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CHRIST'S ATONEMENT: THE HOPE OF CREATION

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BY

MARY L. VANDEN BERG

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN



CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

3233 Burton SE • Grand Rapids, Michigan • 49546-4301

800 388-6034 fax: 616 957-8621 info@calvinseminary.edu

www.calvinseminary.edu

This dissertation entitled

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written by

MARY L. VANDEN BERG

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the requirements for the degree of

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has been accepted by the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

Ronald J. Feenstra, Ph.D.

John Bolt, Ph.D.

Arie C. Ledet, Th.D.

Leanne Van Dyk, Ph.D.

Henry De Moor, Th.D.
Vice President for Academic Affairs

AUGUST 13, 2008

Date

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ABSTRACT

The rich history of research in atonement theology has focused its energy primarily on explanations of how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ leads to the forgiveness of human sin and the restoration of a right relationship between God and humanity. While the biblical text does describe the work of Jesus Christ in these terms, it also makes clear that God's people look forward with hope to the restoration of all creation. Lacking in atonement scholarship is a clear explanation of how the work of Jesus Christ might be connected to and bring about this restoration, described in the Bible as the new heavens and new earth.

The biblical narrative portrays human sin as the despoiler not only of the relationship between God and humanity, but also of creation itself and God's intentions for creation. The sacrificial system of the Israelite cult, especially the Day of Atonement rituals, serves to cleanse Israel, thereby restoring the order and beauty of God's good creation and preserving the presence of God in their midst. Drawing especially on biblical sources, this dissertation argues that Jesus' death is an atoning sacrifice that stands in continuity with the sacrificial cult of Israel. Jesus' sacrificial death, therefore, leads not only to the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity as traditionally argued, but to the restoration of all creation. The result of this biblical study will be a model of atonement based on the metaphor of cleansing. This model enhances traditional atonement models by offering an explanation of how Jesus' death also brings about the restoration of all creation, while offering an alternative metaphor to judicial formulations of atonement theology in an effort to deal with issues regarding violence and the atonement.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

The doctrine of the atonement lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Broadly understood, atonement is concerned with the reconciling work of Jesus Christ from his incarnation through his death and resurrection. The Nicene Creed states it this way: “For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.” This fourth-century¹ formulation merely restates what the writers of the New Testament have described about the life of Jesus and what they understand concerning the purpose of his death and resurrection. The mountains of literature written on this topic throughout the centuries are some indication of the importance of atonement to the Christian faith.

As can be seen in the creedal statement, atonement is generally explained in terms of sinful human persons. In particular, it is often couched in an individualistic understanding such as “Christ died for my sins,” although how exactly this might work and what exactly this means continues to be open to debate. Human sin is portrayed by Scripture as a major problem. Sin disrupts the relationship between human beings and God and apart from a relationship with God, the life God intended

¹ Although the Nicene Creed did not reach its final form until the end of the fifth century and the controversial filioque clause was not added until more than a century after that, many of the elements of the Creed go back to the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) and the Council of Constantinople I (381 A.D.).

for humans is not possible. Thus, atonement theology has generally been concerned first and foremost with what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means for humans and their relationship to God.

The fact of the matter, however, is that human sin affects more than just the human – God relationship. In fact, the Bible draws a connection between the human spiritual condition and the physical condition of humans and creation. Not only are humans spiritually disabled by sin, they suffer physical consequences as well. The fall of humans recorded in Gen. 3 results in punishment for the first two humans. Pain will characterize their work. Childbirth will be painful for women, and men will till the ground through “painful toil” (Gen. 3:16-17).

In addition, human sin has cataclysmic physical effects on creation as a whole. Both humanity and nature suffer as a result of the fall.² While speaking of creation as “fallen” may not be accurate, Genesis 3:17 does suggest that the creation itself is cursed.³ The ground is cursed by God and now becomes an enemy of humans, producing thorns and thistles that will thwart human efforts to feed themselves. Calvin broadens this beyond thorns and thistles writing, “all the evils of the present life, which experience proves to be innumerable, have proceeded from the same fountain. The inclemency of the air, frost, thunders, unseasonable rains, drought,

² Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created In God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 136.

³ Gordon Wenham interprets the ground as cursed “because of” Adam, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15*, a translation also reflected in the New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, the English Standard Version, and the New American Standard Version. Others, such as Victor Hamilton in the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Genesis Chapters 1-17*, interpret the text “cursed is the ground in regard to” Adam. The ground, by this interpretation, is not so much cursed in itself as in the perception and for the purposes of humans. While it is true that the earth will no longer be hospitable to humans and will cause increased toil for them, the older sense of “because of” seems to have a more direct relation to the issue in the general context of Gen. 3 of Adam and Eve’s culpability. The problems they will have delivering children, providing food, and dealing with the earth are in fact because they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They are responsible for their situation and they are responsible for the curse on the ground.

hail, and whatever is disorderly in this world, are the fruits of sin.”⁴ He goes on to say “the whole order of nature was subverted by the sin of man.”⁵

God’s response to this distortion of his intention for humanity and creation is restoration by means of atonement. Thus, the result of atonement presented by the Bible is not just restoration of the relationship between God and humanity, and not even restoration of humans alone, but the restoration of all creation.⁶ The cosmic

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 177. One could ask whether the natural evil described by Calvin is really the result of the fall and subsequent curse or simply the way nature works. To put it another way, should things like floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes be considered natural evil or are they only evil because of their relationship to human persons, because they affect us negatively? For example, the movement of the earth’s tectonic plates in the distant past was formative, contributing to, for example, the building of mountains. But plate movement since the arrival of humans on the scene is associated with earthquakes and tsunamis, events with devastating consequences for human beings. Should these events be thought of as evil? There are no clear answers to this question, especially when one considers the age of the earth and evidence of these sorts of phenomena prior to the appearance of humans and, therefore, prior to the fall. Nonetheless, it seems that something more than just the human perception of creation did, in fact, change with the fall. Certain physical changes, at the very least with human beings, do appear to be post-fall phenomena. Human death, for example, seems to indicate a change in our physical nature. Human bodies are not able to live forever although Genesis indicates that prior to the fall (and even after had the first persons eaten from the tree of life) humans persons had the potential for immortality. In addition, it seems difficult to imagine a world where cancerous cells would be anything but destructive to healthy life. Cancer is, in fact, a creational good—cell mitosis—gone awry. One might also consider the idea that God created the world with the intention of providing a place for human beings to flourish. In so far as natural evil can thwart flourishing and destroy human life (sometimes because humans do foolish things like live in floodplains, but sometimes through no fault of their own), the earth seems at times to thwart human flourishing rather than enhance it. Furthermore, it seems that even prior to the fall, there was some evil in God’s good creation in the form of a deceiving serpent. This evil is sometimes associated with the fall of the angels. It is often recognized that although the original creation was good, it was not yet perfected. Colin Gunton writes, “very early in the Christian tradition, the doctrine of creation was given a teleological or eschatological orientation. Creation was not simply the making of the world out of nothing, not even that world continually upheld by the providence of God, but the making of a world destined for perfection, completeness.” (Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 45.) All of this is to say that the relationship between so-called natural evil in creation and the fall is not clear. What seems more clear is that the new heavens and earth will be characterized by a peacefulness in the creation that stands in some contrast to creation as we currently observe it.

⁵ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, 177.

⁶ It might be helpful at this point to clarify that when I speak of atonement, I am referring to an action at a particular time that has particular results or effects. The overarching idea is that just as sin has spiritual and physical effects as will be demonstrated a bit further on, atonement has not only spiritual effects – forgiveness of sins - but physical effects as well – the restoration of creation,

scope of restoration is especially clear in the writings of certain Old Testament prophets and, in the New Testament, the Apocalypse of John. Despite the general biblical presentation of a connection between atonement and the restoration of creation, however, it remains unclear how atonement is connected to the promised restoration of creation. Atonement theology has offered a variety of models to explain how the atonement brings about the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of human persons, but has failed to offer models that explain how atonement is related to the restoration of creation. Rather, discussions regarding the restoration of creation tend to focus on what the new heavens and new earth might be like, or when this restoration might be expected to happen, ending up in the locus of eschatology, instead of atonement theology. One possible solution is to adopt a model presented within the biblical text that associates atonement with cleansing and the restoration of boundaries, boundaries which symbolize God's intended order of creation.

Thesis Statement

The biblical narrative portrays human sin as the despoiler not only of the relationship between God and humanity, but also of creation itself and God's intentions for creation. The sacrificial system of the Israelite cult, especially the Day of Atonement rituals, serves to restore the order and beauty of God's good creation, allowing for life in his presence with all the blessings that entails. Contrary to some modern understandings, the New Testament presents Jesus Christ as a sacrifice. Furthermore, many New Testament authors recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of the

including the physical aspects of human beings. The question this dissertation will focus on is how atonement can be understood to bring about these physical effects.

Old Testament sacrificial system, particularly the rituals associated with the Day of Atonement. Drawing especially on biblical sources, this dissertation will argue that Jesus' sacrifice should be recognized as standing in continuity with the sacrificial cult of Israel. Jesus' sacrificial death, therefore, leads not only to the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity as traditionally argued, but also to the restoration of all creation. The result of this biblical study will be a model of atonement based on the metaphor of cleansing. This model hopes to enhance traditional atonement models by offering an explanation of how Jesus' death brings about the restoration of all creation, while offering an alternative or supplementary metaphor to judicial formulations of atonement theology in an effort to deal with issues regarding violence and the atonement.⁷

Old Testament Vision of Redemption

The Old Testament prophets offer hope to God's people through a picture of restoration that includes not just Israel's relation to God, but the restoration of creation as a whole where the physical effects of the fall are reversed. Perhaps

⁷ I want to acknowledge at this point the inherent difficulty involved in moving from Scripture to theological conclusions. While there is much discussion regarding how best to make this move, the tradition of which I am a part emphasizes the necessity of letting Scripture guide what one may or may not say theologically. Bavinck writes, "the Reformation recognizes no truth other than that which is given on the authority of God in holy Scripture." See Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, vol 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 30. One does not begin with theology and use Scripture to affirm theological topics. Rather, one allows theological topics to arise from Scripture and then attempts to elucidate those topics using a variety of tools, including Scripture itself. Bavinck explains, "dogmatics is not a kind of biblical theology that stops at the words of Scripture. Rather, according to Scripture itself, dogmatics has the right to rationally absorb its content and, guided by Scripture, to rationally process it and also to acknowledge as truth that which can be deduced from it by lawful inference" (Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 45). This method has at its center the understanding that despite the various emphases and contexts of the human authors of Scripture, God is the primary author. As a result, it is warranted to use a variety of biblical texts to help make sense of a theological topic that might lack sufficient clarity if only one text or author is addressed.

nowhere is this picture of redemption more clear than in the book of Isaiah. At least twice Isaiah gives us a glimpse of a restoration project of cosmic proportions, a restoration that is described as a new heavens and new earth.⁸

There are those, however, who think that Isaiah's depiction of the new heavens and earth is not a vision of cosmic restoration. For example, John D. W. Watts suggests that Isaiah 65 is not an eschatological picture, but a portrayal of God's immediate plans for Israel. Specifically he thinks this restoration project has to do with the new possibility that has been made available to Israel through Cyrus and his successors. Cyrus has initiated a new age and this new age will allow Israel to be rebuilt.⁹ He writes, "Jerusalem is being rebuilt and made ready for the pilgrims who come throughout the following centuries."¹⁰ John Scullion concurs that these verses are not dealing with the distant future, but have to do with the restoration of Jerusalem for the exiles who have returned from Babylon.¹¹

John De Gruchy presents a more comprehensive interpretation of this passage. He offers three alternative ways to interpret the hope of redemption given to Israel by Isaiah. First, as with Watts and Scullion, he suggests that this passage reflects "the re-establishment of the Davidic kingdom, the fulfillment of messianic hope, which is

⁸ See Is. 65:17-25 and Is. 66:22.

⁹ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary, 25 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 353.

¹⁰ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 354.

¹¹ John Scullion, *Isaiah 40-66*, Old Testament Message, 12 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982), 202.

achieved through political action.”¹² Second, hope is conceived “as an apocalyptic event which presupposes the cataclysmic destruction of the old order and the establishment of a millennial age of justice and peace through the unaided action of God.”¹³ Third, and the view he thinks most accurately reflects the hope of this passage, hope is “neither narrowly political nor was it apocalyptic, though both elements are present.”¹⁴ It includes “a vision of a new Jerusalem, and it assumes that God will put the past behind and create a new heaven and earth.”¹⁵ DeGruchy recognizes that this text is “an “extravagant promise” that heralds “the overcoming of everything that has gone wrong in creation, touching every aspect and phase of life and remaking them whole, and overcoming hostility at every level—not just in Israel, or the human community, but throughout creation.”¹⁶

Commentator John Oswalt also affirms the cosmic scope of redemption in the hope presented by Isaiah. But Oswalt specifically recognizes that restoration is needed because of the disastrous effects of sin—not just the sin of Israel that led to captivity, but all sin. He writes, “All the ways in which sin has stamped this world with its own deformed image will be wiped away, not only from reality but even from memory (cf. Rev. 21:4).”¹⁷

¹² John W. De Gruchy. “A New Heaven and A New Earth: An Exposition of Isaiah 65:17-25.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 105 (Nov. 1999): 68.

¹³ De Gruchy, 68.

¹⁴ De Gruchy, 67.

¹⁵ De Gruchy, 67.

¹⁶ De Gruchy, 71.

¹⁷ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 656-7.

How specifically has sin marred this world? Verses 20-23 provide a partial answer. Humans die prematurely, they do not enjoy the fruits of their labor, and they live with the results of the curse on creation which makes all their work futile. The author of Isaiah tells us that these physical effects of the fall will no longer exist in the new heavens and new earth. In addition, according to Joseph Blenkinsopp, the fact that God's elect will remain in possession of their houses and vineyards "represents the reversal of a common curse attached to covenant formulations and, indirectly, to international treaties."¹⁸ Specifically, he refers to the covenant curse as found in Deuteronomy 28:30 which reads, "You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit."¹⁹

Isaiah's vision of a new heavens and earth stands in radical opposition to these effects of sin in the world. Putting Isaiah's vision into his own words Oswalt states, "Instead of tears of frustration and futility, there will be smiles of fulfillment and satisfaction, and songs of praise to God."²⁰ Even childbirth will no longer be painful (Is. 66:7). Rather than hours of painful labor, before the pains of childbirth even come, a child will come into the world. "What," declares Oswalt, "could speak more graphically of an entirely new world?"²¹

¹⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, 19b (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 289.

¹⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are from the NIV.

²⁰ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 659.

²¹ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 674.

In addition to the physical effects of sin on human persons, the effects of sin on nature will also be reversed. Oswalt summarizes, "The effects of the Fall have reached to the world of nature, making nature a dangerous place for the man and woman who were to have been nature's beneficent sovereigns."²² In the new heavens and new earth the wolf and the lamb and the lion will dwell together in peace, and the snake will no longer pose a threat. According to Oswalt the wolf, the lion, and the snake "symbolize all the devouring, ravaging, poisonous aspects of our world, both inside and outside human nature."²³ In the new heavens and earth, nature will itself be peaceful and the danger posed to humans by nature will be eliminated. George A. F. Knight writes "the 'world' too will have been redeemed, and not merely the souls of the people."²⁴

The restoration of creation as a whole as depicted by Isaiah in the new heavens and new earth is the culmination of God's project of redemption. In both the immediate events affecting the nation of Israel and in the future events involving all of creation, redemption involves not merely spiritual renewal but physical renewal of some sort. For the author of Isaiah, redemption is not limited to the individual or the nation, but has consequences for all of creation.

²² Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 662.

²³ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 662.

²⁴ George A. F. Knight, *Isaiah 56-66: The New Israel*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 100.

New Testament Vision of Redemption

In the New Testament, the emphasis on the spiritual aspects of redemption, particularly the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation of God and humanity, largely overshadow the reversal of the physical effects of sin and the hope for the restoration of creation. The theme of the restoration of creation, however, is not completely absent. At least two specific texts are worth mentioning: Roman 8:19-21 and Revelation 21.

There has been some controversy surrounding the referent of “creation” in Romans 8:19-21. Paul says here that “creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (v.19). Furthermore, “creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (v.21). Some, like Moyer Hubbard, understand the “creation” of which Paul speaks not cosmically, but as a reality that takes place in us.²⁵ Although not specifically addressing the issue of Rom. 8:19-21, Hubbard asserts that the overall thrust of new creation language in Pauline literature points toward an inner renewal of humans rather than a cosmic renewal.²⁶

G. W. Lampe also reflects this anthropocentric line of thinking where the new creation focuses primarily on humanity.²⁷ In Lampe’s understanding, creation does not experience the fall and suffers from the curse only insofar as it suffers the ill

²⁵ Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 236.

²⁶ Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought*, 236.

²⁷ G. W. Lampe, “The New Testament Doctrine of κτίσις,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (1964): 454-5.

effects of human sin.²⁸ Creation suffers at the hands of humans and becomes a curse for humans but, Lampe seems to imply, is not itself directly cursed. While Lampe is correct in thinking that the suffering of creation is a consequence of human sin, to suggest that the creation is cursed only insofar as it becomes a curse for human labor is to ignore the language of the text of Gen. 3. The curse on creation does in fact negatively impact human labor, but it also negatively impacts creation itself. Furthermore, Lampe suggests the groaning of creation that Paul writes about in Rom. 8:19-21 is merely a personifying of the frustration of creation's intended purpose due to sinful human mismanagement of creation.²⁹ Rather than exercising proper dominion as God had instructed, humans abuse creation and therefore, creation groans as it awaits renewal. Renewal of creation will come when redeemed humans begin to manage it properly. Thus, physical restoration will not so much be the result of God's work, but the work of humans.

Against these truncated meanings of "new creation," John Bolt notes that those who, like Hubbard and Lampe, want to limit the meaning of "creation" from a cosmic understanding to what he calls an anthropological-soteriological interpretation end up subordinating the redemption of creation to human redemption thus losing the cosmic sense of God's project of redemption.³⁰ But this is not what Paul has in mind. Bolt writes, "Paul is making decidedly cosmic, rather than anthropological-

²⁸ Lampe, "The New Testament," 452.

²⁹ Lampe, "The New Testament," 457.

³⁰ John Bolt, "The Relation Between Creation and Redemption in Romans 8:18-27," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30, no. 1 (1995): 35.

soteriological claims, when he speaks about creation's waiting for redemption."³¹ Specifically, "Paul in Romans 8:18-27 is making distinct and definite *cosmological* assertions about creation," according to Bolt, "rather than poetic or symbolic statements universalizing his experience of personal salvation."³²

C. E. B. Cranfield, commenting on the meaning of κτίσις (creation) in this text, supports Bolt's contention that Paul has something cosmic in mind here. "With poetic boldness and with a penetrating prophetic insight," writes Cranfield, "Paul sees the whole splendid theatre of the universe together with all sub-human life within it as eagerly awaiting the time when the sons of God will be made manifest in their true glory."³³ John G. Gibbs also affirms that κτίσις as used in this text refers to all of creation. He writes, "The meaning of the term depends on the context, and in this instance 8:19 indicates that all of creation is being designated and that no dualism between nature and existence is intended."³⁴ N. T. Wright affirms the cosmic nature of this text as well. Wright recognizes that Paul's teachings about salvation are generally anthropocentric. But he notes that in these verses Paul displays his recognition of God's covenant faithfulness to all of creation. "Whereas, up until now, it might have been possible to think that Paul was simply talking about God's

³¹ Bolt, "The Relation Between Creation," 35.

³² Bolt, "The Relation Between Creation," 36.

³³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 410.

³⁴ John G. Gibbs, *Création and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 40.

salvation in relation to human beings,” notes Wright, “from here on it is clear that the entire cosmos is in view.”³⁵

The notion of cosmic restoration is not found only in Paul however. 2 Peter 3:11-13 speaks of the anticipation of a new heavens and new earth. Although this text has led to some controversy over what might be meant by new, it is clear that God’s people are looking forward to more than spiritual restoration.³⁶ John’s Apocalypse also foresees a time when creation will be restored. In Revelation 21, John has a vision of the new heavens and new earth descending. John writes, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea” (Rev. 21:1). G. E. Ladd notes that in the Bible, salvation does not consist in a “flight of the soul from the sphere of the transitory and ephemeral to the realm of eternal reality.”³⁷ Rather, “throughout the entire Bible, the ultimate destiny of God’s people is an earthly destiny.”³⁸ This is exactly what John is depicting.

³⁵ N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, ed. Leander E. Keck, William L. Lane, and Marion L. Soards (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 596.

³⁶ The controversy in 2 Peter 3 has especially to do with the language of destruction and fire in verses 11 and 12. The question is, will the old earth be completely destroyed and God will start over from scratch, as it were? Or, as indicated elsewhere in scripture, are we to expect a restoration of creation, not a completely new creation? Reformed theology, the tradition to which I belong, has tended to favor the latter idea rather than the former. In other words, the new creation will be a restoration of God’s original intentions rather than annihilation of the old and starting again. For a good summary of this line of thinking as well as references to opposing ideas, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 279-81.

³⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 275.

³⁸ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 275.

When one considers John's Jewish background, the concept of a renewed creation, a new heavens and new earth, should not be seen as something out of step with the general picture of the future portrayed by the prophets, perhaps especially Isaiah. G. K. Beale notes that Revelation contains more Old Testament quotations than any other New Testament book³⁹ and David Mathewson takes special note of the influence of Ezekiel and Isaiah on Revelation 21:1-5.⁴⁰ While the language of Revelation is highly figurative throughout, and this text is no exception, one must not ignore the reality to which the figures point – the reality of a new cosmos, a reality already anticipated in the Old Testament. G. K. Beale writes “it is likely that the meaning of the figurative portrayal is to connote a radically changed cosmos, involving not merely ethical renovation but transformation of the fundamental cosmic structure (including physical elements).”⁴¹ John Stott concurs noting “the vision given to John is not a vision of fantasy but a vision of reality. It is, in fact, the ultimate reality.”⁴² He goes on, “The groaning creation, as we see it all around us, and as we share in its groans, is going to be redeemed and restored, and God will rule over it.”⁴³

³⁹ G. K. Beale, “Revelation,” in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars, SSF*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 318.

⁴⁰ David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 28ff.

⁴¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1040.

⁴² John Stott, “Biblical Meditation: The Restoration of Creation,” in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World: Theology From an Evangelical Point of View*, eds. Mark A. Noll and David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 174.

⁴³ Stott, “Biblical Meditation,” 174.

To summarize, although the New Testament pays special attention to the spiritual aspects of restoration, images of physical restoration are also presented, especially in Rom. 8:19-21 and Rev. 21. Creation has suffered as the result of human sin. These texts, like the Old Testament texts discussed earlier, present the scope of God's redeeming work as a project of cosmic proportions. Not only will human relationships be restored, the restoration of the physical effects of sin on humans and the sub-human creation is also promised.

Atonement and the Restoration of Creation

As demonstrated above, there is a line of thinking in atonement scholarship that tends to narrow the understanding of new creation to individual salvation thereby limiting the effects of atonement to human persons. This tendency toward spiritualizing and individualizing the effects of Christ's work has crept into the church as well. Anthony Hoekema, for example, writes, "One gets the impression from certain hymns that glorified believers will spend eternity in some ethereal heaven somewhere off in space, far away from earth."⁴⁴ Although the tendency to individualize and spiritualize the effects of Christ's work seems to be an ever-present problem, the historic Christian tradition has been cognizant of the broader aspect of Christ's redemptive work. As early as the second century A.D., Irenaeus of Lyon argued against the Gnostics that Christ's work was for the purpose of restoring creation. Anselm also includes creational themes in his atonement theology. Reformed theology too has taken seriously the biblical notion of the restoration of all

⁴⁴ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 274.

creation, and strains of the physical aspect of redemption can also be found in more recent traditions such as the Pentecostal movement.

Although Gnosticism was by no means a uniform way of thinking, at least one characteristic shared by those groups who are identified as Gnostic is the repudiation of the physical world.⁴⁵ The cosmic dualism posited by Gnostic thinking regarded the spiritual as good and the physical as evil. The ultimate goal for the Gnostic, was to be free of the physical nature and advance to purely a spiritual state.⁴⁶ In his important work *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus argues against the dualistic ideas of Gnosticism.

In book 5, Irenaeus focuses his argument on the work of Jesus Christ. Here, having already argued that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in his earlier books, he points especially to the human nature of Jesus. Already in the preface he writes that Jesus “became what we are,” that is, flesh. Furthermore, Irenaeus argues that our bodies which are nourished by Christ’s own body in the Eucharist, “shall rise at the appointed time,”⁴⁷ an obvious repudiation of the Gnostics who believe the body will be permanently discarded at death. For Irenaeus, the renewal of flesh, the material aspect of humanity, especially evidenced in the resurrection of the body, is part and parcel of Christ’s work of redemption.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 290.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 290-1.

⁴⁷ Irenaeus of Lyon. “Against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), V.II.3, 528.

⁴⁸ Irenaeus. “Against Heresies,” V.VI.1, 531-2.

Irenaeus uses Scripture, especially the texts involving Jesus healing physical disease and raising the dead, to support his insistence on the physical aspect of redemption.⁴⁹ Toward the end of book 5, Irenaeus broadens this physical aspect of redemption from humans to creation as a whole. Creation will be restored as the inheritance of the righteous. This is fitting, according to Irenaeus, because through the restoration of creation to its primeval form the promise to Abraham is fulfilled.⁵⁰ “If, then, God promised him the inheritance of the land, yet he did not receive it during all the time of his sojourn there, it must be, that together with his seed, that is, those who fear God and believe in Him, he shall receive it at the resurrection of the just.”⁵¹ In addition, picking up themes from prophecies in Isaiah and Ezekiel, he includes a change in animals and increased fertility of the earth in his understanding of the restored creation.⁵² These prophecies are not allegories of a celestial spiritual kingdom, according to Irenaeus, but refer to the renovated earth after the reign of the antichrist.⁵³

Irenaeus thinks that to allegorize the depictions of the new heaven and earth in the Old Testament prophecies and in Revelation 21-22 raises the question of whether the resurrection of humans ought also to be allegorized.⁵⁴ The one concept follows from the other. If humans are truly, not allegorically, physically raised by

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XIII.1-XVI.3, 539-44.

⁵⁰ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XXXII.1, 561.

⁵¹ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XXXII.2, 561.

⁵² Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XXXIII.3, 562-3.

⁵³ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XXXV.1, 565.

⁵⁴ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XXXV.2, 565-6.

God from the dead as the Bible teaches, then the biblical depictions of a restored creation are also not allegories.⁵⁵ Supported by a variety of biblical texts, Irenaeus clearly believes that the future of humans lies not in a spiritual existence, but in the physical reality of resurrected bodies in a restored creation. He writes, “but when this [present] fashion [of things] passes away, and man has been renewed, and flourishes in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, [then] there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain [continually] always holding fresh converse with God.”⁵⁶ Thus, even very early in church history a fairly robust conception of a restored earth as a result of Christ’s work was not unknown.

Among the Scholastics, few atonement schemes are better known than that of Anselm of Canterbury. In his famous work *Why God Became Man*, Anselm dialogs with his partner Boso to address an overarching question: Boso asks, “Tell me what necessity and reason led God, although he is almighty, to take upon him the lowliness and weakness of human nature in order to renew it.”⁵⁷ In part of his effort to answer this question, Anselm draws an analogy between the relationships of human beings within the feudal system, and the relationships of human beings with God. According to Anselm, when a creature wills what it ought to will, “it honors God – not because it bestows something on him, but because it willingly submits itself to God’s will and direction, and keeps its own place in the universe of things, and maintains the beauty

⁵⁵ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XXXVI.1, 566.

⁵⁶ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.XXXVI.1, 567.

⁵⁷ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” in *A Scholastic Miscellany*, ed. E. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 102.

of that same universe, as far as in it lies.”⁵⁸ When a creature does not will what it ought, “it dishonors God” and “disturbs the beauty of the universe.”⁵⁹ Obedience to God, therefore, in some way maintains the order of creation, a theme common in the Old Testament legal texts. If God should choose not to restore the order that humans had disrupted, the beauty and order of the universe would remain corrupted, and God would seem to be failing in his governance of the universe.⁶⁰

In order to understand what Anselm is getting at here, one needs to have a basic familiarity with the feudal metaphor he is working with. Colin Gunton explains what is at stake in this system. “It was the duty of the feudal ruler to maintain the order of rights and obligations without which society would collapse. Anselm’s God is understood to operate *analogously* for the universe as a whole: as the upholder of universal justice.”⁶¹ In other words, it is not simply the status of the individual that is at stake in Christ’s work. The order and beauty of the whole cosmos is at stake. Robert Sherman also stresses this point. Commenting on Anselm’s concern for the order of creation he writes, “Humanity’s sin threatens creation itself and God’s purposes for that creation; as such, this collective sin cannot be simply ignored or arbitrarily excused.”⁶² In other words, in answering Boso’s question about why God became human, why humans needed the work of Jesus Christ, Anselm includes the

⁵⁸ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” 124.

⁵⁹ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” 124.

⁶⁰ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” 124.

⁶¹ Gunton, Colin E., *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 89.

⁶² Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 190.

idea that sin corrupts the beauty and order of God's creation as a whole, not just his creation of humans. The work of Jesus Christ restores the beauty and order of creation, including even the replacing of the number of fallen angels.⁶³ Thus, Anselm affirms a view of the atonement that is broader than an individual's status before God and includes a restoration of creation.

The Reformed tradition has been especially helpful in recognizing the cosmic nature of Christ's work. Jan Veenhof, in his explanation of the relationship between nature and grace in Bavinck's theology, writes, "The whole world, then, has been given over to corruption through sin, but through grace it is also being saved in its entirety from sin."⁶⁴ Reformed eschatology describes the future not as merely life in heaven with God, but as life in a new heavens and earth. In discussing the final state of believers, Louis Berkhof writes, "The final state of believers will be preceded by the passing of the present world and the appearance of a new creation," noting that this "new" creation is not entirely new but rather a restored creation.⁶⁵ Anthony Hoekema also affirms the breadth of the effects of Christ's work. Sounding a bit like Irenaeus in his rebuttal of those who suggest that the hope of humanity lies in a spiritual afterlife, Hoekema asserts "the Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God's praise in glorified, resurrected bodies."⁶⁶

⁶³ Anselm of Canterbury. "Why God Became Man," 125-6.

⁶⁴ Jan Veenhof, "Nature and Grace in Bavinck," trans. by A. M. Wolters, *Pro Rege* 34, no. 4 (June 2006): 18.

⁶⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 736-7.

⁶⁶ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 274.

Christ's atoning work makes possible not just individual salvation, but the restoration of all of creation. His death had cosmic consequences.

Despite the recognition in Reformed theology that the future envisioned by the prophets and John includes the physical restoration of the cosmos, their atonement theology has largely limited the explanations of atonement to human persons. The focus has been almost exclusively on how Christ's work changes the status of the individual before God. For example, Herman Bavinck at one point in his volume dealing with salvation seems to recognize the world-wide scope of the effects of atonement. He writes, "Intensively the work of Christ is of infinite value but also extensively it encompasses the whole world."⁶⁷ He goes on, "The world, created through the Son, is also intended for the Son as its heir."⁶⁸ Although this sounds cosmic in scope, and perhaps it is, the explanation that follows has exclusively to do with arguments regarding the universal salvation of human persons and not with creation. Thus, Bavinck seems to be taking "world" to mean people.⁶⁹ Although Bavinck cannot be said to offer the sum total of all Reformed theology, a quick glance at various Reformed confessions including the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort suggest that Bavinck's interest in explaining how Christ's work restores human persons with

⁶⁷Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 455.

⁶⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 455.

⁶⁹ I admit there is ambiguity in Bavinck here. He seems initially to be referring to the world understood as the physical cosmos. But because his argument turns very quickly to the question of universal salvation of human persons, one is left wondering what he had in mind in his opening paragraphs where he seemed to be talking about the cosmos. At any rate, regardless of what he had in mind here, his explanation of atonement is entirely directed toward its effects on humans and the scope of humanity that benefit from those effects.

little if any attention given to how his work restores creation as a whole typifies Reformed thought in general. In other words, despite a robust, physical eschatology, Reformed thought lacks a detailed explanation of the connection between atonement and the restoration of all creation.

The Pentecostal tradition also has a lively understanding of the atonement providing not only for the salvation of souls, but also for physical restoration. The emphasis in this tradition is especially on seeing restoration in terms of healing disease, but it also includes the idea of the restoration of creation. In agreement with much of the historic Christian tradition, the Pentecostal tradition believes human suffering is the result of the fall.⁷⁰ According to Vernon L. Purdy, restoration of fellowship with God gives not just spiritual healing, but physical healing as well.⁷¹ Although this tradition is more individualistic in understanding atonement and healing, they do affirm the physical effects of the atonement on creation, at least the human part of creation. William Menzies and Stanley Horton specifically attribute healing to Christ's sacrifice. They write, "Through the atonement wrought by Christ at Calvary not only was the curse of sin broken, but our deliverance from sickness was also cared for."⁷² Atonement is understood as cleansing from sin or redemption from sin, and eschatological hope includes the hope of a physical, resurrected, restored body. But why cleansing or redemption results in healing and restoration is

⁷⁰ Vernon L. Purdy, "Divine Healing," in *Systematic Theology*, ed. Stanley M. Horton. (Springfield: Logion Press, 1994), 492.

⁷¹ Purdy, "Divine Healing," 494.

⁷² William W. Menzies, and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*. (Springfield: Logion Press, 1993), 195-6.

never explained in detail. In other words, the question of how atonement brings about healing remains unanswered.

This brief overview of atonement theology is intended to demonstrate two things. First, the Christian tradition has long recognized physical restoration as part of eschatological hope, a hope that is linked to the work of Christ. Second, there are few if any explanations of how Christ's work might be connected to the restoration of creation. Rather, the tradition focuses explanations on the effects of Christ's work for human persons. In summary, atonement theology, despite its historic acceptance of the broad physical results of Christ's work, continues to be devoid of an explanation of how Christ's work initiates the restoration of all creation.

Present Status of the Problem

As already suggested, modern atonement scholarship has focused primarily on understanding Christ's death with regard to human persons, especially individual human persons. Central to this scholarship has been debate regarding exactly how Christ's work accomplishes human redemption. Numerous theories have been developed throughout the history of the Christian church. In 1931 Gustaf Aulén, in his book *Christus Victor*, offered a historical survey of what he considered were the three main theories of atonement that have had a substantial impact on the broad Christian tradition. What followed was a renewed discussion of the multiplicity of atonement images available to paint the broadest picture of Christ's work on the cross.

Aulén suggested three families of atonement models: the classic model, the satisfaction model, and the subjective model. Although these categories may seem a bit artificial and any given explanation of atonement may not fit neatly into one or the other, they nonetheless have offered Aulén's successors a useful typology from which to work. The so-called subjective model, generally attributed to Abelard emphasizes Christ as an example of God's love displayed for humans which then arouses love in humans for God, a love that sets them free from sin.⁷³ Aulén suggests that the subjective theory "explains the Atonement as consisting essentially in a change taking place in men rather than a changed attitude on the part of God."⁷⁴ Because of this, he understands the subjective theory as standing in contrast and opposed to both the classic idea of atonement and the satisfaction or Anselmian view.⁷⁵ Whether the subjective model is actually opposed to his other two suggested models is an interesting question. What is clear in Aulén's presentation of the subjective model is that the effects of the atonement focus narrowly on the individual. There is no sense of the restoration of creation present in this scheme.

The Latin or satisfaction model which Aulén associates with Anselm also tends to focus on the individual. Aulén explains that the satisfaction model is clearly more objective than the Abelardian model. In the satisfaction model, according to Aulén, "God is the object of Christ's atoning work, and is reconciled [to humans]

⁷³ Peter Abelard, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans (An Excerpt From the Second Book)," in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 283-4.

⁷⁴ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: MacMillan, 1969), 2.

⁷⁵ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 96.

through the satisfaction made to His justice.”⁷⁶ Although Anselm explained atonement as having restorative effects on creation as outlined above, the satisfaction model as presented by Aulén overlooks that aspect of Anselm’s work. By focusing on a person’s judicial standing before God, the satisfaction model emphasizes the restoration of the God-human relationship but neglects the broader picture of physical or even creational restoration.

Aulén’s preferred model is what he calls the classic model of the atonement, a model he traces back to Irenaeus.⁷⁷ He claims that this view has been historically neglected and that atonement theology suffers as a result of this neglect.⁷⁸ According to Aulén, the central theme of the classic model of atonement is “the idea of Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ—Christus Victor—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.”⁷⁹ This model seems to have promise for a more cosmic understanding of the work of Christ. Aulén describes this model as a drama, in fact, a “cosmic drama, and the victory over the hostile powers brings to pass a new relation, a relation of reconciliation, between God and the world.”⁸⁰ Nonetheless, as Aulén goes on to explain this model, he seems to have in mind not “world” in the sense of the entirety of creation, but “world” in the

⁷⁶ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 2.

⁷⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 16.

⁷⁸ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4.

⁷⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4.

⁸⁰ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 5.

sense of the totality of human beings.⁸¹ Thus, although Christ's victory over the devil creates a new situation, the situation is primarily described in terms of humanity's relationship with God and not in terms of new creation.

More recently, concerns about violence have shaped atonement discussions. The violent nature of the atonement, it is argued, leads to violence, especially against the weakest members of society. As a result, some feminist theologians like Rebecca Parker and Joanne Carlson-Brown have argued that the church is a responsible agent, perhaps even *the* responsible agent, in the oppression and abuse of women and in affirming societal norms that allow this oppression and abuse.⁸² The theology of atonement is especially to blame for the victimization of women with its glorification of innocent suffering.⁸³

Carlson-Brown and Parker analyze each of the three main views of the atonement identified by Aulén. None of the views eliminates the problem of innocent suffering and the consequences of that suffering for victims, particularly women. For Parker and Carlson-Brown, the only solution is to get rid of the notion of atonement altogether. They write, "If Christianity is to be liberating for the oppressed, it must itself be liberated from this theology. We must do away with the atonement, this idea of a blood sin upon the whole human race which can be washed away only by the blood of the lamb. This bloodthirsty God is the God of the patriarchy who at the

⁸¹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 42, 59, 72-3, for example. Aulén is not clear about what he means by world. It is possible to construe the victory motif cosmically but Aulén's explanation does not offer any details for how Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil bring about cosmic restoration.

⁸² Joanne Carlson-Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), 2.

⁸³ Carlson-Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," 3.

moment controls the whole Judeo-Christian tradition.”⁸⁴ In the end, human beings are the agents of restoration for Carlson-Brown and Parker, if there is to be any restoration at all.

Aside from the fact that Carlson-Brown and Parker are not working with any notion of atonement at all, it also seems that their conception of restoration is focused on humans. In particular, the driving force behind their project seems to be a desire to restore proper relationships between human beings, relationships where humans treat each other with respect and dignity, relationships where each person is encouraged to flourish but not at the expense of someone else. These are valid concerns and well worth considering. But the biblical project of restoration includes human relationships and so much more. Thus, even if one could accept their radical re-visioning of atonement, it falls far short of the biblical vision of a new heavens and earth where even carnivorous animals live in harmony with each other.

J. Denny Weaver is also concerned about the violent nature of traditional atonement theologies. Rather than disposing of atonement theology however, Weaver proposes what he calls a “narrative Christus Victor” model of the atonement based on an altered version of the traditional Christus Victor model brought to the foreground by Aulén. Weaver suggests that his model offers one way to understand Christ’s work as non-violent.

Weaver rejects the violent death of Christ as a necessary part of God’s plan for the salvation of sinful humanity. He rejects the notion that Christ’s purpose in

⁸⁴ Carlson-Brown and Parker, “For God So Loved the World?,” 26.

coming to earth was to die.⁸⁵ Rather, Christ's coming to earth was a radical breaking into history of the reign of God. It was the reign of God made visible. Drawing especially from the book of Revelation, Weaver writes that Christ's entrance into history marked the beginning of the ultimate battle of good and evil. The forces of evil gathered themselves together to fight the rule of God in Christ.⁸⁶ These forces are not some spiritual, other-worldly entities. In fact, this distinction is one way that Weaver sets himself apart from traditional Christus Victor models such as Aulen's. The forces of evil as Weaver understands them are the "spiritual dimension of material structures,"⁸⁷ the evil powers of the world. It is these powers that reject the rule of God, fight against that rule, and kill Jesus.⁸⁸

Much of Weaver's argument centers on the book of Revelation. The slain lamb of Revelation is the "non-violent conqueror" in both the historic human realm and the cosmic realm.⁸⁹ He gives possible historical interpretations to a variety of the symbols in Revelation but ultimately concludes that these particular interpretations are not integral to understanding the basic message.⁹⁰ The message of Revelation boils down to the victory over evil by Christ and the beginning of his reign on earth. This victory culminates in chapter 21 with the vision of the new heavens, new earth, and a new Jerusalem. Weaver writes, "chapter 21 presents the restoration of all

⁸⁵ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 74.

⁸⁶ Weaver, *The Non-violent Atonement*, 44.

⁸⁷ Weaver, *The Non-violent Atonement*, 210.

⁸⁸ Weaver, *The Non-violent Atonement*, 73.

⁸⁹ Weaver, *The Non-violent Atonement*, 22.

⁹⁰ Weaver, *The Non-violent Atonement*, 27.

things—an ultimate overcoming of evil—and a new Jerusalem, emphasizing the restoration of what was destroyed.”⁹¹

Weaver’s recognition of the cosmic dimension of restoration brought about by the atonement is helpful. He moves well beyond the limited individualistic understandings prevalent in other atonement models. He also identifies the effect of the atonement on structures in this world and the culmination of that effect in the restoration of all things. What remains unclear in his presentation, however, is exactly how Christ’s victory over Satan and evil brings about the restoration of everything, especially the creation. What is it about the destruction of evil that brings about or allows for the possibility of the new heavens and new earth? This question remains unanswered.

In contrast to Weaver’s non-violent approach, Hans Boersma has suggested that violence should not always be understood as negative. Just war theories, for example, “stem from the assumption that sometimes violence is not only unavoidable but also positively required.”⁹² In fact, Boersma says that God’s hospitality toward humans, a hospitality that involves redemption, “requires violence, just as his love necessitates wrath.”⁹³

Boersma states that his book “is a discussion of how human hospitality is underwritten by God’s hospitality in Jesus Christ.”⁹⁴ He is critical of atonement

⁹¹ Weaver, *The Non-violent Atonement*, 31.

⁹² Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 44.

⁹³ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 49.

⁹⁴ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 27.

schemes that press metaphors too far. For example, the penal understanding of the cross as such may not be an affront to the idea of hospitality, but rather the “juridicizing, individualizing, and de-historicizing the cross” is responsible for “an imbalanced approach that legitimizes unnecessary violence.”⁹⁵ The root metaphor Boersma chooses as one that encompasses all other atonement models is recapitulation.⁹⁶ In recapitulation, Christ becomes humanity’s representative who “takes the place of humanity.”⁹⁷

Boersma’s work offers a helpful way to understand the positive angle of violence and the relationship between the violence of the cross and God’s hospitality toward humanity. In his discussion of Paul, he emphasizes the national or communal understanding of the atonement, pointing out that the covenant arrangement was not with an individual but with an entire nation.⁹⁸ This emphasis on the corporate nature of Christ’s work is both helpful and important for moving away from an individualistic understanding of Christianity. Nonetheless, Boersma’s central concern remains the effect of Christ’s work on human persons. The connection between Christ’s work and the restoration of creation receives no more than a passing comment. How atonement results in the restoration of creation is not addressed.

Other theologians seem less concerned with the moral dilemma of a violent atonement and focus their energy on offering a clear account of how the biblical text

⁹⁵ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 158.

⁹⁶ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 112.

⁹⁷ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 122.

⁹⁸ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 176.

and the Christian tradition help explain Christ's work.⁹⁹ Deriving his ideas from careful exegesis, John Stott emphasizes that Christ's death "was central to his mission."¹⁰⁰ His death wasn't merely a consequence of his life, as Weaver would suggest. Jesus' passion predictions recorded in the Gospels, when taken at face value, suggest his death was the plan.¹⁰¹ Stott focuses his work almost entirely on the restoration of the relationship between God and human beings, with substitution as the foundation for this restoration.¹⁰² While his solid biblical foundation and his detailed explanation of Christ as substitute add light to the important idea of substitutionary atonement, he gives no more than passing mention to the biblical reality of the renewal of creation via atonement. Furthermore, why we should expect the renewal of creation as a result of atonement is not explained. The results of atonement remain narrowly focused on humans.

Like Stott, Robert Sherman relies on his commitment to the "basic witness of the Bible and the church's tradition."¹⁰³ In an effort to be faithful to the traditional Christian understanding of God as three persons in one Divine being, Sherman seeks to explain how each person of the Trinity is present in the work of atonement. He writes "One can understand adequately neither Christ's multifaceted reconciliation of a complex humanity to God nor that reconciliation's fundamental unity as God's

⁹⁹ In addition to the two representative theologians treated below, see also such works as Morna Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), and Leon Morris, *Glory in the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

¹⁰⁰ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 17.

¹⁰¹ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 28.

¹⁰² Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 168.

¹⁰³ Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 5.

gracious act apart from the Trinity.”¹⁰⁴ Unlike Stott, Sherman identifies Christ’s victory over the powers of evil with the inbreaking of the kingdom.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the victory of Christ combined with the cleansing of human sin and guilt allows the new creation to “take root and grow.”¹⁰⁶ Although Sherman’s insights are helpful for moving the discussion concerning the atonement’s effect on creation forward, it still lacks a clear explanation of how the sacrificial system instituted by God for Israel and fulfilled in Christ’s ultimate sacrifice serves to restore creation.

Still other theologians focus their energy on a myriad of other aspects of atonement theology. Richard Swinburne, for example, explores the nature of human responsibility with regard to atonement or reparation.¹⁰⁷ Colin Gunton focuses on how to understand the atonement in the face of criticism from the rationalistic tradition.¹⁰⁸ Vincent Brümmer argues for using language that makes sense to modern ears rather than the more commonly used metaphors for atonement which are rooted in the feudal concept of honor of the twelfth century.¹⁰⁹

Two prominent theologians who at some level bring together the work of Christ and the future of creation are Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann. Pannenberg recognizes that the future includes creation as a whole in fellowship with

¹⁰⁴ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 118.

¹⁰⁶ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 250.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁸ Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

¹⁰⁹ Vincent Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

God.¹¹⁰ However, when Pannenberg turns to the work of Jesus Christ his explanation deals almost exclusively with human persons. Furthermore, when he discusses the consummation of creation, he links it to the ongoing work of the Spirit in the world, rather than to atonement.¹¹¹ While Pannenberg doesn't deny that the death and resurrection of Jesus set in motion the possibility for the consummation of creation through the Spirit, he does not explain how, specifically, the atonement brings about this possibility.

Jürgen Moltmann also affirms hope for some sort of restored future for the physical world. Moltmann recognizes that the physical creation suffers as a result of the fall of human persons.¹¹² He strongly argues that eschatological hope is not merely concerned with the restoration of human persons but also with the restoration of all creation. "It [hope] sees in the resurrection of Christ not the eternity of heaven, but the future of the very earth on which his cross stands."¹¹³ Nonetheless, Moltmann's work connects this hope of restoration almost exclusively to the resurrection of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁴ While this is certainly an aspect of restoration that should not be overlooked, his explanation jumps to the resurrection, neglecting an explanation of the role of Christ's sacrificial death in bringing about the restoration of creation.

¹¹⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 136.

¹¹¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1-20.

¹¹² Jürgen Moltmann, *God In Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 68.

¹¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 21.

¹¹⁴ Moltmann, *God In Creation*, 66-7.

While an exhaustive sampling of the literature is not possible, this brief survey demonstrates that the focus of atonement scholarship is primarily on how atonement restores human persons, not creation as a whole. If a broader understanding of atonement's effects on creation as a whole is mentioned at all, it is usually understood as part of the package of atonement but with little explanation given regarding how atonement causes the renewal of creation as a whole and why restoration is necessary.

Proposed Method With Outline

One way to address this gap in the scholarship is by examining the biblical texts that deal with creation, corruption of creation, and atonement. Beginning with the Old Testament, chapter 2 will examine the relationship between creation and order, particularly as understood in the so-called priestly account of creation. In addition, sin will be shown as posing a threat to divinely established order and to the possibility of life as God intended.

Chapter 3 will introduce the work of Mary Douglas in order to explain tribal understandings of pollution and the problem pollution presents to life lived in the presence of a Holy God. Using her model, as well as work done by various Old Testament scholars such as Gordon Wenham and Frank H. Gorman, I will demonstrate the relationship between sin and impurity or pollution in Old Testament texts, and the effect of sin on the possibility of life in the presence of God. Having established a firm understanding of the relationship between pollution, sin, and creation, chapter 3 will go on to examine the sacrificial system of Israel focusing especially on the Day of Atonement rituals as found in Leviticus 16 with the purpose

of demonstrating that one of the goals of the atonement rituals was the restoration of creation.

Chapter 4 will evaluate criticisms of using the language of sacrifice to refer to the death of Jesus Christ. Relying on the biblical text including a survey of the Gospels, the Pauline corpus, the general epistles, and focusing especially on the book of Hebrews, I will demonstrate that the biblical text offers ample evidence in favor of understanding Jesus' death as sacrificial. In fact, his death may be understood as the final atoning sacrifice that opens the way for the first installment of the restoration of the cosmos.

Chapter 5, "Christ's Sacrifice and the New Creation," will demonstrate that the sacrifice of a servant was anticipated by the prophets of Israel and that this sacrifice was expected to restore not just Israel, but the whole earth. This chapter will then survey selected New Testament texts that identify Jesus as this servant and link his work to the beginning of the new creation anticipated by the prophets, a new creation that will be fully realized with the second coming of Christ and the final judgment of the living and the dead.

Chapter 6 will then take the information gathered thus far and show how the picture of atonement presented here can enhance the current models of atonement offered by Aulén and offer some suggestions for further development, particularly of the concepts of purity and order, within these models. It will also suggest that this model presents a more robust idea of Christian hope, hope not merely for restoration of human persons or communities, but hope for people in the land God has promised, hope for abundant life in the presence of God in a restored creation. Finally, chapter

6 will propose what, if any, impact this theological understanding of atonement and creation has on practice and piety.

CHAPTER TWO: ORDER, DISORDER AND THE NEED FOR RESTORATION

Introduction

As briefly explained in the previous chapter, the fall of human beings had negative consequences not just on human persons and relationships, not just on the relationship of humans and God, but on creation as a whole. The cosmos suffers as a result of human sin. While there is general agreement that the Bible portrays an eventual restoration of all things, this belief is usually relegated to eschatology with little or no connection to atonement. There is also widespread agreement that the atonement in one way or another brings about the restoration of human persons. But this leaves unanswered the question of how atonement is related to the biblical portrayal of the restoration of all things. One place to begin to answer this question is to explore what the effects of human sin are on the non-human creation.

The biblical text in Genesis 3 gives an account of the rebellion of the first couple against their creator and the negative results of that rebellion. This account has been referred to as ‘the fall’ and humanity is therefore referred to as ‘fallen.’¹ These particular words do not appear in the text of Genesis 3 but they are useful descriptions that have been used in the Christian tradition to refer to the first couple’s disobedience and the changes brought about in humans as a result of that disobedience.²

¹ There are also those who reject this language as an inadequate description of what takes place in Genesis 3. See, for example, Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 253ff; and Terence E. Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 70-1.

² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 83-85, for example.

Some theologians, however, also refer to the non-human creation as fallen. Ernst Käsemann, for example, writes that in Romans 8:18-30 Paul is proposing salvation for the “fallen and groaning world.”³ Likewise Peter Stuhlmacher writes about the “fallen nature” of creation.⁴ However, to speak of creation as “fallen,” as if the non-human creation in some way disobeyed God, tends to muddy the waters regarding its condition and the relationship between human sin and the corruption of creation. The non-human creation, the cosmos, did not rebel against God and disobey his commands. Humans did. Rather than speak of a “fallen creation,” it is more helpful and accurate to consider how the sin of fallen humans impacts the non-human creation. The biblical text gives some important insights in this regard.

The importance of order can be found throughout the Pentateuch. What modern scholarship has identified as the priestly account of creation in Genesis 1 provides the backdrop to this pre-occupation with order.⁵ Here God is presented as the God who brings order out of chaos, who orders the universe to make it habitable for human persons. The goodness of creation is related to the orderliness of creation. In a similar way, sin is related to disorder or the disruption of the orderliness of creation.

³ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 235.

⁴ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 132.

⁵ It has long been recognized that the biblical text reflects changes and adaptations made by later editors. Richard Muller makes this point citing, for example, the work of seventeenth century theologians Matthew Poole and Matthew Henry. Poole, he writes, “recognized that some of the statements in the Pentateuch could not have been written by Moses and were probably additions made by later prophets.” Likewise, he points out that Henry had a “lengthy note on the unknown authorship and composite character of the history running from Joshua through 2 Kings.” See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 134-5. By referring to the Priestly account, or P, I am not intending to join the modern debate concerning sources. In many ways, I am merely recognizing along with much of modern scholarship, the linguistic and thematic similarities that exist between certain texts within the Pentateuch.

This chapter will examine a variety of biblical texts to help explain the relationship between the goodness of creation and order, and how goodness and order are related to the fullness of life as God intended it, a life lived in his presence. The chapter will begin with a description of creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and 2, explaining the importance of order and boundaries in these accounts. Since the original creation is described as “good,” the following section will discuss how the order and goodness of creation relates to Old Testament wisdom that correlates actions with consequences, and how all of this relates to Israel’s understanding of the law. The next section will demonstrate how living in accordance with God’s established boundaries as reflected in the law leads to life as God intended it, that is, life in his presence. The relationship between sin and disorder will also be explored. By explaining how the sin of the first couple introduced disorder into the well-ordered creation with catastrophic consequences not only for the first humans, but for the nonhuman creation as well, it will be shown that creation as a whole suffers as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin. Furthermore, the negative consequences of sin do not end with the sin of Adam and Eve. Using selected texts from the Old and New Testaments, I will demonstrate how ongoing human disobedience continues to adversely affect creation such that all of creation – humans, animals, and the earth itself – suffers as a consequence of human sin and awaits restoration.

The Orderly Creation

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen. 1:1-2). Thus begins the first book of the Bible. Although

some have argued that this account should be understood as a scientific recounting of the beginning of the earth,⁶ others recognize that modern imposition of scientific categories on this ancient document leads one to miss the central focus of the text.⁷ H. H. Schmid writes, “In the ancient Near East creation faith did not deal only, indeed not even primarily, with the origin of the world. Rather, it was concerned above all with the present world and the natural environment of humanity now.”⁸ More specifically, Gordon Wenham suggests that the central focus of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, in contrast to other creation accounts in the ancient Near East, is to affirm YHWH as the all-powerful creator, and humans and the rest of creation as creatures.⁹

Like many other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts, Genesis 1 includes notions of some sort of primordial chaos.¹⁰ Susan Niditch writes, “The period of chaos in Genesis 1 is described by the rhyming terms *tōhū* and *bōhū*, by the image of darkness on the face of the deep, and by the presence of the spirit of the Lord hovering over the face

⁶ Henry Morris, *The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth* (Minneapolis: Dimension Books, 1972), iv.

⁷ See for example Bruce Waltke, “The Literary Genre of Genesis Chapter One,” *Crux* 27 (1991): 2-10; Bernhard W. Andersen, *From Creation to New Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 1; Klaus Nürnberger, “The Conquest of Chaos: The Biblical Paradigm of Creation and Its Contemporary Relevance,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 98 (July 1997): 45; Davis Young, “Christianity and the Age of the Earth,” in *Is God a Creationist?*, ed. Roland Mushat Frye (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1983), 83-94; and Stanley L. Jaki, *Genesis 1 Through the Ages* (London: Thomas Moore Press), to name a few.

⁸ H. H. Schmid, “Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: “Creation Theology” as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology,” in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 103.

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 1 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 5.

¹⁰ The idea of chaos is especially implied in Genesis 1:2 where the earth is described as a “formless void.” This chaotic state is not conducive to life, human or other life. Only after God begins to order the chaos, are living beings added to the picture.

of the water.”¹¹ Michael Deroche asserts that the Bible does not offer a uniform notion of primordial chaos.¹² He suggests that there are two traditions concerning chaos. In one tradition, most commonly found in the Psalms, Job, and the Prophets,¹³ chaos is “a living being with its own will and personality.”¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann stops short of referring to chaos as a being, choosing instead to identify chaos as a ‘force.’¹⁵ This force “seeks to negate and nullify the world as a secure place of blessing.”¹⁶ Chaos, alternately named Rahab, Tannim, Leviathan, Behemoth, Yam, or Nahar is opposed to God.¹⁷

In the other major tradition identified by Deroche, that which is represented in Genesis 1, chaos “is an inert mass lacking order or differentiation.”¹⁸ Indeed, according to Terence Fretheim, “The chaos of [Gen. 1:2] refers not to some divine opponent (unlike Babylonian parallels), but to raw material that God uses to create what follows, when it ceases to exist.”¹⁹ In this scenario, God isolates, orders, and imposes a structure on the

¹¹ Susan Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation*, Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 18.

¹² Michael Deroche, “Isaiah XLV 7 and the Creation of Chaos,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 1 (1992): 11.

¹³ Deroche, “Isaiah XLV 7 and the Creation of Chaos,” 12.

¹⁴ Deroche, “Isaiah XLV 7 and the Creation of Chaos,” 12.

¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 533.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 533.

¹⁷ Hermann Gunkel, “The Influence of Babylonian Mythology upon The Biblical Creation Story,” in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, trans. Charles A. Muenchow, 25-52 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). In this classic essay Gunkel offers instances throughout the Old Testament where chaos is referred to with these terms. See especially pp. 35-40.

¹⁸ Deroche, “Isaiah XLV 7 and the Creation of Chaos,” 11.

¹⁹ Terence Fretheim, *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 73.

“primeval muck.”²⁰ Perhaps one analogy would be to compare the chaos of Gen. 1:2 to a messy desk with papers and books shuffled together completely covering the surface. The owner of the desk (and the mess) comes in and separates the papers from the books, then further separates the various sorts of books from each other, placing children’s books on one shelf, novels on another shelf, and commentaries on yet another shelf. The papers are likewise separated into specific categories and placed into separate file folders. The folders and shelves serve as boundaries between the categories of papers and books, maintaining the order imposed by the owner of the desk. Likewise, Genesis 1 describes God creating by his word and bringing order out of chaos through separation and division.²¹

The word *bdl* is a key word in Genesis 1. In fact, the largest clustering of *bdl* occurs in this chapter where it is used five times. According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon, *bdl* means “to be divided, separate.”²² The basic idea is the separation of things that do not belong together.²³ Examples of this word outside of Genesis 1 include separating the priests from the people for service in Numbers 8:16, separating clean and unclean, and Israel from the nations in Leviticus.

The priestly account of creation in Genesis 1 emphasizes God’s ordering of the world through separations (*bdl*), an ordering that yields a “good” creation. God brings

²⁰ Deroche, “Isaiah XLV 7 and the Creation of Chaos,” 11.

²¹ Genesis 1 seems to portray creation as the organization of pre-existent matter. The New Testament, however, includes the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. Hebrews 11:3, for example, states “the universe was formed at God’s command so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” How exactly the two notions mesh is an interesting topic but not important for my argument.

²² *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 2nd edition, s.v. “*bdl*.”

²³ Cornelius Van Dam, “*bdl*,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2, revised edition.

order out of the primeval disorder by separating various elements thereby establishing boundaries between them. Light is separated from darkness (v.4), the waters above are separated from the waters below (v.6 and 7), and the lights in the sky separate day from night (v.14 and 18). Water and dry land, light and darkness do not belong together. To blur or erase the boundaries between these elements is to destroy their individual identifying characteristics. Throughout the creation account, the Priestly author uses *hdl* to emphasize “that the creator-God is a God of order rather than a mythological procreator.”²⁴ Gordon Wenham states, “separation is one of the central ideas in this chapter.”²⁵ Deroche concurs, noting that “the acts of separation are those most fundamental to the Genesis notion of creation.”²⁶ Without these basic distinctions (or separations) of light and darkness, day and night, and water above from water below, life—especially human life—could not exist. It is no surprise, therefore, that all of these separations occur and the boundaries are established before any life is created. Milgrom notes that “separation creates order, and the distinctions between the elements must be maintained lest the world collapse into chaos and confusion.”²⁷ Adding to the picture of order presented by the Priestly author is the description of the living creatures of the sea, sky and land being created “according to their kind” (v.21). Likewise the plants produce seeds “according to their kind” (v. 11). Vegetation and creatures, like the elements of the earth, stay within their created boundaries reproducing not in a haphazard, mixed up way, but according to their kind. The ordered

²⁴ Benedict Otzen, “*hdl*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, revised edition.

²⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 18.

²⁶ Deroche, “Isaiah XLV 7 and the Creation of Chaos,” 15.

²⁷ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1761.

environment with water separated from dry land, plants bearing seed according to their kinds, the great lights of the sky separating night and day, living creatures of the sky and sea created according to their kind, and animals on the land created according to their kind all are declared by God to be good (v. 10, 18, 21, 25). In fact, by the end of this account, with the ordered creation complete, God declares his creation to be “very good” (v.31). The repetition of “it is good” throughout the narrative, combined with the final pronouncement of God that this well-ordered world is “very good,” leads to conclusion that goodness appears, at least in some sense, correlated to order.

Juxtaposed with this account of creation stands what may be understood to be a complementary account of creation beginning in Genesis 2:4.²⁸ Here the goodness of creation is melded with images of harmony and well-being that results in a vivid picture of humans in the ideal world of the Garden of Eden. The garden is depicted as a well-watered land with lush vegetation fed by the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers. Trees are provided that are both “pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Gen. 2:9). The man’s relationship with the animals seems peaceful as he encounters each one and assigns names to them. Yet none can provide the intimate companionship this human was created for, so God provides a woman to complement the man and complete the scene. The peaceful fertility symbolizes God’s presence in and blessing on this beautiful garden.²⁹ There is no evil and no suffering and no death. God puts the man in the garden to work it and take care of it (Gen. 2:15), but apparently that work is pleasant and without

²⁸ Fretheim, for example, asserts that the two accounts are intended to be read together, to interact with each other, in order to offer a canonical perspective on creation. He writes, “The differing theological voices of the tradition, woven together, have become a more sophisticated theological perspective on creation and more closely approximate the understanding that Israel, finally, discerned regarding Creator and creature and their interrelationship.” *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 33.

²⁹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 61.

pain. Klaus Nürnberger writes that this narrative indicates “that the Creator intended human existence to be without hardship.”³⁰ But this picture is not without boundaries. The first couple may eat of every tree in the garden save one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The couple is instructed not to eat of this tree. This instruction serves as an invisible boundary, fencing off the tree from the couple, much as a “no trespassing” sign fences off our access to a particular piece of property. To cross this boundary created by God, violating his instruction to them, would be to invite the ultimate symbol of disorder, death, into this pristine world.

The picture of creation offered in the first two chapters of Genesis is one of goodness and harmonious living. But the goodness depicted in the two scenes of Genesis 1 and 2 is related to the order God has established. This order is characterized by separations and boundaries. Without the separations of Genesis 1, no life will exist. Indeed, Gorman explains “these divisions must be recognized and maintained if the created order is to continue to exist and not collapse into confusion and chaos.”³¹ If the boundary around the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2 is crossed, life will cease to exist and the world will once again be characterized by disorder and death. Thus, creation as God intended it to be is characterized by order and declared by God to be “very good.”

³⁰ Klaus Nürnberger, “The Conquest of Chaos,” 48.

³¹ Frank Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*, JSOT Supplement Series, 91 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 41.

Goodness, Order, and Law

What does it mean when God says creation is “good”? Is this to be understood as a divine self-congratulatory remark of some kind? At the very least, “good” could be understood as meaning “appropriate for God’s intended purposes and for creaturely life and well-being.”³² Douglas Knight goes a bit further. He suggests that the Hebrew word *tov*, the word translated “good” in Genesis 1, covers a wide semantic field. According to Knight, this field includes at least the following: “quality, reliability; suitability; correctness according to a given standard; moral or religious value.”³³ He goes on to say, “One can reasonably expect that many, if not most, of these meanings are present when the created world is judged to be ‘good.’”³⁴ Thus, the ordered goodness reflected in Genesis 1 can be understood to have moral value as well.

The moral value of the created order is connected to wisdom. Proverbs 3:19-20 says, “By wisdom the LORD laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided and the clouds let drop the dew.” The Psalms also reflect this connection between wisdom and creation: “How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures” (Ps. 104:24). The order of creation, in other words, reflects the wisdom of God and the wise person recognizes the behavioral boundaries associated with the created order. Joseph Blenkinsopp suggests that a connection between the observable order of

³² Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 49.

³³ Douglas A. Knight, “Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition,” in *Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics*, ed. Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 145.

³⁴ Knight, “Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition,” 145.

creation and wisdom is fairly prevalent in social situations: “In general, a particular society’s stock of proverbs represents a deposit of the accumulated wisdom of the past, a distillation of collective experience based on the observation of order, regularity, and causality in nature and in human affairs.”³⁵ With regard to Israel’s wisdom literature Brueggemann writes, “By the long-term observation of recurring patterns of human behavior, wisdom teachers have sorted out the limits of freedom and the shape of acceptable behavior, beyond which conduct dare not go without bringing hurt to self and to others.”³⁶ Wisdom, at the very least therefore, amounts to the recognition of creational boundaries, boundaries that, for Israel, were understood to be put in place by God. Foolishness ignores God’s limits and lives as though “the individual actor were autonomous and completely unfettered.”³⁷

Biblical wisdom, then, assumes a correlation between act and consequence with regard to the boundaries that characterize the creation order. Knight refers to this correlation as a “closed circuit.”³⁸ One can think about the correlation between moral actions and consequences in a way similar to how we think about the correlation between physical actions and the consequences of those actions. Most people would acknowledge the fact that in the physical world physical actions have appropriate physical

³⁵James Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20.

³⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 337.

³⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 338.

³⁸ Knight, “Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition,” 148.

consequences.³⁹ What biblical wisdom teaches us is that in a way similar to physical actions, moral actions have appropriate consequences. The general teaching of biblical wisdom is the idea that actions in accordance with God's created order or law result in good consequences while those that deviate from the created order or law result in undesirable consequences.⁴⁰ Dianne Bergant writes that one of the primary functions of the wisdom tradition of ancient Israel "seems to have been instruction in a style of living that would assure well-being and prosperity."⁴¹ Hebrew wisdom literature, particularly the Proverbs, generally couches "act-consequence" teaching in terms of human persons, as Bergant suggests. For example, "The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked" (Prov. 10:3). But, as will be demonstrated a bit further on, various other Old Testament texts broaden the consequences of human actions to include creation as a whole. The fact that blessing follows obedience and curse follows disobedience is linked directly and inextricably to the closed system established at the birth of the cosmos, that is, to the ordered creation itself. Brueggemann writes, "'responsible acts' – those that cohere with Yahewh's ordering of creation – will result in good for self and community."⁴²

Nonetheless, it is also evident from biblical wisdom that while consequences are generally in accordance with and flow from actions, the correlation is not without

³⁹ One simple example of this is Newton's third law of motion which simply states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

⁴⁰ For more on this see Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 338; and Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 57-87.

⁴¹ Dianne Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 12.

⁴² Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 338.

exceptions.⁴³ The story of Job is perhaps the ultimate example of the sort of exception to the general rules found in biblical wisdom literature, particularly in Proverbs. David Clines notes that the book of Job assaults the general ideology of Proverbs which asserts that the righteous prosper and the foolish suffer.⁴⁴ Job is introduced to readers as “blameless and upright,” a man who “feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Yet, contrary to expectations, Job is anything but blessed. In fact, he suffers as the result of one negative event after another. This problem is not lost on his friends who are not privy to the prologue of the book as we are. His friends are convinced, in accordance with the general understanding of the ways of the world as typified in biblical wisdom, that Job has sinned and thus is deserving of the devastating evil that has come upon him, a judgment the prologue makes clear is not the case.

The sort of exception illustrated by Job leads to the conclusion that while there is a correspondence between act and consequence understood throughout Hebrew wisdom, the correlation is more along the lines of what Terence Fretheim calls a “loose causal weave” than a tight correlation.⁴⁵ In other words, the correspondence between the moral order and creation is neither mechanistic nor entirely predictable. John E. Hartley writes that the author of Job directly challenges “a simplistic understanding of the doctrine of

⁴³ In other words, to return to physics, it is somewhat like the relationship of quantum physics to classical physics. Classical physics posits a fairly mechanistic view of the world but quantum physics steps in and turns that model on its head in some ways. For example, typically, classical physics states that force = mass times acceleration. But modern physics tells us that under certain circumstances, for instance, as we approach the speed of light, this law no longer holds true.

⁴⁴ David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts, vol. 17 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), lxii.

⁴⁵ Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 122.

double retribution.”⁴⁶ The correspondence between act and consequence is woven into to the fabric of creation and should be understood as the way things generally operate but not the way things always end up happening. In fact, the success of the wicked often ends up being the basis of cries to the Lord for justice, a justice that sometimes looks beyond this life for fulfillment.⁴⁷

Law is also related to wisdom and therefore, insofar as wisdom is reflective of the order of creation, law is also reflective of the order of creation. Blenkinsopp notes that this relationship between law and wisdom is apparent in many societies. He writes “the corpus of proverbs in a traditional society serves to transmit its inherited values, thus helping to form the basis for an agreed pattern of behavior against which conduct of the individual can be measured and with reference to which social deviance can be discouraged.”⁴⁸ Wisdom, as reflected in the proverbial teachings of a society, then, is often foundational for laws which may be understood as agreed upon patterns of behavior. Blenkinsopp points out that this was indeed the case in Israel where law was closely connected to the wisdom tradition.⁴⁹ Thus, whether thought of in terms of the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3, or as the codified law given to Israel at Sinai, law reflects the order of creation, that is, the boundaries within creation, that wisdom recognizes. In other words, law is implicit in the creation order.

⁴⁶ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 48.

⁴⁷ See for example Psalm 73 and 94.

⁴⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, 20.

⁴⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, 21.

To put it another way, the order of creation is the way God intended creation to operate. God established the world with certain boundaries that characterize this order. Wisdom recognizes this order and reflects it through a body of proverbs that suggest reward and punishment for behavior that corresponds to or deviates from this observed order. The law moves a step beyond that, offering explicit instructions to prevent violating these boundaries thereby allowing one to live in accordance with the order of creation. Thus, law is not a set of arbitrary rules imposed on humans to keep them in line. Law is God's gracious means for helping humanity live in harmony with creation. Law reflects the order of creation, the order by which creation is intended by God to operate.⁵⁰ Law promotes proper functioning and integration of the cosmic, political, and social spheres.⁵¹ Bruggemann writes "Law is given with creation, is seen to be integral to proper human life in the world, and enables law to be understood in basically positive terms as that which promotes life. Law is a gracious gift for the best possible life."⁵² To summarize, law is the means God has given for maintaining the boundaries he established when he created the world, boundaries which allow for life.

Righteousness, Blessing, and the Presence of God

Wisdom, law, and the ordered goodness of the cosmos are related to two other common Hebrew concepts, *šēdāqâ* and *šālôm*. Knight describes this relationship as follows: "YHWH created the world according to *šēdāqâ*, 'righteousness,' a principle of

⁵⁰ Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 138.

⁵¹ H. H. Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: "Creation Theology" as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 104-5.

⁵² Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 52.

moral and cosmic orderliness similar to the Egyptian *ma'at*.”⁵³ Knight suggests that in Israel the term *šēdāqâ* is parallel to ‘order.’⁵⁴ Ahlström, commenting on the prophets, concurs, associating *šēdāqâ* with what he describes as “harmonious order.”⁵⁵

Righteousness, *šēdāqâ*, is characterized by life lived within the boundaries that wisdom recognizes.⁵⁶ “‘Righteousness’ for humans,” writes Knight, “is thus not fundamentally a stance of piety but a pattern of behavior which supports rather than subverts the cosmic and moral order.”⁵⁷

In accordance with what wisdom teaches, the pattern of behavior that characterizes righteousness is adherence to the laws and statutes that YHWH has given Israel. “And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness” (Deut. 6:25). To live in accordance with the law is to live in accordance with wisdom. Deuteronomy 4:6 makes this clear: “See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

⁵³ Knight, “Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition,” 149.

⁵⁴ Knight, “Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition,” 136.

⁵⁵ G. W. Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem*. Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 77.

⁵⁶ The word *šēdāqâ* includes a wide semantic field which I choose to sum up in the English word, righteousness in order to maintain its distinction from the parallel term, *mišpat*. However, it is helpful to understand the close connection of this word with the idea of justice. In fact, righteousness and justice (*mišpat*) often appear as parallel terms in the Hebrew text. With regard to individuals, *šēdāqâ* has to do with a sense of right behavior or virtue, a point that the quote from Knight makes clear and which is corroborated by David J. Reimer in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 746-8.

⁵⁷ Knight, “Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition,” 136.

Additionally, as explained earlier, to live in accordance with wisdom is to live in harmony with the order of creation. The one who lives in this manner is considered righteous.

In continuity with the teaching of wisdom, the choice between living in a righteous manner and living in an unrighteous manner, like the choice between wisdom and folly, is really a choice between life and death. For example, one proverb says, “He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity, and honor” (Prov. 21:21). Similarly, righteousness delivers one from death: “Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death” (Prov. 10:2). The path of righteousness, life lived in accordance with the law, with the right order of creation, is the path of life. Moses says as much in the beginning of his instructions to Israel prior to their entering the land of Canaan. “Walk in all the way that the LORD has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess” (Deut. 5:33). Terry L. Brensinger writes, “Ultimately, Deuteronomy offers a choice that is unmistakably reminiscent of Gen. 2. This choice, persuasively presented through the use of parallel expressions, results in either life or death.”⁵⁸ The choice between life and death is even more clearly laid out in the final chapters of the book. “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess” (Deut. 30:15-16).

⁵⁸ Terry L. Brensinger, *chaiyāh* in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2.

Life should not be understood as mere existence, however. Life, in the Hebrew sense of the term, can refer to life-span or life in contrast to death but it has nuances beyond these two rather concrete meanings. Life can also connote well-being or activity.⁵⁹ It is ultimately connected to a relationship with God, a relationship characterized by his presence and the blessing that accompanies his presence.⁶⁰ Blessing is the outcome of the orderliness that is supposed to characterize creation, an orderliness linked to obedience. Schmid describes this connection between blessing, obedience, and order as follows: “The blessing involved in obeying the commandment is nothing other than the harmonious (*heil*) world order given in creation.”⁶¹ Blessing includes the ideas of fruitfulness, abundance, productivity and extravagance.⁶² The fruitfulness associated with blessing is not simply human fruitfulness but includes fruitfulness of the land, of animals, defeat of enemies, and general prosperity.⁶³ Westermann writes, “Blessing is the center of life; it is life itself and it includes all phases of life.”⁶⁴

The term that may best describe this blessed life is the Hebrew word *šālôm* (or *shalom*). *Šālôm* covers a wide semantic field and is difficult to precisely define. K. J. Illman suggests the following meanings: “(1) intact, (2) full, (3) whole; peaceable.”⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Helmer Ringgren, “*chaiyāh*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, revised edition.

⁶⁰ Fretheim, *The Pentateuch*, 98.

⁶¹ Schmid, “Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation,” 110.

⁶² Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, 529.

⁶³ Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 18.

⁶⁴ Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible*, 18.

⁶⁵ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 15, s.v. *šālôm*.

Walter Brueggemann describes this concept in more detail writing that the word *šālôm* summarizes the biblical vision of “joy, well-being, harmony, and prosperity” that is reflected in a number of terms throughout the Old Testament.⁶⁶ *Šālôm* is the destiny of God’s people.⁶⁷ But *šālôm* refers to more than human well-being. *Šālôm* reflects the blessing of God on his creation. Furthermore, righteousness, *šedāqâ* is the necessary prerequisite for *šālôm*. According to Knight, “When *šedāqâ* prevails, the world is at harmony, in a state of well-being, in *šālôm*.”⁶⁸ Thus, human righteousness is not only related to blessing and the concomitant flourishing of humans, righteousness results in blessing and flourishing of all of creation. Recognized as a consequence of *šedāqâ*, *šālôm* is wholeness or, as Cornelius Plantinga writes, “the way things ought to be.”⁶⁹

The sense of well-being or blessing typical of *šālôm* is also frequently associated with the presence of God. According to John Durham, *šālôm* is, in fact, “a completeness, a success, a maturity, a situation which is both prosperous and secure – withal, a state of well-being which is a direct result of the beneficent PRESENCE of God.”⁷⁰ Jon Levenson writes that those who dwell in the presence of God will “enjoy the beatific life” and “be blessed in every way,”⁷¹ notions that can also be associated with *šālôm*.

⁶⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (New York: United Church Press, 1982), 15-16.

⁶⁷ Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 16.

⁶⁸ Knight, “Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition,” 149.

⁶⁹ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way Its Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

⁷⁰ John E. Durham, “שָׁלוֹם and the Presence of God,” in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies*, ed. John I. Durham and J. R. Porter (London: SCM Press, 1970), 276-77.

⁷¹ Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 137.

For Israel, God's presence is what gave them their identity as his people. Ex. 29:46 says "They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God." R. E. Clements comments that these verses "make perfectly clear that for Yahweh to be the God of Israel means that he dwells in their midst."⁷² Wenham writes that without God's presence, Israel's "*raison d'être* is destroyed."⁷³ The people of Israel were not unaware of the crucial importance of God's presence. After the Golden Calf incident in Exodus 32, God tells Israel in Ex. 33 that he is going to withdraw his presence from Israel. They must leave Sinai and he will no longer go with them. Israel's response is to mourn (v. 4). They realize their existence is dependent on God's presence.⁷⁴

So what do we mean when we speak of the presence of God? Traditional Christian theology understands God as omnipresent, that is, he is not confined by space. Nonetheless, although the Bible affirms that God is in some sense present everywhere, the Bible also presents God as uniquely present with his chosen people. Fretheim suggests considering God's presence along a continuum. This continuum moves "from general or creational presence to theophanic presence" with God's presence at the tabernacle as an intermediate position.⁷⁵ He explains, "God is believed to be continuously present, yet God will also be especially present at certain times; God is

⁷² R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 115.

⁷³ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 5.

⁷⁴ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 3 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 447-48)

⁷⁵ Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 25.

believed to be everywhere present, yet God will also be intensively present in certain places.”⁷⁶

One way to understand this is by examining the primary symbol of God’s presence for Israel, the temple or tabernacle and its precincts. The temple was, at least in some sense, a symbol of the world. Levenson explains, “the Temple is the epitome of the world, a concentrated form of its essence, a miniature of the cosmos.”⁷⁷ Thus, the temple represented both God’s special presence for Israel, and the locus in which he was present to the world. Levenson describes this relationship between God’s special presence and his general presence as follows: “In the Temple, God relates simultaneously to the entire cosmos, for the Temple (or mountain or city) is a microcosm of which the world itself is the macrocosm. Or, to put it differently, the center (or navel or axis or fulcrum) is not a point in space at all, but the point in relation to which all space attains individualization and meaning.”⁷⁸

God’s presence, therefore, is not limited only to the tabernacle or temple. The sanctuary symbolized God’s localized presence above the ark of the covenant but, as indicated by Levenson’s description of the symbolism of the Temple and affirmed by Wenham, Israel also understood a more general presence of God in the camp as a whole.⁷⁹ A bit later on, this general presence becomes associated with the promised land,

⁷⁶ Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 25.

⁷⁷ Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 138.

⁷⁸ Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 139.

⁷⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 17. See also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 43.

with Zion.⁸⁰ Brueggemann points out that Israel is not merely anticipating the promise of a land of her own, but the promise of land in the presence of God.⁸¹ “The land for which Israel yearns and which it remembers [in exile] is never unclaimed space but is always *a place with Yahweh* [emphasis his], a place well filled with memories of life with him and promise from him and vows to him.”⁸²

Wenham asserts that the presence of God is the “highest of all divine blessings.”⁸³ Robert Martin-Achard suggests that the Jerusalem temple as a symbol of God’s presence offered “a guarantee against hard times.”⁸⁴ The divine presence, especially as symbolized by the temple, was the assurance of life in the full Hebrew sense of the term, a life characterized by flourishing. Because of God’s presence, the Israelite camp, like the Garden of Eden, is the place of life. Gorman explains, “In this context [the camp], life is characterized by wholeness, well-being, prosperity, peace, community, and holiness.”⁸⁵ To put it another way, life in the presence of God is characterized by *šālôm*. Over against this fullness of life is death. Death can be simply the cessation of life but it can also be equated with separation from God in the land of the living. In reference to Genesis 3, Wenham writes, “the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden was in the narrator’s view the real fulfillment of the divine sentence. . . . [the narrator] regarded their

⁸⁰ For a more complete explanation of this relationship see Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 139-142.

⁸¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 135.

⁸² Brueggemann, *The Land*, 5.

⁸³ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 18.

⁸⁴ Robert Martin-Achard, *An Approach to the Old Testament* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 60.

⁸⁵ Frank H. Gorman, *Leviticus: Divine Presence and Community*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 15.

alienation from the divine presence as death.”⁸⁶ To be expelled from the presence of God was the equivalent of death, it was to enter the realm of death. True life, life characterized by well-being and blessing was life lived in the presence of God.⁸⁷

Righteousness, then, living within the boundaries God has prescribed, is the necessary precondition to life as God intended. Although righteousness might not always lead to blessing, something the book of Job makes very clear, the fullness of life associated with well-being, prosperity, and the presence of God is not possible apart from life lived in accordance with God’s laws. The life God intended for human beings is life lived in harmony with the order of creation in the presence of God as symbolized by the temple.

Disorder and Sin

The orderly creation in Genesis 1 and 2 which is characterized by divisions and separations that promote life and well-being remains under the threat of encroaching disorder and a return of chaos. Bernhard Anderson contends, “Chaos remains at the edge of creation, so to speak, as a threatening possibility.”⁸⁸ Israel recognized that disorder ran counter to creation and blessing, that disorder ultimately ran counter to Yahweh. This recognition of the ever-present problem of chaos and disorder and the threat it presents to wholeness is represented in various ways throughout the Old

⁸⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 404.

⁸⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 74.

⁸⁸ Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 139.

Testament, but in every case, disorder is caused either directly by human agents or indirectly as the result of God's judgment on the sins of human agents. In other words, despite the various forms disorder could take, from the point of view of Old Testament Israel, disorder, the encroachment of chaos, was essentially caused by human persons.⁸⁹

Unfortunately, this is exactly what happens in paradise. In Genesis 3, disorder enters the garden and disrupts the primeval harmony and becomes, as Knight describes it, "the eruption of disorder into the pristine garden."⁹⁰ The first couple has been placed in the garden and is permitted to eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The prompting of the serpent combined with the temptation to overstep the boundary which God has placed around them lead the first couple to reject God's command, transgress the boundary, and eat of the forbidden tree. Patrick Miller affirms that by eating the fruit of this tree they "bring about a kind of disorder in the universe in breaking through the boundary distinction between the divine world and the human world."⁹¹

The effects of this boundary breaking are nothing less than catastrophic not only for the first couple, but for the creation as a whole. The snake is cursed by God and destined to a life of eating dust, eventually to suffer a fatal blow from the seed of the woman. The ground is cursed. The man and woman will no longer labor with joy and fruitfulness. Their work will be characterized by pain, fruitfulness will be hampered, and their relationship with each other will no longer be one of mutuality. The man will now

⁸⁹ Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992), 44.

⁹⁰ Knight, "Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition," 144.

⁹¹ Patrick Miller, "Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 9, no. 2 (December 1987): 66.

rule over the wife.⁹² Even worse, the couple will be expelled from the garden, expelled from the life-giving presence of God. God's very good creation is no longer characterized by wholeness (*šālôm*) but by brokenness. This brokenness, this disruption of *šālôm* is the direct consequence of intentional human boundary breaking, or, to put it another way, it is the result of human sin.⁹³

The idea of breaking boundaries is, in fact, closely associated with sin. One of the Hebrew words for sin, *pāša'*, may be translated 'offence' or 'transgression.'⁹⁴ This word is often grouped with other words for sin including *hātā* and *'āwôn* presenting a complete picture of individual or national rebellion.⁹⁵ By itself, *pāša'* carries with it the idea of a breach or break of some sort. It could be a break in a boundary, such as land, or more often, it implies a breach or break in the relationship with YHWH.⁹⁶

These *pēšā'im* or transgressions are serious breaches⁹⁷ not just in the revealed law, but in the natural order. In fact, the Bible portrays sin as foolish because it is in some

⁹² This assumes that the husband and wife were equal prior to the fall and did not exist in a hierarchical relationship. That the hierarchical relationship was a result of the fall is demonstrated in at least the following works: Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 55ff.; Mary Stewart VanLeeuwen, *Gender and Grace: Love, Work, and Parenting in a Changing World* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), especially 38-48; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 126-28.

⁹³ Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 14.

⁹⁴ H. Seebaas, "*pāša'*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. , revised edition.

⁹⁵ Seebass, *TDOT*, 147-8.

⁹⁶ Seebass, *TDOT*, 146.

⁹⁷ One way to think about this is to consider how exactly something is being breached. A quick look at several commandments should suffice to demonstrate this point. If I steal from someone I have, in effect, broken the boundary that sets their property apart from mine and blurred the distinction between those two categories. Likewise with honoring my father and mother; failing to honor them brings them down to my level and breaches the boundary that sets them apart as deserving special respect, blurring the distinction between myself and them. All breaches of the law are in some sense serious because in every case I am in some sense blurring a distinction either between myself and my fellow human being or

sense unnatural, that is, out of line with the natural order of things. John Barton offers Isaiah 1-3, among other texts, as an example of the unnaturalness of sin. “The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” This verse, he suggests, “lays its primary emphasis on the *unnaturalness* of Israel’s rebellion, which is seen as standing in sharp contrast with the purely instinctive ‘natural’ reaction of animals.”⁹⁸ Sin, according to Barton, as portrayed in the Old Testament, amounts to “cosmic nonsense,” a reversal of the natural order of things.⁹⁹ Sin is foolish, as biblical literature makes clear.

Sin stands opposed to the right order or *ṣēdāqâ* YHWH requires. Because the boundaries that characterize this order are established by God, sin is always offense against God.¹⁰⁰ As such, it not only disrupts the wholeness which characterizes shalom, but it also carries the consequence of divine judgment. Wholeness can be restored but only through confession and forgiveness.¹⁰¹

To summarize, when the first couple eats the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they transgress a boundary established by God. By this action, they introduce disorder, particularly in the form of death, into God’s perfectly ordered good creation with catastrophic results. Although the text of Genesis 3 does not directly call

between myself and God. Furthermore, because these boundaries were set in place by God, I am rebelling against my creator.

⁹⁸ John Barton, “Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (April 1979): 6.

⁹⁹ Barton, “Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament,” 7.

¹⁰⁰ Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, 123.

¹⁰¹ Seebaas, *TDOT*, 141-43.

this rebellion of the first couple a sin, sin is nonetheless closely associated with the idea of boundary breaking and thus the disruption of the ordered goodness of creation.

The Effects of Sin on Creation

The disorder introduced in Genesis 3 through human boundary breaking is certainly not the final word on the disruption caused to creation by sin. The remainder of the primeval history in Genesis 1-11 demonstrates the proliferation of disorder in creation due to human sin. One particularly graphic example of this is Genesis 6-9, the flood narrative, where the entirety of God's work of creation is threatened by human sin. Genesis 6 describes human behavior as follows: "every inclination of his heart was only evil all the time" (6:5). What is the consequence of this wickedness? God decides to wipe out everything on the face of the earth.¹⁰² In fact, some describe the ensuing deluge as nothing less than 'un-creation.'¹⁰³ In other words, God is undoing the creation through judgment, allowing a re-encroachment of the primeval chaos waters across the boundaries he had set in Genesis 1. As human sin has introduced disorder into God's creation, the consequence of human sin here in Genesis 6 is the explosion of that disorder. As with Genesis 3, the ultimate consequence of human sin in Genesis 6 is death, but not just human death. The consequence of human sin is disruption and death in the whole created world.

¹⁰² Of course, not everything is wiped out. God preserves his creation even as he judges it. One man is considered "righteous" – Noah. It is interesting to note the wisdom literature correlation between sin and death, and righteousness and life is already present here. Just as sin in this story is associated with the return of chaos, disorder, and death, righteousness is associated with life, something that becomes explicit a bit later in the Pentateuch with the giving of the law.

¹⁰³ John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1 (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 170.

The prophetic books also paint poignant pictures of the devastating effects of human sin on creation. While the motif of creational consequences of sin can be found throughout the writings of the latter prophets, several specific examples of this general motif warrant a more thorough examination.

Isaiah 24 offers one picture of the devastation ongoing sin causes to creation. Verses 1-3 tell the readers that YHWH is going to “lay waste the earth.” Not just the people, but the earth itself will suffer. John Oswalt maintains, “Although the inhabitants have sinned, the *earth* too will experience the results.”¹⁰⁴ If there is any doubt as to the scope of this destruction and the reason for this destruction, one need only read on: “The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the height of the people of the land languishes. The earth is polluted under its people because they transgress laws, they transgress a statute, they break an eternal covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth and her inhabitants have become guilty; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched and few men are left behind” (Is. 24:4-6).¹⁰⁵

Particularly striking is the causal connection the prophet makes between human sin and the devastation of the earth.¹⁰⁶ The prophet begins this section by telling the people that the source of the devastation is YHWH himself. God will cause the disaster. But the reason for the destruction, the reason for the withering of the earth, the reason for

¹⁰⁴ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 444.

¹⁰⁵ Translation mine.

¹⁰⁶ One interesting point here is that this prophecy concerns the nations, not Israel. The nations do not have the revealed law, the torah. Yet, they are held accountable for their actions. The assumption is that they knew what was right but chose not to do it. The law, in some sense was written on their hearts as Paul says in Romans 1 and 2. The Old Testament assumes that certain norms of behavior are apparent to everyone because they are built into the structure of the world. This assumption underlies much of Israel’s wisdom literature. Although the notion of natural law is intriguing from an Old Testament perspective, it is tangential to the point I am making here. As such, it awaits further consideration at a later time.

the earth's pollution or defilement is the transgression of laws and statutes (v. 5).

Because of human sin, the earth is cursed.¹⁰⁷

Jeremiah 4:23-28 offers a vivid picture of God's coming judgment on Judah because of her sin and rebellion. Much of the prophet's speech in the preceding chapters has consisted of charges leveled against Judah, specifically her unfaithfulness to God and the stipulations of the covenant, and warnings concerning the coming judgment. These verses now describe the prophet's vision about the coming destruction:

²³ "I saw the earth – it was a barren waste;
The heavens – there was no light.

²⁴ I saw the mountains – they were shaking,
And all the hills rocked to and fro.

²⁵ I looked, and there was no human being;
Even the birds of the sky had taken flight.

²⁶ I looked – and the fertile land was desert,
And all its cities lay in ruins

Before Yahweh,
Before his fierce anger.

²⁷ For this is what Yahweh has said:
"The whole land shall be a waste,
Though I will not make a complete end of it.

²⁸ For this reason the earth will mourn,
The sky above will turn black,
Because I have spoken, I have decided,
I will not change my mind and will not turn back."¹⁰⁸

As with Isaiah 24, this text depicts judgment falling not only on humans, but on the creation. In fact, this text, like that of the flood, suggests uncreation of some sort.

Verse 23 uses the language of Genesis 1:2, *tōhū wābōhū*, formless void, to describe the effects of God's judgment. All of creation will suffer because of human sin. Thompson

¹⁰⁷ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 317. See also Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, 445-6.

¹⁰⁸ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 229.

describes it this way: “The earth and the heavens (v. 23), the mountains and the hills (v. 24), humanity and the birds (v. 25), the fields and the cities (v. 26), all were to feel the weight of Yahweh’s wrath.”¹⁰⁹ While causal language is not used in this text as it was in Isaiah, there is no doubt from the general context that human sin is the reason for the coming destruction. Furthermore, there can be no doubt from these verses that the destruction will involve not only the inhabitants of Judah, but the earth itself. Once again, the result of sin on creation is catastrophic.

One more text that offers an example of the link between sin and the corruption of creation is Hosea 4:1-3. This text is interesting because the destruction of creation seems to be directly due to human sin rather than to divine intervention and judgment on that sin.¹¹⁰

¹Hear the word of Yahweh, people of Israel;
For Yahweh has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land,
because there is no faithfulness, no steadfast love,
and no knowledge of God in the land.

²Cursing and lying and killing
and stealing and adultery have broken out
in the land;

³Therefore, the land shall dry up,
and all its inhabitants shall languish
together with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky;
even the fish of the sea shall be taken away.¹¹¹

These verses, an indictment against Israel, form an introduction to the rest of the book.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 229.

¹¹⁰ Carl J. Bosma, “Creation in Jeopardy: A Warning to Priests (Hosea 4:1-3),” *Calvin Theological Journal* 34, no. 1 (April 1999): 89.

¹¹¹ Patrick Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 9-10.

¹¹² Douglas Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts, vol. 31 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 73; also Bosma, “Creation in Jeopardy,” 71.

The text of Hosea 4 begins by outlining sins of omission of which Israel is guilty. Specifically, according to Carl Bosma, Israel's guilt consists of "the absence of faithful loyalty in its relationship to God and in the relationships with the members of God's covenant people."¹¹³ But Hosea does not stop there. He adds a daunting list of Israel's sins of commission. These sins are not just any abhorrent actions. They are, as Bosma notes, "a free grouping of offenses against the neighbor that are categorically forbidden in the apodictic stipulations of Yahweh's covenant ratified with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20.1-24.11)."¹¹⁴ Bosma goes on to say that this list of five crimes "reads like a counter-Decalogue."¹¹⁵ The results of Israel's sins, spelled out in verse 3, is creation-wide involving the land, the beasts, the birds, and the fish as well as the inhabitants of the land who are actually guilty of the offenses listed in the first two verses.

Bosma points out that this text lacks any specific reference to God's intervention and that this omission is intentional.¹¹⁶ The devastation of creation spelled out in verse 3 stands in direct causal relationship to Israel's actions listed in the first two verses. The inferential conjunction that opens verse 3 "establishes a dynamic act-consequence correspondence between the twofold indictment of 4:1c-2 and the tragic situation described in 4:3."¹¹⁷ Thus, not only does creation suffer tangentially when God punishes humans, but Hosea portrays human actions, in this case human sinful behavior, directly

¹¹³ Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 95.

¹¹⁴ Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 96.

¹¹⁵ Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 96.

¹¹⁶ Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 89; Brueggemann concurs with Bosma's suggestion that there is no direct action of God apparent in this text. See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 542.

¹¹⁷ Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 101.

producing negative consequences in the cosmos. These consequences appear to be built into the fabric of creation and not meted out externally.¹¹⁸ In other words, breaking the moral law and rebelling against God and his commandments can carry built-in consequences for creation as a whole.¹¹⁹

The idea that sin negatively effects creation as a whole is not limited to the Old Testament. At least one New Testament text also gives insight into the plight of creation due to human sin. Romans 8:19-22 says:

¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Although the general context of Romans 8 involves Paul's explanation of the benefits of Christ's work for believers, these verses cast the net of redemption a bit wider. N. T. Wright points out that Paul moves here from God's plan with regard to human beings, to God's plan for the whole cosmos.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 109; see also Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Issues in Religion and Theology*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 64-67.

¹¹⁹ Although the language of the above selected texts paints a clear causal relationship between sin and disruptions in creation which is in line with Hebrew wisdom literature, it is not clear that sin *always* disrupts creation any more than it is clear that the righteous *always* flourish as explained with the example from Job above. Nonetheless at least in these texts, a firm causal connection is described. Thinking of the bigger picture in terms of a "loose causal weave" as I quoted from Fretheim a bit earlier, is perhaps a better way to think of these sorts of connections, at least in the present tense. On the other hand, from an eschatological viewpoint, I think it may be entirely legitimate to say that the relationship between sin and death and righteousness and flourishing is indeed a firm causal connection, not merely a loose causal weave since the Bible portrays a final flourishing of the righteous and a final end to sin, death, and disorder at the end of the age. This would need more study, however, and is outside the bounds of this paper.

¹²⁰ N. T. Wright, *Romans*, in *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10, ed. Leander E. Keck, William L. Lane, and Marion L. Soards (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 596.

According to Paul, creation (κτίσις) has been “subjected to frustration” and is in “bondage” due to the sin of human persons. Harry A. Hahne writes “Adam’s sin not only brought sin and death to all of Adam’s descendants (5.12-21), it also put the whole created order in bondage to death, decay, corruption and futility (8.20-22).”¹²¹ Although some suggest that something other than the subhuman creation is in view here, Hahne demonstrates through careful word study as well as by examining how Paul uses the word in Rom. 8 that κτίσις in this text refers specifically to the subhuman creation.¹²² “Since angels, demons, humanity and heaven are excluded [from Paul’s meaning in Rom. 8], this suggests that κτίσις in Rom. 8.19-22 means the subhuman material creation, roughly equivalent to the modern term ‘nature.’”¹²³ Thus, while many of the texts we have dealt with have demonstrated the consequences of sin on both humans and the subhuman creation, these verses are a specific reference to the suffering of the subhuman creation due to human sin.

Paul personifies the subhuman creation describing it as “waiting in eager expectation” for its release from bondage and “groaning” as in childbirth, a reference to Gen. 3 and the painful consequences of the fall on women. By so doing he gives a portrait of the subhuman creation that, along with human beings, awaits restoration.

Unlike human beings, however, the subhuman creation suffers not because it in some

¹²¹ Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Library of New Testament Studies, ed. Mark Goodacre, no. 336 (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 172.

¹²² Hahne provides an excellent review of the literature here and subsequently presents his own arguments in favor of understanding this text as referring to the subhuman creation. See Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 176-181. Although Hahne’s argument is one of the most thorough, other commentators agree with his judgment that Paul is referring here to the subhuman creation. See, for example, N. T. Wright, *Romans*, in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, 596, John R. W. Stott, *Romans*, 238-41, and Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 551.

¹²³ Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 180.

way fell, but because human beings fell and thereby corrupted the created order, subjecting it to bondage and decay (8:21).

The frustration and bondage under which creation is suffering is the result of the judgment of God on the first humans' disobedience. John Stott affirms that Paul is likely referring to Genesis 3 here and that the "one who subjected" (v. 20) creation to futility is God.¹²⁴ N. T. Wright suggests that God subjected creation to futility "in order that creation might point forward to the new world that is to be, in which its beauty and power will be enhanced and its corruptibility and futility will be done away."¹²⁵ Regardless of why exactly God's judgment fell on creation as well as human persons, however, Paul makes it clear in this text that creation is suffering and that suffering is the result of human sin. Hahne writes, "God cursed the earth [Gen. 3] not because of the disobedience of the non-human creation but because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Creation was a victim of human sin."¹²⁶ Nature was subjected to futility at a specific point in time, the fall of the first couple (v. 20), and nature is different in some way than it was prior to the fall.¹²⁷ This difference is negative and is the result of the sin of the first couple. Hahne asserts, "The physical aspect of corruption is a consequence of the moral evil of

¹²⁴ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 238-9.

¹²⁵ Wright, *Romans*, in *New Interpreter's Bible*, 596.

¹²⁶ Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 188-9.

¹²⁷ Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 196. Some suggest that creation merely suffers because of human mismanagement. Rather than responsible dominion as mandated in Gen. 1, humans after the fall are incapable of managing creation properly and as a result, creation suffers. (See, for example, F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Rev. Canon Leon Morris (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 160.) While it is undoubtedly true that the fall influenced human ability to properly manage creation, the evidence in Romans 8 as well as the causal relationship between sin and the suffering of creation that we have examined in the Old Testament texts suggest a more direct correspondence between sin and creation.

the fall.”¹²⁸ Like the Old Testament texts, Paul draws a clear connection between human sin and the effects of sin on creation as a whole.

The biblical text, both Old and New Testaments, offers evidence of the catastrophic effects of sin on creation as a whole. The prophets even draw causal links between human sin and the destruction of creation. Sometimes the Bible describes the effects on creation as the result of God’s judgment, as is the case in Is. 24, Jer. 4, and, with reference to Genesis 3, Romans 8. But in at least one case, that of Hosea, creation is wilting as a direct result of human sin. Overall, it is hard to ignore that human sin has negative consequences on creation. Creation as a whole awaits restoration, a restoration that will be actualized through atonement.

Conclusion

The priestly account of creation in Genesis 1 clearly presents the importance of order in the newly created world. God’s creative work is specifically identified with order and separation, maintaining distinctions between elements that do not belong together. The ordered world provides the conditions necessary for life. The ordered cosmos is declared ‘very good’ by God and this declaration of goodness is related to the order or boundaries which God has set in place. To disrupt creational boundaries is to disrupt the conditions God has established for life.

The boundaries established in creation are reflected in the laws and commandments God gives to Israel. The prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2 could be understood as the first boundary or command which allows for continued life in the garden paradise God has provided them.

¹²⁸ Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 207.

Later, the law given to Israel at Sinai forms the boundary within which Israel must remain if she is to live in harmony with the created order. Righteousness, *šēdāqâ*, amounts to living in harmony with the created order by maintaining the boundaries set in place by God. Righteousness is associated with life in the full Hebrew sense of the term, and with the flourishing of creation, both human and non-human creation. Righteousness results in *šālôm*, the state of well-being characterized by blessing that comes from life lived in the presence of God.

By contrast, transgressing boundaries disrupts *šālôm*. This is true not only of the transgression of the first couple in Eden, but of the continuing transgressions of humans. Sin has adverse effects on humans and the non-human creation. Because of this, all of creation awaits restoration, not just humans. All of creation longs for the way things are supposed to be. We turn now to how the sacrificial system offers restoration of God's intended order for both the people and the land of Israel.

CHAPTER THREE: POLLUTION, SIN, AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, sin has significant detrimental effects on creation. When one breaks God's law, boundaries are transgressed and the order of creation disrupted, sometimes with catastrophic consequences. One result of boundary transgression is pollution. Consider a polluted lake or river for example. A river is supposed to have relatively clean water that is hospitable to life one would expect to find there such as fish, certain birds, frogs, and certain types of vegetation. But in the area where I live, after heavy rains the local wastewater treatment plant is occasionally unable to cope with the volume of water coming in and releases raw sewage into the river. The boundary between untreated water and the river has been breached and the result is a polluted river that the human population is temporarily cautioned against contacting. Or consider oil spills. Huge tanker ships carry crude oil from oil fields to refineries. Along the way, one of these ships has an accident and the crude oil spills out into the ocean causing major problems for the environment. Birds, seals, otters, and other sea life get coated with oil and die. The boundary between the oil tank of the ship and the ocean has been transgressed or breached. The result is pollution, the consequences of which are catastrophic for the environment.

As with environmental pollution, one way to understand the disruption of order caused by sin, particularly sin understood as transgressing boundaries, is by seeing the consequences of sin as pollution of the Israelite camp. The consequence of pollution

infecting Israel's camp is the potential loss of the presence of God. For Israel to lose the presence of God is for her to lose her identity as God's own people. But perhaps even more critical, the loss of the presence of God results ultimately in the loss of life characterized by *šālôm*.

This chapter will examine the threat to Israel's well-being posed by the problem of pollution, including pollution connected with Israel's purity laws and particularly pollution connected with sin. Mary Douglas's pivotal work on the concept of pollution in primitive societies will be applied to Israel's purity laws recorded in Leviticus in an effort to demonstrate the connection between sin, pollution, and the presence of God. This chapter will then describe in some detail the sacrificial system in ancient Israel and how that system cleanses the camp of pollution, restores order, and thereby allows for the continued presence of God in Israel's midst. In addition, it will explain the rites involved in the great Day of Atonement and how those rites served to restore God's creation – Israel.

Dirt, Pollution, and Sin

Mary Douglas's analysis of dirt and pollution in primitive societies offers several helpful insights into how to understand the threat to an ordered environment that pollution poses. Douglas makes the point that ideas about dirt and pollution are often continuous with ideas about anomalies or abnormalities.¹ Ideas about dirt and pollution

¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge: London and New York, 1966), 5.

in societies express symbolic systems. “Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death.”²

Douglas begins by arguing against a purely hygienic understanding of dirt. Especially in the past one hundred years as our understanding of pathogens has increased, pollution and dirt have become associated with unhealthy living conditions. Douglas suggests that although the hygienic understanding of dirt may entail a system of its own, it is helpful when dealing with primitive societies to extricate hygiene and pathogenicity from one’s understanding of dirt. When we do this, we are left with a definition of dirt as “matter out of place.”³ This definition is helpful for understanding dirt as part of an ordered system where certain items are accepted and others are rejected based on classifications that have developed within a given society. These classifications amount to, in effect, a symbolic understanding of pollution and purity.⁴

All people operate within the sorts of ordered systems Douglas describes – systems, by and large, based on experience. In other words, all people tend to place certain things in specific categories based on their experiences. When people are faced with something that is ambiguous or an anomaly to an accepted category, they are faced with the uncomfortable decision of fitting it into the accepted system within which they operate, or rejecting it outright. Douglas suggests that these ordered systems, albeit often not recognized as systems, operate even in modern western societies. For example, in western societies, we do not walk in the door to a house, take off our shoes and place them on the table where we eat our meals. We might even say to a child who did such a

² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 6.

³ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 36.

⁴ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 36.

thing, “Take your dirty shoes off that table!” And the child might reply, “But my shoes aren’t dirty.” Of course the parent was not necessarily referring to literal dirt. She may have only been referring to the fact that something that has been worn on one’s feet does not belong on the dinner table. Likewise, in many places in the United States, pets are not allowed in restaurants. If someone should bring her dog or cat with her to dine indoors at a restaurant, unless the animal was a guide dog, she would be asked to leave. In the United States, we do not publically dine with animals (at least not the four-legged kind). The shoes on the dinner table and the dog or cat in the restaurant are both modern examples of what Douglas calls “matter out of place.” Both of these examples are generally associated, at least symbolically, with the idea of dirt.

According to Douglas, there are several options as far as dealing with dirt. We can opt simply to ignore it. With the example of the shoes given above, the parent could, for some reason, not perceive the shoes as a problem and not say anything to the child. Or the parent could see the shoes, recognize them as a problem, and choose to rethink her categories about dirt and allow the shoes to remain on the table. Or the parent could remove or have someone else remove the shoes from the table. Douglas notes that dirt can be dealt with individually, but most often it is dealt with in the context of cultures. The public character of the rules tends to make the categories of clean and dirty quite rigid.⁵ She concludes her discussion of dirt by asserting, “if uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order.” Furthermore, “uncleanness or dirt is that

⁵ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 40.

which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained. To recognize this is the first step towards insight into pollution.”⁶

Dirt, matter out of place, causes problems because it destroys proper order as defined by a particular community. In primitive societies, disorder represented both danger and power. Disorder had the potential to rearrange or disfigure the pattern of ordered categories established by a given community and therefore put the structure of that community at risk.⁷ What Douglas refers to as “marginal states” or “transitional states” were considered especially dangerous to order. Marginal states are conditions that blur the distinction between ordered societal categories and are often associated with rites of passage where humans are concerned.⁸ A person, animal, or object with transitional characteristics did not fit neatly into one category or another but tended to straddle categories thereby contributing to disorder rather than order. “Danger lies in transitional states,” Douglas writes, “simply because transition is neither one state nor the next.”⁹

Where Israel is concerned, the order in which the community operates is not self-generated. As already noted in the previous chapter, the order within which Israel operated was instituted at creation by God and reflected in the various laws and rituals given by God to Israel. Deviation from these laws and therefore from creation order results in pollution which, if unremedied, could lead to less than desirable consequences for the community.

⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 41.

⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 95.

⁸ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 97.

⁹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 97.

Holiness is central to understanding the danger posed by pollution. Holy (*qđš*) is how YHWH makes himself known to Israel. John Hartley writes that holiness is “the quintessential nature of Yahweh as God.”¹⁰ God is holy. God’s command that Israel be holy, in other words, is a command to be like her creator, to be like God. At a fundamental level this entails maintaining a proper relationship to God. According to Ringgren, this includes at least “ethical obedience, abstinence from what is impure, and worship of the one God.”¹¹ Holiness, in fact, is one of the categories that structures life in Israel.

In the Priestly thinking of Leviticus, three basic categories or states of being are at work: holy, common, and unclean. Everything that is not holy is considered common. Common is further divided into clean and unclean.¹² In order to move from the state of common to that of holy the person or object must be sanctified, usually through ritual. To profane is to move from the state of holy to common, but clean. To pollute refers to the movement from common but clean, to common but unclean. The normal condition of persons and objects is that of being clean. But one can be made unclean by coming into

¹⁰ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), lvi.

¹¹ Helmer Ringgren, “קדש” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 12, revised edition.

¹² This three-fold division of the status of persons or objects in Israel and the following explanation of the relationship between these three states is succinctly presented by Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 19. For a more complete explanation of this conception in Leviticus see Richard D. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 17-38. There are also a number of more detailed studies available that describe, in relation to specific issues like skin diseases or other issues mentioned in the biblical text, not only how defilement might be transferred, but also how to understand this complex system in terms of Israelite ritual. See, for example, David P. Wright’s detailed charts in Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 953-968; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Isarel,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Conner (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399-414; see also Milgrom’s own four-fold scheme, *Leviticus 1-16*, 732-3. For the purposes of my argument, however, the simple scheme presented by Wenham suffices.

contact with something that pollutes. Once one becomes unclean, the person or object can be cleansed through ritual and restored to the normal condition of common but clean.¹³ Uncleanness can be transmitted from an unclean person or object to a clean person or object rendering that person or object unclean. In other words, uncleanness is contagious. Wenham points out that there are also some holy objects that transmit holiness to things that touch them.¹⁴ Cleanness, however, is not transmitted. Wenham claims, “Cleanness is the ground state; holiness and uncleanness are variations from the norm of cleanness.”¹⁵ Furthermore, uncleanness is incompatible with holiness and therefore with life in God’s presence.¹⁶ If Israel is to live in God’s presence, she must maintain her status of clean.

The dietary laws of Leviticus 11 provide one example of the relationship of pollution and order in Israel. With regard to holiness, Douglas notes the connection in the biblical text between God’s command that Israel “be holy” and the prohibitions against eating certain animals. The distinctions between clean and unclean animals are, in fact, prefaced by the command that Israel “be holy” and therefore, according to Douglas, must be understood first and foremost in light of this prefatory command.¹⁷ Specifically, the Israelites are not to make themselves unclean by eating forbidden animals because they are to be holy as YHWH himself is holy (Lev. 11:44-45).

¹³ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 19.

¹⁴ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 20.

¹⁵ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 20.

¹⁶ Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest*, 34.

¹⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 50.

Douglas raises the question of why these laws restrict the consumption of certain animals and not others and suggests that the key to understanding why certain animals are considered unclean lies in the order of creation. The dietary restrictions reflect the tripartite structure of creation: air, land, and water.¹⁸ The primary underlying reason, in other words, for the designation of clean or unclean with regard to the animals listed in Lev. 11 is whether or not these animals fully conform to their class.¹⁹ Specifically, given the creational distinctions in Genesis 1 of earth, water, and firmament, Douglas suggests that “any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness.”²⁰ Gorman affirms her assertion noting that “animals should reflect the norms associated with their particular location and habitat.”²¹ These animals are out of place with regard to creational categories. They exist in a marginal state, not fitting perfectly into any one category but rather straddling creational categories. Because these systems reflect the social order,²² the marginal states of these animals represent a threat to that order. The disordered nature of these animals due to their lack of conformity to the categories of creation, therefore, renders them unclean and a potential source of pollution for the people of Israel.²³

¹⁸ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 56-7.

¹⁹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 56.

²⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 57. Also Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest*, 23.

²¹ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 71.

²² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 3.

²³ It should be noted that Douglas’ model is not without its critics. A number of commentators on Leviticus 11 disagree with Douglas regarding why these animals are out of place. Jacob Milgrom, for example, notes errors in her biblical comments as well as a potential problem with her definition of the realm of the holy. (See *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1-16*, [New York: Doubleday, 1991], p.720ff.) Nonetheless, Milgrom affirms the basic problem of anomalies in these animals that Douglas identifies. Furthermore, Douglas’s recognition of the place of categories in a given society’s value system remains

Although Douglas focuses on the dietary laws in Leviticus 11 as her example of how dirt and the consequent pollution operate in a society, these laws do not represent the only possible pollutants for the people of Israel. Contact with a dead body, childbirth, certain rashes and skin diseases, and some bodily discharges including normal discharges of semen and menstrual blood can render a person or object unclean for a period of time.

In primitive societies, these conditions were hazardous because they were considered transitional states. That is, these conditions straddle the boundary between two states. Victor Turner writes that these transitional entities “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”²⁴ Menstruating or pregnant women and fetuses, for example, are commonly thought to occupy this marginal or transitional state in primitive societies because they place the woman in a socially abnormal position.²⁵ As Douglas describes them, the transitional states that place one into a virtual no man’s land between life and death are of particular danger in primitive societies. She suggests that the unborn child represents one such dangerous transitional state. Douglas writes that the unborn child is often believed to be a danger because its present and future condition is considered ambiguous. “For no one can say what sex it will have or whether it will

helpful as even Milgrom attests. See also Edwin Firmage, “The Dietary Laws and the Concept of Holiness,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 41 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 177-208. Firmage disagrees, for the most part, with Douglas’s conclusions regarding why certain animals are unclean. Yet, he affirms her general understanding of a connection between the dietary laws of Israel and the larger social structure of that society. In fact, there is widespread recognition of the importance of Douglas’s model in understanding the link between codes of behavior such as these dietary laws, and the overall social structure of a particular society. See also John Hartley’s brief review of various proposals to explain ritual purity. John Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 144-146.

²⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 95.

²⁵ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 41.

survive the hazards of infancy.”²⁶ The unborn child, in effect, straddles the boundary between life and death. The unborn child, therefore, could be understood as “matter out of place” because, at least in this case, it has no definable place. The result is disorder which threatens the community.

In Israel, although pregnancy was not considered transitional, childbirth represented danger and resulted in impurity. Gorman suggests that in the process of giving birth, the mother enters into a transitional state between life and death.²⁷ He writes, “She [the woman] brings a new life into the world, but, at the same time, she loses some of her own life through the loss of blood. The woman manifests the loss of life in the act of bringing forth new life.”²⁸ In other words, through the birth process, the woman ends up occupying both the realm of life and the realm of death simultaneously. She does not fit neatly into one category or the other. Childbirth blurs the distinction made between life and death and thus renders the woman unclean.

As far as certain skin diseases (*šāra’at*) are concerned, Milgrom suggests that the impurity associated with these conditions has to do with their association with death.²⁹ He writes “the common denominator of all the skin ailments described in Lev 13 is that the body is wasting away.”³⁰ This wasting away stands in opposition to wholeness which

²⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 95.

²⁷ Richard Whitekettle disputes Gorman’s understanding of this as a transitional state between life and death. Rather, he suggests that this is a rite of passage from gestation to motherhood. While his argument is interesting and helpful for understanding the text, whether he is correct about the rite of passage or Gorman is correct about this being a state between life and death, both argue that it is, in fact, a transitional state that leads to societal restrictions. See Richard Whitekettle, “Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 107, no. 3 (1995):393-408.

²⁸ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 78.

²⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 46-7. See also Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 81.

³⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 819.

is consistently related to holiness.³¹ Among other texts, Milgrom points out Aaron's identification in Numbers 12:12 of Miriam, who has been plagued with *šāra'at*, as being "like a corpse." He also notes the similarity in purification rites between the corpse-contaminated person and the person with *šāra'at*.³² The person with a skin disease (*šāra'at*) was visually associated with death and thus treated as one who had come in contact with death and been infected by it. The person therefore straddled the boundary between life and death, both conditions being present in his body.

Like the skin diseases, genital discharges also render a person unclean. Menstrual blood is considered dangerous in many primitive societies, but a variety of other bodily discharges are also considered unclean, particularly excrement. For Israel, excrement did not carry the danger of defilement. In fact, as Frymer-Kensky notes, only bodily discharges associated with sex were considered polluting for Israel.³³ Why are Israel's laws limited to menstrual blood and semen?

Milgrom thinks genital discharges are considered unclean because of their association with death. For Israel, the loss of vaginal blood or semen implied a loss of life: "The loss of vaginal blood and semen, both containing seed, meant the diminution of life and, if unchecked, destruction and death."³⁴ In contrast to this, excrement had nothing to do with death but rather was necessary to continue a healthy life.³⁵

³¹ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 199. Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 81.

³² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 819.

³³ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall God Forth* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 401.

³⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 767.

³⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 767.

Whitekettle offers a further explanation. He proposes that the loss of vaginal blood or semen indicates dysfunction of the reproductive system with regard to its systemic purpose.³⁶ When the woman's reproductive system was discharging, she was considered not to have the fullness of life, therefore, not allowed to approach the sacred realm.³⁷ The reason Whitekettle believes the woman is considered unclean during discharge is because although the reproductive system is functioning in a physiologically typical way, it is not functioning in a way that will bring about reproduction.³⁸ In other words, the menstruating woman and, by extension, the postpartum woman are not capable of conceiving a child. Her reproductive system is, at least in the Levitical system, dysfunctional and therefore impure. The same is true, he argues, with the seminal emission of a male. When emission occurs outside of sexual intercourse, conception is not possible.³⁹ Normal discharges of blood and semen therefore, because of their relationship to the fullness of life, placed a person temporarily into a position of being not fully alive. If the two opposing states are death and life, to not be fully alive is to be in some sense dying yet still alive, in other words, between the two states of life and death – clearly transitional and therefore, dangerous. Thus, the person is considered unclean and restricted from approaching the realm of the holy, the sanctuary.

The distinction between life and death is a central component of Israel's worldview. The camp of Israel is the place of purity, the place of life. John Goldingay

³⁶ Whitekettle, "Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman," 407.

³⁷ Whitekettle, "Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman," 405.

³⁸ Whitekettle, "Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman," 406.

³⁹ Whitekettle, "Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman," 406.

notes that the distinction between “defiling and clean overlaps with the distinction between death and life.”⁴⁰ This is evident in the structure of the camp itself. There are degrees of holiness within the camp of Israel. Whitekettle describes this as a continuum of consecration in the Israelite camp. “Consecration,” writes Whitekettle, “and therefore the need for purity, increased with movement towards the center.”⁴¹ The tabernacle and tent of meeting are considered “holy,” with the inner sanctuary where the presence of God resided the most holy. The camp as a whole was considered “clean.” If a person became unclean, he had to isolate himself from the community, sometimes outside the camp, and could not approach the sanctuary until he was pronounced “clean.” The area outside the camp was considered unclean. It was associated with the realm of death, the realm devoid of the presence of God and all the blessings that presence entails.⁴² As Whitekettle notes, “the periphery reflected the converse of the center’s character; a quality encompassed in the words ‘death’ and ‘non-life.’”⁴³

Blurring the distinction between life and death carried the potential not only to defile the person, but the camp (Num. 19:13). Frymer-Kensky explains, “The boundaries between life and death are crucial and no individual who has had contact with the world of death can be part of life.”⁴⁴ If a person becomes unclean and does not take the necessary means to cleanse herself, she must be cut off from the people of God.⁴⁵ This is

⁴⁰ John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, Old Testament theology, vol. 1 (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 397.

⁴¹ Whitekettle, “Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman,” 404.

⁴² Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 15.

⁴³ Whitekettle, “Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman,” 405.

⁴⁴ Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” 400.

⁴⁵ See for example Numbers 19: 13, 20.

to protect the community as a whole. Because of the contagious nature of impurity, allowing her to remain in the camp would pose a threat not simply to the individual, but to the entire community.⁴⁶ Gorman writes, “The camp must be protected from impurity and defilement, lest the whole camp suffer.”⁴⁷ Various rituals could cleanse the defiled person but if the person in question refused to avail herself of these rituals, she must be “cut off” (Num. 19:20).⁴⁸

The overarching reason for purity was the presence of God in the camp. The tabernacle sits in the center of the camp and is the locus of God’s holy presence. The holy and the unclean cannot come into contact.⁴⁹ Neglecting the purity regulations pollutes not just the individual, but the camp and even the sanctuary, as evidenced by the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement which serve in part to cleanse the sanctuary. Pollution in the camp that is not cleansed by the proper ritual will result in driving God out of his sanctuary, out of Israel’s midst. “If persons unremittingly polluted the sanctuary,” explains Milgrom, “they forced God out of his sanctuary and out of their lives.”⁵⁰ Pollution, therefore, is a serious threat to life in the presence of God.

⁴⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 803-4. See also Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” 399-400.

⁴⁷ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 59.

⁴⁸ The technical term here is *kārēt*. There is some debate surrounding what exactly the *kārēt* penalty involved and who was responsible for carrying out the penalty. For an overview of these discussions see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 457-60. Regardless of whether God or humans carry out the penalty, and regardless of whether one is cut off by immediate death or banishment from the community, the severity of the penalty is underscored by the fact that the person, in the end, is removed from the presence of God and all the blessings that presence entails.

⁴⁹ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 22.

⁵⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 43.

The discussion so far has focused entirely on ritual impurity, that is, impurity caused by a whole variety of activities generally associated with the regulations found in Leviticus 11-15. Most of the defilement related to ritual impurity is the result of natural processes and substances. Jonathan Klawans offers three characteristics of ritual impurity: “(1) The sources of ritual impurity are natural and more or less unavoidable; (2) it is not sinful to contract these impurities; and (3) these impurities can convey an impermanent contagion to people (priests and Israelites) and to many items within close proximity.”⁵¹ Ritual impurity does pollute Israel and therefore threatens the presence of God.

Klawans identifies another type of impurity, however, moral impurity. Klawans notes several distinctions between ritual and moral impurity. Two are especially important for this discussion. First, he suggests, “while ritual impurity is generally not sinful, moral impurity is a direct consequence of grave sin.”⁵² Second, “While ritual impurity can be ameliorated by rites of purification, that is not the case for moral impurity.”⁵³ In other words, moral impurity cannot be alleviated through some of the simpler rituals like bathing or washing. Moral impurity, the impurity caused by sin, requires punishment or atonement.⁵⁴ Klawans makes a good and helpful distinction. But it begs the question of why sin renders someone unclean or morally impure.

⁵¹ Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54.

⁵² Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and Temple*, 55.

⁵³ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and Temple*, 55.

⁵⁴ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and Temple*, 55.

One way to conceive of sin, as briefly discussed in chapter 2, is as breaking a boundary, in particular, a creational boundary represented through the law.⁵⁵ Impurity is the result of breaching boundaries, either by moving into a space where something doesn't belong or by not fitting properly into an assigned space. As explained in chapter 2, the law is associated with the order of creation and with life. To breach the behavioral boundaries that the law delimits can be understood as breaching the distinction between order and disorder instituted at creation. Because sin breaks this boundary, sin causes impurity and impurity, as Milgrom points out, is identified with death.⁵⁶ A breach between order and disorder, then, is equivalent to a breach between the boundaries of life and death. Sin, therefore, breaches the boundary between life and death. Ongoing sin places the person in the precarious position of being alive, yet dying or infected by death. The impurity which results from sin and infects the camp renders the camp impure, a place of both life and death, rather than the place of life alone. If the camp is left in this state, the people are at risk of being cut off from the presence of God – either because God's presence leaves Israel as happens in Ezekiel 10, or because Israel is cast out of God's presence as with the exile. Gorman emphasizes, "failure to purify ritually the sacred space [of the sanctuary or camp] might result in Yahweh's departure, which would be catastrophic for Israel."⁵⁷ The impurity which results from sin, then, poses a major threat to the continued presence of God in the camp.

⁵⁵ Of course there are many other ways that the Bible presents sin including disobeying instructions given by God. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, the metaphor of sin as boundary breaking as discussed in the previous chapter is the most helpful.

⁵⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 46.

⁵⁷ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 11.

The Sacrificial System

It is clear from the discussion so far that impurity poses serious risks to Israel's life in the presence of God. The unclean and the holy cannot dwell together. The defilement of sacred space threatens to drive God from Israel's midst. After giving careful instructions for distinguishing between the clean and the unclean, the writer of Leviticus offers the following concluding statement: "Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from the uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst" (Lev. 15:31). In fact, remaining unclean poses the risk of driving God from the camp. Living apart from God's presence is, as described earlier, the equivalent of death. Israel, then, needs cleansing from impurity in order to maintain God's presence in her midst.

Ritual, for Israel, functions to do exactly that. Gorman offers one possible typology for understanding the role of ritual and how it functions in relation to order in ancient Israel. He defines ritual as "a complex performance of symbolic acts, characterized by its formality, order, and sequence, which tends to take place in specific situations, and has as one of its central goals the regulation of the social order."⁵⁸ Ritual involves action of some sort. Gorman suggests four types of rituals which address the question of order. First are what he identifies as rites of passage. Rites of passage function to move a person or community from one social or conceptual status to another.⁵⁹ The marginal or liminal state discussed in the previous section is associated with these rites of passage. Gorman emphasizes that "the person in the liminal stage of

⁵⁸ Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*, JSOT Supplement Series, 91 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 19.

⁵⁹ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 53.

the rite stands outside the normal structure of society.”⁶⁰ Second are founding rituals. Founding rituals “are rituals designed to bring into being a certain state, institution, or situation. These rituals present the founding act or origin of something.”⁶¹ Two examples he offers are the ordination of the priesthood in Lev. 8 and the tabernacle cult in Lev. 9. Third are maintenance rituals. These rituals are “designed to maintain the already established order.”⁶² Gorman goes on, “Such rituals may be seen as protectors of the divinely created order of cosmos, society, and cult.”⁶³ He cites the Priestly ritual code of Num. 28-29 as an example of this sort of ritual. The fourth type of ritual is the restoration ritual. These, he claims, are the dominant types found in the priestly ritual system.⁶⁴ “These rituals are designed to restore the order of creation when it has been broken, ruptured, or damaged.”⁶⁵

Creation theology forms the underlying background for understanding ritual in Israel. Gorman writes, “The primary question addressed in examining specific parts of the larger Priestly ritual system concerns the way in which the rituals relate to the foundation, maintenance, and restoration of the divinely created order.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Priestly rituals are much broader than the categories of clean and unclean. The

⁶⁰ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 53.

⁶¹ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 54.

⁶² Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 55.

⁶³ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 55.

⁶⁴ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 55.

⁶⁵ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 55.

⁶⁶ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 60.

primary concern in Priestly theology is “a concern for the reestablishment of the order of creation, an order consisting of cosmic, social, and cultic categories.”⁶⁷

Central to Israelite ritual is the sacrificial system. Five types of offerings or sacrifices are described in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. Although specific instructions for purification from particular defilements such as childbirth are added to these sacrifices elsewhere in Leviticus, the sacrifices are foundational for ritual cleansing of moral defilement in the instructions to Israel.

The first sacrifice described is the burnt or whole offering (*'ōlâ*); “whole” because the whole animal is completely consumed on the altar. Hartley calls the burnt offering the “main sacrifice of the Israelite cult.”⁶⁸ The Burnt Offering was performed every morning and evening and was typically offered on behalf of an individual. It was also performed, often more than twice per day, for various festivals and feast days. The fire on the altar was never supposed to go out (Lev. 6:13). The ongoing daily nature of this sacrifice leads Gorman to place the burnt offering in the category of a maintenance ritual.⁶⁹ Maintenance rituals functioned primarily, as the word suggests, to preserve and maintain the already established order of creation reflected in the order of the camp.⁷⁰

The animal brought for the burnt offering had to be a male without defect but could be a bull, sheep, goat, or bird depending on the resources of the individual involved (Lev. 1:3, 10, 13). The individual involved had to bring the animal to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The worshipper then laid his hand on the head of the animal, killed and

⁶⁷ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 61.

⁶⁸ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 17.

⁶⁹ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 23.

⁷⁰ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 55.

cut up the animal. The priests would sprinkle the blood on the altar, arrange the pieces of the animal on the altar, and burn it completely. In the case of the morning and evening sacrifices, the priest performed these tasks on behalf of the community. The purpose of the burnt offering was atonement (Lev. 1:4) and although some commentators dispute this, Wenham points out that the language of the text itself points toward atonement as the primary, if not the only, purpose of the burnt offering.⁷¹

Unlike some of the other sacrifices of atonement, and especially those connected with the Day of Atonement, it is not particularly clear what is being atoned for with the burnt offering. The laying on of hands suggests the idea of identification, representation, or substitution. But forgiveness is not specifically mentioned with this sacrifice. Nonetheless, the recurring phrase “a gift for a soothing aroma to Yahweh”⁷² suggests that there has been a breach of some sort in the relationship between the person and Yahweh which has disturbed Yahweh in some way. Gorman suggests “a disruption of the right and good order of creation, be it cosmic, social, or cultic, offends and angers the divine creator.”⁷³ He goes on, “The burnt offering provides a pleasing fragrance for God and cools down the divine wrath.”⁷⁴ Given the priestly writer’s interest in creation order, it seems likely that Gorman is right in his judgment that some sort of disruption has occurred. It is difficult to know, however, whether the disruption is due to sin or ritual impurity or some other problem. Nonetheless, clearly the priests are daily offering

⁷¹ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 57.

⁷² Translation by Hartley, *Leviticus*, 13.

⁷³ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 23.

⁷⁴ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 23.

atonement sacrifices that please God and function in some way to repair the break or disruption which threatens the relationship between individuals and God.

The next offering dealt with in Leviticus, the grain offering, is the only offering that is not an animal. The grain brought to the priest had to be without yeast.⁷⁵ Yeast was symbolic of corruption and death and therefore had no place in the pure grain offering.⁷⁵ This unleavened grain was mixed with oil and incense. A handful of the grain mixture was then placed on the altar and burned. Alternately, it could consist of unleavened flour cakes or, in the case of the firstfruits offering, raw roasted grain. Like the burnt offering, this offering is also described as a “pleasing fragrance” or “soothing aroma” to Yahweh (Lev. 2:2).

Given this language, there is some question about whether or not this offering served to atone as the burnt offering did. Gorman suggests that it probably does not atone on its own but is generally used with other sacrifices and offerings in the larger ritual process.⁷⁶ Milgrom however, thinks that this offering substitutes for the burnt offering for the poor and therefore does have an atoning function.⁷⁷ Milgrom’s understanding is possible given the language of “soothing aroma” present in the text. Nonetheless the absence of any reference to atonement as well as specific provisions for the poor to bring smaller animals as burnt offerings seems to suggest that this offering does not have as its primary function atonement. In other words, it is not a substitute burnt offering for the poor. Rather, Gorman suggests that as a supplementary sacrifice to

⁷⁵ Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1-16*, 189.

⁷⁶ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 27.

⁷⁷ Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1-16*, 196.

accompany the burnt offering as well as by itself, the grain offering was an expression of joy and thanksgiving.⁷⁸

The fellowship, peace, or well-being offering once again involves an animal from the flock. The well-being offering is generally a voluntary offering in contrast to the burnt and cereal offerings which were demanded every day. Only two situations require the well-being offering: the ordination of the priesthood (Lev. 9:18-22) and as a part of the celebration of the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:19). Outside of these two specific occasions, Leviticus 7 gives three reasons that a person may want to present a well-being offering. First, it could simply be an expression of thankfulness. Second, it may be offered as the result of a vow. Third, it may be a freewill offering.

Unlike the burnt offering which may only be a male animal, the well-being offering may be a male or a female without defect. There were no provisions for smaller animals as with the burnt offering, perhaps because this was not a mandatory offering. If a person could not afford to sacrifice an additional animal, it was not required. In addition, while the burnt offering was to be consumed completely by the fire of the altar (except for the skin), a large part of the well-being offering was given back to the worshipper for food. According to Hartley, “this meal expressed the deep and abiding relationship between this clan and Yahweh.”⁷⁹

The well-being offering was presented after and sacrificed on top of the burnt offering.⁸⁰ Hartley observes that this sequence may indicate that the atonement enacted in

⁷⁸ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 27.

⁷⁹ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 42.

⁸⁰ Although the well-being offering was presented after the burnt offering the two offerings may not have been presented by the same worshipper. In other words, one did not need to offer a burnt offering in order to offer the well-being offering. See Hartley, *Leviticus*, 42.

the burnt offering was theologically foundational to the emphasis of fellowship present in the well-being offering.⁸¹ Nonetheless, despite the shedding of blood which is generally linked with atonement in Lev. 17:11, it is unlikely that the well-being offering was in fact atoning.⁸² It is an offering that is “pleasing to the LORD” and a “lasting ordinance” but there is no explicit reference to atonement in either Lev. 3 or 7. Rather, the well-being offering emphasized Israel’s covenant bond with Yahweh, a bond celebrated and reinforced through this shared meal.⁸³

The sin or purification offering (*hattā’*) is the fourth offering described in Leviticus. The sin offering, unlike the other offerings, could be performed on behalf of an individual or the community as a whole. Three distinct practices are described in Leviticus 4 and 5. The first practice described is to atone for the inadvertent sin of a priest or the community as a whole (Lev. 4:3, 13).⁸⁴ This practice involves the sacrifice of a bull and the accompanying ritual of laying hands on the head, sprinkling blood seven

⁸¹ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 32.

⁸² Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus*, 221.

⁸³ Wenham correctly points out that this idea of a shared meal should in no way be construed into an idea that God somehow “eats” the offering, regardless of what ancient Israel might have thought. He notes that such a view is countered by Ps. 50:12-13: “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the blood of bulls or drink the blood of goats?” See Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 81.

⁸⁴ It is clear from Leviticus that this sacrifice does not apply to intentional sin. It is clearly intended for inadvertent sin which could mean a failure to do what the law requires, or doing something that one did not realize was wrong. (See Baruch Levine, *JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], p. 18-19) Walter Kaiser notes that inadvertent did not necessarily mean the offender was ignorant of the law. The contrast between inadvertent sin and intentional sin had to do with attitude. Kaiser notes that intentional sin had the character of one shaking one’s fist in defiance of the law and of God. (See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Book of Leviticus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1, ed. Bruce C. Birch, John J. Collins, and Kathryn Pfisterer Darr [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994], 1033-34.) Thus, intentional or premeditated sins usually resulted in the offending party being “cut off,” *karet*. While this subject is not unimportant, my task here is to accurately outline the sacrificial system as presented in Leviticus and not to delve into cases potentially not covered by this system.

times before the LORD inside the tent of meeting, placing some blood on the horns of the altar, and finally pouring out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. The bull is then burned completely, making atonement for the party involved (Lev. 4:20). The second practice is for a leader or a member of the community who sins unintentionally. These offenders must bring a goat, a female goat in the case of the member of the community, sacrifice it, and follow the accompanying ritual of laying hands on the head, placing some blood on the horns of the altar, and pouring out the rest at the base of the altar, thus atoning for the sin of the leader or community member. The third practice in this text has to do with atoning for four specific offenses: not speaking up in public to testify (Lev. 5:1), touching something ceremonially unclean (Lev. 5:2), touching human uncleanness (Lev. 5:3), and the thoughtless taking of an oath (Lev. 5:4). The animal sacrificed in this ritual is more flexible than in the other two but the general practice itself is nearly identical.

Many commentators refer to this offering as the purification offering rather than the sin offering despite the fact that the related word *hattā'* is nearly uniformly translated "sin." As noted earlier, sin causes impurity. Levine writes that there is "an inherent connection between sinfulness and impurity, a connection that is apparent in a variety of situations."⁸⁵ The reason, then, for choosing to call this a purification offering rather than a sin offering is that the sacrificial ritual provides purification from the pollution caused by the sins of the community. As Gorman writes, "purification more precisely indicates its primary function within the priestly sacrificial system."⁸⁶ In addition, Wenham notes

⁸⁵ Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 19.

⁸⁶ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 33.

that this is not the only offering given to atone for the sins of the people. Thus to call it the “sin offering” is misleading not only with regard to its function within the community, but also with regard to its relation to other sacrifices within the ritual system.⁸⁷

Atonement, then, where this offering is concerned, involves purification.

The fifth and final type of sacrifice described in Leviticus is the guilt or reparation offering. As with the purification offering, the guilt offering is for inadvertent sins. Unlike the purification offering, however, the guilt offering is only used by individuals, not the community as a whole. This sacrifice is required first of all for inadvertent sins “in regard to any of the LORD’s holy things” (Lev. 5:15).⁸⁸ Gorman writes that the trespass involved “is an offense against Yahweh that crosses over and violates the boundaries that set apart the holy things of Yahweh.”⁸⁹ Kaiser adds, “The designation ‘the LORD’s holy things’ points to all that is the property of the Lord in a special sense.”⁹⁰ Additionally, three specific sins that require the guilt offering are listed here (Lev. 6:1-3). These are sins against one’s neighbor involving deceit of one form or another and presumably are intentional.⁹¹ Yet they are also described as sins against the LORD perhaps because they involve swearing falsely in the name of the LORD (Lev. 6:2) or perhaps simply because all sin is understood as being in some way against the LORD (Ps. 51:4).

⁸⁷ Wenham, *Leviticus*, 88.

⁸⁸ For possibilities of what these sins might be see Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 106.

⁸⁹ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 41.

⁹⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Book of Leviticus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1042.

⁹¹ Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary, 32.

The prescribed offering is a ram without defect. Unlike other sacrifices, there is no alternate animal available for someone who may have difficulty providing a ram. Everyone, regardless of social status, had to bring a ram without defect. Along with the ram, when the sin was against one's neighbor the offending party had to make restitution for what was lost plus twenty percent. This stipulation leads many commentators to suggest that the proper name for this sacrifice is reparation offering rather than guilt offering because, fundamentally, the purpose seems to be to compensate for damages.⁹² Once the payment is made and accepted by the priest, atonement is granted and the individual is forgiven for the sins that made him guilty (Lev. 6:7).

Atonement

Although the five sacrifices described in the first seven chapters of Leviticus were often used in conjunction with one another, three of these sacrifices are of particular interest: the burnt offering, the purification offering, and the guilt offering. Each of these sacrifices is described in the biblical text as making atonement (*kipper*) for the person or community. This raises the question of what exactly atonement is. To put it another way, what is meant by *kipper*?

Atonement has several ideas associated with it including cleansing, covering, and appeasement. In the early part of the twentieth century, C. H. Dodd asserted that the Greek term ἱλάσκεσθαι, which the LXX frequently used to translate *kipper*, did not mean placate or propitiate as it often did in classical Greek. Rather, when a word from the ἱλάσκεσθαι class was used for *kipper* or one of its derivatives in the LXX, the

⁹² Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 327.

meaning was “to cleanse,” “to purge,” “sanctify,” or “cancel sin.”⁹³ He concludes, “Hellenistic Judaism, as represented by the LXX, does not regard the cultus as a means of pacifying the displeasure of the Deity, but as a means of delivering man from sin, and it looks in the last resort to God himself to perform that deliverance.”⁹⁴ While Dodd’s emphasis on God’s role in atonement was a helpful corrective to what sometimes appeared an overemphasis on placating a wrathful deity, he may have overstated his case.

Leon Morris’s response to Dodd recognizes both the corrective Dodd offers and some potential problems with Dodd’s position. Morris notes that Dodd remedies any misguided notion that the Old Testament sacrificial system possesses the pagan idea of celestial bribery.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, after a survey of numerous texts that in fact do deal with the wrath of God in conjunction with forgiveness, Morris concludes, “it still remains that the word group under discussion [ἰλάσκεσθαι] has reference to the wrath of God.”⁹⁶

Much of the confusion in the above discussion centered around how the translators of the LXX chose to deal with the word *kipper*. Hartley suggests that the entire discussion of how the authors of the LXX chose to render *kipper* is muddied by the discussion about whether the Greek word (ἰλάσκεσθαι) is best translated ‘propitiate’ or ‘expiate.’⁹⁷ When one looks simply at *kipper* as it is found and used in the Old Testament, particularly the cultic texts, the primary emphasis seems to be on “cleansing,”

⁹³ C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), 89.

⁹⁴ Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, 93.

⁹⁵ Leon Morris, “The Use of Hilaskesthai etc. in Biblical Greek,” *Expository Times* 62 (1950-1951), 227.

⁹⁶ Morris, “The Use of Hilaskesthai,” 233.

⁹⁷ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 64.

“removing,” or “purging” rather than on propitiation. Lang writes that the basic etymological meaning of *kipper* is “cover.”⁹⁸ Gorman concurs, noting also the ideas of ‘wipe off,’ ‘rub,’ or ‘ransom.’⁹⁹ Milgrom links *kipper* most closely with “wipe,” “remove,” or “purge” while noting that the word is also closely associated with “purify” and “decontaminate.”¹⁰⁰ Hartley notes that while there are a few texts that suggest the anger of God is being appeased in some way, the cultic texts most often use *kipper* in the sense of expiation made by the priest for the person or community presenting the sacrifice.¹⁰¹

This is not to dismiss the reality of God’s wrath. Hartley cites several texts that talk about God’s fierce anger or wrath in the Old Testament. Nonetheless, this anger is not the primary concern of the cult in Israel. Rather, Hartley explains, “the cult is concerned with the usual, daily means of approaching God.”¹⁰² In other words, the cult is less concerned with God’s already kindled wrath than with avoiding the kindling of his wrath through various forms of impurity.¹⁰³ He describes this as follows: “A person who has sinned is aware that one who does not seek expiation stands in danger of facing God’s anger. But if one takes the appropriate steps to expiate a sin and to win God’s

⁹⁸ B. Lang, “*kipper*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Joseph Fabry, trans. David E. Green, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 289.

⁹⁹ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1079.

¹⁰¹ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 65.

¹⁰² Hartley, *Leviticus*, 65.

¹⁰³ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 65.

favor, that one will escape God's wrath before it is ignited."¹⁰⁴ The primary underlying concern, according to Gorman, was "impurity and the possible departure of Yahweh from the midst of the community."¹⁰⁵ In accordance with that concern, the primary means for covering the disturbance and maintaining God's presence was through the prescribed sacrifices that provided atonement.

As the sacrifices themselves imply, central to atonement ritual is the necessity of shedding blood. Blood is symbolic of life but also of death and therein lies its power. Sin and certain other conditions introduce impurity into the camp, blurring the boundary between clean and unclean, between the realm of life (the camp) and the realm of death (outside the camp). In what seems like a strange picture to modern readers, blood actually cleanses the camp from impurity.¹⁰⁶ Blood offers life to the Israelites by absorbing whatever impurities have been introduced to the camp, reestablishing God's good order which has been disrupted by pollution. According to Gorman, blood cleanses because "it effectively combines in itself the ideas of life and death and is thus an appropriate symbolic agent for cleansing the individual from the uncleanness of contact with death and, at the same time, for effecting the individual's passage from death to life."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 65.

¹⁰⁵ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, while modern readers would probably find this idea strange, there is a fair amount of evidence that ancient peoples would have found the Israelite connection of cleansing with blood and the association of blood with life unusual as well. Blood tended to be associated with death and the underworld among Israel's neighbors. For more on this see Dennis J. McCarthy, "The Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (June 1969): 166-176.

¹⁰⁷ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 168.

Leviticus 17:11 makes explicit the connection between blood and life. “For the life of an animal resides in the blood. I have assigned it to you to make atonement for your lives on the altar; because it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”¹⁰⁸ The just penalty for sin is death. According to N. Kiuchi, the syntax of this sentence implies the substitution of the life of the animal for the life of the human.¹⁰⁹ The blood therefore releases the one offering the sacrifice from the penalty of sinning.¹¹⁰ But blood also removes the pollution which is the result of sin from the camp and consecrates it.¹¹¹ Blood wipes the camp clean, re-consecrating the sanctuary and the camp. The purpose of re-consecration was “to re-establish the boundaries of the holy realm – the bounds of the holy place are re-established at the boundaries.”¹¹² Because the holy and unclean cannot inhabit the same space, and life is only possible in the presence of God, the people are once again assured of life because God’s presence is no longer threatened due to impurity in the camp. Thus, the various atoning sacrifices allow the continued presence of God, thereby ensuring life for the people of Israel.

The Day of Atonement

The great Day of Atonement is perhaps the most important festival day in Israel’s calendar. It was to take place in the seventh month, the tenth day of that month. On that

¹⁰⁸ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 261.

¹⁰⁹ N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, JSOT Supplement Series 56, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 106.

¹¹⁰ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 65.

¹¹¹ McCarthy, “The Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice,” 167.

¹¹² Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 88.

day, a variety of rituals were performed which would purge Israel of all the accumulated pollution of the community from the previous year. The rituals of this day provide cleansing for the people, the sanctuary, the tent of meeting and altar, and for the priests.¹¹³ That this uncleanness is related to sin is clear from Leviticus 16:30. “Because on this day atonement will be made for you to cleanse you: you shall cleanse yourselves before the Lord from all you sins.”¹¹⁴ The sacrifices offered not only purged the sanctuary of defilement, but also cleansed the people from the sins, guilt, and pollution of the previous year. The physical life of the high priest is at stake on this important day, but even more dramatically, the life of Israel also hangs in the balance. Failure to purge the sanctuary from defilement caused by the people’s sins would lead to God’s departure from Israel’s midst. Only through this yearly cleansing can Israel remain in the presence of the holy God.

There are several offerings involved in the Day of Atonement rituals: the bull, two rams, and two goats. After the high priest has washed himself and dressed himself in the holy vestments he is to sacrifice the bull as a sin offering, making atonement for himself and his house (Lev. 16:6, 11). He then takes some coals from the altar, sweet incense, and some of the blood from the bull and goes behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies. The Day of Atonement is the only ritual where blood is brought into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God’s presence, is found.¹¹⁵ The high priest puts the incense on the fire so that a cloud forms to cover the mercy seat or atonement cover and hide it from view. Failure to do this would result in death (Lev.

¹¹³ Gorman, *Ideology of Ritual*, 52.

¹¹⁴ Translation by Wenham, *Leviticus*, 227.

¹¹⁵ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 94.

16:13). He then takes the blood of the bull and sprinkles it with his finger in front of and on the atonement cover seven times. This ritual makes atonement for the high priest and his family.

Before the bull is sacrificed and the high priest enters the tabernacle, the two goats are brought to the entrance to the tent of meeting (Lev. 16:6). The high priest is to cast lots for the goats. One goat will be offered to the LORD and one, the so-called scapegoat, will be for Azazel (Lev. 16:8). The goat designated as the LORD's is to be sacrificed as a sin offering for the people. The scapegoat is to be presented live before the LORD. The blood of the sacrificed goat is brought into the Holy of Holies by the high priest and sprinkled on and in front of the mercy seat as he did with the blood from the bull. This is a sin offering for the people, but interestingly, it is said to make atonement for the *sanctuary*, not the people. The sin of the people has defiled the sanctuary, the dwelling place of God. "In this way he will make expiation for the Holiest Place because of the uncleannesses of the Israelites and their acts of rebellion and for all their sins" (Lev. 16:16).¹¹⁶

After making atonement for the Holy of Holies, the priest comes out with blood from the bull and the goat and puts some of this blood on the horns of the altar. He then sprinkles the blood seven times on the altar, making atonement for the altar, cleansing and reconsecrating it. "He then is to go out to the altar which is before Yahweh and make expiation for it. He is to take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on the horns roundabout the altar. He is to sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times with his finger: thus he will cleanse it and sanctify it from the uncleannesses

¹¹⁶ Translation by Hartley, *Leviticus*, 220.

of the Israelites” (Lev. 16:18-19).¹¹⁷ As with the sanctuary, the object of atonement brought about by the sacrifice of the bull and goat is not the people, but part of the tabernacle. The people’s sin has defiled the tabernacle. Uncleaness has seeped into the holiest part of the camp and polluted it. The boundary between holy, clean, and unclean has been disrupted by this pollution, thereby disrupting the order of the Israelite camp which is characterized by these boundaries.

These rituals that take place inside and outside the tent of meeting serve to cleanse the entire sanctuary.¹¹⁸ Although the blood is only applied to the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies and the altar of burnt offering in the court, these very important objects should be understood by synecdoche to represent the entire tabernacle. Hartley writes, “Since blood has been put on both the Atonement Slate [mercy seat] and the altar of whole offering, the entirety of the sanctuary, both the inside and the outside, is cleansed.”¹¹⁹ Thus, the cleansing brought about through the sacrifices and sprinkling of blood serves to restore the sanctuary to its original state, setting it apart, once again, as “holy.” The re-establishment of the holiness of the tabernacle in effect restores the boundary between it and the rest of the camp thereby re-establishing the order of the camp, an order characterized by the distinction between holy, clean, and unclean.

Following the cleansing rituals for the tabernacle, the high priest presents the live goat. “Aaron [the high priest] is to lay both his hands on the living goat’s head and

¹¹⁷ Translation by Hartley, *Leviticus*, 220-1.

¹¹⁸ Hartley notes that some scholars suggest that the altar being cleansed in this text is the altar of incense which is found inside the Holy of Holies and not the altar of Burnt Offering which is found in the court of the tabernacle. Hartley argues that the language used indicates that the priest does indeed leave the Holy of Holies and therefore, the altar would have been the altar of Burnt Offering. For his full argument, see Hartley, *Leviticus*, 240-41.

¹¹⁹ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 241.

confess over it all the iniquities of the Israelites, all their acts of rebellion, and all their sins; he is to put them on the goat's head and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of one waiting in readiness" (Lev. 16:21).¹²⁰ Understanding the ritual regarding the live goat is central to understanding the elimination of sin from the community. Aaron's confession of the sins of the people with his hands on the head of the live goat ritually puts the sins of the people on the goat. Gorman says that the act of placing the sins on the goat is not "simply" symbolic. "The high priest actualizes or concretizes the sins through confession and puts them on the goat, which carries them into the wilderness, away from the camp."¹²¹ Milgrom describes in more detail how this transfer takes place: "The hand-leaning, so to speak, is the vehicle that conveys the verbal pronouncement of the people's sins onto the head of the goat. A transfer thus takes place – not from the high priest, who is personally immune from the contamination produced by the sins he confesses – but from Israel itself; its sins, exorcised by the high priest's confession are transferred to the body of the goat, just as the sanctuary's impurities, absorbed by the purification blood, are (originally) conveyed to the goat."¹²² Thus, the sins of the people of Israel have been transferred to the live goat via confession by the priest (Lev. 16:22).¹²³

¹²⁰ Translation by Hartley, *Leviticus*, 221.

¹²¹ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 97.

¹²² Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1043.

¹²³ Wenham, *Leviticus*, 233; Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1042-3; Levine, *Leviticus*, 106.

The live goat is then led out to a solitary place, literally a “land of cutting off,”¹²⁴ in the desert and released (Lev. 16:22).¹²⁵

The live goat is also understood to be for atonement, although it is less clear with the live goat than with the other sacrifices what exactly the object of atonement is. The text says only that the goat will be presented live to make atonement “with it” (Lev. 16:10).¹²⁶ While the other sacrifices have the effect of cleansing the sanctuary and the camp of defilement caused by some contaminate, the live goat actually carries away the contaminate: sins. The live goat will carry the sins of the Israelites out of the camp and into the desert so they no longer can contaminate the camp. Milgrom writes “it is clear that the blood purges the impurities of the sanctuary and the scapegoat purges the sins of the people.”¹²⁷ The sins, like their accompanying impurities, are wiped away. The fact that this goat was led out to a remote place in the wilderness emphasizes the serious nature of this ritual. Under no circumstances could this goat be allowed to wander back

¹²⁴ Wenham, *Leviticus*, 233. The verbal root here is *gāzar* the basic meaning of which is “to cut.” Görg’s entry in *TDOT* indicates that the meaning of “cut off” is implied in every case, thus Wenham’s literal rendering is justified. See *TDOT*, vol. 2, s.v. *gāzar*.

¹²⁵ Verse 26 says that the goat is for “Azazel.” The literature is full of speculation about what exactly Azazel might be. Hartley offers a helpful summary of four main explanations found in the literature. First, it may be simply a term for the goat composed of the two terms “goat” and “go away,” thus the traditional rendering “scapegoat.” Second, it could indicate “entire removal.” Third, the rabbinic tradition suggests this word is a reference to the specific place to which the goat is brought. The fourth suggestion is that Azazel refers to a demonic figure that inhabited the wilderness. Since demons and evil forces are often associated with the wilderness, this fourth position perhaps offers the best picture of what might be meant by this peculiar term. Whatever is meant, the overarching theme is that the sins of the people of Israel are sent away, perhaps to their place of origin, the realm of evil. For a complete summary of these positions see Hartley, *Leviticus*, 228-9.

¹²⁶ Translation from Hartley, *Leviticus*, 221. The preposition used here is *’al* which has a number of possible translations. Many translators use “over” or “upon” to translate this word. The NIV seems to ignore the preposition altogether. What is clear is that there is no widespread agreement on how best to render this construction. I think Hartley has the basic idea in place using “with.” This ceremony functions with the other ceremonies of the day to atone for the sins and uncleannesses of the camp. Thus, at least in some sense, atonement is made with this goat. See Hartley, *Leviticus*, 236-7 for more.

¹²⁷ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1043.

into the Israelite camp. The sin of the people had to be removed from the camp with no possibility of it returning. Hartley writes, “The purpose of this ritual was to remove the sins from the area where the people lived, to return them to their source, and to leave them there in order that they would have no more ill effect within the community.”¹²⁸

The importance of the permanent removal of the sins of the people is revealed in later rabbinic tradition that stipulated the goat be pushed over a cliff by the one who was assigned to bring it into the wilderness.¹²⁹ The man responsible for leading the goat out into the wilderness must wash himself and his clothing before re-entering the camp to prevent the danger of impurity from once again infecting the camp (Lev. 16:26):

The Day of Atonement offers a comprehensive picture of the importance of sacrificial ritual for cleansing the camp of impurity. The language of the text makes clear that the sin of the people has caused the defilement of the entire camp. This defilement threatens life in the presence of God. The rituals not only cleanse the people, but they cleanse the camp itself and the structures within the camp, re-establishing the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean and restoring order to the camp. The rituals function to cleanse the camp by absorbing impurities through the sacrificial blood, but also by purging the camp of the source of some impurities by transferring the community’s sins to the head of the live goat, and subsequently exiling this goat to the desert. Through these rituals, the Israelite camp is once again clean and a fit dwelling for the presence of God.

¹²⁸ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 244.

¹²⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1045.

Ritual, Symbol, and Restoration of Order

As noted previously in this chapter, the basic categories with which Israel lived were holy, clean or common, and unclean. A brief review will be helpful as we begin this section. Clean is the normal status of most persons and things. Something clean can become holy by being sanctified but the clean can also become unclean by being polluted in some way. Holy things can be polluted and rendered, at least in a worst case scenario, unclean. Something unclean can become cleansed and therefore rendered clean. Uncleanness is contagious, that is, it can render something that comes in contact with it unclean. Cleanness, however, is not contagious. What is most important to note in all of this is that the unclean and the holy are not to come in contact with each other.¹³⁰ Thus, if the sanctuary becomes polluted, the continued presence of God is jeopardized. Milgrom writes, “The merciful God will tolerate a modicum of pollution. But there is a point of no return.”¹³¹

From a modern perspective, rituals of the sort described in Leviticus are often misunderstood as superstitious expressions with little meaning. Preconceptions of rituals include the idea of mindless, frenetic activity usually associated with primitive religion as well as mindless and rather boring repetition often associated with a lack of emotion in modern churches.¹³² Both conceptions are incorrect with regard to what entails ritual and how ritual functions. In one of his studies on ritual, Victor Turner writes that religious practices and beliefs “are coming to be seen as decisive keys to the understanding of how

¹³⁰ Wenham, *Leviticus*, 19-20.

¹³¹ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 258.

¹³² Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 97-8.

people think and feel about those [political, economic, and social] relationships, and about the natural and social environments in which they operate.”¹³³

Robert Wuthnow offers some idea of what the essence of ritual is through the examples of changing a tire and a wedding. Both of these activities could be seen as repetitious. Both involve emotion at some level. The key difference, according to Wuthnow, is that a wedding is intentionally constructed to evoke emotions and communicate meaning. “The music, physical arrangements, and preparation involved in a wedding ceremony are carefully structured to elicit and convey deep emotion, even if emotion is not naturally present. . . These activities also communicate to the various parties involved that a redefinition of social relations has occurred, that consent has been obtained, and that good wishes are in order.”¹³⁴ Changing a tire does none of these things. “Ritual,” Wuthnow explains, “is a kind of symbol, or more specifically, a set of symbolic acts.”¹³⁵ Jonathan Klawans applies this idea to Israelite ritual, positing the symbolic nature of Israelite sacrifice as metaphorical, and emphasizing analogy as the heart of sacrifice.¹³⁶

This understanding of the symbolic nature of ritual is not without its detractors however. Frits Staal, for example, in an article which examines Vedic ritual in Hinduism suggests that in general, ritual is not symbolic. That is, ritual does not point beyond itself and refer to something else. Ritual is important only because of what is done, not

¹³³ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 6.

¹³⁴ Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 99.

¹³⁵ Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 99.

¹³⁶ Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 67.

because of what is thought. "Ritual," writes Staal, "is primarily activity."¹³⁷ Not only would anthropologists like Douglas, Turner, and van Gennep disagree with Staal's analysis, but biblical scholars like Wenham and Gorman also recognize the symbolic nature of ritual. With regard to Israel, Gordon Wenham interprets the sacrificial system as symbolically reconsecrating Israel.¹³⁸ Likewise, Frank Gorman, as already noted above, recognizes the symbolic character of Israel's rituals.¹³⁹ Thus, Israelite ritual can be and often is understood as symbolic:

Ritual, then, according to Gorman, "refers to a complex performance of symbolic acts, characterized by its formality, order, and sequence, which tends to take place in specific situations, and has as one of its central goals the regulation of the social order."¹⁴⁰ Understood as symbolic, ritual points beyond itself and communicates meaning. Gorman elucidates the meaningfulness of symbols by describing them as "any object, activity, movement, relation, event, gesture, spatial unit, or temporal unit which serves as a vehicle for a conception and/or conveys a socially meaningful message."¹⁴¹ In fact, symbols derive their meaning from the cultural framework in which they are found. Gorman clarifies, "The meanings which are found in ritual actions are derived from and, in turn, help support the cultural system that informs human existence with order, structure and meaning."¹⁴² But equally as important as affirming the

¹³⁷ Frits Staal, "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," *Numen* 26, no.1 (1979): 2-22.

¹³⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, "The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 85.

¹³⁹ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 19.

¹⁴⁰ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 19.

¹⁴¹ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 22-3.

¹⁴² Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 23.

meaningfulness of symbols is recognizing that symbols point beyond themselves to some concrete reality, perhaps more than one.¹⁴³

One reality, then, to which the symbolic rituals of Leviticus point is the concept of order. The three sacrifices which are identified as atoning and the rituals involved in the Day of Atonement offered the Israelites forgiveness of sins as well as purification of accumulated pollution. As described above, the burnt offering, sin offering, and guilt offering all involved the sacrifice of an animal and were considered “atoning.” At least one function of atonement was the purification of the sanctuary and the camp from pollution acquired throughout the previous year, especially pollution related to the sins of the people. As noted earlier, Gorman offers a typology that describes four sorts of rituals that related to order in Israel. He identifies the various rituals of the Day of Atonement with rituals of restoration, which, as already noted, he considers the dominant type found in the Priestly literature. These rituals, explains Gorman, serve “to restore the community to its prescribed and founded state.”¹⁴⁴ Restoration in the context of these rituals symbolically includes, therefore, “the idea of re-founding – a return to the founded order of creation.”¹⁴⁵ Gorman stresses that rituals, all rituals, serve to preserve order.¹⁴⁶ “Indeed,” Gorman contends, “at the heart of Priestly theology is the belief that Yahweh brought into being an ordered world and that at the heart of that created order is a ritual

¹⁴³ This idea has deep roots in Christian thought. Much of traditional sacramental theology centers around the idea of signs which signify or point to another particular thing. For a brief explanation see Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, s.v., signum (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 284.

¹⁴⁴ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 61.

¹⁴⁵ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 18.

order.”¹⁴⁷ For the priestly authors of Leviticus, as argued above, order is directly related to creation often expressed in terms of boundaries.

Creation does not refer only to the beginning of the physical world, however. The language of Leviticus suggests that Israel itself is understood as God’s creation. Jon Levenson asserts that the similarity of language between Gen. 1 and Leviticus is no coincidence.¹⁴⁸ Just as God separates the elements in Genesis 1 to create the cosmos, so God separates Israel out from the surrounding nations as his holy creation. Levenson claims that this distinction of Israel from the nations “is as fundamental to cosmic order as the separations through which God first brought order out of chaos.”¹⁴⁹ Israel is brought out of the nations to be holy (Lev. 19:1). Holiness, as portrayed in the regulations of Leviticus, is correlated to maintaining boundaries that are related to the categories of creation.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, the tabernacle can be understood as a microcosm of the world in the same way that Eden is portrayed as a microcosm of the world in Gen. 2-3.¹⁵¹ Levenson supports this notion of the tabernacle as a microcosm of the world suggesting a fundamental similarity between the temple and the created world.¹⁵² Gorman concurs suggesting, “The construction of the tabernacle (Exod. 40; Lev. 8-9) is

¹⁴⁷ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 118.

¹⁴⁹ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 118.

¹⁵⁰ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 118.

¹⁵¹ For more on the idea of Eden as an archetypal sanctuary, see Gordon Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994, 399-404.

¹⁵² Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 82.

part of the larger process of creation that is shared by Yahweh and Israel.”¹⁵³ Thus Israel and the tabernacle can be understood as symbols of a larger reality: the world as a whole.

When understood in this way, the rituals Israel is called to enact take on a significance that goes beyond the individual or community. The description of the various sacrifices above demonstrates that a central concern of atonement is purification. The boundaries God established in his creation of Israel between holy, clean, and unclean have been blurred through both ritual missteps and the sins of the people. The result is that spaces which are supposed to be holy or clean have become polluted. If the tabernacle is a symbol of the cosmos, then one possible interpretation is that the defilement of the tabernacle caused by sin symbolizes the defilement of the world caused by sin. To put it another way, Israel has corrupted God’s creation by her sin in a way similar to the corruption of the original creation through the sin of Adam and Eve. In order for God to dwell in the midst of his people, this defilement needs to be wiped away.

Atonement, as discussed in the first chapter, is often associated with personal or corporate forgiveness of sins. In this understanding, sin demands punishment. Atonement is the process whereby the just punishment for sins a person or community has committed is transferred to an animal which is then sacrificed. The animal serves as a substitute for the sinner, taking the punishment the sinner deserved and dying in the sinner’s place.¹⁵⁴ Leviticus does not disallow either the idea of substitution or the notion

¹⁵³ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 38.

¹⁵⁴ Although the idea of substitutionary atonement has come under fire in the past number of years as has the notion of atonement as “payment” for sin, these ideas hold a strong place in the history of the church and in the Reformed tradition of which I am a part. Thus, by “commonly understood” I am not disregarding arguments against these views. Rather, I am merely noting that many if not most of those who sit in evangelical churches would still describe atonement in this way. I fully recognize the modern arguments regarding these traditional ideas but defending substitutionary atonement is not within the scope of this paper.

of forgiveness.¹⁵⁵ Indeed forgiveness is directly associated with both the sin offering (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13) and the guilt offering (Lev. 5:16, 18; 6:7), and as described above, the sin offering is one of the central offerings of the Day of Atonement. Nonetheless, the conception of the priestly account of the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement described in this chapter indicates that along with forgiveness of sins, a primary function of atonement is purification. Atonement sacrifices purify not only the person or persons who have become unclean, but also the space which has become defiled. The blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement purifies the sanctuary, including the furniture, removing the pollution caused by the sins of the people thereby restoring the holiness of the sanctuary and re-establishing it as a fit dwelling for the Holy One of Israel. This offering, therefore, re-establishes the boundary between 'holy' and 'clean,' between the tabernacle and the rest of the camp. The scapegoat carries the sins of the people and the accompanying pollution out of the camp into the wilderness, the place of chaos, thereby restoring the camp to the status of clean. The boundary between 'clean' and 'unclean' has also been re-established through this ritual. Uncleanness has been removed from the camp and sent into the wilderness, the realm of chaos, disorder, and death. The boundary between the camp and the wilderness, between life and death, has been re-established. Death, the loss of the presence of God, had threatened the people because of the uncleanness which had accumulated in the camp and even in the sanctuary, God's dwelling place. All uncleannesses have now been purified and banished to their proper place, the realm of death. Israel's enactment of the atonement rituals, as described

¹⁵⁵ Again, it is not within the scope of this study to argue whether or not the various sacrifices were understood as substitutes, representative, identification or some other idea. At least some commentators do affirm the notion of substitution. One such example is Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*.

above, restores the creational boundaries set in place by God. The order of the camp, God's creation, is restored through atonement.

Conclusion

Pollution is a central concern of the ritual system of Israel. Mary Douglas's definition of pollution as matter out of place offers a starting point for understanding how pollution concepts operated not only in primitive societies and societies like that of ancient Israel, but also how this concept continues to operate in modern societies. Pollution blurs or disrupts established boundaries which often function to order society in one way or another. While in many societies, this order is self-generated, dictated by society as a whole, in Israel the order was established by her covenant partner, Yahweh. Israel was Yahweh's good creation, called into being and set apart by boundaries and distinctions which Yahweh set in place. To live life as Yahweh intended was to live life in accordance with the prescribed boundaries and distinctions that established and characterized Israel. Breaching the boundaries established by Yahweh for his creation polluted the camp, the place of life, and threatened the continuation of the presence of Yahweh.

At the heart of Israel's sacrificial system was the concern for this continued presence of Yahweh. Understood as symbols that point to a reality beyond themselves, the various atoning sacrifices as well as the rituals of the Day of Atonement represented the purging of the sanctuary and the camp of all impurity and the re-establishment of the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean. The re-establishment of these boundaries was, in effect, the restoration of Yahweh's creation – the Israelite camp. The work of

Christ in the atonement can be understood in a similar way. The next chapter will examine how this might work.

CHAPTER FOUR: WAS JESUS' DEATH A SACRIFICE?

Introduction

The overview of various Old Testament texts and ideas has provided the backdrop for understanding the purpose of the sacrificial system in Israel. Sin, defined as boundary breaking, causes impurity or defilement to infect the Israelite camp, thereby disrupting the order of the camp. In addition, impurity threatens the ongoing presence of God in the camp. The atoning sacrifices performed by Israel served, at least in part, to cleanse the camp of impurity. By cleansing the camp, the order of the camp – characterized by the boundaries which God established between holy, clean, and unclean – is restored. The restoration of order through sacrifice allowed for the continued presence of God and the fullness of life that was related to that presence. Since the Israelite camp was considered God's creation, as explained above, the restoration of the orderliness of the camp provided by the sacrifices can be understood as a restoration of creation.

The New Testament, particularly the gospels, presents the story of Jesus' life. While each of the gospel writers likely has a particular audience and interest in mind, the basic story runs something like this: Jesus was a Jewish boy, born to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem during the reign of the Roman emperor, Ceasar Augustus. Two of the gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, present his birth as miraculous in some way and all four authors present his life as punctuated by miraculous events as well. His genealogy could be traced to King David who is linked with numerous messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. He was considered an excellent teacher and had a large following of people,

some who admired him, others who hated him. Twelve men and several women are identified as especially close to him. The twelve men are specifically identified as his disciples and three of those, Peter, James, and John, are presented as his closest companions. Jesus' teaching and miracles agitated a number of people, but were particularly resented by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Eventually, these leaders, with the help of one of his disciples, accused him of blasphemy (Matt. 26:65-66) and brought him to the governor. There they accused him of subverting the nation by refusing to pay taxes and claiming to be a king (Luke 23:2). The leaders and the crowds demanded Jesus be crucified. Although the Roman governor at the time could not find Jesus guilty of a capital crime, he commanded the crucifixion to be carried out because he feared the crowd's displeasure (Luke 23:22-24). Jesus was crucified along with two other criminals outside the city at a place called Golgotha. But this is not the end of the story. Each of the four gospel writers records that, a few days later, Jesus came back to life. The tomb was empty and a number of people saw him, spoke to him, and even ate with him. One of the gospel writers further records that sometime later, Jesus was taken bodily up to heaven. This, in a nutshell, is the story of Jesus.

The story of Jesus is central to the Christian faith – no Jesus, no Christianity. And central to the story of Jesus is the cross. It is no coincidence that Jesus' death and resurrection is part of each gospel writer's presentation of his life. Explanations of Jesus' death and resurrection are also central topics to many, if not all, of Paul's letters and the letter to the Hebrews. The core of the apostles' preaching and actions in Luke's narrative in Acts is also tied to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The other New Testament letters, while perhaps not focusing as tightly on Jesus' death and resurrection, also couch

their teaching in the reality of these events. This chapter will attempt to explain why understanding Jesus' death as sacrificial is important to an overall understanding of atonement by examining New Testament presentations of Jesus' death as a sacrifice.

I will begin by examining some of the general criticisms of the language of sacrifice. The biblical text will then provide a response to these criticisms through a survey of the Gospels where sacrifice is implied, and parts of the Pauline corpus and general epistles where somewhat more detailed descriptions are available. Following this, I will examine the sacrificial language in the Letter to Hebrews, explaining how the language of sacrifice in this important epistle is often reinterpreted from a Girardian perspective, and arguing this reinterpretation fails at several important points. Ultimately, this survey of biblical texts will show not only that Jesus' early followers considered his death a sacrifice, but that this sacrifice was understood as standing in continuity with the sacrifices of the cult. As such, Jesus' death served as the final atoning sacrifice that fulfills all of the Old Testament sacrifices, thereby rendering them obsolete.

Problems With Sacrifice

The language of sacrifice calls to mind a multiplicity of images. Although animal sacrifice of the sort commanded in ancient Israel is practically unheard of in modern society, the idea of mental or physical pain, violence, and even death are among the ideas associated with this language. In most cases, the notion of giving something up voluntarily or otherwise is usually involved. For example, it might be said of a parent who worked two jobs to put her child through college that she *sacrificed* for her child's education. What we mean is that this parent gave up something, in this case her time and

talent, to help her child achieve a college degree. This example is rather benign. But violence also permeates some depictions of sacrifice, especially biblical depictions. This connection with violence, a violence that is in some way demanded by God, causes some to distance themselves from any suggestion that Christ should be thought of as a sacrifice.

Some feminist theologians have been at the forefront of the critique of sacrifice. Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, for example, have drawn a connection between the notion of Christ sacrificed for the sins of the world and abusive treatment of women. They write “The image of God the father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son has sustained a culture of abuse and led to the abandonment of victims of abuse and oppression.”¹ Carlson-Brown and Parker are not interested in trying to understand what it means that Christ died as a sacrifice. Rather, they believe the whole notion of sacrifice is misguided and dangerous to marginal people, particularly women. They write, “Jesus was not an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, because God does not need to be appeased and demands not sacrifice but justice. . . . No one was saved by the death of Jesus.”² For Carlson-Brown and Parker, the idea of Jesus as a sacrifice should be discarded.

Feminist theologians are not alone in their critique of sacrificial language for the work of Christ. Anthony W. Bartlett also thinks that the violent grammar of many historic Christian atonement models validates violence.³ Others, for a variety of reasons, suggest

¹ Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), 9.

² Brown and Parker, “For God So Loved the World?,” 27.

³ Bartlett, Anthony W. *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 2.

the violence attributed to the work of God in Christ reveals a misinterpretation of how a loving God relates to human persons. Much of this line of thought draws on the groundbreaking insights of René Girard for support.

Girard thinks that although violence, including the violence associated with sacrifices, may look irrational, it usually has reasons behind it. He believes that human rivalry lies at the heart of violence. This rivalry will naturally result in vengeance. Vengeful violence begets more violence, escalating until it threatens the entire community.⁴ Girard suggests that sacrifice functions within a society to keep the violent impulses toward vengeance due to this rivalry in check. He contends, “The sacrificial process furnishes an outlet for those violent impulses that cannot be mastered by self-restraint . . . the sacrificial process prevents the spread of violence by keeping vengeance in check.”⁵ Sometimes referred to as the “scapegoat mechanism,” the idea is that the anger of the people is directed, instead of at each other, at an innocent victim. Girard explains, “When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand.”⁶ This surrogate victim is subsequently killed and then recognized as a hero.

Girard believes that the gospel accounts of Jesus’ death need to be interpreted in terms of the scapegoat mechanism enacted in certain primitive cultures. Rather than being presented as something positive however, Girard thinks the gospels reveal an

⁴ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 15.

⁵ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 18.

⁶ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 2.

implicit critique of this mechanism. The scapegoat mechanism presented in the gospels serves as a witness to the weakness of this system; or, as Girard puts it, as a witness “to the God who reveals himself to be the *arch*-scapegoat in order to liberate humankind.”⁷ Girard urges Christian conceptions of Jesus’ work to move away from notions of sacrifice as murder and toward an understanding of sacrifice as renunciation. This is a movement “toward freedom from mimesis as potentially rivalrous acquisition and rivalry.”⁸ Jesus’ death as a scapegoat, therefore, functions as a polemic against this system and as such serves to liberate humans from the need for violence as a solution to human rivalry.

Many have used Girard’s insights to help redefine sacrifice in terms of non-violence. Marlin Miller, for example, thinks Girard’s views are useful for understanding sin and its effects. He writes, “his theories provide a way of understanding sin as rivalry with God and in the human community.”⁹ This understanding then helps interpret Jesus’ death, emphasizing the self-offering nature of that death. The violence of Jesus’ death was not what God intended but God was able to use it for human salvation.¹⁰

Ted Grimsrud believes traditional understandings of Jesus as a sacrifice lead to notions of a violent God. Sacrificial theology, that is, the idea that Jesus’ death is primarily a sacrifice offered to a holy God, “pictures ultimate reality (the heart of God

⁷ James Williams, “Interview with René Girard: Comments on Christianity, Scapegoating, and Sacrifice,” *Religion* 27 (1997): 250.

⁸ Williams, “Interview with René Girard,” 251.

⁹ Marlin Miller, “Girardian Perspectives and Christian Atonement,” in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000), 34.

¹⁰ Miller, “Girardian Perspectives,” 37.

itself) as requiring violence – the death of innocent victims.”¹¹ Grimsrud goes on to explain, “Thus ultimately sacrifice does not provide the means to genuine salvation and *shalom* but only feeds the spiral of violence.”¹² In contrast to this, Grimsrud suggests that we “demythify” Jesus’ death. Using Girard’s definitions, Grimsrud explains that myths tell stories from the top down, that is, from the perspective of those in power, those who are often killers.¹³ Demythification tells the story from the bottom up, from the perspective of the victim.¹⁴ Grimsrud believes that the Bible is unique in that it is demythified, telling stories from the victim’s perspective. He claims, “the Bible is a unique resource for exposing mythology that blinds us to the reality that social structures that victimize the many on behalf of people on top are themselves violent.”¹⁵ When Jesus’ death is examined from this demythified perspective, as Girard’s work leads one to do, Grimsrud claims it “helps us to see that Jesus did not die as such a sacrifice.”¹⁶

Michael Hardin also wants to reject all connections between violence and Christianity. Like Miller, he emphasizes the self-giving nature of Christ’s work and asserts that sacrifice does not entail the taking of life but giving of oneself.¹⁷ Jesus’ self-

¹¹ Ted Grimsrud, “Scapegoating No More: Christian Pacifism and New Testament Views of Jesus’ Death,” in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000), 51.

¹² Grimsrud, “Scapegoating No More,” 51.

¹³ Grimsrud, “Scapegoating No More,” 50.

¹⁴ Grimsrud, “Scapegoating No More,” 51.

¹⁵ Grimsrud, “Scapegoating No More,” 51.

¹⁶ Grimsrud, “Scapegoating No More,” 51.

¹⁷ Michael Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews: Reappraising René Girard,” in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000), 115.

offering demystifies violence and leaves it with no positive function for the community.¹⁸ Furthermore, when the New Testament writers expose the innocence of Jesus they show that “the violence against him is the result of mimetic hostility in the community, not the appeasing of an angry God.”¹⁹

J. Denny Weaver follows these lines of thought to posit a “nonviolent atonement.” Like Miller, Grimsrud, and Hardin, Weaver rejects traditional understandings of sacrifice and revisions it in terms of self-giving where the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices represented a “self-dedication to God” rather than a penalty for sin.²⁰ The question that arises from all this is whether it is legitimate to refer to Jesus’ death on the cross as a sacrifice, particularly as an atoning sacrifice. Furthermore, if it is legitimate, what do we mean by this statement and is that meaning radically different from that which the early followers of Jesus would have meant? The answers to these questions lie in the biblical text.

General New Testament Portrayal of Jesus as Sacrifice

As demonstrated in the previous section, the language of sacrifice is complex and controversial. Indeed, as Carlson-Brown and Parker point out, the language of sacrifice has, at times, been misused by the church to condone the victimization of those most vulnerable in society. Girard, working with models gleaned from anthropological studies of archaic societies, offered valuable insights on how this language might be better understood and interpreted in the biblical context. Many others have followed Girard’s

¹⁸ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language,” 105.

¹⁹ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language,” 105.

²⁰ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 59.

lead, using his insights on mimetic violence to shape their interpretations of Jesus' death. Some of these theologians prefer not to use the language of sacrifice at all. Others retain that language, but reinterpret it in such a way that traditional descriptions of Jesus' death are rendered meaningless. One way through this labyrinth is to begin with the biblical text of the New Testament.

What is perhaps most surprising for someone raised in the church with the language of Jesus as sacrifice is that the gospel writers do not directly refer to Jesus in this way. Grimsrud, in fact, suggests that since Jesus portrays God as primarily loving and forgiving, any interpretation of the cross that suggests it is a sacrifice that brings about human salvation is counter to Jesus' own teachings.²¹ Nonetheless, the idea of sacrifice is implicit in a number of texts, including texts that report Jesus speaking about himself. For example, Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 report Jesus saying of himself that the Son of Man came "to give his life as a ransom for many."²² At the very least, this text indicates that Jesus believes he will die for the benefit of "many." But the word "ransom" suggests the idea of sacrifice. The Greek noun used here is λύτρον. In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, O. Procksch notes that one of the words the LXX uses λύτρον to translate is *kopher* meaning "cover" and related to the verb *kipper*, to atone. He writes that when λύτρον is used in this way, "it always denotes a vicarious gift whose

²¹ Grimsrud, "Scapegoating No More," 51.

²² As with many of Jesus' sayings, this text is disputed and often attributed to the early church's desire to understand Jesus' work in terms of sacrifice. Donald Hagner offers a good objection to this line of thinking in his commentary on Matthew 14-28, as well as sources for further study. See Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Waco: Word Books, 1995), 579-580.

value covers a fault” and which substitutes for human life.²³ Even apart from the linguistic connection to Old Testament conceptions of atonement, the notion of a person giving up himself or herself for the sake of someone else can rightfully be understood as sacrifice. For example, someone who dies in the military is often said to have sacrificed her life for her country. What we mean by this is that the person gave up her life for the benefit of the nation she was serving. Or consider the game of baseball as a somewhat less violent example. Sometimes, in order to advance a runner already on a base, the batter will hit a “sacrifice fly,” that is, a fly ball that goes into the outfield and will likely be caught, resulting in the batter being “out” but the runner advancing, perhaps even to home plate and a score. Here again is the idea of something being given up, in this case the chance of the batter getting on base, for the sake of the team being able to score or at least come closer to scoring. All this is simply to demonstrate that it is not unreasonable to imply the idea of sacrifice from Jesus telling his disciples that he came “to give his life . . . for many.”

Each of the synoptic gospels also records Jesus’ words at the institution of the Lord’s Supper as implicitly sacrificial. Jesus speaks of his body being “broken” and his blood “poured out” for his people.²⁴ As with the notion of giving one’s life for another as outlined above, the idea of that Jesus’ body and blood are given “for” his people implies sacrifice. In addition, the specific identification Jesus makes between his blood and the covenant in each of these texts further strengthens the sacrificial undertones in Jesus’

²³ O. Procksch, “λύτρον,” s.v. in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 4, edited by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 329.

²⁴ Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20.

language.²⁵ Jesus says to his disciples, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20b). Jesus’ words call to mind Moses’ words after offering a burnt offering and a fellowship offering to confirm the covenant at Sinai. Moses says, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Ex. 24:8b). Avery Dulles writes that the gospel accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper “implicitly refer to the sacrificial action of Moses whereby he ratifies the Old Covenant by pouring out the blood of goats and oxen.”²⁶ It is clear, therefore, that while the synoptic writers do not necessarily work out a detailed theology of Jesus as sacrifice, their descriptions of Jesus’ work and Jesus’ self-identification clearly point to a recognition that Jesus’ death was a sacrifice for the people, a sacrifice similar in nature to those in the Old Testament.

The idea of Jesus as a sacrifice is also present in the Gospel of John. For example, John 1:29 reports John the Baptist describing Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” It is admittedly unclear what precisely this analogy is referring to. Numerous suggestions have been offered including the Passover lamb, the Lamb of Revelation, and the guilt or sin offering to name a few. While there may be warrant for each of these suggestions, the statement of John does not clearly point in any one direction.²⁷ Nonetheless, regardless of whether any one sacrifice was in the mind of the

²⁵ Many of the major covenants in the Old Testament are ratified by sacrifice. In the first covenant with Abram, for example, God tells Abram to bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove and a young pigeon. God then instructs Abram to cut the large animals in half, allowing their blood to drain into a ditch. (Gen. 15) It has been well-attested that this sort of ritual was a common way to confirm or “cut” a covenant in the Ancient Near East. Thus, covenant and sacrifice are often associated.

²⁶ Avery Dulles, “The Death of Jesus as Sacrifice,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, 4, no. 2 (1996): 7.

²⁷ For a brief introduction to the possibilities and some objections to each of those possibilities see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, edited

Baptizer, anyone familiar with the sacrificial system of Israel would likely have heard an allusion to sacrifice in John the Baptist's words. Leon Morris writes, "The lamb figure may well be intended to be composite, evoking memories of several, perhaps all of the suggestions [for what this might mean] we have canvassed."²⁸ The familiar text of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son . . .," also suggests sacrifice. God is pictured as giving up something of value for the sake of the world, an action we already recognized as sacrificial.²⁹ John Goldingay suggests that gift-giving is central to the idea of sacrifice.³⁰ Thus, in this text too the notion of sacrifice is not foreign. Furthermore, Robert Sherman notes that John's arrangement of his gospel, with the crucifixion occurring on the same day that the Passover lambs were traditionally killed, suggests that "John clearly intends to conflate Christ's death with that of the paschal lamb." He goes on, "In his crucifixion, Christ becomes the new paschal lamb, whose blood saves God's people from death."³¹ Raymond Brown agrees, noting that "Passover symbolism is popular in the Fourth Gospel, especially in relation to the death

by Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 127-130. For an explanation of three principal suggestions see Raymond E. Brown, S. S., *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 58-63.

²⁸ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 130.

²⁹ This raises the question of who is offering the sacrifice and to whom. In this text, it looks like the Father is offering the Son. In other texts, it sounds like Jesus is offering himself. In still other texts, it is not at all clear who is doing the offering. As part of the *opera ad extra* of the Trinity, the Godhead is united in this work of atonement thus, in some sense, it might be understood that both are happening. In other words, the Father gives up the Son and the Son also gives himself up in an act that is completely united in will and purpose. Furthermore, the offering is given to God for our benefit. This follows from the sacrificial system itself where the offerings were brought to the priest who then offered them to God for the benefit of the people. As Robert Sherman notes, "The temple and its cult of atoning sacrifices still serves as the key source for the assumptions and imagery behind the New Testament's understanding of Christ's sacrificial death." Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 173.

³⁰ John Goldingay, "Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ," in *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St. John's College, Nottingham*, ed. by John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 3.

³¹ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 177.

of Jesus.”³² Jesus death, in other words, is correlated with cultic notions of sacrifice by John.

Various other texts outside the Pauline corpus and Hebrews also point toward an implicit recognition of Jesus as a sacrifice. Several examples will illustrate this. In a story told in Acts 8 about an Ethiopian eunuch’s encounter with Philip, an early apostle of Jesus, the writer informs us that the eunuch is reading from Isaiah 53, a text often referred to as the suffering servant song. Acts 8:32-33 identifies Isaiah 53:7-8 as the specific text with which the eunuch is struggling. The eunuch is then said to ask Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” (Acts 8:34) Philip replies by linking the Isaiah text with the gospel of Jesus (v. 35). It seems from this story that at least one of Jesus’ early apostles understood Jesus in terms of sacrifice, the vicarious sacrifice of the servant of Isaiah 53.

1 Peter 1:19 refers to Christ as “a lamb without blemish or defect,” a rather obvious reference to the regulations for animals used as sacrifices in Israel. Thus, by analogy, Jesus is identified as a sacrifice. 1 Peter 2:21 is somewhat more explicit. Here Peter tells readers that “Christ suffered for you” and, like the author of Acts, links this suffering to that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (1 Peter 2:22-25). The suffering servant gives his life in order that Israel might be healed (Is. 53:5). Jesus bears the sins of his people in his own body like the goat sent into the wilderness to its death on the Day of Atonement. By this action the people are healed (1 Peter 2:24). Peter clearly wants his readers to understand Jesus death as a sacrifice.

The association of Jesus with the sacrifices of Israel continues in other Johannine writings. Throughout these writings, Jesus is referred to as the lamb. In the Apocalypse,

³² Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 62.

Jesus is specifically referred to as a lamb, “looking as if it had been slain” (Rev. 5:6). For the readers, this image would have been related to sacrifice. John Stott says the title of “the Lamb” which appears twenty-eight times in this book “has little to do with the meekness of his character (although once his qualities as both ‘Lion’ and ‘Lamb’ are deliberately contrasted (5:5-6)); it is rather because he has been slain as a sacrificial victim and by his blood has set his people free.”³³ John’s first letter is even more explicit. 1 John 2:2 calls Jesus “the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” The word John uses that is here translated “atoning sacrifice” is ἱλάσμοϛ. We have already dealt with issues regarding the interpretation of this word so there is no need to address those again. What is important is to recognize that whether one thinks of atonement in terms of expiation or propitiation or some combination thereof, some form of this word is consistently used throughout the Old Testament to refer to atonement, and atonement always involves sacrifice. By calling Jesus the ἱλάσμοϛ, John directly associates Jesus with the Old Testament sacrifices described in Leviticus that are said to make atonement for the people, the tabernacle, and the camp. These sacrifices cleansed the camp and allowed for the continued presence of God.

This brief survey of New Testament texts amply demonstrates that it is not illegitimate to consider Jesus a sacrifice who stands in continuity with the Old Testament sacrificial system. In fact, it seems that although in general many of the non-Pauline New Testament texts do not explicitly call Jesus a sacrifice, much of their language is connected to notions of animal sacrifice drawn from the Israelite temple cult. Robert Sherman helpfully summarizes these findings as follows: “The temple and its cult of

³³ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 37.

atoning sacrifices still serves as the key source for the assumptions and imagery behind the New Testament's understanding of Christ's sacrificial death."³⁴

Jesus' Death as Presented in the Pauline Corpus

While many of the New Testament texts seem hesitant to explicitly use the word sacrifice in reference to Jesus, parts of the Pauline corpus and the letter to the Hebrews choose to describe Jesus in just those terms, often with some additional theological commentary. Frances Young claims, "Already in the New Testament documents, and particularly the epistles of Paul, we find the idea that the purpose of the death of Christ was the remission of sins, and that therefore his death was sacrificial."³⁵

As with some of the previous texts from the gospels and general epistles, there are a number of Pauline texts from which the idea of Jesus as a sacrifice can be implied even if it is not explicitly stated. The texts which are the most interesting however, are those in which Paul explicitly states that Jesus is a sacrifice of some sort. Romans 3:25a is one such text: "God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." The Greek word which is translated "sacrifice of atonement" is ἱλάσθηριον. Controversy surrounding the precise translation of this word was noted in the previous chapter. As suggested already with a related word in 1 John 2:2 however, regardless of whether one chooses to translate ἱλάσθηριον as 'atoning sacrifice,' 'propitiatory sacrifice,' or 'expiatory sacrifice,' most scholars recognize some idea of sacrifice in this

³⁴Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 173.

³⁵Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ*, with a forward by Maurice Wiles (London: SPCK, 1975), 64.

word. In addition, some suggest that in this particular case it likely refers to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement.³⁶

Although somewhat less clear, Romans 8:3 also describes Jesus as a sacrifice: “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.” Here, the phrase translated “sin offering” is *περὶ ἁμαρτίας*. The NRSV translates this phrase “to deal with sin.” The Revised English Bible also translates it “to deal with sin.” The King James renders it “for sin.” The Anchor Bible writes “for the sake of sin.” At least on the surface, it seems that ideas of sacrifice are not as obvious as the NIV reading suggests. On a strictly literal word for word rendering that is true. In fact, the KJV perhaps offers the simplest translation on that level. So what gives anyone the idea that sacrifice is behind this phrase? Is this merely a theological conclusion based on the context of Paul’s letter to the Romans in general?

While the general context of Paul’s letter here might lead to the conclusion that he is referring to a sacrifice, there are sound linguistic arguments that support the NIV’s translation of this phrase. This particular Greek phrase, *περὶ ἁμαρτίας*, is often used by the writers of the LXX to translate “sin offering.” N. T. Wright suggests that this phrase has “strong and unavoidable sacrificial associations.”³⁷ In support of this he notes that the LXX uses this phrase 54 times, 44 of which should be understood as “sin-offering.”

³⁶ See, for example, Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, eds., Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 232; N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, eds, William L. Lane and Marion L. Soards, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 474.

³⁷ N. T. Wright, “περὶ ἁμαρτίας in Romans 8.3,” in *Studia Biblica 1978*, vol. 3, Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors, ed. by E. A. Livingstone (Sheffield: JSNT, 1980), 454.

Given the contexts of the occurrences of this phrase in the LXX, especially in Lev. 9:2, Wright says that “at the very least the phrase means “for sin” with all the overtones of the sacrifices of Leviticus and Numbers.”³⁸ Wright goes on to argue that the context of sins of ignorance present in Rom. 7:14-25, sins for which the Old Testament law prescribed the sin offering, makes it clear that the context of Rom. 8:3 also supports the translation “sin offering.” Wright concludes, “Though Paul can view Christ’s death in various other ways . . . he here draws attention to that death seen in one way in particular, the way relevant for dealing with sin as it is committed in 7:14-25.”³⁹ In other words, Paul is describing Christ’s death in terms of the sin offering.

A third Pauline text that speaks of Jesus as a sacrifice is Eph. 5:2. It reads, “and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Here Paul not only tells his readers that Jesus “gave himself up for us,” an act that we have already argued may be understood as sacrificial, but he also calls Jesus a “sacrifice” (θυσίαν) and an “offering” (προσφοράν). There is little if any dispute that the first word Paul uses is rightly translated “sacrifice” with the general understanding that this would refer to the killing of a victim in a cultic context.⁴⁰ The second term translated “offering” also has sacrificial connotations. The basic meaning of the verbal root is “to bring to” or “to offer.” As a noun, “offering” or “gift” is an

³⁸ Wright, “περι ἁμαρτίας in Romans 8.3,” 455.

³⁹ Wright, “περι ἁμαρτίας in Romans 8.3,” 456.

⁴⁰ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 364 (page citations are to the reprint edition). See also *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, s.v. *θῶ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 180ff.

accepted translation.⁴¹ Konrad Weiss in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes that this word, when used in the LXX, “is a sacrificial term found predominantly in the legal and historical books.”⁴² In addition, throughout Leviticus various sacrifices are described as being a “pleasing aroma” to God. In the context of this verse where Paul joins “offering” with “sacrifice,” modifying both with the prepositional phrase “pleasing aroma,” the sacrificial connotations would be difficult to deny.

This examination of Paul’s specific references to Jesus as a sacrifice shores up the idea that the New Testament writers clearly identified the death of Jesus as a sacrifice. As with the non-Pauline writers, Paul not only seems to recognize the sacrificial nature of Jesus work in terms of the cult, but is intent on helping his readers recognize this as well. Interpreting Jesus’ work in non-sacrificial terms or in terms that understand sacrifice in ways radically different than first century Jews who were steeped in the language of their cultic system, amounts to ignoring not only the culture of the early church, but also a rejection of the teachings of the earliest apostles in favor of something more palatable.

Modern Critiques of Sacrificial Language in Hebrews

The book of Hebrews is rich in language that calls to mind the cult of Israel as described in the Old Testament, particularly the practices described in Leviticus. Words like cleansing, expiation, offering, sacrifice, and High Priest bring up images of the

⁴¹ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, s.v. προσφορά, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 727.

⁴² *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. IX, s.v. προσφορά (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 65.

tabernacle, the temple, and the various rites associated with the cult. William L. Lane states, "The writer [of Hebrews] develops his discussion of redemption primarily on the basis of the Pentateuch."⁴³ While the scope of this paper will not allow for an in depth analysis of the book of Hebrews as a whole, I will look at selected texts within Hebrews that I believe offer critical insights for understanding Jesus as a sacrifice. Before delving in to specific texts, however, a brief survey of literature that rejects traditional notions of sacrifice in the book of Hebrews is in order.

Theologians who reject any idea of violence in connection to the atonement have had perhaps their most formidable challenge dealing with the letter to the Hebrews. The language of sacrifice is hard to avoid in this letter. The task therefore, from a non-violent standpoint, is to understand what this sacrificial language might mean.

Since Girard's theories lie underneath much of the critique from those promoting a non-violent reading of Hebrews, a brief review of Girard's general ideas along with a more detailed explanation of how he applies these ideas to Jesus' death will provide a helpful starting point for this discussion. Girard asserts that Jesus was not a sacrifice. He explains, "To say that Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices, is to recognize in him the Word of God."⁴⁴ Jesus is not a sacrifice that God wants or needs to atone for the sin of the people. Rather, Jesus is the scapegoat to end all scapegoats. As such, he is the victim of violent people who, through his self-offering, unmask the mimetic nature of ritual sacrifice.

⁴³ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47, ed. by Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), cxvi.

⁴⁴ René Girard, "The Nonsacrificial Death of Christ," in *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1996), 184.

According to Girard, primitive societies that operate without a structured justice system employ what he calls the “scapegoat mechanism” to avert further violence after a conflict. Unchecked violence threatens the entire community. Sacrifice channels violence onto a scapegoat, thereby suppressing further violence.⁴⁵ Girard explains, “The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from *its own* violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself.”⁴⁶ Girard considers it a “fundamental truth” about violence that if it is left unappeased, “violence will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area.”⁴⁷ He goes on, “The role of sacrifice is to stem this rising tide of indiscriminate substitutions and redirect violence into “proper” channels.”⁴⁸ The sacrificial victim is neither of the two parties involved in the original conflict. Girard claims the “function of ritual is to ‘purify’ violence; that is, to ‘trick’ violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals.”⁴⁹ From Girard’s point of view, the sacrificial system in Israel is not unlike other primitive systems designed to keep violence from escalating. Jesus does not function in continuity with this system but functions to reveal the system for what it is. In that sense, his sacrifice has to be understood as renunciation rather than murder.⁵⁰ It is this re-interpretation of sacrifice that lies behind much of the criticism of historic interpretations of Christ’s death as sacrifice.

⁴⁵ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 10, 14.

⁴⁶ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 8.

⁴⁷ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 10.

⁴⁸ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 10.

⁴⁹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 36.

⁵⁰ Williams, “Interview with René Girard,” 251.

The biggest problem with Girard's interpretation of sacrifice and its connection to the so-called scapegoat mechanism is that it seems to lack an understanding of the relationship between sin and sacrifice in the covenant between God and Israel. Sacrifices are not demanded for some supposed vengeance by other humans or by God. As mentioned earlier, sacrifices as presented in Leviticus serve more to prevent God's anger than to pacify it. Similarly, there is little indication of interpersonal conflict as the driving force behind the sacrifices. Israel is instructed by God to offer sacrifices for specific reasons. Primarily sacrifices serve to cleanse the camp and restore it as a place of life where the people live in the presence of God. Sins are forgiven through some of the sacrifices, but some of the sacrifices have nothing to do with sin and nothing to do with an offense against other humans. Furthermore, Israel did have an established system of justice. While not developed as in modern understanding, there were provisions in Israel to prevent tribal disputes from exploding into wars and bloody vengeance.⁵¹

Raymond Schwager, recognizing that Girard's reading presents a hermeneutical problem, nonetheless uses many of Girard's insights to interpret the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death. He affirms, however, that his entire interpretation could be called into question by the language of Hebrews.⁵² Schwager notes a certain amount of apparent continuity between the language of Hebrews and the sacrificial cult of the Old Testament. More striking from his perspective is the discontinuity. He notes that Jesus was a different sort of priest than Aaron and not a servant of the old covenant.⁵³ Although both

⁵¹ See for example, Num. 5:5-10; Num. 27:1-11; Num. 30; Num. 35:6-29.

⁵² Raymond Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans. Maria L. Assad, with a forward by Robert J. Daly (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 200.

⁵³ Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 202.

old and new covenant involved blood, Schwager points out that “the Old Testament priests spilled *other* blood (of goats and bulls) (Heb 9:25; 10:4); but Jesus carried out the work of atonement through *his own* blood (Heb: 9:12; 13:12).”⁵⁴ Schwager’s argument is that Jesus’ self-offering ends ritual sacrifice, which always involves another victim, robbing it of any meaning. Jesus’ redemptive act “is not to be understood in the light of cultic sacrifices, but in the light of the fate of the rejected and murdered prophets and just individuals.”⁵⁵ The language of sacrifice therefore, has nothing to do with the Old Testament cult but merely reflects the more general notion of giving up something of value for the sake of a person or cause.

While this theory regarding the language of sacrifice is interesting, it lacks plausibility in the context of Hebrews. Although there is disagreement concerning who exactly is the audience of this epistle or sermon, there is widespread agreement that the audience was made up of Christians of either Jewish or Gentile background. Regardless of their background, the language of the Israelite cult which permeates the entire letter suggests that they had fairly extensive knowledge of the Jewish scriptures and cultic practices. It is important for modern readers to remember that the readers of this letter did not have access to the Old Testament scriptures on a day-to-day basis. In other words, the readers of Hebrews could not simply open a copy of the books of the Old Testament in order to understand the specific text or practice the author was referring to. The texts

⁵⁴ Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 202, emphasis his.

⁵⁵ Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 204. See also Schwager’s *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 182ff.

and practices referred to by the author of Hebrews presuppose a background in Judaism.⁵⁶ This background would have understood sacrifices in the context of the cult. While Schwager wants to emphasize the discontinuity between Jesus and the Old Testament sacrifices and downplay the continuity, the text of Hebrews stresses both. Jesus is both like *and* unlike the sacrifices. The continuity implies that one cannot simply redefine sacrifice apart from its use in the cult. If the author did not mean for his or her audience to think about the work of Christ in terms of the cult, it is difficult to imagine why he or she speaks about Christ in terms of sacrifice and offering, terms clearly linked to the method of atonement with which the audience would have been familiar.

Like Schwager, Marlin Miller also thinks the sacrificial language of Hebrews needs to be understood in a unique way. Girard's scapegoat mechanism is Miller's operating hermeneutic for a proper interpretation of the language of sacrifice in Hebrews.⁵⁷ Because Jesus is portrayed in Hebrews as offering himself, this offering stands in contrast to the victim mechanism of offering something to God to get something from God. Miller maintains, "Christ's death is not portrayed as the spilling of even innocent blood demanded by vengeance, but as an act of self-offering that reveals the scapegoat mechanism."⁵⁸ Miller emphasizes, "God neither wanted the sacrifice nor was pleased with it. Rather, the new covenant makes clear that sins and lawless acts are

⁵⁶ While this point is made by a number of commentators, for a brief overview of this argument see Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 402.

⁵⁷ Marlin E. Miller, "Girardian Perspectives and Christian Atonement," in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. by Willard M. Swartley (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000), 37.

⁵⁸ Miller, "Girardian Perspectives and Christian Atonement," 40.

forgiven on the basis of repentance rather than sacrifice.”⁵⁹ The problem with this view is that it seems to render Jesus’ death as merely consequential, having no part of an eternal plan of God that would rectify the plight of sinful human beings. Yet other texts, for example Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, indicate that Jesus’ followers believed both his resurrection and his death were part of God’s plan of salvation. From Miller’s perspective, Jesus died at the hands of immoral and violent humans but because he did so voluntarily, his death revealed the problem inherent in mimetic violence while at the same time demonstrating the ultimate example of self-giving love. Jesus’ death is reduced to that of an example that, although differing in form from Abelard’s portrayal does not differ in substance. Although the so-called moral influence theory generally attributed to Abelard has its merits, isolating it as the sole means for understanding the atonement ignores the multiplicity of other images present throughout the Bible and the Christian tradition.

Michael Hardin also contends that the language of Hebrews needs to be interpreted in a different hermeneutical framework from that of the Old Testament cult. Hardin claims that “Hebrews subverts the sacrificial process, albeit under cover of sacrificial language.”⁶⁰ In other words, despite the references to the cult and sacrifice throughout Hebrews, the letter/sermon really functions as a polemic against the sacrificial system with which the audience would have been familiar.

Hardin basically agrees with Girard’s conception of the function of mimetic violence in the community. With Girard, he believes that the Bible, beginning already in

⁵⁹ Miller, “Girardian Perspectives and Christian Atonement,” 40.

⁶⁰ Michael Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews: Reappraising René Girard,” in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. by Willard M. Swartley (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000), 103.

the Old Testament, demystifies the sacrificial system by asserting the innocence of the victim and thereby exposing the mechanism of sacred violence.⁶¹ He claims that the church and synagogue have read the text through a “sacrificial hermeneutic” in which God demands sacrifice to appease his wrath, rather than “nonsacrificially” from the perspective of the victim.⁶² Unlike Girard, however, he suggests that a careful reading of the letter to the Hebrews, despite its sacrificial language, reveals an underlying criticism of the victimage mechanism.⁶³

In order to understand how this works, one must take into account Hardin’s insistence that the victimage mechanism is always discussed in terms of taking someone else’s life. In other words, self-offering is not included in ideas of victimage. “To give one’s life bespeaks intentionality, a substantially different way of conceiving victimage, in contrast to a passive victim.”⁶⁴ This is an important point for Hardin. Jesus’ death is not due to the demands of God for sacrifice, a giving in order to get something in return, but is a self-giving which both “yields to and reveals the scapegoat mechanism in all its fury.”⁶⁵ This conclusion is based primarily on the exegesis of Psalm 40 found in Hebrews 10:8-10.

Hebrews 10:5b-7 says, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will.’” This

⁶¹ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 104.

⁶² Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 105.

⁶³ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 105.

⁶⁴ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 109-10.

⁶⁵ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 112.

quotation is from the LXX version of Psalm 40:6-8. According to Hardin, this text suggests that God is not in favor of violence in religion. In fact, religious violence in the form of sacrifice is rejected by God. Hardin writes, “The author of Hebrews saw the distinction between revelation and religion when he contended that God neither wanted sacrifice nor was pleased with it. Yet, the law required them.”⁶⁶ The new covenant, referred to in Hebrews 10:16-18, affirms this idea for Hardin. “In the new covenant,” he asserts, “sins and lawless acts are forgiven apart from sacrifice (10:18).”⁶⁷

Although Hardin raises a number of interesting issues and questions, ultimately his misunderstanding of the message of Psalm 40 leads him to misinterpret the role of sacrifice in Israel and, therefore, Hebrews’ portrayal of Jesus. Hardin is not alone in suggesting that Psalm 40 along with some of the speeches from the prophetic books, particularly the critiques of the eighth century prophets, are anti-sacrificial texts.⁶⁸ Others, however, suggest that these texts are not anti-sacrificial per se, but reflect a critique of the misuse of the sacrificial system by Israel.⁶⁹ The concern of the prophets was that sacrifices could become mere ritual, that is, outward expressions that bordered on the magical notions of appeasing the gods common in Israel’s neighbors. They were using sacrifices in much the same way as the nations around them—as a way to control God—rather than understanding that God wants faithful obedience which would allow for a

⁶⁶ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 113.

⁶⁷ Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 114.

⁶⁸ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 63.

⁶⁹ See for example, Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ*, with a forward by Maurice Wiles (London: SPCK, 1975), 32-33; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Waco: Word Books, 1991), 262-3; Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 274ff.

loving relationship with him and life in his presence, life as he intended for them.

Outward displays apart from faith and obedience were an abomination to God.⁷⁰ A brief survey of similar texts demonstrates this.

1 Samuel 15 tells the story of Saul's rejection as king of Israel. Saul has disobeyed God's command to completely destroy the Amalekites. He kept some of the best of the spoils for himself.⁷¹ When confronted by Samuel, Saul argues that he kept the good animals in order to sacrifice them to God. Samuel replies, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). The context does not suggest that God does not desire sacrifices, only that sacrifices apart from obedience are useless.⁷²

Isaiah 1:11 is another supposedly anti-sacrificial text. Isaiah says to Judah, "'The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?' says the LORD. 'I have more than enough of your burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.'" Isolated from its context this verse sounds like God is telling Israel that the sacrificial system is not what he had in mind. The immediate context, however, suggests that it is the attitude with which Israel comes to worship and the ethical behavior outside of worship which lies at the heart of the prophet's criticism. Verses 12-16 continue the criticism of Israel's religious practices and

⁷⁰ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 276.

⁷¹ The language of *herem* here suggests that the Amalekites and all their property was to be an irrevocable offering to God. Thus, Saul's keeping of the best for himself amounted to offering an imperfect sacrifice which, in addition to his direct disobedience to God's command, led to his rejection as king.

⁷² Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts, Vol. 10 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 152-3.

end with, “Stop doing wrong; learn to do right” (Is. 1:16-17). John Oswalt writes, “Isaiah is saying that the instruction which God gave Moses did not have chiefly to do with cultic prescription and legalistic righteousness. Rather, God’s *tôrâ* has to do with character and attitudes and relationships, all of which may be symbolized in the ceremonies but which are not to be replaced by the ceremonies.”⁷³

Even more important than how one interprets these so-called anti-sacrificial texts is the recognition that the Bible does not present these rituals as something Israel simply adopted from the nations around her or constructed in place of a judicial system.

Although sacrifices are common in Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus lays out clear instructions for various sacrifices as noted in my previous chapter. The instructions for these rituals are given to Israel by Moses, but Moses receives these instructions from YHWH himself as indicated repeatedly throughout the book by the words, “The LORD said to Moses . . .,” and even by the Hebrew title of the book “And He Called.”⁷⁴ God is the author of the sacrificial system.⁷⁵ In addition, the sacrifices are often referred to as a “pleasing aroma,” a phrase that would suggest not only that God is not against sacrifices, but that he actually delights in properly offered sacrifices. The problem, it seems, is not with the sacrifices but with the attitudes and motives of the people who bring the

⁷³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 96.

⁷⁴ See Lev. 1:1-2; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1; 6:8; 6:19; 6:24; and so on.

⁷⁵ Hardin’s response to this is to suggest that God did not really institute this system despite what the text says. He writes, “just because a text claims God is speaking does not mean God is speaking.” So how do we know whether God is speaking? According to Hardin, “any notion of the “Word” of God or God’s revelation must come under the truly critical control of the distinction between religion, which grounds violence, and revelation, which is nonsacrificial.” See Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 113. Following Girard, Hardin thinks that the biblical texts regarding sacrifice must be read from a perspective of non-violence, that is, with a nonsacrificial hermeneutic. Although Girard suggests that the author of Hebrews lapsed back into a sacrificial hermeneutic, Hardin does not think this is so and contends that Hebrews, like the New Testament as a whole, can be read nonsacrificially. Hardin, “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,” 105.

sacrifices; attitudes and motives which belie a misunderstanding of the people's relationship to God.

There are also some who assert that sacrifice and atonement are not necessarily connected. Weaver, for example, suggests that since sacrifices were offered for rejoicing and thanksgiving as well as for sin, "it cannot be a simple matter of ritualized blood payment to satisfy guilt as prescribed by the law."⁷⁶ While it is true as previously outlined that there are sacrifices which do not bring about atonement, atonement is nonetheless always connected to sacrifice. To put it another way, although sacrifices do not always atone for sin, there is no atonement for sin in the cult apart from sacrifice.

In summary, given the sacrificial language of Hebrews and the references to atonement, it seems unlikely that the author was trying to completely dissociate Jesus from Jewish conceptions of the cult and the sacrifices associated with the cult. Rather, Jesus is presented as standing in continuity with the cultic practices as understood by first century Jews, practices which included sacrifices for atonement as defined above. Jesus is indeed a "more perfect" and "final" sacrifice, but still a sacrifice in the cultic sense of the term.

Jesus as Sacrifice in Hebrews

The notion of Jesus as a "more perfect" or "final" sacrifice in Hebrews is representative of one of the outstanding features of the letter to the Hebrews: its presentation of the superiority of Jesus. Carson, Moo, and Morris in their introduction to the New Testament state, "The general theme of Hebrews is not in dispute: the

⁷⁶ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 59.

unqualified supremacy of God's Son, Jesus Christ."⁷⁷ The letter presents Jesus as superior in several specific ways. Most important for understanding Jesus' role in atonement, however, is Hebrews' explanation of Jesus as a sacrifice. This explanation is found in the most detail in Hebrews 9:1-10:18.

The context of the sacrifice of Jesus explained in Hebrews 9 and 10 is set forth in chapters 7 and 8, which describe the inferior nature of the old covenant coupled with a description of the new covenant quoted from the familiar text of Jeremiah 31:31-34. The second or new covenant is superior to the first which is disappearing. In reference to the contrast between the old and new covenants the author to the Hebrews writes, "By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear" (Heb. 8:13). In other words, everything associated with the first covenant is becoming obsolete due to the inferior nature of that covenant. The priesthood, the temple, and the sacrifices – all connected to the old covenant – have become obsolete and are disappearing.

It is important to recognize, however, that it is not these institutions per se that are obsolete and disappearing. Rather, God has changed these institutions in important ways, rendering them superior. For example, under the old covenant, the high priest was to be from the tribe of Levi. But Jesus was not a Levite. The author of Hebrews, however, identifies him as the "great high priest" who intercedes on our behalf (Heb. 4:14). He is qualified to be a high priest because he was appointed by God to a permanent priesthood. The author identifies Jesus with the Old Testament figure of Melchizedek, also identified as a priest (Gen. 14:18). The identification of Jesus with Melchizedek demonstrates that this sort of appointment is not without precedent. But the author also describes this God-

⁷⁷ Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 391.

appointed priesthood as superior to the Aaronic priesthood (Heb. 7:11-22). In other words, the institution of the priesthood is not obsolete. Rather, the priesthood *as it had been formally understood* is obsolete.

Likewise, other institutions of the old covenant have been radically changed. The high priestly role of offering sacrifices and interceding for the people is maintained. But salvation and intercession are now perfected because of the perfect nature of the new high priest (Heb. 7:11-28). Hebrews says, “Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself” (Heb. 7:27). The temple too is called a “shadow” or “copy” of the authentic heavenly sanctuary: “They [the priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (Heb. 8:5). As with the priesthood, the temple is not completely distinct from the earthly sanctuary. In fact, according to the author, the earthly sanctuary was patterned after the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:5). Nonetheless it was inferior. Likewise, the sacrifices associated with the old covenant were not complete. It is not that the sacrifices were unnecessary. Rather as F. F. Bruce points out, they were “temporary tokens [which] give place to one which is effective and of eternal validity.”⁷⁸ The issue then, which chapters 9 and 10 address, is how to understand the superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice.

Hebrews 9 begins by describing the structure and divisions of the earthly tabernacle and the work of the priests and the High Priest in the tabernacle. The author summarizes this description by explaining the inferior nature of the sacrifices offered in the tabernacle, even on the Day of Atonement. These sacrifices were not able to “clear the conscience of the worshipper” (Heb. 9:9). Lane writes, “Defilement extends to the

⁷⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 181.

conscience as well as to the body and is inimical to the approach to the living God.”⁷⁹

The fact that the sacrifices had to be repeated over and over again indicated the insufficiency of animal sacrifices and sets up the argument for the superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice.

The author begins by reminding the audience of Jesus’ role as high priest. As high priest, Jesus enters the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle not by means of the blood of animals as Aaron or his sons would have, but by means of his own blood (9:12). This is a clear reference to the Day of Atonement rituals, the only day the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place. Furthermore, he enters the Most Holy Place “once for all” (9:12). Normally, the high priest would perform the Day of Atonement rituals once every year, presumably forever (Lev. 16:29, 34). This action of Jesus functions to “cleanse us” (v. 14, 22) and to “take away the sins of many people” (v. 28), the two main functions of the Day of Atonement as outlined above. A bull is sacrificed for Aaron’s house as a purification offering and a goat is sacrificed for the Israelites as a purification offering. The sacrifices cleanse Aaron’s household, Israel, and the camp, including the sanctuary. Then Aaron symbolically places the sin and rebellion of Israel on the head of a second goat which is sent out to the wilderness thereby taking away the sins of Israel. The author of Hebrews indicates that Jesus did both of these things and that he did them once and for all.

The fact that the author of Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus cleanses his people by means of his own blood indicates not only Jesus’ high priestly role in atonement, but his role as sacrifice. As high priest, Jesus provided “purification for sins” (1:3) and “makes atonement” for the sins of his people (2:17). Hebrews 7:27 identifies the sacrifice, saying,

⁷⁹ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 224.

“He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.” Chapter 9 then affirms and expands on what the author has hinted at earlier. The once-for-all sacrifice offered by the eternal high priest Jesus Christ is nothing other than the high priest himself (9:14). Jesus himself is the purification offering. It is Jesus’ own blood that makes atonement. Sin is not forgiven *apart* from sacrifice as some who object to this language suggest. Sin is cleansed and forgiven *because* of sacrifice, one final sacrifice. The continuity between old and new is in the necessity of sacrifice (9:22). The discontinuity is in the result of Jesus’ self-sacrifice. Jesus’ sacrifice had no need for repetition. The text suggests his sacrifice was superior due to the uniqueness of the sanctuary he entered and the uniqueness of the sacrifice he presented (9:11b-12a).⁸⁰

Hebrews 10 explains what about Jesus self-sacrifice is unique, that is, why his sacrifice is the final sacrifice needed. The sacrifices of the Day of Atonement did not make the people perfect and did not cleanse them from feelings of guilt (10:2). Rather, the old sacrifices reminded the people of their sin and their need for cleansing (10:3). The quotation of Psalm 40 points out the inadequacy of the sacrificial system. The sacrifice of Jesus, offered in perfect obedience to the will of God, brings an end to the need for sacrifice. His sacrifice is a perfect sacrifice which fulfills all the requirements of the law, including all the sacrifices prescribed by the first covenant.⁸¹ Loren Johns suggests an irony in Hebrews that “seems to reject the sacrificial cultic system itself,

⁸⁰ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 237.

⁸¹ Many commentators point out that the list of sacrifices in the quote from Psalm 40 comprises nearly all the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus. See Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 275; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 240-1; and Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 263, for examples.

while appropriating all that is important in it for Christology.”⁸² But Hebrews does not reject the system. Sacrifice is no longer necessary, not because Jesus overthrew the system through non-violence, but because he fulfilled the system through his perfect final sacrifice. Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). The portrayal of Jesus as a sacrifice that atones by the author of Hebrews points persuasively toward Jesus standing in continuity with the sacrificial system of Israel as the fulfillment of that system. His death is an atoning sacrifice – in fact it is the perfect atoning sacrifice. When a person claims that her spouse is the fulfillment of all her dreams for a life-partner, she is indicating that this partner is the last partner she will need. Her previous relationships were incomplete in some way. This relationship is not unlike the previous relationships but is better than those relationships could ever be. Likewise, Jesus’ sacrifice was foreshadowed in the sacrificial system, but the perfect nature of his sacrifice renders the system complete. No other sacrifice is needed. Sin has been forgiven and, as the author of Hebrews writes, “where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin” (10:18).

Conclusion

Central to the interpretation of the story of Jesus’ life, is the interpretation of his death. For a variety of reasons, the language of sacrifice, which the Christian tradition has typically used with reference to Jesus’ death on the cross, has become problematic for

⁸²Loren Johns, “‘A Better Sacrifice’ or ‘Better Than Sacrifice’? Response to Michael Hardin’s ‘Sacrificial Language in Hebrews,’” in *Violence Renounced, René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000), 121.

some people. As a result, some choose to argue that Jesus' death should not be understood as a sacrifice in the cultic sense of the term.

By way of response to that critique, this chapter has surveyed a variety of New Testament texts that offer insight into the work of Jesus and whether his work can rightly be understood and spoken of as a sacrifice. Although the Gospels do not directly refer to Jesus as a sacrifice, the writers and various other non-Pauline texts imply that Jesus was, in fact, a sacrifice like those of the Israelite cult. Furthermore, Paul not only implies this through his use of language, but in at least one instance describes Jesus as an atoning sacrifice (Rom. 3:25a). Hebrews goes even further than Paul, directly ascribing this role to Jesus and explaining how his sacrifice is superior to the sacrifices offered in the earthly tabernacle, yet also stands in continuity with the Old Testament cult. In fact, Hebrews portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of all that has come before – not apart from his sacrifice, but because of it. Jesus, therefore, is the once-for-all sacrifice that provides final cleaning, offering his people the possibility of life in the presence of God with all that entails.

CHAPTER FIVE: JESUS' SACRIFICE AND THE NEW CREATION

Introduction

Genesis 1 portrays creation as God's speech ordering the primeval chaos primarily through setting boundaries. The original creation is depicted as a peaceful, harmonious world, where pain and death are absent. Unfortunately, the first couple breaches a boundary that God has set in place, allowing disorder to encroach and pollute this beautiful world. Israelite wisdom literature teaches that maintaining the order of creation is related to a life characterized by blessing, something the Old Testament often associates with the presence of God. Like the first creation in Genesis, Israel is depicted as God's creation with ordered boundaries prescribed by God, boundaries that distinguish between holy, clean, and unclean. Pollution blurs these creational boundaries, threatening the order of the camp. Although pollution can be caused by sin, there are a variety of other ways that the people and the camp can become unclean. Regardless of how the camp becomes polluted, however, failure to cleanse the camp threatens Israel with the loss of the presence of God and therefore the loss of life.

Chapter 3 presented the idea that the rituals associated with the Israelite sacrificial system, especially the rituals of the Day of Atonement, are primarily concerned with the problem of pollution in the Israelite camp. The Day of Atonement functioned to purge the camp of impurity, thereby re-establishing the boundaries between unclean, clean, and holy, boundaries which are also associated with the distinction between pre-creation chaos and the order which characterizes creation.

Chapter 4 demonstrated that it is biblically warranted to think about Jesus as a sacrifice in continuity with the Israelite cultic understanding of sacrifice. Furthermore, his death is presented by the New Testament authors, particularly the author of Hebrews, as fulfilling once and for all the sacrifices of the cult including and perhaps even especially the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement. No other sacrifice is needed, not because restoration happens apart from sacrifice, but because restoration happens as a result of Jesus' sacrifice. Thus Jesus' sacrifice functions, at least in part, to purify Israel, thereby restoring the order of God's creation.

The restoration offered in the sacrificial rituals of Israel's cult, however, is limited in scope. Only the Israelite camp is cleansed. Later, with the conquest of Canaan and subsequent occupation of the land, the cleansing of Israel brought about by the sacrifices includes not only the temple and people as it did in the desert, but the promised land itself. As with the camp, purging pollution from the nation of Israel re-establishes the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean, thereby restoring the distinction between the chaos of the wilderness and the order of God's creation.

Having demonstrated in the previous chapter that Jesus himself is the final atoning sacrifice, this chapter will argue that Jesus' sacrifice brings about healing and restoration not just of Israel, but of all things. This chapter will begin by showing that the prophets of ancient Israel anticipated restoration not just of the people but of the land and even the whole earth. Then, working especially with the texts of Isaiah and Ezekiel, the chapter will demonstrate that the prophetic anticipation for restoration was fundamentally connected to the sacrificial ritual of the cult. Finally, turning to selected New Testament texts, it will argue that Jesus' superior sacrifice, anticipated by the prophets, brings about

the initial establishment or first installment of the restoration of all creation, a restoration that will be completed after the final judgment. The initial establishment of a restored creation points forward to the time when creation will be fully restored and characterized, as the first creation was, by life in the presence of God with all the blessings that presence entails.

Prophetic Anticipation—From Israel to All Creation

The prophets, especially the eighth-century prophets, warn Israel that her continued disobedience will have catastrophic results. Israel has sinned against God. Claus Westermann suggests that the corporate nature of the prophetic judgment speeches indicates that any number of sins are being addressed.¹ However Tikva Frymer-Kensky asserts that the offenses committed are particularly egregious. She notes that there are certain serious acts of apostasy which the people engage in that call for the *karet* penalty, a penalty often carried out by corporate stoning. The big three she identifies are idolatry, child-Molech service, and necromancy. “These offenses,” she writes, “are particularly grave in that they strike at the very basis of Israel, its relationship with God.”² Certain other offenses, she points out, including ignoring divine judgment, murder, adultery, false witness, and kidnapping also involve corporate punishment, although not stoning. The

¹ Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. by Hugh Clayton White, forward by Gene M. Tucker (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 170.

² Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel.” In *The Word of the Lord Shall God Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 406..

reason for this sort of corporate punishment of the offender is that these sins have the potential to infect the community as a whole if not removed.³

The problem is pollution. Frymer-Kensky observes the connection between the collective responsibility apparent in the laws of corporate punishment and the polluting effect of certain sins. Molech worship, idolatry, necromancy, as well as murder, and various sorts of sexual immorality are described by the biblical text as polluting the people.⁴ Hosea is ripe with the imagery of pollution. In Hosea, Israel is compared to Gomer, the prophet's unfaithful wife. Just as an adulterous wife is defiled because of her illicit relationship with another man, so Israel is defiled because of her illicit relationship with other gods (Hos. 4:10-13). By the time of the exile, as Frymer-Kensky points out, the prophet Ezekiel is comparing the nation of Israel to a menstruating woman, what she calls the "ultimate defiled woman."⁵

The prophets not only warn the people of personal defilement; however. It is clear in the prophetic texts that the sins that result in the pollution of the people also pollute the land.⁶ Isaiah 24:5 states that the earth has been defiled by people who disobey the laws and statutes of God. Jeremiah also frequently refers to the people defiling the land. In Jeremiah 2:7 he says to the people, "I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable." Brueggemann asserts that the land has become "impure by covenant

³ Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation," 407.

⁴ Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation," 407.

⁵ Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation," 409.

⁶ Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation," 409.

breaking and violation of relation with Yahweh.”⁷ A few verses later Jeremiah says to Israel, “You have defiled the land with your prostitution and wickedness” (Jer. 3:2). Later, in an announcement of judgment against Israel, God specifies the means of pollution by telling Jeremiah, “I will repay them double for their wickedness and sin, because they have defiled my land with lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols” (Jer. 16:18). The land is full of bloodshed and violence (Ez. 7:23), and the commandments of God are ignored (Hosea 4:2). The prophets make clear that Israel’s behavior has rendered the land unclean. Bruggemann suggests that Israel’s behavior “not only offends Yahweh who may respond in anger, but it also affects the land” and that this trouble “goes beyond its own borders.”⁸

Leviticus is clear about the link between sin and defilement of the land. God warns Israel not to defile herself through failure to follow God’s decrees and laws. The nations God is driving out of Canaan sinned and because of their sin “even the land (*haeretz*) was defiled” (Lev. 18:25). If Israel follows the legacy of the previous inhabitants of Canaan, they too will defile the land and the land will “vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you” (Lev. 18:27-28). Frymer-Kensky comments, “Israel based its right of possession of its land on the idea that God dispossessed the original inhabitants because of their misdeeds.”⁹ In other words, Israel will only possess the land insofar as she does not follow the detestable practices of the nations that God drove out of the land before Israel, practices that, at the very least,

⁷ Bruggemann, *The Land*, 112.

⁸ Bruggemann, *The Land*, 112.

⁹ Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation,” 408.

include the lists of Leviticus 18 and 20. Furthermore, pollution of the land by these practices could not be removed by ordinary cultic sacrifices. Persons who engage in these practices must be cut off (*kārēt*). If the community does not cut these wrongdoers off, the land will vomit all the people out (Lev. 18:28-30; Lev. 20:5, 22-23). Frymer-Kensky summarizes the consequences of the pollution caused by these practices. “In the face of such pollution, the temple and its cult could not be enough to save Israel, and this necessitated the land being destroyed and the people sent into exile. The exile is thus seen as a necessary result of the pollution of Israel.”¹⁰ Steven M. Bryan, commenting on the connection between pollution of the sanctuary and pollution of the land, concurs with Frymer-Kensky that certain willful sins such as those listed in Lev. 18 have no remedy other than cutting off the offender.¹¹ Where the pollution of the land is concerned he too asserts that pollution “was thought to accumulate inexorably until a threshold was reached which demanded the punishment of the exile.”¹²

Alongside the problem of defilement and pending exile, however, stands the expectation by the prophets for restoration. Judgment is not God’s last word.¹³ What exactly, however, does restoration involve? That is, what did the prophets anticipate as far as the restoration of Israel? One aspect of restoration anticipated by the prophets is spiritual restoration. Several texts from Isaiah and Jeremiah can serve as examples of the

¹⁰ Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation,” 409.

¹¹ Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 147.

¹² Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgement and Restoration*, 147.

¹³ This point is made by John Oswalt in the introduction to his commentary on Isaiah. In contrast to those who suggest that the prophets of Israel were merely prophets of doom Oswalt explains judgment and redemption as coordinating themes as they appear in the book of Isaiah. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 39-44.

anticipated spiritual restoration of Israel. Isaiah 2:3 says “Come let us go to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” Israel, who has been characterized by faithlessness, will now be faithful to God’s commandments. God’s teaching will bring about this spiritual change. Isaiah 45:25 also reflects this complete spiritual change. “In the LORD all the descendents of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.” Restoration will result in Israel being found righteous. Jeremiah poetically and comprehensively portrays this spiritual restoration in his description of the New Covenant.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jer. 31:33-34)

The spiritual aspect of restoration envisioned by Jeremiah is deep, essential change. John Calvin writes “To *write the Law in the heart* imports nothing less than so to form it, that the Law should rule there, and that there should be no feeling of the heart, not conformable and not consenting to its doctrine.”¹⁴ Knowing God and conforming to his standards, two sides of the same coin, will become ingrained in the people of Israel. According to Pamela Scalise, “In the promised new covenant each person’s desires and

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and The Lamentations*, vol. 4, trans. by Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 133.

decision will embrace, without reservation, God's self-revelation."¹⁵ God will change the inner nature of the people, their minds and their will.¹⁶ Obedience to God will be second nature to the people under the new covenant. Just as an antelope runs from a predator without having to be trained to do so, God's people will obey him. They will not need to be taught right from wrong; they will know right from wrong. They will know God with such deep intimacy that turning against him would be inconceivable.

Spiritual restoration is a crucial element in the overall picture of Israel's restoration portrayed by the prophets. If the people are not spiritually restored in the sense described by Jeremiah, where the restoration is deep and permanent, they will fall back into their old patterns of sin. As long as the potential for sin remains, the potential for pollution of the land remains. Without spiritual restoration, any physical restoration will be short-lived because of the polluting effects of sin.

That is not to say, however, that physical restoration was not in the minds of the prophets. Spiritual restoration is only part of the final package. It goes hand in hand with physical restoration. Bernard Anderson makes this point in his comments on the promises of Jeremiah 31 quoted above. He notes that the 'new thing' spoken of by the prophets which God will do for Israel should not be understood as merely spiritual. The covenant formula "you shall be my people and I will be your God," he explains, "is not purely spiritual; it involves return from exile and resettlement of the land of the ancestors (31:5, 12), the blessing of fertility and increase for the land and people (31:4-5), and a

¹⁵ Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 27, eds., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 135.

¹⁶ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 581.

situation of security and peace (31:4,13).”¹⁷ Brueggemann concurs with this idea. God’s people and the land are always connected in some way. The promise to God’s people always includes the gift of land.¹⁸ Commenting on the text of Jer. 31:21-22 in the context of new covenant Brueggemann asserts, “The tradition of Jeremiah sees that any new history must finally be history that leads to Zion.”¹⁹ In other words, the history of Israel is always linked with the land promised first to Abraham.

The description of restoration provided so far has largely to do with the restoration of Israel *to* the land. However, it is important to note that the physical aspect of restoration as recorded by the prophets was not just concerned with restoration of Israel *to* the land, although that was certainly part of it. Physical restoration included both restoration *to* the land and restoration *of* the land, as well as broad creational themes such as healing and long life. In other words, not only would Israel regain the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as her inheritance, the land itself would be restored to a condition of fertility and flourishing.

Examples of the restoration of the land take several forms. Sometimes, the prophets describe the restoration of towns or the city of Jerusalem. Isaiah 58:12 says “Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations,” a probable reference to the future restoration of Jerusalem.²⁰ A similar promise occurs in Isaiah 61:4 where God promises to rebuild and renew ancient ruins and ruined cities. Jeremiah also speaks of the future restoration of the cities and towns of Judah (Jer. 30:18;

¹⁷ Bernhard Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 191.

¹⁸ This begins in Eden where the first couple are given the garden to care for. It continues in the covenant with Abraham which sees at least partial fulfillment in the conquest of Canaan.

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 128.

²⁰ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, 507.

33:10-11). Certainly God will rebuild the towns of the people and their capital city, the city of Jerusalem. But the prophets also foresee a restoration of the land itself including the animals which depend on the land.

The prophet Joel offers one such description (Joel 2:21-27). After the devastation caused by the locusts described earlier in the book, God promises that the land will once again be fruitful. Interestingly, part of the promise is spoken directly to the land and the animals. “Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice” (Joel 2:21). “Be not afraid, O wild animals, for the open pastures are becoming green” (Joel 2:22). Leslie C. Allen notes that this prophecy “is a deliberate reversal of the bad news Joel was forced to deliver in the earlier part of the book.”²¹ Creation has suffered as a result of the people’s sin: “The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up. How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering” (Joel 1:17-18). Restoration, as Joel announces it, includes promises to the suffering creation as well as to the people. Indeed commentator Douglas Stuart suggests that these prophecies point toward a “dramatic reversal of fortunes” that fulfills the promise in Leviticus 26:42, “I will remember the land.”²² Allen even goes so far as to relate these promises to a reversal of the fall. “Human, animal, and plant life,” he writes, “is to be re-created with a glorious total harmony of divine blessing, a striking contrast for the reader of the OT to the threefold effect of the Fall in Gen. 3:14-19.”²³

²¹ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 91.

²² Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 31, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 259.

²³ Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 91.

A similar prophecy appears in Ezekiel in the context of God's promise to restore Israel. Ezekiel is told by God to "prophesy to the mountains" (Ez. 36:1). God promises the mountains that they will again be fruitful: "But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home" (Ez. 36:8). Ezekiel, along with a number of other prophets, envisions a time when the land which has dried up and lacks fertility due to Israel's sin will once again blossom and be fruitful. God has not forgotten the land any more than he has forgotten the people. Daniel Block in his commentary on these verses notes the interrelationship between restoration of the people and restoration of the land. "The description of the new day," he writes, "envisions the complete restoration of the deity-nation-land relationship." Furthermore, "The sign of the new day will be the renewed fruitfulness of the land, described according to the ancient covenant blessings (Lev. 26:1-13)."²⁴ Ezekiel anticipates not only spiritual restoration for the people of Israel, but restoration of the earth as integral to God's overall project of salvation. Together, Ezekiel and Joel draw a picture of restoration that includes not only humans, but the physical creation as a whole including land, plants, and animals.

Restoration of the land as described by the prophets, however, expands well beyond the borders of Israel. Just as many of the prophets describe God's judgment on the nations surrounding Israel, the scope of restoration is also broader than Israel. Several texts from Isaiah will illustrate this expansion from Israel to the earth as a whole. Isaiah 34 describes the coming judgment of God against the nations surrounding Israel. The first four verses call on the whole earth to listen to this prophecy and go on to describe

²⁴ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 333.

the universal effect of God's judgment. God is going to "totally destroy" the nations (v.2). Their blood will soak the mountains (v.3). The trees, vines, and even the stars will suffer the consequences of God's wrath (v.4). The prophet then specifically names Edom. "My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed" (Is. 34:5). Although the prophet seems to have turned his attention to Edom, John Oswalt suggests that Edom is actually representative of all the nations as indicated by the previous verses.²⁵ The scope of God's judgment, therefore, should be understood to include all the nations, in fact, the whole earth insofar as it was known at that time.

Following the depiction of multi-national, perhaps even world-wide destruction in chapter 34, Isaiah 35 turns from judgment to promise. The restoration promised in Isaiah 35 includes physical restoration for human, but also the restoration of the earth:

The desert and the parched land will be glad;
 the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
 Like the crocus,
² it will burst into bloom;
 it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
 The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
 the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
 they will see the glory of the LORD,
 the splendor of our God.

³ Strengthen the feeble hands,
 steady the knees that give way;
⁴ say to those with fearful hearts,
 "Be strong, do not fear;
 your God will come,
 he will come with vengeance;
 with divine retribution
 he will come to save you."

⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened

²⁵ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 610.

and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer,
 and the mute tongue shout for joy.
 Water will gush forth in the wilderness
 and streams in the desert.
⁷ The burning sand will become a pool,
 the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
 In the haunts where jackals once lay,
 grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

Although some suggest that the promises here apply only to Judah,²⁶ when coupled with scope of judgment described in chapter 34, the promise of restoration can be understood to apply well beyond Judah. Oswalt writes, “just as Edom in ch. 34 represented the nations in general, so here the desert represents the total world: physical, social, and spiritual, which, human arrogance having destroyed, God in his grace can make to bloom.”²⁷ In other words, the restoration depicted by the prophet Isaiah not only encompasses the land of Israel, but the whole earth.

Other passages in Isaiah also point toward a universal restoration. Jerusalem will surely be rebuilt (Is. 60:10-13; 61:6-7,12; 66:10-11, 20). But Jerusalem does not function merely as a the capital city for Israel but, as David Holwerda suggests, as a synecdoche for the whole world. Jerusalem is the city “that will embody the salvation promised to the whole earth.”²⁸ Holwerda explains, “This future city of salvation is a universal city,

²⁶ See for example, Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 344ff.

²⁷ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 620. Chapter 34 clearly begins as a warning of impending judgment on the nations and then focuses down on the particular nation of Edom. Given the general warning of the opening verses, Oswalt seems correct in asserting that Edom is functioning as an example or representative of what will happen to all the nations. For more on Edom as representative see J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 268-272. The connection recognized between chapters 34 and 35 by many commentators coupled with the fact that no reference to a specific people is given in chapter 35, Oswalt also seems warranted in suggesting a universal scope to this prophecy.

²⁸ David Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant of Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 98.

and just as the former Jerusalem represented the land of Canaan, so the Jerusalem of the future will be the quintessence of the new earth.”²⁹ John de Gruchy also recognizes the symbolic character of Jerusalem in these texts. According to de Gruchy, “The prophetic hope for Jerusalem leads to the hope for a ‘new earth,’ a new world order that embraces the whole creation.”³⁰

Nowhere is this comprehensive idea of salvation described more clearly by the prophets than in Isaiah 65:17-25. Here Isaiah offers a beautiful description of the “new heavens and new earth” which God will create. Jerusalem is part of this prophecy (v.18), but the poetic phrase with which the prophet begins indicates that the vision is much bigger than just that city, or even the land of Israel: “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Is. 65:17). “Heavens and earth” in this text is not intended to be a reference to those two particular physical places. Rather, this phrase is a merismus, a Hebrew poetic device which names the outer limits of something in order to express the totality.³¹ In other words, “heavens and earth” is a poetic way to express “all that is,” or “the entire cosmos.” In language reminiscent of Gen. 1:1, Isaiah clearly indicates that the new thing that God will do which has been the focus of hope throughout his writing will encompass not just the nation of Israel but all of creation: cities (v.18), humans (v.20), land (v.21), and even animals (v.25). The anticipated restoration is a world-wide event and God is the one who will restore. Oswalt writes, “God is the sole Creator. He stretched out the heavens and

²⁹ Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 98.

³⁰ John W. de Gruchy, “A New Heaven and a New Earth: An Exposition of Isaiah 65:17-25,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (Nov. 1999): 69.

³¹ Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 40.

founded the first earth (cf. Isa. 40:21-23), and he will remake them in the end.”³² Apart from God’s acting in history, restoration will not happen. The question then, is what exactly does God do to bring about the restoration of creation.

Atonement and New Creation

A primary characteristic of the prophetic anticipation for restoration is the anticipation of life in the presence of God. Indeed, depictions of the New Jerusalem in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation all include the presence of God. Chapter 2 of this paper describes the link between God’s presence and his blessing. God’s presence is associated with the flourishing and well-being often described as *šālôm*. Life in the presence of God is life lived in harmony with God’s intended purpose for creation. John Goldingay writes that the presence of God, his “face shining on them” (Num. 6), is the “means of their being blessed and kept, of their experiencing God’s favor and of their lives being characterized by well-being.”³³ The primary threat to God’s continued presence in Israel was uncleanness or defilement. The holy God will not dwell in the midst of uncleanness. The boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean must be kept in place but the prophets are clear that Israel has defiled the land, thereby disrupting those boundaries. Like the Canaanites before her, the land has vomited the people out. Israel is exiled because she defiled the land with her sin. Israel’s exile and the destruction of Jerusalem are described in several texts. Even more dramatic than the descriptions of Israel’s demise, however, is Ezekiel’s portrayal of the loss of God’s presence.

³² Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, 690.

³³ John Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*. Old Testament Theology, vol. 1 (Downer’s Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 403.

In one of the most heart-rending texts in the Old Testament, Ezekiel 10 and 11 describe the departure of God's glory (*kābôd*) from the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel 8 and 9 have set up the reason for this dramatic move. The idolatry of the people had moved into the temple, including the inner court (Ez. 8:16), defiling the very house of God. God responds with judgment on the idolaters (Ch. 9). Then his glory rises above the temple and moves to the East Gate of the temple. (Ch. 10) Finally, in Ezekiel 11:22-23 the glory of the Lord leaves the temple and city altogether: "Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. The glory of the LORD went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it." Daniel Block describes the significance of this action: "The departure of the glory signals the end of a relationship that had existed for almost four centuries. The divine king has abandoned his residence."³⁴ In other words, God will no longer dwell with his people in the promised land. The impurity of the people has defiled the land and rendered it inhospitable to the presence of God. Brueggemann explains, "The holy God of Israel will not and cannot stay in a place that is defiled."³⁵

The problem presented by the prophets is that Israel's sinful behavior has rendered the land unclean and therefore unfit for the presence of God. Without the presence of God, there can be no blessing, no flourishing, no fullness of life as God intended. The solution anticipated by the prophets is cleansing. Only if the people and land are clean can God once again dwell with his people. Cleansing is, in fact, central to the prophetic anticipation of restoration. Isaiah speaks of this cleansing in the context of

³⁴ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 326-7.

³⁵ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 187.

God's judgment on Judah and Israel. "The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire" (Is. 4:4). This cleansing, spoken of by Isaiah, will result in Israel being a holy people as God had instructed them to be in Leviticus (Lev. 19:2). Jeremiah also has prophecies about the future cleansing of Israel and, like Isaiah, relates this cleansing to the removal of sins: "I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me" (Jer. 33:8). Likewise, Ezekiel tells of a time when the people of Israel will once again be clean. God says to Israel, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols" (Ez. 36:25).

As is easily observed in the above texts, the anticipated cleansing that will take place is understood by the prophets as nothing less than an act of God. The sacrificial system as practiced by Israel is not effective for removing the defilement caused by the nation's ongoing unfaithfulness to YHWH. The only solution is for God to step in and cleanse Israel himself.³⁶ Schmid and Steck affirm this writing, "Human beings, even those who are faithful to YHWH, cannot actively cause [restoration]. They can only impede it or conform to it."³⁷ One way to understand how God accomplishes this cleansing is not to disregard the sacrificial system altogether, however, but to examine

³⁶ Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution in Biblical Israel," 409. Frymer-Kensky makes this point and draws a parallel between the exile and the flood narrative of Israel's primeval history, a parallel apparently made in some Midrashic literature. Both the exile and the flood purge the land of sinful humans while preserving a remnant that God will re-settle in the land. An extensive discussion of this parallel is outside the bounds of this paper but of interest is the rabbinic parallel between the promised land of Israel and the world. God's actions with Israel at some level reflect his purpose for the world as a whole.

³⁷ Schmid and Steck, "Restoration Expectations in the Prophetic Tradition of the Old Testament," In *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. by James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 57.

God's actions that restore Israel in light of the sacrificial system and in particular, the rituals of the Day of Atonement.

The exile itself can be understood to resemble one piece of the Day of Atonement ritual. Recall that on the Day of Atonement, two goats were offered as sin or purification offerings (Lev. 16:5). One goat was killed and its blood was taken into the most holy place and sprinkled on and in front of the atonement cover of the ark, and on the tent of meeting (Lev. 16:15-16). A bit later, the high priest was to lay his hands on the head of the other goat, putting the sins and associate impurity of Israel on it. The goat was then sent into the chaos of the wilderness, away from the life-giving presence of God, taking with it the impurity of the camp and restoring the camp to the status of 'clean.' Israel has defiled herself and the land by her sins. Just as the camp was purified by sending the goat with all Israel's sins and impurities into the wilderness, so in the exile, the land of Canaan is purified with the removal of the impure people from the land. Like the scapegoat, sinful Israel has been banished to the wilderness, away from the presence of God. This "sending away of sins" essentially cleanses the land in the same way that sending the goat into the wilderness cleansed the camp of sin.

Although not drawing the connection to the Day of Atonement scapegoat ritual, Daniel Block makes a similar point in his commentary on Ez. 39:12 suggesting that the defilement brought about by the sin of the Israelites was resolved through God's purging the land of its population and allowing the land a Sabbath rest.³⁸ Furthermore, God cleanses Israel by "sprinkling" her with clean water: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols"

³⁸Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, 470.

(Ezek. 36:25). This sprinkling associated with cleansing clearly alludes to the sacrificial system in which the sprinkling of blood has the effect of cleansing the object on which it is sprinkled. Although water is being sprinkled in this text rather than blood, Block nonetheless suggests that this sprinkling with water in Ezekiel represents “a wholesale cleansing from sin performed by Yahweh.”³⁹ Block reflects an understanding of the symbolic significance of sprinkling earlier explained by Walther Eichrodt. According to Eichrodt, the symbolism involved in the ritual action of sprinkling, regardless of whether the sprinkling was with blood or water, would have been well known to every Israelite and recognized by them as representing the cleansing action of God.⁴⁰ The peculiar attention to proportion and order in the final chapters of the book dealing with the temple, as well as the renewed emphasis on the distinction between clean and unclean also point toward a restoration of boundaries and order similar to that accomplished in the Day of Atonement. Ezekiel’s final vision, according to Katheryn Darr, portrays “a perfectly ordered Israelite society living in a perfectly ordered homeland under the leadership of a perfectly ordered priesthood serving in a perfectly ordered Temple complex.”⁴¹ Through actions which are reminiscent of the rituals of the Day of Atonement, the land of Canaan is cleansed. Thus, by sending the people of Israel into exile and sprinkling them with water, God restores this part of his creation, both people and land.

The verses immediately following the sprinkling text illustrate the comprehensive nature of the anticipated restoration. “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day

³⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, 355.

⁴⁰ Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 498.

⁴¹ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Bruce C. Birch, John J. Collins, Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, and David L. Petersen, vol. VI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1532.

I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it” (Ezek. 36:33-34). This restoration is described further in the following chapter through the vision of the valley of the dry bones and Ezekiel’s explanation of that vision, ending with the ultimate hope of God once again dwelling with his people in the land. If the exiles had any lingering doubts about God’s intentions, the massive temple described in chapters 40-42 solidifies the hope for God’s renewed presence. In chapter 43, the glory of God is seen coming back to the inner court of the temple and God promises to live among his people forever. Zion, in fact, will have the name “The LORD is there” (Ezek. 48:35).

There are hints, however, that restoration brought about by the cleansing predicted by Ezekiel is a new thing that God is doing and that it includes more than just Israel. One such hint comes at the end of chapter 47. Here, Israel is instructed to allot land not only to themselves, but to aliens who have settled among them as an inheritance: “You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance,” declares the Sovereign LORD” (Ezek. 47:21-23). Brueggemann comments about the striking contrast of this instruction to Israel’s previous understanding of land: “Now the alien is treated like the native born. The promise is expansive and inclusive.”⁴² The promise is expansive and

⁴² Brueggemann, *The Land*, 134.

inclusive because prior to this, the land was an inheritance only for Israel. Aliens could dwell with Israel but the land was allotted only to Abraham's descendants. In addition, as is often the case with Israel's prophecies, this promise seems to point beyond the time of the actual return from exile not only because the temple rebuilt under Ezra and Nehemiah came nowhere near the structure described in these chapters, but also because the inclusion of aliens stands in direct contrast to the instructions given to the returning exiles under Ezra and Nehemiah. Ronald Clements comments that "Ezekiel's vision is suffused with the promise of a yet greater and grander New Jerusalem – a heavenly city resplendent with a temple more glorious than any earthbound site could contain... (Revelation 21)."⁴³

The temple and city and the symbols used to describe them by Ezekiel in chapters 40-48 offer another hint that the vision of Ezekiel concerns a universal reality, not just a reality for Israel. This is especially true in chapter 47. The description of Zion in chapter 47 with its river that becomes so deep eventually no one can cross it has a number of symbolic connections to motifs of paradise or the Garden of Eden.⁴⁴ Eden predates any national or ethnic identity.⁴⁵ Rather, the first man and woman represent all of humanity and Eden represents the earth. It follows, therefore, that if the restored Zion foreseen by

⁴³ Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 179.

⁴⁴ Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 1595. See also Jon Douglas Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 31-32.

⁴⁵ Although more interested in the political aspects of this reality than I am, Levenson makes exactly this point. See *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48*, 33.

the prophet is likened to paradise or Eden, Zion would represent a restored earth and humanity, not just a restored Israel.⁴⁶

As with Ezekiel, Isaiah describes restoration involving all of creation. Furthermore, like Ezekiel, Isaiah emphasizes that restoration will be the work of God. Although the language of cleansing is not as common in Isaiah as Ezekiel, Isaiah also describes God's work in connection with the rituals of atonement and that the result of God's atoning work will be cleansing. Isaiah 1 includes numerous allusions to defilement and then, in the context of coming judgment, God says he will remove Israel's impurities (Is. 1:25). Likewise, Isaiah 4 speaks of a future time when God will clean Israel of her impurities. She will be holy, thus no longer impure, and God's presence will dwell on Mount Zion (Is. 4:3-6). Isaiah 52:1-12 also suggests that Israel will once again be pure. Her deliverance will include putting on beautiful garments (v. 1), the exclusion of any unclean person (v.1), and the command not to touch any unclean thing (v. 11). God's people will burst into songs of joy because of his work of redemption (v. 9). And this redemption will impact the whole earth (v. 10). God's redemption is, as Oswalt explains, "cause for joy, not just for humans alone but for the whole cosmos."⁴⁷ He notes that humans and nature alike will enjoy God's redemptive work: "Just as nature has suffered the effects of sin, so one day it will share the benefits of God's redemption, and

⁴⁶ Darr, while recognizing the Edenic/paradisiac nature of Ezekiel's vision disputes that this universalizes the restoration. Nonetheless, others, including Ackroyd, Eichrodt, and Frymer-Kensky support the notion of a universal scope to restoration. See Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 114-115; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 585-6; Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," 409-412. In addition, Old Testament studies generally recognize the universal scope of the first eleven chapters of Genesis with the story narrowing to Israel only at the end of Gen. 11 and the beginning of Gen. 12. Thus, to suggest that the anticipated new paradise would be universal rather than just focused on Israel stands in line with Old Testament theology in general.

⁴⁷ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 367.

that is cause for song.”⁴⁸ But what will God do to bring about this cleansing? The answer to that question lies in the following verses of Is. 52:13-53:12 where God’s work is identified with one specific person, the servant.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 are likely some of the most written about and discussed verses in the entire prophecy. The connection of restoration to the rituals of atonement is most clearly drawn in Isaiah’s portrayal of the suffering servant in this text. Isaiah 53:10 describes the servant’s suffering as a guilt offering: “Yet it was the LORD’S will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.” The guilt offering, as explained in chapter 3, was specifically for offenses against God that violate the boundaries that set apart the holy things of God. These sins are described as sins against God.⁴⁹

The guilt offering was typically given by an individual rather than on behalf of the group. Yet Isaiah seems to suggest that in this case, the guilt offering functions corporately. The fact that the Servant himself is the guilt offering indicates not only that he is blameless since the animal offered was to be pure, but also that this offering is being made on behalf of another. Clearly, the previous verses indicate that the work of the Servant is “for us.”

Despite the normally individual nature of the guilt offering, commentator John Watts suggests that in this case, the offering is, in fact, corporate: “God is prepared to regard the death [of the servant] as vicarious propitiation for the sins of the group, ‘a guilt

⁴⁸ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 367.

⁴⁹ See chapter 3, p. 20 and the accompanying references.

offering’.”⁵⁰ Oswalt offers a slightly different understanding, proposing that Isaiah’s specific reference to the guilt offering suggested that “If the Servant’s ministry is to have any validity for me, I must take the broken self he offers me and in turn offer it back to God in my place.”⁵¹ In other words, the sacrifice of the servant would not be understood as corporate in the sense that his sacrifice covered the group as a whole with no response on their part. Rather, it should be understood as one sacrifice which could be appropriated by each individual and therefore offered by each for their guilt, as was the purpose of the guilt offering. Both explanations seem plausible given the wording of the text and the Levitical understanding of the guilt offering. Thus, it is possible that some mixture of both of these explanations is at work here especially in light of the fact that Isaiah is describing a new thing that God will do. Regardless of how one understands this apparent change in the method of presenting a guilt offering, however, the servant is identified as a guilt offering and thus identified with one of the rituals that provides atonement for God’s people.

In addition to the specific identification of the servant with the guilt offering, the allusions to the sacrificial system throughout this poem are difficult to miss. Isaiah 52:15 hints at notions of sacrifice with the language of “sprinkling”. Although many commentators prefer the translation of “startling” here, the Hebrew word (*yzh*, Hiphil perfect of *nzh*) is the same as that used in Leviticus with reference to the ritual sprinkling of blood in several of the regular sacrifices, purification rites, and the rituals of the Day of

⁵⁰ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 228.

⁵¹ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 402.

Atonement.⁵² The usage of this word in the Levitical texts combined with the references to defilement in the previous verses of Isaiah 52, as well as the sacrificial connotations of the following verses dealing with the suffering servant, seem to suggest that it is not out of place or unwarranted to affirm the traditional translation of “sprinkling” as the most fitting. In fact, in the overall context of the suffering servant, Edward Young suggests that this translation sets before us “the Servant of the Lord . . . as One who performs a work of expiatory purification.”⁵³ Indeed Henri Blocher believes that the language here, anticipating the following verses, has reference to the sin offering: “The Servant’s death will be a sin offering; through the sprinkling of his blood many sinners will receive cleansing (*cf.* I Pet. 1:2).”⁵⁴

Beyond this single word, however, the overall picture of the suffering servant painted by Isaiah also alludes to the sacrificial system. Although the text does not deal with these categories precisely, as Christopher Seitz points out, the connections to cleansing and atonement cannot be ignored.⁵⁵ Isaiah 53:4-6 says:

But surely it was our sickness he carried, our pains he bore. But we considered him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced through for our rebellions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment of our well-being was on

⁵² For a more complete description of the alternate translation see John Oswalt who suggests that the lack of a clear parallel in the poem combined with the lack of the preposition ‘on’ following the word support what he considers the better translation of this word as ‘startling.’ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 374. For a compelling argument in favor of the traditional translation of ‘sprinkling’ see Edward J. Young, “The Interpretation of יָחַד In Isaiah 52:15,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (May 1941): 125-132. Following Young, Henri Blocher also affirms the traditional translation of “sprinkling.” Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant: Isaiah’s Good News* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 61-63.

⁵³ Young, “The Interpretation of יָחַד In Isaiah 52:15,” 132.

⁵⁴ Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant: Isaiah’s Good News* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 62.

⁵⁵ Christopher R. Seitz, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, eds. Bruce C. Birch, John J. Collins, Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, and David L. Petersen, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 464.

him, and his welts have made healing for us. All of us, like sheep we go astray, each on to his own way we have turned; but the Lord has caused to fall on him the iniquity of all of us.⁵⁶

The idea of substitutionary suffering stands out in this text. The anticipated servant suffers “for us.” The servant will be stricken, pierced, and crushed “for us.” Sin renders a person unclean and therefore unable to live in the life-giving presence of God.

Cleansing from the defilement caused by sin comes by means of blood sacrifice. Indeed, Wenham notes that in texts where the sin was so grave that God immediately judges by killing the offending party, no subsequent sacrifice is needed.⁵⁷ Normally, however, the animal stands in place of the offending party in the sense that the animal’s blood cleanses the person so he can continue to live in the full sense of the term, that is; to live in the presence of God. This is the image the prophet is portraying, as Oswalt explains: “the language of carrying and bearing sets the stage for the substitutionary understanding of the Servant’s suffering.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, this language is, according to Oswalt, “the language of the cult, especially from Leviticus.”⁵⁹ The point Isaiah is making therefore, is that the Servant will, by his sacrifice, restore Israel’s purity so she can once again dwell in the presence of God.

One other allusion to atonement is worth mentioning. Isaiah 53:8b says, “For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.” The suffering servant was to be “cut off from the land of the living.” Like the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, the sins of the people are put on the servant and he is

⁵⁶ Translation by Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 384.

⁵⁷ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 29.

⁵⁸ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 386.

⁵⁹ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 386.

sentenced to death. Just as the scapegoat was sent out to the wilderness, the place of death, cut off from the land of the living, so the servant will be sent to his death bearing the sins of the people.

What is the result of the servant's work? Atonement. More specifically, the result of his work is to remove sin and its accompanying defilement, thus re-establishing the boundaries between unclean, clean, and holy. By so doing, he restores the order of creation and the possibility for life in the presence of God. Evidence that this is what has happened through the suffering and death of the Servant is apparent in verses 10b-12a. These verses record a life of fertility and fruitfulness for the once despised and rejected Servant, the sort of life one would expect in the presence of God. If the land was still defiled, God could not dwell there and no blessing would accrue to the Servant. Furthermore, the blessings the text describes are due to the fact that he "poured out his life unto death" (v. 12b). Not only will the life of the Servant be blessed, but Zion will also be blessed. It is no accident that Isaiah 54, following on the heels of the work of the Servant, records the restoration of Zion. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 can be understood as the means of this restoration.⁶⁰ Although the theme of judgment continues through the rest of Isaiah, it is always juxtaposed with hope, hope that flows from the work of the Servant described above. By the end of the book, this hope is expansive, encompassing nothing less than the promise of a new heavens and new earth.⁶¹ The covenant curses will "never

⁶⁰ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 413. Oswalt suggests that Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is "understood as an expression of the means by which a restored relationship between God and his people is possible." I would suggest it is not only the means for restored relationship but for restoration more generally understood since, as Brueggemann suggests, the people and the land cannot be neatly distinguished.

⁶¹ Some commentators insist that the reference to the new heavens and new earth has only to do with Israel and not creation as a whole. See, for example, R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* (Greenwood: Attic Press, 1975), 275-6; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 408-9. But

again” be imposed (Is. 65:20-21). Rather, the blessings associated with the presence of God – fruitfulness, flourishing, peaceful existence – will characterize this new reality. Atonement, accomplished by the Servant, has banished sin and its accompanying defilement forever.⁶² The result of the sacrifice of the Servant is the restoration of the order of creation to something like its pre-Fall condition, a condition that allows for fullness of life which can only be experienced in the presence of God.⁶³

The Servant, Christ, and the New Creation

Left in the Old Testament, the discussion of the new creation is incomplete. What is anticipated and only partially brought about through Israel’s return from exile in Babylon, moves toward completion in the New Testament where the servant Isaiah spoke of is revealed. There are those who assert that the servant spoken of in Isaiah, particularly Isaiah 52:13-53:12, is not Jesus Christ. Whybray, for example, suggests that the servant is none other than Deutero-Isaiah himself.⁶⁴ Morna D. Hooker believes the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is Israel.⁶⁵ In fact, the text of Isaiah does not tell us who the servant is. Nonetheless, a wide swath of both pre-critical and modern Christian exegesis recognizes the servant as Jesus Christ.

many others such as Oswalt, Seitz, and pre-critical commentators such as Calvin recognize and affirm a universal scope to this text.

⁶² Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 661.

⁶³ Seitz, *Isaiah 40-66*, 544. Seitz makes this point due to allusions in the text to Genesis 1-3. He does not suggest, nor do I, that the anticipated new heavens and earth is a return to Eden. Only that some features of Eden, particularly those that exemplify fruitfulness and humanity’s relationship to God, will also characterize the new reality that God is creating.

⁶⁴ Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 171.

⁶⁵ Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959), 46.

In part, this recognition comes out of the New Testament itself. Luke 22:37 is part of Luke's portrayal of Jesus speaking to his disciples at the last supper. In this text, Jesus quotes directly from Isaiah 53. At this final meal with his disciples, Luke records the following words spoken by Jesus: "It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors;' and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment." The way Luke records this event, it seems that in this context, just hours before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus recognizes in his own work the work of the Servant described by Isaiah.⁶⁶ R. T. France offers the following comments regarding Jesus' self-understanding: "that Jesus on the eve of his death should quote from Isaiah 53 at all is surely significant, and indicates that he saw his death in the light of that chapter; that he should quote the phrase 'was numbered with the transgressors,' far from indicating that vicarious suffering was absent from his mind, shows that he was preoccupied with the fact that he, who least deserved it, was to be punished as a wrongdoer."⁶⁷ In addition, the formula "this scripture has its fulfillment in me" strongly suggests that Jesus did indeed see himself as the Servant about whom Isaiah wrote.

Luke also refers to Isaiah 53 in his story of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch. As Luke tells it, the eunuch is reading from Isaiah 53:7-8 when he encounters Philip. The eunuch asks Philip if he can tell him who the prophet is talking about. Luke records, "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good

⁶⁶ I recognize that some dispute the authenticity of this text, but the Reformed tradition of which I am a part, along with the majority of the historic Christian church, accepts the entire text of the Old and New Testaments as part of the inspired canon, thus accepts this text as what it claims to be: the words of Jesus. For a short defense of this position see R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 115.

⁶⁷ R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 115.

news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Luke, and Philip also according to Luke, recognized the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 as Jesus.

The suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is depicted as an atoning sacrifice. In at least some New Testament texts, Jesus is directly identified with this suffering Servant. Furthermore, the book of Hebrews describes Jesus’ death specifically in terms of an atoning sacrifice. Insofar as atonement brings about the re-establishment of boundaries between unclean, clean, and holy and the corresponding restoration of creation, these images of Jesus combine to point toward an understanding of Jesus’ death as the means by which creation will be restored. It will be helpful then, to investigate whether the New Testament actually relates the work of Jesus, in particular, his sacrificial death, with the restoration of creation. While a complete study is not within the scope of this chapter, a brief sampling of texts should suffice to demonstrate the connection between Jesus’ sacrificial death and the restoration of creation.

Beginning with the gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, the record of Jesus’ miraculous works recorded in the three synoptic gospels and John have clear links to ideas of a restored creation. Isaiah 35 is a prophecy that depicts a restored creation. In this text, the desert flourishes and nothing unclean resides, a situation one would expect if the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean have been restored. But this text also depicts physical restoration of human disabilities, disabilities that reflect the adverse effects of sin on the physical world. “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy” (Is. 35:5-6a). The gospels record several instances of Jesus healing blind persons. Matthew 9:27-31, Matthew 20:29-34 (*cf.* Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43), and John 9:1-

11 are three specific examples but the gospels also record more general statements referring to Jesus' healing miracles including the healing of the sorts of maladies described by Isaiah. Sin has corrupted not just humanity's relationship with God, but has corrupted the physical world itself as described earlier. On the level of individual humans, this corruption is evident in various physical infirmities. Jesus' healing miracles therefore, demonstrate a preliminary installment of the reversal of this corruption and the restoration of creation, at least the human part of creation, as God intended and as anticipated in Isaiah 35.

Luke 7:21-23 (*cf.* Matt. 11:2-6) is a striking statement of Jesus' healing miracles. Luke records his version of a conversation between the disciples of John the Baptist, who has been imprisoned by Herod, and Jesus. Luke writes, "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind." He then quotes Jesus' response to John's disciples' inquiry regarding who Jesus is. According to Luke, Jesus tells John's disciples, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." Jesus' response would have sounded familiar to his Jewish listeners. It forms, as Joel Green points out, "a symphony of Isaianic echoes."⁶⁸ Jesus describes himself in terms of the work he is doing, work which corresponds very closely to the picture of the new creation foretold by Isaiah, especially in chapter 35. Understood in that context, it is as if Jesus is saying "the new creation God promised so long ago is here; the restoration

⁶⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 297.

of creation is now.” Healing miracles provide examples of the initial stages of the restoration of the corrupted creation.

Paul also connects the work of Jesus with new creation. N. T. Wright suggests that the Old Testament is shaped by the intertwining themes of creation and covenant and that these themes shape Paul’s thinking and theology.⁶⁹ Covenant has to do, not only with law, but with God’s unfailing promises to his people. According to Wright, “The fulfillment of the covenant, resulting in new covenant and new creation, is accomplished, for Paul, by the particular events of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”⁷⁰ The great Christological hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 is an example of Paul’s connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the restored creation. Verse 16 associates Christ with the creation of the world: “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16). Furthermore, verse 20 states that Jesus, “through his blood, shed on the cross,” has reconciled “all things” (τά πάντα). “The implication of such a statement is,” writes Andrew Lincoln, “that at some stage the cosmos with its original harmony, as God had created it in Christ, was put out of joint, so that it became in need of being restored to harmony through Christ.”⁷¹ Once again, the sin of the first couple corrupted not only their relationship with God, their creator, it also seriously corrupted the original harmony of creation. Just as Jesus was involved in the bringing into being the original creation, he chooses not to leave either his creatures or

⁶⁹ N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 20, 24-5.

⁷⁰ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 13.

⁷¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Letter to the Colossians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 600.

the physical world they inhabit in a state of disarray. His sacrifice on the cross restores creation, restores “all things” to their intended order.

Two other Pauline texts are worth briefly examining: 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15. Both of these texts use the expression “new creation” (καινή κτίσις). Gal. 6:15 says, “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.” This statement comes at the close of Paul’s letter where he is summarizing the overall points regarding the law and grace which he has been stressing to the Galatians. Some suggest that the reference to new creation here has only to do with individual believers. Herman Ridderbos, for example, proposes, “The words point to the new life in the Holy Spirit.”⁷² More recently, Moyer Hubbard has also argued that both Galatians 6:15 and 2 Cor. 5:17 have to do with an anthropological rather than a cosmic reality. “Paul’s new creation,” he asserts, “expresses a reality *intra nos* not a reality *extra nos*, and functions as an alternative formulation of his central Spirit affirmation – *the Spirit creates life*.”⁷³ Richard B. Hays, however, offers a broader interpretation. He suggests that Paul, in continuity with the message of Galatians as a whole, is associating the cross of Christ with a whole new reality that encompasses the entire creation. This reality erases old distinctions like Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female (Gal. 3:28) and establishes the new creation.⁷⁴ The unusual syntax of the sentence in Gal. 6:15 emphasizes the radical newness brought about by Christ. As Hays describes it, “The

⁷² Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 226.

⁷³ Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 232.

⁷⁴ Richard B. Hays, *The Letter to the Galatians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander F. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 344.

broken syntax of the sentence expresses the utter discontinuity between the abolished cosmos and the new world.”⁷⁵ Lest there be any confusion, Hays makes clear that Paul is not writing only about the spiritual rebirth of an individual. Rather, proposes Hays, Paul “is claiming that the God who created the world has come to reclaim and transform it.”⁷⁶ Although Hays’s suggestion that there is “utter discontinuity” between old and new cosmos seems too strong, his point regarding the cosmic scope of Paul’s statement comports well with the overall argument of Galatians which contrasts old covenant with new.

A similar argument arises with 2 Cor. 5:17. Here Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Confusion with this text arises because the words translated “he is” in the NIV quoted above, do not appear in the Greek text. Literally, the first phrase of this text reads “if anyone be in Christ – new creation.”⁷⁷ While some translations add “he is” and others add “there is,” neither construction appears in the Greek but rather must be assumed from the context. Hubbard argues in favor of what he calls an anthropological-soteriological understanding, of this text.⁷⁸ He writes, “As the context makes clear, in 2 Corinthians 5.17 *καινή κτίσις* is an anthropological motif relating to the new situation of the individual ‘in Christ.’”⁷⁹ Nonetheless, it is not unwarranted to understand Paul’s

⁷⁵ Hays, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 344.

⁷⁶ Hays, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 345.

⁷⁷ Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, 177.

⁷⁸ The details of this argument are not important for this paper. For a brief summary of the general arguments see Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, 183-187.

⁷⁹ Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, 183.

language here as referring to a larger reality, the cosmos.⁸⁰ In fact, just a few verses later Paul writes “God was reconciling the world (κόσμον) to himself in Christ” (v.19) hinting that the scope of Christ’s work is beyond the individual. N. T. Wright notes that Paul is always working within the framework of creation to new creation not just with regard to individuals, but the cosmos.⁸¹ In addition, even if Paul is merely speaking of humans in this particular text, given his already/not-yet eschatological viewpoint,⁸² the new human creation referred to may in fact be the first vestiges of the restored cosmos, just as the resurrected Jesus is understood as the firstfruits of the general resurrection of all humans that will come at the close of the age (1 Cor. 15:20).⁸³ Humans are, after all, part of the created world. Paul is contrasting the old order of things with the new order. Christ’s sacrifice has brought into reality this new order such that anyone who is in Christ is the new creation, part of this new order. Ralph Martin describes it this way: “Paul is not describing *in this context* the personal dimension of a new birth; rather he is announcing as a kerygmatic statement *the advent of the new creation ‘in Christ’*, the dramatic

⁸⁰ Margaret Thrall, while finally concluding that this particular passage is dealing primarily with humanity, does not disallow the wider potential scope. Furthermore, she broadens the understanding beyond a mere spiritual renewal which Hubbard limits this text to. For more see Margaret Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 420-29. See also Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 32A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 315-16.

⁸¹ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 33.

⁸² This understanding of Paul’s theology is quite well attested. Wright offers a brief but helpful description for those not familiar with it. He refers to this aspect of Paul’s theology as “inaugurated eschatology” although other terms are sometimes employed. He describes this as “a sense that God’s ultimate future has come forwards into the middle of history, so that the church is living within – indeed, is constituted precisely by living simultaneously within! – God’s new world and the present one.” See *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 57.

⁸³ Wright asserts that the language of 1 Cor. 15 of all dying in Adam and all made alive in Christ is, in fact, new creation language. See *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 28.

recovery of the world, formerly alienated and dislocated, by God who has acted eschatologically in Christ, i.e. the world is placed now under his rule.”⁸⁴ While the fullness of restoration awaits the second coming of Christ and the final judgment (Rom. 8:22), already the new eschatological creation has begun in the new creation of humanity. Paul makes clear here and throughout his writings that this new reality is the result of Christ’s sacrifice.

One other text that deserves consideration is Revelation 21:1-22:5. Here, in language similar to that of Isaiah,⁸⁵ John describes the culmination of God’s work. The Bible closes as it opened: with the creation of heaven and earth. The story has moved from creation to new creation. This is the end, the *telos*, of the hope of God’s people ever since the introduction of sin in Genesis 3. Although Revelation as a whole is a difficult book to interpret and much controversy surrounds how to understand its message, at least some modern commentators recognize both the historical character of the book and a futuristic outlook regarding the promises of God that have not yet been fulfilled.⁸⁶ Thus, it is appropriate to understand the picture John paints of the new heavens and earth in this important text as a future reality.

An important question to ask with regard to this beautiful picture is what brings about the arrival of the new creation. Dan Liroy suggests an overarching Christological

⁸⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul’s Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 104.

⁸⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 727.

⁸⁶ See for example, Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); and Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

pattern to the book of Revelation. In that light, God is shown working through his chosen servant or Messiah defeating evil to accomplish his purpose.⁸⁷ The defeat of Christ's opponents has already happened with his death and resurrection.⁸⁸ But the final victory has not yet been accomplished. It is this final victory portrayed in Rev. 19-20.

In Rev. 5 John portrays Jesus as the Lamb, a Lamb "looking as if it had been slain." (v.6) The Lamb is praised because "you [the Lamb] were slain and with your blood you have purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God" (v. 9b-10). These words are the words of a "new song" that the heavenly creatures sing. According to Beale, the new song indicates "praise for God's victory over the enemy, sometimes including thanksgiving for God's work of creation."⁸⁹ Given the context of creation in the previous hymn of Rev. 4:11, Beale suggests that the word 'new' here "associates Christ's redemptive work with the beginning of a new creation."⁹⁰ Furthermore, Beale points out that the hymn celebrates Christ's victory through his death,⁹¹ a death which we know from our earlier investigation, can rightly be considered an atoning sacrifice. Thus, it is through Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection that the new creation is begun.

One of the most striking aspects of the final victory described at the close of the apocalypse is the destruction of death (Rev. 20:14). Death, if the reader will recall, is the

⁸⁷ Dan Liroy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 162.

⁸⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 245.

⁸⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 358.

⁹⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 358.

⁹¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 359.

place of chaos, the place outside the camp where the unclean must go and the place to which sin is banished on the head of the scapegoat. In the vivid imagery of the apostle, death is eliminated. Witherington comments, "Here, as in 1 Cor. 15, death is not viewed as a natural part of and ending to life. It is not seen as a part of God's original intent for his creation. It is viewed as the enemy that must be destroyed."⁹² Although there is no clear-cut link to Christ's work in this section, standing as it does near the end of John's vision, after the final battle, it seems obvious that this comes to pass because of the victory of the Lamb over evil,⁹³ a victory whose decisive battle was won with his death on the cross. Understood as the final atoning sacrifice, the sacrifice that accomplished everything that the Day of Atonement accomplished, the banishment of death is fitting. Death, the ultimate pollutant, will no longer have the power to pollute. The ultimate cleansing has happened with Jesus' sacrificial death. Death is gone.

The new heavens and new earth of the following chapters exemplify the cleansing and re-establishment of boundaries that Christ has brought about.⁹⁴ John calls the city

⁹² Witherington, *Revelation*, 252.

⁹³ Lioy, *The Book of Revelation*, 148.

⁹⁴ This brings up an important point with regard to the explanation of atonement as a cleansing that re-establishes creational boundaries. In the context of Israel and the Old Testament, the boundaries divided and kept separate the realms of unclean, clean, and holy. Maintaining these divisions effectively maintained the order of the camp, of creation. The question that arises is how to understand boundary language in the context of the New Testament with regard to Christ's sacrifice. Having established the cosmic scope of Christ's work, what creational boundaries does his sacrifice re-establish? Or, to put it another way, what do we mean when we suggest that Christ's sacrifice cleanses creation, human and non-human, thereby re-establishing the boundaries? At the very least, to say that Christ, as the fulfillment of the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, re-establishes creational boundaries is simply to say that he restores the good order of creation. What precisely this might entail with regard to the law, Christian living, and the role of the church, to name a few issues, is worth thinking about but outside the parameters of my rather limited treatment of the topic in this dissertation. For example, what might all of this have to do with Paul's admonition to the believers in Corinth (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1), an admonition that clearly draws on Old Testament ideas of unclean, clean, and holy? How do those categories function in a New Testament context? Can a believer, one in whom God dwells, be unclean? This is difficult to flesh out in part because we live in the time between Christ's first and second coming, in the "already/not-yet." While these categories function in Israel to represent the order of creation, there is some indication in the prophets that

‘holy,’ a level above ‘clean’ (v. 2). Zion is described as a beautifully dressed bride, a stark contrast to the images of filth and harlotry given by the various prophets to describe sinful Israel, and an apparent allusion to at least one of the prophecies of restoration in Isaiah (Is. 61:10, perhaps also 62:5).⁹⁵ The city itself is characterized by purity or “cleanness” (καθαρός – Rev. 21:18, 21). Those whose actions are impure (21:8) will not be allowed in the city. The river flowing out of that city, like the river in Ezekiel, will be “for the healing of the nations” (22:2). But perhaps most indicative of the cleansing work which Christ’s sacrifice has accomplished, is the emphasis on the presence of God. God will not dwell in the midst of impurity. The Pentateuch and prophetic texts make that clear. But here, at the end of Revelation, with the work of the Lamb completed, the voice from the throne thunders “Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them” (Rev. 21:3). The city will have no temple because God and the Lamb will be its temple (Rev. 21:22). “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:3b-4). The measuring of the city indicates, according to Beale, a guarantee of his “future presence with his people and the absence of sin and threats to the security of the redeemed.”⁹⁶ Because of the sacrificial Lamb, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” as John says in another place, creation is restored and God’s presence and the blessing that accompanies that presence will never again depart.

the specific categories of unclean, clean, and holy will no longer be needed in the new heavens and earth. Zechariah, for instance, indicates that everything, even the cooking pots, will be holy (Zech. 14:21). So maybe unclean, clean, and holy represent the good creation but holy is, in fact, the penultimate category, the telos of creation. These, and related questions and ideas, however, are topics for further study.

⁹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1044.

⁹⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1072.

Conclusion

Sin has despoiled God's good creation, not just humans, but creation as a whole. The biblical text is clear that central to eschatological hope is the restoration of creation, the new heavens and new earth. Aside from the fact that the restored cosmos is foretold in both the Old and New Testaments, how do we know this will actually happen? Hope, after all, is not wishful thinking but the assurance of a coming reality. The key to certainty lies in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Recognizing that Jesus Christ is not only a sacrifice, but the final atoning sacrifice as demonstrated in chapter 4, is central to understanding restoration. But even with this understanding in place, reasons for applying Jesus' atoning work beyond the camp or the land to the cosmos need elucidation. This chapter has sought to do exactly that.

The Old Testament prophets, it was shown, clearly anticipated restoration of the physical world, not just the relationship between God and his people. Various texts were explained to show that Israel's sin had defiled the land itself as well as the people. This defilement threatens the life of Israel, life lived in the presence of God. The eighth-century prophets, often associated with announcements of judgment, make clear that God's plan for Israel is to restore them and their land. Restoration will be spiritual, but it will also be physical.

Restoration will not be merely a return to the land and the old way of living, although it may entail that as well. Restoration envisioned by the prophets will reflect something new God is doing (Is. 42:9). Physical maladies will no longer be part of human existence. Pain will no longer characterize human work. The land will no longer suffer the effects of the curse. Even the deserts will flourish and produce fruit, and wild

beasts will live in peace with humans and domestic animals. Furthermore, the promised restoration is anticipated to include the entire world, according to the prophets, not just the land and people of Israel. The restored creation will be characterized by blessings that accompany the fullness of life in the presence of God.

God chooses, however, to bring about this restoration, the new heavens and new earth, not by divine fiat, but through the sacrificial system with which Israel is familiar and under which Israel operates. The difference between how God has restored order to Israel in the past and how he will restore creation as a whole in the future is that God himself will provide the sacrifice. The prophetic anticipation of this sacrifice takes the form of a servant who offers himself as an atoning sacrifice which removes the sin of the people and its accompanying defilement, thereby restoring the order of creation.

The New Testament identifies this sacrificial servant anticipated by Isaiah as Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sacrificial servant, the atoning sacrifice, who by his suffering and sacrificial death removes defilement and cleanses God's people. But his sacrifice does more than cleanse and restore God's people. Several Pauline texts as well as the book of Revelation associate the sacrificial work of Jesus with the restoration of creation. Thus, Jesus' sacrifice cleanses and restores the cosmos. Jesus' healing miracles recorded in the gospels indicate that physical restoration has begun. His sacrificial death brings about the first installment of the new creation such that anyone who is in Christ is, in fact, the new creation. This restoration, made possible by Jesus' cleansing work on the cross, will culminate in the eschaton with the new heavens and new earth. Sin and death will finally be eliminated and the new creation will be characterized by purity with no more

risk of defilement. Christian hope, therefore, lies in the reality of the new creation where all will dwell in the presence of God without any threat of harm or destruction.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This dissertation has examined the death of Jesus Christ in light of the sacrificial system of Israel in an attempt to offer one possible explanation of how the death of Jesus brings about the restoration of all creation. This final chapter will reflect on the implications of this for theology and practice.

As noted in chapter 1, in the area of atonement theology, perhaps part of the reason for the lack of a detailed explanation of the connection between Jesus' death and the restoration of creation up to this time is that atonement theology has focused almost exclusively on the restoration of human persons. Furthermore, this focus has often been limited to ideas of spiritual restoration or restoration of relationships rather than physical restoration. New creation as pictured in biblical texts like Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21, when dealt with extensively, is usually addressed under the locus of eschatology.

Eschatology does offer some discussions about the idea of new creation. Nonetheless, it tends to focus on the task of describing the new creation – what it might be like, when it might come to be, and so forth – rather than on what allows for this restoration. While it might be assumed that Jesus' death is connected to the anticipated new heavens and new earth, an explanation of how it is connected has not been thoroughly discussed. The explanation of how Jesus' sacrificial death brings about the restoration of creation, then, while especially important for atonement theology, also has implications for eschatology.

This concluding chapter will begin by reviewing the overall argument of the dissertation. Part 2 will explore how the model of atonement as cleansing presented in this dissertation can enhance current models and ideas in atonement theology. This section will address the three-fold typology of atonement presented by Gustaf Aulén, showing how the model of cleansing interacts with each of Aulén's models and helps broaden these models to include restoration of the cosmos. It will also briefly address Robert Sherman's Trinitarian typology for atonement in an attempt to explain how the metaphor of cleansing can enhance his model to account for the restoration of creation. Part 3 will examine modern concerns with the violent nature of atonement and propose the metaphor of cleansing as one possible way to address those concerns. Part 4 will then explore the implications of this atonement model for eschatology, particularly the theology of hope. The final section of this chapter will address some practical concerns of this study with regard to Christian piety.

Review of Argument

Chapter 1 presents the biblical expectation for the restoration of creation as well as the general theological affirmation that atonement has restorative effects, not just on human persons, but on the cosmos. The survey of atonement scholarship presented there, however, demonstrates that atonement theology has tended to focus rather narrowly on how atonement allows for the forgiveness of human sins. An explanation of how the work of Jesus Christ is connected to the biblical ideas of the restoration of creation as a whole is lacking.

Chapter 2 examined the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2, focusing particularly on the priestly concern for order and boundaries in Genesis 1. The order and boundaries of creation were presented, especially through the lens of Hebrew wisdom literature, as related to the law. Thus, human transgression of the law – boundary breaking – is understood to have adverse effects on the very good order of creation. By contrast, acting in accordance with the law, in accordance with the boundaries of creation as God has established them, results in flourishing and well-being, not just for humans, but for all of creation. Life, in the fullest biblical sense of the term, is characterized by this flourishing and well-being of the world and is associated with the presence of God. This picture is encapsulated by the biblical notion of *šālôm*.

The biblical text describes how the sin of the first couple disrupted the order of creation, disrupted *šālôm*, causing negative consequences, not only for the first humans, but for the physical world as well. In addition, the Bible makes clear that the destructive effects of sin on the world did not end with the sin of Adam and Eve. Ongoing human sin continues to mar the world. Consequently, the whole cosmos, not just human persons, awaits restoration.

Building on the idea of sin as boundary breaking, the next chapter introduces the idea of sin as pollution with special attention paid to the concepts of dirt and pollution in primitive societies as spelled out by the work of Mary Douglas. Transgression of boundaries results in pollution or defilement. For Israel, these boundary transgressions can be the result of day-to-day living, such as coming in contact with a dead body, or the result of sin. Un-remedied, defilement is understood to threaten the presence of God, the source of life for Israel. Ritual is the means to erase defilement, and many of the Israelite

cultic rituals serve exactly that purpose. Where sin is concerned, defilement caused by sin is eliminated through sacrifice, particularly the sacrifices and rituals of the Day of Atonement. The sacrifices associated with this day function both to cleanse Israel spiritually and physically, and to restore the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean that had been transgressed.

Chapter 4 examines the claim that Jesus should be considered a sacrifice whose self-offering stands in continuity with the Old Testament sacrificial system. Concerns about violence, particularly violence demanded by God, have led to questions regarding this claim. The survey of the gospels in this chapter, however, shows that not only did the gospel writers understand Jesus as the sort of sacrifice they were familiar with in the cult, but also that Jesus himself suggests the cultic character of his sacrificial death. The Pauline literature strengthens this cultic understanding of Jesus' death. Finally, the letter to the Hebrews offers the clearest correlation of Jesus' sacrificial death to the sacrificial system of Israel. Hebrews offers a detailed explanation of how his sacrificial death not only stands in continuity with the Israelite cult, but also is superior to that cult and therefore should be understood as the final sacrifice needed.

The atoning sacrifices of the Israelite cult were understood to restore Israel's boundaries. Since Israel was understood as God's creation, the sacrifices can be said to restore creation, but only insofar as Israel was concerned, not universally. Chapter 5 examines the prophets who anticipate a future restoration that encompasses the entire cosmos, a restoration that will be brought about by God through his servant. The New Testament writers associate this servant with Jesus Christ and associate his sacrificial death with the cleansing and restoration of creation anticipated by the prophets.

The restoration of creation, particularly as portrayed by Paul, has already begun. Full restoration, however, awaits the second coming of Jesus when sin and death will be removed once and for all. With the threat of the corrupting effects of sin and death removed, creational boundaries will no longer be at risk. The new creation will be characterized by the blessings associated with God's presence, with the well-being and flourishing of all creation as depicted by Isaiah. God will dwell with his people permanently, not provisionally, because there will be no corruption to drive him away.

Implications for Theology

Primary to the understanding of Jesus' sacrifice in this dissertation has been the recognition of the importance of the metaphor of cleansing as it relates to boundaries and sacrifice in Israel. Sin amounts to crossing boundaries that God has set in place in order for Israel to experience life as he had intended. Crossing boundaries leads to pollution or defilement. The sacrificial system removes defilement, cleansing Israel and thereby re-establishing her boundaries. Israel is understood as God's creation, brought into being through separation (*bdl*) just as the original creation was. Re-establishment of the boundaries in Israel, therefore, amounts to the restoration of God's good creation. Using this metaphor of defilement and cleansing so prevalent in the biblical text to interact with various models of atonement will help broaden these models, offering a more comprehensive explanation of the effects of atonement.

First it might be helpful at this point to remember what exactly the boundaries in ancient Israel were and why they were important. In order to maintain life in the Israelite camp, the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean needed to be kept intact. This

assured Israel of God's continued presence in their midst. The rituals of the Day of Atonement restored these boundaries which had been blurred as a result of accumulated defilement due, especially, to the sin of the people. These rituals purged the entire camp of impurity as well as of the sin that caused the impurity. By so doing, the boundaries are restored, the sanctuary is once again holy, and the camp is once again clean.

In the first chapter, a three-fold typology for thinking about atonement introduced by Gustaf Aulén was explained. This typology, referred to frequently in atonement literature, consisted of what he called the classic model, the satisfaction model, and the subjective model. Given the emphasis on cleansing as the result of atonement and the connection of cleansing to the re-establishment of the boundaries of creation, it will be helpful to examine how the metaphor of cleansing relates to the three models in Aulén's typology.

Aulén associates what he calls the subjective model of atonement with Abelard, but also with Enlightenment critiques of atonement following the era of Protestant Orthodoxy.¹ As noted earlier, Abelard suggests that the life and death of Christ is a demonstration for humans of God's love. This demonstration arouses human love which effectively "saves" the person. Aulén asserts that Enlightenment theologians were building on Abelard by proposing "a 'more human' idea of the Atonement . . . to replace the accepted 'juridical' treatment."²

Aulén is critical of the subjective model. He claims that, unlike the other two models, the subjective model only emphasizes a change in humans and their attitude

¹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 133.

² Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 134.

toward God. No change in God's attitude is suggested by this model as Aulén presents it.³ God's attitude has always been an attitude of love, and Jesus' death serves as the supreme example of that love. The result, according to Aulén, is that "so far as God was concerned, no Atonement was needed."⁴

Whether or not Aulén is correct in his conclusions about the subjective model's presentation of the need for atonement is open to debate. Paul Fiddes, for example, suggests that explanations of Abelard's view of atonement as merely exemplary are overly simplistic and do not do justice to Abelard's thought. Jesus' death does serve as an example of God's love for Abelard, but it also changes humans by making them love him. Fiddes explains, "Abelard's point is that Christ *did* 'infuse' love in us (though he prefers the phrase 'poured out' love), precisely *through* revealing it."⁵ In other words, humans do not just subjectively respond to the atonement with love. God's love is actually, objectively poured into humans through the atonement, causing them to love God. Fiddes thinks that Bernard of Clairvaux, one of Abelard's early critics whom many later critics follow, misses this point entirely: "Bernard is complaining that Jesus must have done something objectively and decisively for us in order to restore us to God; Abelard's point is that the demonstration of God's love is at the same time restorative, and so an objective act."⁶ The atonement enables humans to love God by pouring God's love into them.

³Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 2.

⁴Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 135.

⁵Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 144.

⁶Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 144.

Regardless of this debate, however, the notion of cleansing as it relates to sacrifice so prevalent in the Israelite cult suggests that more is involved in atonement than merely a demonstration of God's love, or even an infusion of God's love. Just as the sacrificial victims were not primarily understood as examples of God's love, neither was that Jesus' primary purpose in offering himself as a sacrifice which fulfilled the cultic sacrifices of Israel. Nor is there any indication that the sacrifices were primarily intended to evoke love for God or infuse love for God into the one making the offering, although that may have been a side effect. Rather, the sacrificial rituals, especially those associated with the Day of Atonement, served to purge the camp of sin and its associated impurity. Apart from sacrifice, cleansing and restoration does not happen. Once impurity has been removed by sacrifice, the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean are restored in the camp, thus assuring God's continued presence with his people. The presence of God was provisional in the Old Testament, dependent on the ongoing sacrifices of the people. In the New Testament, however, not only does the final cleansing sacrifice of Jesus restore order and beauty to the world, it also guarantees God's presence with his people now and in the future. No further sacrifices are needed. That realization may indeed evoke feelings of love and gratitude for God, but that is not the primary purpose of the sacrifices.

One additional note about the subjective model will round out this discussion. It is important to point out that although sacrifices take their primary meaning from what they do, that is, from the fact that they serve to cleanse the camp thereby making it hospitable to God's presence, the subjective model can still be helpful for reminding people that Jesus was indeed an example of God's great love not only for human persons,

but also for his creation as a whole. The familiar quote from the gospel of John says, “For God so loved the world [cosmos] that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God was under no external necessity to provide a way to remedy the effects of sin on creation. Nonetheless, as Anselm asserts, it was “fitting” that God would choose to restore his broken world.⁷ It is what one might expect from God. It was, in fact, an act of great love. The recognition that God loved his creation so much that he put provisions in place to restore it should evoke feelings of love. To put it another way, love for God seems to be a natural response when one recognizes that God was willing to become part of his creation in order to restore not only human persons, but the world God gave them to inhabit.

God not only restores us, but cleans up our mess. Think of a child who has found some chocolate, taken it to his room and eaten it all. He smears the chocolate all over himself and his room, then gets sick and vomits all over the floor. God is like the child’s parent who comes in, picks up the child and gently washes him. But he doesn’t stop there. He then cleans up the room so the child has a hospitable place to live. The child is not responsible to clean up his own mess. God does it for him. Just as a child will often respond with hugs or other displays of affection toward the parent who has cleaned up his mess, so humans should respond to God. In fact, it seems that love for God is the natural response and, whether this love is infused in some way or not, it is difficult to imagine someone realizing that God has done this amazing work and not responding with love.

Aulén identifies Anselm with what he refers to as the satisfaction model of atonement. Anselm’s primary task is to explain why it was necessary for God to become human, that is, why a mere human could not accomplish atonement. But, as pointed out

⁷Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” 105.

in chapter 1, he also explains why it was necessary for God to restore order to the universe. Anselm suggests that, like a feudal lord, God's honor would be in question if he left the corrupted creation alone.⁸ In his scheme, Christ's sacrifice restores order by paying the debt that humans incurred through their sin.

Although, according to Aulén, Anselm is concerned in his explanation of atonement primarily with concepts of God's honor, his model developed into views that focused less on God's honor and more on judicial metaphors where Jesus was understood as suffering vicariously in the place of humans to pay the penalty incurred by human sin. Aulén is less critical of Anselm's model than he is of that of Abelard. Nonetheless, he believes that the development of Anselm, especially the developments associated with the Protestant Scholastics, diverge from Anselm in important ways, especially in their emphasis on the necessity of Christ's active obedience to the law throughout his life, and on his death as the penalty required by God's justice for human transgression of the law. Aulén describes this as follows: "Hence there is a double necessity: Christ must by His *obœdientia activa* fulfill God's law to the uttermost, and He must by His death pay the penalty which justice requires for man's transgression of it."⁹

While Aulén's general typology provides a useful model and is helpful in many ways, he is not entirely correct in his assessment, perhaps especially in the case of Anselm and the Protestant Scholastics. Anselm also speaks frequently of Christ's obedience although he tends to focus on Christ's obedience to the Father's will for his death rather than to the law. The Protestant Scholastics simply expand this notion of Christ's obedience to his whole life, relating it to the law. While this notion of active

⁸ Anselm of Canterbury, "Why God Became Man," 124.

⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 129.

obedience to the law is emphasized by the Protestant Scholastics, there are hints of it in Anselm as well. For example, book 1, chapter XV discusses the notion that when a creature does the will of God, that creature upholds the order and beauty of the universe. The Protestant Scholastics' notion that Christ's life of obedience, including his death, substituted for the lives of sinful humans expands on Anselm's idea using the Pauline notion of Christ as the second Adam, an idea also present in early conceptions of recapitulation. Thus, the Protestant Scholastics do not so much diverge from Anselm as they expand and develop him.

Nonetheless, Aulén's concern about an overemphasis on the law and punishment is warranted, at least as far as the sacrificial system of Israel is concerned. The overarching concern in the sacrificial system is cleansing, the maintenance of life, not punishment. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the idea behind the sacrifices is to avoid punishment, particularly the loss of the presence of God. Atonement maintains God's presence in the community by restoring purity where it has been disrupted.¹⁰ The presence of God brings life and flourishing and blessing to the people and to the land. All creation flourishes in the presence of God.

The non-human creation is not an agent. It has not sinned and does not deserve punishment. Nonetheless, it suffers the consequences of human sins. The judicial focus on law and punishment tends to only offer explanations of how humans are forgiven, emphasizing the spiritual aspect of atonement while neglecting the groaning of creation. Adding the idea of cleansing to the traditional judicial models complements those models by offering an explanation of the physical aspect of atonement. Although punishment is a part of the biblical picture of Israel's history and is included in the picture of the

¹⁰ Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, 8.

suffering servant of Isaiah 53:5, the sacrificial system as outlined in Leviticus and explained in this dissertation should caution against a narrow interpretation of atonement consisting primarily of punishment. The sacrificial system as presented in Leviticus serves to cleanse creation, thereby restoring the boundaries God has set in place, restoring the order and beauty of creation.

The restorative character of the sacrificial system can also enhance understanding of the “classic model,” what Aulén describes as “Christus Victor.” In the classic model, Christ through his death and resurrection fights against the powers of evil, death, and the devil and defeats them. This defeat destroys the enmity between God and humans and restores the relationship between them.

The classic model’s emphasis on evil and death as the targets of Christ’s work fits well with the Old Testament notions of the disruptive effects of sin and death on creation. Sin and death are always joined together. Both pollute, and therein lies their power. In the categories of ancient Israel, holy cannot dwell with unclean. Sin and various ritual violations bring defilement into the camp. This defilement threatens the ongoing presence of God in the camp by blurring the boundaries between life and death, between the camp and the wilderness, between the place where God dwells and the disorder and chaos that characterize the lack of his presence. Although not described in terms of victory, the rituals and sacrifices, especially those associated with the Day of Atonement, cleanse the camp of defilement allowing God to continue to dwell with his people.

In the classic model, Jesus wins the victory over sin and death, not only removing them and their polluting effects, but eventually eliminating them. Just as the rituals and sacrifices of Israel purge sin and its accompanying defilement from the camp and restore

the boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean, so Jesus' defeat of the devil purges the world of sin, death, and their accompanying defilement. His defeat of evil and death, therefore, cleanses once and for all, restoring order, restoring the boundaries between life and death, and assuring the presence of God.

Furthermore, because the cleansing brought about by Jesus' death is final as indicated by the biblical text, God's presence is no longer tentative for his people, but permanent. God's people are clean as indicated by the designation, "kingdom of priests" (Rev. 5:10). Because his people are clean, God can dwell with them. In fact, God's people now enjoy the presence of God, not in a temple built by humans, but in them through the person of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Cor. 6:19). The temple is no longer a building in Jerusalem but the people of God. Why can God live in his people? Because they have been cleansed by the victory of Jesus over sin and death and, therefore, are able to live life in God's presence as he intended, a presence that now indwells them and enables them to live in accordance with God's created order.

As has been emphasized throughout, however, human restoration is only part of the story. The rest of creation still groans because sin and death have not yet been completely eliminated. Thus creation as a whole awaits full restoration. The explicit already/not-yet character of the classic model points toward this eventual restoration of all things in a way that the other two models do not. The decisive battle has been won by Jesus on the cross, making his people pure and allowing them to enjoy a restored relationship with God. The final victory, however, awaits his second coming (Rev.

20:14-15). At that time, death will be done away with completely and the chaos associated with evil and death will no longer threaten God's creation. The boundaries between holy, clean, and unclean have been restored through Jesus' death, but await full restoration, along with the removal of any future threat of disruption, for Jesus' final victory. The new heavens and new earth are assured of God's continued presence because the threat of defilement which would remove that presence will no longer exist. In summary, when the Old Testament metaphor of cleansing is assimilated into the classic model of Christ as victor, with his victory cleansing the world of sin and death, it offers an explanation of why this victory is so important not only to humans, but also to creation. In addition, the anticipated final victory of Jesus where death is finally destroyed assures God's people that at some point, creation will be fully restored with no future possibility of corruption.

While Aulén's typology is a helpful way to organize models of atonement, a brief overview of one other typology of atonement will further demonstrate the usefulness of the metaphor of cleansing with regard to explanations of atonement. To that end, Robert Sherman's Trinitarian typology provides a strong, modern dialog partner.

Sherman interacts with the three models of atonement often associated with Aulén, through the lens of the traditionally understood three offices of Christ: king, priest, and prophet. His interest is to present a fully Trinitarian understanding of the atonement that avoids stressing one person of the Trinity to the exclusion of the others. He suggests that theology "should recognize a certain correspondence and mutual support between the three persons of the Trinity, the three offices of Christ, and the three commonly

recognized models of his atoning work.”¹¹ Atonement is a term, he says, that points “to *what* has occurred between humanity and God, but on its own does not necessarily connote *how* it has occurred.”¹² It is the question of *how* that the metaphor of atonement as cleansing addresses, not only with respect to human persons, but with respect to creation as a whole.

Sherman explains that each of the offices of Christ mediates a particular action of God. “The king,” he writes, “mediated the sovereignty of God, the priest mediated the holiness and forgiveness of God, and the prophet mediated the truth and commands of God.”¹³ This three-fold work must be understood as fully his own, and fully Trinitarian. Thus, according to Sherman, “it is also appropriate to understand his royal work as done on behalf of the Father, his priestly work be understood as his own proper work as Son, and his prophetic work as done on behalf of the Spirit.”¹⁴ With this recognition in mind, Sherman then associates each of the offices of Christ with one of the atonement models provided by Aulén: king is associated with Christus Victor, priest is associated with vicarious sacrifice, and prophet is associated with what Aulén would call the subjective model but Sherman calls the “empowering exemplar” model.

As king, Jesus demonstrates sovereignty over evil and death through his victory over these disruptive elements. Sherman associates this victory specifically with the resurrection.¹⁵ While this is correct, the metaphor of cleansing associated with sacrifice

¹¹ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 9.

¹² Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 10.

¹³ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 74.

¹⁴ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 116-17.

¹⁵ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 118.

carries the notion of victory to the cross itself, not just the resurrection, and has implications for creation as a whole. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, like the atoning sacrifices of the cult, functions to remove evil and death by banishing them from the world. Sovereignty can be understood not only in terms of conquering, then, but in terms of power over these disruptive elements that threaten creation. To put it another way, Jesus' sacrificial death mediates the sovereignty of the Father over evil and death by cleansing the world of these disruptive elements—once and for all restoring the boundary between life and death not only for humans, but for creation as a whole allowing it to flourish as God intended.

As priest, Jesus offers himself as the perfect atoning sacrifice that is a pleasing aroma to God. This sacrifice forgives human sin, as Sherman points out, but also cleanses the world of the effects of human sin and restores order as God intended. Sherman notes that in this office and through his sacrifice, Christ “enacts a new covenant, a new way for persons to relate to God and therefore to one another.”¹⁶ The New Testament makes clear, however, that not only does this sacrifice bring about a new way for people to relate to God, it brings about a new creation (1 Cor. 5:17), a new creation that begins with human persons but eventually will extend to the entire cosmos. Thus, in his work as priest, Christ brings about the reality of the promised new creation.

Jesus is also understood as fulfilling the prophetic office. Sherman writes, “To recognize Jesus as prophet is to recognize that he is God’s living and life-giving Word, the teacher of God’s truth who thus discloses the world’s meaning and our own to us.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 171.

¹⁷ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 222.

In this capacity, Sherman thinks the Son serves as an instrument of the Spirit. Indeed, according to Sherman, “Jesus not only taught but also granted the ability through the power of the Spirit, to follow those teachings.”¹⁸ Thus, Jesus is the great exemplar but he is an exemplar who does not leave his people unaided. The cleansing work of Jesus’ sacrificial death enables the Holy Spirit to indwell God’s people, teaching them his ways, and guiding their lives. No longer does God only dwell in the temple or the land of Israel. The cleansing provided by Jesus’ sacrifice allows for the outpouring of the Spirit into the world, such that the life-giving presence of God is spread throughout the world in his people.

As with Aulén’s typology, applying the metaphor of cleansing to Sherman’s understanding of the three-fold offices of Christ has the potential to expand our understanding of atonement. The metaphor of cleansing drawn from the Israelite cult offers an explanation of how the sacrificial death of Jesus brings about not only forgiveness of sins, but the restoration of all creation.

Modern Concerns with Violence

In addition to how the idea of cleansing interacts with traditional atonement models, the metaphor of cleansing may also have the potential to address concerns raised by feminists and others regarding the violent nature of atonement. The unease for these theologians stems from a general understanding of a seemingly dysfunctional relationship between an angry God and a submissive Son, a Son whose behavior we are called to emulate. Rather than an angry God who demands the sacrifice of Jesus as punishment for sin, however, the sacrificial system as it was intended to be practiced by ancient Israel

¹⁸ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 234.

presents atonement in terms of cleansing, not punishment as mentioned above. The Old Testament portrays pollution as the major threat to Israel's life. The sacrificial system, the system with which Jesus' sacrifice stands in continuity, serves not so much to assuage God's anger as to avert it and maintain his presence with his people, a presence that is accompanied by blessing for humans and creation as a whole.

Part of the problem associated with discussions of punishment stems from misinterpretation. Punishment is frequently connected with a picture of an angry God. The Heidelberg Catechism, a confession commonly used in Reformed circles, states that God is "terribly angry" about human sin and that his justice "demands" punishment.¹⁹ This offers a depiction of God that can easily be distorted. John Stott correctly describes the wrath of God as "his holy reaction to evil," a concept that makes perfect sense of the distinctions we have come to understand between the categories of holy and unclean. Nonetheless, modern people seem prone to misunderstand this concept because they lack an understanding of the categories within which Israel operated, categories which are familiar to the biblical authors and their audiences.

Modern people hear about the anger or wrath of God and tend to see God as someone who looks like Bobby Knight screaming at his basketball team rather than a loving parent who, although angry at her child's disobedience, is not anxious to punish her child but to correct her so that she will grow up to be a decent human being. When the idea of an angry parent is coupled with judicial notions of crimes deserving punishment, it is not too difficult to understand how people end up with the idea of traditional atonement imagery summarized by J. Denny Weaver: "because salvation of

¹⁹ Question & Answer 10, 11.

sinner depends on the Son's willing submission to violence willed or needed by the Father, it poses an image of divine child abuse."²⁰

One solution to this problem, suggested by theologians indebted to Rene Girard's line of thinking, is to re-interpret New Testament sacrificial language as a polemic against the scapegoat system of the cult. As noted in chapter 4, however, re-interpreting sacrificial language in a way that disconnects it from the cultic associations that would have been commonly accepted in the first century is not biblically warranted. When the sacrificial system in Leviticus and the Old Testament prophecies are read alongside New Testament statements about Jesus' death, it seems clear that his death was understood in continuity with the sacrifices of the Israelite cult.

Another solution, often coupled with the re-interpretation of sacrificial language, is to distance God from Jesus' death. In this scheme, Jesus' death was not something God ordained as the means to eliminate sin and evil. Weaver explains, "God did not send Jesus to die, but to live, to make visible and present the reign of God."²¹ While the latter part of this statement may be true, at least one text, Peter's sermon on Pentecost Sunday, seems to argue against the idea that God did not send Jesus to die (Acts 2:14-36, esp. v.23). In addition, if my assertion that Jesus' death stands in continuity with the sacrificial system of Israel is correct, his death was required by God, just as the death of the sacrificial animals was required by God to bring about the restoration of his creation.

Despite my insistence that the traditionally understood language of sacrifice be maintained, along with the idea that sacrifice is something God desires, the metaphor of cleansing may be more palatable and offer a helpful corrective to models that tend to

²⁰ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 156.

²¹ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 74.

stress punishment. While the intent of punishment or discipline should be loving correction, it unfortunately is not always practiced that way. Cleansing, however, is often an act of love. Several examples from the mundane realm of parenting should suffice to demonstrate this. Consider the case of an infant with a dirty diaper. No parent in their right mind would consider leaving that diaper unchanged and allowing the baby's skin to stay in contact with the excrement. Even if the baby did not cry, indicating his or her displeasure with the situation, an unchanged diaper will eventually irritate the skin and cause a painful rash. Love for the child dictates that the parent change the diaper and thoroughly cleanse the baby's bottom, a task that is often unpleasant. If the baby has sensitive skin and, perhaps, a bit of diaper rash already, the process can even be unpleasant and somewhat painful for the child. He or she might squirm to try to avoid being washed, but a good parent will hold the child tight and continue washing until the area is clean. Thus, although cleansing the child's bottom and restoring it to the status of 'clean' might be unpleasant and even painful for both the parent and the child,²² it is an act of love and can readily be understood as such.

Or consider the example of a child who has fallen while playing outdoors and received numerous cuts and scrapes on her body. As with the diaper example, a good parent will attempt to cleanse the wound to prevent an infection from setting in and to promote proper healing. This may be difficult if the parent is squeamish about blood and sometimes a parent will need to take a break from the task to suppress nausea. In addition, the cleansing process can be painful for the child. The child might even resist

²² Painful for the parent in the sense that quite often, even when a parent is helping a child, if that help causes the child pain, the parent hurts emotionally. Think, for example, of immunizations or other medical treatments a child might need. These are often painful for the child and, particularly in the case of procedures that cause pain for more than just a couple of minutes, the parent will often be in anguish, fighting back her own tears because of what the child is going through.

and try to cover the wound with her hand. But a good parent will continue to cleanse the wounded area even if it is difficult and painful because she loves the child and knows that cleansing is what is needed for restoration.

The analogy then, is that God is like the loving parent described above. Just as a child who has taken a spill into a pile of gravel or who has a dirty diaper that has been soiled, so sin has polluted the beauty of God's world. This pollution caused by sin needs to be cleansed to restore creation to his intent for it. Cleansing is not a pleasant task. It involves blood and sacrifice to absorb the effects of evil. But like a loving parent, God does not walk away from the mess. He reaches down, even becoming part of the mess, and cleans it, thereby restoring the beauty of the universe.

This analogy is not unlike an analogy Anselm uses to describe to Boso why humans could not be saved apart from satisfaction for sin. Anselm uses the analogy of a pearl that was knocked out of its owner's hand by an envious person into the mud. Anselm says that it would not be fitting for God to leave the pearl, once recovered, in this filthy condition. In fact, when Anselm questions Boso about this Boso replies that if God did not restore the pearl to its original condition, it would seem that either God "could not carry out what he planned or that he regretted his good plan." Neither of these options is possible for God. Thus, according to Anselm, satisfaction had to be made in order for humans to be restored to their intended state.²³

From my perspective, the major problem with traditional models that emphasize ideas of God's wrath and punishment is pastoral. As Joanne Carlson-Brown and Rebecca Parker suggest, "As long as our culture images God as a father demanding and carrying

²³ Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, I.XIX, 135.

out the suffering and death of his own son, it is sanctioning abuse and it is abandoning the victims of abuse and oppression.”²⁴ Atonement as cleansing, then, may be a pastorally useful alternative that is faithful to the biblical text both in its presentation of atonement, and in the Bible’s metaphorical portrayal of God as a father, a father who loves his polluted creation so much that he takes on himself the dirty job of cleaning it up and restoring it to the condition he intended for it.

Implications for Eschatology

The connection between Christ’s atonement and the hope for the restoration of all creation emphasized throughout this paper leads not only to conclusions regarding atonement, but eschatology as well. Jürgen Moltmann states that eschatology is “the doctrine of Christian hope, which embraces the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it.”²⁵ Although I have explained how Jesus’ atonement understood through the lens of the Old Testament sacrifices brings about the restoration of creation, it is obvious by reading the newspaper or listening to the news that the peaceable kingdom promised by the prophets is not yet fully realized. The full restoration remains in the realm of hope, a hope expressed especially in the promises of Isaiah and Revelation. So what is hope and how does it relate to these promises?

Hope is not wishful thinking. It is more than daydreaming. “Hope,” writes Josef Pieper, “is one of the very simple primordial dispositions of the living person. In hope, man reaches ‘with restless heart’, with confidence and patient expectation . . . toward the

²⁴ Carlson-Brown and Parker, *Divine Child Abuse*, 26.

²⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch, 5th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 16.

arduous ‘not yet’ of fulfillment, whether natural or supernatural.”²⁶ Pieper calls it the virtue of the “not yet.” Hope is the virtue of understanding the human condition as “being on the way” and trusting God for assistance in reaching the end.²⁷ Moltmann suggests that hope lives with the tension of promise and fulfillment.²⁸ Hope looks forward to the biblical vision of joy, harmony, and well-being for all of creation, a well-being guaranteed by the presence of God.

The tension between promise and fulfillment that Moltmann refers to is crucial to keeping hope in balance. Working with his understanding of Aquinas, Pieper explains that hope can go off-track in two distinct ways: presumption or despair. Because of the already/not-yet character of the restored creation, presumption and despair pose twin dangers for Christian practice.

Pieper calls despair “a perverse anticipation of the nonfulfillment of hope.”²⁹ In other words, despair gives up on God’s promises. Although Pieper is referring to individuals, the following description helps elucidate the problem associated with despair: “The Christian who despairs about eternal life not only destroys the pilgrim character of his natural existence but also denies the actual ‘way’ to eternal happiness and fulfillment: Christ himself who appeared in human form.”³⁰ Despair, then, locks itself in the here and

²⁶ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997), 100.

²⁷ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 100.

²⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 112.

²⁹ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 113.

³⁰ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 115.

now, doubting that the restoration of all creation promised in the Bible will ever come to pass. Moltmann writes that “despair seeks to preserve the soul from disappointments.”³¹

Presumption, by contrast, is what Pieper calls “a perverse anticipation of the fulfillment of hope.”³² Presumption also fails to recognize the pilgrim character of existence. Pieper offers a helpful description of presumption. He writes, “presumption destroys supernatural hope by failing to recognize it for what it is; by not acknowledging that earthly existence in the *status viatoris* is, in a precise and proper sense, the ‘way’ to ultimate fulfillment, and by regarding eternal life as something that is ‘basically’ already achieved, as something that is ‘in principle’ already given.”³³ Both presumption and despair are the result of a lack of trust in God’s ability to carry out his promises.

One striking feature of restoration, whether it is of Israel after the exile or of the earth in the eschaton, is that restoration is God’s work. The first person pronouns in Ezekiel 36:24ff, for example, make this clear: “For *I* will take you out of the nations; *I* will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. *I* will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; *I* will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols” (v.24, 25, emphasis mine). Commenting on the new creation as described by Isaiah, John Oswalt writes, “God is the sole Creator. He stretched out the first heavens and founded the first earth (cf. Is. 40:21-23), and he will remake them in the end.”³⁴ John also indicates that new creation is God’s work recording

³¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 23.

³² Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 113.

³³ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 125.

³⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, 690.

the words of God regarding what John is seeing: “I am making everything new” (Rev. 21:5).

The God-centered character of restoration raises the issue of whether the transformational language regarding the relationship between Christians and culture, language brought to the foreground by Richard Niebuhr’s typology,³⁵ is an appropriate expression of hope. In other words, is the restoration of creation something that is primarily God’s task or that of humans?

Certainly the understanding of humans as images of God implies that we represent God and cooperate with him.³⁶ Nonetheless, the language of humans as ‘transformers of culture’ or ‘restorers of creation’ should be used with due caution lest it end in the sometimes triumphalistic notion that humans can bring into being the new creation promised by God. These ideas emphasize the ‘already’ and lean dangerously close to presumption. Richard Mouw insists, “While the Bible does teach . . . that Christ will transform culture in the end time, there is no clear biblical command to Christians to “transform culture” in any general way.”³⁷ A healthy recognition that God is the primary actor in the restoration of all things will help keep hope in balance.

What Benefit is There for Us?

At the end of all these words and all this research and all this work one burning question always remains: “So what?” In other words, although the understanding of

³⁵ Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 190-229.

³⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 68.

³⁷ Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 76.

atonement as cleansing can be helpful for theological constructions, for garnering a better understanding of atonement and how atonement and new creation are connected, is there a practical pay-off for the person sitting in the pew on Sunday morning, for the pastor struggling to come up with a sermon for next week? I venture a cautious “yes.” Cautious because most of my closest friends are not theologians and think that this sort of work is peculiar at best, a waste of time at worst. I hope they are mistaken, at least about the latter assumption.

First, the recognition, drawn from the prophetic texts, that restoration is first and foremost God’s work has implications for Christian practice as hinted at above. One way to understand the role of Christian responsibility is through Jesus’ metaphor of light. The primary task for Christians is not, as some would suggest, one of intentionally attempting to transform culture. Rather, the task is to live as the new creations that we are, to live as children of light, and to figure out what that sort of living looks like. Then, at the very least, living as children of light would entail living within the boundaries God has established, boundaries that are grounded in creation, boundaries restored and summed up by Jesus: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39). Mouw describes this sort of living as follows: “In humble submission to the Lord’s commandments we can be empowered for those good deeds that will show forth the light of God’s peace and justice in a world of oppression and suffering.”³⁸ This sort of living is wise living, living that recognizes God’s boundaries and tries, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to maintain them, not disrupt them.

³⁸ Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In*, 76.

This does not mean that Christians will not have a transformative effect on their surroundings. Even a lit match changes a dark room. Furthermore, just as a light on a farm house in the country attracts certain creatures but repels others, Christians living as new creations in a broken world will attract some people who desire to live life as God intended, and repel those who prefer to live apart from God's intentions for his creation. New creation, that is, creation as God intended should be found wherever Christians are found.

To fail to live as children of light because it seems impossible some days is to deny the reality of what Christ has done and will do. It is to despair of God's promises. To take biblical notions of the peaceable kingdom and try to transform society accordingly not only risks misinterpreting what the new creation is, but also runs the risk of thinking that the promise of the restoration of all creation in some way depends on us, an attitude of presumption. Where the balance lies and how exactly this might all work out would be an excellent topic for further study. What can be ascertained from the biblical text is that when the final victory is won and the chaotic forces that threaten creation are banished forever, something that will be accomplished by God, then the new heavens and new earth will become a reality and creation, human and non-human, will live and flourish in the presence of God.

Second, popular notions about the afterlife, as noted in chapter 1, which focus on some sort of spiritual existence in heaven, however that is described, fall far short of the hope presented by the Bible. Most people will tell you they hope they don't have to endure the picture presented by an old hymn: "prostrate before thy throne to lie and gaze and gaze on thee." And although some might say that bouncing around on the clouds

looks like fun, many think that working and living without sin and its accompanying hardships would indeed be heavenly. The reality of the atoning work of Jesus Christ is that it not only takes away our sins and restores our relationship with God, as is frequently said, but it also opens the way for the restoration of all things. The promise of God is a promise of land (Gen. 15:7), a restored cosmos where God dwells with his people (Rev. 21:3), where nothing can harm or destroy (Is. 65:25).

This is a promise earth-bound people can relate to. This is a promise for those who long to see diseases that hamper life eliminated, for those who long to see disabled loved ones run or walk or hear or see, for those who long to see the end of oppression of the weak by the strong, for those who long for peace between humans, creation, and God. The hope of Christ's work is a physical hope humans can embrace.

Third, this hope is not wishful thinking on the part of the biblical authors. People can be assured that this all *will* come to pass because, as demonstrated in this paper, the atonement of Jesus Christ stands in continuity with God's project of restoration throughout history. Like the sacrifices of the Old Testament, Jesus' sacrifice provided the cleansing needed to restore the order of the universe, a restoration which has already begun. The promise of the new heavens and new earth is bound up with the work of atonement accomplished once and for all by Jesus Christ. What the prophets anticipated – the restoration of creation and the reality of life in the presence of God – has already begun. Christians are the first manifestation of that anticipated new creation. As Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (1 Cor. 5:17). Furthermore, Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of the anticipation of our own resurrection with restored, perfected bodies. In other words, this is only the beginning. The best is yet to come and

it is guaranteed by the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has begun this work and he will complete it.

Summary

The Old Testament begins with a depiction of God creating the world, a creation that is characterized by separation or the placing of boundaries between various elements thus bringing order out of the primordial chaos. The newly ordered world is pronounced “very good,” a pronouncement that has moral as well as esthetic connotations. The sin of the first couple amounts to crossing a boundary and allowing chaos to once again encroach on the created order. Restoration of order comes through cleansing. The sacrificial system in Israel focuses on atonement. Atonement cleanses the people and the land, banishing sin and its effects, thereby restoring the boundaries of creation.

This final chapter has attempted to show how the metaphor of cleansing associated with Israel’s atonement rituals can be useful for expanding traditional atonement models to account for the prophetically anticipated restoration of creation. In other words, when the metaphor of cleansing is applied to various atonement models including those that Aulén proposed and the typology presented by Robert Sherman, these models are broadened to include an explanation of how atonement brings about the restoration, not only of human persons, but also of the entire physical world.

In addition, this final chapter has offered cleansing as an alternative or supplementary metaphor to address on-going concerns with the violence associated with many other atonement metaphors. While the notion of sacrifice is, in fact, violent, perhaps recognizing that cleansing is one of the primary results of sacrifice will allow for a more loving portrayal of this sometimes contentious topic.

Finally, this chapter has offered a few suggestions for understanding the eschatological idea of hope. Jesus' atoning work which brings about the restoration of creation must be understood as God's work. Christians are not mandated to go out and restore creation, to, in effect, help God along in his restorative work. Rather, Christians are to live as new creations, bringing light to the world around them and anticipating the time when God will finish what he has begun.

¹⁷ "Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.

¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

²⁰ "Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
he who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere youth;
he who fails to reach a
hundred
will be considered accursed.

²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.

For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the works of their hands.

²³ They will not toil in vain
or bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,
they and their descendants with them.

²⁴ Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
but dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD (Is. 65:17-25).

THESES

Theses Related to Dissertation

1. The sin of the first couple not only adversely affected the relationship between God and humanity, it also has devastating physical effects on humans and creation as a whole.
2. Ongoing human sin continues to adversely affect creation such that all of creation – humans, animals, and the earth itself – suffers as a result of human sin.
3. Pollution threatens the ongoing presence of God in the Israelite camp and consequently threatens the abundant life intended by God for Israel.
4. Jesus' early followers considered his death a sacrifice that stood in continuity with the sacrifices of the Israelite cult.
5. Jesus' superior sacrifice, anticipated by the prophets, brings about the initial establishment or first installment of the restoration of all creation.

Theses Related to Course Work

6. Human suffering is not redemptive in the same sense that Christ's suffering is redemptive thus, the term "redemptive suffering" should be reserved for references to Christ's salvific work.
7. Abraham is esteemed by the author of Hebrews and Christian tradition as a hero of faith. Yet, with regard to the promise of a son, his faith seems less than exemplary. What appears as a failure of faith, however, can really be better understood as a failure of the theological virtue of hope as described by Thomas Aquinas.
8. Bonhoeffer's tight linkage of justification and sanctification in his work, *Discipleship*, serves to emphasize the importance of the link between doctrine and practice to an audience that had apparently disconnected explanation of truth from moral formation.
9. In Gen. 12:10-20, Abraham passes off Sarai as his sister, allowing Pharaoh to take her as his wife, a situation many modern people find morally reprehensible. A careful reading of commentators of the reformation and post-reformation era demonstrates that the tradition has not been unaware of the moral problems presented by these texts. These commentators took care to interpret the text in light of the moral problems it presents.

10. Early eighteenth century exegete John Gill was not what some call “hyper-Calvinist.” That is, his theology of election was neither “rigid Supralapsarian,” antinomian, nor anti-missional.

Theses Related to Personal Interest

11. Traditional theology and the Bible identify human persons as made in the image of God. This description is often further divided into structural and functional image. This division, however, poses grave dangers to a proper understanding of human persons, especially with regard to biomedical issues dealing with beginning and end of life.
12. For an increasingly post-literate population, a renewal of multi-sensory worship of the sort practiced by ancient Israel, as well as the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, may open new doors for assisting people to experience God’s presence in worship.

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