helps the reader understand his approach to the text while his "Critique of Diachronic Reading Strategies" (30–38) demonstrates a less faithful and less helpful approach. Lastly, he describes clearly his goals and approach that will be followed in the rest of the commentary.

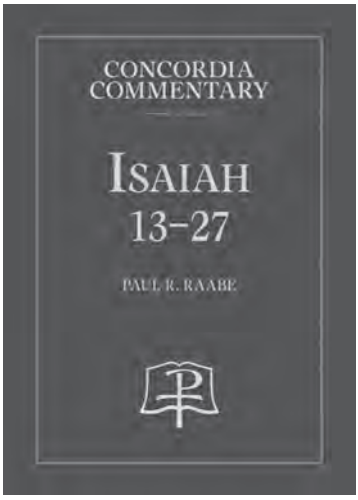
Following the introductory materials, Raabe gives a translation of chapters 13–27, encouraging his readers to read the whole unit before studying the parts. He offers a clear translation, wooden enough to feel the Hebrew

but refined enough to be readable and identifiable as the poetry it is.

Next comes the commentary proper in two pieces since Isaiah 13–27 consists of two distinct units: 13–23, the Ten Burdens, and 24–27, sometimes called the Isaiah Apocalypse. Before digging into the specifics of each section Raabe gives a general intro for that section. He then delves into the text according to the plan laid out in the introduction—"Introduction and Structure," "Translation," "Textual Notes," "Commentary," the unit "Within the Book of Isaiah," "Historical Context of Isaiah Ben Amoz," and "Scriptural and Theological Reflections" (41).

As Raabe gives a brief introduction to 13–23, the Ten Burdens, he recognizes this as a distinct unit of material dealing "primarily with foreign nations," emphasizing "that the God of Israel includes non-Israelite nations in his overall plan" (71). There are ten burdens "structured into two sets of five with a narrative in the middle" with each burden announcing "coming disasters upon places and the aftermath of those disasters" (71). As one reads through the burdens it is striking to find both Israel and Judah mentioned. Raabe explains that it is "because the covenant people of God have made themselves like the pagan nations, and consequently they stand under the same judgment" (72–73).

To sample Raabe's work, the second burden, Isaiah 14:28–32, provides a concise example. The burden is short and the treatment correspondingly brief



compared to other longer burdens. As one moves through the treatment, one experiences Raabe's skill as reader and interpreter developed through many years of reading Hebrew, Hebrew poetry, Isaiah, and secondary literature. Here is a master reader and interpreter from whom to learn and whom we can emulate in our own work. Especially helpful is his treatment in the "Scriptural and Theological Reflections," where all the previous work comes together.

His introduction to chapters 24–27 argues against calling any of this material apocalyptic, emphasizing reading it simply as prophetic literature. He refuses to date it late as is often done, attributing it entirely to Isaiah ben Amoz. He recognizes certain "connections with the ancient mythology of Baal versus Mot as given in Ugaritic texts" (410), recognizing also that this mythology was popular in Israel and Judah and was therefore a threat to faith in Yahweh. Yet

he is unwilling to let these connections drive his interpretation. Helpfully, Raabe points out the "climactic peaks" in the thought progression of these chapters with a repeated "movement from God's action of punishment to salvation in Zion" (412). After addressing Hebrew verb tenses in this material, he also addresses the variety in the ways that scholars have tried to outline these chapters. Raabe chooses to follow an outline that arises by observing "speakers and textual addressees" (414). This however does not create truly distinct units as one finds in the earlier section of Ten Burdens.

In 24–27, Raabe treats the whole instead of smaller parts. This makes it more difficult to sample this section of his work. If one wants to see what he has to say about Isaiah 25, one has to read that portion of the translation, then that portion of the translation notes, and then that portion of the commentary. Then one has to read the last three portions of his treatment—"Within the Book of Isaiah," "Historical Context of Isaiah Ben Amoz," and "Scriptural and Theological Reflections"—for the whole of 24–27. That might prove frustrating for the reader who wants to research just a portion of this section of Isaiah, but it reinforces the sections unity. The whole commentary is well worth reading and beautifully ends considering the eschatological restoration for which we "eagerly yearn" (504).

Paul Raabe learned from talented scholars with very different perspectives and dedicates this volume to two of them, both of whom studied under William Foxwell Albright. David Noel Freedman at the University of Michigan embodied a very careful, close reading of the text and especially Hebrew poetry. Horace Hummel, an erudite scholar and stalwart member of the Concordia Seminary faculty was first Raabe's teacher and then longtime colleague. For over four decades Raabe has passed on what he learned, making his own significant contributions along the way. Now he has concretized much of that in this commentary for the benefit of generations to come. Pastors, seminarians, and astute lay people can learn not only the content of Isaiah 13–27 but also how to read biblical texts well as they follow along in this commentary. I look forward to using it for myself and in courses with students.

Philip Werth Penhallegon

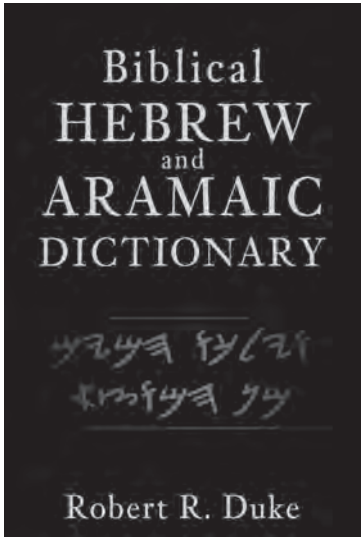
BIBLICAL HEBREW AND ARAMAIC DICTIONARY. *By Robert R. Duke. Zondervan Academic, 2024. 662 pages. $59.99.*

Robert Duke has produced a unique contribution to the field of Hebrew/Aramaic lexicography with the *Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary*. An immediate indication that Duke's dictionary will be a fruitful resource is the frustration beginning/intermediate students of the semitic languages experience when they first begin to engage the secondary resources. Duke's dictionary

is an attempt to remedy this situation (xi). To aid students in overcoming these difficulties, Duke developed the dictionary with less technical data than the Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* or *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)* (xi). This means its entries are shorter and arranged not by root, but by the first letter of the perfect third masculine singular form. The dictionary is also diachronic, focused on the variety of (verbal) forms one might find, particularly for the common terminology of the words in the Hebrew/Aramaic portions of the Bible. In this way, Duke demarcates his contribution as one intended as a steppingstone from basic students who wish to have a handle on biblical resources, but who are not yet prepared to advance to more technical tools.

Unlike many standard intermediate dictionaries that focus exclusively on biblical or non-biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, Duke's work includes both biblical and non-biblical texts. Entries include not only phrases where the word is used, but frequently lengthier quotations. The reader that uses this dictionary will be exposed not only to biblical texts with translations, but also to paleo-Hebrew inscriptions and excerpts from non-biblical Qumran texts (xviii). Qumran citations are certainly more frequent, but the paleo-Hebrew inscriptions allow for a student unfamiliar to receive a gentle introduction to texts with which the student almost certainly will be less familiar. Thus, this dictionary is designed to be a tool for the intermediate student seeking to advance beyond the framework of an introductory grammar. Additionally, the dictionary deserves consideration by professors teaching intermediate to advanced Hebrew/Aramaic texts.

Though helpful, Duke's dictionary is not a replacement for other necessary resources, Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* for Hebrew, or Vogt-Fitzmyer's *Lexicon of Biblical Aramaic*, or Cook's *Lexicon of Qumran Aramaic,* as it is not



comprehensive and limited in its scope. Additionally, Duke does not divide the dictionary based on language, or separate the two languages from another, but shades Hebrew roots black and Aramaic roots grey. As Duke intends (xix), this does make it possible for the student to compare cognate Hebrew and

Aramaic entries with one another. At its best, the reader will see the relation between the two languages and the overlap between them. For instance, the use of לשׁן in biblical Hebrew and Aramaic is close, with both languages using the term for "tongue, language." The student that examines these entries side by side will see readily how flexible the term is in both languages. On the other hand, this does have the potential to confuse the intermediate student, or conflate terms too much, especially given that, diachronically considered, these languages each have significant variation. The intermediate student that imports the Hebrew meaning of a term into the reading of a Qumran text could potentially make a serious error. This dictionary does not offer a way to avoid this issue in its format, and thus presumes the professor will counteract such readings in the classroom.

The most serious question that Duke's dictionary must address is whether it marks a real advance, not upon BDB, but upon other intermediate lexicon resources such as Holladay or the Harris, Archer, Waltke *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT). Unlike TWOT, Duke's dictionary does not, in fact, include entries for every word one may encounter reading biblical Hebrew/Aramaic, only those that occur ten or more times (xvii). As far as completeness as an intermediary *biblical* resource is concerned, then, the *Theological Wordbook* still seems to carry the day. However, the addition of paleo-Hebrew and Qumran text can be a real aid, especially for students and teachers who wish to engage such texts. As a supplement to advanced resources and steppingstone to more diverse texts, this project marks a welcome addition to the intermediate student's bookshelf.

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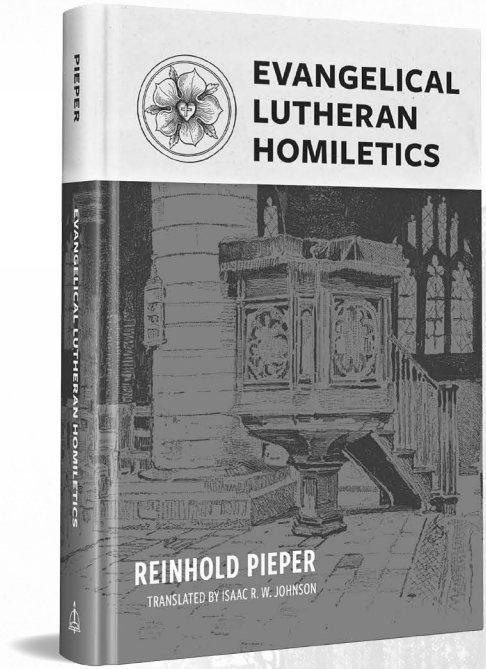

"Rev. Johnson has done a great service to the church in making this translation available in English for the first time. It is my hope and prayer that many will read and learn from this work and help recover some of the vigor and biblical foundation that has been the hallmark of Lutheran preaching since the time of the Reformation."

— **TODD A. PEPERKORN**, STM, DMIN, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Director of Vicarage, Director of Residential Pastoral Formation Programs, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

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