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*“vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo”—Col. 3:3*

**KERUX: THE JOURNAL**  
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1. The Blind Man and Jesus.....	3
James T. Dennison, Jr.	
2. Edward Leigh: More Than Psalms.....	12
3. Inclusive Psalmody: Why “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” Refers to More Than the Old Testament Psalter.....	13
Scott F. Sanborn	
4. A Hymn of Heavenly Love.....	51
Edmund Spenser	
5. The Rhetoric of the Post-Exilic Prophetic Reversal: Chiasmus in Haggai 1:1-15.....	54
Benjamin W. Swinburnson	
6. Reviews.....	75

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## *Abscondita cum Christo:* **The Blind Man and Jesus**

John 9

James T. Dennison, Jr.

How dark it was behind the blackness of that barrier—that barrier which darkened his unseeing eyes. Unenlightened, he sat by the way reaching a hand into the light—reaching a hand into the light beyond his darkness; a hand begging, pleading for something other than darkness—some small gift, some little token, some glimmer of kindness to console, to lighten his darkness. Only darkness, darkness as far back into his memory as he could reach—his reach, his mental reach—never anything but darkness—never any light at the end of his reach. His mother told him, he had been born in darkness. Birth to him had been just more of the same—black darkness outside the womb as inside. Never day light, ever night time for him; never sunshine for him, even inky darkness for him. His father led him out into the sunshine: he could feel it, but he could not see it. From his childhood, father and mother led him by the hand—the outstretched hand—for they were his light, his eyes. Still *his* world was darkness and in the darkness of *his* world, he sat begging for his daily bread. Sat, begging, reaching out his hand while others passed by—passed by on the other side of his darkness.

And Jesus passed by. Jesus passed by and he saw—Jesus saw the man who could not see. Jesus saw the blind man in his darkness. Jesus passed by in the light and out of the daylight, he reached forth—Jesus reached forth beyond the light into that man's darkness. And Jesus touched that darkness—Jesus felt

that darkness. As the cosmic darkness on the face of the deep in the beginning of creation; as the dark mantle of blackness which shrouded Egypt under the cursed plague—even darkness which might be felt: Jesus reached forth into the darkness of that blind man’s world—Jesus reached forth and drew that blind man into a new world—into *his* world.

Jesus passed by in the light and stretched forth his hand—his re-creative, curse-bearing hand. For light to shine on these dark orbs, it will require a new creation, a lifting up of the curse—a rebirth in sight and light. This darksome house of Adamic dust will need that dust of the ground new created. For the light to shine, dust must return to dust, dust covered with dust—dust covered with life-giving dust, light-giving dust. For this blind dust to see the light, some dusty clay must touch the curse, cover the curse, wash the curse; for this blind dust to see the light, some dusty clay must draw out the darkness, transfer the darkness, swallow up the darkness in the waters of rebirth. To substitute the light of *his* world, Jesus spits water on to the dust of this world and touches the blind eyes—covers the dark eyes with spittle-clay and sends the man to the Pool called “Sent”. Jesus touches, covers his eyes with watery clay and sends him to wash away the darkness as the dark creation waters were illuminated by “Let there be light!” Jesus touches the blindness—places his hands on the cursed darkness—and draws that curse, transfers that darkness to himself. Jesus, the vicarious one, says, “Let there be sight!” The One Sent by the Father to lift the curse by water and by blood—the One Sent by the Father sends this house of darkness to bathe in the Sent waters. And washing in the waters to which he is sent, the blind man experiences a new world. Water, spittle-water provides the transition to light; water, Siloam water dissolves the barrier of darkness; water, spittle and pool water flush away the curse, send the darkness into a world where it dies. And in the place of the curse, substituted for the darkness, the brightness of the world of the One Sent by the Father. Blackness drawn away on to the Light of the World; inky blackness swallowed up in a pool of brilliant daylight. This new creation bringer says, “Let there be sight; I am the light of the cosmos!”

This new light dazzles, leaves some things still unclear—unfocused. This new light lets the sun shine in, but its brilliance leaves some glimmers of confusion. There is yet more darkness to pass away; yet more light to penetrate, transform, radiate. “The man who is called Jesus”—I heard his name, I heard

his voice, but my darkness kept his face from mine. I heard his disciples; I heard him spit on the ground; I felt his touch—I felt him touch my darkness with his clay-covered fingers, but I could not see his face. I could not see him; I could only obey him. He said, “Go, wash!” So I went and washed and I received the light. But my light did not yet shine on him. His light took away my blind-darkness, but still I did not see him.

They brought me to the Pharisees. My light—my new born/new created light shone upon my face. No more darkness in my eyes. I told them, these Pharisees, I testified to them, “Jesus put clay upon my eyes and I washed and I see.” Could they not see? I could see. Why could they not see? With their light, they say he is a sinner. This one who brought a new creation, a new birth to my sight. This one who hallowed the Sabbath day by transforming it into a day of light; this one, they say, is a sinner. They say he is accursed who took away my curse. They say he is a darkness-dweller who took away my darkness. They say he is blind to their light and therefore he is a bond-slave of darkness. I am beginning to see more and more; Jesus is a prophet! Surely a prophet brings light. Isaiah, the prophet, said the eyes of the blind shall be opened. This one opened my blind eyes as the prophet said. The very same prophet, Isaiah, said there will come one who will bring out the prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. This Jesus brought me out of my prison-house of darkness as the prophet said. Surely, Jesus *is* a prophet!!

But these Pharisees still do not see. They cannot see what I see. A creator of light on the Sabbath day; a fulfiller of prophecy in lifting up the curse of darkness. They cannot see that the light shines more and more—upon Jesus. They refuse the light; they seem to cling to the darkness—the dark accusation that I was never blind. They seem to be what I once was—blind, shrouded in darkness. Call my parents; they will shed light upon my dark past. My parents will testify of the darkness in which I was born—darkness in which I was imprisoned and bound all those dreadfully black years.

And the witness of the parents? the twofold witness of the parents—the testimony of the parents confirms the light, establishes the light by confirming the darkness. He *was* born blind; now he sees. We are witnesses: this *is* our son. But the darkness of the arena in which the Pharisees dwell—the darkness of that arena stifles this man and wife—intimidates them, reduces them to fear.

How he sees, we do not know. Ask him. Don't ask us, ask him.

These Pharisees are relentless. They will not let me rejoice in the light. They call me again and again they tell me Jesus is a sinner. How could a light-giver dwell in cursed sin-darkness? This light—this light which he has given me is beginning to illumine *him*. Once I was blind, but now I can see. Can you Pharisees not see?

“What did he do?” you ask. As if he is some dark magician, some charlatan of the black arts. I have already told you. Clay, water, sight. That's how it happened. Does repeating it again make it any clearer? If I say it again, will it illumine what I have already said to you? Are you beginning to be illumined with the light of following him; of becoming like me, one of his disciples?

“We are disciples of Moses.” We have no light as to where this man comes from. *You* have no light?! He opened my eyes—my born-blind eyes he touched. He gave me light and you who claim to have theological light don't know where he comes from. Light creators only come from the Creator of light. If Jesus were not from God—the Light—he would be as powerless in the face of darkness as I once was. Never, since the beginning of time, has anyone opened the eyes of one *born blind*. Surely, he does not come from out of the darkness, like you and I. Surely, he does not come from the arena of the curse, like you and I. Surely, he comes from God. My eyes have been touched by one who comes from God. God's very own arena has shed its divine and supernatural light upon my darkened eyes.

Who do *you* think you are to teach us? *We* are the learned; we are the professional theologians; we are the religious establishment; we are the moguls, the movers and shakers. We have the light; you are a sinful darkness-dweller. Out! Get out with your darkness; go back into your darkness.

And the once-upon-a-time blind man went back out—out in and into the light newly created for him by Jesus. And in the light of the new creation, Jesus found him. The Light of the World drew the light of the new creation before his face and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The Son of Man—that light-bearer; that heavenly man who rides upon the glory clouds of heaven; that celestial man who comes into the night with the clouds of light. “Do you believe?” Lord, I need a little more light. Who is he, this light-bringer, this

cloud-rider, this glory-bearer?

And Jesus says, “I am taking away all the darkness.” No more haziness, no more cloudiness, no more blindness. The Son of Man, the Light of the World, the Prophet, the One from God: you see him, you hear him. And he who had been blind said, seeing all, “Lord.” Lord! My Lord, I believe. I see it all clearly now. You have made me a part of the new creation. Eyes to see—no more darkness; and a heart to believe—no more blackness. I can walk in the light for I have seen, I have possessed, the light of the age to come. The Light of the World is Jesus!

But the darkness still hovers; the inky black darkness still blocks out the light. The prisoners of darkness refuse the light; remain in the darkness; love the darkness. This is the judgment that light is come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not comprehend it.

Blindness deepens for those who hate the light. But for those dwelling in deep darkness who have felt the touch of Jesus’ hand, upon them has the light shined.

And I saw the new Jerusalem . . . and that city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof.

## **John’s Narrative Artistry**

This miracle story, unique to the fourth gospel, is artistically structured with an inclusio and what I call dialogic shifts. The inclusio marks this chapter off from what precedes (chapter 8) and what follows (chapter 10). At the beginning and end of chapter 9, we find a literary envelope, a delimiting bracket in the form of interrogative/response, or more popularly Q&A (question and answer). The narrative core of John 9 is included within a question (the disciples in v. 2; the Pharisees in v. 40) and an answer (by Jesus both times, v. 3 and v. 41). The narrative of the blind man then develops dialogically—that is, by means of dialogue or conversation with the various characters appearing in the story. Note v. 8, where the neighbors enter into dialogue with the blind

man. This leaves vv. 1-7 as a unit. The next dialogue is with the Pharisees (vv. 13-17) leaving vv. 8-12 as a unit. In v. 18, the blind man's parents entertain a dialogue with the Pharisees—a conversation stretching to v. 23. A second interview occurs between the Pharisees and the blind man (vv. 24-34), ending in his excommunication from the synagogue. Jesus finds and speaks to the blind man for the second time (vv. 35-38); and finally, Jesus addresses the Pharisees (vv. 39-41). This is indeed a carefully structured narrative of a marvelous supernatural transformation.

But did you notice that Jesus is absent from most of the scenes in this drama. After he touches the blind man's eyes, he disappears from the narrative until like a good Pastor—like a Good Shepherd—in v. 35, he finds his sheep, his excommunicated lamb. Yes, chapter 10 of John's gospel is built on chapter 9. Jesus at the beginning of the blind man's story; Jesus at the end of the blind man's story, but in between, Jesus off stage. Center stage from vv. 8-34 is the blind man. In this gospel where Jesus is so magnificently central, here in chapter 9 Jesus is displaced by a former blind man. How is it that our author, the apostle John, whose gospel soars like the eagle to the heights of heaven's Logos, the refreshing streams of the one who is the fountain of living water, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Resurrection and the Life—how is it that this Christocentric gospel now in chapter 9 displaces Christ for a transformed believer? The characterization of Jesus here in John 9 is healer, miraculous healer, bringer of the eschatological light, compassionate Pastor; but this story develops by means of the characterization of the healed blind man. Ironically, in a gospel full of the centrality of Christ, in 9:8-34 Christ is not central. What is going on here? Has John forgotten himself? Has some redactor, some editor, inserted the dialogues with the blind man because that editor has a non-Christocentric perspective? How do we justify the centrality of the blind man in a gospel which majors in the centrality of Christ?

Well, perhaps *we* are not seeing things clearly. Perhaps we have our eyes covered with a hazy film which prevents us from fully seeing the light. Perhaps we need some illumination that enables us to see Jesus in the blind man and the blind man in Jesus. Perhaps we need to see what John sees and that is why the blind man takes center stage at the heart of this drama.



## **Abscondita cum Christo**

In the previous chapter of this gospel, our Lord has been involved in an intense dialogue with the Pharisees about his identity (Who are you?), his parentage (Where is your father?), his testimony (Your witness is not true). The intense dialogic exchange in John 8 amounts to a verbal trial—Jesus charged by the Pharisees with blasphemy and demon possession; the Pharisees counter-charged by Jesus with being bond slaves and children of the devil. In the course of the dialogic charges and countercharges, Jesus turns the tables on his accusers and places them on trial. The accused becomes the accuser.

The blind man in chapter 9 is also in an intense dialogue with his neighbors and the Pharisees about his identity (Is this the one who used to sit and beg?); about his parentage (Is this your son who you say was born blind?); about his testimony (What was done to you? How did you receive your sight?). And in the course of the dialogic charges and counter-charges, the blind man turns the tables on his accusers and places them on trial (vv. 30-33). The accused becomes the accuser. As with Jesus (John 8), so with the blind man (John 9).

Throughout the fourth gospel, there have been divisions over Jesus among the multitudes and among the Pharisees. The multitudes divided over Jesus when he claimed to be the source of the thirst-quenching water of salvation (7:37). The famous division among the Pharisees occurs at the end of chapter 7 when Nicodemus defends Jesus before the Sanhedrin. This blind man too is the source of division: division among the neighbors (vv. 8-9), division among the Pharisees (v. 16). As with Jesus, so too with the blind man.

Jesus is rejected as an outsider, not part of the acceptable establishment. The blind man is rejected as an outsider, cast out of the synagogue. Jesus breaks the Sabbath by healing the blind man; the blind man breaks the Sabbath by being healed. Jesus is the one sent by the Father; the blind man is the one sent to the Pool called Sent. Jesus is charged with being a sinner (v. 24); the blind man is charged with being a sinner (v. 34). As with Jesus, so also with the blind man.

But I have reserved the most remarkable parallel to the end. In the gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself as the “I am” (Greek, *ego eimi*). You know several

of these: I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; before Abraham was, I am. Look at John 9:9. Others were saying, “This is he.” Still others were saying, “No, but it is like him.” He kept saying, “*Ego eimi*. I am.”

And now, do you see what is happening? Why John has preserved this wonderful story for us? Now, do you see why Jesus is off stage at the heart of this narrative, while the blind man is in the spotlight? Now, do you see why the Shepherd and his lamb share parallel experiences? Now, do you see why the blind man’s life hidden with Christ in God (*abscondita cum Christo*)? You do see it, don’t you. The union between the life of Christ and the life of the blind man. The ineffable union between the Light of the World and the one who is given that light. The sweet mystical union between the Eschatological Apostle (the One Sent from the Father) and the one sent to the apostolic pool to bathe himself, to wash himself, to cleanse himself in the Sent-One, the One who touched his eyes—the One who sent his darkness to Hell and the one who sent his light—his own heavenly light—into that blind man’s body and soul. You do see it, don’t you. John 9 is about being identified with Christ. John 9 is about the imitation of Christ—the precious imitation, the wondrous identification, the blessed conformity which comes when Jesus touches the eyes of the blind.

And now, you see even more, don’t you. Now, you see yourself in the light of this story because now, you see your life touched by the Light of the World. You see your former life of blindness and darkness now marvelously transformed by the One whom the Father sent to open your eyes and to drive away the darkness that covered your soul. Now you see yourself reproached, even persecuted and cast out from a cultural and often religious establishment which refuses the Light, hates the Light, even kills the Light when unrestrained. You too are an outsider, like your Lord and Savior, like this blind man. You too have been left alone with the Light; alone with Jesus to let your light shine—to bear witness to the Light (“once I was blind, but now I can see”), to share the sufferings of the Light at the hands of a world dwelling in darkness, to walk as the sons and daughters of the light.

The miraculous healing of the man born blind is not only unto salvation, it is to draw his new life into union with Christ. So that the new man may live and breathe out of his identification with his Lord. The centrality of the

transformed man born blind in John 9 is the revelation of a new creation in union with his Creator and Redeemer. His life, in the light, a reflection of his life-union with the Light of the World. Revile him—revile his Lord; cut him off from the church of his day—cut off his Lord; reject the light in which he walks—reject the true Light; remain in the darkness—remain in sin—remain outside of Christ—remain outside of the forgiveness of sin.

You, upon whom the light has shined, here is your life. John 9 is your story—your story of being touched by the Light, of walking in the light, of possessing the Light in whom there is no darkness. No never, not ever. Jesus is the Light of *your* world.

## Edward Leigh: More Than Psalms<sup>1</sup>

As we may lawfully sing Scripture-psalms, so also songs and psalms of our own inditing (say some) agreeable to Scripture: “Sing unto the Lord a new song” framed on a fresh occasion. Therefore [in] 1 Cor. 14:26, a psalm is named among those things which they had for the use of the church. For seeing a psalm is but a musical prayer for the most part, therefore we may make songs for ourselves agreeable to the Word of God as well as prayers. And God knowing the efficacy of poetry and music to help [the] memory and stir up affection, allows his people to use it for their spiritual as well as natural comfort. The apostle speaks of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16). Who can show any reason to limit his speech to Scripture-psalms? Why may one not praise God in song for our deliverance in [15]88 or the Gunpowder treason?

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Leigh (pronounced “Lee”) (1602-1671) was an English Puritan who served in Parliament (1636) and was a colonel in the Parliamentary army during the “War of the Three Kingdoms” (English Civil War, 1642-1651), until his expulsion from Parliament with others of the Presbyterian faction in 1648 (Pride’s Purge). He was the author of several important theological works, the most famous being his dictionary of Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek (*Critica Sacra*, 1639-1644). The quotation above is from the second edition of *A Systeme or Body of Divinitie* (1654/1662) 841 (spelling and punctuation slightly modernized). Leigh’s reference to 1588 is to the destruction of the Spanish Armada by Sir Francis Drake. The Gunpowder Plot (1605) was a (failed) attempt by Roman Catholics to assassinate King James I.

Worship song books with more than Psalms were known from the Reformation period. For example, Kenneth H. Marcus cites the Constance Hymnal of Basel, Switzerland of 1559 which contained 235 songs, divided with 150 on the Psalms and 85 “Hymns” by other writers (“Hymnody and Hymnals in Basel, 1526-1606.” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 32/3 [2001] 732).

## **Inclusive Psalmody: Why “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” Refer to More Than the Old Testament Psalter**

Scott F. Sanborn

In recent years, many have questioned the regulative principle of worship, even in Reformed circles. Those who have defended it have often been in the Exclusive Psalmody camp; they are to be highly commended for this. Biblical evidence and the history of Reformed theology are in favor of the regulative principle. However, it is the contention of this article that the regulative principle, far from supporting Exclusive Psalmody, demands that the church sing more than the Psalms in public worship.<sup>1</sup>

This demand gives God his rightful due in worship and Christians their rightful liberty, a precious freedom that flows from the indicative of redemption. The traditional doctrine of the regulative principle defends Christian freedom by the two-edged sword of prescription and restriction. It requires

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<sup>1</sup> As a response to Exclusive Psalmists, most of whom believe that Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to *public* worship, we will also assume these texts deal with *public* worship. We will not engage in detail the question of whether they simply refer to *private* worship. However, we ask, if they refer to private worship, how can they refer to it exclusively? Even if “singing to one another” suggests private worship, would not the content of worship song extend to public worship? Would the apostle intend us to conduct public worship more loosely than private worship? Or would he not expect us to sing even more fully out of the same reality in public worship? Further, we will show later in this article that Paul’s call to sing “to one another” arises out of the mystery now revealed—uniting Jew and Gentile in one body. It does not narrow the focus of attention to private worship.

worship to include those elements that liberate the church in her redemption. And it restrains the clergy from imposing anything on the conscience of the laity not grounded in Scripture.

The claim of Exclusive Psalmists is that those churches that prescribe hymns not found in the Psalter rob God of his glory and impose extra-biblical burdens on the consciences of Christians. The claim of this article (following the regulative principle) is that churches that restrict worship to the Psalms rob God of his full glory (manifest most fully in the historical accomplishment of Christ's death and resurrection) and impose an unnecessary burden on the freedom of Christians, by restricting their worship to the Psalms. The issues are significant since the worship of God our Savior (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is the goal of all our theological reflection.

Exclusive Psalmody is often supported by the claim that "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer exclusively to the Old Testament Psalter. The burden of this article is to prove the opposite, namely that "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" refer to more than the Old Testament Psalter. By implication, they include vocal music composed after Christ's life, death, and resurrection, addressing songs not sung by men prior to Christ's appearance.

This article does not deal with the debate over the use of inspired (versus uninspired) songs in public worship.<sup>2</sup> Instead, it only intends to counter the

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<sup>2</sup> This point would require its own article, dealing with the implications of Psalmody *prophetic utterance* for new covenant worship. (For a brief summary of the Exclusive Psalmody argument that worship songs must be songs revealed by prophetic utterance, see Sherman Isbell, *The Singing of Psalms*, 1996, chapter 3, available at <http://www.mastertrumpet.org/psalms.html>). If these implications were to prove that only songs revealed by prophetic revelation may be used in public worship during the New Testament period, the case would be closed—then only songs revealed in the New Testament (and elsewhere in the Old Testament) may be sung in addition to the Psalter. However, if Psalmody prophetic utterance does not imply the necessity of special revelatory song, then such an article would have to go further. Assuming that this present article proves its point (that Ephesians and Colossians require more than the singing of Old Testament revelation in public worship), this would imply that at a minimum the songs revealed in the New Testament are required in worship. Then an article dealing with the question of inspired versus uninspired hymns would also have to analyze the songs found in the New Testament itself. Assuming they are required in worship, such an article would also have to assume that whatever clues the New Testament gives us for them are sufficient to satisfy the regulative principle. That is, if the present article implies that they are required, but the specific texts dealing with them do not make specific commands that they be sung, then specific commands are not necessary to satisfy the regulative principle. Instead, general commands or other arguments of necessary implication

Exclusive Psalmist claim that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) refer exclusively to the Old Testament Psalter. Any other biblical theological reflections of this article relate to this exegetical issue.

Exclusive Psalmists rightly point out that all three terms “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs” can refer to the Psalter. However, they wrongly conclude from this that these terms refer *exclusively* to the Psalter—that they cannot refer to anything else. As stated, we hope to show shortly that the contexts of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 strongly indicate that these terms refer to more than the Old Testament Psalter. If this is proved, it follows that the terms “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” refer to a broader category of which the Psalter is only one subcategory. In other words, our contention is that these terms refer to a genus of which the Psalter is only one species.

We are suggesting that Exclusive Psalmists make a category error. They do not recognize that these terms refer to the Psalter simply because it is one species of the broader genus “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, as a set of terms referring to a genus, these terms refer to all the species within that genus just as “cat” refers to both lions and house cats. As everyone knows, just because “cats” refers to house cats that does not necessarily mean it refers to them alone. So also, just because “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” refer to the Psalter, this does not necessarily mean that they refer to

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are sufficient to satisfy the regulative principle—since these are the only criteria used in the New Testament to satisfy the regulative principle for its own songs. (Of course, Exclusive Psalmists themselves would presumably be open to this argument since many of them argue that the general command to sing Psalms found in some of the Psalms is sufficient to satisfy the regulative principle with respect to the whole Psalter.) Such an article dealing with the question of inspired versus uninspired hymns would then have to examine whether these same criteria sufficiently argue the necessity of uninspired hymns.

3 To put the case more precisely, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” taken together may represent an *order* (borrowing a term from the biological taxonomy: order, family, genus, species), referring to all the musical compositions Paul considers appropriate in public worship. Then each of the three terms considered individually may refer to a *family*, at least one of these families having *genera* both inside and outside the Psalter. Further, the genus of “songs” in the *Psalter* (under the family “spiritual songs”) may contain more than one *species*. This allows us to recognize different types of “songs” within the Psalter, falling under different categories. Finally, each of these species of “songs” contains one or more individual instances, e.g., Psalms 120 and 121. As with biological classification, just because the branching of subcategories is extensive with respect to one leg of the tree, this does not mean it has to be just as extensive with respect to another branch of the tree. Thus, under the family of “songs,” the Psalter may contain a genus with *several species*. Yet a different book of Scripture may contain a “song” genus with only *one species* and perhaps only one individual instance.

the Psalter alone.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the remainder of our article will seek to show that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” also refer to other songs composed after the close of the Psalter.

## Ephesians 5:19

We begin our study with an examination of Ephesians 5:19 in its broader context. To introduce things, our claim can be divided into four considerations.

First, the revelation of the mystery in Ephesians 3:4-6 is the basis of the praise of 5:19. In Ephesians 5:19, Paul is calling the church to sing songs about the revelation of the mystery. This mystery “in other generations was not made known to the sons of men” (Eph. 3:5). It has only now “been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” (3:5) during New Testament times. It was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets—including the Psalmists. Therefore, Paul is calling the church to sing more than the Psalter.

Second, this mystery is that (in the kingdom age) Jews and Gentiles would be united in one body. It is not that Gentiles would become worshippers of God. This was clearly revealed in the Old Testament prophets. It is that they would become “fellow heirs and *fellow members of the body*, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (3:6, emphasis mine). With Christ’s historical death and resurrection, he has brought this mystery to pass. He has brought semi-eschatological reconciliation—in Christ abolishing the curse of the law that separated Jews and Gentiles. Thus, Paul is calling Gentiles to look back at these events, to explicitly praise God for the accomplishment of Christ’s work, by which they have been made partakers of the body.

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<sup>4</sup> Again, more precisely, “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs” each refer *directly* to their own subcategories. The contexts of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 make this more plausible than saying that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” can *only* refer *collectively* to an individual instance (e.g., the Psalter) which contains all the subcategories “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs.” For we will argue that at least one of these terms in Paul refers to songs of the New Testament era, and the New Testament does not contain an individual collection of songs consisting of all three subcategories. Neither does the Greek construction require them to be taken collectively with reference to an individual instance.



Third, in the context of Ephesians, being one body involves being equal participants in the house of God, the heavenly temple of God (2:16, 19, 21). The realization of this mystery is thereby tied to the arrival of the semi-eschatological temple. While all the saints of the Old Testament participated in this heavenly temple before the time, it has now been more fully realized (semi-eschatologically) with the accomplishment of Christ's death and resurrection. Thus, in public worship, the church is called to sing songs that correspond with the way in which she now (more fully) participates in that heavenly temple.

Thus, our access to the tabernacle above is connected to the mystery of Christ and our union with him (2:18). The work of Christ is the historical foundation of this heavenly temple (in its present manifestation). In Christ, semi-eschatological reconciliation has abolished the visible curse of the law that hung over the nation of Israel. Jesus identified with his people, taking upon himself the enmity of the law (Eph. 2:15-16). Thereby he has abolished the ceremonial law (2:15) and brought Jews (as well as Gentiles) to the semi-eschatological temple above (2:18, 21-22). In him, they have greater access to the Father above than the saints of old. Thus, as dwellers in heaven, Jews and Gentiles alike are called to praise Christ for *already* building the foundation of this temple in his death and resurrection.

Finally, Paul's exhortation to sing follows a series of commands in Ephesians that are dependent on the new revelation of the mystery that has come in Christ (4:15, 25; 5:18; 4:1-4a, 17-18, 22-24, 25-32, 5:1-17). In two cases (4:15, 25), the language of these exhortations even reflects that of Ephesians 5:19. In other cases, clues from their vocabulary or context indicate their dependence on the mystery (4:1-4a, using "one body;" 17-18 insofar as it addresses Gentiles; 22-24, and by implication 4:25-32 and 5:1-17). Together they all strengthen the case that Paul grounds Ephesians 5:19 in the mystery. These commands (in the fullness with which Paul gives them) could not have been made had Christ not already come and brought his semi-eschatological kingdom.

In summary, Paul's exhortation to sing to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is a command<sup>5</sup> that could not have been given to the church

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5 When we say that Paul *commanded* singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we must admit that "be filled with the Spirit" is possibly the only imperative in Ephesians 5:18b-21 (strictly speaking according to the canons of Greek grammar; see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

(in the way Paul intends it) prior to Christ's historical appearance, death and resurrection. This exhortation is a call to *sing out of the semi-eschatological temple* in Christ. The mystery (in which Jew and Gentile are united in one body) is essential to the nature of the *semi-eschatological temple*—and the worship that takes place in it. Neither the semi-eschatological overlap of the ages nor the union of Jew and Gentile in one body was revealed to the prophets of old. Thus, Paul's exhortation is a call to *sing out of the mystery* that has now been fully revealed in Christ—to sing in a way that one could not have sung prior to Christ's coming. This mystery has now been revealed through the New Testament apostles and prophets in a manner that surpasses the revelation given to the Old Testament prophets—including the Psalmists. By calling us to sing out of the mystery, Paul is surely calling us to sing more than the Psalter.

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Publishing House, 1996, pp. 639, 644-45, 651.) Wallace argues that the participles “speaking... singing... making melody... being thankful... being submissive” are *not* imperatival participles. Imperatival participles are rare in Greek. Instead, the participles in Ephesians 5:19-21 are dependent on the main command to be filled with the Spirit, similar to the stringing together of participles in Ephesians 1:13-14. Wallace suggests they are participles that speak of the *result* of fulfilling the command to “be filled with the Spirit.” Thus he distinguishes “result” from “attendant circumstances.” “Seeing no distinction between the two would make the participles coordinate commands, while taking them as result would regard them more as the overflow of one who is Spirit-filled (cf. Gal. 5:22-23 for a similar idea)” (644-45). However (as we would also argue with respect to Galatians 5:22-23), while the focus of the command is on being filled with the Spirit, its effects are implicitly commanded with it. Imagine someone saying to his servant, ‘light a match in such a way that it results in a fire in the fireplace.’ If the servant lit a match that was quickly snuffed out and then walked away, he would not be doing the will of his master. To do his will, he must light a match *and* produce a fire. Thus, the command to do something with a specific result implies that the result is commanded too (by necessary implication). It may be that Wallace's suggestion separates the resulting participles from the *imperative*, connecting them only with the *state* of being filled with the Spirit. That is, he may be connecting the participles only with the *condition arising from fulfilling the imperative*, not with the imperative itself. However, if this is his argument, it only holds water if the resulting participles are simply *possible* results and not *necessary* results of this state. For if they are all necessary results of being filled with the Spirit, then it is necessary to express these fruits in that state. Those who are not expressing these fruits are not in that state. And so they are not fulfilling the command to be filled with the Spirit. Thus, to fulfill this command, one must live out of the resulting participles, giving them imperatival force (even if the stress is first and foremost on being filled with the Spirit). It may be that Wallace's discussion reflects more his Dispensational theology (in which certain fruits may or *may not* result from the Spirit's work, i.e., carnal Christianity) than a solid analysis of Greek grammar. The grammatical construction clearly indicates that the participles are dependent on the *imperative* “be filled with the Spirit,” not simply on the state of being filled. Therefore, when we refer to Paul's *command* to sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” in this article, we are acknowledging that they are participles that are dependent on the imperative to be filled with the Spirit. And (with Wallace) we may also call them “result participles,” if we consider the qualifications noted above. However, we are suggesting that this endows them with imperatival implications.

## **Exhortations in Ephesians: The Argument in Outline**

Now, let us summarize how the exhortations are connected to one another and to eschatology in Ephesians before we examine some of them in greater detail. A few points are worthy of notice. First, Paul's exhortation to "speak" to others in the church (v. 19) is repeated several times in Ephesians (4:15, 25). Thus, these exhortations mutually correspond and mutually interpret one another. We will argue that these earlier passages (4:15, 25) are dependent on the mystery and the semi-eschatological arrival of the kingdom. Therefore, the exhortation to speak in Ephesians 5:19 is also dependent on the same mystery.

Second, the command to be filled with the Spirit (v. 18) governs a proper understanding of the continuing exhortation in verse 19, "speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." This command (to be filled with the Spirit) is dependent on the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit that has only come in fullness with Christ's resurrection.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the command to sing "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" is also dependent on the semi-eschatological arrival of the kingdom. The nature of the kingdom governs the nature of the commandment.

Third, "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (v. 21) follows the exhortation of verses 19-20. This subjection is intimately tied to "singing to one another" (and seems to flow out of it). Therefore, this singing must be of such a nature to adequately account for the subjection. Verse 21 then also connects us to the exhortations that follow (vv. 22-6:9). This submission is dependent on the fullness of revelation in Christ (v. 25, sacrifice in Christ). Therefore, the songs by which we submit to one another ought also to be dependent on the fullness of revelation in Christ.

Finally, the Lord at the end of verse 19 is the Lord Jesus Christ. And "giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" must fit with a proper

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<sup>6</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Richard Gaffin, 91-125.

interpretation of verse 19. Thus, the nature of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” must fit with Paul’s usual understanding of “giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

### **The Mystery and Worship: Ephesians 3**

Let us look at these things in more detail. First, we will look at the general context of the mystery and its connection to Ephesians 5:19. In this examination, we will look at the mystery in Ephesians 3, its relationship to worship, and then its connection to chapter 2 (the inclusion of the Gentiles). Then we will show the exegetical connections between chapter 3 and Ephesians 5:19.

Beginning our analysis with chapter 3, we can see that Paul speaks of the mystery in relationship to worship. First, his ministry involves making this mystery known (3:9). Second, it was God’s purpose to make this mystery known through the church. At this point, the focus may only seem to be on preaching, not so much the church’s singing. However, as we move to verse 11, we see that making known this mystery is connected to the church’s worship. Making known the mystery is in accordance with God’s eternal purpose in Christ—in whom we have access to worship in his heavenly temple. This access is a general category and by implication includes all aspects of our worship. Thus, making known the mystery to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places also occurs in every aspect of access/worship. Every aspect of worship must make known the mystery.

The fact that Paul is speaking of worship is further emphasized in 3:14-19. The riches of his glory (v. 16) are the semi-eschatological riches of Christ (v. 8). The mystery (for the Gentiles to participate in one body) involves them becoming equal participants of these riches. Thus, Paul discusses the riches after he says, “from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name” (v. 15). The implication is clear; the Gentiles are called to praise God for the revelation of the mystery—that they are full participants in the blessings of the kingdom. If so, they must praise God with more than the Psalms—because the Psalms did not reveal this mystery.

## **The Mystery and the Semi-Eschatological Temple: Ephesians 2**

Now we will see how the revelation of this mystery is dependent on the historical accomplishment of Christ's work and the inclusion of the Gentiles—how chapter 3 is dependent on chapter 2. Ephesians 3:3 states, "I wrote before in brief." This may refer to chapter 2. Or perhaps 3:4 refers to the whole letter of Ephesians—"by reading this," which would emphasize that the whole letter is about the mystery. Even if this is not the case, chapter 3 clearly follows chapter 2, suggesting that chapter 3 develops the arguments of chapter 2.

Here in chapter 2 (vv. 11-18), Paul speaks about this "access" as well. By it the Gentiles are now brought near as fellow heirs with Israel. And this took place (vv. 15-17) by the accomplished act of Christ's reconciliation. Bringing the Gentiles near is something new that God has done in redemptive history after Christ's historical appearance. It is a new work that was not accomplished in the Old Testament period. Thus, the accomplishment of this reality presents a relative contrast between the present time and the old covenant period. The application of reconciliation in the present age takes on a new (fuller) dimension that it did not possess in the previous age. Now there is more for which to praise God. The praise we now give God in the eschatological temple must involve praise to him for the actual accomplishment of this event—for this greater reconciliation. For this greater reconciliation is the ground of the semi-eschatological temple found in the verses that follow.<sup>7</sup>

Verses 19-22 expound this semi-eschatological temple—directing the reader's gaze to the Gentiles. "You" (v. 19) have "been built upon the foundation" (v. 20)—"being built into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (v. 22). The access that Paul expounds in chapter 3 is thus access to the semi-eschatological temple of God—access to life in the Spirit. This is access to the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit, a reality only now fully granted after Christ's resurrection.

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<sup>7</sup> In this article, we will refer to this greater reconciliation, fuller reconciliation, fullness of reconciliation, or new reconciliation in Christ. In each case, we are referring to what we might call semi-eschatological reconciliation. In terms of the relationship between reconciliation and justification, semi-eschatological reconciliation is comparable to Paul's doctrine of semi-eschatological justification. See my "Paul and Eschatological Justification, a Critique of Dunn and Wright," an unpublished address from the 2005 Kerux Conference, available from Northwest Theological Seminary.

Paul's discussion of his subject connects the Spirit's gift to this semi-eschatological period of redemptive history. For the Gentiles to be "in the Spirit" is a fulfillment of the mystery—a blessing only found in fullness after Christ's death and resurrection. Christ brought this greater fullness of *reconciliation*, ushering it in only after he accomplished his death and resurrection in time and space history. Greater reconciliation has brought greater blessings in Christ, bringing the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit.

Paul continues to think of the Spirit as a semi-eschatological gift at the end of chapter 4 when he says, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30). This sealing reflects Ephesians 1:13-14 in which the sealing of the Spirit is given as a down payment of the future inheritance. That is, to possess the Spirit is to possess the substance of the eschatological inheritance, presenting the Spirit as the eschatological gift par excellence.

## **Ephesians 5:18 and the Semi-Eschatological Temple**

This discussion is the background for Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:18 to "be filled with the Spirit." Paul is exhorting the church to be filled with the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit in their singing—singing out of the semi-eschatological temple above. When Paul tells the church to live out of the Spirit, he expects their objective behavior to mirror the reality of the Spirit. He does not simply expect them to use the subjective power of the Spirit to mirror the prior reality embodied in the previous history of redemption found in the old covenant. This is his consistent approach—expressing the gift of the Spirit as the objective indicative upon which he grounds their objective imperatives. Their external behavior (as well as experience of the heart) must mirror the new reality that has now come in Christ.

Thus, when Paul tells the church to be filled with the Spirit, he expects their singing to objectively reflect this semi-eschatological gift. They must sing of the semi-eschatological reality of reconciliation, this greater reconciliation brought by Christ. For without it they would not have the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit. Without it they would not have access to the semi-eschatological

temple. They must praise God for this new reality in Christ, praising him for making them fuller participants in the heavenly temple.

### **Semi-Eschatological Reconciliation in “one body”: Ephesians 4-5**

The connection between chapter 3 and 5:18 is further reinforced by the content of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. In chapter 4, Paul calls the church “one body” (4:4), reminding us of the mystery now revealed, in which “Gentiles are...fellow members of the body” (3:6). This unity results from Jews and Gentiles being *reconciled* in “one body” through the cross (2:16). Thus, Paul’s other statements of unity flow out of this same reconciliation. When he urges them to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” we are reminded of the *peace* of the new reconciliation (2:17), reconciling the enmity between Jew and Gentile in Christ, making them a “dwelling of God in the Spirit” (2:22). “One Lord, one faith, one baptism,” and “one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” also suggests that Jew and Gentile are now equal participants in these blessings. These realities result from the fullness of the mystery now revealed in Christ.

So also the language of Christ being raised and giving gifts to men, giving to the church various gifts, suggests that Gentiles as well as Jews are God’s gifts to the church, suitable office holders in the church. These gifts, just as Christ’s resurrection, are cosmic—“that he might fill all things” (4:10). They are extended throughout the Gentile world redeemed by grace. This new reconciliation is so pervasive that it not only allows them to be joint members of the body of Christ, but also makes them contributors to its very building.

The new reconciliation in Christ influences both the “already” and the “not yet” of Paul’s proclamation. If Jews and Gentiles have already been reconciled in one body, then the goal of the church’s life is the consummation of this newly established unity. Christ has given gifts to his church for the “building up of the body of Christ” (4:12), the body that has recently been made one, leading them on to further “unity” (4:13). Because Christ has already made Jew and Gentile “into one new man” (2:15), they look forward to becoming a “mature man” (4:13), attaining “the measure of the stature belonging to the fullness of

Christ.” This “whole body,” of Jew and Gentile newly reconciled in Christ, builds one another up in love (4:16). Here we are set to look at Paul’s further imperatives in 4:15 and 25.

When we come to Chapter 5 (in which we find our verses—18-20), we find a continuing discussion of this unity, based on the new reconciliation in Christ. Chapter 5 introduces a series of exhortations dependent on the discussion of the mystery in chapters 2-4. Thus chapter 5 begins with “therefore,” following the mystery of chapters 2-4, live out of this mystery. Paul is still fleshing out the implications of the mystery when he arrives at verse 18. Thus, when he calls them to be filled with the *Spirit*, he is calling them to live out of this reality, to sing of this reality, to praise God for the new reconciliation they have in Christ.

## **Exhortations in Ephesians 4**

Now we are ready to see the connection between two of Paul’s exhortations in chapter 4 (vv. 15, 25) and his following exhortation in 5:19, “speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” In these two exhortations (just as in 5:19), Paul calls the Ephesians to “speak” to one another (vv. 15, 25). “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into him, who is the head, *even* Christ” (4:15). “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (4:25).

We have already observed that the “body” language of chapter 4 is grounded in the “one body” of Jews and Gentiles reconciled in chapter 2. The reconciliation of this one body is the mystery now revealed (3:6). Here we will suggest that 4:15-16, 4:25, and 5:18-19 are all tied together as similar exhortations. All three have the same nature. If 4:15 and 25 call the church to speak of this newly revealed mystery, so does 5:18-19.

### **Ephesians 4:15-16**

The discussion of “body” that precedes these two verses (4:12-13) is



grounded in the mystery. Verses 15-16 themselves continue this discussion, with verse 16 focusing on “the whole body” and its union. Further, Paul can speak of “the building up” of “the body” (4:16) just as he spoke of the building of the semi-eschatological temple (2:21-22). Both are united as the semi-eschatological habitation of God in the Spirit.

This is the context in which we find Paul’s exhortation in 4:15, “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into him, who is the head, *even* Christ.” The eschatological associations of this verse are reinforced by two further facts: first, that the “truth” has eschatological overtones, and second, that we are growing up into him—the head.

The “truth” brings us back to Ephesians 1:13. There Paul says “you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise.” This message of *truth* refers back to Ephesians 1:9-10, “He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his kind intention which he purposed in him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.” Thus, gospel of *truth* refers specifically to the good news that the fullness of the times has arrived in Christ. It is the message that the semi-eschatological age has already arrived.

In Ephesians 1:10, we also find the second element of 4:15—Christ’s headship, which further indicates that Paul is focusing on the same themes in 4:15 as he was in this context (1:9-14). Only now, in the fullness of the times, have all things been summed up in him to the degree Paul describes in Ephesians 1:10. Thus, to “grow up in all *aspects* into him, who is the head” involves growing up in conformity with Christ’s resurrection life, to live as possessors of the fullness of the times in him. It involves living out of the semi-eschatological inheritance that he has given to the church as a result of his headship over all things (Eph. 1:10-11, 13-14).

This administration is the administration of the fullness of the times. It is the new administration that has come in Christ, in which is revealed the “mystery.” Thus, the gospel of truth that reflects upon this refers to this full administration. It does not refer simply to salvation as it was in all respects similar in the Old and New Testament periods. It refers to the fact that all

things have already been headed up in Christ in his resurrection. This is further confirmed by the result of this salvation. The Gentiles have been sealed with the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit as a result of believing this message (1:13-14). Thus, Paul's exhortation "speaking the truth" involves speaking in union with the truth of the semi-eschatological gospel revealed in Christ, speaking out of the fullness of the mystery. It is grounded in the fact that Christ has already come, that he has already brought the fullness of the times, heading up all things in himself.

## **Ephesians 4:25**

Now we will look at the following exhortation in 4:25. This follows the old man/new man contrast of 20-24, which informs speaking the truth in love. Interestingly, Paul's old man/new man contrast in Colossians 3 is more than an absolute contrast between fallen and redeemed humanity. It also refers to a relative contrast between the old Jewish administration and the new reality in Christ. It is not clear to the present writer that the same contrast is involved in Ephesians 4. However, the redemptive-historical transition that takes place for the Gentiles is at work here in this text. First, the old man is clearly associated with the Gentiles in their sin. Second, the fact that they are "excluded" from the life of God (4:18) reminds us of their being "excluded" from the commonwealth of Israel (2:12). Thus it appears that present unconverted Gentiles are living in a state that is comparable to Gentiles before Christ. In this way the old man represents the state of the Gentiles before Christ. As a result the new man represents their state after the coming of Christ. This suggests that the old man/new man contrast is redemptive-historical in character.

Thus we come to the statement "laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (4:25). The exhortation to lay aside falsehood (vs. 25) refers back to verse 22, "lay aside the old man." Thus, the exhortation entails, "laying aside the old era (in which Gentiles were excluded) speak truth to one another." Even if this is not the case, Paul's exhortation flows from the mystery when he says, "we are members of one another," members of one another in the new man. This language is clearly dependent on Paul's discussion of chapter 2 where Paul states that Jews and Gentiles are one body, the language he carries forward in

chapter 4, stating there is “one body.” The new man is the one body in Christ. The new man is dependent on the mystery of the revelation of the union of Jew and Gentile in one body.

Thus, when Paul calls the church to speak truth “because we are members of one another,” he is making an exhortation that depends on the revelation of the mystery of the new man, the union of Jews and Gentiles in one body. Speaking truth to one another must fit with the laying aside of the old era, clothing oneself with the new era in which Gentiles are not excluded, having equal access in one Spirit. Thus, the speaking of truth must involve speaking the mystery hidden beforehand. When Paul calls us to speak the truth to one another in all things, he is calling us to live in union with the truth of this new reality in Christ, to live out of the fullness of the mystery. Because you are now members of one another, speak the truth to one another.

This “one another” language, which reflects the mystery, is also found in Ephesians 5:19, “speaking to one another.” The very exhortation Paul gives to sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” is grounded in the mystery. It is grounded in the fact that we have been united to one another in Christ, that Jews and Gentiles have been united in one body. The “one another” language in this epistle is not incidental. Its preeminence suggests that Paul intended this. Just as he commanded the Ephesians to “speak” truth because we are members of “one another” (4:25), he exhorts them, saying, “speaking to one another” (5:19).<sup>8</sup> Both flow from the mystery revealed in Christ—that we (Jews and

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<sup>8</sup> It is true that Paul uses different Greek words in these two passages. In Ephesians 4:25 he uses ἀλλήλων and in 5:19 he uses ἑαυτοῖς. Initially, one may think that Paul is therefore not focusing on the same theme. However, two things suggest that he is. First, while ἑαυτοῖς is often used as a reflexive pronoun in the New Testament, Daniel B. Wallace suggests that in Ephesians 5:19 it is used like a reciprocal pronoun, a pronoun more commonly indicated by ἀλλήλων (op. cit., 351). Second, Paul himself uses both ἀλλήλους and ἑαυτοῖς together, practically as synonyms in a discussion that arises from the mystery. Like his use of ἀλλήλους, Paul’s use of ἑαυτοῖς in Ephesians 4:32 is reciprocal, for Paul is not simply calling each individual in the church to forgive himself. He is calling them to forgive one another, and the parallel use of ἀλλήλους in this verse confirms this. To underscore that Paul is discussing the mystery in 4:32, we note that the ἀλλήλους of this verse connects us back to the ἀλλήλων of 4:25 in which Paul says “for we are members of one another.” Ephesians 4:25 began this mini-section with “therefore,” alluding to the mystery in which we are members of one another and verse 32 ends this mini-section with an exhortation to be kind to one another (ἀλλήλους). Therefore, verse 32 also discusses imperatives that arise out of the mystery. Further, since Paul makes a parallel exhortation in the same verse using ἑαυτοῖς, he clearly intends us to understand *it* in the context of the mystery as well. And thus we believe we are justified in claiming that Paul’s use of ἑαυτοῖς in a similar context in Ephesians (5:19) also alludes to the mystery.

Gentiles) are one body. Both flow from the greater fullness of reconciliation that has come in Christ. Now that we are at peace, we are called to sing to one another representing our unity in the Spirit.

Does this new reality only influence our subjective experience; or does it also inform the objective content of our song? For Paul's other indicative/imperative pronouncements, the two are never separated. The greater indicative of semi-eschatological redemption is always the foundation for greater imperatives. As the indicatives of the kingdom grow organically out of the older administration, so also the imperatives. Both grow out of the same reality.

So why should it be any different here? And the context suggests that it is not. As in Paul's other indicative/imperative structures, he grounds the command in the new reality found in Christ. "Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor: *for we are members one of another*" (4:25, emphasis mine). The new indicative is the ground of the imperative. As the indicative is greater, so also is its resulting imperative. The metaphysical nature of the new reality determines the nature of the imperative that flows from it. Both possess the same organic continuity and development as the other.

## Greater Imperatives in the New Creation

This pattern is found in other Pauline letters. For instance, in Galatians 5:16-26, Paul presents the church with greater imperatives based on the greater indicative—the fuller gift of the Spirit. Thus Paul presents the Spirit not only as the subjective power of our new obedience, but also as the objective standard of righteousness. The phrase "walk by the Spirit" that encloses this section (vv. 16, 25) is comparable to the statement "walk by this rule" (6:16). 'Walk by the Spirit as a rule, as the objective standard of righteousness,' might aptly paraphrase the apostle. Just as he calls the "new creation" a "rule" by which Christians are to "walk," so he implies that the Spirit is that standard.

The language "walk by," in both cases, implies that the new creation and the Spirit are intimately related. This relationship is reinforced by another connection in Galatians. For instance, Paul connects the Spirit with the *Jerusalem above*, describing them both as mothers (Gal. 4:26, 29). In this context, Paul

quotes Isaiah 54:1 (Gal. 4:27), implying that the gift of the Spirit (i.e. the Jerusalem above) is the semi-eschatological fulfillment of Isaiah's eschatological Jerusalem (Isa. 54:1; see also 65:19, 66:20).<sup>9</sup> In so doing, Paul alludes to a set of associations in Isaiah, which connects the eschatological Jerusalem with the *new creation* (Isa. 65:17-18; 35:1-2, 5-6, 9-10). In this way, we discover that the Spirit is associated with the Jerusalem above and is thereby associated with the new creation. We might diagram it as follows: The Spirit  $\Leftrightarrow$  the Jerusalem above  $\Leftrightarrow$  the new creation. Thus 'walk by the Spirit' is synonymous with 'walk by the new creation.' As a result, Paul teaches that the Spirit is the rule by which we are to walk just as he teaches that we should walk by the rule of the new creation.

Since the gift of the Spirit is the semi-eschatological fulfillment of Isaiah's New Jerusalem, so the Spirit is more fully bestowed with the arrival of the semi-eschatological age. The fuller provision of the Spirit in the new creation is the rule by which we walk. Therefore, the greater gift of the Spirit brings greater imperatives.

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<sup>9</sup> In this passage, Paul also alludes to *Isaac* being born according to the Spirit (Gal. 4:28-29). This suggests the substantial continuity of salvation before and after Christ. It also suggests that Isaac really participated in the eschatological Jerusalem above before the time. Still, this should not blind us from recognizing the discontinuity found in Galatians 4: 21-31. Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1, suggesting that the Jerusalem above is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Gal. 4:27). From Isaiah's point of view, he was looking forward to a new abundance that did not exist during his own lifetime. It would only come when the Messiah arrived. Therefore when he came, Christ must have brought something new. He must have brought a greater abundance of being born according to the Spirit. And so he did on the day of Pentecost. This is consistent with the way that Paul interprets the history of Sarah/Isaac versus Hagar/Ishmael. Isaac's supernatural birth prefigured (as well as embodied) the supernatural resurrection of Christ to come (Rom. 4:16-25). In this respect, Isaac's supernatural birth was prophetic of the present time, in which the birth from above participates in a greater touch of the supernatural. The present semi-eschatological age displays the supernatural more abundantly. For in it, supernatural birth disregards all concern for national descent *according to the flesh* (Rom. 9:3, 8-9, 23-26). It is birth exclusively *according to the Spirit*. As such, Gentiles are not required to become Jews by circumcision to participate in the full blessings of the covenant. This fits with the greater contrast between the flesh and the Spirit found in Paul's writings, describing this semi-eschatological period. Paul finds in the patriarchal history a prophecy of the time in which the new administration will transcend the older administration of the covenant of grace (Gal. 4:21-31). Isaac's birth looked forward to the day in which God's people would possess the Spirit in greater fullness. Thus, Galatians 4:21-5:1 suggests that Paul is making a relative contrast between the two covenants even in regards to their legitimate use within their own respective periods. This relative contrast suggests that when the new administration comes, it must supersede the older administration. Those who do not recognize this must be *absolutely* condemned. For they have thereby denied the prophetic dimension of the older administration and turned it into something it never was in the first place.

This is fleshed out in terms of the fruits of the Spirit. They are subjective reflections of a new objective reality and standard. For instance, Paul discusses the fruit of joy elsewhere in Galatians (4:27). Isaiah's imperative to "rejoice" is grounded in the coming eschatological "Jerusalem above" (Isaiah 54:1, Gal. 4:26). From Isaiah's point of view, the coming eschatological Jerusalem would never be destroyed by covenant curses as was the present Jerusalem. This called forth a greater imperative to "rejoice." While the Old Jerusalem could be lamented over (and Jeremiah could legitimize that lamentation in his book of Lamentations), the New Jerusalem calls for something greater, a joy that never ceases, eternal in the heavens. The greater indicative calls forth the greater imperative. And Paul believes that day has arrived in the Spirit. Thus, the fruit of the "Jerusalem above," the fruit of the Spirit, is "joy" (Gal. 5:22). The new standard of the Spirit requires greater joy, giving what it commands, providing the new reality that makes it possible.

The new objective reality in Christ grounds a new objective standard, a standard that organically unfolds the previous standard of the history of redemption and fills it out. This is represented continually in Paul's epistles by his indicative/imperative structures. We may even observe it in Ephesians where Paul grounds the command to love one's wife in the mystery—"because we are members of his body" (5:30). This mystery fills out the command to love one's spouse found in the previous history of redemption. And here in 4:15, we find a similar structure: "speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (4:25). If the nature of the indicative determines the objective nature of the imperative (as it does elsewhere in Paul), then Paul is calling the church to speak truth that objectively conforms to the new reality in Christ.

This is further confirmed by the nature of truth telling that we have observed in Ephesians. Paul's call to tell the truth in all things involves telling one another the truth of the mystery, the new reconciliation found in Christ. Thus, like his parallel imperative to tell the truth, his imperative to sing implies that we must sing to one another songs that disclose the new mystery in Christ. They must objectively conform to our new unity in the Spirit.

In both 4:15 and 4:25, we have learned that Paul's exhortation to "speak"<sup>10</sup>

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10 It must be admitted that two different Greek words are used here. Ephesians 4:15

calls the church to speak words that conform to the new mystery found in Christ. If this is the case, it strongly implies that his exhortation in 5:19 to “speak” also suggests that the church speak to one another words that objectively conform to the new mystery revealed in Christ. As a result, the terms Paul uses to express the content of what they are to speak, must refer (at least in part) to songs that objectively convey this mystery. Therefore “...speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” implies that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (whatever their referent) convey the mystery. Since he says that the mystery was not so revealed to the Old Testament prophets (3:5), these songs must refer to more than the Old Testament Psalter. Their referent must be broader than the Psalter. They must include “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” that reveal the mystery—songs not found in the Psalter.

## Semi-Eschatological Light in Ephesians 5

If these indications are not enough for us, there is further exegetical glue that suggests that Paul’s exhortation in 5:18-19 flows from the semi-eschatological blessings of the kingdom found in the previous chapters. Specifically, we find that 5:18 is directly dependent on the semi-eschatological nature of the “light” of the new creation (vv. 8, 13). This semi-eschatological nature of the light further reinforces the semi-eschatological nature of the Spirit we have already observed.

Paul compares being filled with the Spirit to *walking in the light* (v. 8, 13). This is seen by the fact that Paul’s exhortation to be filled with the Spirit flows out of his discussion of light and darkness (vv. 7-14).<sup>11</sup> Verse 15 reads “therefore” followed by a series of three oppositions: “not as unwise, but wise” (v. 15); “do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (v. 17); and “do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit” (v. 18). These three exhortations (together with their opposites) reflect the opposition between light and darkness (vv. 7-14).

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uses the participle ἀληθεύοντες (from the verb ἀληθεύω) while 4:25 uses λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν. However, the verb ἀληθεύω used in 4:15 and the phrase λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν (4:25) are essentially synonymous. Even if one still questions the connection between 4:15 and 5:19, the relationship between 4:25 and 5:19 remains compelling, both of which use the verb λαλέω.

<sup>11</sup> “Therefore” introduces 5:1ff, 5:7-14, and 5:15ff

And this light is the semi-eschatological light of the kingdom that has arrived in Christ. This is indicated both by Paul's allusion to the "kingdom of Christ" (5:5) and by the association of light with *truth* (5:9). To possess an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ not only looks forward to the future, but also implies something about the present possession of that inheritance, as it does in Ephesians 1:14. It is to be a partaker of the kingdom rather than a partaker of darkness (5:7-8). To be a "partaker with them" entails that one *is* "darkness," that is, that he is identified with darkness. Thus, if one *is* "light," he is a partaker of the kingdom. The light is the light of the semi-eschatological kingdom of Christ.

Paul also associates light with truth (5:9), which, as we have seen, possesses semi-eschatological overtones. It is unlikely, in light of Paul's discussion of truth in chapter 4, that this is a more general notion of truth. But even if it is, the clear association of this light with the kingdom suggests that it is the semi-eschatological light that has appeared with Christ.

It is this light which informs the imperatives of 5:15-20. As we have seen, verse 15 introduces this section with "therefore"—"therefore" as a result of the semi-eschatological light of the kingdom. And this "therefore" governs three oppositions, the third of which is "do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit" (v. 18).

Thus, the semi-eschatological light of the kingdom calls the church to be filled with the Spirit. This further indicates that when Paul exhorts the church to "be filled with a Spirit", he is urging her to live a *semi-eschatological life* in Christ. However, the connection between light and the Spirit reveals more than that. It shows that when Paul commands the church to sing, he is calling her to sing out of this semi-eschatological reality, to *sing out of the light of the kingdom*.

## **Giving Thanks and Being Subject to One Another**

There are a few other indications within our verses (5:18-21) suggesting that Paul was calling the church to engage in unique semi-eschatological songs of praise. They are 'giving thanks' and 'being subject to one another.' Exclusive Psalmists claim that the Psalms (all by themselves) can satisfy "giving thanks



for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus” since they reveal Christ. While we wholeheartedly agree that the Psalms reveal Christ, we do not believe that they alone do justice to Paul’s exhortation here. In this verse, Paul calls the church to give thanks for “all things,” including the fact that the gifts of the new covenant have already been bestowed on them in Christ.

Another reference in Ephesians to giving thanks further suggests this point. In Ephesians 1:16, Paul gives thanks for the Ephesians because they have been made participants of the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit. He gives thanks to God for a gift that is only fully bestowed after Christ’s death and resurrection, during the semi-eschatological age. He then prays that they may be enlightened to understand the fullness of this inheritance they have in Christ, an inheritance in the heavenly places only bestowed in this fullness after Christ’s death and resurrection (1:3, 11, 13-14). This reinforces what we have observed about the mystery of Christ and its application to singing in 5:18-19. Both fit together most consistently with the notion that Paul is calling Christians to sing out of and give thanks for the mystery that has only now most fully been revealed in Christ, granting them the semi-eschatological inheritance above.

Finally, this singing appears to be connected to being “subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (5:20). Paul expands on this subjugation in 5:22 to 6:9. A fuller exposition than we can offer here would substantiate the fact that the fullness of these imperatives arises from the fullness of the revelation of the mystery in Christ. But a few indications will suffice. First, Paul bases his exhortation for husbands to love their wives on the mystery (5:32-33). They are to love their wives following the pattern by which Christ has loved the church, the pattern by which the church has received semi-eschatological reconciliation. Paul alludes to semi-eschatological reconciliation here when he says, “that she should be holy and blameless” (5:27). For it is this new holy and blameless character that has enabled her to possess the semi-eschatological inheritance in heaven (1:3-4). Since the historical arrival of Christ and his work has brought these semi-eschatological riches, it seems that Paul is alluding to them. He is making God’s semi-eschatological work of redemption the paradigm out of which husbands should love their wives. They are to love their wives in union with Christ in his greatest work of redemption.

This is further reinforced when Paul unites the husband's headship to the new headship that Christ has received in the fullness of the times (5:23), now specifically as head of the church. And as already noted, Paul reflects on the "mystery" (5:32) when he speaks of Christ as Savior of the "body" (5:23), the new body of Jew and Gentile that has been made one in Christ (though this consideration may be a bit more remote now). Still "because we are members of his body" reminds us of the "mystery."

Second, the exhortation given to masters is grounded in the new reality in which there is no distinction between slave and freeman as there was in the Jewish theocracy. That is, "there is no partiality with him" (6:9). This reminds us of Peter's statement to Cornelius that now God does not show partiality as he did under the older administration (Acts 10:34). And Paul connects it to the heavenly reality that has most fully dawned now in Christ (6:9).

Even if one is not convinced by these latter two considerations (giving thanks and subjection to one another), we do not believe they are essential to our case. At best they help reinforce our central thesis cumulatively. That is, they are further indications in an *inductive* argument, not essential links in a *deductive* argument. Therefore, they are not subject to the criticism for which John Murray is so well known, that an argument is only as strong as its weakest link. For this is only true of *deductive* proofs, whereas the last two points are only two unessential inductive pieces of the puzzle. What the puzzle portrays as a whole is still clear without them. Thus, even if the reader is not convinced by these latter two considerations, we believe the exegetical case that "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" refers to more than the Psalter is still compelling.

In summary, Ephesians focuses on the semi-eschatological temple. The worship that Paul calls for in 5:19 implicitly takes place in the heavenly temple. It must therefore partake of the nature of that temple. But this semi-eschatological participation in the temple above (in which Jew and Gentile are united in one body) is founded on a mystery that was not made known in the Old Testament. No Old Testament revelation (including the Psalter) revealed this mystery. However, this mystery is essential to the nature of the church's semi-eschatological *union* in that temple. And so it is necessary to the nature of the *worship* that takes place in it. Therefore, the songs that Paul calls us to

sing must reflect that mystery, the fact that Jews and Gentiles have already been made one body in Christ Jesus, that the blessings of the new inheritance in Christ Jesus have already arrived in the fullness of the times.

### Colossians 3:16

After considering these things from Ephesians, some may object: you haven't made a substantial argument against Exclusive Psalmody. You've only proven that we must sing of Christ. But the Psalms sing of Christ. Therefore, the Psalms alone are sufficient to satisfy this requirement.

In reply, we begin by conceding (and wholeheartedly agreeing—moreover praising God for the fact) that the Psalms sing of Christ. Every new covenant Christian, when he or she sings the Psalms, is to sing in their hearts out of the fullness of Christ. For Christ is truly present in the Psalms.

However, we believe it has been shown that Paul calls the Ephesians to sing out of the revelation of the fullness of the mystery that has now been revealed in Christ. The Psalms (as Old Testament prophetic revelation) do not reveal the fullness of the mystery. Thus, they do not objectively reveal Christ to the same degree of fullness—that Christians are called to praise him. As a result, whenever new covenant Christians praise Christ with the Psalms, they do so with the objective knowledge of New Testament revelation *subjectively* reflected in their hearts. The Psalms themselves (apart from this connection to the New Testament) do not *objectively* reveal this fullness of the mystery. That is, by themselves they do not objectively *teach* the fullness of the mystery in Christ.

However, our thesis here will be that in Colossians 3:16, Paul calls Christians to *objectively teach* one another the fullness of the mystery in their vocal music. That is, he commands them to *teach one another* wisdom insofar as it is fully revealed in New Testament revelation. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

What Paul said of the mystery in Ephesians is no less applicable to the

wisdom of Christ in Colossians. It is a revelation not fully made known to men in previous generations. Ephesians sets us up for this fact when Paul compares the mystery to “the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:9-10). Paul also makes this connection in Colossians when he speaks of “God’s mystery, *that is*, Christ *himself*, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3). The wisdom of Christ (in the fullness described by the apostle here in Colossians) is God’s mystery, a mystery that was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets—including the Psalmists. Paul makes this clear in Colossians 1:26 when he states, “the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to his saints.” As in Ephesians, this mystery involves the fact the Gentiles would be full members in union with Christ, “the mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). Therefore in Colossians 3:16, Paul is calling Christians to sing songs whose objective content is capable of teaching other Christians the fullness of the mystery, the mystery hidden from the Old Testament prophets, including the Psalmists. Thus, when he says to sing “with all wisdom,” he is calling the church to sing more than the Old Testament Psalter.

Some may object: he does not tell them to sing songs whose objective content reveals the fullness of the wisdom of Christ, only to teach one another the fullness of this wisdom through the Psalms. That is, the hearers’s subjective appropriation of new covenant revelation should be sufficient for them to see that the Psalms prefigure this revelation.

However, Paul’s view of teaching is much more explicit in its nature than this. He says that as a preacher and an apostle, he is a *teacher*, a teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim. 2:7). And his preaching, which involves teaching, is “according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested” (Rom. 16:25-26). Out of this mystery, he teaches the nations. He does not simply teach the Old Testament (or read it) in isolation from the new revelation given to him as an apostle of Christ.

To teach people always has as its goal taking them from one subjective state of understanding to another. This can only be done by objectively leading them beyond their previous subjective understanding. One does not teach when he relies solely on the present subjective state of the recipient to provide the new content. However, if we teach others the fullness of the wisdom of

Christ exclusively through the Psalms, this is precisely what we are doing. We are simply relying on their present subjective understanding of how the New Testament fulfills the Psalm. Then we are hoping this previous subjective understanding alone will lead them to a greater understanding of how the New Testament fulfills the Psalm. We are not objectively teaching them how the New Testament fulfills the Psalm. Thus we are not leading them on from one state of understanding to a richer understanding. That is, we are not teaching them.

Certainly, reflecting on the Psalms themselves can lead us to a greater understanding of how they are fulfilled in the New Testament and thus indirectly give us a greater appreciation of the wisdom of Christ. However, this alone does not do justice to Paul's understanding of teaching the fullness of the mystery. That involves objectively teaching the wisdom of Christ with the fullness revealed in the New Testament. Such was the nature of Paul's ministry. And he is calling the church to make its worship an extension of his ministry—so that she might thereby reveal the fullness of the mystery (“the manifold wisdom of God”) to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph. 3: 9-10). So Paul commands the Colossians “with all wisdom teaching” (3:16). It is true that if we sing the Psalms, we are presenting them objectively. However, if we only sing the Psalms, we are not objectively teaching one another the fullness of the wisdom of Christ. Instead we are relying on the subjective understanding of the hearers to supply the appropriate insight into the Psalms. For in the Psalms we are only objectively teaching the revelation of the Old Testament prophets who did not fully grasp this mystery. We are not objectively teaching the fullness of the mystery as Paul did in his ministry.

## **Embodied in Christ: All Wisdom and Semi-Eschatological Forgiveness, Colossians 2**

Now let us look to the broader context of Colossians 3. Here we begin by examining our thesis in the light of Colossian 2, considering its teaching of semi-eschatological redemption. This will help us understand Paul's view of being raised with Christ (Col. 3:1-4) in the new man (Col. 3:9-11) and thus of teaching “with all wisdom” (Col. 3:16).

Thesis: “Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” taken together must include more than the Psalms of the Old Testament. We are called to teach and admonish one another in the word of Christ with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Thus they must be an objective means of instruction that correspond with the fullness of the revelation that is found in the word of Christ, who is the wisdom of God. This is expounded in some of the following reasons.

As we have noted, the word of *Christ* is the “mystery” that is revealed in fullness with the coming of Christ (2:2). This mystery is the true wisdom (2:3) and knowledge of God (2:2, 3). This connects back with our verse 3:16. For 3:16 calls us to teach and admonish one another with this wisdom—with *all* wisdom. This wisdom then defines what the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are.

Thus, the question arises: what is this wisdom? We have already noted that Paul connects it with the “mystery.” Now we are prepared to see how this mystery has unfolded in Colossians 2:13-17. These verses are the background for chapter 3. They indicate that Paul contrasts this mystery (relatively speaking) with the Old Testament administration. This will be important for our present question. If the wisdom of God in Christ surpasses Old Testament revelation, then to sing in a way that teaches others in all wisdom involves singing more than Old Testament revelation. Thus, we must see that Paul is (relatively speaking) contrasting the wisdom of Christ to Old Testament revelation.<sup>12</sup> That is, while it appears that Paul is also combating a syncretistic Jewish heresy, he is doing so partially by noting that Christ surpasses the Old Testament administration itself.

This is indicated when Paul makes “therefore” (2:16) his connecting link between 2:13-15 and 2:16-17. “Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things that are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance be-

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<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Paul is making an absolute contrast between the wisdom found in Christ and the Old Testament administration when it is cut off from the full revelation in Christ. However, the fact that he is presenting this latter contrast should not blind us to the fact that he is also making a relative contrast. This relative contrast is between the Old Testament administration itself (properly administered) and the new administration flowing from the full revelation of Christ as the wisdom of God. This will be borne out by the following two paragraphs of this article. If proven, it sets up the case against the exclusive use of the Psalms (even given their proper sense according to the time in which they were revealed) for teaching the wisdom of Christ.

longs to Christ.” In the Old Testament period, it would have been appropriate for someone to judge you if you did not eat according to the dietary laws or follow the Jewish festival calendar. Obviously the fact that Christ has already accomplished his work in history (2:13-15) has changed all that. As a cause, it has “therefore” brought a new effect in redemptive history. It means that Christ’s work is applied to the New Testament people of God in a way that it was not applied to the Old Testament church. There has been a redemptive-historical transition.

Christ has “canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us” (2:14). The “decrees...against us” certainly remind us of God’s absolute curse on fallen humanity. But they also remind us of God’s visible curses on the nation of Israel when he said, “I will set my face *against you*” (Lev. 26:17, emphasis mine), giving you sword, famine, nakedness and plague. Even these latter curses have been taken away from the people of God in the New Testament period (Rom. 8:33, 35; Col. 2:14). That is, Christ has canceled the debt of the New Testament church in a way that he did not do so for Old Testament saints during their pilgrimage under the law. This is clear when we recognize that this cancellation has had an effect on the New Testament church that it did not have on Old Testament saints during their pilgrimage. It means that no one can judge us with regard to Jewish cleanliness laws and festivals. However, Old Testament saints under the law could be judged with regard to these things.

But why could they be judged? Because, by implication these things were necessary during the time in which the visible curse was still placed upon the covenant people. That is, these things had something to do with temporarily alleviating the covenant curses during the older administration. In this way, they looked forward to the time when Christ would eliminate these visible curses from his people—as well as the absolute curse of eternal judgment. In other words, we are suggesting that by telling us what these things looked forward to, Paul is telling us something about their nature. Jewish ceremonies looked ahead to the elimination of the covenant curses in the New Testament era. Therefore, they temporarily alleviated the visible covenant curses during their own time—albeit imperfectly. Of course, as ineffectual in themselves, they could only do this as intrusions of the work of Christ to come.

Some may object, claiming that Paul is only discussing the cancellation of the eternal debt of judgment and not the cancellation of the visible covenant curses of the Old Testament on the covenant people. This would be to suggest that the application of Christ's work to Old and New Testament saints during their pilgrimage is identical in all respects. However, Paul teaches differently. This cancellation has a new *effect* for New Testament Christians. They now cannot be judged with regard to Jewish food laws and festivals. The fact that there is a new effect for them implies that the way in which the *cause* of salvation is understood with respect to them takes on a new dimension. The nature of the cause must be adequate for all its effects. And since the pivotal point of transition takes place after the cause has been accomplished historically, it appears that the historical accomplishment of the cause leads to the fullness of its effects. Only after the historical accomplishment of Christ's death and resurrection would it yield new effects—the cancellation of the visible covenant curses on God's people.

This is consistent with Paul's doctrine of semi-eschatological justification in Romans and Galatians and his doctrine of semi-eschatological reconciliation in 2 Corinthians and Ephesians. Christ has taken away the visible curses placed on corporate Israel. Even though these curses were administrations of the Mosaic covenant of grace, they still had to be eliminated before the semi-eschatological age could come to the church. Only then could she be raised with Christ to the degree described in Colossians 3:1.

Therefore, Paul's language in Colossians 2 involves a relative contrast between the Old Testament administration (even properly understood) and the New Testament administration.

### **All Wisdom: The Transition from the Old to the New Era in Christ**

This relative contrast between the two eras is the background for Paul's expression "all wisdom" (3:16). Showing this will be significant for our purposes. For if "all wisdom" teaches that the transition from the Old to the New *has already taken place*, then "all wisdom" includes New Testament revelation.



Clearly, the texts we have already examined (2:13-17) teach that the transition has already taken place. If these explain the meaning of “all wisdom,” then all wisdom cannot refer to Old Testament revelation alone. For Old Testament revelation only revealed that this transition was yet to take place.

But how can we show that when Paul used “all wisdom” he was implying this? How do we know that Paul was picking up this theme of transition from old to new in Colossians 2 when he used the phrase “all wisdom” in chapter 3? We know this for one simple reason: Paul’s discussion of the transition from the Old to the New in 2:13-17 was an expansion of his discussion about Christ as the “wisdom” of God in 2:2-3. That is, Paul spoke of Christ embodying “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in 2:3. Then he expanded this in the following discussion (2:4-23), of which 2:13-17 is an essential part. Thus, when Paul used the phrase “all wisdom” (3:16) he was not only referring back to “all... wisdom” in 2:3; he was also referring back to its expansion in 2:13-17. He was implying that the transition from the Old to the New Testament period had already taken place.

Thus, to show that “all wisdom” (3:16) refers to specific New Testament revelation, it is sufficient to show one thing: that Colossians 2:13-17 is carrying on the discussion of Christ as the wisdom of God in 2:3. To show this, let’s look at 2:2-17 in a bit more detail, beginning at 2:16 and working our way back to 2:2-3. When we look at Paul’s use of “therefore” in verse 16 (“Therefore let no one act as your judge”), it appears to be a conclusion arising from verses 6-15. These verses can be divided into two parts: verses 6-8 and 9-15. Verses 6-8 contain a set of exhortations that Paul afterward grounds in the indicatives of verses 9-15. Verse 16 flows from these indicatives, suggesting a connection with the other imperatives (vv. 6-8) that are also grounded in verses 9-15. Thus, verse 16 is similar in nature to the imperatives of verses 6-8.

How then do we know that verses 6-8 (together with their companion in verse 16) carry on the discussion of 2:2-3, of Christ embodying “all... wisdom?” Because “therefore” in verse 6 is a conclusion drawn from verses 4-5. Verses 4-5 in turn, refer back to Paul’s statement about Christ embodying “all... wisdom.” This can be seen in verse 4 when Paul says, “I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.” What does he say, about which no one may delude you? What he just said in verses 2-3: “...*attaining*

to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *himself*, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

This brings us full circle. For Paul introduced his claim that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are found in Christ by saying that Christ is God's *mystery*. This reminds us of Colossians 1:26 and "the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations." This new administration, in which Gentiles are made equal partakers in Christ (Col. 1:27), has only "now been manifested to his saints" (Col. 1:26). Thus, it is fitting for Paul to expand on Christ as the mystery (Col. 2:2-3) by discussing the transition from the old to the new era (Col. 2:13-17).

Therefore, the fact that *there has already been* a transition from the Old to the New Testament period (2:16-17) is a direct logical deduction from the revelation of all wisdom in Christ (2:2-3). "All...wisdom" clearly refers to more than Old Testament revelation because Old Testament revelation did not reveal that the transition from old to new *had already taken place*. Nor did it reveal that the Gentiles would be equal partakers in Christ.

Of course "*all* the treasures of *wisdom* and knowledge" as hidden in Christ is picked up by Paul in Colossians 3:16 when he says, "with *all* wisdom teaching" (emphases mine). In light of what we have seen, all wisdom refers to more than Old Testament revelation. Thus, it refers to more than the Psalter. Paul is exhorting the church to sing more than the Psalter when he calls them to teach and admonish one another "with all wisdom." This phrase "all wisdom" qualifies what he means by "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (3:16). These clearly refer to more than the Old Testament Psalter.

### **Raised in Christ: The Transition from the Old to the New Man, Colossians 3**

We believe this should be sufficient to make the case. However, to reinforce the fact that Paul's discussion of "all...wisdom" in chapter 2 continues in chapter 3, we note some of the ways in which chapter 3:1-17 carries on the discussion of chapter 2.

As we suggested, being raised with Christ in 3:1 results from the transition from the old to the new in 2:13-17ff. This is reinforced by the fact that the transition from the old to the new man involves a transition beyond the older administration (3:11). Paul is specifically speaking about the new man when he says that this is a renewal “in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.” This is very similar to Paul’s language in Galatians 3:28. Colossians 3:11 adds the note of “barbarian” and “Scythian” not found in Galatians 3:28, perhaps giving the passage in Colossians greater cosmic significance in light of its themes (chapter 1). And perhaps by focusing on the other distinction in the theocracy that involved inheritance rights (male and female), Galatians places greater emphasis on the new *inheritance* as opposed to the old. However, both passages suggest a transition from the old covenant to the new covenant and from the old age to the new age. Both are redemptive historical and cosmic. In our text, Paul discusses three distinctions that were legitimate divisions in the Old Testament: the distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, and slave and freeman. The fact that he says these distinctions are no longer valid indicates that we have moved beyond the Old Testament administration. He could not make these statements if we had not.

As a result, this suggests that his discussion of the contrast between the old man and the new man includes a relative contrast between the older administration of the covenant of grace and its new administration. The old man/new man contrast also involves an absolute contrast between fallen humanity and life in Christ, but this absolute contrast *does not exclude* the other contrast between the old and new administrations. Both are involved, as 3:11 makes clear. This suggests that in chapter 3, Paul is still discussing the relative contrast between the two administrations found in Colossians 2:13-17. And he is doing this by focusing on the greater/fuller union with Christ bestowed in the present administration. This greater fullness of union means that “Christ is all, and in all,” resulting from *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge being found in him.

The exhortations of verses 12-17 result from our new identity as the *new man* in Christ Jesus (vv. 10-11). This connection is seen clearly in verse 12 where Paul explicitly calls the church to “put on” certain virtues, as he told them

to “put on the new man” (3:10). They are to put on Christ in his full-resurrected life revealed in the New Testament. Just as the old man/new man contrast involves a relative contrast between the old and the new administrations, these exhortations express the same relative contrast. They are dependent on the full wisdom of God now revealed in Christ in the New Testament.

### **Singing with Thanks for the New Era in Christ**

A few other details in our verses (3:15-17) may indicate their connection to the preceding verses. First, Paul says, “to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful” (3:15). The “peace” that should rule in them results from the fact that they are “one body.” This probably reflects the new union they have in this new administration found in 3:11. If so, then their thankfulness specifically flows from the new reality that has dawned with the coming of Christ. For this thankfulness flows partially from their being “one body” (v. 15).

Presumably the ground for their thankfulness in verses 16 and 17 (“with thankfulness,” “giving thanks”) would in part be the same—thankfulness for the fact that the new administration has arrived and they have been made one body in a new way. This would reinforce the fact that giving thanks to God the Father involves explicitly thanking him for the new revelation and administration in Christ Jesus, as it does in Colossians 1:12. In this latter passage, Paul implies that the Colossians give thanks to the Father because he has qualified them “to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” That is, they thank God for being given the greater inheritance of the new administration. This is further indicated in 1:13 in which they are transferred into the “kingdom of his beloved Son.” Here they give thanks for *already* participating in new covenant blessings, for the fact that the new administration has already arrived in Christ.

Both these considerations (thanks for “one body” in 3:15 and “to God the Father” in 3:17) lend strength to the idea that Paul is exhorting the Colossians in 3:17 to explicitly give thanks for the new administration in Christ. This would fit with the fact that they are called to teach one another in their songs about this new administration in “all wisdom.” And thus “singing with thankfulness”

in their “hearts” to God is not simply singing in their hearts about a reality that they do not sing with their lips. Instead it is the reflection in their hearts of the objective reality they sing to one another with clear words of praise. They sing songs that accord with this new reality, having been made participants of the full wisdom found in Christ. They sing as one body, having been made partakers of the new inheritance above.

## Objections Considered

While we believe the case has been made, we note a few objections before closing this article. Some may still object, saying that “all wisdom” does not define the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Instead, the Psalms define the wisdom. Thus, it might be argued, the wisdom is simply the degree of revelation about Christ found in the Old Testament. If there is progressive revelation of the wisdom of God in Christ, Paul’s reference to the wisdom found in Christ is sufficiently satisfied by Old Testament revelation. The Old Testament (it might be argued) simply looks forward, while the New Testament simply looks back. And this is sufficient to teach “all wisdom.”

However, this does not fit with Paul’s claims about the “wisdom” of God in Christ in Colossians. As we have seen, this is a wisdom that leads us beyond the older administration. This wisdom teaches that the transition from the old to the new administration *has already taken place*. Paul’s claims about the nature of the wisdom of God in Colossians are so clear that it is impossible to reduce that wisdom to the level of Old Testament revelation. But that is what we do if we say that the Old Testament Psalter is objectively sufficient to teach this fullness of wisdom.

Others may still object even though they acknowledge that the wisdom of God in Christ in Colossians takes us beyond the wisdom of God in the Psalter. They may claim that when we sing the Psalms, we do it in light of the fullness of revelation in Christ, and this alone is fully sufficient to teach one another the wisdom of Christ. As a result, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are nothing but the Psalter. This amounts to saying that when we sing the Psalms, we do it with a subjective understanding arising from the full flowering of organic progressive revelation in the New Testament, that the Psalms contain

the revelation that eventually flowers into the fullness of the revelation of the mystery and wisdom of Christ. And indeed this is true.

However, if the Psalms alone are used to teach “all wisdom” this means (as we have suggested) that all this understanding of the fullness of wisdom growing out of the Psalms arises from the singer’s previous subjective understanding of New Testament revelation. It is not being “taught” to him at that moment by his brother in Christ. However, Colossians 3:16 implies that his brother in Christ is teaching it to him at that moment. We concede that the Psalms themselves objectively contain the organic threads of revelation that unfold into the full flowering of the wisdom of Christ. However, when they alone are objectively presented in worship, they are cut off from an objective presentation of their full flowering. In effect they are isolated from the organic continuum of which they are a part, so that in the worship service they do not objectively teach their organic fruition, that the fullness of their organic threads have *already* been realized in Christ. And this is what the wisdom of God in Christ requires as a minimum. Thus, whatever “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” are, they must of themselves (considered as a whole) objectively teach the fullness of the revelation of the mystery of Christ.

Exclusive Psalmody provides us with an *objective inadequacy* and tries to make up for it with the subjective understanding of the recipient. But in so doing, it does not follow the pattern of redemptive historical teaching (found throughout Scripture) in which the objective presentation always precedes the subjective appropriation. And it cannot satisfy Paul’s call to objectively teach one another the wisdom found in Christ. If all that is sung is Old Testament revelation, then it is only a partial means of teaching the final revelation in Christ. Old Testament revelation must be completed with the fullness of New Testament revelation. Singing the Psalms must be completed with singing songs proclaiming that Christ has already triumphed (semi-eschatologically). Otherwise our singing cannot satisfy Paul’s command to teach with “all wisdom.”

This is consistent with preaching as an objective means of teaching. The preacher should never preach an Old Testament passage and simply let his congregation subjectively supply the New Testament conclusion to the story—drawing the appropriate conclusion only from their own previous knowledge. The preacher is called to make it explicit—to explicitly move from the Old

Testament to the New Testament.

The same is true of our songs if they are to teach *all* wisdom in Christ. Thus, whatever “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” are, they must (as a whole) objectively teach the fullness of revelation in Christ. And the Psalter does not do this. Thus, as claimed, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” includes more than the Psalter. These terms refer to a broader category<sup>13</sup> of which the Psalter is only one subset.<sup>14</sup>

Someone may further object: you are making singing an objective means of grace that exercises the keys of the kingdom. We reply, however: while singing to one another may not be on the same level as preaching (as an objective means of grace involving the keys of the kingdom), Paul does describe it as a means of general Christian “teaching” and “admonition.” Thus, it has an objective character even if it is not an objective means of grace by the power of the keys.

We suggest the following: perhaps the congregation can move from songs reflecting Old Testament revelation (the Psalter for instance) to songs reflecting on the fullness of the wisdom in Christ (found in New Testament revelation).

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13 Each of the terms “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs” taken individually also refers *directly* to its own *family* (to use a term from the biological taxonomy: family, genus, species). At least one of these three families contains several *genera* throughout Scripture, e.g., “songs” in the Psalms (Ps. 18:1, 48:1, 92:1, 108:1, 134:1), “songs” in Isaiah (Is. 5:1, 26:1), “songs” in the book of Revelation (Rev. 5:9, 15:3), etc. In this article, we have loosely described the Psalter as a subset of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” because it is composed of *genera* from all three families: “psalms,” “hymns,” and “songs.” However, for something to be a “song,” it is sufficient that it fall under the family “song.” It does not have to be a part of a *collection* containing *genera* from all three families: “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs” (see fn. 4).

14 When Exclusive Psalmody points out that “psalms,” “hymns” and “spiritual songs” refer to musical compositions in the Psalter, it is correct (e.g. 2 Chron. 29:30). But when it concludes from this that all three of these terms in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to them alone, it is in error (as indicated by our study of these passages). Therefore, it has made a category error. It has assumed that the phrase “spiritual songs” (for instance) refers exclusively to the narrow category of “songs” in the Psalter. Instead, we should recognize that “songs” refers to songs in the Psalter simply because the Psalter’s songs represent one subcategory (i.e. *songs in the Psalter*), falling under the broader category “songs” found throughout the whole Bible. This is the necessary conclusion of Paul’s claim that “*spiritual* songs” (taken as a whole) reveal the mystery not revealed to the Old Testament prophets. The same may also be the case for the terms “psalms” and “hymns.” However, it is possible that (strictly speaking) our study has only proven that *one* of these three terms must refer to songs teaching New Testament revelation, not all three. Still, this is all that is necessary to disprove Exclusive Psalmody.

In the songs of God's people, this would reflect the movement from Old to New Testament revelation found in the preaching of the Word. This is no doubt appropriate since worship is a covenantal engagement with God—God first offering himself to us in grace and we responding with sincere devotion. Thus, our response mirrors his word—the word revealing God's progressive mighty acts.

This is in accordance with the pattern of song we find throughout progressive revelation—the pattern in which saints sing about the glories of the mighty acts of God. They do not restrict their praise to the more remote acts of God's redemption. But like Mary in her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), they sing of the most recent mighty acts of God. So also Paul calls the church to sing out of the fullness of God's mighty acts as they have culminated in the work of Christ—the mighty acts of his life, death, and resurrection. These have brought the new semi-eschatological reconciliation found in Christ, the wisdom of God. These have brought the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit. And these are the reality out of which we are called to sing praise to God, fully thanking him for *all things* in Christ Jesus.

## Conclusion

We have attempted to show that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to more than the Old Testament Psalter. In Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:19, he exhorts the church to sing out of the “mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men” (Eph. 3:4-5), including the Psalmists. To support this, we have seen the exegetical connections that tie Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:19 to the mystery revealed in Ephesians 1-4—the mystery that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body” (3:6). And we have found that this mystery is grounded in the semi-eschatological reconciliation now found in Christ (2:13-16).

In addition, this mystery is the “manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:9-10) revealed in Colossians. As Paul says: “God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *himself*, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3). In Colossians 3:16, Paul exhorts the church to sing out of this wisdom, teaching



each other “all wisdom” with the objective content of their worship songs. As we have seen, the context of this exhortation also indicates that it arises from Paul’s discussion of Christ as the wisdom of God (Colossians, chapters 1-2). According to Colossians 2, this wisdom indicates that the new administration of grace in Christ has already arrived. The curses of the covenant upon the Old Testament people of God have been canceled, abolishing the ceremonial law. Therefore we find (as in Ephesians) that this wisdom is “the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations” (Col. 1:26), including the Psalmists. Both in Ephesians and Colossians, Paul is exhorting the church to sing songs whose objective content speak of the mystery, the wisdom of God in Christ not revealed to men in previous generations. Thus when he tells them to sing to one another in “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,” he is calling them to sing more than the Old Testament Psalter.

If this case has been made and if these texts refer to public worship (as we suggest), then it follows that the church is required to sing more than the Psalter in public worship. The church is called to express with her lips and with her heart the fullness of grace found in Christ. She is called to exalt in the fullness of God’s glory, rejoicing in his mighty acts in Christ. She is exhorted to sing songs that proclaim that Christ’s work has *already* been accomplished, bringing semi-eschatological blessings to his people. Thus, to restrict the church’s song to Old Testament revelation in the Psalter is at odds with the Regulative Principle of worship. It robs God (in worship) of his full glory in Christ. It unduly restricts the consciences of Christians whose Christian duty calls them to sing more than the Psalter. And it binds the liberty of Christians, whose liberty frees them to sing of the full glories of their redemption, the semi-eschatological reconciliation they now have in Christ Jesus.

The church is freed from the curse semi-eschatologically; freed to sing out of this new reality. She is lifted up to heaven—to make God’s heart her heart. She is brought to the feet of Jesus. There she enters into the sweetest union with her Savior, as he rejoices in resurrection glory in lavish communion with his Father. With the lips of Christ, she drips eschatological praise.<sup>15</sup> And

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<sup>15</sup> Union with Christ is a continuing theme in Ephesians, sometimes only alluded to by the phrases “in him” (1:4, 10) or “in whom” (1:7, 11, 13; 2:21-22; 3:12). The use of the latter phrase in 3:12 indicates that new covenant saints are called to praise God in union with Christ. This suggests that they are to praise the Father out of the same perspective from which Christ praises the Father. For in Christ they have this new access to the Father (2:18). Christ has access

so she effuses the sweetness of Christ to the nations that they may say—what a union of delights, ‘God is truly among them.’

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to the Father in the Spirit (2:18) by which he has been made a partaker of the inheritance above (1:13, “sealed *in him*”). Thus, by implication, he also praises the Father in his access to him. For the place of access to which he has been raised is the heavenly temple. And the temple in the Old Testament was known preeminently as a place of worship. As head of his people, Christ leads the way for them in all things. (In fact, Paul’s “in whom” statements seem to imply that Christ is the forerunner of all those blessings he describes in Ephesians.) Therefore if Christ has access to the heavenly temple, he worships the Father there.

The focus on *reconciliation* in Christ (2:16) does not detract from this, implying that Christ is simply the means of access for others in this heavenly temple. For even in the Old Testament, the offering itself was burned as a sweet smelling aroma to God. It was consecrated to him in his holy temple. Elsewhere, Paul himself speaks this way when he tells Christians to “worship” God by presenting themselves as a “holy sacrifice, acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1). In voluntarily presenting oneself as a living sacrifice, one is worshipping God. So also is one who presents the fruits of his sacrifice to God. Thus, Christ himself worships the Father in the heavenly temple—praising him for his resurrection and his eschatological reward.

In union with Christ, the saints are also called to praise God that Christ has *already* been raised from the dead into the heavenly temple above. And they are to praise God that they have access to the heavenly temple with him *this side of the resurrection*. This semi-eschatological participation is a new reality for both Jews and Gentiles in Christ Jesus—a greater fullness for the Jews and totally new for the Gentiles.

This union of praise is not undermined by the fact that there remain discontinuities between the way in which Christ and his saints praise the Father. For instance, the saints do not praise the Father that they have been given children by means of their own objective work of atonement (Heb. 2:11, 13). Instead, they praise the Father that he has given the Son his children through the Son’s own atoning work. Nor does Christ praise the Father for delivering him from his own personal sins since he had none. There remains a distinction between Christ and his people even in their union with him. However, in those ways in which we may speak of the similarities between Christ and his saints in union with him, so also we may say that they praise the Father for the same realities for which Christ now praises the Father in heaven. Both do so from the perspective that they have *already* been seated in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6), in fulfillment of the prophetic prophecies about the coming kingdom.

## A Hymn of Heavenly Love

Edmund Spenser<sup>1</sup>

But man forgetful of his maker's grace,  
No less than angels, whom he did ensue,  
Fell from the hope of promised heavenly place,  
Into the mouth of death, to sinners due,  
And all his offspring into thralldom threw:  
Where they forever should in bonds remain,  
Of never dead, yet ever dying pain.

Till that great Lord of Love, which him at first  
Made of mere love, and after liked well,  
Seeing him lie like creature long accurst,  
In that deep horror of despaired Hell,

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Spenser (ca.1552-1599), justly famous for his great spiritual allegory, *The Faerie Queene*, was a Protestant poet with Reformed or Calvinistic inclinations. The *Faerie Queene* is the allegory of the Christian's spiritual life in the face of temptations such as Error's Wood, the false Lady Una (Duess), the counterfeit monk (Archimago), the giant Orgoglio's prison-tower and other adventures representing the (Protestant) Christian believer's encounter with deceit and temptation, i.e., Roman Catholicism, Islam, magic and superstition, lechery, etc. The excerpt above is from one of his *Four Hymns* (1596) which include: "A Hymn in Honor of Love," "A Hymn in Honor of Beauty" and "A Hymn in Honor of Heavenly Beauty"—powerful expressions of eternal beauty and profound love. His wedding poem (*Epithalamion*) written for his bride, Elizabeth Boyle, is exquisite and may be recommended to all Christian husbands and wives. The spelling in the selection above has been modernized for greater ease of understanding.

Him wretch in doole<sup>2</sup> would let no longer dwell,  
But cast out of that bondage to redeem,  
And pay the price, all were his debt extreme.

Out of the bosom of eternal bliss,  
In which he reigned with his glorious sire,  
He down descended, like a most demisse<sup>3</sup>  
And abject thrall, in fashes frail attire,  
That he for him might pay sin's deadly hire,  
And him restore unto that happy state,  
In which he stood before his hapless fate.

In flesh at first the guilt committed was,  
Therefore in flesh it must be satisfied:  
Nor spirit, nor angel, though they man surpass,  
Could make amends to God for man's misguide,  
But only man himself, who self did slide.  
So taking flesh of sacred virgin's womb,  
For man's dear sake he did a man become.

And that most blessed body, which was born  
Without all blemish or reproachful blame,  
He freely gave to be both rent and torn  
Of cruel hands, who with despiteful shame  
Reviling him, that them most vile became,  
At length him nailed on a gallow tree,

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2 Meaning grief or sorrow.

3 Submissive or base.

And slew the just, by most unjust decree.

O blessed well of love, O flower of grace,  
O glorious Morning star, O lamp of light,  
Most lively image of thy Father's face,  
Eternal King of glory, Lord of might,  
Meek lamb of God before all worlds behight<sup>4</sup>,  
How can we thee requite for all this good?  
Or what can prize that thy most precious blood?

Begin from first, where he encradled was  
In simple crèche, wrapt in a wad of hay,  
Between the toilful ox and humble ass,  
And in what rags, and in how base array,  
The glory of our heavenly riches lay,  
When him the silly shepherds came to see,  
Whom greatest princes sought on lowest knee.

With all thy heart, with all thy soul and mind,  
Thou must him love, and his behests embrace;  
All other loves, with which the world doth blind  
Weak fancies, and stir up affections base,  
Thou must renounce, and utterly displace,  
And give thyself unto him full and free,  
That full and freely gave himself to thee.

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4 Ordained.

# **The Rhetoric of the Post-Exilic Prophetic Reversal: Chiasmus in Haggai 1:1-15**

## **A Structural and Biblical-Theological Analysis**

Benjamin W. Swinburnson

In recent years, studies of the book of Haggai have been marked by a stark shift in methodology. With the rise of literary and structural analysis in biblical interpretation, both form and redaction criticism have begun to lose their dominant grip on the study of Haggai. Whereas this earlier scholarship found Haggai 1 to be a fertile site for the discovery of various layers of contradictory editorial interpolations and modifications, more recent studies have been calling attention to its essential literary-structural unity and integrity. A keystone of this new approach has been the discovery of a chiasmic pattern in Haggai 1. While some disagreement remains regarding the details of this pattern, this attempt at narrative and structural analysis is encouraging.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we propose to build upon this recent work in order to further answer some of the critical theories regarding the redaction of Haggai. Our thesis is that the prophetic proclamation of Haggai 1:1-15 is a single unit, arranged in a tightly knit and comprehensive chiasmic pattern. However, the significance of this structural pattern cannot be reduced to mere aesthetics, nor does it simply serve as a constructive apologetic for the unity of the text against destructive critical views. As we shall demonstrate in the second part

<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, not all scholars are agreed as to the extent of this chiasmic pattern. Most attempts have lopped off 1:1 and 1:12-15 as a later appendage to the chiasmically arranged oracles of 1:2-11.

of this article, the chiasmic structure of Haggai 1:1-15 serves to rhetorically reinforce one of the main theological themes of the post-exilic prophetic writings—the theme of eschatological reversal. We will begin our study with a brief examination of the critical analyses of Haggai 1, then present our case for a comprehensive chiasmic pattern in the same chapter, and finally present a brief biblical-theological analysis of Haggai’s message in light of our structural conclusions.

## A Survey of Critical Views

Speaking in general terms, there has been widespread agreement among critical scholars that various redactional layers can be detected throughout the text of Haggai. While each proposal has differed (sometimes markedly) in both exegetical detail and theological analysis, nearly all of them have begun with the fundamental assumption that the oracular and narrative portions of the book come from different authors or editors.<sup>2</sup> Though there are as many theories as there are scholars with regard to the details of Haggai’s redaction, all of them nevertheless agree on this foundational axiom divorcing the oracles and narrative framework of Haggai’s prophesy. What follows is a brief survey of some of these critical proposals.<sup>3</sup> While by no means exhaustive, this study will allow us to appreciate the helpful role that structural and literary analysis can play in coming to a consensus on the textual integrity of Haggai’s prophesy.

The first major proposal was that of Peter Ackroyd.<sup>4</sup> He broke down the

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2 Critics use the term “oracular portions” (or the equivalent) in reference to that aspect of Haggai’s prophecy that records the actual vocal/audible disclosure of the prophet. In contrast to this, the “narrative portions” of Haggai refer to the prefatory statements introducing the prophecies, their concluding statements, as well as several editorial comments interspersed throughout. Thus, for example, Hag. 1:1-2a would be part of the “narrative framework” of Haggai 1, while Hag. 1:2b would be an “oracular portion” of the book.

3 In addition to my own study of the primary documents (where available in English), I have made use of the following surveys of the interpretation of Haggai: John Kessler, *The Book of Haggai: Prophecy and Society in Early Persian Yehud* (2002) 18-22, 31-57. Frank Yeadon Patrick, *Haggai and the Return of YHWH* (Ph. D. Dissertation, Duke University, 2006) 4-56.

4 The basics of Ackroyd’s view are outlined in the following two articles: Peter Ackroyd, “Studies in the Book of Haggai” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 2 (1951): 163-76; “Studies in the Book of Haggai” (Continued from Vol. II – No. 4) *Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 (1952): 151-56.

redaction of Haggai into four distinct periods:

1. First, there was the original oral delivery of the prophecies.
2. Second, there was the oral transmission of these prophecies.
3. Third, there was an early written collection which added 2:3-5, 11-14a.
4. Fourth, one to two centuries later, a redactor expanded and reinterpreted the prophecies, and added dates.
5. Finally, some interpretive glosses were added (2:5a, 9b, 14b, 17b)

The theological agenda of the later editors was to refute the claims of the Samaritans in the Second Temple period. Ackroyd regarded the oracular portions as the “Haggai” original, while the “narrative framework” was regarded as the result of later editors.

Building upon the work of Peter Ackroyd, W. A. M. Beuken, also sought to isolate the oracular and editorial layers of the book.<sup>5</sup> According to Beuken, later editors (one to two centuries after Haggai) transformed these original oracles into larger “scene-sketches” (*Auftrittsskizzen*), which included the additions of Haggai 1:3-11, 12b, and 2:15-19. Its final form was produced by a “Chronistic” editor, who arranged the book into what he called “chronistic episodes”. This “Chronicler” added introductory formulae (1:1, 2:1-2), as well as statements about the effects of the prophet’s words (1:12-14).

The theological agenda of each editor, according to Beuken, breaks down as follows. The first editor, the “scene-sketcher,” was a Judean landowner who had not gone into exile. He favored a return to the pre-exilic conditions, and thus condemned all forms of Jewish syncretism. By contrast, the final redactors emphasized the continuity of the Davidic line to refute Samaritan claims about the temple. In addition, these redactors emphasized repentance and the power of prophecy in the history of God’s people. By thus reinterpreting and

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<sup>5</sup> W. A. M. Beuken, *Haggai-Sacharja 1-8* (1967).



resituating Haggai's prophecy, this Chronistic editor reframed Haggai's message to fit the agenda of later anti-Samaritan Judeans.<sup>6</sup>

Later, R. Mason proposed an alternative to Beuken's analysis.<sup>7</sup> He agreed with Beuken that there were several redactional layers in Haggai, but attributed them to an editor with a more Deuteronomistic orientation (415-16). Mason sees the following texts as the editorial framework of Haggai: 1:1, 3, 12, 13a, 14, 2:1, 2, 10, and 20 (414). Though different in these details, Mason's approach as a whole differs little from Beuken. Both agree in dividing the book into narrative and oracular sections, and attributing each of these to separate writers/editors with distinct theological agendas. As Mason himself states, "No one can treat any aspect of the books of Haggai and Zechariah i-viii without being deeply indebted to Beuken's work, even where he may find himself questioning some of the conclusions" (414).

More recently there is the proposal of Hans Walter Wolff.<sup>8</sup> Following Beuken and Mason, Wolff argued that the final version of Haggai has come down to us in the form of a "chronicle," though it originally consisted of several isolated prophetic utterances. Wolff believes that the various layers, consisting of the prophetic oracles themselves, the scene-sketcher, and the Haggai Chronicler, are clearly discernible (34). He summarizes these layers in terms of three "growth rings":

1. First, there is the *prophetic proclamation* itself (1:4-11; 2:15-19; 2:3-9; 2:14; 2:21b-23).
2. Second, there are the *scene-sketches* (*Auftrittsskizzen*), composed by the Haggai Chronicler. These consist in the introductory formulas (1:1-3, 1:15a; 1:15b-2:2; 2:20-21a), and various supplementations of the *scene-sketches* (2:4, 15, 17b, etc).
3. Third, there are various *later interpolations* (the last words of 2:18, first four words of 2:19ab, and the LXX expansions of 2:9, 14, 21, 22ba).

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6 Cf. the comments of Kessler (19)

7 Rex A. Mason, "The Purpose of the 'Editorial Framework' of the book of Haggai," *Vetus Testamentum* (1977): 413-21.

8 Hans Walter Wolff, *Haggai: A Commentary* (1988).

For Wolff, these distinctive features can be summarized as follows. First, the Haggai Chronicler addresses the governor, high priest, and people, while the “scene-sketcher” addresses only “this people” (1:12, 13). Second, the “scene-sketcher” calls Haggai “Yahweh’s Messenger,” while the Haggai Chronicler calls him “the prophet” (1:1, 3; 2:1, 10). Third, whereas the Haggai Chronicler introduces the revelation of God’s word as “the word of Yahweh came by...” (1:1, 2; 2:1, 10, 20), the scene sketcher uses “thus has Yahweh said” (8 times) or “saying of Yahweh (Sabaoth)” (12 times).

Many other scholars have proposed other similar analyses of the redaction of Haggai, including Janet Tollington and R. J. Coggins.<sup>9</sup> But it is not necessary to outline them all in detail here. The important thing to note is that nearly all of these earlier studies on the structure of Haggai share the common assumption regarding the clear contrast between oracular and narrative material. By setting these aspects of the text in sharp antithesis, scholars would then deconstruct the present text and the theological agendas of its various editors. The basic principle underlying this approach was clearly articulated by Herman Gunkel (albeit in a different context), one of the fathers of form criticism.

It is the common fate of older narratives which are preserved in later form that certain traces which made sense in the earlier contexts are transmitted in the newer account, in which they have, however, lost their context. Such old traces, fragments of an earlier whole, without context in the present account, and hardly understandable from the standpoint of the one who finally reports it, disclose to the investigator the existence and the particular traces of an earlier form of the existing narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning with the assumption that the book in its present form is fraught with literary and stylistic contradictions, they then proceed to fragment the book into

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<sup>9</sup> Janet Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1-8* (1993). Idem, “Readings in Haggai: From the Prophet to the Completed Book, as Changing Message in Changing Times,” in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (1999). R. J. Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. Old Testament Guides (1987).

<sup>10</sup> Herman Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (2006) 6.

its original form(s), and trace the editorial development of the prophecy.

## An Encouraging Methodological Shift

However, in recent years, studies in Haggai have been marked by an encouraging methodological shift. Rather than tracing the redactional history of the narrative and oracular portions of Haggai's prophecy, these newer studies have sought to emphasize the coherent literary unity of the text in its final form. Utilizing new methods of narrative, structural, and poetic analysis, these scholars have begun to appreciate anew the literary beauty and artistry of Haggai's prophecy. Some still presuppose an editorial process in the formation of Haggai's prophecy, but most are much less confident about discerning the details of that process.

For example, though Myers and Myers have argued that an "editorial framework has been superimposed upon a core of original material," they nevertheless insist that "there is little hope or even purpose in separating out all of the individual units."<sup>11</sup> Rather, there is a clearly discernable literary continuity between the oracular and narrative portions of the text. Likewise David Peterson, though he too still presupposes a redactional history to the book, openly refers to the various critical reconstructions as "unconvincing" and even "artificial."<sup>12</sup> John Kessler, in his recent monograph on Haggai has also emphasized this point. Though he seems eager to assure his colleagues that he is not challenging the validity of form and redaction-critical methods, he admits that Haggai's "oracles and frameworks share a good deal of common ground," and that "the book ought to be read as 'an integral whole.'"<sup>13</sup> Michael Floyd has been so impressed with the unity of the book that he has urged his peers "to reconsider the whole notion of the narration in Haggai as an editorial device framing composites of originally separate prophetic speeches."<sup>14</sup> Some

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11 Carol L. Myers and Eric M. Myers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (1987) lxx.

12 David Peterson, *Haggai-Zechariah* (1984) 39.

13 Kessler, 55-56.

14 Michael Floyd, "The Nature of the Narrative and the Evidence of Redaction in the Book of Haggai." *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995) 473.

scholars have moved even farther away from form and redaction criticism, focusing almost all their attention on the literary shape of the text itself. Elie Assis has contributed several articles in this vein on the structure of Haggai, delineating both its macrostructural and microstructural literary coherence.<sup>15</sup> Frank Yeadon Patrick has also argued strenuously that “the book is best read as a cohesive and artistic literary composition with clearly identifiable communicative goals.”<sup>16</sup>

However, though most recent scholars have recognized to some degree the literary unity of the final form of Haggai’s prophecy, most of them have not fully given up their redaction-critical presuppositions. Many of them have yet to come to grips with the far-reaching methodological consequences of such a conclusion about the literary unity of the book of Haggai. The difficulty (as we see it) is that critical scholars *began* their analysis of Haggai with the assumption that various portions (oracular vs. narrative material) of Haggai were in obvious tension with one another. Varying stylistic, terminological, and theological differences between these two portions were assumed to be obvious evidence of different editorial hands at work in the development of the prophecy. However, recent research has shown the final form of Haggai demonstrates a carefully crafted, and even artistic literary unity. Some of the apparent stylistic discrepancies are now recognized as integral components of carefully crafted literary artistry. The evidentiary support for the redaction-critical approaches has thus apparently been removed from beneath the critics’ feet. Yet these approaches to exegetical analysis of Haggai continue to be perpetuated, even with the plain admission that the evidence supporting such an approach is wholly lacking. It is becoming clearer that such approaches have been based far more in epistemological, hermeneutical, and philosophical precommitments than in the concrete character and scope of the prophetic text. Rather than dealing with the actual text as it stands, these critical methods have simply imposed an alien paradigm on to the biblical text, thus destroying the beautiful literary unity and artistry of biblical revelation the way a vandal defaces a priceless piece of artwork.

Nevertheless, with these more recent approaches to Haggai, many schol-

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15 Elie Assis, “Haggai: Structure and Meaning,” *Biblica* 87 (2006) 531-541.

16 Patrick, 27.

ars have begun to analyze the structure of Haggai's prophesy anew, including his opening chapter. Generally speaking, a new consensus is developing that views Haggai 1:1-15 (formerly a favorite target of redaction-critical analysis) in its present form as a coherent literary whole. Specifically, many scholars have noted the chiasmic arrangement(s) of Haggai 1:1-15. However, scholars are not entirely agreed as to the precise details of this chiasmic arrangement. David Dorsey (who has had no trouble finding chiasms throughout the Bible) has argued for a chiasmic structure in 1:2-11, though in our opinion his points of correspondence are purely thematic.<sup>17</sup> Likewise J. Alec Moyter notes a possible chiasmic arrangement to 1:1-11, but, like Dorsey, his suggestion is purely thematic and has little basis in the lexical, grammatical, or syntactical shape of the text.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, his analysis breaks off 1:12-15 from the rest of the chapter, thus falling short of demonstrating the unity of the whole chapter. Duane Christenson also sees a chiasmic pattern in Haggai 1, but bases it on "rhythmic patterns" rather than concrete textual correspondence.<sup>19</sup> Kessler has noted various points of correspondence at the beginning and ending of Haggai 1 and although he misses the chiasmic inclusion of the dates, he has proposed a chiasmic arrangement of 1:4-11 that is similar to ours.<sup>20</sup> Elie Assis<sup>21</sup> has analyzed Haggai's careful patterning in 1:1-11, noting the chiasmic arrangement of 1:6 and 1:9, as well as several correspondences in 1:4-6 and 1:7-9. However, these treatments fail to note the chiasmic arrangement of the dates in 1:1 and 1:15, and both fail to integrate the whole of chapter 1 as a unified structural whole. While all these studies have put us on the right track, all of them fail to provide a comprehensive structural analysis of Haggai 1.

However, Frank Yeadon Patrick's recent work is a notable exception. He has argued for a chiasmic arrangement in Haggai 1 similar to the one proposed

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<sup>17</sup> David Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (1999) 316.

<sup>18</sup> See his treatment of Haggai 1 in: *The Minor Prophets: Volume Three*, ed. by Thomas Edward McKomiskey (2003) 973.

<sup>19</sup> Duane L. Christenson, "Impulse and Design in the Book of Haggai," *JETS* 35 (1992) 445-56.

<sup>20</sup> Kessler, 248, 111-12.

<sup>21</sup> Elie Assis, "Composition, Rhetoric and Theology in Haggai 1:1-11," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* (online only) 7.11 (2007) 7, 8.

here.<sup>22</sup>

- A—Beginning Date (1:1a)
  - B—Introduction of Characters and Problem (1:1b-2)
    - C—Curses Reconsidered (1:3-7)
      - D—Actions of the people and the Deity (1:8)
        - C—Curse Conditions Explained (1:9-11)
          - B—The Characters Respond / Rebuild the Temple (1:12-14)
- A—Concluding Date (1:15)

Together with Myers and Myers,<sup>23</sup> Patrick is the only scholar I have come across who has also noticed the chiasmic arrangement to Haggai's dates in 1:1 and 1:15. In addition, his proposal is superior to the others in that it does not break off 1:1-3 or 1:12-15 from the rest of the chapter, but integrates it into the rest of the chapter as a literary whole. Furthermore, in our estimation, Patrick has insightfully grasped the theological significance of the reverse chiasmic pattern in Haggai 1. The chiasmic structural reversal is a signal for a greater prophetic reversal from exile to return.

All of these scholars have helped us move forward in understanding Haggai 1. However, no one has offered a detailed analysis of the structural patterns of the entirety of Haggai 1 that definitively challenges the previous critical consensus. It is precisely this that we propose to do in this article. In so doing, we hope to provide a helpful antidote to the more destructive analyses of the text of Haggai 1, and hopefully protect Haggai's inspired masterpiece from further desecration at the hands of critical vandalism.

## **The Chiasmic Structure of Haggai 1:1-15**

In a previous article, we have noted the importance of dates in the prophesy

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<sup>22</sup> Patrick, 106

<sup>23</sup> Myers and Myers, 36

of Haggai.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the entire book is arranged in four sections, each demarcated by the appearance of a date and a revelatory preface (1:1, 2:1, 2:10, 2:20). However, the integrity of Haggai 1 as a single unit is debated by critics and conservatives alike. While some argue that the entire chapter is a holistic unit, Peterson,<sup>25</sup> Floyd,<sup>26</sup> Verhoef,<sup>27</sup> and others divide it into two sections (1:1-11, 1:12-15). At first glance, this does not appear to be without warrant, for a date does occur in 1:15, which may suggest that 1:12-15 is a separate unit.

However, a closer examination of these dates supports the literary unity of the entire first chapter. First, we note that the dates in 1:1 and 1:15 are given in full (day, month, year), which does not always occur in Haggai. Also, the name “Darius the king” appears in each. This suggests that the dates in 1:1 and 1:15 are a broad inclusio bracketing the entire chapter. Secondly, these dates do not merely repeat, but they do so in a chiastic pattern. While 1:1 follows the pattern of year-month-day, 1:15 reverses the order to day-month-year.

**A - <sup>1</sup> In the second year of Darius the king**  
       **B -    in the sixth month**  
           **C -    on the first day of the month...**  
           **C' - <sup>15</sup> on the twenty-fourth day**  
       **B' -    in the sixth month**  
**A'. In the second year of Darius the King**

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24 Benjamin W. Swinburnson, “The Glory of the Latter Temple: A Structural and Biblical-Theological Analysis of Haggai 2:1-9.” *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 23/1 (2008) 28-46.

25 Peterson, 35, 41-42

26 Michael Floyd, *Forms of Old Testament Literature: Minor Prophets: Part Two* (2000) 255.

27 Verhoef, Peter. *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (1989) 20-25

**A**<sup>1</sup> - בשנת שתיים לדרגוש המלך  
**B** - בחרש הששי  
**C** - ביום אחר לחרש  
**C'** - ביום עשרים וארבעה  
**B'** - לחרש בששי  
**A'** - בשנת שתיים לדרגוש המלך:

There are some differences between the two dates. Not only does the day itself change (first day/twenty-fourth day), but the preposition prefixed to “חרש” does as well (ב/ל). Furthermore, in 1:1 the day is described in terms of its relationship to the month (“the first day of the month”), whereas in 1:15 it is simply described as a numerical day (“the twenty-fourth day”). However, these differences pose no problem for our chiastic arrangement. Not only do the time-markers “year-month-day” in 1:1 clearly reverse themselves to “day-month-year” in 1:15, the phrase “לדרגוש המלך” is precisely duplicated as well. Furthermore, the difference between 1:1c and 1:15a noted above can be easily explained. The number 24 in Hebrew (as in English) requires two words (עשרים וארבעה), whereas the number 1 only requires one (אחד). To add the word “month” to 1:15c would bring prosodic imbalance to Haggai’s carefully arranged inclusio. Note the prosodic balance on the lexical level. In the AA’ sections, there are four words. In the BB’; there are two words. In the CC’, there are three words. Such analysis reveals to us the careful and intricate nature of the hand of the prophet as he etches his prophesy. Only someone paying close attention to prosodic symmetry and structural balance would pen this the way our author did.

The chiastic nature of Haggai’s temporal inclusio suggests a possibility for the rest of this section: is there a chiastic arrangement evident in the entire chapter? Let us work our way through the chapter to see what the prophet has for us.



First, we note the repetition of characters at the beginning and end of chapter one. In 1:1-2, four characters appear: Haggai the prophet (הַגַּי הַנָּבִיא), Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and “these people” (הָעָם הַזֶּה). In 1:13-14, these same four characters reappear: Haggai, the LORD’s messenger (מֵלָאֲךָ יְהוָה), Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people (כָּל שְׁאֵרֵית הָעָם). While the descriptions of Zerubbabel and Joshua remain the same in each, those of Haggai and the people slightly differ.

Second, each appearance of these four characters is followed by a statement describing the work of the people. In 1:2, the LORD states that the people are saying “the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD” (לְהַבְנוֹת לַיהוָה). However, when we come to 1:14, we read that “they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God” (וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ מִלְאכָה בְּבֵית־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵיהֶם). In addition to the thematic repetition of “work” and “building” these verses are linked by the duplication of the phrase “house of the LORD” (בֵּית יְהוָה) and the root “בוא.”

As we press downwards towards the center of Haggai’s first chapter, we see another point of correspondence and duplication in 1:4 and 1:9c. In 1:4, the prophet sets in contrast the people’s well-built paneled houses (בְּבִתְיֶכֶם), with the house of the LORD which lies in ruin (וְהַבַּיִת הַזֶּה חָרֵב). In 1:9c, this contrast returns: “my house which lies in ruins” (בֵּיתִי אֲשֶׁר־הוּא חָרֵב) stands in contrast to “his own [the people’s] house” (לְבֵיתוֹ). In keeping with the chiasmic nature of this chapter, this repetition of the people’s house vs. God’s house also takes a chiasmic form<sup>28</sup>:

1:4b—בְּבִתְיֶכֶם סְפוּנִים  
 1:4c—וְהַבַּיִת הַזֶּה חָרֵב  
 1:9c—בֵּיתִי אֲשֶׁר־הוּא חָרֵב  
 1:9d—לְבֵיתוֹ

28 This chiasm is also noted by Assis (8).

In the center of the chiasm, the word “חרב” is repeated. Furthermore, though the form of the word “house” (בַּיִת) changes from 1:4c to 1:9c, the referent in each is to the house of יהוה. At the outsides of the chiasm, the word “house” is repeated, each time with reference to the people’s own houses. As we press further towards the center of Haggai’s chiasm, we are pressed down towards his central concern: the בַּיִת יְהוָה.

The prophet further amazes us with another explicit parallel duplication. In 1:5a and 1:7 the revelatory formula “thus says the LORD of Hosts” (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה) is precisely repeated. This formula marks the two central sections of Haggai’s chiastic arrangement. Within the subunits demarcated by this revelatory formula, we note the following points of correspondence:

1. The repetition of the phrase “consider how you have been faring” in 1:5b and 1:7b (שִׁימוּ לְבַבְכֶם עַל־הַרְכִּיבְכֶם)
2. The repetition of the parallel formula “you have sowed much (הִרְבֵּה) and have brought in little (קָטַן)” in 1:6 and “you have been expecting much (הִרְבֵּה) and have been getting little (לְקַטֵּץ)” in 1:9.<sup>29</sup>

However, there is a difference between the two sections. In the first section, the description of the futility of Israel’s existence (expecting much, receiving little) is fivefold: sow/bringing in, eat/no satisfaction, drink/no fill, clothes/no warmth, wages/bag with holes (1:6). In the second section, the command for Israel to build the Lord’s house is fivefold. Note the five verbs: “בִּן... וְאָכַר... עָלֶיךָ... וְהִבֵּאתֶם... וּבְנִי” The fivefold description of Israel’s futile disobedience in building their own houses is reversed in a fivefold instruction to Israel to build the Lord’s house!

Let us now chart our findings in one comprehensive picture, first in English, then in Hebrew:

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<sup>29</sup> Note also the repetition of “בוא” in each verse in connection with the “much-little” formula.

A—<sup>1</sup>In the second year of Darius the king  
 B—in the sixth month  
 C—on the first day of the month...

D { Four characters (1:1-2):  
 1. Haggai the prophet  
 2. Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah  
 3. Jushab the son of Jehozadak, the high priest  
 4. These people  
 The people don't work: "the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD" (1:2)

E - 1:4—Your paneled house...  
 F - ...this house lies in ruins

1:5a: Thus says the LORD of hosts  
 1:5b: ...consider how you have been facing  
 G 1:5c: ...sowed much...harvested little  
 1:6: Fivefold description of fertility

1:7a: Thus says the LORD of hosts  
 1:7b: ...consider how you have been facing  
 G' 1:8: fivefold verbal instruction to rebuild  
 1:9: ...sowing much...getting little

F' - 1:9c—...my house which lies in ruins  
 E' - ...each to his own house

D' { Four characters (1:12-14):  
 1. Haggai, the LORD's messenger/Haggai the Prophet  
 2. Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah  
 3. Jushab the son of Jehozadak, the high priest  
 4. All the remnant of the people  
 The people work: "...they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (1:14)

C—<sup>15</sup> on the twenty-fourth day  
 B'—in the sixth month  
 A'—In the second year of Darius the King

- A—בָּתָּם לִלְמַד הַסֵּפֶר
- B—בָּתָּם הַשֵּׁשִׁי
- C—בָּתָּם אָמַר לִלְמַד

- D {
  - Four characters (1:1-2):
  - 1. וְיָצֵא הַגֵּרִים
  - 2. וְיִבְנֶה בְּתוֹכָם פֶּתַח יְהוּדָה
  - 3. וְיִשְׁלַח בְּיָמָיו הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
  - 4. הַשֵּׁשִׁי
- The people don't work: וְלֹא יִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר לְיָמָיו (1:2)

- E-1:4—וְיִבְנֶה בְּתוֹכָם פֶּתַח
- F—וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי

- 1:5a: וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
- G 1:5b: וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
- 1:6a: הַשֵּׁשִׁי... הַשֵּׁנִי
- 1:6: Fivefold description of facility

- 1:7a: וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
- G 1:7b: וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
- 1:8: fivefold verbal instruction to rebuild
- 1:9: הַשֵּׁשִׁי... לְיָמָיו

- F'-1:9—וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
- F''—לְיָמָיו

- D' {
  - Four characters (1:12-14):
  - 1. וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי / וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
  - 2. וְיִבְנֶה בְּתוֹכָם פֶּתַח יְהוּדָה
  - 3. וְיִשְׁלַח בְּיָמָיו הַסֵּפֶר הַשֵּׁנִי
  - 4. בְּלִי שְׁמֵי יָמָיו
- The people work: וְיִשְׁלַח הַסֵּפֶר לְיָמָיו (1:14)

- C'—בָּתָּם שְׁמֵי יָמָיו
- B'—לְיָמָיו הַשֵּׁשִׁי
- A'—בָּתָּם לִלְמַד הַסֵּפֶר

It goes without saying that this chiasmic arrangement, if valid, has monumental significance for the current scholarly debate about the structure of Haggai. First, it most certainly establishes the entirety of 1:1-15 as a distinct unit, *contra* Verhoef and others who divide it up into two sections.<sup>30</sup> Second (and more importantly), this chiasmic arrangement also poses deadly problems for the various form and redaction-critical analyses of Haggai. For example, Wolff assigns 1:4 to the original prophetic proclamation, whereas 1:14 comes from the hand of the Haggai Chronicler. However, as we have seen, each of these plays an integral part in the chiasmic reversal: the transition from no work (1:4) to work (1:14). It seems highly unlikely to this writer that the central dramatic reversal in Haggai 1 would be the chance result of two different tendentious editors!

But the problems such a chiasmic structure poses for form and redaction-critical approaches lies not so much in the fact that it challenges the details of various proposals to the redaction of Haggai, but in the more fundamental hermeneutical questions it raises. If the present text of Haggai 1 demonstrates a cohesive and comprehensive literary unity, on what basis can we proceed to deconstruct the text into its (allegedly) original constitutive parts? If those elements which once appeared to be in irresolvable tension with one another now appear as essential elements of a integrated literary pattern, how do we justify disintegrating this cohesive rhetorical unity? The conclusion seems inescapable to us, in light of the clear literary unity of Haggai 1, that such approaches (in spite of their long-standing dominance in the study of the prophetic literature) can only serve to obstruct a true understanding of the text of Haggai's prophecy. Rather than seeking to *understand* Haggai's prophecy as a single text (let alone as the revealed Word of God), these approaches stand *over* the text and force it into a hermeneutical model foreign not only to its inspired character, but also its Ancient Near Eastern literary milieu.

This conclusion will become even more apparent when one begins to analyze the theological significance of this chiasmic paradigm for the message of Haggai 1. In other words, Haggai's chiasmic structure is more than mere aesthetics; indeed, it is even more than a powerful apologetic antidote to the various destructive critical views proposed in the past century. Rather, the

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<sup>30</sup> In fairness to Verhoef, he does accurately highlight the structural focal point of verse 8 (Verhoef, 21).

chiastic pattern of Haggai 1:1-15 is rhetorically reflective of the prophet's redemptive-historical message to post-exilic Israel. Indeed, Haggai's chiasmic pattern is marvelous example of the rhetoric of the post-exilic prophetic reversal.

### **Biblical Theology of Haggai 1:1-15<sup>31</sup>**

Haggai and Zechariah represent the dawn of a new era for the prophets of Israel. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Israel had been the recipient of the prophetic ministry of the "former prophets" (Zech. 1:4). Israel's failure to heed their message resulted not only in the beginning of the exile, but also a period of silence in the progressively unfolding revelation of the Lord of Hosts. The destruction of Jerusalem marked the end of one era (the Monarchy) and the beginning of a new (the Exile). A reversal of anti-eschatological proportions had taken place. Israel was removed from the land of blessedness (Canaan), and cast out to the land of cursedness (Babylon). Yet God did not leave his people without hope. He promised that he would one day visit Israel with many happy returns.

The end of Judah's exilic nightmare came with the decree of Cyrus and the returns of Ezra and Nehemiah to Judah. In the midst of this transition, Haggai and Zechariah helped to enunciate the dawn of a new age of hope for the people of God. These "latter prophets" proclaimed to God's people the return of God's glory in the "latter days"—a dramatic historical reversal of eschatological proportions. They proclaimed a reversal of the temple: from destruction to construction. They proclaimed a reversal of Israel's covenant disobedience: from faithlessness to faithfulness. They proclaimed a reversal of Israel's covenant-communion with God: "return to me, that I may return to you" (Zech. 1:3).

But the return was not all that was expected. Immediately, the new Israel began to face bitter hardship from the surrounding peoples. Indeed, these returned exiles in Haggai's day were surrounded. They were surrounded by the

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<sup>31</sup> The following biblical-theological analysis is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, we simply aim to present the biblical-theological bones upon which a more full-orbed analysis can be fleshed out with greater exegetical detail. Our main point is to highlight the role that the eschatological prophetic reversal plays in Haggai's proclamation in chapter 1.

oppressive rule of the Medo-Persian Empire. Darius I, son of Hystaspes, had gained control of the Persian Empire after a brief period of internal strife after the death of Cyrus's son Cambyses. Whatever hopes the conquered nations had of the dissolution of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Iranian regime were dashed with the accession of Darius. After his accession to the throne, Darius consolidated his power, and divided his kingdom into several satraps. This consolidation is celebrated in the famous "Behistun Inscription" in the mountains of Western Iran.



The picture is well worth the several thousands words which tell its story. The winged figure at the top of the monument is likely the Persian God "Ahura-Mazda." Ahura-Mazda was worshipped as the Creator-God of the Persians (whether in a henotheistic or monotheistic sense is debated). In contrast to Ahura-Mazda and his creation, stood Anga Mainyu and "uncreation." This dualistic orientation precipitated a conflict between what they referred to as the *Arta* and the *Druj* (the truth and the lie). All things lie on one side of this dualistic construct: light, water, fertile land, health, etc., stood on the good side; darkness, winter, drought, sickness, death, etc. stood on the other. Inter-

preted in light of 6<sup>th</sup> century Persian nationalism, the *Arta* was embodied in the comprehensive rule of the Achaemenid monarchs, whereas the *Druj* was represented in the various would-be usurpers of the Persian world order. The creation and order of the Persian rule (*Druj*), stood over against the chaos and disorder of these rogue rebellious kings.

As one can easily see from the above picture from the Behistun monument, Persia wanted to send a clear message to these potential rebels. Beneath Ahura-Mazda, standing tallest above the rest, is none other than Darius himself, the enforcer of the *Arta*. To his left stand his assistants. To the right stand nine conquered kings (with one on the ground under his feet). Darius is clearly presenting himself as an enforcer of righteousness and order, the “king of kings” who is above all.

Yet how subtly does Haggai proclaim the reversal of this pagan empire! Though the present time is the time of Darius the king, and Israel finds herself surrounded and bracketed on all sides by his tyrannical rule, Haggai is signaling a day when Darius’ kingdom will be brought to an end. The chiasmic reversal of Darius’ regnal calendar in 1:1 and 1:15 is proleptic of the conclusion of this prophecy. For in Haggai 2, we no longer see Darius bracketing Israel’s eschatological future, but rather Zerubbabel, the Son of Shealtiel. The double mention of Zerubbabel at the beginning and ending of the final prophetic unit stands in stark contrast to the dominating presence of Darius in chapter 1.

But the prophetic reversal does not only affect the pagan nations, it touches the heart of Israel herself. Indeed, Israel herself stands in need of a reversal—the reversal of her covenant disobedience into covenant obedience. Depressed, discouraged, and dejected, she is no longer giving her hands to the work God had commissioned her to do. It had been more than fifteen years since Cyrus the great made his famous proclamation to return to the land and rebuild the house of God, yet the people are saying “the *time* has not yet come, the time to rebuild the house of the Lord” (Hag. 1:4). She is to be filled with zeal as she goes about the Lord’s work, but the prophet finds in her only weak excuses that testify against the depth of her disobedience.

But how different Israel looks after the word of the Lord is proclaimed in her midst. Though in Haggai 1:2 the people are excusing their disobedient laziness, in Haggai 1:14 that disobedience is graciously reversed: “they came



and worked on the House of the Lord their God.” Through the power of the prophetic message, Haggai stirs up the people, priest, and governor to fulfill the covenantal commission they had received from the Lord to rebuild the temple of God.

How different Israel looks now! No longer is she only concerned about her own private houses, decorating them with temple-like paneling as she seeks to bask in the material comfort of the Fertile Crescent. Now her heart is fixed on the true center of her life as the people of Israel: the house of God! How marvelously Haggai reinforces this wonderful change of heart-orientation by means of chiasmic arrangement. The double mention of “your own house” and “the house of the Lord” of 1:4 is exactly reversed in 1:9.

A - 1:4—Your paneled houses...  
    B - ...this house lies in ruins  
    B' - 1:9c—...my house which lies in ruins  
A' - ...each to his own house

What was formerly central (their own houses) now lies on the periphery. The new orientation of her life and heart has been reversed to what is truly her highest end: the house of God. The prophet has rhetorically reinforced Israel's theocentric transformation by means of an intricate chiasmic arrangement.

And this transformation has taken place by one central instrumentality: “the word of the Lord of Hosts.” In 1:7 and 1:9, we have a duplicate repetition of the divine disclosure formula: “Thus says the Lord of Hosts.” It is God, by his word, who sovereignly, graciously, and persuasively moves Israel back to the center of her life. The dual declaration that Haggai's message is indeed the word of the Lord of Hosts brackets this central orientation at the heart of his prophecy. As Israel is inundated by the temporal curse-sanctions of the Mosaic era for her unfaithful disobedience (1:6, 9-11), she is being prodded to consider what ought to be the true center of her life: the temple and house of the Lord. The center of Haggai's message, both structurally and theologically, is the command we read in Haggai 1:8: “Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and

be glorified, says the Lord.”

The glory of God in the house of God—that is Israel’s past glory, partial present possession, and future eschatological hope. As Israel’s life centers anew on the glory of that house, nothing less than a complete reversal takes place. Pagan rule is reversed in the *shalom*-like Messianic kingdom of peace; covenantal disobedience is sovereignly and graciously reversed into faithful covenant obedience; Israel’s shameful self-centered focus on her own houses is marvelously reversed into a glorious God-centered focus on his house. How marvelously Haggai has reinforced his message about the post-exilic prophetic reversal!

It is this eschatological and redemptive-historical reversal that is mirrored here in Haggai 1:1-15. The prophet’s artistic and literary skills are impressive. He has even conformed his rhetorical method to the flow of redemptive history! The prophet carefully arranged his words in a reverse chiasmic fashion. He meticulously arranges his prophetic word in a reverse rhetorical pattern in order to persuade Israel—in order to draw his hearers—into the life and glory of Israel’s reversal.

And Haggai’s message of eschatological reversal comes not only to Israel, but also to us. These things happened to Israel for an example, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11). The written record of Haggai’s oracular proclamation signals to us that its message will continue to have abiding significance into the future. Indeed, Haggai desires that we too participate in the glory of the construction of the latter temple. His spiral-like reversal of Israel’s life in the former is recorded for you, that you might be caught up in the whirl-wind effects of his prophetic proclamation. The people of God who live now during the last days are part of the eschatological temple, of which Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone. As they sojourn as strangers and exiles, with the effects of sin and curse still all around them, they (with Israel) have the word of the Lord to stir them up unto his zealous service. For Jesus, their great prophet, priest, and king, abides with them to comfort, encourage, and strengthen them, even unto the end of the age.

## Review

[K:NWTS 23/3 (Dec 2008) 75-77]

Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. 632pp. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1-56563-331-5. \$44.95.

In 1938, Berthold Altaner published, *auf Deutsch*, the first volume of his famed *Patrologie*. Passing through five editions in Altaner's life-time, the German 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1958) was finally translated, *auf Englisch*, by Hilda C. Graef of Oxford in 1960. Altaner's *Patrology* was the handy one-volume 'bible' of patristics and took its well-deserved place on the shelf of every scholar pastor who wanted an overview of the church fathers from Clement of Rome (fl. 96) to John of Damascus (ca. 650-ca. 750). Providing more detail than the standard church history dictionary, Altaner, his Roman Catholic bias notwithstanding, became the standard single-volume handbook of Patristics. Even after it went out-of-print, it was eagerly sought on the secondary market as a treasure. But Altaner could not compete with his replacement—Quasten. Beginning in 1950, Johannes Quasten began to release his *Patrology*. In first one and then other densely packed volumes, Quasten exhaustively summarized and cited the biography, theology and bibliography of all the church fathers. When he died in 1987, his authorial and editorial labors were assumed by Angelo Di Berardino (assisted by seven others), so that the three English volumes he left (extending from Clement of Rome to Theodoret of Cyrus [ca. 393-ca. 466]) were extended even further to encompass the "Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature" (Nicaea [325] to Chalcedon [451]). At this writing, Quasten's *Patrology* has grown to five superb volumes bringing coverage of the Christian fathers (and noted mothers), their theology and bibliography to

John of Damascus. Each of the five volumes is a *vade mecum* with details and summaries of each writing personality in the patristic period. Particularly useful are the synopses of individual works.

But Quasten, like the bulky and over-sized works by Ferguson (*Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*) and Di Berardino (Oxford edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, 2 volumes), is expensive (\$255 for the five-volume set in paperback). It also takes up much more shelf space. McGuckin's *Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*<sup>1</sup> is too brief, though it is an excellent introductory work. Döpp and Geerlings (*Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*) is too radical, being in many places a revisionist work. Moreschini and Norelli (*Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History*, 2 volumes)<sup>2</sup> is decent, but unlike Altaner not a handy one-volume resource.

Now comes Drobner, and the long-sought replacement for Altaner has arrived. More comprehensive than McGuckin; handier than Ferguson, Quasten, Di Berardino and Moreschini; more accurate than Döpp and Geerlings: this is a gem worthy to be Altaner's noble successor. While slightly truncated in its coverage and hence not as comprehensive as Altaner, nevertheless every major Christian figure from Clement of Rome to John of Damascus is surveyed. A brief overview of each figure's life is the entrée to standard bibliographical surveys, followed by summaries of select major works. Hence, Drobner is an up-dated version of Altaner in one-volume. It is the current worthy addition to the scholar pastor's library who wants a handy overview of the fathers. More thorough and exhaustive work will require consulting Quasten. But our volume has a splendid "Supplemental Bibliography" by William Harmless (581-604) which updates (to 2004) the thorough general bibliography appearing on pages xli-lvi. Included in these bibliographies are microform sources, electronic databases (e.g., CETEDOC, TLG, PL CD-ROM, *In principio* CD-ROM, etc.) and websites. NB: the complete second German revision of this work (2004) has *not* yet been incorporated into this English translation of the

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1 Cf. our review: *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (John McGuckin). *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 19/3 (December 2004): 38-40.

2 Cf. our review: *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature* (Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli). *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 22/1 (May 2007): 47-48.

original 1994 German edition.

The explosion of patristic research over the past fifty years makes tools such as those listed above essential to the study of the church fathers. As entry level works, they orient the reader to the person, his theology and to his writings. They are welcome helpers in tracing out the history of doctrine, as well as the history of the (early) Christian church to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. We commend the publishers for making this volume available to a wider audience *auf Englisch*.

—James T. Dennison, Jr.