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THE RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE OF GOD

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To Gina,
my wife, my encourager,
the love of my life

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PREFACE

The production of a dissertation is a rewarding process. However, it is also a long and difficult journey. Along that journey a number of key individuals that have made this endeavor possible. First, I would like to thank Dr. Steve Wellum, my advisor. His willingness to meet with me on short notice, his encouraging words, and his scholarly insight are an example of true mentoring. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Bruce Ware. It was Dr. Ware who first suggested my topic and who helped me to understand the subject matter better and see its importance. I would also like to thank Dr. Puckett for graciously working with me to meet the overall requirements of the Ph.D. program. As a student who works full-time and writes, I faced many challenges. Dr. Puckett was always available to answer questions and give guidance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The idea of divine retributive justice is not a popular concept in current theological circles. Joel Green and Mark Baker, for instance, in *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, characterize retributive justice as a vengeful striking out on the part of God, a theme they believe is unworthy of both God and the apostle Paul. They write, “The ‘wrath of God’ is for Paul, not an affective response on the part of God, not the striking out of a vengeful God. As we have indicated, Paul’s concern is not with retributive punishment.”¹ Weaver continues the critique in his article, *Narrative Christus Victor: The Answer to Anselmian Atonement Violence*. Here, Weaver describes the Anselmian view of the atonement as divinely-willed violence and proposes instead the Christus Victor model as an acceptable, non-violent view of the atonement.² Continuing the

¹Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 121–22.

²Denny J. Weaver, “Narrative Christus Victor: The Answer to Anselmian Atonement Violence,” in *Atonement and Violence A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1–29. For a similar view of Christ’s death, see John Goldingay, “Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ,” in *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St John’s College, Nottingham*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 3–20. Goldingay portrays Christ’s death as an act of cleansing, restoration, and absorbing of human violence, but not as a propitiation of God’s wrath. In the same volume, Tom Smail rejects the possibility of vicarious punishment on the basis that sin is a personal matter that can be borne only by the guilty party. See Tom Smail, “Can One Man Die for the People?” in *Atonement Today a Symposium at St John’s College, Nottingham*, ed. John. Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 73–92. For a comprehensive critique of retributive justice, see Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

assault, Chalke charges that the idea of retributive justice presents an unworthy view of God; he instead proposes an Abelardian approach to describe the work of Christ.³ According to Chalke, God can simply forgive sin without satisfaction because the primary essence of God is love.⁴ Finally, Travis devotes an entire volume to God's judgment in which he rejects the notion of God's retributive justice. In his treatment of the subject, Travis, like C. H. Dodd, characterizes God's wrath as the natural outworking of divinely-instituted consequences in which transgressors receive the outcome of their sinful actions.⁵ So, he writes, "But in the context of [Paul's] argument he makes [Old Testament retributive terms] serve his conviction that the consequences of sin follow by inner necessity (under God's control) rather than by acts of retribution imposed from outside."⁶

By characterizing God's wrath as merely consequential, Travis is able to disassociate God's direct involvement in the punishment of sin. As a result, Travis redefines wrath as a lack of relationship in which sinners choose to disassociate themselves from God. Travis states this clearly when he says that "[w]rath is a relational

³Peter Abelard, "Exposition of The Epistle to the Romans," in *A Scholastic Miscellany Anselm to Ockham*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 10, ed. Eugene Rathbone Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 283. Abelard denied the necessary connection between Christ's death and the forgiveness of sins. He was the first theologian to give expression to the moral influence theory of the atonement.

⁴Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 53, 63.

⁵Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 74–86; and C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 21–23.

⁶Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 84.

term, denoting that lack of relationship with God which is his judgment on those who reject his love.”⁷ Therefore, according to Travis, wrath is not ultimately retributive, but simply the exclusion from the divine presence as a result of human choice.⁸

The above examples are only a sample of the material that illustrates the hostility that contemporary theologians have toward the concept of God’s retributive justice. However, in rejecting or modifying the concept of God’s retributive justice, theologians like Travis actually redefine crucial aspects of God’s nature. For instance, Goldingay asserts that God’s nature has no need of appeasement for sin, implying that God’s holiness does not demand satisfaction. Goldingay makes this very clear: “The problem with sin in Leviticus is not that sin involves infidelity or disloyalty to God which makes God angry but that sin pollutes, stains, and spoils, and thus makes people or things repulsive. . . . The problem that sacrifice thus deals with is not anger but revulsion or rather repulsiveness.”⁹

As a result of this modification to the doctrine of God, the atonement, according to Goldingay, involves only cleansing from sin, not a satisfaction of God’s justice. By thus modifying the concept of God’s nature, Goldingay and theologians of a similar persuasion, modify the interpretation of the atonement. But this poses a crucial question. Can God simply forgive sin as a sheer act of his will or does divine justice demand satisfaction? If God can simply forgo the punishment of sin without satisfaction, then surely he must be defined primarily in terms of his will or his love. As a result, the necessity of God’s retributive justice fades into the background and God’s justice is

⁷Ibid., 69.

⁸Ibid.

⁹John Goldingay, “Your Iniquities Have Made a Separation between You and Your God,” in *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St John’s College, Nottingham*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 51.

redefined as his covenant faithfulness, or, in Grotian fashion, it reduces the requirements of justice to a mere demonstration of God's wrath or simply eliminates it as Socinus did.¹⁰ On the other hand, if justice is retributive, then God's righteousness demands strict payment for sin. As a result, the death of Christ is interpreted as the satisfaction due to God's holy¹¹ nature rather than a demonstration of his love or a deterrent to sin. In other words, how one understands God's retributive justice has important implications for one's doctrine of God and one's understanding of what the atonement has accomplished.¹² Many contemporary theologians, however, have jettisoned the idea of God's retributive justice altogether in favor of another standard.

¹⁰For a definition of justice in terms of God's covenant faithfulness, see James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (January 1992): 340–46. For a description of the Grotian view of God's justice, see H. D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ in Faith, Revelation, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 203–07. For a description of the Socinian view of God's justice, see Richard A. Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, vol. 3 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 491. For a description of other attempts to remove penalty from the idea of God's justice, see Oliver Crisp, "Non-Penal Substitution," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (October 2007): 415–31.

¹¹I use holiness and justice in close relationship to one another. In many standard theological works, the taxonomy for God's holiness and justice is fairly standard, although there are some minor variations among theologians. For instance, God's holiness refers to God's internal moral excellence. This moral excellence results in God's righteousness—his right thoughts, deeds, words, etc.—which results in God's perfect justice. God's justice is both legislative—the giving of perfect statutes—and distributive—the impartial and equitable payment of everyone according to their works. Finally, God's distributive justice may be broken down into his remunerative justice—the reward for obedience—and his retributive justice—the just punishment for disobedience. See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 448; Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 476–97; Charles Hodge, *Theology*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1899), 416–27; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 73–76; John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 345–48.

¹²John Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 10:487.

Thesis

It is in light of the many contemporary challenges to God's retributive justice that this study is undertaken. Therefore, the primary task of this study will be to demonstrate from the Old and New Testaments that given the creation and fall of man, the ethical character of God expresses itself in retributive justice so that God impartially and equitably judges and punishes sin.¹³ This punishment may take the form of a vicarious sacrifice as it did in many of the Levitical sacrifices, which ultimately point to the cross of Christ. However, this punishment may also be expressed directly as it has been in numerous biblical events like the flood, the Exodus, and the Babylonian Exile.¹⁴

Since God's retributive justice has been defended in the past, one may legitimately ask Why the present study? Indeed, John Owen has given a masterful defense of God's retributive justice in his *A Dissertation On Divine Justice*.¹⁵ Moreover, the subject has been addressed in a secondary manner in both past and present literature.¹⁶ On the other hand, no current work exists that is solely dedicated to

¹³For a brief discussion of God's impartiality and equity in judgment, see Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 488–90. That God is impartial and equitable in his judgments, rendering to everyone according to his work, is a concept drawn from the Scriptures (Ps 62:12; Job 34:11, 19; Prov 24:12; Jer 32:19; Deut 32:4; Ps 11:7; 48:11).

¹⁴I understand God's direct punishment to also include what some have called the indirect expression of God's wrath (Rom 1:18-32). For reasons why passages like Romans 1:18ff should be classified as a direct expression of God's wrath, see Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 465–66.

¹⁵Owen, "A Dissertation On Divine Justice."

¹⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.16.1–19; Hodge, *Theology*, 416–27; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 251–68; Mark A. Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, vol. 2, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 39–74; and John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 9–18.

defending the subject of God's retributive justice. Instead, in recent years there has been a chorus of writing against the subject. Travis's work is a clear example that attempts to dismiss or minimize God's retributive justice.¹⁷ Further, while Owen's work is valuable, the subject matter does not take into account contemporary scholarship. This is especially true when it comes to many of the presuppositions of the New Perspective that undermine the concept of retributive justice.¹⁸ In fact, objectors to the concept of God's retributive justice assume many of the New Perspective's presuppositions. Moreover, while many modern writers simply reproduce a variety of older arguments that Owen has addressed, exposing and refuting those arguments in the current context is a valuable exercise in reapplying past lessons learned. Indeed, if this is not done, those past lessons run the risk of being lost. Error can then masquerade as truth. On the other hand, if the ties to error are clearly underlined, then rehashing old truths can be very valuable. Therefore, a secondary objective of this study is to address new objections to the concept of retributive justice and expose and refute old errors that are creeping back into the teaching of current scholarship regarding the concept of God's retributive justice.

In biblically defining and defending God's retributive justice, this study will attempt to come to a proper biblical understanding of how God's justice relates to his other attributes of love and mercy. It seeks to refute views that erroneously exalt the will or the love of God at the expense of his other attributes, especially his justice. Instead, this study demonstrates that a biblically-correct view of God's attributes entails a proper understanding of the relationship between the attributes. As Calvin states, "One might more readily take the sun's light from its heat or its heat from its fire than separate God's

¹⁷Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*.

¹⁸E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); Dunn, "The Justice of God"; and N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

power from his justice. For such is the symmetry and agreement between his mercy and his justice that nothing proceeds from his that is not moderate, lawful, and orderly.”¹⁹

Symmetry between God’s attributes is crucial for a proper understanding of God and his work. Therefore, as this study progresses, I expose positions like Chalke’s as a distortion of the symmetry between God’s mercy and justice.²⁰ In addition, I expose the false assertion that the righteousness of God is merely his covenant faithfulness²¹ or his transformational work in man²² as a misunderstanding of the biblical data that defines the attribute of God’s justice.

Why is it necessary to postulate such a severe attitude on the part of God against sin? Ultimately, it is because Scripture declares God *a se* in the moral realm as expressed in his holiness. Leviticus 11:33 states, “I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy.” In a similar way, Habakkuk 1:13 describes God’s attitude toward sin in the following way: “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.” This study argues that Scripture teaches that God’s retributive justice is ultimately rooted in his holiness, the attribute that describes God’s internal moral excellence or his ethical perfection.²³ It is this moral excellence that results in God’s external righteous conduct: his right thoughts, words, and deeds. God’s moral excellence, in turn, leads to the divine promulgation of just laws for his creatures,

¹⁹Cited in John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 212.

²⁰Chalke and Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 53, 63.

²¹Dunn, “The Justice of God.”

²²Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 188.

²³Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73–74. Holiness is understood as both God’s ontological distinction from his creatures and his moral perfection.

which finally results in his distributive justice, the reward for just behavior (distributive justice) and retributive justice, and the punishment for sinful behavior.²⁴ Seen from this vantage point, God's retributive justice is based on his holiness. Retributive justice and holiness cannot be separated. In other words, God is simply true to his holy nature when he punishes sin. Therefore, if God is infinitely perfect and morally pure, then his nature must be opposed to anything that attempts to resist his character. According to this definition of holiness, God chooses to act in accordance with his divine nature when he punishes sin.²⁵ In this sense, God is said to be righteous because his judgment is based upon moral rectitude that flows from his being. It is God's moral rectitude, founded in his holy nature, that gives a moral foundation to the universe as well as a divine moral necessity for the atonement.²⁶ This aspect of God's retributive justice is captured clearly

²⁴Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 448.

²⁵This argument assumes that God has a compatibilist type of freedom instead of a libertarian one. In other words, God's justice is not characterized by a freedom of indifference; it is a spontaneous reaction that accords with his holy nature. See Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 493.

²⁶The debate in modern circles as to why God may forgive sin reaches back to medieval scholasticism and can be contrasted in the views of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. According to Aquinas, the divine intellect recognizes the inherent worth of a moral act and informs the divine will to reward the act appropriately. According to Scotus and later Ockham, the divine will is primary in determining the worth of a moral act. This concept naturally leads to the question as to whether God, by an act of his will, could radically alter other aspects of the created order. In an attempt to bring conceptual stability to this issue, later Scholastics made use of the distinction between God's absolute power—what God could do in his unlimited ability to act—and God's ordained power—what God has freely chosen to do in the present created order. In this system, God is said to be committed to his ordained acts. However, there is clearly no guarantee. Since God's will is primary, God could overturn the present order. It was for this reason that Calvin, reacting to later, radical scholasticism refused to separate God's power from his justice. If God's will is not based on his holy nature, then what security is there in the stability of the moral order? Modern theology must face this issue if it declares that God may simply forgive sin without satisfaction. See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 45; David C. Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Absolute Power of God," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 18 (Spring 1988): 70; Alister E. McGrath, "John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought," *Archiv Fur*

by John Owen: “Vindictory justice is so natural to God, that, sin being supposed, he cannot, according to the rule of his right, wisdom, and truth, but punish it.”²⁷

Methodology

This study relies heavily upon biblical exegesis to prove the necessity of God’s retributive justice.²⁸ However, before embarking on biblical proofs, I first engage and catalogue the arguments against retributive justice so that a proper dialogue can take place. This is the task of chapter 2. Here, focus is placed upon current objections, in particular, the objections of the New Perspective. I also catalogue the exegetical, theological, and cultural reasons that critics reject the concept of God’s retributive justice.

Chapter 3 begins the task of unfolding God’s retributive justice as it appears in the Old Testament. After drawing the exegetical connections between God’s holiness and retributive justice, a number of examples are cited in order to show that the concept of retributive justice appears early and often in Scripture. For example, I argue that God’s retributive justice is threatened in the Garden of Eden where God promises death to Adam if he eats the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:17). Additionally, I argue that this concept is sustained in a number of cataclysmic events in the Old Testament. Most notably, God demonstrates his hostility to sin in the flood (Gen 6-9), in his judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19), and in his covenant dealings with Israel. God’s retributive justice comes to light in numerous ways in the Mosaic covenant as his holiness is

Reformationsgeschichte 77 (1986): 58–78; Mark S. Heim, “The Powers of God: Calvin and Late Medieval Thought,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 19 (November 1978): 156–66; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.23.3; Hodge, *Theology*, 423–27.

²⁷Owen, “A Dissertation on Divine Justice,” 499–500.

²⁸The assumption in this study is that the Scriptures are God’s infallible, inerrant Word and are the final authority in every doctrinal dispute (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). See *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Lawrenceville, GA: The PCA Committee for Christian Education & Publication, 1990), chap. 1.

demonstrated through the Passover, God's covenant promise to bless and curse (Deut 28), his provision of the sacrificial system for sin, and his punishment of Israel as she breaks faith with God in the golden calf incident (Exod 32). In the Psalms, God's retributive justice is apparent when God, the just judge and king of all, imposes his righteous rule upon the earth. Psalm 9:7 reads, "The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice." This portion of chapter 3 demonstrates that God's righteousness is not simply God's covenant faithfulness but that it includes the concept of an ethical norm. After treating the Psalms, I focus on the writings of the prophets. I argue that God's retributive justice is apparent as the covenant curses come to fruition as a result of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Mosaic covenant.

In chapter 4, I extend the argument of the Davidic kingdom to the New Testament. Christ is presented as both the inaugurated Savior and the coming king of judgment. Christ is also presented as the suffering servant who bears God's judgment as well as the perfect sacrifice to satisfy God's wrath. As the coming king, Christ will return as the Davidic king of Psalm 2 to restore God's justice to his creation. Retributive justice is prominent in both the inaugurated and future kingdoms of Christ.

In chapter 5, I address God's retributive justice as it applies to the writings of Paul. Again, the inaugurated and future aspects of Christ's kingdom are addressed in the Pauline literature in order to show Paul's continuity with the Gospels. Emphasis is placed on the book of Romans where I argue that there is a sustained treatment of God's wrath. As Carson states, "The flow of argument that takes us from Romans 1:18-32 to Romans 3:9-20 leaves us no escape: individually and collectively, Jew and Gentile alike, we stand under the just wrath of God, because of our sin."²⁹

²⁹D. A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21-26," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical & Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger R.*

Chapter 6 is devoted to the rest of the New Testament writings, especially the book of Revelation. I argue that the Apocolypse presents the consummation of the Davidic kingdom as Christ returns to fulfill his promise to subdue the nations as he comes in judgment. The wrath of God exhibited in this book is none other than God's retributive justice exercised against a creation that has rebelled against his holy rule. Moreover, it is Christ himself who finally executes this last, great stroke of vengeance. As Revelation 19:15b, referring to Psalm 2, states, "He [Christ] will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Finally, chapter 7 draws conclusions in light of the study undertaken in chapters 1 through 6. This dissertation seeks to give a careful defense of God's retributive justice and, from this defense, answer many of the unbiblical critiques posed against it.

Nicole, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 120.

CHAPTER 2

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Introduction

According to the Scriptures, God is holy (Isa 6:3). Further examination of the term reveals that God's holiness encompasses his absolute ethical purity (Job 34:10; Hab 1:13). Berkhof aptly describes this aspect of God's nature in the following statement: "This ethical holiness of God may be defined as that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills, and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in his moral creatures."¹ According to Berkhof, God not only exhibits perfect moral purity. He demands moral perfection in his creation. It is this aspect of God's holiness, the demand for moral perfection, that concerns us because it arises from the very nature of God, that gives rise to God's retributive justice and causes it to spring into action. Put another way, God's holy nature not only exhibits perfect moral purity, but it also opposes sin on every front and will demonstrate its wrath in response to rebellion in his creatures.

Just a cursory examination of the Old Testament data will confirm that God's wrath, in response to sin, is on prominent display. In light of this D. A. Carson makes the following comment:

Still in the Old Testament, the wrath of God manifests itself in sword, hunger, and plague (Ezek 6:11-14), in wasting diseases "until you perish" (Deut 28:22), devastation (Jer 25:37-38), scattering (Lam 4:16), and depopulation (Jer 50:13). God treads the nations in his winepress (Isa 63:1-6); alternatively, God gives them the cup of his fury to drink (Isa 51:17; cf. 63:1-2; Joel 3:13). Under the wrath of God, members of the covenant community may be "cut off" from their people (e.g.,

¹Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 74.

Exod 30:33,38; Lev 7:20; Num 9:13; 19:20). Nevertheless this community learns that God's anger does not necessarily last forever.²

This “nevertheless” in Carson’s statement is deeply encouraging and gives one hope of God’s grace in Christ. Yet it would be unwise in light of the overwhelming Biblical data to underestimate the greatness of God’s wrath toward those who rebel against him. In spite of this, a number of critics now deny this aspect of God’s nature. Instead of seeing God’s retributive justice as a valid Biblical doctrine arising from the pages of Scripture, critics often see it as an irrelevant intrusion of western culture that misunderstands and misrepresents the true nature of God.³ Therefore, in order to understand why this rejection has taken place, it will be necessary to interact with these voices at a deeper level. In the following sections the major challenges to God’s retributive justice will be catalogued and explained. An analysis of the data reveals that the challenges to God’s retributive justice can be broken down into three general categories: exegetical, theological, and cultural. The following discussion will proceed in that order.

Exegetical Challenges

The doctrines of the atonement and, consequently, God’s retributive justice, have been the subjects of heated discussion throughout the history of the church.⁴ While

²D. A. Carson, “The Wrath of God,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 39.

³For a critique of retributive justice, see Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 86; Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: A Study in the Christian Doctrine of Atonement* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 101–02; Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 46.

⁴H. D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ in Faith, Revelation, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985); Henri Blocher, “Biblical Metaphors and the

the topic of retributive justice is seldom discussed in isolation, it lies just under the surface in any discussion on the work of Christ. Therefore, shifts in views on the atonement can signal a shift away from a robust adherence to God's retributive justice. For instance, Karl Barth, although making an apparent return to a Reformed view of the atonement, denies the idea of penal substitution and instead presents the atonement under the category of love rather than a satisfaction of divine justice.⁵ Gustaf Aulen's classic, *Christus Victor*, attempts to reassert the ancient idea of victory over Satan as the central concept of redemption in contrast to the Anselmian view that he characterizes as legalistic.⁶ However, a significant contemporary challenge to God's retributive justice began with E. P. Sanders and the New Perspective.⁷

Doctrine of the Atonement," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004): 629–45.

⁵For Barth's denial of penal substitution, see Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation.*, vol. 4 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), 253–54, 268.

⁶Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. Arthur Gabriel Hebert (London: SPCK, 1931). For a recent presentation of this argument, see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 120–25.

⁷A notable antecedent to the New Perspective is Krister Stendahl. Another important figure often cited by the New Perspective is C. H. Dodd. Dodd rejects the idea that Christ's death propitiates the wrath of God. He does so by questioning the meaning of *hilaskomai* and its cognates. Dodd agrees with the scholarly consensus that *hilaskomai* carries the meaning of "propitiation" in classic Greek. However, Dodd claims that in the LXX the word group means "to purge," "to forgive," or "to expiate." Therefore, the latter is the preferred meaning in the New Testament. In rejecting the language of propitiation, Dodd is implicitly denying that Jesus' death satisfies the wrath of God.. Dodd's research has been challenged by Leon Morris and Roger Nicole. In spite of its obvious shortcomings, Dodd's research is still cited in New Perspective literature by figures like James D. G. Dunn. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 214 n 32. For a defense of the concept of propitiation, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Roger R. Nicole, "C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1955): 117–57. It should be noted that N. T. Wright is

The New Perspective and God's Righteousness

The New Perspective is important to this study because its understanding of second temple Judaism has resulted in a view of the atonement that is both non-penal and non-retributive. Moreover, the New Perspective's definition of God's righteousness as his covenant faithfulness has been used by a much broader audience to deny the necessity of God's retributive justice. As a result, throughout this dissertation there will be an interaction with both New Perspective proponents and the much broader audience that attempt to commandeer the New Perspective's view of God's righteousness. Therefore, before moving forward, a brief explanation of the New Perspective is necessary.

E. P. Sanders inaugurated the movement with the publication of his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.⁸ One of Sanders's purposes in his work was to destroy the current conception in New Testament scholarship that Judaism at the time of Paul was a legalistic religion by which Jews sought righteousness through strict observance of the law.⁹ Surveying a large body of Jewish literature from approximately 200 BC to 200 AD, Sanders came to the conclusion that Second Temple Judaism was primarily a religion of grace, not of works.¹⁰ Sanders defined this grace-based Judaism as covenantal nomism.¹¹

somewhat inconsistent in his view of retributive justice in that he does not deny the punitive element of God's justice. However, he attempts to subsume it under the idea of covenant faithfulness. Therefore, punitive justice is not a primary element in Wright's exposition. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); C. H. Dodd, "Hilaskesthai, Its Cognates, Derivatives and Synonyms, in the Septuagint," *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1931): 352–60; idem, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 54; N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 55–59.

⁸E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

⁹Ibid., xii.

¹⁰For a challenge to Sander's view, see Jacob Neusner, *Judaic Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: A Systematic Reply to Professor E. P. Sanders* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993).

According to Sanders, because the Apostle Paul operated within this covenantal framework, the consensus view that he was resisting Rabbis who were teaching salvation by works is historically inaccurate.¹² Moreover, the common conception that Paul's moral plight was that of the sinner before a holy God is incorrect. Instead, faced with the inevitable fact that Jesus is the Messiah, Paul simply concluded that all other means of salvation are excluded. In other words, Paul worked from solution (Christ is the Messiah) to plight (the law and Judaism cannot be the means of salvation).¹³ Therefore, given Paul's pre-Christian, covenantal framework, God's retributive justice fades into the background because Paul never really had this problem in mind. Sanders states this clearly: "It seems unlikely that he [Paul] followed the modern fundamentalist approach of first convincing people that they were sinners and in need of salvation."¹⁴ In this way, Sanders minimizes the understanding that the Apostle Paul primary concern was the encounter of sinners with a holy God.

Both James Dunn and N. T. Wright adopt Sander's premise that the heart of second temple Judaism is grace-based covenantal nomism and that Paul is not reacting to a legalistic framework.¹⁵ However, both disagree with Sanders's solution that Paul

¹¹Sanders defines covenantal nomism as (1) God chooses Israel and (2) gives them the law. The law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. God rewards (5) obedience and punishes transgression. The law provides for (6) means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. All those who are (8) maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement, and God's mercy belong to the group that will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement. See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 422.

¹²Ibid., 426–28, 442–47.

¹³Ibid., 442–47.

¹⁴Ibid., 444.

jettisoned Judaism simply because it was not Christianity.¹⁶ Instead, for Dunn the primary problem Paul had with Judaism was that national boundary markers like circumcision and other Jewish rites excluded Gentile participation in God's covenant.¹⁷ For N. T. Wright the problem is the ongoing exile of Israel that must be resolved by the death of Jesus. In spite of these disagreements, both Dunn and Wright agree that the propitiation of God's wrath is not the primary problem that Paul addressed in his epistles.¹⁸

¹⁵Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 339–40; N. T. Wright, *Paul In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 26.

¹⁶Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 552.

¹⁷James D. G. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10–14)," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 523–42; idem, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 183–214; idem, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 361–63.

¹⁸N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 39–62. According to Wright, the curse referred to in Gal 3:10 is the curse of exile that the nation of Israel is under as a result of her rebellion. The Judaizers are those who identify themselves with Old Testament Israel and thus place themselves back under the exilic curse that existed before Christ appeared. Jesus suffers the punishment of death, which is the ultimate exile in order to redeem his people (including Gentiles) from the curse, a curse that he exhausts in his body. Although Wright's concept includes some aspects of penal substitution in that Christ suffers the penalty of exile for Israel, nevertheless, salvation does not appear to be through the satisfaction of God's wrath, but through the ending of Israel's exile. On the other hand, Wright gives a surprising endorsement to the concept of propitiation in his commentary on Romans. However, he fails to endorse this concept in his more recent writings on Galatians. Therefore, one is left with a mixed opinion of Wright's view of penal substitution and the related concept of retributive justice. See N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, in vol. 10 of *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 474; idem, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (London: SPCK, 2002), 34; idem, *Paul In Fresh Perspective*; idem, *The Climax of the Covenant Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); and idem, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

According to Dunn, the traditional, forensic view of righteousness is not biblical at all. Instead, it is a reflection of our western European intellectual heritage that embodies a Graeco-Roman ideal of righteousness against which individual actions can be measured and justice can be satisfied.¹⁹ Failure to measure up to this standard of righteousness involves ethical or criminal liability. When applied to God, the Graeco-Roman view of justice is a principle that requires divine satisfaction in the form of retributive justice against those who transgress God's holy law.²⁰ On the other hand, Dunn argues that the underlying Hebrew idea of God's righteousness is a relational rather than a forensic concept.²¹ One is righteous in the context of his obligation to another. First Samuel 24:17 provides an example, where David is considered to be more righteous than Saul because of a relational act of restraint. Saul, however, fails in his duty toward David because, rather than protecting the life of his subject, he seeks David's life. In other words, in a relationship of mutual obligation, David is righteous but Saul is unrighteous. When applied to God, this concept of righteousness consists in his faithfulness to his covenant people, Israel. God is righteous because he is faithful to

¹⁹The criticism that retributive justice is a Western concept foreign to the Scriptures is common among critics of penal substitution. For instance, see Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 45; and Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 5.

²⁰Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 341.

²¹James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (January 1992): 16. Dunn appeals to the study by H. Cremer. Cremer's view of righteousness is now common. See Hermann Cremer, *Die Paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre Im Zusammenhange Ihrer Geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1900). See also Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1. For an analysis of Cremer's work, see Mark A. Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 415–42.

deliver and vindicate Israel from her enemies.²² Dunn makes this clear when he states, “God is righteous not because he satisfies some ideal of justice external to himself. Rather, God is righteous when he fulfills the obligations he took upon himself to be Israel’s God. That means, in rescuing Israel and in punishing Israel’s enemies.”²³ According to Dunn’s view, God’s righteousness and salvation are essentially the same.²⁴ Dunn believes that the concept of God’s righteousness as his covenant faithfulness is taken over by Paul without qualification in the New Testament. Therefore, when one reads in Romans 1:16-17 of God’s righteousness, one is to understand God’s faithfulness in fulfilling the obligations he took upon himself not only in creating man but especially in electing and redeeming Israel. Dunn believes that this concept of God’s righteousness was so clearly evident in the Old Testament that Paul could assume its content for his

²²Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 342 n 32. Dunn finds biblical support for his concept of God’s righteousness in numerous Psalms and in the prophetic literature. Dunn notes that in a number of passages in the Psalms (Ps 51:14; 65:5; 71:15), and Isaiah (Isa 46:13; 51:5-8; 62:1-2) the NRSV translates *tsedhaqah* as deliverance or salvation. In Mic 6:5 and 7:9 the translation of *tsedhaqah* is vindication. Mark Seifrid, on the other hand, argues that Dunn’s view presents only a partial concept of God’s righteousness. According to Seifrid, the Old Testament presents God as the sovereign king who enacts the right order between himself and the world. This idea involves vindicating acts of judgment in which God condemns his enemies and delivers his people. Therefore, God’s salvific acts on behalf of his people involve, by nature, forensic acts of condemnation and judgment against his enemies. For a full presentation of Seifrid’s argument, see Mark A. Seifrid, “Paul’s Use of Righteousness Language against Its Hellenistic Background,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, vol. 2, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 39–74; Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism.”

²³Dunn, “The Justice of God,” 16–17. Dunn does not exclude God’s wrath from his discussion. However, God’s wrath, according to Dunn, is clearly not a major theme in the Old Testament. Instead, it is God’s saving righteousness that is clearly in the foreground. See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 343 n 34.

²⁴Dunn, “The Justice of God,” 17.

New Testament audience.²⁵ As a result, Paul spends relatively little time explaining the concept of God's righteousness in Romans. Instead, one can assume that when this concept was applied to Christ's sacrifice, the early church would comprehend God's faithful, saving action on behalf of human beings. Dunn writes,

It explains why he (Paul) could simply announce his theme as "the revelation of the righteousness of God" (Rom 1:16-17) without further ado. He was able to assume that "the righteousness of God" was "the power of God for salvation," and that even an unknown church would recognize this effective equation without further explanation.²⁶

So, God is righteous by remaining faithful to his promise to redeem. This redemption comes through Jesus Christ to every Jew or Gentile who believes in Christ.²⁷

This concept, of course, leads to the question: how does Christ redeem? In answering this question, Dunn is very careful to avoid any idea of divine retributive justice in relation to the death of Christ. His evasion is clearly illustrated by Dunn's translation of the Greek term *hilasterion* in Romans 3:25.²⁸ Dunn opts for the translation of "expiation" rather than "propitiation" because, according to Dunn, the latter suggests the inappropriate idea of Christ appeasing God's wrath.²⁹ Instead, the wrath of God is

²⁵The exegetical conclusion of Dunn that God's righteousness consists of his covenant faithfulness, is generally embraced by numerous theologians. For examples, see Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 26–49; Colin Greene, "Is the Message of the Cross Good News for the Twentieth Century?" in *Atonement Today A Symposium at St John's College, Nottingham*, ed. John. Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 235; and Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 103.

²⁶Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 343.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 342–44.

²⁸For Dunn's exegesis of Rom 3:21-26, see James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 161–83.

viewed by Dunn as the inescapable consequences of sin.³⁰ Dunn is clear on this when he says: “God’s wrath, we might say, is his handing over of his human creation to themselves.”³¹ In the case of the cross, the destructive consequences of sin are somehow concentrated in Jesus, the representative man, so that in destroying Jesus they exhaust and destroy themselves.³² To clarify his thought Dunn uses a medical analogy in which he compares this process to the vaccination of a healthy body:

The wrath of God in the case of Jesus’ death is not so much retributive as preventative. A closer parallel may perhaps be found in vaccination. In vaccination germs are introduced into a healthy body in order that by destroying these germs the body will be built up in strength. So we might say the germ of sin was introduced into Jesus, the only one “healthy”/whole enough to let that sin run its full course. The “vaccination” seemed to fail, because Jesus died. But it did not fail, for he rose again; and his new humanity is “germ-resistant”, sin-resistant (Rom. 6:7, 9). It is this new humanity in the power of the Spirit which he offers to share with men.³³

²⁹Dunn relies on C. H. Dodd’s study of the *hilaskesthai* word group for his conclusions. Similar to Dunn, John Goldingay argues that in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the action under consideration is not punishment but cleansing. He also argues that sacrifice is a way to give a gift, a way of handling violence in the community, a bridge between man and a holy God, and an act of restoration. Sacrifice, however, as an act of retributive justice, is not considered. See Dodd, “*Hilaskesthai*, Its Cognates, Derivatives and Synonyms, in the Septuagint.” For a response to Dodd’s study, see Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*; Nicole, “C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation.” For Goldingay’s assessment of the sacrificial system, see John Goldingay, “Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ,” in *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St John’s College, Nottingham*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 10.

³⁰Dunn summarizes Paul’s understanding of sin as a power or compulsion that humans experience in themselves or in their social contexts. This power turns humankind in upon itself so that it is preoccupied with satisfying its own needs. Put another way, sin is human rejection of dependence upon God. The wrath of God is the consequent turning over of man to his futile thoughts and deeds. Dunn also describes sin as a disease comparable to a malignant poisonous organism. See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 42, 112; idem, “Paul’s Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice,” ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 50.

³¹Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 42; idem, “Paul’s Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice,” 50.

³²Ibid.

By using this analogy, Dunn distances himself from the concept of retributive justice and adopts a more benign description of Christ's death as an act that heals, cleanses or removes a stain. Again, Dunn is clear on this point: "The imagery is more of the removal of a corrosive stain or the neutralization of a life-threatening virus than of anger appeased by punishment."³⁴

In summary, Dunn's argument against retributive justice is supported by two main exegetical pillars. First, Dunn agrees with E. P. Sanders, that Paul's theology did not emerge as a reaction against Pharisaic legalism. The situation was quite the opposite. Paul, prior to meeting Christ, believed himself to be in a gracious covenant initiated by God. Therefore, Paul believed that the works of the law do not justify but simply maintain one's status within that covenant. Second, Paul's understanding of justification was drawn directly from his view of God's righteousness which Dunn believes to be relational rather than forensic.³⁵

The stage is now set for Dunn to distance himself from a penal substitutionary view of Christ's death which, at its heart, includes the concept of retributive justice derived from a forensic rather than a relational view of God's righteousness. Indeed, Dunn believes that many of the post-reformation debates around the concept of God's righteousness are simply irrelevant in light of his new exegesis. For instance, the question of whether the verb *dikaioo* means "to make righteous" or "to reckon as righteous" is

³³Ibid. Dunn believes that Christ communicates the "new humanity" through the Spirit as the believer is united to Christ. Salvation is a process that occurs as the "old nature" is destroyed and the "new nature" is received through union with Christ. However, there is no act of satisfaction to God in this process. Instead, God acts against sin, which is metaphorically described by Dunn as a virus that infects man. See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 214–15, 263–64; and idem, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice," 47–48.

³⁴Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 214–15.

³⁵Ibid., 345.

simply misguided. It is not a matter of one or the other, but both. God's covenant partner is called into a gracious relationship (apart from any act of divine retributive justice) in which he is counted righteous in spite of his failure. Yet, that same covenant partner is inevitably transformed (made righteous) by a living relationship with the covenant keeping God.³⁶ Therefore, in electing and transforming his people, God requires no act of retributive justice to satisfy his holy nature.

In conclusion, the New Perspective's definition of God's righteousness as his covenant faithfulness is a very effective tool in denying God's retributive justice. As a result any defense of retributive justice must be able to demonstrate that God's righteousness includes the concept of a moral norm that demands satisfaction. Without demonstrating this key element, traditional theology is vulnerable to the critics of retributive justice.

Metaphorical Language and the Atonement

A related tool in the arsenal of the critics of God's retributive justice is the use of metaphorical language to describe what takes place in the atonement. As Blocher notes, metaphors are being used like missiles to dismantle systematically the classic idea of penal substitution.³⁷ Although the metaphorical argument is used to minimize penal substitution rather than retributive justice, nevertheless, when used in conjunction with the New Perspective's view of God's justice it becomes a very effective tool. For instance, by discrediting penal substitution with the metaphorical argument and then debunking retributive justice through the concept of relational righteousness, it is hoped that any defense for penal substitution will collapse. As a result, one can view the

³⁶Ibid., 344.

³⁷Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors," 630.

metaphorical argument as an application of the critics' rejection of retributive justice. The two arguments actually work in tandem to dismiss penal substitution.

How then does metaphor serve the purposes of the critics of God's retributive justice? To understand this, one must first briefly come to terms with the use of metaphor in post-modern philosophy. In the battle for ideas the question becomes: does metaphorical expression communicate abiding conceptual truth? For instance, for much of post-modernism, metaphorical truth belongs to an ontological level that is divorced from reality. Derrida contends that concepts are ultimately metaphorical and therefore conceptual truth through written expression is an illusion.³⁸ Vanhoozer notes that Derrida's maxim "there is nothing outside the text"³⁹ "means that there is no non-metaphorical way of speaking about the world."⁴⁰ Concepts are deconstructed as they are unmasked as figures of speech that claim to explain reality. Concepts always refer to one another and never to some objective truth. It is as if one is caught in a giant web of connecting concepts in which each identifies the others but never points to an ultimate reality outside the web. As a result, truth claims become an illusion.

Although Derrida's deconstruction goes far beyond the strategy of many theologians who oppose retributive justice, nevertheless, there is a subtle connection. For instance, a common charge against the traditional view of penal substitution is that it takes the idea of retributive justice far too literally. Colin Gunton states, "To conceive

³⁸Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). For a similar view, see Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). For a critique of Derrida, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

³⁹Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

⁴⁰Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 131.

Jesus as primarily the victim of divine punitive justice is . . . to read that metaphor literally and merely personalistically.⁴¹

Although Gunton avoids Derrida's error by connecting metaphorical language with reality, nevertheless, he believes that the precision of theological language concerning the atonement that is evident in Warfield or Hodge is not possible due to the nature of metaphor itself.⁴² There is a certain agnosticism associated with metaphor that refuses to hand over the mysteries of the atonement with the clarity that they are depicted within penal substitution. Theologians that hold to retributive justice are accused of taking the text too literally. The result is a crass literalism that the writers of the biblical texts never intended.⁴³ Gunton makes this clear when he states,

[Biblical metaphors of atonement] are finally unfathomable and present to the theologian ever new possibilities for insight and development. For the same reason, no final account can be given of what they mean, certainly not this side of eternity: they are eschatological concepts, giving up their secrets only by anticipation and through the gift of the Spirit. We shall not therefore expect the classical theologies of the atonement to be finally adequate, certainly if they suggest that there are fixed meanings to them that can be played off against each other.⁴⁴

⁴¹Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 165.

⁴²Blocher notes that Gunton has been influenced by Romantic thought, especially Coleridge, and therefore is suspicious of conceptual clarity. For Gunton's connection of metaphor with reality, see Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 31, 40, 45, 48. See also Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors," 663.

⁴³Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 64. Gunton's literalistic criticism is applied almost exclusively to penal substitution or to ransom theories that identify Satan as an objective, personal reality. As a result, Blocher accuses Gunton of bias when he states that "it just so happens these beliefs are also most unpalatable among the intelligentsia today" (Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors," 633).

⁴⁴Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 105. Notice that a final, fixed theory of the atonement is impossible because the biblical metaphors constantly present us with new possibilities. In a similar manner, Green and Baker make the claim that "crossing cultures requires the creation of new metaphors" (Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 38). However, one could accuse this theory of allowing the culture to influence and drive the definition of the biblical metaphor. If that is the case, one

As a result, theologians who hold to penal substitution are accused of attempting to know too much about what happens at the cross.

By describing traditional theories of the atonement as being overly literal, Gunton is able to dispense with certain unsavory aspects in the classic theories. For instance, Gunton believes that the ransom theory of the atonement over-literalizes the text by seeing a victory over actual demonic forces that inhabit a transcendent world. Gunton believes that the real victory should be understood in terms of impersonal, earthly powers. As Gunton states, “The texts present us not with superhuman hypostases trotting about the world, but with the metaphorical characterization of moral and cosmic realities which would otherwise defy expression.”⁴⁵ Therefore metaphor becomes a powerful tool that critics use to tailor their views of Christ’s work.

A similar method is followed with penal substitution. By over-literalizing the biblical text and applying a western, legal concept to the atonement, Reformed theologians were able to conceive of the atonement as the satisfaction of retributive justice.⁴⁶ However, according to Gunton, this reads the metaphor “literally and merely personalistically.”⁴⁷ Instead, one should understand God’s justice as a relational concept

wonders how such a fluid view of the atonement can escape the charge of cultural relativism—the very charge that Gunton lays at the feet of penal substitution. See Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 95.

⁴⁵Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement*, 66.

⁴⁶Ibid., 89, 95. Gunton has in mind both Luther, who, he believes, was preoccupied with justification, and Augustine, who was preoccupied with the health of his soul. It is these Western influences, according to Gunton, that helped to give rise to penal substitution.

⁴⁷Ibid., 165.

in which God is faithful to redeem his creatures.⁴⁸ Justice, according to Gunton, should be described as God’s faithful, transforming act. Gunton states,

The concept of the justice of God which has been advocated in these pages is, as we have seen, transformational rather than punitive or distributive. That is to say, it accepts human responsibility and culpability for the breach of the universal order which result from rebellion against God, but holds that justice is done not by the imposing of equivalent suffering—as we saw to be the case with “the justice of Zeus”—but by a process of transformation in which the reconciliation of persons enables the acknowledged evil of the past to become the basis for present and future good.⁴⁹

Therefore, on the one hand, through the use of biblical metaphor, penal substitution is discredited. However, at the same time, by applying the New Perspective’s view of God’s justice, Gunton is able to redefine the conception of the atonement as transformational. The metaphorical and judicial arguments work in tandem to give new meaning to the atonement.

A second charge against the proponents of penal substitution is that they attempt to centralize a metaphor that is only one among many ways to understand the atonement. Again, Gunton makes this clear when he states, “To conceive Jesus as primarily the victim of divine punitive justice is to . . . treat one metaphor of atonement, the legal, in isolation from the others.”⁵⁰ This is a central tactic of many critics of retributive justice.

As seen in the above discussion, biblical metaphors present only a partial picture of the atonement, not the whole. Therefore, we are able through each individual

⁴⁸Ibid., 102–05. Here, Gunton illustrates his dependence on the New Perspective’s view of justice. Gunton believes that Paul uses legal metaphors to describe divine justice. However, according to Gunton, these legal metaphors are secondary and underscore the relational aspect of justice. To support his case that justice is a relational rather than a forensic concept, Gunton appeals to the research of Sanders.

⁴⁹Ibid., 188.

⁵⁰Ibid., 165.

metaphor to understand one aspect of this many-sided reality.⁵¹ To take one metaphor and to focus on it would be like focusing on only one aspect of a beautiful painting. While that aspect may be engaging, one loses the overall beauty of the picture. Moreover, because there are so many metaphors, and because they each bring out different aspects of the atonement, to attempt to harmonize them under the umbrella of a central metaphor is simply not possible. In fact, if one attempts to harmonize the various metaphorical concepts surrounding the atonement, inevitable contradiction is the result.⁵² Blocher gives a brief but helpful synopsis of this position: “What clinches the argument based on plurality is the presence of incompatible features across the field of biblical metaphors: one is caught in contradiction if one tries to erect them as doctrinal sketches.”⁵³ Therefore penal substitution with its related doctrine of retributive justice is not the organizing principle of redemption but, at best, only part of a much larger picture of God’s plan of salvation.

Diversity and incompatibility make any type of systematic scheme impossible in relation to atonement theology. To make the legal metaphor primary, as does the theory of penal substitution, is reductionistic.⁵⁴ Therefore the use of biblical metaphor is a way for New Perspective theologians to relativize and ultimately dismiss penal substitution and therefore retributive justice. When this strategy is combined with the

⁵¹Ibid., 62. See also Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 83–88.

⁵²Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement*, 174–75. Green and Baker cite Hodge’s attempt to explain Christ’s victory over Satan in relation to penal substitution as an example of his inability to harmonize the various redemptive metaphors.

⁵³Blocher, “Biblical Metaphors,” 633.

⁵⁴Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 175.

New Perspective's relational view of God's justice, penal substitution ceases to have any theological relevance at all.⁵⁵

Theological Challenges

In addition to and building upon the exegetical challenges to retributive justice are the theological questions concerning God's retributive justice. These questions concern the very nature of God and reveal what is at stake in this debate. According to the Scriptures there is nothing more important than our knowledge of God.⁵⁶ John 17:3 reads, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." If we take this verse of Scripture seriously, then any revision to the Doctrine of God can have serious theological implications. Therefore, to redefine an attribute of God, such as his justice, has the potential to redefine one's entire view of God, including his relation to the world. This is exactly what the New Perspective attempts to do. At its heart, the challenge of the New Perspective is really a challenge to the knowledge of God. Specifically, the New Perspective seeks to reconstruct a doctrine of God free from any vestige of retributive justice. As seen above, this is accomplished in two steps. First, the New Perspective redefines the historical context of Paul as one arising from covenantal nomism rather than rabbinic legalism. Second, and, more importantly, the New Perspective redefines the concept of God's righteousness as relational rather than forensic. As a result, a new doctrine of God arises

⁵⁵The reference in the previous quote that penal substitution is unbiblical refers to Green and Baker's previous discussion that the term "justice" is a relational rather than forensic concept. Therefore, Green and Baker use the exegetical argument in conjunction with the metaphorical argument to distance themselves from the idea of penal substitution and retributive justice. For the entire context, Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 173–75.

⁵⁶For a discussion on the scriptural importance of the doctrine of God, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 1–3.

that is cleansed of retributive justice. With this theological piece of the puzzle in place the stage is now set to dismantle the traditional view of God. This deconstruction often includes harsh criticism leveled against a view of God that includes the concept of retributive justice.

Retributive Justice Presents an Angry View of God

Perhaps one of the most frequent challenges to God's retributive justice is that it presents an angry view of God.⁵⁷ Indeed, this is a constant refrain among New Perspective theologians. For instance, Steve Chalke makes the following charge: "The greatest theological problem with penal substitution is that it presents us with a God who is first and foremost concerned with retribution for sin that flows from his wrath against sinners."⁵⁸ According to Chalke, the problem with penal substitution is that, at its heart, it presents us with an angry God who must seek retribution. Green and Baker seem to agree with this assessment and go to great lengths to purge the idea of wrath from their

⁵⁷The rejection of retributive justice has a long history. Peter Abelard considered the concept cruel and believed that God could pardon sin apart from the death of Christ. The rejection of retributive justice gained strength in the nineteenth century. Bushnell believed that the idea was "akin to blasphemy," while Campbell thought that the idea was repulsive. Many liberal theologians have opposed the idea of retributive justice based on their belief that it is an ugly relic of man's primitive religious development. See Peter Abelard, "Exposition of The Epistle to the Romans," ed. Eugene Rathbone Fairweather, in *A Scholastic Miscellany Anselm to Ockham*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1956), 280–83; Horace Bushnell, *Christ and His Salvation: In Sermons Variousy Related Thereto* (New York: Scribner, 1866), 251; John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Handsel, 1996), 82; Henri Blocher, "The Sacrifice of Christ: The Current Theological Situation," *European Journal of Theology* 8 (1999): 25.

⁵⁸Steve Chalke, "The Redemption of the Cross," in *The Atonement Debate Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 39. See also Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 402.

doctrine of God. The following argument is typical: “For Paul, the notions of punishment and retribution are peripheral at best. . . . The ‘wrath of God’ is, for Paul, not an affective response on the part of God, not the striking out of a vengeful God. As we have indicated, Paul’s concern is not with retributive punishment.”⁵⁹ Notice that Green and Baker see no need for God’s holy nature to be appeased. Instead, they attempt to resolve God’s justice into his mercy:

His (God’s) justice has gracious intent, as he seeks to eliminate sin that threatens human existence and severs relationship with him. . . . Pervasively in the Old Testament, God’s wrath is relationally based, not retributively motivated—that is it is oriented toward the restoration or protection of God’s people, not toward retaliation or payback.⁶⁰

Therefore by placing God’s wrath under the category of relationship Green and Baker are able to dispense with the notion of retribution.

At their most extreme, proponents of this argument charge that retributive justice in the atonement entails divine child abuse. In the volume *Atonement and Violence*, J. Denney Weaver writes the following:

The motif of Jesus as the substitute object of punishment, which assumes the principle of retribution, is the particular image that feminists and womanists have found so offensive. It puts God in the role of the one who demands retribution. God punishes—abuses—one of God’s children for the sake of the others. And the Jesus of this motif models passive submission to innocent and unjust suffering for the sake of others.⁶¹

⁵⁹Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 121–22.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 69, 72.

⁶¹J. Denny Weaver, “Narrative Christus Victor: The Answer to Anselmian Atonement Violence,” in *Atonement and Violence A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 8. For a similar charge, see Rita Nakashima Brock, “And a Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), 52–53. For a detailed discussion of the issue of violence and the atonement, see Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating The Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

In summary, a doctrine of God that includes the concept of retributive justice not only presents a God of vengeance and wrath. It places God in the position of demanding punishment from his own Son. This, according to the critics of retributive justice is simply an unacceptable view of God.

Retributive Justice Presents a Mechanistic View of God

What then do the critics put in the place of God's retributive justice? Steve Chalke suggests the concept of God's love when he says,

So what of God's anger? The most profound theological truth expressed in the whole canon of Scripture is that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). The Bible never defines God as anger, power or judgement; in fact, it never defines him as anything other than love. Love is not a quality that God possesses but rather his divine essence itself—his essential being. . . . God's anger is an aspect of his love, and to understand it any differently is to misunderstand it.⁶²

Notice that Chalke does not dismiss God's wrath. Instead, he subsumes wrath under love. In other words, God's love is the central attribute under which every other attribute of God must be understood.

Paul Fiddes seems to agree with this concept when he comments on Abelard's view of God: "He [Abelard] affirms that when God revealed himself in the life of Jesus and reconciled us to himself by his death, he did not have to satisfy any prior conditions such as the demands of Satan or his own justice. He was simply satisfying his own nature of love. The very essence of God is love."⁶³ Since Fiddes, like Abelard and Chalke, sees God's primary attribute as love, he is able to take the next logical step and dispense with God's retributive justice. Fiddes states, "What justice demands is not payment but repentance; it is finally 'satisfied' not by any penalty in itself but by the

⁶²Chalke, "The Redemption of the Cross," 40.

⁶³Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 143.

change of heart to which penalty is intended to lead.”⁶⁴ For Fiddes, because God is primarily love, he is under no constraint to demand strict justice. Moreover, to demand justice reduces God’s freedom. It makes God a mechanistic prisoner of his own law:

The theory runs that God cannot forgive us until the punishment demanded by justice is exacted. This conceives justice as law with ultimate authority; even when the law is said to be God’s own law, the theory still requires God to act in a way which is confined by legal restraints. Law has ceased to be a useful guideline to the purpose of God for his creatures, and has become a supreme principle. It does not allow God the freedom to exercise a justice of another kind.⁶⁵

Therefore, love that may freely override God’s own judicial requirements seems to be a primary principle that guides Fiddes’ view of God.

Green and Baker follow a similar line when they comment on Hodge’s view of penal substitution: “Within his [Hodge’s] penal substitution model, God’s ability to love and relate to humans is circumscribed by something outside of God—that is, an abstract concept of justice instructs God as to how God must behave.”⁶⁶ In this case, God’s law is characterized by Green and Baker as an inhibition of God’s nature rather than a revelation of his character.

Notice that in the above citations retributive justice is viewed as an outside, legal constraint that forces God’s hand. Instead, according to Fiddes, the law should be

⁶⁴Ibid., 104. Historically, these views are preceded by John McLeod Campbell’s view of the atonement. The point is that God’s justice is satisfied not by a legal mechanism but through living transformation. This concept is Gunton’s point. For a similar view, see Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989). See also Steven Porter, “Rethinking the Logic of Penal Substitution,” in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader And Guide*, ed. William Lane Craig (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 599. For Campbell’s view of the atonement, see Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*. For Gunton’s view of God’s justice, see Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 188.

⁶⁵Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 101; See also Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 415.

⁶⁶Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 174.

seen more as a guideline for God's children; a guideline that is somewhat loosely tethered to God's justice and that certainly does not demand payment for sin. Moreover, this view of God's nature paves the way to redefine God's wrath. Since God's nature does not demand that God display his wrath in the form of retributive justice, the wrath of God can be redefined as the God-ordained consequences of sin. As Fiddes states, "[I]s the wrath of God a judgment inflicted from outside human life, or God's consent to the natural consequences of human sin from within? If it is the latter . . . then God is free to forgive those who repent. There is no other blockage than their own stubborn resistance to the love of God."⁶⁷ In other words, God's wrath points to the natural consequences inherent in life when we transgress God's law, not to God's holy nature that has been offended. Therefore, in the final analysis, God can forgive sin without satisfaction because neither his law nor his nature demands it. God is like the Father in the story of the prodigal son who sees the son from afar and without any reservation throws his arms around his estranged child. No payment is made because none is necessary. The changed heart of the prodigal son is enough. In fact, to demand payment is to become like the elder son who is incapable of understanding God's mercy.⁶⁸ It is to view God in an unloving, mechanistic way. In summary, the rejection of retributive justice results in a new direction for the doctrine of God in which love is seen as the central concept through which all other attributes are interpreted. However, the question becomes: can God be defined primarily in terms of his love, or does God's holiness also play a major role in defining his nature? This question will be examined in chapter three of this study.

⁶⁷Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 101–02, 108; and Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 72. C. H. Dodd is perhaps the most famous proponent of this position. See Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 20–23.

⁶⁸Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 101–02.

Retributive Justice Contradicts Jesus' Message of Love

The next criticism of God's retributive justice is related to the previous section in that it also centers on the love of God. However, this criticism is focused more on the actual teachings of Jesus than the general doctrine of God. The claim is that God's retributive justice contradicts Jesus' message of love. For instance, Matthew 5:38-39; 43-45a reads,

You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth." But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . You have heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

According to these passages, Jesus requires his followers not only to resist evil but also to offer unconditional forgiveness to their enemies. In other words, no restitution for evil can be required before a Christian offers forgiveness. On the other hand, the doctrine of retributive justice as seen in penal substitutionary atonement presents God as demanding payment for sin before he offers forgiveness. This, according to the New Perspective, is a direct contradiction of Jesus' teaching and presents God as a hypocrite who demands one thing from his followers but actually requires another from himself. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann clearly make this point when they say that "[i]f the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil."⁶⁹ Fiddes makes a similar point by suggesting that Christ has actually abolished the Old Testament concept of retributive justice:

[Jesus] himself set aside the Old Testament law of retribution which called for a just equivalence in punishment; "You have heard that it was said of old an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you—do not resist one who is evil." . . . there is not such thing in the kingdom of God as offended honor that must be

⁶⁹Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182–83; and Chalke, "The Redemption of the Cross," 41.

satisfied. If our love may involve setting aside a penalty, can God act any differently?⁷⁰

According to Fiddes, while retributive justice may have existed in the Old Testament, Jesus' teaching of the kingdom removes any vestiges of this doctrine. The teaching of Jesus is that love has no limits. On the other hand, the idea of offended holiness that must be satisfied is a concept that is passé in the kingdom of Christ.⁷¹

Retributive Justice Divides the Trinity

Another serious challenge to divine retributive justice is that it serves to divide the persons of the Trinity. Actually, this argument is not specifically directed against retributive justice itself but against retributive justice in conjunction with the doctrine of penal substitution. Therefore, retributive justice is faulted for the specific role it plays in the doctrine of penal substitution. For example, in their comment on Romans 5:8, Green and Baker assert that any demonstration of retributive justice against Christ is a threat to the intra-Trinitarian unity of purpose and activity:

In the end we find in Pauline discourse the unrelenting affirmation of the oneness of purpose and activity of God and God's Son in the cross. Thus any atonement theology that assumes that in the cross God did something "to" Jesus is not only an affront to the Christian doctrine of the triune God but also stands in tension with Paul's clear affirmation in Romans 5.⁷²

Paul Fiddes makes a similar point concerning Trinitarian unity when he states the following: "One of the problems of a theory of penal substitution is that it depends for its logic upon a strong individualization of Father and Son as independent subjects, which makes it hard to speak of the one personal reality of a God who becomes vulnerable for love's sake within his own creation."⁷³ According to Fiddes, the concept of one Person

⁷⁰Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 103.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 83.

of the Trinity judging another Person of the Trinity, as in the case of penal substitution, threatens God's unity because it depicts the Father and Son as independently acting subjects. Therefore, retributive justice is considered an illegitimate concept because, in the final analysis, it fails to uphold the unity of the triune God.

Retributive Justice Involves God in Logical Contradictions

Finally, according to a number of critics, divine retributive justice involves God in logical contradictions. For instance, Denny Weaver believes that because the persons of the Trinity mutually inhabit each other, it is impossible for one Person of the Trinity to exercise judgment while another remains the passive recipient of that same judgment. Weaver writes,

According to standard interpretation, each Person in some way reveals the fullness of the God, and there is nothing in the Godhead or in any of the Persons of the Trinity that is not in the others. Following that logic, it is not possible for God to exercise violence while Jesus is also nonviolent, and if Jesus is nonviolent, then the Godhead is also nonviolent.⁷⁴

According to Weaver, the actions of the Father must be the identical actions of the Son in order to preserve the unity of the Trinity.

While the previous example involves a contradiction between the persons of the Trinity, Eleonore Stump finds a logical contradiction between the concepts of retributive justice and forgiveness. According to the doctrine of penal substitution, God forgives us when Christ pays for our sins through his death on the cross. However, Stump believes this presents a contradiction. To prove the point Stump gives the following example:

⁷³Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 108. See also Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 295-301.

⁷⁴Weaver, "Narrative Christus Victor," 16.

The proponent of [penal substitution] might claim that God's forgiveness consists precisely in his not requiring that *we* pay the debt for sin but rather he himself paying it for us in the person of Christ. But it is hard to see what constitutes forgiveness on this claim. Suppose that Daniel owes Susan \$1000.00 and cannot pay it, but Susan's daughter Maggie, who is Daniel's good friend, does pay Susan the whole \$1000.00 on Daniel's behalf. Is there any sense in which Susan can be said to forgive the debt? On the contrary, Susan has been repaid in full and has forgone none of what was owed to her.⁷⁵

According to Stump, if God requires restitution for sin in the person of Christ, we cannot actually say that God forgives sin. Instead, God receives full payment. True forgiveness would be to remit the debt with no demand for justice. Therefore, according to Stump, the concepts of retributive justice and forgiveness are considered to be mutually exclusive.⁷⁶ As a result the idea of penal substitutionary atonement falls apart because retributive justice and forgiveness are logically incompatible. In summary, the concept of retributive justice is rejected by its critics because it either involves the Trinity in contradictory actions or the concept when combined with God's mercy is logically incoherent.

Cultural Challenges

A third category of criticism directed against retributive justice is that it is culturally disconnected. According to the critics, the concept of retributive justice is a western concept that is entirely focused on the individual sinner and has nothing to say to broader social issues. As a result, it fails to engage people in the matters that touch their lives on a daily basis. The thought is that a more practical form of social justice is needed to bridge the gap between the Bible and the needs of society.

⁷⁵Elenore Stump, "Atonement According to Aquinas," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, University of Notre Dame Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 62.

⁷⁶Similar to this objection is the criticism that the Levitical sacrificial system is not retributive because sacrifice is not proportional in relation to the sin (i.e., greater sins demand a greater sacrifice and lesser sins demand a smaller sacrifice). See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 295-30; Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 12.

Usually this criticism takes three specific forms. First, it is suggested that retributive justice is simply a product of Western culture. The thought is that without specific legal biases the church would have never understood God's justice as retributive. Second, retributive justice is culturally and individually irrelevant. In other words, retributive justice addresses a problem that is unintelligible and unimportant to modern society. Third, retributive fails to address major social issues; issues that are urgent and that tear at the fabric of society.

Retributive Justice is a Product of Western Culture

According to some critics, retributive justice does not arise from biblical teaching but instead finds its origins in the western, legal concepts that influenced the early church. Gunton makes this charge when he states that

there developed in the West a tendency to conceive the human relation to God largely in terms of legal obligation (and, it might be added, a corresponding perplexity in the Eastern churches about Western atonement theology as a whole). The central motif is demand: the human agent is expected to fulfill certain obligations.⁷⁷

Fiddes makes a similar claim by asserting that penal substitution is the combination of Roman legal concepts and the Anselmian view of repayment. According to Fiddes, the idea of retributive justice arose from this legally biased context and resulted in the unbiblical doctrine of propitiation.⁷⁸ Green and Baker add an additional component to the mix when they claim that western individualism and an over-concern with moral guilt have produced a climate that fostered the concept of retributive justice inherent in the theory penal substitution.⁷⁹ Finally, this argument is buttressed by the suggestion that

⁷⁷Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 86.

⁷⁸Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 98.

⁷⁹Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 42.

apart from certain individuals and specific time periods the emphasis on divine retributive justice at the cross would not have developed.⁸⁰ For instance, according to Paul Fiddes, the influence of John Calvin and the Reformation are largely responsible for the penal view of the atonement.⁸¹ Gustaf Aulen follows a similar train of thought by suggesting that the early church was largely ignorant of divine retributive views and that *Christus Victor* was the dominant model of the cross.⁸²

In summary, New Perspective theologians tend to lay the development of retributive justice at the feet of Roman jurisprudence and Anselmian/Reformed ideas that, in their opinion, drove the concept of justice in an unbiblical direction.

Retributive Justice is Culturally and Individually Irrelevant

Another fundamental concern of the critics is that retributive justice and the related doctrine of penal substitution is unintelligible to many cultures. According to Green and Baker, diverse cultures have diverse needs and cultural ideas. For instance, the concept of justice in one culture may be quite different from what one experiences in America.⁸³ Since cultural ideas of justice change, retributive justice and the related doctrine of penal substitution simply do not make sense in these settings. The

⁸⁰Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 218–20.

⁸¹Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 88–89.

⁸²Aulén, *Christus Victor*.

⁸³As an example, Green and Baker point to the shame-based culture of Japan. According to Green and Baker, the concept of Japanese justice focuses on the preservation of human relationships. Shame plays a major role in this system by threatening personal or group alienation. Relational ideals are therefore more important than western ideas of law and punishment, where justice is seen as the impartial weighing of one's innocence or guilt according to a moral standard. See Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 192–209.

implication is that a new model for the atonement is necessary in order to speak effectively to different people groups and generations.⁸⁴ Going hand-in-hand with this argument is the claim that Christ's sacrifice is, at best, a dead metaphor, and at worst presents the revolting idea of blood sacrifice to an angry God.⁸⁵ According to this argument, if the idea of sacrifice is to be salvaged it must be redefined as an act of cleansing.⁸⁶ The thought is that the modern psyche has need for purification and therefore can relate more readily to a cleansing sacrificial act than to the metaphorical relic of God's retributive justice. To have the soul cleansed and transformed is much more relevant than the idea of being justified through sacrifice. Indeed, according to Colin Gunton God's justice is effected by transformation.⁸⁷ However, according to the critics, the concept of personal transformation is simply not addressed by retributive justice and the related doctrine of penal substitution. While retributive justice may satisfy God's holiness, it ends there. In fact, when combined with penal substitution, the doctrine of retributive justice is little more than a legal fiction in which the ledger books of God's holiness are adjusted in our favor but no real life change takes place.⁸⁸ What is worse, retributive justice rather than drawing one to God actually causes people to live in fear. Steve Chalke mentions this criticism in *The Atonement Debate* and relates how penal substitution has practically crushed Christians with an overbearing focus on God's

⁸⁴Ibid., 174–76.

⁸⁵For a complete discussion of how the metaphor of sacrifice should be redefined, see Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 115–41; and Goldingay, “Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ.”

⁸⁶Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 111.

⁸⁷Ibid., 188.

⁸⁸Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 175–76; Greene, “Is the Message of the Cross Good News?,” 231.

anger.⁸⁹ In summary, the critics believe that retributive justice has little to say both culturally and individually and therefore should be purged from the doctrine of God.

Retributive Justice Does Not Address Social Justice

Another serious criticism of retributive justice is that it does not address the larger concerns of social justice. Strictly speaking, this argument concerns the results that flow from one's definition of justice, and so it is not a direct criticism of retributive justice. However, the implication is that a focus on retributive justice by way of the doctrine of penal substitution must be a reason for social neglect, and cultural decline.

The argument states that because the idea of forgiveness through Christ's satisfaction is focused on individual sinners, it never considers the broader cultural issues. According to many critics, what is needed is the more practical form of social justice to address the pressing needs of society. Green and Baker make this assertion when they state the following:

It is also true that this particular way of portraying the significance of Jesus' death (penal substitution/retributive justice) has had little voice in how we relate to one another in and outside of the church or in larger, social-ethical issues. That a central tenet of our faith might have little or nothing to say about racial reconciliation, for example or issues of wealth and poverty, or our relationship to the cosmos is itself startling and ought to give us pause.⁹⁰

For Green and Baker, social justice is an effective theological tool because it addresses specific cultural issues like racial tension, wealth, and poverty, issues that threaten to divide us and therefore serve to undermine our very social existence. Retributive justice, on the other hand, has little to say about such matters and because of this is relatively benign in the social arena.

⁸⁹Chalke, "The Redemption of the Cross," 42–43.

⁹⁰Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 48.

A similar criticism comes from the ranks of liberation theology.⁹¹ According to this theological perspective, God's justice is oriented primarily toward the liberation of the poor and oppressed. Jose Miguez Bonino, a prominent proponent of this cause, states, "The biblical notion of justice is neither an inference from God's nature or attributes, not an ethical reflection on human virtue but a notion descriptive of Yahweh's liberating action experienced from within a situation of oppression."⁹² Bonino believes that justice is not adherence to an ethical norm derived from God's holiness. Instead, justice is experienced almost entirely in the liberation of the poor from oppression. Moreover, according to Bonino, forensic justice has been overplayed in the church. As a result, justification has been so individualized that our relationship to society has been forgotten. As a corrective measure, God should be viewed as constituting the human subject both personally and communally. Faith is not simply a response to God but the enactment of justice that must address the rights of the poor as it confronts political structures that are oppressive. Therefore, God's justice must take political form if it is to be authentic.⁹³ On the other hand, retributive justice really has nothing to say about social transformation. In fact, because all theologies are shaped by their surrounding

⁹¹Liberation theology comes in a variety of forms. The most prominent are Latin American and Black liberation theology. Latin American liberation theology is a product of South American theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez and Jose Bonino while Black liberation theology has its roots in the Black civil rights movement of the United States. Both hold that God's justice consists in the political liberation of society's poor and oppressed. For a summary of Latin American liberation theology, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973); José Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). For a discussion of Black Liberation Theology, see James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970); and James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon, 1999).

⁹²José Míguez Bonino, "The Biblical Roots of Justice," *Word and World* 7 (Winter 1987): 12.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 19–21.

culture, Protestant theology and, by implication, its related doctrines of retributive justice and penal substitution are really part of a larger value system that serve to uphold western social institutions. In other words, Protestantism is simply capitalism masquerading as Christianity.⁹⁴ What is needed, according to Bonino, is a massive reconstruction of society along the lines of a Marxist revolution in which social justice is enacted and oppressive western policies are removed.⁹⁵

In summary, retributive justice does not provide an answer to the complex social issues of modern life because it either fails to address them or it is part of the overall problem that needs to be corrected. Therefore, according to the critics, it is better to move on to the more pragmatic form of social justice that give real-life solutions to pressing political problems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the critics of God's retributive justice have engineered a careful strategy to redefine the doctrine of God. By building a new exegetical foundation in which the biblical concept of God's righteousness is redefined as God's covenant faithfulness, the New Perspective is able to shift the discussion surrounding God's justice from a forensic to a relational concept. God's justice is not what his nature demands but what God faithfully accomplishes on our behalf. Above all, God's righteousness is not the satisfaction of a legal ideal in which Christ appeases the wrath of God. It is instead his faithfulness to save (transform, heal) his covenant people.⁹⁶ Once this shift is enacted the concept of God's nature, as it relates to retributive justice, can be called into question.

⁹⁴Jose Miguez Bonino, "The Struggle of the Poor and the Church," *The Ecumenical Review* 27 (October 1975): 39.

⁹⁵Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 96–97.

Indeed, according to this exegetical analysis, forensic justice is not a major Biblical theme at all. Therefore, God himself must be understood in a whole new light. Rather than seeing God's justice as informing his love and mercy, the New Perspective tends to define God solely in terms of his love. The idea that God would be wrathful with sinners is considered an idea beneath him. Moreover, the idea of the Father's exercising retributive justice on the Son not only divides the Trinity but also involves God in logical contradictions. Finally, the whole concept of retributive justice must be understood as the imposition of a Western legal concept upon the biblical data; a concept that is outdated, irrelevant and unable to bring the kind of individual and social transformation that is so needed in our postmodern society. In short, God's retributive justice is a concept that is not worthy of our time. Of course, the real question is whether the New Perspective presents a truly biblical picture of God. The next chapter will begin to answer this question in detail.

⁹⁶According to the New Perspective, the effects of the cross are explained with a variety of metaphors. However, the appeasement of God's wrath is not in the approved list. For an example of what the cross accomplishes in the New Perspective, see Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 207–31.

CHAPTER 3

THE RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction

The retributive justice of God finds its roots in the pages of Old Testament Scripture.¹ It is here that the character of God begins to unfold and that foundational theological concepts are discovered that will be central to later New Testament revelation. It is here within the pages of the Old Testament that Israel comes to terms with her God as the Holy One who demands absolute purity of heart and loyalty to his person. God chooses Israel, and in the context of the covenant Israel learns what is required of her in order for God to tabernacle in her midst. Indeed, for Israel the question quickly becomes: How can God dwell in the midst of a stiff-necked people (Exod 33:3)? Putting it more succinctly: How can a people of unclean lips survive in the presence of a Holy God (Isa 6:1-5)? It is in the midst of this covenant indwelling that the Old Testament doctrine of God develops and his inevitable retributive justice is experienced by the nation of Israel.

Within this covenant relationship (and preceding it), a basic but profound conceptual pattern of the one true living God begins to emerge. This pattern begins in the

¹God's retributive justice can be defined as his just punishment of sin that is necessitated by his holy nature. However, in a broader sense, God's justice is both legislative (the giving of perfect statutes) and distributive (the impartial and equitable payment of everyone according to their works). Further, God's distributive justice may be broken down into his remunerative justice (the reward for obedience) and his retributive justice (the just punishment for disobedience). For a discussion of God's justice, see Richard A. Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, vol. 3 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 483–97.

garden and constantly re-emerges throughout God's history with Israel. It is repeated in God's covenant with Israel and is on prominent display in the Psalms and Prophets. That concept is simply that God is a God of mercy and a God of justice. Both are equally true of the God of Israel. Indeed, God defines himself this way in the book of Exodus when he reveals himself to Moses. As God hides Moses in the cleft of the rock, he proclaims his name to him (Exod 34:5-7):

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.

In this passage one finds an emphasis on the grace of God that is tempered by his retribution against sin. As Keil states, "[This passage] proclaimed that God is love, but that kind of love in which mercy, grace, long-suffering, goodness, and truth are united with holiness and justice."² Therefore as one studies the doctrine of God it is important to maintain a proper emphasis on both justice and mercy in order to maintain a biblically based theology.

It is true that God in his mercy and love takes Israel to be his special possession, promising to dwell in her midst. And yet in taking Israel to himself, God sacrifices none of his holiness (Lev 19:2). In fact, Israel finds herself in covenant with a merciful God who is at the same time an all-consuming fire. Here is the God who chooses Israel and delivers her from Egypt. Yet this same God threatens to destroy the entire nation over the sin of idolatry (Exod 32:9-10). Retribution for sin is swift and

²C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch: Exodus*, trans. James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 240.

often severe. Moreover this retribution is seen as the direct action of God in the form of his wrath³ that is in response to Israel's rebellion.⁴

Underlying the concept of God's retributive justice is God's holiness.⁵

Because God himself is intrinsically holy, he requires his people to be holy. Moreover, God's law is the standard of holiness for his people. The Book of Leviticus leaves no

³For a thorough discussion of God's wrath in the Old Testament, see Bruce Edward Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, American University Studies (New York: P. Lang, 1992), 65–147.

⁴Klaus Koch denies God's imminent involvement in judging Israel for her sins. According to Koch, the Old Testament presupposes an underlying moral mechanism that spins out blessing and punishment apart from the direct intervention of God. It is important to note that while Travis holds to Koch's general theme of retribution in the New Testament, he does not think that this same concept can be sustained in the Old Testament. See Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 57–87. For a critique of Klaus's position, see D. A. Carson, "The Wrath of God," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 42–45. See also Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 13–17.

⁵Traditionally, God's holiness has been understood to include both his ontological excellence (Isa 40:18-25) and his absolute moral purity (Lev 19:2; 11:44). From this purity flows his standard of justice. Peter Gentry, in a recent address, challenged the traditional understanding of God's holiness. Gentry characterizes God's holiness as his consecration or devotion. While Gentry's ideas are interesting, his view of holiness is most likely a derivative of the more common definition and have little support in past or current literature. For a discussion of God's holiness, see Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 497–503; Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. "קדש," by Jackie A. Naudé; Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), s.v. "Holiness," by Karl Holl. See also Peter Gentry, "No One Holy, Like The Lord," Chapel address delivered at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 9 September 2011 [lecture on-line]; accessed 4 April, 2011; available from <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/lectures/no-one-holy-like-the-lord/>; Internet.

question about this. Statements like “You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am Holy” (Lev 19:2) immediately precede and follow both moral and sacrificial commands in Leviticus (Lev 11:44-45; 20:26; 21:8). In context, these statements clearly link the law to God’s holiness and holiness to Israel’s obedience. One might say that God’s holiness is reflected in the obedience of his covenant people as they follow his commands. On the other hand, it is disobedience to God’s Law that provokes God’s wrath. Because God loves righteousness and hates iniquity, he will judge sinners (Ps 11:5-7). His eyes are too pure to look upon evil (Hab 1:13). Therefore, at the deepest level sin is not simply transgression against the law. Sin is rebellion against God himself who expresses his moral purity and perfect will in the law. God’s wrath is his just judgment against sinners who rebel against the perfect will of God.⁶

Coupled with the idea of God’s retributive justice is God’s mercy. However, mercy does not dispense with justice. Instead, justice permeates mercy. In other words, these attributes coalesce so that each is informed by the other.⁷ As a result, when God chooses to have mercy, he does so in such a way that his justice is satisfied. Nowhere is this more evident than in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. Indeed, these books answer the question: How can God dwell in the midst of a stiff-necked people (Deut 9:6)? However, they do so by interacting with the full orb of the doctrine of God presented in the Pentateuch. As stated previously, the very question, “How can God dwell in the

⁶Rebellion against God and his expressed will is the primary reason for God’s wrath in the Pentateuch while unjust oppression is a secondary cause for God’s wrath. See Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, 191–210.

⁷This argument assumes the doctrine of divine simplicity. For a discussion of divine simplicity, see Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 271–324. Calvin affirms the interpenetration of the divine attributes when he states, “One might more readily take the sun’s light from its heat or its heat from its fire than separate God’s power from his justice” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960], 214 n. 7).

midst of Israel?” poses a serious difficulty. On the one hand, God proclaims that Israel is engraved upon his hand (Isa 49:16). Israel is like the pupil of his eye (Deut 32:10). In fact, God’s love to Israel can be summarized by the term, חסד (hesed); a term not simply of obligation, but of gracious love and devotion.⁸ On the other hand, the very presence of God within the nation of Israel threatens her destruction. One need only read Exodus 33:5 to understand this point: “For the Lord had said to Moses, Say to the sons of Israel, ‘You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I will do with you.’”

Therefore, in order for God to dwell in her midst, Israel needs overflowing pardon that flows from God’s mercy.⁹ But how can this be accomplished? If God is both a God of mercy and equally a God of justice, how can the two meet? The answer is given by God himself and comes in the form of sacrifice. The God who is Judge is also the Savior and he provides for his people.¹⁰ It is through the shedding of blood that forgiveness occurs (Heb 9:2). Therefore, God provides the tabernacle and the Levitical sacrificial system as the means to atone for the sin of Israel so she will not be consumed. As Clowney states,

The tabernacle would be built; God in symbol, would dwell in the midst of his people. The veils of the tabernacle would insulate, as it were, against the fire of God’s presence. But at the same time, the tabernacle imaged a way of approach into God’s presence. At the entrance to the court stood the great bronze altar of sacrifice. Only through shed blood could the stiff-necked people come into the presence of God. The blood marked the death of the sacrificial animal in the place of the sinner.¹¹

⁸Edmund P. Clowney, “The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in *Right with God*, ed. D. A. Carson (London: Paternoster, 1992), 26.

⁹Ibid., 27.

¹⁰Ibid., 24.

¹¹Ibid., 27.

Indeed, all of this foreshadows the true lamb of God who would himself be the sacrifice that would satisfy God's justice and open the storehouse of mercy for God's people (Rom 3:21-26).

In light of this one must say that God is both full of mercy and a God of holy justice. God will by no means leave sin unpunished. Yet, in spite of this, he makes a way for his people by providing access to his presence in a way that compromises none of his holiness. In summary, the Old Testament informs us that God's retributive justice proceeds from his holiness and therefore God will always choose, in accordance with his nature, to judge sin. If God determines to show mercy, God's retributive justice will still be satisfied in sacrifice, which brings forgiveness to his people. However, it will never be the case that God will allow sin finally to go unnoticed, much less unpunished.

Exegetical Analysis

The purpose of this section will be to show that significant events in the history of the Old Testament demonstrate the necessity of God's retributive justice. Contrary to the claim voiced in the critics of God's retributive justice,¹² because God is holy, he will always choose to punish sin, either through vicarious atonement or directly as he visits wrath upon unrepentant sinners. This chapter will begin in Genesis by showing God's retributive justice against sinful mankind in general. It will then progress to the covenant with Israel, where it will be demonstrated that God's justice and mercy meet in atoning sacrifice. Finally, the patterns of retributive justice discovered in Genesis and the Mosaic Covenant will be briefly traced in the Psalms and Prophets in an effort to show the continuity of God's retribution throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

¹²Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: A Study in the Christian Doctrine of Atonement* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 101; Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 173–74.

Genesis

The Book of Genesis is a cohesive unit that describes the beginning of the universe, the creation of man, the entrance of sin into the world, and the beginning of God's plan of redemption for his chosen people.¹³ Genesis announces to the covenant community that her God is the God of creation.¹⁴ He is the King of the universe who not only is the Giver of all life but who also brings order, makes provision, and requires absolute allegiance to his person (Gen 1-2).¹⁵ Genesis introduces foundational doctrines that are expanded upon in later Old and New Testament books. Therefore, it is not surprising that God's retributive justice is on prominent display at the very beginning of

¹³Allen Ross and John N. Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 3. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to defend, the present discussion assumes the literary unity of the Pentateuch as opposed to the approach described in the documentary hypothesis theory. In addition, this discussion assumes the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and that Adam is an historical figure. As to Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, this seems to be implied in the Pentateuch itself as God actually gives Moses the Ten Commandments and the Levitical Law (Exod 20:2-23:33; 34:11-26; Lev 1:1; 27:34). Moreover, Deuteronomy claims to be the Mosaic exposition of the law to the Israelites in three addresses (Deut 1:5-4:40; 5:1-26:19; 30:2-20). In addition, Jesus also makes the assumption of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Matt 8:4; Luke 16:31; 24:27, 44; John 1:17; Acts 3:22). As to the historic nature of Adam, Paul seems to assume this in Romans 5:12-19. Kidner agrees on this point when he states, "Other scriptures, however offer certain fixed points to the interpreter. For example, the human race is of a single stock ('from one', Acts 17:26); again, the offense of one man made sinners of the many, and subjected them to death (Rom 5:12-19): and this man was as distinct an individual as were Moses and Jesus Christ (Rom 5:14)" (Kidner, *Genesis*, 29). Kidner's point is important because, as he states, an historical figure excludes the idea of myth, which simply dramatizes the natural order, and ensures us that we are dealing with a pivotal historical event; in this case the fall of man. For a description and analysis of the documentary hypothesis theory and suggested alternative literary structures of Genesis, see Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 18-24; Ross and Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus*, 19-25; Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 17-29.

¹⁴Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 55.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

God's interaction with man. In fact, we are introduced to this principle in three prominent places in the book of Genesis; the fall, the flood, and the judgment at Sodom and Gomorrah.

The fall. The fall of mankind (Gen 3) provides the first glimpse of God's retributive justice. The backdrop for the unfolding of this episode of Scripture is the creation of man and his placement in the garden of Eden (Gen 1-2). Within this pristine environment God gives Adam the following command: "And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). After issuing this prohibition God then creates the woman and brings her to Adam's side to be his helper. The scene is now set for the events of chapter three to unfold. However, before proceeding to the fall, it is imperative to note that God morally prepares Adam for the task of cultivating and caring for the garden. God clearly outlines his expectations for Adam by issuing both a command and a related consequence. In the event that Adam violates God's will not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the consequences are clear: "you will surely die (Gen 2:17)." Westermann notes the legal importance of both command and consequence in these verses when he states the following: "They are the two basic forms of command and law. The prohibition (command) has the form of the commandments of the Decalogue, and the second sentence that of apodictic law consisting of condition (case) and consequence (punishment)."¹⁶ So then, in parallel fashion to the law, God issues a direct command that entails both blessings for obedience and retribution for transgression.¹⁷ However,

¹⁶Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 223.

one must ask: What exactly is the nature of the threat in this verse? Is the consequence posed by God simply a threat to deprive Adam of the tree of life, implying that God's role in Adam's death is somewhat indirect?¹⁸ Wenham is especially helpful in this regard. He notes that this text employs a verbal construction (infinitive plus the qal of *tmwt*) which is a grammatical form used for divine or royal threats found in a number of other biblical passages (Gen 20:7; 1 Sam 14:39, 44; 22:16; 1 Kgs 2:37, 42).¹⁹ This construction often translated as "you shall surely die" indicates a direct threat from God in which Adam will die by the hand of God if he transgresses the command not to eat. The exact manner of death is undefined and therefore, left to the discretion of the

¹⁷Of course, the positive blessings of life would surely follow obedience and are clearly implied in this passage. See Ross and Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus*, 47.

¹⁸U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 124–25. The full meaning of this threat will be discussed in a moment. However, for the present it is important to determine the extent of God's involvement in the threatened consequence of death. Cassuto, after giving a list of the possible meanings of God's threat to Adam, settles on the idea that Adam was doomed to die because he was deprived of the tree of life. According to this view, although God is still responsible for Adam's death, he brings this judgment to Adam in a somewhat indirect manner.

¹⁹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 67–68. Milgrom makes the additional observation that within Levitical Law the qal form of the verb (*ימות*) is always used in contexts where execution is administered by God (Lev 16:2, 13) whereas the hophal form of the verb (*יומת*) is always used in contexts where execution is administered by man (Exod 31:14f). Genesis 2:17 employs the qal form of the verb that, in context, clearly indicates that God is the one who will carry out the execution. For a detailed discussion and listing of texts see Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology* (Berkeley: University of California, 1970), 5 n 7; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 173. In addition, variations of the phrase "you shall surely die" are found in numerous other texts in the Old Testament in which punishment for sin or an untimely death is the resulting consequence of transgression (1 Sam. 14:44; 22:16; 1 Kgs 2:37, 42; 2 Kgs 1:4, 6, 16; Jer 26:8; Ezek 3:18; 33:8, 14). *Ibid.*, 173 n. 74. Therefore, the threat in Gen 2:15 is the direct threat of death by the hand of God.

executioner.²⁰ However, the certainty of death is clear. In support of this reading, one should note the exact construction in Genesis 20:7 in which God threatens to intervene and strike down Abimelech if Sarah is not returned to Abraham immediately. Therefore, the Biblical data would strongly suggest that in this text God himself intends to carry out the death sentence against Adam.

In the ensuing sequence the sad events of the fall unfold. Satan, in the form of the serpent, carefully maneuvers Eve into a place of doubt and disobedience by emphasizing God's prohibition, not his provision. He then questions God's command and motives by denying the seriousness of God's threat.²¹ The temptation strikes at the very heart of heaven: "You will be like God knowing good and evil."²² Hamilton comments on Adam and Eve's desire to displace God when he says: "The temptation encourages Eve to declare autonomy, quite apart from any guidance God may have given, which is to be considered absurd and irrelevant."²³ The serpent has now effectively introduced a

²⁰John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. Robert L. Hubbard and Robert K. Johnston, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 60.

²¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 91.

²²The exact meaning of the phrase in Gen 3:5 "knowing good and evil" is debated. Perhaps the best way to interpret the phrase "good and evil" is to seek to understand it in relation to similar expressions in the Old Testament. For instance, discerning between good and evil is used in Deut 1:39, 1 Kgs 3:9, and 2 Sam 14:17, where it refers to the wisdom and discernment necessary to make moral distinctions in the realm of life. In two of the passages just cited (1 Kgs 3:9; 2 Sam 14:17) it seems clear that such knowledge is comprehensive and proceeds from God. For instance, in 1 Kgs 3:9 Solomon prays that God would grant him a discerning heart to distinguish between good and evil so that he might properly govern the people of Israel. In light of these passages it seems that Satan was holding out the possibility of moral autonomy to Adam and Eve that included practical knowledge that would bring them blessing and fulfillment in this life. For a detailed explanation of the various attempts to explain the phrase "knowing good and evil," see Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 242–48. See also Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 91–92; Hartley, *Genesis*, 66–67; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 25.

distrust of God and a desire for autonomy into the mind of Eve. Moreover, he has also removed the fear of consequences (death) if Eve disobeys.

Eve quickly succumbs to Satan by giving in to her physical lust for the fruit and the desire for independence from God. As a result, she eats from the fruit of the forbidden tree. She then gives to her husband, and in clear transgression of God's command, he eats. The act, while clearly a transgression of the commandment of God, is also deeply personal in that it reveals the heart of Adam and Eve to change their allegiance from God to Satan and from faith in God to faith in self.²⁴ The purposes of Satan are achieved as the couple cowers in fear and shame in anticipation of God's confrontation (Gen 3:1-9).

The consequences of disobedience are swift. The first consequence occurs almost immediately and manifests itself in spiritual death, which is the broken relationship between God and man.²⁵ Even before God confronts Adam and

²³Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 43.

²⁴It is interesting to note that Stephen Travis questions whether there can be retributive justice in the context of personal relationship because one is rewarded or punished not because of character but because of some overt act. Yet in this text we see that the overt act of sin deeply concerns the character of those involved. As a result retributive justice, in addressing the act, must necessarily speak to the character of the person involved. See Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 9.

²⁵The question arises as to whether the punishment of death was immediately imposed by God. It is clear that Adam did not die a physical death on the spot. Therefore, did God forgo the penalty that he had clearly threatened? Belousek argues that God suspends indefinitely the immediate death threat that hovered over Adam because of his disobedience. Moreover, Belousek argues that the natural death that Adam will eventually experience is not retributive but simply a consequence of his expulsion from the garden and therefore a result of his being unable to eat from the tree of life. Therefore, death enters the human race not as divine condemnation but by secondary human causation. However, that is not how Paul describes the matter in Rom 5:12-19. Indeed, Paul links death and the spread of death directly to Adam's sin. Moreover, Rom 5:16 states that just as Adam's sin brought God's condemnation so Christ's sacrifice brings justification and life. Therefore, according to Paul, death is not a

Eve, their eyes are opened, and they experience shame and fear of God. This inward sense of guilt and shame is a direct warning, corresponding to the prohibition in Genesis

natural cause resulting from deprivation but a direct judgment of God just as one's righteousness in Christ is a direct gift from God. As a result, Belousek's argument must be rejected as unscriptural. The solution proposed by Jonathan Edwards is to understand the term "day," in this text, as a general time period. Therefore the threat of death would concern the whole expanse of Adam's life from the time of his sin forward. While this interpretation is certainly a possibility it seems to strain the meaning of the text. A third solution would be to understand that death is postponed as an act of God's mercy. It would not be a contradiction of the text and God's merciful character if God postponed his judgment (Exod 34:5-7). In this case God would remain just and yet show mercy by imposing death on Adam sometime later in life. A fourth solution would be to understand Adam as undergoing an immediate spiritual death. According to Waltke, death is disruption of one's relationship with God and with each other. Death is therefore primarily spiritual in nature. In support of this reading one should note the immediate alienation of Adam and Eve from God after their transgression. The clearest sign of this alienation is shame and fear. In addition, expulsion from the garden and God's presence is another sign that man is now alienated from God who is the source of life. Further, Scripture never describes transgressors as existing in the realm of life and light. Instead, the wicked are represented as existing under the wrath of God, reserved for his judgment (Pss 1, 2, 11, 12, 35, 73). Fullness of joy exists only in the presence of God (Ps 16:11). Moreover, God clearly states in the law that life does not consist in physical sustenance alone but comes from every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deut 8:3; Ps 19:7; Ps 119). These ideas are picked up and expanded upon in the New Testament. Jesus describes those physically dead (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) as alive because of their relationship with God (Matt 22:32). This would clearly imply that life is a result of union with God and not simply physical existence. Moreover, death in the New Testament can exist if one is physically alive. The apostle Paul in Eph 2:1-6 clearly describes death as spiritual alienation from God in which the physically living participate. Perhaps the best solution is to understand the text as a combination of a spiritual and a physical death. Adam, because of disobedience, initially experiences a spiritual death which will be followed, at some time in the future, by his physical death. See Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 87–88; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 229–30; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch: Genesis*, trans. James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 85–86; John Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 127–28; and Jonathan Edwards, "On Original Sin," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol.1, ed. Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 186; Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 365; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 285.

2:17 that God's judgment is close at hand.²⁶ In addition, it is a sign that their relationship with God, who is the source of life, has been severed. As a result, Adam and Eve hide themselves from God. Although it is not stated in the text, it seems fair to assume that Adam's inward guilt and separation from God are immediate judgments from his omniscient Creator who has already put retributive justice into motion by giving Adam over to spiritual death.²⁷ Adam senses within his own soul the death he will taste later as his body returns to dust.²⁸ Indeed, Adam and Eve have now destroyed their very lives. In Genesis 3:19, God states that physical death will certainly follow. Here, it is important to note that physical death is clearly presented as the direct consequence of Adam listening to his wife and disobeying God's command (Gen 3:17). Even if death is delayed by God's mercy, nevertheless, it inevitably follows Adam and his offspring. Moreover, death is a direct pronouncement of God in response to Adam's sin (Gen 3:17, 19; Rom 5:12, 6:23).

In light of the previous discussion, it is difficult to understand how Goldingay can argue that death is a natural process and not the result of God's retributive justice. However, Goldingay seems to cloud the issue by classifying the creation and fall of man as a simple parable that imparts very general information. For instance, concerning the fall, Goldingay states,

We know we have not realized our vocation to take the world to its destiny and serve the earth; we know there is something wrong with the world in its violence; we know there is something wrong with our relationships with one another . . . [W]e

²⁶Adam's shame is a result of guilt before God. This becomes clear when he attempts to hide himself from God. The awareness of his nakedness is a manifestation of the inward disruption of his relationship with God. His fear is the result of God's impending judgment. See Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 96–97.

²⁷Genesis 2:17 certainly implies that death will be immediate and by the hand of God. See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 67–68.

²⁸Calvin notes that the miseries that permeate man's existence in this life are like an entrance into death. See Calvin, *Genesis*, 127–28.

know there is something wrong with our relationship with God. We also know we die. The question Genesis handles is, Was all that a series of problems built into humanity when it came into existence? The answer is no. . . . There was a point when humanity had to choose whether it wanted to go God's way, and it chose not to. The Adam-and-Eve story gives us a parabolic account of that.²⁹

According to Goldingay, the fall answers only the very generic question of whether sin was part of humanity's initial existence. However, it seems to be clear that Goldingay does not see the parabolic account as a description of God's just judgment against sin. Instead, the fall is characterized as the loss of possibility.³⁰ Adam had the potential for immortality, but he simply passed that opportunity by, failing to realize his destiny. Death is not God's just penalty for sin. Instead, it is part of the natural makeup of mankind.³¹ Adam and Eve had the potential for endless life had they chosen it. But they did not. Further, the parable does not describe a blissful intimacy with God from which Adam and Eve fell.³² Nor does it describe the beginnings of the moral incapacity of mankind.³³ Instead, one receives the impression from Goldingay that, aside from the loss of possibility, there are very few consequences to Adam's sin.³⁴ However, the Apostle Paul argues very differently. No doubt with this passage in mind, Paul explicitly states that death is the result of the entrance of sin into the world through Adam's transgression (Rom 5:12; 6:23). Adam and mankind in general suffer death as a direct act of God's

²⁹John Goldingay, *Genesis for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 63.

³⁰John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 144.

³¹*Ibid.*, 146.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*, 147.

³⁴If Goldingay sees moral incapacity in man it comes not from the concept of original sin but from social imitation. In the cultural sense, sin becomes pervasive and inevitable. See Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 147.

retributive justice against sin (Gen 2:17, 3:17). But Goldingay will not allow Paul into the discussion.³⁵ Whereas Paul clearly sees Adam as an historical figure, Goldingay classifies him as parabolic. Whereas Paul, in the fall, sees a specific act of sin with a specific act of judgment (death), Goldingay sees a very generic event with almost no associated consequences. Therefore, in light of Paul's clear discussion on the origins of death, it would appear that Goldingay takes a very unscriptural approach to the Genesis narrative; an approach that ends up contradicting the Apostle on a number of issues, especially the origin of death. Goldingay's approach to the fall is certainly not evangelical.

Returning to the text in Genesis 3, retributive justice is also clearly on display in God's confrontation of Adam and Eve. God interrogates the couple, forcing a confession. God asks, "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The focus in this text is on the command. Although God is omniscient, he is carefully modeling justice for Adam and Eve. As Waltke states, "The just king will not pass sentence without careful investigation."³⁶ Confession is necessary before sentence is

³⁵Goldingay explicitly states that he wants to interpret the Old Testament independently of the New Testament. Moreover, it is clear that Goldingay does not want to see the New Testament as the authoritative interpretation of the Old. As a result one receives the impression that Paul's comments on death (Rom 5) are somewhat irrelevant to Goldingay's discussion. But Paul draws his views of the fall and death directly from the Old Testament narrative in Genesis just as Goldingay claims to do. The only difference from Goldingay is that Paul sees the fall as an historical event whereas Goldingay classifies it as parable. Indeed, Goldingay's view of the fall as parable is clearly contradictory to Paul's view of Adam as an historical figure. In Paul's view, Adam is the head of humanity. In Adam, all fell just as in Jesus all live (Rom 5:12-19). This history is erased in Goldingay's description of the fall and replaced with very questionable content. See Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 20–28, 145–48; idem, *Genesis for Everyone*, 63.

³⁶Goldingay understands this and similar statements to indicate that God is not omniscient in the sense of possessing all knowledge intuitively. Instead, God's knowledge comes about through discovery. Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 137. However, Westermann describes the events in Gen 3:9-19 as a legal process in which God as

passed. After conducting his investigation, God then pronounces his verdict. Interestingly, each judgment is uniquely tailored for the recipients. The serpent, because of his role in the fall, is cursed above all livestock. This is a direct invocation of God's judgment upon the serpent who will now be forced to crawl upon his belly as a reminder of his seduction of Eve (Gen 4:14).³⁷ Moreover, because the serpent brought about man's destruction, he himself will eventually be destroyed (Gen 3:15).³⁸

God's direct word to Eve concerns the very focal point of feminine life. Before the fall, Eve was to find her delight in bearing children in a loving relationship with her husband. That has now changed. God will himself disrupt this relationship as a direct judgment upon Eve's sin. God clearly states to the woman, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing" (Gen 3:16a). The Hebrew text uses the word "conception" translated by our English word in the NIV for childbearing. Ross notes that this is a synecdoche, a part representing the whole. In other words, not only will the act of bringing children into the world be painful, but the act of raising them will also be filled with difficulty.³⁹ All of these issues are the result of God's just judgment upon Eve's sin.⁴⁰ Further, God will disrupt Eve's relationship with Adam. God states, "Your desire

judge passes sentence upon Adam and Eve after their interrogation. Therefore, the legal form of the text would enforce the notion of retributive justice. See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 252–53; and Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 92.

³⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 78. Wenham notes that what is striking about this curse is that God himself utters it, thus guaranteeing its effectiveness.

³⁸Ross and Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus*, 57. From other portions of Scripture it is clear that Satan is behind the action of the serpent (Rom 16:20; Rev 12:9). Therefore, the final destruction of Satan by the second Adam is a punishment that perfectly fits the crime.

³⁹Ross and Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus*, 56. Eve certainly experiences difficulty in the raising of Cain and Abel.

⁴⁰Goldingay does not see God as cursing Eve. As noted above, Goldingay sees the fall as a parable that simply communicates that sin was not originally inherent in

will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Gen 3:16b). Waltke notes that the chiasmic structure of the verse pairs the terms “desire” and “rule over.” This structure suggests that Eve’s desire will change from loving submission to the desire to dominate her husband.⁴¹ In turn, Adam, instead of exhibiting loving male leadership, will attempt to dominate his wife.

As with Eve, God judges the very core of Adam’s existence (Gen 3:17-19).⁴² Man had been created to tend and cultivate the garden. Now man’s relationship to the ground is reversed. Instead of being in submission to Adam, the ground will resist by bearing thorns and thistles. Instead of experiencing the joy of work, man will now bring forth produce by the sweat of his brow. In the end, because of Adam’s rebellion against God, the ground will actually swallow up man as he returns to dust.⁴³ Like the woman, the center of man’s existence will be filled with pain.⁴⁴ All of this comes directly from the hand of God, who curses man because he obeyed his wife rather than God and ate from the tree from which God had commanded him not to eat (Gen 3:17; 2:17).⁴⁵

humanity. However, if one takes the text at face value it seems to communicate much more. In Gen 3:16 God claims to be the direct agent who disrupts the focal point of feminine life, which is the bearing and raising of children. It would seem that in light of the context, this disruption would constitute a curse. See Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 142.

⁴¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 94–95.

⁴²Again, Goldingay states that there is no curse upon Adam but a curse upon the ground. However, one wonders how Adam avoids being cursed when God curses the focal point of his life: his ability to provide for his family. Surely in cursing the ground God cursed Adam. See Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 142.

⁴³Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 94–95.

⁴⁴Hartley, *Genesis*, 70.

⁴⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 82.

In summary, this passage demonstrates God's retributive justice in a number of ways. First, God issues a direct command followed by a clear consequence for disobedience (Gen 2:17). If Adam eats he will suffer the penalty of death as a result of his transgression. The text is clear that God himself will be the party responsible for carrying out the execution.⁴⁶ Second, when the transgression occurs, God carefully investigates the matter by interrogating Adam and Eve. God's role is that of the just King and Judge who demonstrates to Adam that judgment will not be passed until a full investigation has been conducted.⁴⁷ Therefore, the very nature of God's questioning models justice. Third, God imposes punishment. Adam suffers spiritual death eventually followed by physical death. As argued above, even if one wishes to discount the spiritual nature of death, nevertheless, God nevertheless God does eventually carry out his sentence of physical death. Moreover, as we learn from the Apostle Paul, the sentence of death is passed upon Adam's entire race (Rom 5:17).⁴⁸ Finally, retributive justice is demonstrated in the way each judgment is specifically tailored for the recipients. Adam and Eve are each judged at the core of their existence. This judgment is a daily reminder to Adam and Eve and to their descendants of the cost of disobedience to God. God's retributive justice now permeates life for all of humanity. Eve will have pain in

⁴⁶Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology*, I, 5–7.

⁴⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 92.

⁴⁸Romans 12:17-19 makes it clear that because of Adam's sin death has been visited upon the entire human race. Moreover, this death is not simply the result of imitating Adam's sin, although humans do imitate Adam and sin without exception. However, Paul is arguing on a more comprehensive basis. Paul is saying that the descendants of Adam partake of his spiritual death and that they are destined for physical death (Eph 2). If this is not the case, why would Paul connect all sin with Adam's one sin (Rom 12:19)? Moreover, why would Paul draw the parallel between Christ's obedience and a Christian's righteousness? Paul's point is clear: Mankind has been engulfed in spiritual and physical death because Adam's sin has been imputed to Adam's progeny just as Christ's righteousness has been imputed to believers in Christ. God's retributive justice reaches the entire human race. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 270–93.

childbearing and difficulty with her husband. Adam, because he ate of the fruit, will now toil to eat.⁴⁹ In the end, both Adam and Eve will return to dust as a reminder that they are creatures, not gods. Summing up, one could say that retributive justice in this passage is overt in the death sentence, comprehensive for the whole human race, and meticulous in that it reaches to every detail of human life.⁵⁰

The flood. Although the narrative covers three chapters (Gen 6-9), the concept of God's retributive justice unfolds early, primarily in the first chapter of the narrative. The introductory text can be divided into two sections. The first section describes the population growth of mankind in general (Gen 6:1-4), while the second describes God's determination to destroy mankind through a worldwide flood. (Gen 6:5-8).⁵¹ The first section of the passage introduces the narrative and informs us that man quickly began to populate the earth. Of course, God had intended for man's propagation to be a blessing (Gen 1:28). However, in the present situation the very opposite has happened.⁵² In Genesis 6:1-4, one reads the following: "When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the

⁴⁹In response to Adam's eating the fruit, God mentions eating no fewer than five times in the context of this passage (Gen 3:17-19). See Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 94.

⁵⁰ It is interesting to observe that if Travis's assertion is true that retributive justice deals only with externals, then in this case, the eating of the forbidden fruit, one must ask: Why all the fuss? After all, it is only fruit. Certainly God could be expected to forgive such a slight transgression. However, the incorrect nature of Travis's assertion is revealed by the interrogation and the punishment. Adam and Eve's actions reveal inward rebellion against their creator. Their sin is a desire to displace God and become autonomous. God will not let this stand. Therefore, he returns the creature to dust. For Travis's assertion, see Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 8-9.

⁵¹Hartley, *Genesis*, 95.

⁵²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 262.

Lord said, ‘My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal, his days will be a hundred and twenty years.’”

In verse three, one finds the first hint of God’s displeasure.⁵³ Interestingly, God’s concern is with the legitimate institution of marriage that has now become a means of perversion to society. The exact nature of the marriages and the underlying sin associated with those marriages is uncertain.⁵⁴ For example, there is a question as to who the sons of God are who marry the daughters of men. Three primary answers have been given: fallen angels, Sethites, or a dynasty of demonically inhabited tyrants.⁵⁵ The last

⁵³The placement of the description of the marriages before the description of God’s displeasure is the author’s way of making the point that the marital unions are what are offensive to God. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 266.

⁵⁴The reference to men taking beautiful women as they pleased would indicate that these choices were driven by lust rather than by spiritual discernment. See Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 117; and Cassuto, *Genesis from Noah to Abraham*, 302.

⁵⁵The idea that angels would have sexual relations with humans, a view held by some early church fathers, seems to be an unbiblical notion and would contradict Jesus’ description of angelic nature (Matt 22:30; Mark 12:25). While angels are described as eating and drinking in Gen 19:1-3, the idea of marriage and procreation seems to be a bit far fetched. Moreover, if this interpretation is correct, it would seem to lay the infraction against the angelic world, not man. However, in the text it is the world of men that is judged. No mention is made of any judgment against angels. For these reason this interpretation of the text is unlikely. The more traditional view is to see the sons of God arising from the godly line of Seth and the daughters of men arising from the pagan line of Cain. According to this interpretation, the infraction occurs when godly men abandon themselves to ungodly marital unions and thus pervert the true faith. This infraction is similar to Solomon’s union with foreign wives who turned his heart from the Lord (1 Kgs 11:4). While attractive, this interpretation has two flaws. It requires the Hebrew word for “man” in v. 2 to be understood as generic man while in v. 3 the same noun must be understood as the specific line of Cain. Linguistically, this strains the text. Second, because the birth of daughters is repeated nine times in Gen 5, it is more in line with the previous structure of chapter 5 that the daughters referred to in this text come from the line of Seth. However, neither of these arguments is conclusive and so this interpretation remains an attractive option. A third interpretation understands sons of god as a dynasty of rulers and the daughters on men as their royal harems. These rulers are a continuation of the line of Cain who claims for themselves godlike powers. An offshoot of this view is to see this line of rulers as demonically controlled despots who are able to exert

two choices are most likely. However, a fully defensible position is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, the general point of the text is that God was displeased because of a corruption in society that came about through a perversion of marriage.

Moreover, these marriages furthered the general prevalence of wickedness by the violent offspring they produced. According to the text, the offspring of these marriages were the Nephilim: heroes and mighty warriors. The term “Nephilim” is used in Numbers 13:33 to describe the sons of Anak who are described by the Israelites as giants.⁵⁶ In summary, it appears that these marriages produced a race of violent men who spread violence throughout the earth. As a result, God grants mankind a reprieve of 120 years, after which he will judge the earth.⁵⁷ The second section of this pericope describes God’s reaction to man’s unbridled sin. The text tells us that God saw the greatness of man’s wickedness. This is not an admission of God’s previous ignorance (cf. Ps 139). Rather, God, as with the fall, is using the language of investigation to demonstrate that he does not judge capriciously. Instead, God carefully weighs the facts before he passes

tremendous power and charisma because of the demonic forces that inhabit them. This view would explain the phrase “sons of god.” In addition, the demonic influence would explain the uncontrolled violence of the time. Either of the last two views can be adopted without doing violence to the text. However, a definitive position is difficult to obtain without more details. See Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 115–17; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 264–65; Ross and Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus*, 68–69; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 116–17; and Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 62.

⁵⁶This reading identifies the Nephilim as heroes and men of renown. However, some interpretations see the Nephilim as a distinct group and the *men of renown* as the offspring of the union between the sons of god and the daughters of men. For this interpretation, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 270. See also Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 118.

⁵⁷It is unlikely that the threat refers to a reduction of man’s life span in general since most of the people in Genesis, after the flood, live well beyond 120 years. Instead this is parallel to the passage in Jonah 4:5 in which God delays his judgment. God is giving time for repentance. However, judgment will be passed in 120 years. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 269; and Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 117.

judgment. Moreover, God's inquiry uncovers some disturbing facts. According to the text, every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart was continually wicked (Gen 6:5). In other words, man's evil was comprehensive (Gen 6:11-12). Cassuto states, "Not only what man actually did with his hands, but what he *formed* (i.e., devised) with his mind was nought but evil, continually (literally, *all the day*)."⁵⁸

As a result of this state of affairs God is severely grieved. Man's wickedness causes a state of intense regret so that the text describes God as repenting over the creation of man. Adding to this picture is the fact that God is described as extremely sorrowful over man's sin.⁵⁹ The idea conveyed in the text is one of pain in God's heart. It echoes the earlier language from Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve experience pain because of their sin.⁶⁰ However, in this case, it is God who now experiences pain because of the regret he feels over his fallen creation.⁶¹

Finally, the consequences of man's sin not only result in God's grief, but also bring about God's determination to destroy the entire world. Genesis 6:7 states this in no

⁵⁸Cassuto, *Genesis From Noah to Abraham*, 303.

⁵⁹Belousek attempts to argue that the flood was a display of God's grief rather than his wrath. However, one could argue that God's anger includes the emotion of grief over sin. In other words, the text is communicating that God's anger is not a petulant reaction but careful reflection. Indeed, anger often includes the emotion of grief and regret. Regardless of the emotions involved, the flood is clearly God's retributive payment for man's sin. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 182.

⁶⁰Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 118–19.

⁶¹While it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a full discussion of God's immutability, many commentators see the use of anthropomorphic language in this passage and therefore affirm God's unchangeable nature (1 Sam 15:29). Ross notes that the text uses anthropomorphic language to convey the intensity of the grief that God feels over sin. What is conveyed is God's opposition to sin expressed in the human language of regret rather than a change of mind (Mal 3:6). See Calvin, *Genesis*, 249; Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 140. See also Ross and Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus*, 67. For a full discussion of God's immutability, see Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 308–20.

uncertain terms: “So the Lord said, “I will wipe mankind whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.” The intensity of the situation is amplified by the fact that God seems to be deliberating.⁶² This is no act of petulant rage on the part of deity. Instead, God carefully investigates, deliberates, and then grants a period of grace for repentance. Nevertheless, in spite of God’s patience, if man does not turn from sin, God’s destruction will be comprehensive.⁶³ Only Noah, a righteous man, and his family will be spared.

From this brief preface to the flood a basic but profound theological truth about God’s nature begins to emerge. From the text it is clear that God is grieved by unrighteousness. The comprehensive violence and sexual misconduct of man are described as being directly responsible for the intense regret and grief to the heart of God. Calvin, commenting on this passage, states that “God was so offended by the atrocious wickedness of men, as if they had wounded his heart with mortal grief.”⁶⁴ Waltke notes that the term translated “grief” carries the idea of indignant rage.⁶⁵ According to this passage, man’s sin is such an affront to God that it moves him in the core of his being. As a result, there is no overlooking of sin on the part of God. Instead, God is offended by the very presence of wickedness and therefore cannot be indifferent to its existence.

⁶²Calvin, *Genesis*, 249–50.

⁶³The judgment described in this passage clearly fits the model of retribution. God is not trying to reform man but wipe him from the face of the earth because of his wickedness. Of course, the threat of similar judgment at the end of the world is used to deter man from sin (2 Pet 3:3-13). However, from the context of this passage deterrence is clearly a secondary motive for the flood. For a discussion of the various forms of judgment, see Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 4–10.

⁶⁴Calvin, *Genesis*, 249.

⁶⁵Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 119.

Critics often claim that God is not inclined to judge man's sin directly, but simply allows him to suffer the natural consequences of his own foolish actions. The implication is that God stands in the distance, unaffected by man's sin, able to forgive and forget transgression with a single act of his divine will. Paul Fiddes states something very similar to this when he says,

In discussing the place of justice and judgment within atonement, a fundamental decision about perspective has to be taken: is the wrath of God a judgment inflicted from outside human life, or God's consent to the natural consequences of human sin from within? If it is the latter, as I have been arguing, then God is free to forgive those who repent. There is no other blockage than their own stubborn resistance to the love of God. . . . If God's free will is in fact the final factor, then he is also free to dispense with satisfaction altogether.⁶⁶

In the above quotation Fiddes makes two assumptions. First, God's judgment is simply the natural consequences that he allows sinners to experience, and second, as a result, God can wipe away sin with a mere act of the divine will apart from satisfaction.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Fiddes argues that no act of atonement is necessary for man's sin. Repentance is God's only requirement for forgiveness. However, other passages of Scripture seem to contradict this possibility. For instance, Exod 34:7 declares that it is God's nature to hold the guilty accountable. In Exod 32:34 God declares to Moses that he will punish the Israelites who have committed the sin of idolatry by worshiping the golden calf. Note that this threat occurs after three thousand Israelites have already been slain in judgment, and after Moses has interceded for the people. The Israelites were now presumably contrite and humble. Nevertheless, God visits a plague upon the people (Exod 32:34-35). A similar incident occurs at Kadesh where the Israelites refuse to enter Canaan. Even though the Israelites repent in earnest they still are made to wander in the desert for 40 years (Num 14). In a similar manner, the illegitimate child of David and Bathsheba is taken by death in spite of David's prayers of repentance (2 Sam 12:13-23; Ps 51). In the New Testament, a similar theme occurs. God is represented as storing up his wrath against sinful man for the day of judgment (Rom 2:5). However, the greatest proof that God does not simply forget sin is contained in Rom 3:25. Here Paul argues that God overlooked past sin (in the Old Covenant) out of his gracious forbearance until Christ ultimately satisfied God's justice. Therefore, the concept of repentance is best understood in light of God's merciful forbearance, a forbearance that will ultimately require atoning sacrifice. As a result, Fiddes is wrong to conclude that repentance does not require sacrifice. See Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 101-02.

⁶⁷Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 101-02.

However, both of these assumptions are contradicted by the text in Genesis 6. In the flood, God is the direct agent of judgment who determines to remove mankind from the face of the earth by sending a worldwide deluge. The flood, according to the biblical text, is not a natural disaster but a cataclysmic act of divine judgment.⁶⁸ Second, the biblical text in Genesis 6 clearly states that judgment arises from the very core of God's being because man's sin grieves the very heart of God. Retributive justice is not simply an external set of natural circumstances alien to God. Instead, it is God's internal resistance to sin that spontaneously arises from his holy nature. To put it another way, God's will does not act independently from his nature and simply choose to forget sin. Instead, God's holy nature informs God's will to act in judgment when God is offended by sin.

⁶⁸Rene Girard's solution to the flood account is to classify it and many other Old Testament acts of punishment by God as legendary. Girard believes that when God chooses to punish sin he always does so through secondary human agency. Further, Girard believes that Old Testament sacrifice is an expression of the violence within a socially dysfunctional society rather than God's merciful provision for sin. Girard does not believe that God's holy nature requires payment for sin but takes the view that the concept of retributive justice is like an external law that forces God's hand. Therefore, retributive justice is characterized as an illegitimate act of violence. Walter Wink, picking up on Girard's study, characterizes retributive justice as an attempt by God to overcome violence with violence. The idea is that retributive justice simply perpetuates what it is trying to destroy. Interestingly, Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, evangelical authors, draw from Wink's observation. However, it is important to note that unless one is willing to go the non-evangelical path of Girard and classify the flood as legend, the text in Genesis 6 leaves one no option. Retributive justice is clearly taught in this section of Scripture. Instead of being an external law forcing God's hand, retributive justice is simply God's reaction to sin from the core of his being. It is God's holy nature, responding willingly by moving to eradicate sin from the face of the earth. See Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 148–49; Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 125–29. For a full analysis of Girard's views and how they have impacted Wink, Chalke and Mann, see Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 236–39.

Fiddes makes a serious doctrinal error when he asserts that God can forgive sin apart from atonement because he divorces God's will from his holiness.⁶⁹ The Scriptures never do this. Green and Baker make a similar mistake when they state that God's retributive justice is an outside legal constraint that forces God's hand to judge. Commenting in the context of penal substitution Green and Baker state the following: "Within a penal substitution model, God's ability to love and relate to humans is circumscribed by something outside of God—that is, an abstract concept of justice instructs God as to how God must behave."⁷⁰ However, as seen above in Genesis 6, the case of God's justice is exactly the opposite of what Green and Baker claim. God's judgment arises from God's internal grief over sin, not an external standard that forces God's hand to act. God's standard of judgment is ultimately his internal quality of

⁶⁹The debate as to why God may forgive sin reaches back to medieval scholasticism and can be contrasted in the views of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. According to Aquinas, the divine intellect recognizes the inherent worth of a moral act and informs the divine will to reward the act appropriately. According to Scotus and later Ockham, the divine will is primary in determining the worth of a moral act. This naturally leads to the question as to whether God, by an act of his will, could radically alter other aspects of the created order. In an attempt to bring conceptual stability to this issue, later Scholasticism made use of the distinction between God's absolute power (what God could do in his unlimited ability to act) and God's ordained power (what God has freely chosen to do in the present created order). In this system, God is said to be committed to his ordained acts. However, there is clearly no guarantee. Since God's will is primary, God could overturn the present order. It was for this reason that Calvin, reacting to later, radical scholasticism refused to separate God's power from his justice. If God's will is not based in his holy nature, then what security is there in the stability of the moral order? This is an issue that Fiddes must face if he declares that God may simply forgive sin by a sheer act of divine will. See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 45; David C. Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Absolute Power of God," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 18 (Spring 1988): 70; Alister E. McGrath, "John Calvin and Late Mediaeval Thought," *Archiv Fur Reformationsgeschichte* 77 (1986): 58–78; Mark S. Heim, "The Powers of God: Calvin and Late Medieval Thought," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 19 (November 1978): 156–66; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 950; and Charles Hodge, *Theology*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1899), 423–27.

⁷⁰Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 174.

holiness that expresses itself in his love for righteousness and his hatred of iniquity (Ps 11:5-7). To claim otherwise is to imply that God could somehow ignore or be indifferent to sin. Again, this is not how the Scriptures present God. As Peterson states, “[The Biblical writers] portray the wrath of God as his fixed and determined response to all that is unholy and evil. At the same time, they proclaim him as the God of mercy (e.g., Exod 34:6-7), who provides way in which the consequences of sin may be averted.”⁷¹ In summary, God is both a God of mercy and of justice.

A second truth that emerges from this passage is that God loves righteousness. The text states: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God (Gen 6:8-9).” According to this passage Noah is described as being righteous, blameless and one who walks with God. In this context, the term “righteous” refers to Noah’s piety and ethics.⁷² Although Noah did not have God’s written law, apparently God, in grace, had allowed Noah to retain his moral bearings. Noah had not submerged himself in spiritual darkness by searing his conscience through acts of wickedness like the surrounding culture. Instead, he zealously sought to please God in everything he did. This zealous pursuit of God is what the term “blameless” indicates.⁷³ Moreover, Noah walked with God. This phrase links Noah to Enoch, who also had intimate fellowship with God (Gen 5:24). No doubt, through this close communion with God Noah was able to learn of God’s ways and thus discern and follow God closely in his daily life. All of this resulted in a man

⁷¹David Peterson, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 9.

⁷²Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 133.

⁷³The pairing of the terms “blameless” and “righteous” suggests a wholehearted commitment on the part of Noah to righteousness. See Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 133.

who exhibited a stark contrast to the current generation. Noah was a man who communed deeply with God and as a result exhibited righteousness in his outward behavior. Therefore, God was pleased with Noah.

However, a caveat must be inserted at this point. Noah should not be understood as one who is perfectly righteous. Noah is still classified among the sinners of his generation. As Calvin states, “Let us, however, know that they are called just and upright, not who are in every respect perfect, and in whom there is not defect; but who cultivate righteousness purely, and from their heart.”⁷⁴ Indeed, Noah will demonstrate his sinfulness soon after the flood in a fit of drunkenness. Further, the text indicates that Noah’s preservation is itself an act of God’s mercy. The text tells us that Noah found favor in the eyes of God. This phrase is found in a number of passages and seems to indicate the idea of undeserved grace (Gen 18:3; 32:5; 33:8; 39:7).⁷⁵ Noah’s righteousness is not his own but a gracious gift of God and a fulfillment of the prophecy of God to put enmity in the hearts of Eve’s descendants against the Serpent.⁷⁶ Therefore, we are left with the idea that God is pleased with the righteousness of Noah, a righteousness that God himself has granted.

In summary, one can draw the conclusion that the flood is a demonstration of God’s retributive justice against the sinfulness of Noah’s generation. From the text it is clear that God as just judge executes sentence against the wickedness of mankind. Moreover, this judgment has the primary purpose of removing man from the face of the

⁷⁴Calvin, *Genesis*, 251–52. Note also that in Gen 8:21 God states the following: “[E]very inclination of his (man’s) heart is evil from childhood.” This comment occurs after the flood and in the context of Noah’s sacrifice. It is an indication of the universal nature of man’s corruption (Ps 51:5).

⁷⁵Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 276. The fact that v. 8 (Noah’s finding favor in God’s eyes) precedes v. 9 (Noah’s preservation) is another indication that God’s grace is operative in Noah’s election.

⁷⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 119.

earth in order to eradicate evil. However, the flood, in addition to demonstrating God's retributive justice also seems to give a more profound understanding of God's motivation behind his acts of judgment. According to this passage, the sinfulness of man causes intense grief to the heart of God, while even the imperfect righteousness of Noah is enough for God to spare him from the flood. This is important to note because it tells us that God is opposed to sin in his very being. As stated before, God is not at war with himself when it comes to judging sin. He is not required to judge by an external standard of righteousness that forces his hand. Instead, he is settled and sure within his being that sin must be eradicated. In summary, this passage is consistent with the idea that retributive justice arises from God's inner state of holiness in which his hatred of sin and love for righteousness moves him to judgment.

Finally, this passage is important because it serves as a paradigm of judgment for later Scripture. For instance, the judgment of Jerusalem is compared to the flood waters of Noah (Isa 54:7-9) while the final judgment on the earth is compared to God's wrath poured out from the windows of heaven (Isa 24:18; Gen 7:11, 8:2).⁷⁷ These clear references to the flood point to the fact that this section of Scripture does not give us an isolated caricature of God but serves to define his nature for future generations. Although God has given man time for repentance, his retributive justice will appear again for all to see at the end of the age (Matt 24:29-37; 2 Pet 2:5). It is a warning to all that the unchanging God of heaven is unchanging in his complete hatred of and opposition to the sinfulness of man.

Sodom and Gomorrah. From the flood waters of Noah we turn next to the judgment at Sodom and Gomorrah. The text opens with the appearance of the Lord to Abraham and the promised birth of Isaac to Sarah (Gen 18:1-15). From this gracious

⁷⁷Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 301.

promise God now addresses the case against Sodom and Gomorrah. God takes Abraham into his confidence and reveals his plans for the cities, primarily for the purpose of instructing Abraham in the ways of God’s justice. The text states the following: “Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? . . . For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen 18:19). This case is especially instructive for the subject at hand because God’s revelation of his judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah is meant to instruct Abraham and his posterity on how to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Waltke states, “Such a nation has to learn justice beginning with its father, Abraham (18:17-19). The Lord models justice to Abraham in his treatment of the Sodomites (18:20-33) and through this remarkable dialogue he educes Abraham’s integrity.”⁷⁸ What is important to notice in this passage is that the terms “right” and “just” have the force of ethical norms.⁷⁹ This is seen first by their connection with the

⁷⁸Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269. Although every vice of Sodom is not enumerated in detail, one becomes aware that the city is morally corrupt. The lesson to Abraham appears to be both in the patient process of justice and the moral perversity that God detests. In this case Abraham learns what is right and just by contrasting it to evil and learning that such behavior is abhorrent to God (Gen 19:20-21). Keil states, “The destruction of Sodom and the surrounding cities was to be a permanent memorial of the punitive righteousness of God, and to keep the fate of the ungodly constantly before the mind of Israel. To this end Jehovah explained to Abraham the cause of their destruction in the clearest manner possible, that he might not only be convinced of the justice of the divine government, but might learn that when the measure of iniquity was full, no intercession could avert the judgment—a lesson and a warning to his descendants also” (Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 230).

⁷⁹Scullion notes that in Gen 30:33 הַצְּדִיקָה (“righteousness”) refers to right conduct or honesty as when Jacob says to Laban, “My הַצְּדִיקָה will answer for me later.” Clearly, a moral norm is at work here. What is significant in God’s dealings with Sodom is that the righteousness of man is tied to God’s just behavior with Sodom so that God becomes the pattern of man’s righteousness. This concept is important because it points to an ethical norm in God by which he judges man’s actions and by which he expects man

phrase “to keep the way of the Lord.” In Scripture, keeping the way of the Lord is a metaphor for the whole course of life lived in conformity to God’s covenant (Ps 18:21-22).⁸⁰ The phrase “doing what is right and just” is also used in other portions of Scripture to describe the enactment of justice by following God’s law.⁸¹ For instance, in Ezekiel 18:5-9, doing justice and righteousness is equated with following God’s decrees. Moreover, doing justice and righteousness often includes the ruling activity of kings whose job it is to preserve and restore right order in society.⁸² For instance in Jeremiah 22:3-4 God gives the following command to kings:

to judge himself. See Noel David Freeman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Righteousness,” by J. J. Scullion.

⁸⁰Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269.

⁸¹The most frequent parallel to the term צדק is the term משפּט judgment (used approximately 80 times). When used this way the terms are nearly synonymous with the term משפּט, conveying the idea of decision, judgment, and law while the term צדק focuses on what is right or correct. See Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 12, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988–99), s.v. “צדק,” by Bo Johnson. This use of the terms is significant because the New Perspective constantly speaks of God’s covenant faithfulness as his righteousness. However, the term בריה converges with the term צדק only 7 times in the Old Testament. As a result, as Seifrid notes, it is misleading to speak of God’s righteousness as his covenant faithfulness. Instead the frequent association of righteous language with ruling and judging language suggests the imposition of God’s rule by means of a standard. For instance, in Isaiah 26:9 one reads, “When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.” The idea conveyed is that when God imposes his rule then his standards of righteousness are understood. All of these ideas point to a righteous norm in God by which he will judge and rule the earth (see also Ps 94:15; Job 8:3; 2 Sam 8:15; Isa 58:2). In this regard, God’s law is characterized as his righteous law (Ps 119:7, 62, 106, 164). See Mark A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 423–30.

⁸²Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” 427. According to Seifrid’s article, one need not choose between the conventional scholarly view of righteousness as covenant faithfulness and righteousness as an ethical norm in God. Instead, both are true. In his acts of deliverance to save the

This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace.

Therefore, it is clear that keeping the way of the Lord is accomplished by doing what is just and right, which is none other than applying God's law to every setting of life (Ps 119; Isa 58:1-12). Of course, in the passage before us, the law has not yet been delivered. Nevertheless this passage clearly points to God who is the exemplary judge over the affairs of men, in this case Sodom. This truth is seen in Abraham's dialogue with God. In a bold appeal for Sodom (Gen 19:23-25), Abraham asks God three times, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham is appealing to the moral integrity of God. It would be unthinkable that the judge of the earth would abandon the distinction between good and evil and sweep away all alike. This argument assumes a moral rectitude in God himself from which human judgments draw their standards (Deut 32:4; Zeph 3:5).⁸³ As Hartley says, "Petition gains power by appealing to God's essential nature and to the fundamental way he rules."⁸⁴ God's nature is the standard from which human justice springs.

Abraham is articulating the principle that justice begins with Yahweh, who first exemplifies the love of righteousness (Ps 33:5). It then proceeds to the king or judge

righteous, God at the same time judges and punishes the wicked and restores right order to all facets of life by the application of his righteous norms reflected in the law. Therefore, we may speak of a righteous God who delivers the righteous and punishes the wicked (Ps 7, 11). Ibid., 430.

⁸³Israelite judges were expected to condemn the wicked and acquit the righteous (Deut 25:1; Exod 23:6-7; Prov 17:15). See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 52. In Ps 45:1, God is pictured as the great judge who loves righteousness and hates iniquity. As such he cannot fail to distinguish between good and evil.

⁸⁴Hartley, *Genesis*, 182.

(Ps 45:6-7; Isa 9:6-7) and finally flows to the people, where it permeates all of society (Ezek 18:5-9).⁸⁵ Therefore, Abraham ends his case with the statement: “Will not the judge of all the earth do right?” Clowney, referring to God’s perfect standard of justice, states,

Abraham’s appeal would bind God to absolute standards of justice, yet these are God’s own standards: he is the supreme and universal judge. Further, God is the judge, not as the sovereign of a world empire might be, but as the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth. In contrast to the treachery, injustice, and oppression brought on Jerusalem by her human rulers, there stands the perfect justice of God.⁸⁶

Abraham is appealing to God’s inherent ethical standard of righteousness, his just character, which is the standard of justice in the case against Sodom.⁸⁷ This is none other than his love for righteousness and hatred of iniquity that finds expression in his revealed law in the Old Testament (Ps 119). Psalm 11:7 states this truth about God clearly when it says, “For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.”

The fact that Abraham is appealing to an ethical standard of righteousness that is inherent in the nature of God is an important conclusion because it challenges the current scholarly view that God’s righteousness is simply God’s covenant fidelity. Indeed Dunn, relying on the work of Hermann Cremer, defines God’s righteousness primarily as a relational concept when he states the following: “God is righteous not because he satisfies some ideal of justice external to himself. Rather, God is righteous when he fulfills the obligation he took upon himself to be Israel’s God. That means, in rescuing Israel and in punishing Israel’s enemies (e.g., Exod 9:27; 1 Sam 12:7; Dan 9:16;

⁸⁵Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” 427.

⁸⁶Clowney, “The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” 21.

⁸⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 270.

Mic 6:5).”⁸⁸ Dunn is adamant that God’s righteousness is not the satisfaction of a moral norm but God’s faithfulness to his covenant.

However, Genesis 18 clearly challenges Dunn’s conclusion. Speaking of Abraham, Genesis 18:19 states, “For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised to him.” In this passage, the concept of righteousness clearly holds forth the idea of an ethical norm. As demonstrated above, the context clearly suggests that God is upholding a standard in his judgment of Sodom that will be used by Abraham’s descendants and inculcated later in the law.⁸⁹ God himself abides by this standard of judgment and expects Israel to do the same. By judging Sodom God exemplifies, albeit in a negative way, what is right and just. Moreover, according to this passage, this is similar to a test case in law. Therefore, it holds importance for future generations. God himself is revealing the standard of justice by which future judgments are to be made. Therefore, while the concept of righteousness may include God’s covenant faithfulness, it is incorrect to say that it excludes the idea of an ethical norm.⁹⁰

Having stated that he will make an example of Sodom and Gomorrah, God now proceeds to the case against the cities. Genesis 18:20 states, “Then the Lord said, ‘The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I

⁸⁸James D. G. Dunn, “The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (January 1992): 16–17. See also Hermann Cremer, *Die Paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre Im Zusammenhange Ihrer Geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1900).

⁸⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 268–70.

⁹⁰For a detailed study on this matter, see Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” 415–42. For a lexical study, see Johnson, “קִדְּוָה”; and Scullion, “Righteousness.”

will know.” Several terms in this text signal the approaching judgment of God. The term “outcry,” used in verse 20, is similar to the outcry of Abel’s blood in Genesis 4:10. It refers to the travesty of the unpunished sin of Sodom that cries out to God for vengeance.⁹¹ More specifically, it could refer to the plight of the innocent victims of Sodom’s decadent society. In Scripture, an outcry generally comes from the weak, oppressed, or disenfranchised. It is the obligation of anyone within hearing to come and give help. Otherwise, God himself becomes the last hope of these victims (Jer 20:8; Job 19:7; Hab 1:2).⁹² In either case, the term “outcry” is significant because it is clear evidence that God does not simply forget or ignore sin. As Keil states, “The cry is an appeal for vengeance or punishment, which ascends to heaven (Gen 4:10).” Like the sin of Cain, the sin of Sodom is crying to God for retribution. This is an important point because it contradicts the idea that God’s wrath is relationally, not retributively based. For instance, Green and Baker state, “Pervasively in the Old Testament, God’s wrath is relationally based, not retributively motivated—that is, it is oriented toward the restoration or protection of God’s people, not toward retaliation and payback.”⁹³ However, from this section of Scripture it is very difficult to see how one can classify this example of God’s wrath as restorative since God’s plan is to annihilate the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moreover, as stated above, because this incident serves as a test case for future generations, it would seem to indicate that retributive justice will be central in God’s dealings with Israel. Therefore, Green and Baker’s analysis that God’s justice in the Old Testament is relational, not retributive, seems to hit wide of the mark.

⁹¹Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 50.

⁹²Hartley, *Genesis*, 181.

⁹³Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 72.

Resuming the analysis of the text, the additional terms “great” and “grievous” are used to describe the gravity of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. The phraseology is similar to the terminology used in the flood (Gen 6:5) and indicates that the cities are in grave peril. There is a note of grief and indignation that signals that God’s heart is moved and that the matters being dealt with are weighty. As in the case of the flood, this text informs us that God is not forced into a state of judgment by an external standard of justice. Instead, God’s very nature demands that sin be punished. As a result God determines to make a punitive example of Sodom and Gomorrah, one that will stand for all time.

Finally, the fact that God states that “he will go down and see if what they (Sodom) have done is as bad as the outcry” indicates the deliberative nature of God as he investigates the matter. As pointed out in the flood narrative, God is communicating that his judgments are not capricious but based upon solid evidence.⁹⁴ This idea is especially evident in Abraham’s dialogue with God where he patiently allows Abraham to bargain for the salvation of Sodom. The very fact that God would spare such a sinful city for the sake of ten righteous people not only displays his mercy but illustrates the value he places upon godly behavior. This point is very important because critics tend to characterize retributive justice as a display of petulant anger unworthy of the God of the Bible. For instance, Green and Baker write, “It is worth noting that God’s “personality,” so to speak, is not one quickly or impulsively given to anger or retribution. . . . The “wrath of God” is for Paul, not an affective response on the part of God, not the striking out of a vengeful God. As we have indicated, Paul’s concern is not with retributive punishment.”⁹⁵ Green and Baker pejoratively characterize retributive justice by describing it as impulsive, vengeful, and quick-tempered. The idea communicated is that God would

⁹⁴Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269.

⁹⁵Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 72, 122.

never behave in such a thoughtless and volatile way. Indeed, one must agree with Green and Baker if this is how one defines retributive justice. However, according to this section of Scripture, God's retributive justice is quite different from Green and Baker's description. God is not impulsive or quick-tempered but instead is deliberate in his judgment, patient in waiting for repentance, and full of mercy to Lot and his family. In contrast to Green and Baker, Waltke aptly summarizes God's justice when he states,

It is now established that the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, the paradigm for God's future judgments, is just. The Lord investigates the accusations thoroughly (18:22), ensures two objective witnesses, involves the faithful in his judgment, displays active compassion for the suffering, and prioritizes divine mercy over indignant wrath (i.e., not to be destroyed if even ten are righteous). The Lord himself will not appear again in this act; in the next scene he will rain down the judgment from heaven (see 19:24).⁹⁶

Therefore, Green and Baker are again wide of the mark because they have failed to account properly for God's justice in a seminal portion of Scripture.

In summary, God's retributive justice is evident along several fronts. First, the text clearly indicates that God's judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah is a direct result of their great sin (Gen 18:20). Moreover, because the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is complete, it can only be understood as retributive. Of course, the cities do become a deterrent to future generations. However, the judgment itself is clearly punitive. Second, this text indicates, as in the flood pericope, that the grounding of God's judgment is in God himself, namely, in his nature. In judging and punishing the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, God is acting according to an internal, not an external standard of righteousness. This is indicated by the use of terminology that indicates that the sin of Sodom is an affront to the nature of God. The fact that the sin of Sodom is crying out to God seems to indicate that God must confront the situation. Additionally, because God himself is the exemplar judge in this passage, his righteous standard of judgment becomes the norm for all future judgments in Israel. As indicated above, this clearly calls

⁹⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 271.

into question the critics' understanding of God's righteousness as only his covenant faithfulness.⁹⁷ Third, the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah illustrates the mercy and patience of God with sinners. The fact that God goes down to Sodom to investigate the case is meant to emphasize that his judgments are not capricious but based on complete knowledge of the facts at hand. Moreover, the fact that God allows Abraham to negotiate for the life of Sodom is an indication of his mercy and his value of even a few righteous inhabitants.

Conclusions from Genesis. In retrospect, the three incidents discussed in this section—the fall, the flood, and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah—communicate important truths concerning the nature of God. First, these incidents illustrate the basic doctrine of God's retributive justice. In each case God makes it clear that man's sin has resulted in God's specific act of judgment. Retributive justice is especially evident in the fall in that God's judgment is visited not only upon Adam but also upon his descendants (Rom 5). In this case retribution is comprehensive. Moreover, the particular way in which each judgment is tailored to the recipients underlines the meticulous nature of God's retributive justice. All of life is cursed because of the fall. In the case of the flood and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah we gain the additional insight that sin is an act

⁹⁷The term used in Gen 18:25 is *משפט* not *צדק*. Therefore, technically the translation is "Will not the judge of all the earth do justice?" However, given the parallel usage of *משפט* and *צדק* in the Gen 18:19 (see n. 81 above) and the fact that Israel's future *צדק* is determined by God's judgment of Sodom, it seems clear that the concept of a righteous standard inherent in God is taught by this passage and communicated by the term, *משפט*. Hence the translation "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" Perhaps this inherent righteousness in God is an indication of an oversight by the critics (mentioned above) in that (as stated earlier) it attempts to associate the term *ברית* with *צדק* when the biblical data actually associates *משפט* with *צדק* in a majority of the cases. The combination of these terms (judgment and righteousness) indicates a standard imposed by a judge rather than the idea of covenant faithfulness (Ps 94:15; Deut 32:4; Zeph 3:5; Isa 9:6-7). The concept that God the king and judge will restore order by imposing his righteous rule upon the earth is a concept clearly taught in Scripture (Ps 2, Isa 9, Dan 7). See Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 270.

that grieves the very heart of God. In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sins of the cities literally cry out to God for retribution. This fact is an indication that God will not be indifferent to evil. Instead, God's judgment proceeds from his very nature, not an external standard of justice. Sin is an affront to the holy character of God.

A second insight one gains from these passages is that God's judgment is deliberative. God is not a God of petulant rage but a divine judge who is fully informed before he passes judgment. In each incident God makes it clear that he thoroughly understands the facts involved in the issue. Concerning the fall, God interrogates Adam and Eve to expose their sin. At the flood God is described as "seeing" the greatness of man's sin. Concerning the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, God sends two angels to the city of Sodom to confirm his knowledge of their transgressions. In each case God shows himself to be a just party who judges righteously and thus leaves man with no excuse.

A third fact one gains from an examination of Genesis is that God loves righteousness. This truth is especially evident in God's dealing with man at the flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah. God spares Noah because of his (imperfect) righteous behavior. In addition, God is willing to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous people can be found. When one considers the degree to which sin grieves the heart of God, and that man's righteous behavior is imperfect at best, God must truly delight in righteousness in order to spare man his wrath. Again, this is another indication that God's judgment proceeds from his nature not an external standard.

A fourth insight that one gains from these texts is that God is a God of mercy. Although the concept of mercy was not the focus of the previous discussion, nevertheless in each incident God provides for the continuation of a remnant after judgment is passed. In the case of Adam and Eve, God promises a godly seed that will continue in spite of his curse. In the case of the flood, God saves Noah and his family alone from among the inhabitants of the earth. In the case of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot is

rescued with his daughters from the fires of destruction. However, it is imperative to note that salvation occurs in the context of judgment. God does not simply ignore sin. He judges it, eradicating evil and rescuing a remnant out of his judgment.

The final point is that God is a God of righteous judgment. This attribute is most clearly indicated by the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here we learn that God is the exemplar judge who bears in his nature the standard of righteousness. As stated earlier, the terminology used in Genesis 18 indicates that righteousness bears the idea of a norm rather than the idea of covenant faithfulness. God clearly indicates that his action of judging Sodom and Gomorrah will become an example of what it is to keep his way by doing what is just and right. From the context it becomes clear that this text teaches that God himself is the standard for man's righteousness. This standard includes the concept of retribution as it is visited upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In summary, it is important to note that all three incidents in the previous discussion, the fall, the flood, and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah are exemplary retributive judgments meant to shed light on God's future dealings with man. The fall explains the presence of sin and the reality of God's curse upon the created order. The flood becomes a paradigm for God's cataclysmic judgments upon Israel and his final judgment upon the earth (Isa 54:7-9; 24:18). The judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah displays God as the exemplary judge who is the standard of Israel's righteousness. These incidents, rather than being isolated events, are meant to define God's nature for future generations of Israelites.

The Mosaic Covenant

The concept of covenant is a major organizing principle in the Old Testament.⁹⁸ This can be confirmed simply by observing the fact that the New Testament

⁹⁸For a discussion of the concept of God's covenant with Israel, see Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 25–30; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic*

references the Old Covenant numerous times (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:14; Gal 4:24; Heb 7:22; 8:6, 9; 9:1, 4, 15, 20; 10: 29).⁹⁹ The author of Hebrews seems to have a special interest in this concept because he employs the Greek term 17 times as compared to the 16 times it is used in the rest of the New Testament.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, in the Old Testament the concept of covenant appears often and in prominent places in God's interaction with man. For instance, it appears in God's dealings with Noah as God promises never again to send a flood upon the earth (Gen 9:8-17). It surfaces in God's dealings with Abraham as God unilaterally promises to bless Abraham and his descendants and in turn all nations through him (Gen 15).¹⁰¹ It appears again in messianic form in God's dealings with David as the Lord promises to establish David's kingdom forever (2 Sam 7). Finally, the concept of covenant is employed to foreshadow the blessings of Christ as a new covenant appears on the horizon in Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-33). However, it is the Mosaic Covenant that garners the most attention when one speaks of the concept of covenant in the Old Testament. Indeed, one could say that the Mosaic Covenant is a primary organizing principle of the Old Testament because in it God reveals specifically what it means to be in relationship with himself. It is in anticipation of the Mosaic covenant that God separates Israel as a nation for his own possession by removing her from the shackles of Egypt. It is in preparation for this covenant that God

Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 65–111; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 36–45; and Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 511.

⁹⁹Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 65.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹It is in the Abrahamic covenant that one encounters the cutting in two of the animal sacrifice. This cutting ritual seems to be an invocation of the fate of the divided animal upon the one who would dare break the covenant agreement. See Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 68.

graciously gives the Law to Israel, binding himself to her and commanding her complete allegiance through blood ratification (Exod 24:8). It is in fulfillment of this covenant that God draws near to his people by dwelling in her midst as the cloud of glory settles upon the tabernacle, symbolizing the very presence of God within the midst of Israel. Indeed, the whole purpose of the Book of Exodus is to reach this climactic event described in Exodus 29:45 and fulfilled in Exodus 40:34: “They (Israel) 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. . . . Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

The gracious presence of God with his people is at the heart of the Mosaic covenant. As Eichrodt says, “The covenant knows not only of a demand, but also a promise: ‘You shall be my people and I will be your God.’” However, as indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the promise poses the peril. God’s very presence threatens the undoing of Israel. Indeed, as God draws near to sinful Israel his holiness manifest itself in retributive justice. Therefore, in the Book of Exodus the theology of God’s retributive justice is deepened as God reveals himself to Israel. The purpose of this section will be to examine the nature of God’s retributive justice as it unfolds around the covenant. Specifically, we shall examine God’s retributive justice in relation to the Passover (which prefaces the Mosaic Covenant), the curses of the Mosaic covenant, the priesthood of the Mosaic covenant, and the sacrificial system of the Mosaic covenant.

The Passover. The Passover is clearly linked to and prefaces the Mosaic Covenant. There are two reasons for making this claim. First, during the Passover God’s final judgment is executed against Egypt, which results in Israel’s release from bondage. Therefore, the Passover anticipates the climactic event in which Israel will leave Egypt for the purpose of being constituted a nation dedicated to God by means of the covenant ceremony. Second, the Passover, along with circumcision, becomes a permanent

ordinance in the life of Israel to commemorate her deliverance from bondage (Exod 12:14). The Passover ordinance is given specifically so that the Israelites will remember both their deliverance by God and therefore his claim upon their lives (Exod 12:26-27). God has purchased Israel as a people for his own possession. Indeed, the preface to the Ten Commandments begins with this very claim upon Israel's life, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:2-3). Therefore, the Passover and the related deliverance that comes out of God's judgment upon the Egyptians is like a preamble to the Covenant, both of which lay claim to the very heart and soul of Israel.

In the Passover God's retributive justice is clearly evident when he executes judgment against Egypt and against the gods in which she trusts. Exodus 12:12 states the following: "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord."¹⁰² However, it is not simply the firstborn of Egypt that are at stake in God's Passover judgment. Israel's firstborn are liable to the same fate if they do not meet God's condition of sacrifice. A lamb must be slaughtered, and the blood of the lamb must be applied to the doorposts of each home in order for Israel to escape the same judgment. That Israel would suffer the same fate without the Passover sacrifice is evident in the Passover instructions that God gives to Moses. Exodus 12:13 states the following: "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt." Unless the blood is on the doorposts Israel's first-born will die. It is clearly the blood symbolizing the death of the Passover lamb that spares Israel's firstborn from the

¹⁰²Keil notes that in slaying the firstborn of Pharaoh and many of the firstborn animals the Lord struck the Egyptian gods who were worshiped in their kings and certain sacred animals. Therefore, the blow by God was both a judgment against the Egyptians and their gods. See Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 19.

destructive plague of God's judgment that he will execute upon Egypt.¹⁰³ Indeed, the very name of Passover would seem to indicate the withholding of God's retributive justice against Israel's first-born because God passes over Israel, thereby sparing them his wrath.¹⁰⁴ As Peterson states,

With the last and most terrible plague, however, Israel is only delivered by obedience to the Lord's command and by the fulfillment of this sacrificial ritual. The Passover is more than a demonstration of God's love. The blood averts the judgement of God (12:12-13), and this deliverance initiates the whole process by which God brings the Israelites out of Egypt and enables them to function as his chosen people (12:50-13:16).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³Some have used Lev 17:11 to suggest that sacrifice, in releasing the blood of the sacrificial animal, releases its life from the physical body and presents it to God. In so doing, the sacrifice somehow becomes a life-giving energy for others. According to this understanding, no idea of propitiation is present. Lev 17:11 states, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." The idea that sacrifice releases life can be traced to B. F. Westcott. However, this claim is highly debatable. Alan Stibbs, in a thorough examination of the Old Testament, has demonstrated that the term "blood" functions as a symbol for death. Leon Morris has conducted a similar study and comes to the same conclusion. Moreover, Morris notes the obvious fact that in Lev 17:11 the life of the sacrifice ceases to exist when the blood is poured out. Nowhere is there an allusion to a post-physical existence of the sacrificial animal that is somehow presented to God. To see this is to read more than is in the text. Moreover, it is clear that in all the Old Testament sacrifices the sacrificial blood is obtained by killing the sacrificial animal. This suggests that life rather than death is presented to God in Hebrew sacrifice is to depart from the overwhelming evidence of Scripture and the Hebrew mindset. Moreover, in relation to the specific Passover text being considered, Morris's comment is very helpful. Concerning Exod 12:13, Morris writes, "It is impossible to understand from the splashing of blood on the lintel and doorposts that a life is being presented to anyone. The obvious symbolism is that a death has taken place, and this death substitutes for the death of the firstborn" (Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 121). See B. F. Westcott, *Commentary on the Epistles of John* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1883), 34ff.; A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture* (London: Tyndale Press, 1973); and Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 117. For a full discussion of the matter discussed above, see Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture*; Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 112–28; and John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 179–81.

¹⁰⁴For a discussion of the term "Passover," see Peter Enns, *Exodus: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 248

However, at this point an important question arises. Why would God threaten to judge the very people he seeks to deliver? Israel, thus far, has committed no flagrant sin. Why should she suffer the same judgment God will bring upon Egypt? The answer, although not yet apparent, will surface later in the book of Exodus as Israel's latent idolatry surfaces. Israel had been in Egypt for four hundred years, and it was inevitable that she would fall prey to the idolatrous practices of the Egyptians. Indeed, Israel's behavior at the golden calf incident (Exod 32) seems to illustrate clearly that she was well-versed in the worship of pagan gods. Therefore, Israel is guilty and just as deserving of God's judgment as Egypt (compare Ezek 20:4-10; Deut 9:4-27).¹⁰⁶ It is only through the Passover sacrifice that God's wrath is diverted and Israel is spared. Of course, this assumes that the Passover sacrifice propitiates wrath.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, when one reads the text

¹⁰⁵Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 4.

¹⁰⁶Belousek disputes this argument, noting that the text of Genesis cites no sin worthy of death for Israel's firstborn. However, given the behavior that will occur after the Exodus, it is difficult to imagine that Israel's firstborn were model Hebrew citizens. For this reason, Belousek's argument is unconvincing. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 159-67; T. D. Alexander, "The Passover Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 17.

¹⁰⁷John Goldingay disputes this claim. According to Goldingay, the blood of the Passover lamb serves only as a marker to distinguish the Israelites from the Egyptians. Goldingay even suggests that God, in this case, suspends his omniscience and prefers to see physically and distinguish Israelite homes from Egyptian. Goldingay, in another discussion of Old Testament sacrifice, does not allow for the idea of propitiating God's wrath. Instead he sees sacrifice as gift-giving, cleansing/restoration, a way of enabling movement between this world and the realm of the holy, and a way of handling violence in the community. However, this passage directly associates the diversion of God's wrath with the Passover sacrifice. It is because of the Passover blood that God's judgment is turned away. Therefore, it is difficult to understand how Goldingay can assert that the blood is only a marker that God uses to distinguish Israel from Egypt. Indeed, the blood of the sacrifice turns away judgment, which is at the heart of the concept of substitution and propitiation. See John Goldingay, *Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone*, *The Old Testament for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 56-57; idem, "Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ," in *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St John's College, Nottingham*, ed. John Goldingay (London:

no other interpretation seems possible.¹⁰⁸ The angel of death passes over the homes of the Israelites whose doorposts are swabbed in the blood of a lamb, which is slain to protect the firstborn of Israel. All who do not follow this practice suffer God's judgment. As Morris states, "The obvious symbolism is that a death has taken place, and this death substitutes for the death of the firstborn."¹⁰⁹ It is the blood of the Passover lamb that averts the judgment of God."¹¹⁰ Waltke summarizes this passage well:

None can escape this final and decisive divine judgment on wickedness. No pharaoh, no deity, no status can provide protection. Not even Israel is exempt apart from the Passover blood, for they too have been unfaithful (Exod 6:9; cf. Deut 9:4-27). Deliverance rests solely on Israel's trusting God's Passover provision. Israel is delivered because a death that satisfied God's wrath has been made and applied by faith.¹¹¹

Therefore, the Passover, precisely because it averts the wrath of God's judgment upon Israel, is a clear example of God's retributive justice visited upon a sacrificial substitute.¹¹²

However, this point is precisely where Green and Baker misinterpret the images of the Exodus account. In their eagerness to focus on the deliverance theme

SPCK., 1995), 3–20; idem, "Your Iniquities Have Made a Separation between You and Your God," in *Atonement Today*, 39–53.

¹⁰⁸Morris notes that most rabbinic scholars by the time of the closing of the Old Testament believed that all sacrifices, including the Passover, were propitiatory. When one considers Lev 17:11, this conclusion seems valid. Moreover, this seems to be how the apostle Paul understood the Passover (1 Cor 5:7). For a full discussion including references to Rabbinic passages, see Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 130–31.

¹⁰⁹Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 121.

¹¹⁰Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 37.

¹¹¹Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 381.

¹¹²For a discussion of how the Passover relates to penal substitution, see Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 37–38.

presented in Israel's emancipation from Egypt, Green and Baker fail to understand the seminal event of the Passover and thus place in the background any idea of God's retributive justice that would come into view. Moreover, this concept of deliverance is then used to interpret the death of Jesus and thus minimize the role that atoning sacrifice plays in Christ's death. For instance, In reference to the Last Supper, Green and Baker state the following:

The controlling images found in both the ransom saying and the words of Jesus at the Last Supper derive from reflections of the exodus story. The most prominent echoes of Israel's past, then, would center not on the problem of sins *per se*—nor, then, on the need for a sacrifice to deal with sin. What are at stake, rather, are images of deliverance, the generation of the community of God's people and the formation of that community's identity.¹¹³

What Green and Baker fail to point out is that Israel's deliverance from Egypt is prefaced by the Passover sacrifice, which functions to deliver Israel's first-born from the wrath of God. Without this initial deliverance, Israel will suffer God's destructive judgment in the same manner as Egypt. Moreover, the redemptive nature of the Passover is re-emphasized in the ceremony of the consecration of the first-born of Israel (Exod 13:11-16). Every first-born male Israelite must be redeemed by sacrifice. Indeed every first-born male of the livestock must be redeemed or killed. The explanation of this ceremony is as follows (Exod 11:14): "In the days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'" Therefore, the redemption of the first-born stood as a constant reminder of both the sacrifice and deliverance that took place at the first Passover.¹¹⁴ As a result, to focus solely upon deliverance or the formation of the community's identity is to misrepresent this seminal event. Indeed, the New Testament seems to place the Passover sacrifice at the forefront in interpreting the Exodus. For instance, when Jesus

¹¹³Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 64.

¹¹⁴Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 37.

institutes the Lord's Supper he uses the sacrificial imagery of the Passover as the interpretive key (Luke 22:14-20), not the simple image of deliverance as Green and Baker suggest. Moreover, Paul follows the same example in the Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:7; 11:23). Therefore, to separate the theme of deliverance from the sacrificial Passover theme, as Green and Baker do, is something that the Bible never does. Deliverance and sacrifice belong together in the Exodus account.

In summary, once again one sees God demonstrating both justice and mercy in the Passover event. Justice is shown to Egypt as her first-born suffer God's wrath. However, justice is also served in the case of Israel as a substitute takes her place in the form of the Passover lamb to suffer God's wrath. Yet at the same time mercy is displayed in God's gracious provision for Israel's sin. As a result God's holiness is satisfied and Israel is saved from God's judgment. This pattern will continue in the Mosaic covenant and ultimately be demonstrated in the cross of Christ (1 Cor 5:7).

The curses of the Mosaic Covenant. As one considers the Mosaic covenant, God's retributive justice is evident on a number of levels. Recent research on the literary form of Deuteronomy has revealed that retributive justice is built into the very structure of the covenant itself. For example, Meredith Kline has demonstrated that Deuteronomy is a covenant renewal document very similar in structure to the treaties of the ancient Near East.¹¹⁵ Additionally, within the structure of the ancient treaty documents both blessings and curses are enumerated in order to emphasize the necessity of adhering to

¹¹⁵Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King; The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963). See also Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, *Anelecta Biblica* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963); J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 19–26; and Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 24–29.

the stipulations of the treaty. The Book of Deuteronomy reproduces this aspect of the ancient Near Eastern treaty in rather detailed fashion (Deut 28). Moreover, although Deuteronomy places the blessings of the covenant at the beginning of the stipulation section, nevertheless, it devotes most of the chapter to the enumeration of the divine curses (Deut 28:15-68). As a result, the emphasis falls heavily upon the cataclysmic consequences of breaking the covenant and the resulting terror that God will bring upon the nation as a whole.¹¹⁶ So then, the very form of the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy is structured to emphasize the retributive justice of God.

If the form of Deuteronomy reveals God's retributive justice then the content drives the point home with utter seriousness. Deuteronomy 28 has five sections (20-26; 27-37; 38-48; 49-57; 58-68) in which siege and exile repeatedly appear as the climax of unfaithfulness to God's covenant.¹¹⁷ This fact is significant because banishment from the promised inheritance signifies the loss of God's special presence, the loss of access to his person through the Levitical priesthood, and loss of the special status as God's kingdom people.¹¹⁸ It is essentially the return of Israel to the former state she suffered under the rule of Egypt. Further, the point is clearly made that it is God himself who will avenge his oath by visiting a series of disasters upon Israel until she is utterly destroyed by epidemic drought, and war (Deut 28:20-26). As Kline argues, "It was the right and duty of the forsaken Lord himself, the One to whom and by whom Israel swore the covenant oath, to avenge the oath. Whatever the human or earthly origin of the several curses, the Lord was their ultimate author."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 124.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 126.

The greatness of God's wrath and judgment are driven home as the chapter provides vivid detail of the suffering Israel will endure if she forsakes her God. Israel's demise is no simple, quick execution. Rather, she is made to suffer a slow and agonizing death that destroys her dignity and place of privilege. God will drive her to madness, afflict her with incurable disease, and cause all of her endeavors to end in futility (Deut 28:27-37). He will subject her to harsh servitude and leave her in poverty through the pillage of war so that in the end she is reduced to cannibalism (Deut 28:49-57). Finally, God will scatter Israel to the wind, turning her over to pagan idolatry so that she is indistinguishable from the nations from which she came (Deut 28:58-68). The picture described in this chapter is one of vivid agony and woe in which Israel is incessantly pursued by the vengeance of God until she is utterly consumed by his wrath.¹²⁰ Again, one is brought face-to-face with God's utter hatred of sin that comes to light in Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness to God's covenant. This truth does not negate the mercy of God. Indeed, at the end of the initial enumeration of the curses (Lev 26) Israel is told that if she cries to God in the midst of her distress he will hear. God's mercy is available and overflowing. However, for Israel to receive God's mercy she must come to terms with the gravity of her sin by confessing it, humbling herself before God, and making restitution. Leviticus 26:40-41 states,

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers - their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob.

It should be noted that while the above text clearly affirms God's mercy, it also clearly affirms his opposition to sin by declaring God's hostility toward Israel because of her rebellion. As seen in the previous text (Deut 28), this hostility is no quick flash of anger that God easily forgets. Instead, his wrath is intense and enduring until Israel is

¹²⁰Ibid., 125–29.

destroyed or until repentance occurs and payment for sin is made.¹²¹ The history of Israel bears this truth out. One need only read the book of Judges or the history of Israel in the book of Kings to see the vengeance of God enacted, a vengeance that ultimately ends in the Babylonian exile. Indeed, the prophets, to a great extent, simply preach these very blessings and curses to Israel in order to bring her to repentance.¹²²

In light of these texts it is difficult to understand why many critics of God's retributive justice attempt to minimize the seriousness of God's wrath in the Old Testament. For instance, in a reference to Exodus 34:6-7, Goldingay states the following:

In Yhwh, tagging along behind compassion, grace, patience, commitment, steadfastness and a willingness to carry waywardness, comes an insistence on not acquitting and a determination to let the consequences of waywardness run through the family. Yhwh's self-description does not clarify how these two sets of inclinations interrelate except by implying that the first set has priority. The first comes more naturally, but Yhwh is capable of implementing the second.¹²³

¹²¹In his commentary on Leviticus, Goldingay compares the curses in Lev 26 to the chastisements of a parent. However, Lev 26:40-41 states something far more serious. What is described in Lev 26 and Deut 28 is the intense wrath of a holy God as he encounters sin. God's hostility is caused by the severe nature of the curses enumerated in the chapters, and it is the same holiness that Isaiah encounters (and fears) as he enters God's presence (Isa 6:5). See Goldingay, *Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone*, 186.

¹²²In a discussion that includes the covenant curses (Deut 28), Belousek inappropriately characterizes God's wrath as optional and restorative. Belousek's assertion that God's wrath is optional is contradicted by the prominent passage in Exod 34:7 in which God promises punishment of the sinner to the third and fourth generations. Moreover, to characterize God's justice as simply restorative is reductionistic and does not do justice to the text of Deut 28 nor to the history of Israel (Exod 32-34; Judg 10:6-7; 2 Kgs 22:13; 2 Chr 36:16; Prov 11:23; Isa 5; Ezek 7:3; Zeph 1:15; Rom 3:19). Indeed, while God does show mercy in restoring his people, this restoration does not negate the necessity for his retributive justice (Rom 3:25-26). See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 413-19.

¹²³John Goldingay, *Israel's Life*, Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 598. For a similar comment on Exod 34:6-7 in which Green and Baker attempt to resolve God's justice into his love, see Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 68-70.

However, in light of the curses of the Mosaic covenant (Deut 28 and Lev 26) how can Goldingay characterize God's wrath as tagging along behind his mercy? Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 are fuller explanations of God's holy nature that is introduced in Exodus 34:6-7. It would seem, then, that one should instead say that God's wrath is as intense as his compassion and patience. Nevertheless, according to Goldingay's comment, wrath seems to be a secondary attribute when compared with his compassion.¹²⁴ The implication is that God's wrath is not to be taken as seriously as God's mercy. However, this line of reasoning is only partially true. It is correct to say that wrath is not a permanent attribute of God because wrath assumes sin, which also assumes the creation and fall of man. Nevertheless, God's wrath is based in the permanent attribute of holiness. God's wrath is simply an expression of God's holiness as God encounters sin.¹²⁵ When viewed from this perspective, God's wrath is every bit as serious and long-lasting as his compassion. That truth seems to be the point that Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, and Exodus 34:6-7 emphasize. God is holy and therefore will not tolerate sin. If God does show mercy it is not because wrath is somehow secondary and therefore less important to God than his mercy. This notion is the false

¹²⁴According to Goldingay, there are dominant and secondary aspects to God's character. Goldingay characterizes love as dominant and retributive justice as secondary. He bases this claim on Lam 3:33, which he translates, "Because it is not from the heart that he [God] afflicts or makes human beings suffer." Goldingay claims that this verse and the larger context in Lamentations teaches that God's punishment of sin does not come from his heart, his inner being. In other words, retributive justice does not arise from the primary nature of God. However, this interpretation is questionable. One should most likely understand this section of Lamentations not as instruction on God's inner being but as an affirmation that God does not take joy in the affliction of man. Moreover, Goldingay's position seems to be contradicted by a broader spectrum of biblical texts that affirm that sin is an affront to the very nature of God (Gen 6:5-7, 18:20-21; Lev 26; Deut 28). See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, trans. James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 416; and John Goldingay, *Israel's Faith*, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 165–66.

¹²⁵Hodge, *Theology*, 413, 422–23.

conclusion that Goldingay seems to draw. As a result Goldingay ends up minimizing the holiness of God. However, the Scriptures never draw this conclusion. Instead, the Scriptures present both wrath and mercy with equal seriousness because both flow with equal intensity from God's nature. If God chooses to show mercy it is never at the expense of holiness. Instead, mercy is informed by holiness so that the two meet in atoning sacrifice.¹²⁶

The breaking of the Mosaic covenant. From the curses of the Mosaic covenant one turns next to the breaking of the covenant as Israel commits the sin of idolatry and puts her existence as the people of God in jeopardy. Exodus 32-34 narrates the events, and it is here that the depths of God's wrath and the heights of his mercy are experienced by Israel in a manner that will clearly define the character of God for the Old Testament people.¹²⁷ The text itself can be divided into four sections: the sin of Israel (Exod 32:1-6), the retributive justice of God (Exod 32:7-33:3), the mercy of God (33:4-21), and the re-establishment of the covenant (34:1-28).¹²⁸

¹²⁶Ibid., 423.

¹²⁷Moberly argues that Exod 32-34 is a clearly defined literary/theological unit that is linked to what precedes (Exod 19-31) and follows (Exod 35-40) it. See R. W. L. Moberly, "At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 99 (1983), 44-45.

¹²⁸The setting of this text occurs after the ratification of the covenant on Sinai but before the actual construction of the tabernacle. Therefore, Exod 32-34 presupposes chaps. 19-31 in which Israel has entered into a covenant relationship with her God. At the heart of that relationship stands the law and the, as yet, unconstructed tabernacle (Exod 25-31). These facts are important because the law was given to Israel as her moral compass in the world and, more importantly, before God. Therefore, when we come to the present section, Israel stands fully aware of what God requires from her. In addition, Israel has committed herself to God in covenant obedience. She has taken a solemn oath ratified by the blood of the covenant that she will obey God (Exod 24). To complete this phase of God's plan for her she has only to receive the two tangible aspects of the covenant: the stone tablets and the tabernacle. The Stone tablets hold special significance because they serve not only as a summary reminder of the law but also as a

The first stage of the text introduces the reader to the sin of Israel as she makes the golden calf (Exod 32:1-6). One learns from the narrative that Moses stayed in the presence of the Lord for forty days receiving instructions concerning the tabernacle (Exod 24:18). During his extended absence the people become impatient, suspecting that some disaster has befallen Moses (Exod 32:1-2). As a result Aaron and the people conspire to make an idol (Exod 32:1). From the text, it appears that the idol not only served as a symbol for God, but because Moses mediated the divine presence and guidance, it was also intended as a replacement for Moses.¹²⁹ Because Israel seems to identify the golden calf with the Lord (Exod 32:4) and his representative (Moses), it would appear that the people are adopting a form of syncretism rather than opting for a completely new god.¹³⁰ Regardless of this point, Israel's sin is serious. Not only does she forget the great saving acts of the Lord in delivering her from Egypt. She also breaks the covenant by transgressing the first and second commandments, which forbid the making of idols.¹³¹ In essence, Israel has quickly turned her allegiance from the one true God to an image made by her own hands (Isa 44:15).

Stage 2 (Exod 32:7-33:3) is an important segment of the text because it details God's reaction to Israel's rebellion. Indeed, this section contains a rich mixture of God's

legal instrument that will bear witness to the people's commitment to God. The tabernacle will mediate God's presence among Israel so that she may approach him without fear. Therefore, it is with this background in mind that one now approaches the text in Exod 32-34. See Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 44-45.

¹²⁹Ibid., 46-47.

¹³⁰Pierre Berthoud, "The Compassion of God: Exodus 32: 5-9 in Light of Exodus 32-34," in *Engaging The Doctrine of God*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 149. Waltke sees Aaron as only attempting to represent the God of Israel by making the golden image. However, Waltke believes, because of the people's command in Exod 32:1 ("make us gods"), Israel was making a more extreme move by turning to a pantheon of gods. See Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 469.

¹³¹Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 149.

retributive justice combined with his mercy. First, we see the wrath of God that swiftly comes upon the people because of their disobedience. As Israel is in the midst of her sin, the omniscient God abruptly and indefinitely suspends his meeting with Moses, ordering him off the mountain (Exod 32:7). In reference to God's reaction Childs states, "In v.7 there is a harsh dissidence, as if he had suddenly broken off. There is no purpose in continuing with covenant laws when the covenant has been shattered."¹³² By despising the honor and glory of God the people have struck at the very heart of the covenant and must now face the consequences of God's justice.¹³³ As a result, God instructs Moses to leave him alone so that his anger may burn (Exod 32:10). God will destroy Israel and start over with Moses, building a new nation in place of the stiff-necked Israelites. Indeed, Moses would later remind the people that God was angry enough to destroy both Aaron and the people over Israel's infidelity (Deut 9:19-20). In summary, the situation is dire and the text emphasizes its seriousness numerous times (Exod 32:10, 33, 35; 33:3, 5).

However, in the midst of this very tense situation there is a ray of hope. In the very declaration of judgment there seems to be an open door for intercession. As Childs states,

Nevertheless, the classic Jewish interpreters have correctly sensed a profound paradox in Yahweh's response that runs through the Bible. God vows the severest punishment imaginable, but then suddenly he conditions it, as it were, on Moses'

¹³²Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 567.

¹³³Baloian notes that the often elaborate motive clauses in the Pentateuch serve to underscore that God is just in judging Israel. In the present text two reasons are given for Israel's destruction: her idolatry (Exod 32:7-8) and the fact that she is implacable (Exod 32:9). Indeed, in the entire Pentateuch every mention of God's wrath is associated with a motive clause. Moreover, the vast majority of the cases concern fidelity to God's will rather than social or economic oppression. See Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, 79.

agreement. “Let me alone that I may consume them.” The effect is that God himself leaves the door open for intercession.¹³⁴

Ironically, Israel in her most sinful moment is now in the position to receive the mercy of God, but she is in no place to ask for it. God is justly poised to deal a death blow to the entire nation unless intercession is made. It is into this tension-filled situation that Moses carefully intervenes as mediator between God and Israel. In fact, given what we know of God and his covenant faithfulness (Gen 15), it appears that God is actually orchestrating the situation so that Moses may intervene.¹³⁵ This idea is suggested by the fact that when Moses prays for God’s mercy he appeals to the very character of God in both maintaining his own glorious reputation before the nations and keeping the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 32:13).¹³⁶ Far from dishonoring himself by breaking faithfulness (as Israel has done), God is demonstrating his fidelity by providing intercession through the mediator, Moses. However, he does so in such a way that upholds the integrity of his holiness. In other words, there is a real tension that the text introduces between God’s mercy and his holy wrath that, at this point, is only partially resolved by the intervention of Moses.¹³⁷ Israel is in a very precarious situation in which

¹³⁴Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 567.

¹³⁵For a discussion of God’s faithfulness to the covenant in light of this passage, see Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 470; Berthoud, “The Compassion of God,” 151; and John Calvin, *Harmony of Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy*, vol. 3 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 343.

¹³⁶Moses also appeals to God’s glory by reminding him that if Israel is destroyed, Egypt will misunderstand his action and accuse him of being an angry, vengeful God (Exod 32:12). See Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 470.

¹³⁷Moberly notes that although God provides a way of escape from his judgment through the mediation of Moses, this in no way reduces the seriousness of the situation or the intensity of God’s wrath. Childs notes that the tension between God’s mercy and wrath is present in both the Old and New Testaments. See Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 50; and Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 599.

she is truly open to receive the grace of God, yet, at the same time, justly exposed to the fierce justice of God.

In light of the previous discussion, it is difficult to understand how critics refuse to see the uncompromising nature of God's anger in the Old Testament. For instance, in reference to God's wrath, Green and Baker state the following:

Whatever meaning atonement might have, it would be a grave error to imagine that it focused on assuaging God's anger or winning God's merciful attention. One by one, the stories of human rebellion in Genesis 3-11 (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the ark, Babel) indicate that the human proclivity toward sin is not matched by God's withdrawal. Rather, God draws near to see what humankind has done, pronounces judgment, but then, in gracious optimism and mercy tries again.¹³⁸

According to Green and Baker, God's wrath, while present, is clearly not a serious impediment to his presence or his plans for man. God simply wants to work out a secondary solution and try again. However, that is not how Exodus 32 presents the matter. According to the current text, God's anger directed against sinners is both intense and life-threatening. In this case, God threatens to destroy the entire nation and start over with Moses. It is only by an appeal to God's own glory and his faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant that Moses is able to save Israel (Exod 32:11-14). Therefore, to characterize this event as a gracious, optimistic attempt to try again seems to miss the point. Moreover, as we shall see, God threatens to withdraw his presence permanently from Israel's midst, an action that would directly contradict Green and Baker's statement. Therefore, as a result of the dire circumstances, Moses attempts to win God's merciful attention by intercession and disciplinary action of the people.

As Moses leaves God's presence and goes back down the mountain he sees firsthand the dire situation. God has relented of his immediate plan to destroy Israel and start over with Moses. However, nothing is resolved. The people are out of control both

¹³⁸Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 68.

religiously and morally.¹³⁹ Furious with Israel's behavior, Moses shatters the stone tablets, powerfully picturing the broken covenant between God and Israel. He then begins a series of actions intended to bring the tumultuous situation under control. First, he burns the golden calf, grinding it into a powdery substance that he forces the Israelites to drink (Exod 32:20).¹⁴⁰ Next, Moses interrogates Aaron, holding him accountable by attributing Israel's sin to a failure of his leadership. Finally, speaking prophetically for God, Moses orders the repentant Levites to execute God's judgment by traversing the camp, killing everyone in their path. The phrase used in the enactment of this punishment ("Thus says the Lord") is rare in the Pentateuch and proclaims the direct word of God; in this case the order to kill three thousand people.¹⁴¹

In spite of this display of vengeance, Moses does not consider the matter closed. The following day, in an address to the people, Moses underlines the severity of Israel's sin and openly determines to return to the presence of God in order to make restitution for the people. Moses will go to the point of offering his own life as an atonement for Israel, an offer that God roundly rejects (Exod 32:31-33). As Waltke states, "[Moses] asks that as a substitute for the people his name be blotted out of the 'book' that registers God's people (cf. Ps 56:8; Isa 4:3; Mal 3:16; cf. Rom 9:3). But Moses, unlike Christ, cannot make atonement. The ones who sinned will be blotted out of the 'book,' and I AM will strike them with a plague."¹⁴² God's judgment cannot be

¹³⁹Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 469.

¹⁴⁰Fretheim notes that not only is the calf destroyed. It suffers the ignominy of being reduced to human waste. Waltke sees the action of drinking the powder as a sign that Israel is bearing the burden of her sin before God (Num 5:11-28). See Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 288; and Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 470.

¹⁴¹Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 571.

stopped even by the life of Moses (Exod 32:33).¹⁴³ The guilty party will be punished.¹⁴⁴ As a result, God visits a plague upon the people of Israel (Exod 32:35).¹⁴⁵ Although the nation has not been obliterated, she is reeling under the wrath of God. Indeed, in a final demonstration of retribution and in an effort to spare her complete destruction God determines to remove himself from the midst of Israel. Exodus 33:3 states the following: “Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.”

In summary, God determines to lead Israel indirectly through an angel. However, the plans for his mediated presence through the tabernacle will be suspended.¹⁴⁶ This is significant because without the tabernacle Israel will have neither

¹⁴²Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 470. This passage seems to negate Belousek’s assertion that retributive justice is optional for God to exercise. Certainly God is not forced to exercise justice by an outside parameter. Rather, because God is just he will always satisfy his justice. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 415.

¹⁴³Berthoud notes that the use of the term “atonement” in the text (Exod 32:30) indicates that Moses understands the need for propitiation and expiation in order for forgiveness to take place. Further, the fact that Exod 32-34 is preceded and followed by instructions for the tabernacle indicates that there is no expectation in the text that Israel could receive forgiveness without atoning sacrifice. Berthoud, “The Compassion of God,” 154. However, one could put a finer point on the matter and say that the reestablishment of the covenant rests completely upon the unconditional mercy of God. However, this act of mercy will re-introduce the tabernacle, which will provide the means of atonement necessary for the sinful nation. In other words, forgiveness is based upon God’s mercy but is realized in atoning sacrifice. This matter will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

¹⁴⁴Delitzsch notes that in spite of God’s mercy displayed at the golden calf incident, his judgment against Israel eventually is served at Kadesh (Num 14:26-30). See Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 232.

¹⁴⁵Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 572. Israel will later repeat her disobedience to God and as a result the entire exodus generation will die in the wilderness (Deut 1:35). As Cole notes, Israel repeatedly shows herself devoid of the faith and obedience necessary to please God. See R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 231.

access to God nor any means of atoning for her sin.¹⁴⁷ In light of this, Green and Baker's previous comment that "the human proclivity toward sin is not matched by God's withdrawal,"¹⁴⁸ is simply wrong. The human proclivity toward sin (Israel's stiff-necked condition) is exactly what causes God to withdraw his presence from Israel. Moreover, this withdrawal will be repeated years later when the glory of the Lord departs from the temple as God again withdraws from the sinful nation in an act of judgment (Ezekiel 10). In fact, the present text is a clear indication that God will not tolerate sin. In one sense God's withdrawal is a blessing because it saves Israel from extermination. If God remains in the presence of sinful Israel he will visit his retributive justice upon her by annihilating her (Exod 33:3). On the other hand, God's withdrawal is clearly a judgment because Israel is denied the blessing of his indwelling.¹⁴⁹ However, because God's holiness is incompatible with Israel's sin there seems to be no other option. God is opposed to sin on all fronts and will make no exceptions. This is exactly what Green and Baker fail to understand. As a result they accuse those who hold to retributive justice of presenting an angry, petulant God who is captive to his justice.¹⁵⁰ However, this text presents a very different view of God. It presents a God who willingly, consistently, and

¹⁴⁶According to the Scriptures, the presence of God in Israel is tied specifically to the tabernacle and later to the temple (Exod 25:28; 29:45; Num 14:42, 4; Isa 6:1; 37:16 Ps 99:1). Therefore God, by suspending his presence, is suspending all plans for the tabernacle. To introduce the tabernacle to a rebellious nation is to invite disaster. Even God-ordained sacrifice does not avail the unrepentant (Ps 51:16-17). Therefore God will make a temporary arrangement permanent and meet with Moses outside the camp in the tent of meeting. See Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 45; Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 469; and Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 26.

¹⁴⁷Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 27.

¹⁴⁸Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 68.

¹⁴⁹Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 588.

¹⁵⁰Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 121–22, 173–74.

passionately chooses to oppose sin in all of its forms. God is not captive to his justice. Nor does God demonstrate a shallow form of anger by throwing a tantrum. The fact that God provides Moses as an intercessor suggests that God's anger is not a petulant display of emotion but something far more serious, something that must be dealt with.¹⁵¹ As Morris states, "There is a consistency about the wrath of God in the Old Testament. It is not capricious passion, but the stern reaction of the divine nature towards evil. It is aroused only and inevitably by sin."¹⁵² Therefore, as this stage comes to completion one can say that while Israel has been mercifully spared total destruction, yet because of her sin of idolatry she justly suffers God's retribution through execution, plague, and separation from God's presence. Indeed, in light of God's holiness, this section of Scripture poses a very difficult question that Green, Baker and similar critics fail to come to terms with: How can a holy God dwell in the midst of a sinful people (Exod 33:3, 5)?¹⁵³

If stage 2 introduces God's retributive justice, stage 3 (Exod 33:4-21), in an equally poignant way, introduces God's mercy. It is here that the question is answered: How can a holy God dwell within a sinful nation? However, the scene opens in the midst of grim circumstances. The nation, having suffered the withdrawal of God's promise to dwell in her midst is now in a state of mourning (Exod 33:4). The construction of the tabernacle, the sacred dwelling place of God among his people, has been suspended indefinitely.¹⁵⁴ Moses now pitches a tent outside the camp, symbolically representing

¹⁵¹The fact that Moses offers his own life as an atonement underlines the seriousness of Israel's sin. See Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 154.

¹⁵²Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 150.

¹⁵³Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 154–55.

¹⁵⁴Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 592; and Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 155.

God's withdrawal from the people. Although a prerequisite to receiving God's mercy, it is clear that Israel's repentance is not enough to restore God's presence. Something more is needed. Indeed, one would think that both Moses and the people would be agreeable to the present situation. In spite of his withdrawal, God has promised to continue his leadership of Israel to the promised land, although he will do so indirectly (Exod 33:1-2). However, in light of the people's propensity to sin, God's indwelling presence in the midst of the camp is simply too dangerous. If Israel is capable of such heinous idolatry at the foot of Sinai, how can she possibly be expected to maintain her fidelity as she moves forward? Therefore, God will maintain his distance, ensuring Israel's safety.¹⁵⁵

Regardless of the apparent benefits of this new arrangement, Moses and the people are dismayed by God's withdrawal (Exod 33:4). Clowney aptly captures the sentiment of the nation when he states the following: "The journey from Egypt to Canaan was not for a change in diet: to substitute milk and honey for fish and onions. Nor was it just to exchange slavery for freedom. At the goal of the journey and along the way, the meaning of the exodus was that Israel should be the people of God; to know him, to have fellowship with him."¹⁵⁶ Therefore, in spite of Israel's repentance, the chasm between God and Israel caused by Israel's sin is significant and remains. It is precisely at this point that one must question the critics of retributive justice. For instance, Goldingay repeatedly makes the assertion that sin is not a significant factor that causes a separation between God and man, as in the following example:

A common illustration of the need and achievement of atonement pictures God and humanity on either side of a chasm carved out by human sinfulness. . . . Our situation is not one in which God and ourselves are set over against each other with

¹⁵⁵Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 155; and Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 471.

¹⁵⁶Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 27.

sin causing a gulf between us, but one in which God is on the same side as us over against all that spoils and offends.¹⁵⁷

It should be noted that Goldingay's comments fail to take the present text into consideration. However, Exodus 32-34 presents a very different set of circumstances in which God, because of Israel's sin, has removed himself from the midst of the nation. In contradiction to Goldingay's comment, there is a wide chasm that exists between God and Israel in spite of Israel's grief over her sin. In a similar vein, Paul Fiddes believes that all God requires to be reconciled to man is a sincere repentance: "What justice demands is not payment but repentance; it is finally 'satisfied' not by any penalty in itself but by change of heart to which penalty is intended to lead."¹⁵⁸ And yet, the overall context of Exodus 32-34 clearly presents a repentant nation, grieving before a holy God. According to Fiddes, this repentance should be sufficient to reconcile Israel with God. Yet, in spite of her grief God refuses to go forward with the nation lest he destroy it because of its sinful nature. Clearly, Fiddes's and Goldingay's comments fall short because they fail to take into account the holiness of God that gives rise to the chasm between Israel and her God.

Indeed, as a result of this chasm Moses approaches God in the tent of meeting and makes two bold requests. First, Moses pleads for God to return his presence among

¹⁵⁷Goldingay, "Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ," 11.

¹⁵⁸Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 104, 106. Fiddes follows John McLeod Campbell, who suggested that satisfaction takes the form of perfect confession rather than vicarious sacrifice. Campbell drew his inspiration from Jonathan Edwards who suggested but rejected the idea that a perfect repentance can satisfy the wrath of God. See John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Handsel Press, 1996), 114–26; and Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 141–42. See also Jonathan Edwards, "Remarks on Important Theological Controversies," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol.2, ed. Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 565. For a modern presentation of this view, see Oliver Crisp, "Non-Penal Substitution," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (October 2007): 415–31.

the people. Next he asks for a deeper revelation of God's nature so that he might please God. Exodus 33:12-13, 18 states the following:

Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people.' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people. . . . Now show me your glory."¹⁵⁹

In response to Moses' intercession God relents and graciously grants his first petition (Exod 33:14, 17) when he states, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. . . . I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." This act of mercy is none other than the restoration of the

¹⁵⁹In his first request, Moses begins by stating the problem (Exod 33:12). He refers back to the two portions of text that indicate that an angel would lead the people but that God would remain at a distance (Exod 32:34; 33:1-6). The use of the preposition *עִם* (with) in Moses' statement appears to be significant (Exod 33:12, 16): "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people.' but you have not let me know whom you will send *with* me." The prepositional phrase *with me* (*עִמִּי*) contains a subtle allusion to the personal relationship that exists between the Lord and Moses. It is quite possibly a reference to God's promise made at Moses' calling (Exod 3:12): "I will be *with* you." Based upon his close relationship with God, the general, indirect guidance that God now intends to give Israel through the angel falls far short of the intimate communion with God that Moses has experienced and wishes for the people. In this brief phase there is a subtle request that God return his presence to Israel. Indeed, Moses' desire for God's fellowship with the nation is indicated in the request, "Remember that this nation is your people" (Exod 33:13). Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 156. Moreover, the manner in which the divine fellowship will be present seems to be hinted at in this brief dialogue. The phrase, "but you have not let me know *whom* you will send with me," is quite possibly an incorrect translation of the text. The phrase can also be translated "but you have not let me know *what* you will send with me." Moberly notes that the Hebrew phrase is not specifically personal and could equally well be translated by the impersonal pronoun *what*. If this interpretation is indeed the case, then Moses seems to be making a reference to the tabernacle through which God dwells in the midst of his people. However, regardless of this textual point, because God's indwelling of Israel is inseparably connected with the tabernacle (Exod 25:8; 29:45; Num 14:42, 44), Moses, by subtly asking for a reinstatement of God's presence, is also asking for a reinstatement of the tabernacle. As Moberly notes, "It was the shrine that was denied in 33:3b-6 and which Moses now seeks to restore" (Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 69). See Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 69; and Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 156 n. 48.

tabernacle through which God will mediate his presence to the nation.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, this restoration is perhaps the most important element in the path of Israel's restoration. Israel must have the presence of God reinstated if she is to experience the actuality of the covenant promise. This reinstatement of the presence God's presence is what Moses has been pleading for. God must tabernacle in Israel's midst.

But at this point in the text one must pause for an important question: Why has God suddenly relented? There seems to be no payment required to reinstate Israel. There is only a gracious response to the intercession of the mediator. Has God suddenly dispensed with his justice? Indeed, Green and Baker would seem to have a case when, concerning Old Testament sacrifice, they state that "assuaging God's wrath and payment of the penalty of sin are wide of the mark."¹⁶¹ However, to understand our text in this manner is a misconception for several reasons. First, God has already exacted payment from Israel by execution and plague (Exod 32:27-35). So the nation has made partial restitution with their lives. Moreover, God has promised to hold the remaining guilty parties accountable for their sin (Exod 32:33). How this will be done is unclear. However, there is no indication in the text that God has rescinded this judgment. Indeed, Israel will repeat her disobedience at Kadesh and as a result, all adult members of Israel will be sentenced to die as they wander in the wilderness for forty years (Nu 14:28-29). Therefore, to suggest that God has somehow overlooked his justice in the golden calf incident would be to present a very inconsistent picture of God when compared to the incident at Kadesh. Second, when Moses offers his life to God as an atonement for Israel's sin (Exod 32:32), it is clear that Moses understands that sin requires atonement. However, instead of accepting Moses' offer God exacts restitution from Israel by striking

¹⁶⁰Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 69.

¹⁶¹Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 76.

her with a plague. Third, the Mosaic era seems to be a time of God's patient forbearance comparable to the general grace God demonstrates to man after the flood (Gen 9:11). As Berthoud states, "Thus the Lord, in answer to the prayer of Moses, withheld his wrath and judgment and indicated implicitly that the Mosaic era was a time of reprieve and patience."¹⁶² Rather than interpreting this event as evidence that God does not require payment for sin, one should instead see God as graciously postponing the required payment. More specifically, for restitution one must look to the upcoming Day of Atonement or ultimately to the sacrifice of Christ (Lev 16, Rom 3:25). Finally, the very restoration of the presence of God in the form of the tabernacle argues against Green and Baker's interpretation. The tabernacle (and later the temple) is the means through which God mediates his presence to Israel (Exod 25:28; 29:45; Num 14:42, 4; Is 6:1; 37:16 Ps 99:1).¹⁶³ Without the tabernacle there is no indwelling. Moreover, the tabernacle is in turn intimately tied to the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system. As a result, without the priesthood there is no covenant. Hebrews 7:11 states as much when it says, "If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come?"

In other words, the covenant law assumes the entire Levitical system, the heart of which is atoning sacrifice carried out by the Levitical priests (Lev 17:11).¹⁶⁴ Without the priesthood, Israel stands naked before a holy God. The sacrificial system itself, and especially the Day of Atonement, will have the purpose of removing iniquity from the

¹⁶²Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 165.

¹⁶³Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 45.

¹⁶⁴The concept of sacrifice as atonement will be taken up in the next section. However, for an explanation and defense of this concept, see Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament."

nation of Israel so that she is acceptable to God (Lev 16).¹⁶⁵ The tabernacle along with the associated Levitical Priesthood is God's gift of grace to Israel so that God might dwell in her midst. As Clowney states,

It is precisely this pardon for sin, flowing from *hesed* and *emet* of the Lord that is symbolized by the tabernacle. The tabernacle would be built; God, in symbol, would dwell in the midst of his people. The veils of the tabernacle would insulate, as it were, against the fire of God's presence. But at the same time, the tabernacle imaged a way of approach into God's presence. At the entrance to the court stood the great bronze altar of sacrifice. Only through shed blood could the stiffnecked people come into the presence of God.¹⁶⁶

Therefore, while God's covenant is founded upon and re-established by God's unconditional grace (Deut 7:7; Exod 34:6-7), forgiveness must come through Levitical sacrifice. God does not dispense forgiveness without sacrifice.¹⁶⁷ While God may be patient with Israel and postpone payment, nevertheless payment must come. As a result the idea that God does not require payment for sin is not supported by the overall context of this passage.

Encouraged by this first response to his request, Moses changes his tone and boldly presses forward with his second request (Exod 33:18): "Now show me your glory." Moses' purpose in making such a plea is not to satisfy idle curiosity. Instead, he desires to have a deeper insight into God's ways so that he and Israel might please God (Exod 33:13). Moreover, after experiencing the mercy and compassion of God firsthand, Moses is compelled by the beauty of God's grace to ask for a deeper encounter with the

¹⁶⁵Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 6-7.

¹⁶⁶Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 27.

¹⁶⁷Berthoud notes the fact that because instructions for the tabernacle precede and follow Exod 32-34, no indication is given in the text that God forgives sin apart from sacrifice. Additionally, the fact that Moses offers himself as an atonement for Israel's sin indicates that Moses understood that there is no forgiveness apart from atonement. Indeed, Moses quite likely came to this understanding as he received the Levitical law and instructions for the tabernacle on mount Sinai in the presence of God. Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 154.

character of God.¹⁶⁸ In response, God grants this request. However, he does so in a manner appropriate to the situation. God states to Moses, “And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all of my goodness to pass in front of you. . . . But you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live (Exod 33:20).’”¹⁶⁹ As a result God calls Moses back to Sinai where he will both reveal himself and renew the covenant by engraving two new stone tablets (Exod 34:1-28).

In the final stage (Exod 34:1-28) of this episode the reader finds Moses alone on the mount before the God of Israel. In a definitive encounter the Lord causes his goodness to pass in front of Moses as God proclaims his name to his servant in Exodus 34:6-7:¹⁷⁰

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.

¹⁶⁸Berthoud, “The Compassion of God,” 159; and Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 68.

¹⁶⁹Moberly notes that the context of this passage suggests that the barrier between God and man is primarily moral, not ontological. This idea is not to deny the ontological difference and distinction between God and man. Yet the present passage focuses on the disastrous consequences of rebellion against God. See Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 79–80; and Berthoud, “The Compassion of God,” 162.

¹⁷⁰This section of Scripture presents both the incomprehensibility and knowability of God. The fact that Moses sees only the back of God would indicate that God cannot be exhaustively known by man. On the other hand, the positive cognitive content of the revelation also indicates real substance that can be grasped and expressed verbally by Moses and Israel. While this knowledge is not comprehensive (univocal) it certainly is not meaningless (equivocal). Instead, one could describe our knowledge of God as analogical, understanding by that term real but finite knowledge. For a discussion of epistemology in relation to the doctrine of God, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 199–213.

What is immediately noteworthy in this encounter is the emphasis upon God's gracious character.¹⁷¹ The terms used in this text unveil the riches of God's mercy to sinful Israel. God is described as one of compassion and grace. God's compassion focuses on his deep, tender understanding and appreciation of the misery experienced by Israel.¹⁷² His grace is God's favorable predisposition toward the undeserving.¹⁷³ Adding to this mosaic, God is said to be slow to anger or long-suffering. In other words, God patiently waits for repentance, never striking out in a volatile display of frustration. Instead, when God does respond in anger he does so righteously, deliberately, and even reluctantly (Isa 28:21).¹⁷⁴ Moreover, this compassionate, gracious, and long-suffering God is said to abound in love and faithfulness. The term for love often refers to God's covenant commitment to his people and is connected in this text to his truthfulness. The point is that God's love is unfailing and, unlike his judgment, endures forever.¹⁷⁵ Finally, God is said to forgive. The term used in the text means to lift or to carry. God is pictured as

¹⁷¹This portion of Scripture focuses on both mercy and justice. However, the section on mercy clearly outweighs the section on justice. For instance, comparing Exod 20:5-6 (a similar statement) to the current formula, the additional concept of mercy is not only added to the description, but it is placed before the concept of justice. Moreover, the description of God's mercy in this text is more elaborate and detailed than the section on God's justice. Clearly the author wishes to emphasize the concept of God's mercy. No doubt one is to understand by this emphasis that God's mercy is his primary work while his wrath is God's strange work (Isa 28:21). God's desire is to show mercy. However, his holiness may not be compromised. Indeed, although mercy is emphasized in this section, Belousek's argument that God's punishment is always restorative is contradicted by this passage. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 413-19; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 87-88. For a helpful discussion of God's wrath, see Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 147-54.

¹⁷²Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 163.

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 1042.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

lifting or carrying away Israel's burden of guilt.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, God forgives the guilt of the wicked, the rebellious, and the sinful. The point seems to be that God forgives any and all kinds of sin.¹⁷⁷ This, of course, must be understood in light of the previous discussion in which the tabernacle and the Levitical sacrificial system are central to Israel's forgiveness. Therefore, in this text we have an elaborate display of God's grace that is meant to move the heart of Israel toward her God.¹⁷⁸

However, in the event that Israel thinks she may presume upon God's mercy,¹⁷⁹ God reminds her of his justice when he describes himself by the following (Exod 34:7b): "Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." Not only does this text tell us that God's justice is a factor in God's dealing with Israel; it also informs us that God's justice should be understood as conditioning his mercy. As Berthoud states,

The Lord's compassion, grace, and favor are juxtaposed, even united to his holiness and justice. . . . He is love, holy love. This is why, because of their sin, the dilemma of Moses and the people remains, and the tension persists, for the threat of judgment continues to hover over their heads. This explains the final intervention of Moses as he bows down before the Lord in awe and adoration.¹⁸⁰

One might say that God's mercy cannot be separated from his holiness. Holiness informs mercy just as mercy informs or conditions holiness. Indeed, from this passage we learn that God's decisions are informed by the full range of his attributes. As a result, God,

¹⁷⁶Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 163.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 163–64.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 154.

¹⁷⁹This notion includes presuming upon the grace present in the sacrificial system of the tabernacle. See Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 469.

¹⁸⁰Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 164.

does not choose by a raw act of will to ignore sin by ignoring his holiness. Calvin makes this point when he states, “One might more readily take the sun’s light from its heat or its heat from its fire than separate God’s power from his justice. For such is the symmetry and agreement between his mercy and his justice that nothing proceeds from him that is not moderate, lawful, and orderly.”¹⁸¹ Therefore, God, when forgiving sin, acts according to both his mercy and his holiness.

As this section concludes Moses, in response to this revelation, falls down and worships God. As he is doing so he reiterates his request that God forgive the nation’s sin (Exod 34:9). “O Lord, If I have found favor in you eyes,” he said, “then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness, and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.” In light of the revelation that Moses has just received there can be no doubt that he is appealing to the mercy and goodness of God as a basis for God to forgive Israel’s sin. As Berthoud states, “As Moses contemplates the divine manifestation, he is convinced that only the goodness of God, as revealed in his compassion, grace, and faithful loving-kindness, can bring about reconciliation and the restoration of the covenant.”¹⁸² However, there is clearly no presumption of God’s grace on the part of Moses. God remains both a God of mercy and of justice.

In summary, two theological points need to be emphasized. First, the text of Exodus 32-34 sets up a tension between God’s mercy and God’s retributive justice that is

¹⁸¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 214 n. 7.

¹⁸²Berthoud, “The Compassion of God,” 165. God’s glory and reputation among the nations is also mentioned as a reason why God does not destroy Israel. However, God’s mercy seems to be the primary reason for God’s decision to pardon Israel’s sin and restore his presence. This truth is evident not only because Moses reiterates his request for pardon immediately after God’s revelation of his goodness but also because of the many Old Testament requests for mercy that are based upon Exod 34:6-7 (Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). See Ryken, *Exodus*, 1041.

evident throughout the Old Testament and that is never completely resolved.¹⁸³ This tension is evidenced in the fact that Exodus 32-34 does not lightly pass over God's wrath but even highlights and underlines the seriousness of Israel's plight before a holy God. However, with equal and even greater emphasis, God describes himself as gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, forgiving wickedness and rebellion and showing mercy to multitudes. Because of his mercy God relents of his plan to destroy Israel, renews his covenant with Moses and the nation, and dwells in the midst of his people. Therefore, what one discovers from this text is that God is both full of mercy and of holiness. As Keil states, "God is love, but that kind of love in which mercy, grace, long-suffering, goodness, and truth are united with holiness and justice."¹⁸⁴ While the emphasis falls upon God's mercy, neither aspect of God's nature may be minimized or ignored.

This, of course, contradicts the critics of retributive justice who emphasize God's mercy often at the expense of his retributive justice. For instance, Paul Fiddes makes this mistake when he resolves God's justice into restoration, "The Father wants nothing less than the return of his children to him; he passes his verdict against human life in order to awaken a spirit of penitence within human beings."¹⁸⁵ According to Fiddes, God's wrath is not an expression of his retributive justice but simply an agent used to awaken sinners to the need for repentance. While it is true to say that part of God's plan in judging Israel is to move her to repentance, it is not true to characterize the totality of God's justice in this way. In a similar way, Green and Baker make the same misstep when they attempt to filter out any trace of divine retribution in God's justice.

His (God's) justice has gracious intent, as he seeks to eliminate sin that threatens human existence and severs relationship with him. . . . Pervasively in the Old

¹⁸³Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 599.

¹⁸⁴Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 241.

¹⁸⁵Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 105.

Testament, God's wrath is relationally based, not retributively motivated - that is, it is oriented toward the restoration or protection of God's people, not toward retaliation or payback. . . . The Old Testament never identifies Israel's sacrificial system as a means of averting or assuaging God's wrath.¹⁸⁶

In an effort to ground these affirmations in Old Testament theology Green and Baker cite Exodus 34:6-7 and make the following comment:

A series of important affirmations flow from this confession, the most basic being that God's graciousness is basic to his character; hence, it spills over in abundance in activity that saves and sustains life. It is significant then, that Yahweh thus attributes "steadfast love and faithfulness" to himself in the immediate aftermath of the episode involving the golden calf (Exod 32). This points to the persistent, everlasting quality of the love he lavishes on his people, even when rebuffed by them.¹⁸⁷

While Green and Baker acknowledge God's justice, they interpret justice through the lens of mercy, characterizing justice as God's gracious restorative act. Any idea of retributive justice is absent from Green and Baker's view. However, this simply repeats the error of Fiddes by ignoring the balance between God's mercy and retributive justice in the overall context of the passage in Exodus 34:6-7. As noted earlier, while it may be appropriate to say that God's mercy is his primary work, it is incorrect to assert, as Green and Baker do, that God's justice can be resolved into mercy and thereby suggest that God's holy wrath has no need of retribution. Certainly Moses understood the retributive nature of God's wrath when he attempted to appease God by offering his own life as an atonement for Israel's sin (Exod 32:30). Retributive justice is also clearly in view when God withdraws from Israel's midst so that he will not destroy the entire nation because of her stiff-necked condition (Exod 33:5). Indeed, the complete destruction of all adult Israelites will occur after Kadesh as the nation wanders in the desert for forty years (Num 14:28-29), a judgment that should make Green and Baker pause in their analysis. Moreover, retribution seems to be at the front of God's agenda when he orders Moses to execute

¹⁸⁶Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 69, 72.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 68–69.

three thousand Israelites at the hand of the Levites (Exod 32:27-28) and then follows up with a plague upon the nation (Exod 32:35). No doubt these acts served to bring Israel to her knees. However, to say that there is no act of divine retribution in these judgments is to misread the text. Finally, the last phrase of Exodus 34:7 would seem to indicate that justice cannot be resolved into a simple act of restoration. Exodus 34:7 states, “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” In light of the overall context (Exod 32-34) of this verse, it seems more likely that the nation that had just experienced near annihilation for idolatry would see Exodus 34:7 primarily as a warning against God’s retribution and not as a text communicating simple restorative justice. In other words, this verse serves as a stern reminder that God’s grace cannot be presumed upon and that judgment awaits for anyone who attempts to take God’s mercy for granted by breaking the covenant. Of course, there is a measure of restorative grace in all of the acts mentioned above because the Israelites who survived God’s retributive justice presumably learned from the experience. However, to suggest that God’s justice is only restorative, as Green and Baker do, is to go beyond the text. As a result, a more balanced reading would see that both mercy and retributive justice coexist in this Scriptural context and in the person of God. As Keil states,

But in order that grace may not be perverted by sinners into a ground of wantonness, justice is not wanting even here with its solemn threatenings, although it only follows mercy, to show that mercy is mightier than wrath, and that holy love does not punish till sinners despise the riches of the goodness, patience, and long-suffering of God.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, while God’s wrath may be his strange work (Isa 28:20), nevertheless it must be taken with utter seriousness because God’s wrath arises from the attribute of holiness, which is also one of God’s foundational characteristics.¹⁸⁹ If God

¹⁸⁸Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 241.

chooses to show mercy to Israel, it is not because he has forgotten his justice. According to God himself justice will be served (Exod 32:33). Instead, as seen previously, it is because God has chosen to be patient and give sinners time to repent. Therefore, Green and Baker and similar critics of retributive justice make the mistake of failing to give retributive justice a balanced treatment in Exodus 32-34.

Finally, the tension between God's mercy and justice in Exodus 32-34 answers the accusation of the critics that retributive justice is a product of western culture and not a product of Scripture.¹⁹⁰ The emphasis on God's justice throughout this passage clearly contradicts this assertion. Moreover, the Apostle Paul seems to carry the same concept of God's justice into the New Testament as he explains the need for Christ's death and how Christ satisfies the God's wrath in atoning sacrifice (Rom 3:21-26). However, it is enough at this point to say that based on the doctrine of God presented in Exodus 32-34, the Old Testament is the source of the concept of God's retributive justice, not western culture.

The second theological point to be made from Exodus 32-34 is that this section of Scripture informs one of the manner in which God forgives his people. God does not simply ignore or forget sin. There is a process through which God moves to eradicate sin. First, Israel is the recipient of God's unconditional grace as she is chosen and re-established as the people of God. As Moses makes his final request he pleads that God will forgive Israel in spite of the fact that she is a stiff-necked people (Exod 34:9). Because this request occurs immediately after the revelation of God's merciful character (Exod 32:6-7), it is clear that Moses is relying solely upon God's grace as the basis for

¹⁸⁹Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 497–503.

¹⁹⁰Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 42; Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 86; and Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 98.

the nation's restoration with God. In other words, Moses can do nothing but acknowledge the serious nature of Israel's depravity and, in light of the revelation of God's grace, plead for God's mercy to re-enact the covenant.¹⁹¹ As Waltke states, "Ultimately, however, God's grace, not priests and rituals, makes possible his residence among sinful covenant partners."¹⁹² Therefore, the mercy of God is foundational to the re-establishment of the covenant, and it is the primary reason for Israel's forgiveness.

However, this concept leads one to a second factor in the process of God's forgiveness. God's mercy comes through the intercession of the mediator. Moses is called and appointed by God as mediator between God and Israel and plays a significant factor in the restoration of the covenant.¹⁹³ The appeal to God's grace for Israel is based upon the unique relationship between Moses and God. Indeed, Moses appeals to this relationship in Exodus 33:12 when he says, "You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.'"¹⁹⁴ Moberly notes the significance of this relationship

¹⁹¹Keil notes the similarity between this situation and God's mercy to man after the flood. God in mercy determines not to destroy man again by flood in light of the fact that man is depraved from birth. Man's only hope of survival lies in God's mercy. See Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 241; Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 165; and Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 91–92.

¹⁹²Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 472.

¹⁹³Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 157–58.

¹⁹⁴The statement of Moses, "You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me,'" is repeated by God in 33:17b and therefore deserves some attention. In this context, the verb "to know" (יָדַע) means to have a personal relationship with someone. When this verb is used in conjunction with God it can refer to choice or election (Gen 18:19; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5; Amos 3:2). Moreover, when the phrase "by name" (בְּשֵׁם) is added it suggests intimate personal knowledge of one's character. In fact, this is the only time in the Hebrew Bible the terms "name" and "know" are brought together. Therefore, Sarna suggests that the phrase be translated "I have singled you out by name," a phrase that suggests God's sovereign placement of Moses in his unique relationship as mediator of the covenant. The idea of God's sovereign choice of Moses is clearly indicated in Exod 3:10, in spite of Moses' own desire to refuse the call (Exod 4:13-14). The second part of the phrase "you have found favor with me," complements

by stressing the fact that after her sin, Israel's existence depends not only upon the unconditional mercy of God but also upon the intercession of the mediator.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, Moses bridges a gulf that Israel cannot. Without his intercession there is no access to forgiveness. Indeed, without the mediator Israel would have been destroyed. As a result of this intercession and the revelation that follows, the relationship between Israel and God is now altered so that the focus is upon God's mercy and patient forbearance.¹⁹⁶ While Israel is still liable to the wrath of God, the imminent threat of annihilation has been removed and replaced with a measure of patience answering to the revelation received in Exodus 34:6-7.¹⁹⁷ However, this does not mean that wrath is passed over. It is simply postponed in light of God's patience. God will bear with the nation, but Israel will still suffer his wrath in due course if she fails to repent and seek God's mercy

the previous idea. "To find favor in the eyes of the Lord" means to meet with God's approval. However, in this context more than simple moral approbation seems to be intended. As seen previously, Moses' position as mediator is a result of God's special election. Moses stands before God, in intimate communion by God's choice and for the purpose of mediating God's covenant to Israel. However, as a result of his unique association with God, Moses has been granted the fruit of moral integrity. Therefore, while Moses is certainly referencing his upright behavior as a reason for his request, nevertheless, the clear underlying emphasis is upon God's grace in granting Moses both his position as mediator and character that pleases God. Moberly notes that this context is very similar to Gen 6:9, where Noah is said to have "found favor with God." Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 70–71. Only Moses and Noah are given this honor in Scripture. But just like Moses, Noah's righteousness and integrity are the fruit of God's election and the resulting fellowship he enjoys with God. At its heart the appeal of Moses is persuasive because he acknowledges the grace of God both in his calling and integrity of life. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 297; Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 157 n. 54. Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 213. Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 157.

¹⁹⁵Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 105–06.

¹⁹⁶Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," 165.

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*

through the sacrificial system. As Keil says, “Though grace may modify and soften wrath, it cannot mar the justice of the holy God.”¹⁹⁸

This brings us to the third factor necessary to receive the forgiveness of God. Israel is required to display an attitude of humble repentance and obedience before God. At the basis of the covenant is a requirement that Israel be fully devoted to her God (Deut 6:5). However, Israel has broken faith with God by committing idolatry and thus forsaking the covenant. As a result she stands under God’s immediate wrath. While her forgiveness is ultimately based solely upon God’s mercy, nevertheless it is required that she confess and forsake her sin. God refuses to be manipulated by liturgy or ritual sacrifice, and his presence cannot be manufactured nor presumed upon.¹⁹⁹ Israel must turn from her sin if she is to receive forgiveness and the restored presence of God. Part of God’s purpose in withdrawing from Israel was to bring her to a deeper recognition of the seriousness of her sin.²⁰⁰ Repentance from sin and turning to God is a legitimate factor in the process of restoring Israel to favor. As Waltke notes, “But those who do not love him, as shown by their rejecting his means of atonement and healing retain their guilt.”²⁰¹

The fourth and final element necessary for the restoration of Israel is the reinstatement of the tabernacle. As mentioned earlier, the basis of Israel’s forgiveness is God’s mercy as God, in grace, re-establishes the Mosaic covenant. However, while forgiveness rests upon God’s mercy as its foundation, this truth does not mean that God

¹⁹⁸Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 232.

¹⁹⁹Waltke notes that this passage guards against both the Catholic notion of *ex opere operato* and the pagan notion of magical rites, both of which seek to manipulate God. See Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 469.

²⁰⁰Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 233.

²⁰¹Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 472.

ignores his holiness and therefore that sin is not atoned for. The necessity of atonement is seen clearly in the resumption of instruction for the tabernacle (Exod 35:30). As stated above, Israel must have the presence of God reinstated if she is to experience the actuality of the covenant promise. However, the presence of God comes in the form of the tabernacle. Moreover, as seen above the tabernacle is intimately associated with the Levitical sacrificial system and is the means of God's grace to the sinful nation. In light of this reality, Clowney's comment bears repeating:

It is precisely this pardon for sin, flowing from *hesed* and *emeth* of the Lord that is symbolized by the tabernacle. The tabernacle would be built; God, in symbol, would dwell in the midst of his people. The veils of the tabernacle would insulate, as it were, against the fire of God's presence. But at the same time, the tabernacle imaged a way of approach into God's presence. At the entrance to the court stood the great bronze altar of sacrifice. Only through shed blood could the stiff-necked people come into the presence of God.²⁰²

Clowney's point is critical because it means that while mercy is the basis of the covenant and its re-instatement, atonement through Levitical sacrifice is the means by which Israel will experience God's forgiveness. Without atoning sacrifice there is no forgiveness for Israel (Heb 9:2).

In summary, there is no indication in Exodus 32-34 that forgiveness can take place apart from atonement. Instead, one should understand God's unconditional grace as the basis of Israel's election and the tabernacle as the means necessary for forgiveness. Green, Baker, and similar critics are correct in recognizing the grace of God as he re-establishes the covenant. However, they fall short when they fail to see God's retributive justice in the larger context of Exodus 32-34 as God provides forgiveness through sacrifice. Moreover, they misinterpret God's patience with Israel as a lack of retribution when instead they should understand patience as God's gracious provision for Israel that is meant to lead her to repentance. Retribution is not removed. It is simply postponed.

²⁰²Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 27.

Indeed, Green and Baker fail to see the intricacies of God's forgiveness, which involves his mercy that provides the mediator and the sacrificial system that satisfies his justice.

Finally, in light of the four aspects of forgiveness mentioned above (mercy, intercession, repentance, and atonement) it is important to note that all are necessary for the pardon of Israel and, by extrapolation, the forgiveness of New Testament believers. To focus upon one aspect at the expense of the others is to misrepresent the text and therefore the Biblical doctrine of God's forgiveness. However, this fact is clearly what Fiddes does when he states that repentance is all that is necessary to satisfy God's justice: "The justice of God demands, and is satisfied by, the penitence of people down through the ages as they share in the penitence of Christ."²⁰³ According to the previous analysis of Exodus 32-34, the satisfaction of God's justice demands much more than repentance. As seen above, repentance is part of the equation. However, Israel must also receive atonement for sin and the intercession of Moses. In a similar way, the atoning blood of Christ and his priestly intercession must be present in order for New Testament believers to receive forgiveness (Heb 7-10). Therefore, Fiddes is wrong to assume that repentance alone can satisfy God's justice. Green and Baker make the same error when they isolate the aspect of mercy in Exodus 34:6-7 as God's primary attribute.²⁰⁴ As a result, they also present a doctrine of forgiveness that requires no atonement. However, as previously noted, this is to take Exodus 34:6-7 out of context, a context that clearly demands satisfaction for sin. Instead, what is needed is a more balanced approach to the text that recognizes every aspect of God's forgiveness. In summary, Exodus 32-34 presents a rich mixture of God's mercy and God's holiness. Therefore, any analysis that does not give a balanced treatment to both is a misrepresentation of the text and will most likely lead to a distorted doctrine of grace.

²⁰³Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 106.

²⁰⁴Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 68–72.

The sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant. The previous section made the assumption that God's retributive justice lies at the heart of the Levitical sacrificial system. But is this assumption correct? Certainly at the heart of God's covenant with Israel is God's promise to dwell among his people. Moreover, this promise is not simply the granting of a general spiritual presence but is instead a specific, tangible reality associated with the Tabernacle and the Levitical sacrificial system.²⁰⁵ For instance, Exodus 29:4-5 reads, "So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God." Therefore, from this section of Scripture, it would appear that the tabernacle and therefore Levitical sacrifice is at the center of God's covenant with his people. But why is Levitical sacrifice necessary for God to dwell among his people? Do the sacrifices in Leviticus primarily serve to propitiate God's wrath (as the previous section of this paper assumed) or do they present a diversity of ideas that point to a decentralized theme? The answer to this question will greatly affect one's view of God and the manner in which he should be approached. Indeed, if one examines the biblical evidence there appear to be several compelling reasons to suggest that the assertion made in the last section is correct, namely, that the satisfaction of God's retributive justice lies at the heart of the Levitical system and therefore at the heart of God's covenant with Israel.

The first reason to suggest that satisfaction is at the heart of Levitical sacrifice is that God's presence demands it. While God is generally present within the camp of Israel, he is said to dwell in the tabernacle within the holy of holies. Therefore, while the whole of Israel's life is to be lived out before God, the acts of worship at the tabernacle bring Israel (and especially the Levitical priesthood) into the very presence of God.²⁰⁶ As

²⁰⁵Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 45.

a result of this close proximity to God death was a real possibility (Lev 15:31).²⁰⁷ Moreover, if the priest failed to follow the prescribed order of worship, disaster could follow (Lev 8:35, 10:2, 6, 7, 9, 16:2, 13). This is clearly illustrated by the deaths of Nadab and Abihu as they transgressed the Levitical order by bringing unauthorized incense into the presence of God and were consumed by fire (Lev 10:1-5). Commenting on the incident God states the following (Exod 10:3): “Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of the people I will be honored.” God’s holiness is demonstrated in this case when he exercises his retributive justice in the form of his fierce wrath, a wrath that resulted from departing from the Levitical system. The conclusion one must draw from the above texts is that the wrath of God threatens anyone who attempts to draw near to God. In order to shield one from this danger sacrifices are offered by the high priest to prevent God’s wrath from breaking forth (Lev 15:31; 16:2-3, 15-16). As Wenham states, “The idea that man is always in danger of angering God runs through the whole Pentateuch. Fierce judgment and sudden death stud its pages. Sacrifice is the appointed means whereby peaceful coexistence between a holy God and sinful man become a possibility.”²⁰⁸ Therefore, the Levitical system must be meticulously followed if one is to overcome God’s wrath and enter his presence.

²⁰⁶Wenham notes that the laws of sacrifice speak of the Levitical priests as approaching the Lord (Lev 16:1; 21:17) and that sacrifice takes place before the Lord, or that the sacrifice is a soothing aroma for the Lord (Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:9; 3:5). All of this implies that God is preeminently present in the act of sacrifice. See Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 16.

²⁰⁷Uncleanness includes both moral and ceremonial impurity. See Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 22.

²⁰⁸Wenham notes Gen 6:5 and Lev 1:9, 13, 17 in which sacrifice is said to have a soothing effect upon God. See Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 56.

This leads to the second reason for suggesting that propitiation lies at the heart of Levitical sacrifice: Levitical holiness demands it. Wenham notes that holiness could be termed the motto of Leviticus.²⁰⁹ Indeed, in the Book of Leviticus the concept of holiness has a very specific meaning. For instance, Leviticus classifies everything that is not holy as common. Additionally, common things can be broken down into two categories: the clean and the unclean.²¹⁰ Clean items/people become holy when they are sanctified.²¹¹ On the other hand, items/people that are unclean must first be cleansed before they qualify to become holy. In both instances the element that moves an item from unclean to clean or from clean to holy is sacrificial blood.²¹² This truth is important because the unclean and the holy must never meet within the Levitical system. Otherwise severe implications are in store for the offender. For example, if an unclean person eats holy food, that person must be cut off from the covenant people (Lev 7:20-21; 33:3).²¹³ Moreover, it is important to note that the state of uncleanness may be contracted either through bodily processes or through sinful acts. The latter is significant because it indicates that the states of cleanness and holiness often entail the concept of moral holiness in addition to ceremonial purity.²¹⁴ However, both instances of uncleanness (moral and ceremonial) will draw the wrath of God if they are not properly accounted for through the blood of the Levitical sacrificial system. Therefore, in summary, it is

²⁰⁹Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 18.

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, 19.

²¹¹*Ibid.*, 18–20.

²¹²*Ibid.*, 26.

²¹³*Ibid.*, 19–21.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

sacrificial blood that provides cleansing from ceremonial and moral impurity that would otherwise bring down the wrath of God upon the congregation of Israel.

The third reason to suggest that propitiation is at the heart of Levitical sacrifice is found in the concept of atonement itself. Leviticus 17:11 states, “For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for ones life.”²¹⁵ There is considerable debate over the foundational meaning of the verb “to make atonement” כִּפֶּר (kipper). Some scholars have suggested that the Hebrew root conveys the idea “to cover” or “to conceal.” However, this idea seems to present difficulties.²¹⁶ Others have suggested that atonement means “to cleanse” or “to purge.”²¹⁷ This certainly fits many of the cultic occurrences of the term in Leviticus.²¹⁸ Indeed, it is clear from the previous discussion that unclean items and people are made clean through the application of sacrificial blood. Wenham states, “In Leviticus sacrifice, or more precisely, sacrificial blood, is regularly associated with cleansing and sanctification. For example, the hallowing of the altar and the priests is effected through anointing with oil and sacrificial blood (Exod 29:36-37; Lev 8:11-15, 23-30).”²¹⁹ Moreover, because uncleanness is often the result of sin, atonement rites cannot be reduced to a simple act of purification. As Nicole notes, “More often than defilement, sin is what makes the rite necessary; more frequently than purification, forgiveness is shown to be the result of the act; offerings closely linked with

²¹⁵For a discussion of Lev 17:11, see n. 103.

²¹⁶Peterson, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” 10. Kidner notes that while “cover” may indeed be the derivation of the term it is not supported by usage. See Derek Kidner, “Sacrifice—Metaphors and Meaning,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 127.

²¹⁷Peterson, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” 10.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*

²¹⁹Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 26.

the rite of kippur, even in cases of uncleanness, are designated as sin (ḥaṭā't חַטָּאת) and guilt (ʿāšam אָשָׁם).²²⁰ Therefore, even though the term “atonement” carries the meaning of “to cleanse” or “to purge,” nevertheless the cleansing is effected by a blood substitute that serves to remove the wrath of God, which results from both ceremonial impurity and moral defilement.²²¹

In addition, it would appear from the grammatical construction of the purification passages that in atonement, purification rites cannot be disconnected from the concepts of substitution and compensation. This reality is demonstrated by the fact that individuals are never the direct objects of atonement rites, whereas inanimate object are. For instance, the preposition על and occasionally בְּעַד are consistently used to show that the individual is benefiting from an action performed on his behalf (outside of him) rather than an action that was performed upon him (as in the case of inanimate objects). The idea of substitution is clearly present since the sacrifice is given on behalf of the individual who needs cleansing. The idea of compensation is implied because through a sacrifice given to God his wrath is averted and both cleansing and forgiveness are granted.²²² In conclusion, since uncleanness of any kind draws the wrath of God,

²²⁰Emile Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and James A. Frank III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 48. To support the premise that sin is most often the factor that makes atonement necessary, Nicole cites the twelve occurrences for sin and guilt offerings in Lev 4-7. To support the premise that forgiveness is most often the result of purification, Nicole cites Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22 and Num 15:25, 28. Concerning the last premise, Nicole notes that there are 12 occurrences with the verb “forgive” (נָסַח), and 7 with the verb “purify” (טָהַר). Ibid., 48 nn. 47, 48.

²²¹Averbeck notes that even though the basic meaning of כָּפַר is “to cleanse” nevertheless the verb can assume the meaning of “ransom” when the verb refers to the overall effect of the action. See Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. “כָּפַר,” by Richard E. Averbeck.

²²²Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch,” 48. Nicole cites Lev 16 as a clear example of this principle. For instance, for sacred objects the direct object with the

sacrifice was necessary for purification and forgiveness so that the individual would not suffer God's wrath directly. For sacred objects, the uncleanness that attached to them had to be removed to prevent God from deserting his temple.²²³

The final possible meaning for the term "atonement" involves the idea of ransom and is associated with the term כֹּפֶר (kōper).²²⁴ This meaning is derived from usage and is found in Exodus 30:11-16 and Numbers 35:29-34, where both כִּפֶּר (kipper) and כֹּפֶר (koper) occur together suggesting that atonement is effected through the payment of a ransom.²²⁵ The concept is also suggested in a number of other passages that involve

particle is the verbal construction that is employed. This suggests the typical translation "He makes atonement *for* the Tent of Meeting, and for the altar." However, for persons, the preposition is used, suggesting another translation: "*For* the people he makes atonement." In other words, people, because they need not only purification but reconciliation with God, are not the direct objects of the purification rite but instead are the beneficiaries of a rite that is performed on their behalf. However, sacred objects, because they are simply polluted, become the direct objects of the purification rites. Ibid., 49. Additionally, Nicole argues that Lev 17:11 allows for the idea of substitution by using the uncustomary preposition כִּי instead of the more customary preposition עַל. For a defense of this position, see Ibid., 40. Belousek argues that because the Levitical cleansing rites are enacted on behalf of people or upon sacred items, God is not the object of the cleansing action and therefore is not propitiated. Instead, Belousek characterizes the Levitical cleansing rites as a saving action initiated by God. In response one could reply that regardless of the object of the cleansing action, the rite sets one in right standing with God and therefore averts God's wrath. Indeed, without the cleansing rite God will desert his temple (Ezek 10), break forth on his people in judgment (Lev 15:31), and annihilate the high priest (Lev 16:2). Therefore, the concept of propitiation is certainly contained within the Levitical cleansing rites. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 180-81.

²²³Keith Crim, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), s.v. "Atonement in the Old Testament," by Jacob Milgrom.

²²⁴For an extensive discussion of the cultic and non-cultic uses of kipper and kopher and how atonement is effected through a ransom, see Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 161–74. Belousek's study fails to properly associate כִּפֶּר and כֹּפֶר as Morris does and Belousek does not therefore make the vital connection between atonement and ransom that leads one to the concept of propitiation. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 146-56.

²²⁵Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 11.

the payment of either money or life as an atonement (Exod 32:30; Num 25:10-13; 31:50; Deut 21:1-9; 2 Sam. 21:1-14).²²⁶ From these biblical texts the concept of ransom can be extended to animal sacrifice, by noting the connection between Exodus 30:15-16 and Leviticus 17:11. The exact Hebrew phrase "to make atonement for yourselves" occurs in both passages suggesting a close conceptual connection between the verses.²²⁷ As Peterson notes, "The means of atonement for a human life in Exodus 30:11-16 is a monetary payment, whereas the means of atonement in Leviticus 17:11 is the blood or 'life' of a slaughtered animal."²²⁸ Wenham agrees with this assessment:

In certain passages where various monetary payments are said to make atonement, to pay a ransom would seem to be a much more appropriate rendering than "to cleanse" (e.g., Exod 30:15; Num 31:50). Such an understanding is compatible with

²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷Ibid.

²²⁸Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 11; and Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 45. Nicole argues for the idea of compensation on grammatical grounds from the second phrase of Lev 17:11. According to Nicole, the bêt (בֵּת) of exchange is to be preferred over the instrumental use of the preposition. Therefore, Nicole translated the second phrase in Lev 17:11 as "I have given it (blood) to make atonement for yourselves (your lives)." The instrumental use translates the phrase "I have given it (blood) to make atonement by means of the life (that is in the blood)." While frequency of usage favors the instrumental use, there are significant instances of בֵּת introducing an item that is acquired by exchange or price (Lam 1:11; 2 Sam 3:27; Deut 19:21; Gen 29:18). Moreover, there seems to be a logical difficulty in the instrumental use. For instance, if one equates life with blood then the phrase "Blood makes atonement by life" is reduced to the tautology "Blood makes atonement by blood." Finally, Nicole notes that the word order in Lev 17:11 supports the non-instrumental use of the preposition. The subject begins the sentence and is enforced by the pronoun producing the phrase "blood itself." This is followed by the complement "for life" and the verb "make atonement." This gives the translation "It is the blood itself for life that makes atonement," a translation that places the focus on *blood* not *life*. If the intention was to emphasize the life in the blood the word *life* would need to be at the beginning of the sentence: "It is by life that blood makes atonement." For a complete defense of the translation above, see Nicole, "Atonement in the Pentateuch."

most of the passages that speak of sacrifice “making atonement” for someone. Through the animal’s death and the subsequent rituals men are ransomed from the death that their sin and uncleanness merit.²²⁹

This is significant because Leviticus 17:11 follows the instructions for the Day of Atonement and seems to state the general purpose for sacrifice.²³⁰ Therefore, by implication it would appear that an element in every sacrifice is atonement, which involves the concept of being ransomed from the wrath of God.²³¹

The question that arises from the above discussion is whether one must choose between the ideas of “cleansing” and “ransom” when defining atonement. No doubt, certain contexts will demand one or the other definition. However, as seen above, in discussing the meaning of atonement as “cleansing” one cannot separate the idea of “compensation.” In other words, the two ideas seem to be woven together within the Levitical system so that it is not always necessary to see one or the other. As Nicole states, “Even in a cultic context, it is not possible to limit the meaning of the term *kipper* to a mere purification rite, since it is also linked to compensation, which implies God.”²³² In summary, both cleansing and ransom are communicated by the concept of atonement, both of which serve to remove the wrath of God from the community of Israel.²³³

²²⁹Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 28; and Milgrom, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” 80.

²³⁰Morris notes that by the close of the Old Testament period all sacrifices were believed to have atoning value. See Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 131 n. 1.

²³¹It is significant that this verse follows the description of the Day of Atonement and gives the reason for the prohibition against eating blood. See Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 45.

²³²Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch,” 49.

²³³Belousek argues that because restitution to God is not proportional (as it is in the civil code) then sacrifice is not retributive. The assumption made by Belousek is that a lesser sin should have a smaller penalty. However, before God the penalty for sin

In spite of the above, Goldingay insists on eliminating the idea of God's propitiation from the Old Testament concept of atonement. He writes,

The problem with sin in Leviticus is not that sin involves infidelity or disloyalty, which makes God angry but that sin pollutes, stains, and spoils, and thus makes people or things repulsive. . . . The problem that sacrifice thus deals with is not anger but revulsion or rather repulsiveness, a pollutedness of which human beings are as aware as God is. By means of sacrifice God makes it possible for humanity's stain to be dealt with. In this connection sacrifice "is not something human beings do to God (propitiation) but something which God does for humankind (expiation)."²³⁴ Sacrifice does not directly relate to anger.²³⁵

Green and Baker concur with Goldingay when they state the following: "More pointedly, though, it is simply the case that, in the Old Testament, the antidote to God's wrath is not developed in sacrificial terms."²³⁶ However, the evidence clearly points in a different direction. If Leviticus 17:11 is a normative verse for sacrifice, both usage and etymology would suggest that the idea of propitiation (appeasement through blood ransom) is prominent in its meaning. Moreover, as seen above, because the idea of cleansing involves the removal of God's wrath, retributive justice is involved even in the concept of sacrificial purification.²³⁷ Therefore, to suggest, as Goldingay clearly does, that appeasement is absent from Old Testament sacrifice is a clear distortion of the evidence.

Adding to the body of evidence that propitiation is prominent in the concept of Old Testament sacrifice is the Day of Atonement.²³⁸ The Day of Atonement stands

is death no matter how slight the transgression (Rom 6:23). See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 183-86.

²³⁴Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 71.

²³⁵Goldingay, "Your Iniquities Have Made a Separation between You and Your God," 51.

²³⁶Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 76.

²³⁷Peterson notes that the common denominator in all sacrifice is to siphon off the wrath of God. See Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 12.

structurally at the heart of Leviticus and is significant for at least two reasons. First, the ceremony is prefaced by a reference to God's wrath. Leviticus 16:1-2 states,

The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord. The Lord said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover."

This passage is a clear reference to Leviticus 10:1-2, in which Aaron's sons are consumed by fire for approaching God in an unauthorized manner. In order that this disaster might not be repeated Leviticus 16 begins with a warning followed by an explanation of how Aaron might safely approach God and thus avoid annihilation. Therefore, the reference to this unfortunate incident highlights the fact that the wrath of God must be overcome in order to enter God's presence.²³⁹ Therefore, from the introduction to the Day of Atonement it seems clear that the appeasement of God's wrath lies at the heart of this ceremony.

Second, the Day of Atonement is the means by which both ceremonial uncleanness and sin are nationally atoned for within the nation of Israel so that the wrath of God may be siphoned off from the entire community.²⁴⁰ This process begins with the high priest. As seen above, Aaron cannot simply enter the presence of God empty-handed because he will die. In order to avoid God's wrath he must first make atonement

²³⁸Wenham notes that the burnt offering, the peace offering, and the reparation offering also atone for sin. See Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 88.

²³⁹Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 47. The high priest's personal sacrifice is the means through which God's wrath is averted: "This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. . . . Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household" (Lev 16:2-3, 6).

²⁴⁰Peterson notes that in both the cleansing of the sanctuary and the atonement for individuals the removal of God's wrath is always in view. See Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 12.

for himself by offering a young bull and sprinkling its blood in front of and on the mercy seat within the tabernacle (Lev 16:2,14). Additionally, and preliminary to this act, the priest must place incense on the fire before the Lord so that the mercy seat will be concealed and he will not die (Lev 16:13). Finally, after these preliminary matters are accomplished, the high priest can atone for the sins of Israel.

In order to atone for Israel's sins the priest must cast lots over two goats to determine which one will serve as a sacrifice to God and which one will bear the sins of Israel. The blood of the sacrificial goat is sprinkled upon the mercy seat and serves to cleanse the sanctuary from the ceremonial contamination of Israel's uncleanness (Lev 15:31). Nicole compares this process to a type of decontamination: "All sacred places and furniture were to be decontaminated by a man wearing special clothes, almost like an atomic power station. Thus, not only ritual impurity but sin itself was to be driven out like pollution in this graphic rite of the so-called scapegoat."²⁴¹ Uncleanness in any form is perilous and must be dealt with through sacrifice because it draws the wrath of God. This is clearly seen in Leviticus 15:31 when God warns Israel: "You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them." Therefore, the purification rite on the Day of Atonement serves not only to cleanse but to protect Israel by removing God's wrath, a wrath that according to Leviticus 15:31 would otherwise break forth on the camp.

However, in addition to removing the defilement of sin, the ceremony also appeases God for transgressions committed by the Israelites. According to Leviticus 16:16 the blood of the sacrificial goat is said to atone for the rebellion and sin of Israel. The term for rebellion פְּשָׁע only occurs in the priestly code and refers to willful acts of sin. The term for sin חַטָּאת is more general in nature and refers to transgressions

²⁴¹Nicole, "Atonement in the Pentateuch," 48–49.

regardless of their degree. When the two terms are combined with the prepositions מִן (from) and לְ (to) the idea conveyed is that sin of every kind would have been atoned for, from accidental to overt acts of rebellion.²⁴² As a result, humility and confession are required during the ceremony as the priest recites all of Israel's sin and guilt publicly before God. Therefore, because both rebellion and uncleanness are the focus of the Day of Atonement, and because both draw the judgment of God, it would appear that the removal of God's wrath is central in the Day of Atonement.²⁴³

In order to complete the ritual the high priest must present the scapegoat "for Azazel" so that sin may be removed from the camp of Israel (Lev 16:20).²⁴⁴ To accomplish this the high priest must lay both hands upon the head of the live goat while confessing all of the transgressions of the people. By this act, the priest symbolically places Israel's sin upon the head of the live animal so that they might be borne away from the congregation into the wilderness. The expression "bear iniquity" (Lev 16:22) is important because it communicates the idea of bearing responsibility for the punishment of sin (Lev 5:1; 17:7; 7:18; 17:16; 19:18; Num 5:31).²⁴⁵ In this case, the scapegoat vicariously bears the consequences of Israel's sin and carries them away from the people

²⁴²John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), 240. Capital cases would have been omitted from atonement and would therefore merit the death penalty (Num 15:30). For a list of these offenses, see Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 406.

²⁴³Hartley, *Leviticus*, 47.

²⁴⁴Peterson notes that a variety of interpretations have been suggested for Azazel: (1) the mountain where the goat is destroyed, (2) the sin that is given to destruction, and (3) the evil angel who is bribed so that he does not accuse. Regardless of the choice one makes, the basic idea communicated is that sin is removed/exterminated from Israel. See Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 13–14.

²⁴⁵Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 14.

into a place of destruction. In light of this, although the scapegoat removes iniquity there is also a sense of vicarious punishment involved in the ceremony as the scapegoat is sent away to die.²⁴⁶

Summarizing this section, one can say that the Day of Atonement, the terminology for atonement, and the theological concepts of God's presence and holiness clearly communicate the idea of propitiation in Levitical sacrifice. God provides a way for his wrath to be removed from the community of Israel so that he can dwell in Israel's midst. This is clear from the fact that purification rites involve ritual cleansing in order to effect the removal of God's wrath from both the tabernacle and individuals. It is clear from the fact that sacrifice in general seems to involve the concept of exchange in order to ransom one's life through blood atonement from the wrath of God (Lev 17:11). Finally, it is clear from the central sacrifice in Israel, the Day of Atonement, which serves to remove the wrath of God from Israel through blood purification and vicarious suffering. Therefore, one can confidently state that in order to enter God's presence God's wrath must be appeased through Levitical sacrifice.

In light of the above paragraph, it is difficult to understand how critics can deny God's retributive justice in the Old Testament sacrificial system. However, this reality is exactly what Green and Baker do. Indeed, in order to understand fully their error a quote is worth repeating:

Pervasively in the Old Testament, God's wrath is relationally based, not retributively motivated—that is, it is oriented toward the restoration or protection of God's people, not toward retaliation or payback. . . . The Old Testament never identifies Israel's sacrificial system as a means of averting or assuaging God's wrath; indeed, it is telling that God's wrath is never mentioned in Leviticus.²⁴⁷

^{246cc}The goat is sent to 'a land of cutting off' presumably where it dies or is killed. When this concept is combined with the term 'Azazel' (either 'total destruction' or 'precipice') there is a strong suggestion that the scapegoat is destroyed" (Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 14–15). See also Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 233–35.

Goldingay concurs when he states, “It is thus questionable whether the Old Testament sees sacrifices as propitiating God’s wrath. While anger is an important aspect of God’s attitude to humanity in the Bible, there is hardly any book in which it is less prominent than Leviticus.”²⁴⁸ Of course, one might remark that the reason wrath is mentioned so little in Leviticus is due to the fact that Aaron (after the incident with his sons) is careful to follow every sacrificial command of God so that God’s wrath does not break forth. It is precisely the sacrificial system that hold’s God’s wrath at bay, a wrath that was unchecked and surely not remedial in the case of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2).²⁴⁹ Moreover, to say, as Green and Baker do, that God’s wrath is relationally, not retributively, based is to misrepresent the argument. It is more biblically precise to say that God’s wrath is the result of an improper relationship with God, a relationship in which sin and ceremonial uncleanness defile one’s person and thus draw God’s retributive justice. Because of uncleanness and sin, both the high priest and the camp of Israel are in constant peril of experiencing God’s fierce wrath. In order to rectify the rift, God himself provides sacrificial means to cleanse and atone so that a proper relationship can be restored and maintained between God and his people. God works to restore the relationship with Israel by means of satisfying his retributive justice through blood sacrifice. Therefore, the concepts of relationship and retribution are not antithetical, as Green and Baker suggest. Instead, they are complementary. Finally, in response to Green and Bakers’s comment that Old Testament sacrifice does not deal with God’s wrath one can point to the definition of the term “atonement” as a rebuttal. It seems clear from etymology and usage that the term carries both the idea of cleansing and ransom.

²⁴⁷Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 72.

²⁴⁸Goldingay, “Your Iniquities Have Made a Separation between You and Your God,” 51.

²⁴⁹Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 47–48.

Therefore, to say that retribution is absent from the Old Testament sacrificial system is simply not the case.

In conclusion, one final matter needs to be addressed in order to answer the critics of retributive justice in regard to the Levitical sacrificial system. According to a number of scholars, there is no one central concept in the sacrificial system that serves to interpret the whole. Instead, God gives Israel a variety of sacrifices and therefore a variety of metaphors to express how he chooses to deal with sin. Therefore, to say that propitiation is a primary interpretive element in Leviticus is to single out one metaphor among many and therefore to misrepresent and narrow the entire message. Gunton clearly holds this view when he states, “Biblical sacrifices were made for various purposes: for sin, for the sealing of a covenant, for thanksgiving, for the remembrance of a historic salvation, for communion with God, or simply as a gift in response to God’s goodness.”²⁵⁰ However, as we have seen, the biblical data seems to point in a different direction. Indeed, summarizing the above data should serve to put this criticism to rest. For instance, as seen above, the term for atonement, כִּפֶּר (kipper) carries the connotation of both “ransom” and “purge” in priestly contexts in which God’s wrath is clearly appeased. Therefore, the terminology suggests that propitiation is a legitimate element in sacrifice. In addition, Leviticus 17:11 provides a direct statement in a didactic book that sacrifice is given for the general purpose of making atonement. As seen above, the construction of this verse clearly suggests a price paid by blood to ransom the life of the one bringing the offering.²⁵¹ Therefore, Leviticus 17:11 provides strong evidence that propitiation is the central element of Levitical sacrifice. Adding to this evidence is the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement is the keystone of the Book of Leviticus, coming after the instructions on sacrifice and the ordination of Aaron and before the laws

²⁵⁰Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 120.

²⁵¹Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 61.

on holy living.²⁵² Again, as seen above, this central ceremony in the life of Israel clearly serves to siphon off the wrath of God through blood purification and vicarious sacrifice. Indeed, the text repeatedly states that the Day of Atonement serves to make atonement for the people of Israel (Lev 16:17, 24, 30, 32-34). Therefore, the Day of Atonement provides strong evidence that propitiation is a central element in sacrifice. Additionally, one could cite the burnt offering, the peace offering, and the reparation offering, all of which serve to atone for sin.²⁵³ Moreover, the Passover, another key event in the life of Israel, served to propitiate the wrath of God prior to Israel's exodus from Egypt. Finally, when one considers the danger of entering God's presence and that sacrifice is the safeguard against such danger, one is forced to conclude that the propitiation of God's wrath is a central concept in the Levitical sacrificial system. There are, of course, other sacrifices that are more festive in nature. For instance, the meal after the peace offering was a festive occasion in which the worshipper and his friends celebrated before the Lord (Lev 3:1-17).²⁵⁴ However, before one can enjoy this privilege one must be ceremonially clean before God. This ceremonial cleansing is only effected through blood sacrifice that removes God's wrath. Therefore, the idea of averting the wrath of God through sacrifice is pervasive in Leviticus (the didactic book on sacrifice) to the point that one wonders how any other concept could compete with the idea of propitiation.

Conclusions from the Mosaic covenant. In conclusion, after examining the various facets of the Mosaic covenant it appears from the biblical data that God's retributive justice is prominent in all aspects of his relationship with Israel. For instance,

²⁵²Hartley, *Leviticus*, xxxv.

²⁵³Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 88; and Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 5.

²⁵⁴Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 81.

the initiation of Israel as a nation is prefaced by a deliverance that has as its focal point blood sacrifice. The Passover stands at the gateway that leaves Egypt. In order for Israel to escape bondage and the judgment of God, her sin must be atoned for. Otherwise, Israel will suffer the same fate as Egypt. Moving forward, the very structure of the covenant presupposes retributive justice. As seen above, the suzerain-vassal nature of the Mosaic covenant provides blessings for obedience and penalties for disobedience. This aspect of the covenant is clearly evidenced not only in Israel's history but in the golden calf incident as Israel runs the risk of being annihilated by God's wrath when she breaks faith with her Lord. Indeed, one can see in the Book of Exodus the great danger of God's wrath as God draws near to Israel. While this indwelling is certainly a blessing it is also a curse in that the close proximity of God to an unholy people can mean sudden death. Danger of death is around every turn for Israel as she interacts with her Holy God. In light of this Wenham quote is worth repeating: "The idea that man is always in danger of angering God runs through the whole Pentateuch. Fierce judgment and sudden death stud its pages. Sacrifice is the appointed means whereby peaceful coexistence between a holy God and sinful man become a possibility."²⁵⁵ Indeed, sacrifice is the means by which an unclean people can be cleansed from moral and ceremonial impurity and thus enter the presence of God. As seen above, it is the tabernacle and the Levitical sacrificial system that is inextricably bound to God's covenantal presence without which there is no hope of surviving an encounter with God. At the heart of the Levitical system stands the concept of atonement, which conveys the ideas of cleansing and ransom, both of which serve to remove the wrath of God from the community of Israel. Blood sacrifice is the means by which God's holy wrath is appeased and Israel receives forgiveness from her sin. Nowhere is this more evident than on the Day of Atonement when both ceremonial

²⁵⁵Wenham notes Gen 6:5 and Lev 1:9, 13, 17 in which sacrifice is said to have a soothing effect upon God. See Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 56.

defilement and forgiveness for rebellion were dealt with through blood sacrifice and the vicarious death of the scapegoat. Indeed, the author of Hebrews summarizes the entire Levitical system by the concepts of cleansing and forgiveness when he says (Heb 9:22), “In fact the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Certainly, this verse affirms what we have already seen. If the unholy/unclean comes into contact with the Holy God it will be destroyed. Only blood sacrifice can cleanse and ransom one from this wrath and thus open up the presence of God. According to the author of Hebrews this is exactly what Christ has done for his people by his one final sacrifice, a sacrifice that is foreshadowed by the Levitical sacrifices, a sacrifice that satisfies the retributive justice of God in a way that the Levitical sacrifices never could.

The Psalms and the prophets

Having laid the foundation for God’s retributive justice in the Pentateuch it is now necessary to examine briefly the Psalms and the prophets for similar patterns of God’s dealings with Israel. A cursory examination of the Psalms provides a rich source of material that falls under the category of God’s retributive justice. However, God’s retributive justice is not simply contained in specific Psalms. The concept of God’s retributive justice is inherent in the theme of God’s rule over Israel. Therefore, in the following discussion the reader will be introduced first to the concept of God as the ruler and judge of Israel. Within this context specific Psalms will be discussed as they relate to the topic of God’s retributive justice. Finally, the theme of God’s retributive justice will be examined in the writings of the prophets, specifically as it relates to Israel’s expulsion from the promised land. The goal will be to show that although God’s mercy is evident in the prophets’ writings, nevertheless, the theme of God’s retributive justice also stands out in stark tones and must be satisfied before Israel may experience God’s mercy.

The Psalms. The grouping of Psalms 1 and 2 in the Psalter does not appear to be a random arrangement.²⁵⁶ According to the thesis defended by Jamie Grant, within the Book of Psalms, kingship psalms are intentionally juxtaposed to psalms emphasizing the Mosaic law. This is done for two reasons. First, the arrangement informs the reader of the character of the eschatological king. Second, it encourages a similar form of godliness among the general Israelite population.²⁵⁷ While Grant’s observation is extremely helpful, it does appear that it can be extended one step further. By adding the theme of God’s justice to the overall scheme of Psalms 1 and 2, one now understand the Davidic king not only as a pious man of wisdom but as a righteous judge who enforces the law. Indeed, James Hamilton goes on to make this observation when he states, “When we combine Grant’s observations on the arrangement of the Psalms in book I with their heavily Davidic character, it does seem that the program advocated is that of a messianic king who will enforce the Torah.”²⁵⁸

A brief review of Psalms 1 and 2 does seem to confirm Hamilton’s observation. In Psalm 1 blessedness comes from turning away from the mindset,

²⁵⁶The canonical approach to the Psalms understands the final arrangement of the Psalms as intentional and a contributing factor to the overall theological understanding of the book. For a discussion of the canonical approach to the Psalms, see Jamie A. Grant, “The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms,” *Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica* (2004); and Bruce K. Waltke, “A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms,” in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 3–18.

²⁵⁷Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 9. According to Grant’s thesis, not only do Pss 1 and 2 reproduce these twin points, but book I of the Psalter (Pss 1-41) also reinforces this emphasis. This is especially true in Psalms 15-21 in which Psalm 19, a Torah Psalm, is bracketed by Kingship Psalms. For a thorough discussion of Grant’s view in relation to Pss 1 and 2, see James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 279–83.

²⁵⁸Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 281.

behavior, and associations of the ungodly (Ps 1:1).²⁵⁹ Instead godliness is associated with following and delighting oneself in the law of God (v. 2). As a result of his commitment, the godly man will experience God's untold blessing as his life exhibits permanence, abiding worth, and fruitfulness over time (v. 3). In contrast, the ungodly are like chaff which quickly dissipates in the wind. Moreover, when judgment comes the ungodly will not stand (vv. 4-6).²⁶⁰

The point to be noted in Psalm 1 is the centrality of the law.²⁶¹ Moreover, when one compares the Deuteronomic instructions for the king to observe and make a written copy of the law (Deut 17:14-20) with the content of Psalm 1, there seems to be a strong link between the two. This connection is further strengthened when one remembers God's direct charge to Joshua to meditate upon the law (Josh 1:9) and Solomon's request (made directly to God) for wisdom to govern God's people (1 Kgs 3:5-9), both of which echo the sentiments of Psalm 1. The suggestion is that Psalm 1 is not only for the pious man but is also a prayer for God's righteous king. The king is to be first and foremost a man of the covenant who meditates and delights upon God's law so that he might justly rule God's people (Ps 72:1-2).²⁶²

²⁵⁹Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity, 1973), 47–48.

²⁶⁰Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 282.

²⁶¹According to Waltke, the term law (תּוֹרָה (tôrâ)) in similar contexts (Ps 19:7; 119:1) refers to the Mosaic covenant. See Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 136.

²⁶²For a discussion of the Mosaic law and its relation to the Davidic king, see John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, The Biblical Seminar (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 135–42.

Psalm 2 begins with the just rule of God and focuses upon the Davidic king. The Psalm opens by recognizing the futility of the nations as they attempt to throw off the yoke of the Lord (Pss 1-3). Their insurrection is met with the hostile derision of God and his proclamation of the divine decree, which installs the messianic king as ruler over the nations (Ps 1:4-7).²⁶³ Included in the decree is the divine threat of destruction in which God's anointed king will shatter the rebellious nations into so many pieces like bits of broken pottery (Ps 2:8-12).²⁶⁴ As a result, the nations are instructed to be wise (reflecting the wisdom theme of Ps 1) and submit to the messiah (Ps 2:12).

The clear theme of Psalm 2 is God's judgment through which the Messianic king will be established and bring the nations into submission. However, Psalm 2 assumes a much larger significance when one understands that it is rooted in the Davidic decree (Ps 2:7). The Davidic decree not only promises to establish David's kingdom. It also proclaims that the Davidic throne will endure forever (2 Sam 7:5-17). As a result, the decree is foundational to the stability of David's reign and explains David's confidence in God that his kingdom will endure and even culminate in the messianic hope (Acts 2:24-31).²⁶⁵ Psalm 2 expands this decree by promising that David's seed will rise to crush the wicked (Ps 2:9). Therefore, David has an ultimate hope that his kingdom will not be overcome by evil but that God will be his shield and will ultimately rise and break the teeth of his enemies (Ps 3:3, 7). David's hope in God is none other than the ultimate destruction of the wicked (Gen 3:15; Ps 2:9-12; 3:3; 5:9-11; 6:10; 11:6; 50:22;

²⁶³Craigie notes that the mockery and anger of God is prompted by the rebellion of the nations. Moreover, God's response is said to terrify the nations. See Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 66.

²⁶⁴Behind the messianic throne is the power of God to rule the nations with a rod of iron and to pulverize the rebellious among them. See Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 67.

²⁶⁵Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 282-83.

55:23; 73:19) and the establishment of God's righteous kingdom through the messianic throne (Ps 2). Indeed, there is such confidence in God's promise to deliver that it seems to conquer death itself (Ps 16:10) and is interpreted as such in the New Testament (Acts 2:24-31).²⁶⁶

The combination of Psalms 1 and 2 presents the reader with a powerful formula of justice (Ps 2) and law (Ps 1). The king in the Psalm 2 is the blessed man who not only delights in God's law but who also enforces God's statutes by bringing the nations into submission, thus establishing God's kingdom according to the Davidic decree (2 Sam 7:5-17; Ps 2).²⁶⁷ Central to the establishment of God's righteous kingdom is both the salvation of the godly and destruction of the wicked (Ps 2, 7, 11).²⁶⁸ Therefore, God's retributive justice is present in an overarching way because God's kingdom includes the judgment and destruction of anything that opposes God's rule. As Seifrid writes, "Promises of God's intervention to "right" the wrongs in this fallen world stand at the center of biblical interest. This perspective does not exclude the divine recompense of the wicked, it rather presupposes it."²⁶⁹ In the final analysis, there is no peaceful coexistence of evil with good in God's eyes. As Psalm 11:5-7 states, "The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face." God's retributive justice is part of the establishment of God's kingdom.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶Ibid., 283.

²⁶⁷Ibid.

²⁶⁸Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 430.

²⁶⁹Ibid.

The observation that the establishment of God's kingdom involves both deliverance of the righteous and judgment of the wicked is important for two reasons. First, as seen above, it establishes God's retributive justice as an inherent part of the establishment of God's kingdom. Second, it serves to define God's righteousness in ethical terms. Because the laws of the kingdom are God's laws, they reflect God's standard of judgment (Ps 72:1; Ps 19).²⁷¹ Because God himself is understood to be a righteous judge (Ps 7:7-9; 11:5-7; 98:9), there is an expectation in the Psalms that God himself will intervene to reinstate right order in the world either directly or through his messiah.²⁷² Indeed, God is explicitly described in the Psalms as a righteous judge who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked (Ps 7:10, 12; 11:5-7; 50:6). In this regard, Psalm 7:7-11 bears repeating:

Let the assembled peoples gather around you. Rule over them from on high; let the Lord judge the peoples. Judge me O Lord, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High. O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure. My shield is God most High who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

In these verses, David has in mind a personal injustice that he wishes God to address (Ps 7:1-4). Nevertheless, the Psalm takes on a cosmic dimension as God takes his seat among the nations who gather around him as their judge (Ps 7:7). The scene

²⁷⁰Belousek characterizes the Psalms as a book of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. While this is certainly true, as seen above, God's justice also permeates the book. As a result, Belousek is again guilty of an unbalanced approach to the Scriptures in relation to God's justice. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 402-05.

²⁷¹If one compares God's judicial attributes described in Deut 32:4 and Ps 18:30 with the judicial attributes of the law found in Ps 19:7-10 one finds that the two are similar. God's law, like God's character, expresses judicial perfection and thus must reflect God's own righteousness. See Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 23; and Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 141-42.

²⁷²Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 426.

pictures universal justice flowing from the one true judge and lawgiver of Israel who searches the minds and hearts of both David and his enemies (Ps 7:9).²⁷³ Indeed, this picture is similar to Isaiah 2:3-4 where one reads: “Come, let us go up 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. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” The point of these texts is that God not only judges the wicked, but he judges them by the standard of his law. God’s righteousness involves an ethical standard of judgment.

The declaration that God’s righteousness involves an ethical norm leads one directly into the controversial discussion of the meaning of the term righteousness (רָצוּן). A quick survey of the literature will confirm that the concept of connecting God’s righteousness to an ethical standard is under considerable debate. Indeed, the majority of articles on the subject define God’s righteousness as his covenant faithfulness.²⁷⁴ However, there are recent challenges to this view and so the matter is far from being settled.²⁷⁵ Moreover, there are serious theological implications at stake in this debate.

²⁷³Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 64.

²⁷⁴Hermann Cremer in his extensive study of God’s righteousness was one of the first to deny that the biblical usage of the term contains the concept of an ethical norm. Cremer’s view of God’s righteousness is now common in the current literature. For instance, James Dunn makes reference to Cremer’s work in his discussion of God’s righteousness. See Cremer, *Die Paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre Im Zusammenhange Ihrer Geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*. See also Dunn, “The Justice of God,” 16; idem, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 341. For a similar view, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 18.

²⁷⁵Johnson, “רָצוּן,” 239–64; Scullion, “Righteousness,” 724–36; Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism”; and Ahuva Ho, *Sedeq and Sedaqah in the Hebrew Bible*, American University Studies (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

For instance, If God’s righteousness is defined as “correspondence to an ethical norm,” then retributive justice in the Bible can easily be explained. On the other hand, if God’s righteousness is seen primarily as his “covenant faithfulness to deliver,” then God’s justice can fade entirely as one loses sight of God’s holiness. More specifically, this concept finds expression in most New Perspective theologians who are unwilling to view the cross of Christ as God’s final judgment upon sin.²⁷⁶

However, it does appear that the term "righteousness" cannot be limited simply to God’s covenant faithfulness. First, as noted in the previous discussion, God’s overall plan appears to involve God as judge and king who executes his judgments according to the righteous standard of the law. Therefore, since God is a just judge his righteousness must be defined according to an ethical standard. Second, biblical usage of the term for righteousness seems to confirm the idea of a norm as one of its meanings. For instance, in Leviticus 19:15 God gives the following command to Moses: “Do not pervert justice, do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly (קִדְּשׁוּ).” The concept of an equitable moral standard is clearly in view in this passage as God forbids preferential treatment in the execution of his justice.²⁷⁷

A similar idea is portrayed in Psalm 7:8, which reads, “Let the Lord judge the peoples. Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High.” In this verse, the Psalmist is appealing to his integrity as the basis for his acquittal before God. In the process he uses the terms “righteousness” (קִדְּשׁוּ) and “innocence” (נְהַלְתִּי) to describe his moral standing. Clearly the parallel usage of קִדְּשׁוּ and

²⁷⁶For instance, see Green and Baker’s comments on Hodge’s view of penal substitution. See Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 170–84. For a possible exception see N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone Romans* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 55–59.

²⁷⁷Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 128–29.

along with the judicial context of the verse demand that the term “righteousness” be understood as a moral principle.²⁷⁸

The concept of a moral standard seems to be evident in Psalm 9. Speaking of God, the psalmist says the following in verses 4-5a: “For you have upheld my right and my cause; you have sat on your throne judging righteously. You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked.” These verses picture God as a judge executing judgment by destroying the wicked and delivering the righteous. The phrase *שׁוֹפֵט צְדָקָה* used in verse 4 is significant because it pictures God as a just judge, indicating that the concept of a norm is inherent in God’s judgments (Ps 7:11, Isa 1:26; 11:4-5; Jer 11:20).²⁷⁹ Moreover, the overall judicial setting of the verse enforces the concept that an ethical standard is at work in God’s judgments. For instance, the Psalmist seems to assume that God has adjudicated his case and found him to be innocent of any wrongdoing when compared to his enemies (Ps 7:8).²⁸⁰ This adjudication and acquittal clearly implies judgment according to a moral standard by which God decides between a just and an unjust cause. As a result, there is rejoicing in God the righteous judge who has heard the Psalmist’s cry and vindicated his right. In verses 7-8, the idea of God’s righteous judgment is extended to the entire world: “The Lord reigns forever, he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world with righteousness; he will

²⁷⁸This concept further enforced in vv. 10 and 11 where the righteous God (*אֱלֹהִים צְדִיק*) is also the righteous judge (*שׁוֹפֵט צְדָקָה*), who searches the minds and hearts and can therefore judge David’s cause in an equitable manner. Therefore, the concept of a moral norm (for the term *צְדָקָה*) seems to be clearly in view in Ps 7. See Scullion, “Righteousness,” 728.

²⁷⁹The phrase used in 9:4 (*שׁוֹפֵט צְדָקָה*) can be translated as “just judge” or “judge who judges righteously.” In either event, the idea of a moral standard is communicated by the term “righteousness” (*צְדָקָה*). See Ho, *Sedeq and Sedaqah in the Hebrew Bible*, 37; and Johnson, “צְדָקָה,” 252.

²⁸⁰A similar assumption of innocence using the term “righteousness” is seen in Ps 7:8. See Scullion, “Righteousness,” 728.

govern the peoples with justice.” The combination of the terms “judgment” (מִשְׁפָּט), “righteousness” (צְדָקָה) and “equity/justice” (מִישָׁר) in these verses is significant. While the parallel usage of “judgment” and “righteousness” suggests rule according to an ordered principled,²⁸¹ the additional expression, מִישָׁר carries the connotation of equity or uprightness.²⁸² In other words, God’s judgments are carried out equitably according to an ordered principle so that only the wicked need fear God’s reprisal.²⁸³ The same theme seems to be reiterated in Psalm 98:9: “Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.” This verse pictures the celebration of creation as God returns to restore judicial order to his creation. Again, the terms righteousness (צְדָקָה) and equity (מִישָׁר) are associated (cf. Ps 9:8), indicating that God’s righteousness is an ethical quality by which he judges the world.²⁸⁴

Moving to another example, Psalm 72:1-2 seems to be especially clear that God’s righteousness includes the idea of an ethical norm. Verses 1 and 2 read, “Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. He will judge

²⁸¹While the terms “judgment” and “righteous” may be nearly synonymous in parallel usage, nevertheless Johnson notes that they retain a semantic distinction. The term “judgment” (מִשְׁפָּט) conveys the concept of decision, judgment, or law while the term “righteousness” (צְדָקָה) retains the idea of what is right or correct. See Johnson, “צְדָקָה,” 247.

²⁸²*The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, trans. Edward Robinson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), s.v. “מִשְׁפָּט,” by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, and William Gesenius. Seifrid notes that the term צְדָקָה is associated with the concept of normativity throughout the Northwest Semitic language group and often in the Hebrew Bible (in this case מִישָׁר) (Isa 33:15; 45:19; Ps 9:9; 17:1-2; 58:2; 96:10; 98:9; 99:4; Prov 1:3; 2:9). See Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” 420–21.

²⁸³Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 119.

²⁸⁴Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” 420–21; and Johnson, “צְדָקָה,” 247–48.

your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.” The first thing to note about Psalm 72 is that verse 1 is a prayer to God that he will grant the Davidic king judicial wisdom. This verse seems to echo the importance of the law outlined in the Deuteronomic instructions given to kings (Deut 17:14-20) and the charge given to Joshua (Josh 1:9). More specifically, this prayer is very similar to Solomon’s request in I Kings 3:9 where Solomon asks God for a discerning heart to govern Israel by distinguishing between right and wrong (1 Kgs 3:9; Isa 11:1-5). Therefore, the overall biblical context would suggest that the Psalmist is asking for God to grant wisdom to the king in the proper application of the God’s law. Since the term “righteousness” occurs within this strong judicial setting one would expect that it would take on the meaning of an ethical norm. That this truth is the case is demonstrated not only by the biblical context but by the pairing of the terms “justice” (טִפְשָׁיִם) and “righteousness” (הַקְּדָשׁ, קְדָשׁ) in both verses 1 and 2. As seen above, the parallel usage indicates that righteousness is the principle to which judgment corresponds.²⁸⁵ In summary, one can say that righteousness as a standard of judgment originates in God and then flows to the king where it is applied to the people. As Scullion states, “Yahweh is asked to endow the king with his (Yahweh’s) mišpāt and sēdāqā so that he (the king) may be able to judge the people with sedeq and mišpāt; i.e., proper order comes from Yahweh through the king (cf. Isa 32:1).”²⁸⁶ Therefore, Psalm 72 gives clear evidence that God’s righteousness corresponds to an ethical norm.

In yet another example, Psalm 97:2 describes righteousness and justice as the foundations of God’s throne (cf. Ps 89:14). That a moral standard is intended seems to be

²⁸⁵Johnson, “קְדָשׁ,” 247–48; and Ho, *Sedeq and Sedaqah in the Hebrew Bible*, 40.

²⁸⁶Noel D. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Righteousness,” by J. J. Scullion.

clear again from the paring of *xdq* and *mvpt* and the general context in which, amidst visions of Sinai and divine terror, God returns in final judgment to conquer the rebellious nations and establish his kingdom. As Tate writes, “His [God’s] throne is supported by those qualities of right order and justice which should characterize the nature of all true kingship.”²⁸⁷

Finally, that the term righteousness (*קִדְּוָה*) refers to an ordered principle can be seen in Psalm 119 where it is closely associated with other normative terms. For instance, the law is described as that which is right (*יֵשֶׁר*) in verse 137 and that which is righteous (*צִדִּיק*) in verse 138. It is said to be both trustworthy (*אֱמוּנָה*) and righteous (*קִדְּוָה*, *צִדִּיק*) in verses 75 and 138. Finally, in verse 7, the righteous (*קִדְּוָה*) law is said to be the source of the Psalmist’s (*יֵשֶׁר*) upright heart. From the context of these verses it would appear that the term righteousness takes on the concept of an ethical norm. Moreover, since the law is constantly referred to as God’s law one can assume it reflects God’s standard of righteousness.

The above examples are simply a sample of a larger pool of Scriptures that indicate that the term “righteousness” can convey the concept of a moral norm. Of course, as the New Perspective has pointed out, the term “righteousness” (*קִדְּוָה*) also conveys the concept of deliverance (i.e., Pss 51:14; 65:5; 98:2; Isa 41:10; 46:13; 48:18; 51:5-6).²⁸⁸ For instance, Dunn states the following: “In Hebrew thought 'righteousness' is a more relational concept—'righteousness' as the meeting of obligation laid upon the individual by relationship of which he or she is part.”²⁸⁹ Dunn then extends this relational concept to salvation when he states the following: “It should be equally evident

²⁸⁷Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 518.

²⁸⁸Dunn, “The Justice of God,” 16–17.

²⁸⁹Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 341.

why God's *righteousness* could be understood as God's *faithfulness* to his people. For his righteousness was simply the fulfillment of his covenant obligation as Israel's God in delivering, saving, and vindicating Israel, despite Israel's own failure."²⁹⁰ The difficulty with Dunn's understanding is that he restricts the meaning of "righteousness" almost exclusively to the concept of "salvation." However, as seen above, "adherence to a moral norm" is also conveyed by the term. The question that surfaces is why has this range of meaning been overlooked by the New Perspective? While a thorough answer is beyond the scope of this dissertation, nevertheless, some insight can be gained by looking into the history of this debate. In fact, Hermann Cremer's study of the term "righteousness" in the Hebrew Bible stands as a reference point for modern scholarship and is cited on a regular basis by the New Perspective.²⁹¹ Indeed, Dunn relies heavily upon Cremer's work with little or no evaluation.²⁹² However, upon closer examination, Cremer's work reveals major flaws. For instance, Cremer's attempt to locate an overarching meaning for the term "righteousness" violates the basic principle of hermeneutics that context has priority in determining meaning. This error leads to a second fundamental mistake. In seeking a univocal meaning for "righteousness," Cremer logically insists that קִדְּוָה terminology always carries a relational connotation, regardless of the context.²⁹³ This notion has the obvious result of predetermining the meaning of a text before it is studied.

²⁹⁰Ibid., 342.

²⁹¹Cremer, *Die Paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre Im Zusammenhange Ihrer Geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*.

²⁹²Dunn makes pivotal references to Cremer's study in both his articles on *The Justice of God* and in his larger work, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. However, Dunn fails to evaluate Cremer's work. See Dunn, "The Justice of God," 16–17; idem, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 341–42.

²⁹³Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 418–19.

However, as noted above, even a cursory examination of Scripture reveals a normative sense in the term “righteousness.” In many scriptural examples it is impossible to define “righteousness” in relational terms. For instance, in Genesis 30:33 Jacob says to Laban that his “righteousness” (צְדִיקָה) will testify for him. Clearly the concept of honesty or integrity is in view in this passage. Proverbs 1:3 states that wisdom is “doing what is right (צְדִיק) and just (מְשֻׁפָּט) and fair (מִישׁוֹר).” Again, in this passage, an ethical norm seems to be in view. Finally, speaking of the Messiah, Isaiah states the following (Isa 11:3-4): “He will not judge (שֹׁפֵט) by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness (צְדִיקָה) he will judge the needy, with equity (מִישׁוֹר) he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.” Certainly, from the judicial context of this verse, one must understand the term “righteousness” in a normative sense. In fact, this last verse brings one back to the theme of the just king who rules well by applying God’s law in an equitable fashion. Therefore, in light of the biblical evidence, it is necessary to depart from Cremer’s insistence that the term “righteousness” has only a relational connotation. Instead, both the relational and normative aspects of God’s righteousness must be embraced.

How then can one understand the relational (salvific) and normative aspects of God’s justice without ignoring either aspect? The solution is really not as difficult as one might expect. In fact, it appears that God’s justice is contained in his acts of salvation. God’s acquittal is not simply a verbal verdict from a judge. Instead, in the act of deliverance, God simultaneously judges, condemning and punishing the wicked while he acquits and delivers the righteous.²⁹⁴ The legislative and executive functions are joined in God and therefore simultaneously carried out.²⁹⁵ As seen above, the Psalmist sees in God’s deliverance the vindication of his cause. The assumption is that God has judged

²⁹⁴Ibid., 426–27.

²⁹⁵Ibid., 427.

his integrity (צדק) (Ps 7:8) and on that basis delivered him from his enemies. Therefore, the salvation of Israel does not exclude God's judgment. Instead, it presupposes it.²⁹⁶ As a result, the view that excludes the normative aspect of God's righteousness must be reevaluated. As Seifrid writes, "[God's] acts of 'justification' do not represent mere 'salvation' for Israel, or even merely 'salvation.' They constitute the establishment of justice in the world which Yahweh made and governs."²⁹⁷ As a result one can conclude that because the New Perspective has focused exclusively upon the salvific aspects of God's righteousness they have ended up with a distorted view of God's justice.

In light of the above, one final item must be examined in order to complete this brief analysis of the Psalms. It is necessary to understand how the imprecatory Psalms fit into God's overall plan of bringing justice to the world. In fact, thirty-five of the Psalms ask for God to punish the Psalmist's enemies.²⁹⁸ Moreover, several of the Psalms are quite graphic in their depiction of God's punishment, which has led some to question their moral validity (Pss 11; 109).²⁹⁹ However, upon closer examination the imprecatory Psalms are clearly biblical and serve to focus on God's holy nature. First, in their defense, these prayers are expressions of faith and patience by men of integrity asking for God to avenge the gross injustices they have suffered.³⁰⁰ Speaking of David's patience, Kidner states, "There have been few men been more capable of generosity under personal

²⁹⁶Ibid., 430.

²⁹⁷Ibid., 441.

²⁹⁸William A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. "Psalms: Theology of," by Bruce K. Waltke.

²⁹⁹C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 23.

³⁰⁰Waltke, "Psalms."

attack, as he proved by his attitude to Saul and Absalom, to say nothing of Shimei; and no ruler was more deeply stirred to anger by cruel and unscrupulous actions, even when they appeared to favor his cause.”³⁰¹ Rather than avenge himself, David chooses to put his trust in Yahweh, who is the judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25). Second, these prayers are theologically correct. For instance, the prayer in Psalm 109:6, which requests that the children of the wicked become beggars, is simply an application of Exodus 34:6-7 in which God promises to curse the wicked to the third and fourth generation. The Psalmist is asking God to eradicate evil according to his promises enumerated in the Mosaic covenant. Finally, these prayers are correct in that they ask for the establishment of God’s righteous kingdom. As Waltke writes, “They are theocratic, looking for the establishment of a righteous kingdom by the Moral Administrator of the universe (cf. Pss 72, 82). The earthly king asks no more of the heavenly king that the latter asked of him (Deut 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:13, 19; 21:9, 22; 22:22, 24).”³⁰² As such, God is asked to distinguish between right and wrong and to bring to justice, according to his law, those who resist the Davidic King (Ps 2). Therefore, these prayers are a clear example of a desire for God’s retributive justice against the workers of iniquity so that evil might be eradicated and God’s throne might be established. And while these Psalms might seem harsh to modern ears, untrained in the nature of God’s holiness, nevertheless, it must be remembered that there is no truce between God and evil. As the Psalmist states (Ps 11:5, 7), “The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates . . . for the Lord is righteous, he loves justice, upright men will see his face.”

The prophets. Moving from the Psalms, it is now necessary to examine the prophets for signs of God’s retributive justice. In fact, what one discovers is that the

³⁰¹Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 26.

³⁰²Waltke, “Psalms.”

preaching of the prophets is first and foremost preaching that conforms to God's Covenant with Israel (Deut 13:1-5). As Waltke argues, "Obviously an oracle from Israel's covenant keeping God will not violate his character, his covenants, or his counsel."³⁰³ Therefore, one would expect that the prophets would demand that Israel conform to the Mosaic covenant or suffer the consequences. In fact, this is indeed the case as the prophets repeat many of the covenant curses found in Deuteronomy 28. The final expulsion from the land of both the northern and southern kingdoms is simply a repetition of Deuteronomy 28:26, which give the following penalty for rebellion against God: "The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers." This truth is seen clearly in the book of Isaiah as God, through the prophet, prophesies of the northern kingdom's expulsion by the Assyrians. Isaiah is commanded to write the inscription Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz ("swift to come is the spoil, speedy is the prey") upon a scroll.³⁰⁴ The cryptic prophecy is attested by two leading citizens, and a further witness is provided through the child that Isaiah and his wife conceive. According to the prophetic word, before the child is able to speak correctly, Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria (Isa 8:4). The prophet, in legal fashion, then proceeds to build the case for Israel's expulsion. Leading the list of accusations is both theological error and moral wickedness. For instance, the term ungodliness (רָחֵק) used in 9:17 refers primarily to apostasy, defilement, and religious error, while the term wickedness (רָשָׁע) (9:17-18) refers more to the violation of the moral law.³⁰⁵ Moreover, both ungodliness and wickedness appear to have permeated the

³⁰³Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 829.

³⁰⁴Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 72.

³⁰⁵J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 109.

entire nation and are spreading like an uncontrolled brush fire. In addition, immorality has worked its way into the social structure of Israel. The leadership is accused of making unjust laws that deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed (Isa 10:1). In summary, it appears that apostasy, immorality, and social injustice have so infiltrated Israel that God has determined to remove them from the land of promise. However, Israel will not go without warning. God will make sure, through his prophets, that Israel understands and is warned of God's coming judgment. As Motyer states, "The Lord is not a God of capricious fury. Behind his judgments lies the examination of the evidence (Gen 18:20ff.)."³⁰⁶ Moreover, that God is the agent behind this judgment is clear from Isaiah 10:5 where Assyria is referred to as God's agent ("the rod of my anger"). That God is directing the unsuspecting nation of Assyria to discipline Israel is very clear from the text. God is said to send Assyria (Isa 10:6) to loot and plunder because he is angry with Israel (Isa 10:6). All the while, Assyria is unsuspecting, having only the motive to destroy and pursue her goals of imperialism. Indeed, God responds to the boasts of Assyrian imperialism with a declaration of his omnipotent rule. While Assyria proclaims her might, "By the strength of my hand I have done this" (Isa 10:13), God proclaims his absolute sovereignty: "Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up" (Isa 10:15). Assyria is simply a tool of God's justice against the northern kingdom. Therefore, in response to Israel's disregard of the covenant, God directly sends Assyria to exact his retributive justice upon her by expelling her from the promised land. Indeed, in Isaiah 10:22 one reads the following: "Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the Lord Almighty will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land."

³⁰⁶Ibid.

A similar case is found for the southern kingdom. For instance, the book of Jeremiah is dominated by the theme of the Babylonian exile. The reason for Jeremiah's final condemnation is multifaceted. Israel is accused of idolatry (Jer 11:13; 19:13), pride (Jer 13:9), and failure to keep the Sabbath (Jer 17:19-27). However, a dominant motif in Jeremiah seems to be the unjust social, political, and economic system that has permeated the general populace.³⁰⁷ In a scene reminiscent of the Sodom episode in Genesis the Lord, through Jeremiah, states the following: "Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city" (Jer 5:1). As a result of her covenant disloyalty, God declares that he will exile the nation: "I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword" (Jer 20:4). Moreover, the conquest and expulsion by Babylon will be severe. In tones similar to the curses enumerated in Deuteronomy 28, Jeremiah declares that the disaster brought by God will be cataclysmic: "I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle" (Jer 19:3). The prophecy goes on to speak of Jerusalem's total destruction in very gruesome images: "In this place I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, at the hand of those who seek their lives, and I will give their carcasses as food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth" (Jer 19:7). Therefore, as with the northern kingdom, because Judah has forsaken God she will now be destroyed as she reaps his fierce wrath, wrath that was promised in the original covenant with Moses (Deut 28).

However, one must understand that God's judgment is not the last word in the prophetic books. There are overtones of mercy for both the northern and southern kingdoms. The devastated northern kingdom will be the recipient of God' marvelous

³⁰⁷Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 841.

light that will shine in both Zebulon and Naphtali (Isa 9:1). Indeed, this prophecy is said to have been fulfilled by the ministry of Christ in Matthew 4:16. The southern kingdom will be returned to the promised land after a period of 70 years (Jer 30-33). Moreover, God will make a new covenant with the people in which he will write his law in their minds and hearts (Jer 31:31-34). However, these clear predictions of God's overwhelming mercy must not be understood as negating the themes of retributive judgment that are just as significant.³⁰⁸ The tendency of the New Perspective is to collapse God's judgment into his mercy. For instance, Green and Baker attempt to define God's wrath in terms of restoration: "Pervasively in the Old Testament, God's wrath is relationally based, not retributively motivated—that is, it is oriented toward the restoration or protection of God's people, not toward retaliation and payback."³⁰⁹ However, as seen in the covenant curses (Deut 28) and in the Scriptures cited above, the descriptions of devastation are, at times, so severe that it is not possible to understand God's actions simply in restorative terms. One example in Ezekiel will clarify this idea. In describing God's destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet writes the following:

Therefore, this is what the sovereign Lord says: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations. Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children, and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all of your survivors to the winds. Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you. A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword. Then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside and I will be avenged. And when I have spent my wrath upon them, they will know that I the Lord have spoken in my zeal. (Ezek 5:8-13)

³⁰⁸Belousek, while he recognizes God's restorative grace, refuses to balance his approach with an equal understanding of God's retributive justice that is clearly present in the writings of the prophets. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 398-405.

³⁰⁹Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 72.

Similar biblical texts in the Prophets could be cited (Hos 5:14). However, these graphic images serve to illustrate that God's wrath is visited upon rebellious Israel in the most severe fashion. Moreover, as seen in the last sentence of this text, God's wrath will continue until it is completely expended (Isa 51:17). In addition, because Israel seems to have crossed a line in her rebellion, there is now no room for repentance. It is simply too late.³¹⁰ Jeremiah 14:11 states the following: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Do not pray for the well-being of this people. Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine, and plague.'" The theme of no return is repeated and intensified in Jeremiah 15:1-2: "Then the Lord said to me: 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Let them go! And if they ask you "Where shall we go?" Tell them "This is what the Lord says: 'Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.''" God's judgment is now a settled matter. Therefore, in light of these texts, it is impossible to understand God's wrath as simply restorative. Indeed, in the Ezekiel passage (Ezek 5:13) God speaks of avenging himself against Jerusalem. Therefore, Green and Baker are wrong to reduce God's wrath to a product of his mercy in the form of restoration. Moreover, according to these biblical texts, no amount of repentance will rectify one's broken relationship with God. The people of Israel must now go through judgment before they can experience God's mercy.³¹¹ God's wrath must now be satisfied.

³¹⁰Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2002), 222.

³¹¹For an extended treatment of God's salvation through judgment, see Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*.

Conclusions from the Psalms and the prophets. In conclusion, it is clear that God's retributive justice is evident in both the Psalms and the prophets. In the Psalms, God's rule through the Davidic messiah presupposes that he will bring order to his creation by imposing his will upon all nations (Ps 2). Moreover, in bringing his kingdom to bear, God, as judge, will adjudicate the nations according to an ethical standard of righteousness (Pss 1, 72). This standard, as seen above, includes not only God's faithfulness to save but his function as judge to distinguish between right and wrong and to acquit the innocent and condemn the guilty. In addition, because the legislative and judicial functions are joined in God, his verdicts are often seen in acts of salvation in which the righteous are acquitted or acts of judgment in which the wicked are condemned. Therefore, the Psalms, by preaching the coming messianic kingdom, preach the coming of God's retribution upon the wicked and his salvation of the righteous.

The prophets, while they preach God's salvation, also heavily emphasize God's coming retribution to both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. There is a sense in which the prophets see Israel as passing the point of no return, and therefore, God's judgment is now inevitable. This judgment is often described in graphic terms and reflects God's holy opposition to sin. Therefore, both the northern and southern kingdoms must suffer God's wrath because of the evil that has permeated both kingdom. However, once God's anger is expended there are promises of hope; especially for the southern kingdom. However, Israel must pass through judgment before she experiences God's mercy.

CHAPTER 4
THE RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE OF GOD
IN THE GOSPELS

Introduction

The concept of God as king and judge is a prominent theme in the Old Testament. In the last chapter, the concept of God as judge surfaced in God's dealings with man in the fall, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the golden calf incident. Moreover, it was argued that the role of judge is carried forward in the Davidic Messiah (2 Sam 7:10-16), who is both king and judge of the earth (Ps 2) and who will rule by the standard of God's law (Ps 1). In his reign through the messianic king, God will establish righteousness by crushing evil (Ps 2).

While the Old Testament clearly depicts God as the judge of evil, he is also the God who saves. However, in saving his people, God sacrifices none of his holiness. Instead, God chooses to enter into covenant with Israel where he provides a means of approach to himself through atoning sacrifice. From this covenant relationship God establishes Israel as a nation and provides protection from her external enemies. Indeed, the Mosaic Covenant provides the basis of Israel's overall relationship with God in the Old Testament.

The aspect of God as king passes over into the New Testament through the concept of the messianic kingdom of God.¹ As Schreiner notes, "The expression

¹George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), xi. The following discussion on God's kingdom is not meant to be exhaustive but is merely a brief summary intended to link God's kingdom to the subject of retributive justice. For additional discussion of the kingdom of God and its relation to the New

‘kingdom of God’ occurs four times in Matthew, fourteen times in Mark, thirty-two in Luke, and four in John.”² The prominence of the kingdom in the Gospels can be seen from the fact that John the Baptist announces that it is at hand (Matt 4:17) and that Jesus proclaims that the kingdom has arrived in the presence of his person (Mark 1:14-15; John 4:26; cf. Luke 1:31-33, Mark 1:1-3; Matt 16:16). Indeed, Jesus’ teaching in Galilee is none other than the proclamation of the kingdom of God (Matt 4:23, cf. 9:35; 24:14; Luke 4:43).³

Further linkage to the Old Testament is provided by the fact that the old covenant kingdom concepts of deliverance and the defeat of evil are carried forward into the New Testament. For instance, Jesus is identified as the one who will “save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21; Luke 2:25-32; John 3:16; cf. Jer 31:34), while his eschatological statements promise his return in glory to judge the earth and consummate his kingdom as the promised Son of Man in Daniel 7 (Luke 21:27; Mark 13; 26). Therefore, in the New Testament the concept of God’s kingdom contains both Old Testament concepts of redemption and retributive justice as God saves his people and judges their enemies.

The purpose of this chapter will be to demonstrate from the Gospels that God’s retributive justice is present in both Christ’s redemptive work as well as his divine acts of

Testament, see Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 41–79; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, ed. Raymond O. Zorn, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962).

²Thomas R. Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ A Summary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 45–46. Schreiner notes that the term “kingdom of heaven” is an approximate equivalent of the term “kingdom of God” and serves to emphasize that God’s kingdom is not earthly but from above. Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 47.

³Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 48.

eschatological judgment. While the latter may seem obvious, nevertheless there have been significant attempts to define God's judgment in a manner that excludes retributive justice.⁴ Additionally, as noted in chapter 2, numerous writers have challenged the retributive nature of Christ's atoning work. Therefore, this chapter will proceed along two lines. First, it will be argued that the redemptive work of Christ satisfies God's retributive justice. Isaiah 53 will be examined as a major theme of the Gospels in which Christ, the Servant of God, suffers for the transgressions of his people. After this concept is established, retributive justice will be argued on the basis of Jesus' ransom saying (Mark 10:45), the Passover motif in the Passion narrative (Luke 22:19-20; Mark 14:22-24), and the account of the crucifixion itself (Mark 15:33-39). The second major division of the chapter will consist of a discussion of Christ's view of eternal punishment and how retributive justice is present in this aspect of Jesus' teaching. In both sections, the focus will be upon the fact that whether God is redeeming or condemning, his retributive justice will always be satisfied.

Jesus' Redemptive Work

In the Gospels, Jesus is portrayed as the Davidic messiah promised in the Old Testament. Luke 1:32-33 clearly introduces him in this way: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." This passage echoes 2 Samuel 7, where God makes a covenant with David in which he promises that David's kingdom will endure forever and that one of David's offspring will always sit upon his throne. This promise is repeated and enhanced in Psalm 2 where the

⁴Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009).

Messiah is designated to be God's king who will subdue and rule the kingdoms of the earth (Pss 2:8-12). Moreover, this messianic theme is picked up in Daniel 7:13-14, where, under the title of the Son of Man, a divine ruler approaches the Ancient of Days in order to receive an eternal kingdom. It is this ruling authority that is claimed by Christ before the high priest (Mark 14:62) and repeated to his disciples in Matthew 28:18. Therefore, in the Gospels, Christ is depicted as the Messianic king who rules over God's kingdom.

However, the Gospels place a significant qualification upon this claim. While Christ is said to be the Davidic Messiah who rules, he is also the Messiah who suffers. Concerning this aspect of Jesus' messianic ministry, Schreiner states, "It is clear from the Gospel, however, that as the true Israelite and the Davidic king, he is destined to suffer."⁵ In other words, the Gospels connect Jesus' suffering with his messianic office and see it as an intricate part of establishing his kingdom. Jesus himself affirms this truth on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-26): "How foolish you are, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" One could also cite Peter's great confession (Matt 16:16) and Christ's follow-up to Peter that the Messiah must suffer as confirmation of this principle: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matt 16:21). Indeed, the very purpose of the Gospels is to point readers to the cross, as Schreiner notes: "The

⁵Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 269.

Synoptics truly are passion narratives with extended introductions.”⁶ Therefore, the Gospels designate suffering as an instrumental part of the Messianic mission.

In establishing why suffering is related to the messianic office, it is helpful to look at the relationship between covenant and kingdom. Fundamentally, the biblical covenants communicate the idea of divine-human relationship.⁷ This is demonstrated in the Mosaic Covenant in Leviticus 26:12, where one reads, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Moreover, in the promise of the New Covenant (Jer 31:33), God promises to write his law upon the minds and hearts of his people, thus guaranteeing a bond between God and his elect. On the other hand, the Kingdom of God, while it includes man’s relationship to God, focuses more upon the rule of God as he brings salvation to man and defeats evil.⁸

The particular way that covenant and kingdom relate to each other is that God establishes his relationship with man and extends his kingdom throughout the world through a series of biblical covenants.⁹ This reality can be seen in God’s pre-fall relationship with man as Adam becomes God’s vice-regent to subdue the earth. Adam is created in God’s image, given dominion over the earth, and is tasked with subduing the world (Gen 1:27-28). Adam is then placed in the garden where intimate communion with

⁶Ibid., 275.

⁷This section is dependent on the research of Stephen J. Wellum and Peter J. Gentry, who graciously granted access to their pre-publication manuscript. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21.

⁸Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 183, 195.

⁹For a thorough explanation of how kingdom relates to covenant, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*.

God takes place. From the vantage point of covenant fellowship with God, Adam is to learn how he is to accomplish the task of subduing the earth.¹⁰

The concept of kingdom through covenant is also seen with Abraham. God makes a covenant with Abraham, establishing fellowship with this chosen patriarch who then will extend this blessing to the entire world (Gen 22:18). Indeed, God instructs Abraham on the proper understanding of righteousness and justice in the Sodom and Gomorrah incident so that Abraham might pass this standard on to his posterity and presumably the world (Gen 19:19).

The Abrahamic Covenant is expanded upon in the Mosaic Covenant. Building upon his promise to Abraham, God establishes the nation of Israel by delivering her from Egypt. At the center of the nation stands the Mosaic Covenant, which consists of the Law with its sacrificial system. God becomes Israel's king by crushing her enemies and bringing her into covenant relationship with himself. This covenant is effected through his Word given to Moses and the sacrificial system (Exod 24:8). It is from this covenantal vantage point as a holy nation treasured by God and as a kingdom of priests (Lev 19:5-6) that Israel is to expand God's kingdom to the world.¹¹

The Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7) expands further upon this concept as the Davidic king becomes an extension of God's rule (Ps 2). Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Davidic king is to be a man of God's Word and therefore a man of the covenant (Ps 1). He is to copy God's Law, meditate upon it, and thus use it as a standard of righteousness as he rules (Deut 17:14-20; Ps 72:1-2). In other words, the king is to move from the presence of God and his instruction to the presence of the nations, administering justice out of a covenantal framework. Because of the failure of Israel and the inadequacy of the Mosaic Covenant, God promises a New Covenant in

¹⁰Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 218.

¹¹Ibid., 321.

which he promises to write his law upon the hearts and minds of his people, thus guaranteeing their fidelity (Jer 31:33-34). Now New Testament believers are called to be a kingdom of priests and thus to propagate God's message out of the covenant relationship established in Christ (Matt 28:18-19). Wellum states, "Our covenant Lord has given us the supreme privilege of knowing him, and as we give our life to his worship as his servant-kings and are completely devoted and fully obedient to him in every domain of life, God's rule is extended throughout the life of the covenant community *and* to the entire creation."¹²

In summary, the relationship between kingdom and covenant is a very close one.¹³ This is so because entrance into God's kingdom requires entering into a covenant relationship with God. God does not rule his people from afar. He lives and rules in their midst (Exod 29:45; 1 Cor 3:16). Because he is the King he demands absolute allegiance of heart (Deut 6:5, Rom 12:1-2). The covenant through its sacrificial system brings man back into relationship with God and places him under God's dominion. Therefore, God's kingdom grows out of the covenant relationship that God establishes with man.

If kingdom and covenant are closely related, then how does suffering relate to Christ's kingdom? The answer lies in the fact that it is through suffering that Christ effects the New Covenant. Christ, at the Last Supper states this very thing: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). It is through Christ's suffering and death that the New Covenant comes into being. Moreover, if we follow the logic outlined above, then it is the New Covenant that ushers in the kingdom of God. Therefore, it is the work that Christ accomplishes at the cross that effects the New Covenant and grants forgiveness to his people by allowing them to enter the presence of God. The same is true of the Old Testament. Indeed, the Mosaic covenant

¹²Ibid., 596.

¹³Ibid., 595.

was inaugurated with blood that effected the ceremonial cleansing of Israel and thus prevented the outbreak of God's wrath upon the nation (Exod 24:8). Therefore, the Messiah must suffer and die in order to inaugurate the New Covenant and establish the kingdom. As a result, the following sections will elaborate on the suffering of Christ by examining how the Gospels see Christ as undergoing God's retributive justice for his people as the Suffering servant, the ransom for sin, and the Passover Lamb, on the cross.

Christ as the Suffering Servant of God

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the decisive text on the Servant of the Lord.¹⁴ The broader context of the passage reveals that the Servant of the Lord represents both the nation of Israel (Isa 41:8-9; 44:1-2; 45:4) and a particular individual (Isa 50:4-6; 52:13-53:12).¹⁵ That Jesus could bring together these two aspects in his person is possible because he represents not only the individual of Isaiah 53 but also the collective nation itself.¹⁶ However, what is particularly important for the present discussion is the function of the servant in Isaiah 53. That the servant suffers God's retributive justice for the sins of Israel seems to be evident from the following text:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us have turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . 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. (Isa 53:4-6, 10)

¹⁴Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 262. While there is vigorous debate over the Servant Songs in Isa, the goal of this discussion is to understand the text in its final form.

¹⁵For a full discussion of the nature of the servant, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 262–64.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 172–73.

Several things are noteworthy in this passage. First, the nature of the suffering is substitutionary. The servant is said to take up our infirmities and carry our sorrows.¹⁷ Second, the Servant suffers because of sin. The text states that the servant is pierced for our transgressions. Third, the suffering borne by the servant is the direct will of God. The text informs the reader that the servant is smitten by God and afflicted (v. 4). God is specifically said to be the one who crushes the servant for the transgressions of his people. As Childs notes, “What occurred was not some unfortunate tragedy of human history but actually formed the center of the divine plan for the redemption of his people and indeed the world.”¹⁸ Finally, the suffering is sacrificial. The word use to describe the act of the servant is the Hebrew term זָבַח . This term seems to be an unmistakable reference to the guilt offering in Leviticus 5-7, which is described as an atoning sacrifice for sin (Lev 5:16, 18; 7:7).¹⁹ The link with the Levitical sacrificial system is significant because, as has been previously argued, the heart of Levitical sacrifice was to prevent the wrath of God from breaking forth upon the camp of Israel (Lev 17:11), thereby preserving a right relationship between God and his people.²⁰ This favorable relationship

¹⁷For a complete discussion of the substitutionary nature of Isaiah 53, including an interaction with those who disagree with this position, see Steve Jeffery,

Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 52–61.

¹⁸Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 415.

¹⁹The uniqueness of the human sacrifice spoken of in Isaiah 53 is extraordinary. However, Isaiah himself, at the beginning of this passage, acknowledges its extraordinary character (v. 1). Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 61.

²⁰Belousek recognizes the sacrificial language in Isa 53:10 but denies any concept of propitiation in the Levitical guilt offering. Instead, according to Belousek, the Servant becomes an example of unjust suffering that shocks the nation of Israel into repentance. This reading is an overly metaphorical interpretation of the text that ignores

accomplished through sacrifice seems to be demonstrated in the present text. Indeed, verse 11 reads, “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied, by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities (Isa 53:11).” As a result of the servant’s sacrificial sin bearing, “the many” now stand in a right relationship with God.²¹ Therefore, in summary, this passage seems

the true nature of the Levitical sacrifice. Indeed, Belousek attempts to interpret the נִפְּאֵר of the Servant as a sacrifice of reparation that repairs the breach between YHWH and Israel in a non-retributive manner. However, as already shown, the Levitical system protected the nation of Israel from God’s wrath through sacrifices that both cleansed one from sin and propitiated God’s wrath. Therefore, the biblical terminology of Isa 53:10 naturally leads one to the concept of propitiation. This seems to be the most appropriate interpretation of the text and the interpretation given by the gospel writers. The objection of Belousek that the nation of Israel remained burdened by sinful consequences, unrelieved by the Servant’s propitiatory sacrifice, is ineffectual. Levitical sacrifices did not guarantee the relief of outward consequences but provided a way to have one’s sin atoned for (Lev 16:16). Belousek’s additional objection that the Servant’s trial was humanly unjust and could not therefore have produced peace, is also an unsuccessful argument (Isa 53:8). According to Isaiah, God uses the unjust actions of Assyria to accomplish his righteous judgment upon Israel (Isa 10:5-19). Therefore, God could accomplish his just purposes of propitiation through a humanly unjust trial of the Servant and remain holy in the process. Indeed, this truth is Peter’s claim concerning the cross of Christ (Acts 2:23). See Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 224-243; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 2:340-59.

²¹Childs, *Isaiah*, 419. Goldingay attempts to render the verb קָדַשׁ (“to justify”) as “to show faithfulness.” Therefore the translation of the phrase in Isaiah 53:11b would read “By his knowledge my servant will show many that he is indeed faithful, because he bears their wrongdoing.” However, Goldingay’s translation, although a possible rendering, would seem to go against the general meaning of the passage. The overall context of the passage is sacrificial suffering. For instance, the Servant is said to bear the crushing wrath of God as a guilt offering, because of Israel’s transgressions (Isa 53:8, 10). As seen in the previous chapter, the general purpose of the Levitical sacrificial system was to prevent the wrath of God from breaking forth upon Israel. Isaiah 53:10 is very similar in nature, in that the Servant is crushed in place of God’s people. The appeasement of God’s wrath is accomplished through the guilt offering of the Servant. Israel can stand before God without being consumed by his wrath because the Servant has offered himself as a sacrifice. Therefore, in view of the overall context of this passage, right standing (achieved by the Servant’s sacrifice) seems to be the best rendering of קָדַשׁ (to justify), not covenant faithfulness. John Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel, Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 836.

to be a clear expression of God's retributive justice exercised against the divinely appointed servant who becomes a human sacrifice to bear the guilt of Israel before a holy God.

Concerning the topic of the Servant of the Lord in the Gospels, the Gospel writers do not claim directly that Jesus is the Servant of the Lord spoken of in Isaiah. Nevertheless, it is clear from various quotations and allusions given in the Gospel accounts that the connection is made.²² For instance, Jesus, on several significant occasions predicts that his death and resurrection fulfill that which is spoken of him in the Scriptures (Matt 26:54, 56; Mark 14:49; Luke 24:25-27, 44-46). Although Jesus does not directly identify the passages in the Old Testament to which he refers, it would be difficult to find a more appropriate passage than Isaiah 53.²³ Therefore, the overall theme of messianic suffering predicted by Christ himself suggests that Jesus has Isaiah 53 in mind.²⁴ More specifically, a number of passages refer to Isaiah 53 or its overall context in which the servant is mentioned. For instance, God's approval of Jesus at his Baptism (Matt 12:18) is a direct reference to the servant passage mentioned in Isaiah 42:1-2a: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him." In this passage there is a reference to the servant theme, the approbation of the chosen servant (Isa 42:1), as well as a broader reference to the Spirit that would rest upon the Davidic Messiah (Isa 9:11). Matthew 8:17 cites the healing ministry of

²²Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 265. Stuhlmacher argues convincingly that Jesus saw his ministry and death in terms of Isaiah 53. Peter Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 147-62.

²³Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 265.

²⁴For a defense that the Gospel references to the servant of Isa 53 originate with Jesus, see Peter Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation, Law, & Righteousness*, trans. Everett Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 16-29.

Jesus as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. This citation seems to be an anticipation of Christ's suffering where he will bear sin, sorrow, and disease on the cross.²⁵ Luke references Isaiah 53:12 (“and he was numbered with the transgressors”) and links this passage to what must be fulfilled in Christ (Luke 22:37). Additionally, Matthew and Mark seem to point to Isaiah 53:12 when they reference Christ's crucifixion in the midst of the two thieves (Matt 27:38; Mark 15:27).²⁶ The silence of Jesus at his trial (Matt 26:62-63; 27:12-1) can also be seen as an allusion to Isaiah 53:7: “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.” Mark 10:45 is another servant passage that seems to present one with a reference to Isaiah 53. Although the text does not contain a specific quotation from Isaiah 53, nevertheless, the broader context does contain an extended reference to service in which Jesus in his death is depicted as the epitome of servanthood: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” In conjunction with the theme of service, the passage also connects the theme of sacrifice (Isa 53:10-12) when Christ refers to himself as a ransom given for many. A final connection with Isaiah 53 can be seen when Mark 10:45 uses the term “many” (*πολλῶν*) which (in light of the themes of servant and sacrifice) may be a reference to the “many” who are ransomed in Isaiah 52:14-15 and 53:11, 12. As Schreiner states, “The use of the term ‘many’ (*πολλῶν*) and the notion that Jesus’ death secures forgiveness of sins resonates with the themes of Isa. 53.”²⁷ In light of the many references in the Gospels to Isaiah 53, it seems clear that the Gospel writers saw a clear connection between Jesus and the Servant of Isaiah.²⁸

²⁵Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 266.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 267–68 Stuhlmacher connects this passage with both Isa 43:3-4 and 53:11-12. Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts,” 151.

However, the most important question for the topic at hand is, how do the Gospel writers use the various references to Isaiah 53? Morna Hooker, while admitting Gospel references to Isaiah 53, sees no connection to the overall theme of retributive justice in those references. Instead, she believes that the Gospel writers are pulling verses out of context and using them as proof texts quite part from their original meaning.²⁹ While a full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation, nevertheless there are several reasons that Hooker's assertion seems to be incorrect.

First, the idea that the New Testament writers use Old Testament passages out of context has been challenged. Moo states, "The 'ultimate' christological meaning discerned by New Testament authors in passage after passage of the Old Testament often extends beyond, but is always based on the meaning intended by the human author."³⁰ An example of this occurs in John 19:36 where the apostle quotes Exodus 12:46b, "Not

²⁸When one considers the broader context of the New Testament, the idea that the Gospels are portraying Christ as the Servant of Isaiah becomes more apparent. For instance, the fact that Philip begins preaching the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch from Isa 53 (Acts 8:26-40) and the fact that 1 Pet 2:24 quotes or paraphrases many of the concepts in Isa 53 (cf. Isa 53:4-6, 7, 9, 12) supports the argument that the apostolic message was embedded with the concept that Christ was the Suffering Servant of Isa. Stuhlmacher makes a strong argument that the application of the Servant concept to Christ originated with Jesus himself, not the early church and should therefore be considered in conjunction with early doctrinal formulae like Rom 4:25 and 1 Cor 15:3b-5. As a result, it would seem appropriate that this theme would be present in the Gospels. Hooker avoids 1 Pet 2:24 by questioning the date of the Epistle. However, if the servant concept originates with Christ, there is no reason to understand this concept as a late addition to the gospel message. See Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," 151; idem, *Reconciliation, Law, & Righteousness*; Morna D. Hooker, "Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?" in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), 93.

²⁹Hooker, "Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?" 92-93.

³⁰Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 211.

one of his bones will be broken.” In citing this passage it seems clear that John wishes the reader not only to understand that Jesus’ bones remained intact but that, according to the broader context of Exodus 19, he was also the Passover lamb.³¹ In addition, Matthew’s expansion of Isaiah 53:4 to include the healing of disease (Matt 8:17) can easily be explained by understanding the atonement of Christ as the foundation by which all sickness is destroyed.³² Therefore, it would appear that the Gospels cite the Old Testament in a more complex and comprehensive manner than Hooker allows.

Second, Mark 10:45, an important passage on the sacrificial nature of Christ’s death, references Isaiah 53 in proper context. Mark 10:45 reads, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”³³ As noted above, there are several reasons to see this passage as a reference to Isaiah 53. However, what is significant is the sacrificial language that Mark uses. Christ is referred to as a “ransom” (Greek: λύτρον, Hebrew: כֶּפֶר).³⁴ In the LXX, the Greek term λύτρον and its cognates were consistently used to translate the Hebrew equivalent (כֶּפֶר). In such cases, λύτρον always conveys the meaning of a substitute gift that is given for the payment of a debt.³⁵ The use of λύτρον in the context of Mark 10:45 points to Christ

³¹For other examples of Old Testament citations that refer to the broader context, see Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 65–66.

³²Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 66.

³³For a discussion concerning the authenticity of this passage, see Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts”; idem, *Reconciliation, Law, & Righteousness*; and Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 29–38.

³⁴Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts,” 151.

³⁵Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 26.

who is said to give his life as a ransom, a payment, for the lives of the many.³⁶ Although the recipient of the payment is not mentioned, if one understand this verse as an allusion to Isaiah 53, then Christ would seem to be the guilt offering referred to in that passage and given over to satisfy the wrath of God.³⁷ Therefore, Mark 10:45 clearly references the retributive justice of God in a contextually correct manner.

Third, Hooker's assumption (that the Gospels cite Isaiah 53 in a non-retributive, non-contextual manner) should be challenged on the basis of the Gospel tradition itself. For instance, according to Stuhlmacher, the New Testament teaching on Isaiah 53 bears marks of being the original teaching of Jesus and was therefore passed on to the disciples by Christ himself.³⁸ As such, this instruction would have taken into account the full context of Isaiah 53, bearing both similarities with and significant innovations to the rabbinic teaching of the time.³⁹ Indeed, according to Stuhlmacher, the connection to the broader context of Isaiah 53, in which Jesus as the Servant bears our sins, seems to be the only way to make sense of the forgiveness that Luke says comes

³⁶Belousek, in spite of the textual evidence, refuses to allow the concept of retributive payment for sin to apply to the term λύτρον in Mark 10:45. Instead, he interprets this ransom saying—and all others—as a reference to the exile. According to Belousek, Jesus does not ransom one from God's wrath. Instead, Jesus, presumably by his example of suffering, restores Israel and the people of God to a new walk of holiness. This interpretation is wrong because it bypasses the clear meaning of the text/context and opts for an interpretation (exile) that is nowhere in the context. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 149.

³⁷Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 33. Stuhlmacher sees a similar reference to Isa 53 in Luke 22:19-20 (cf. Mark 14:22-24, the Last Supper). See Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," 152.

³⁸Evidence of such teaching can be found in passages like Mark 9:31; 10:45; 14:22-24; Luke 22:35-38 and should be read in context with such foundational passages as 1 Cor 15:3b-5 and Rom 4:25. Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," 149–52, 156.

³⁹Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," 149.

through Jesus, the Servant of God (cf. Acts 3:13, 19 with 2:38; 5:31; 10:43). In support of this, Stuhlmacher notes that the titles given to Christ by Luke. Servant of God (Acts 3:33, 26; 4:27, 30; cf. Isa 61:1; 52:13; 53:11) and Righteous One (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; Isa 53:11) are both Isaianic and pre-Lukan and can be traced to Christ's original message taught to the apostles.⁴⁰ Therefore, these titles must be considered with such formulaic passages as Romans 4:25 and 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5, which clearly teach a comprehensive, retributive view of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.⁴¹ Additionally, Stuhlmacher notes that Luke uses these Isaianic titles in passion accounts (Acts 3:13-16; 4:27-28; 7:52), which serves to point the reader to the overall context of Isaiah 53 in which Christ, the Servant, suffers God's wrath for the transgressions of his people.⁴² Moreover, according to this holistic approach, when one comes to Acts 8:26-39 (Baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch), one should understand Philip's messages in the same overall context of the message outlined above, that forgiveness comes through Christ, the suffering servant of God, who has borne God's wrath in our stead. This argument would certainly answer Green and Baker's assertion that the Lukan texts often understood as references to Isaiah 53 (Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32-33; cf. Luke 24:13-35) are not enough to deduce the theme of atonement and thus retributive justice in the Gospel of Luke. In fact, Green and Baker assert that references to the primary atonement texts in Isaiah (i.e., Isa 53:5, 6b 10b, 11b, 12) are missing in Luke.⁴³ However, if Stuhlmacher is correct, Luke

⁴⁰Ibid., 148–49.

⁴¹Ibid., 156.

⁴²Ibid., 156–57.

⁴³Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2011), 97.

clearly intends the reader to associate the entire context of Isaiah 53 with his Gospel account (Luke 17:25; 24:6-7; 44-46).

Finally, if one takes into account the references to Isaiah 53 in larger context of the New Testament, Hooker's assumption (that retributive justice is absent from these texts) is further questioned. For instance, in 1 Peter 2:22-25 one reads,

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats, Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed, For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.⁴⁴

Numerous allusions to Isaiah 53 can be found in this passage (Isa 53:4, 5, 6, 12).

However, the key phrase that concerns the present discussion is, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." The phrase "bore our sins" conveys the concept of bearing punishment.⁴⁵ Moreover, the reference to Christ bearing our sins upon the tree calls to mind Deuteronomy 21:23, in which God is said to curse the one who is hung upon a tree. Therefore, using twin images, this passage portrays Christ as suffering God's retributive justice by bearing our transgression upon the cross. As a result, it is clear that Peter cites Isaiah 53 in context in order to demonstrate that Christ bore God's retributive wrath.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to assume that when the Gospel writers refer or allude to Isaiah 53 they wish the reader to understand the entire context of the passage. This idea includes the sacrificial context that is often connected to Jesus' death. In other words, the Gospel writers, by referring to Isaiah 53, intend one to understand Jesus' death

⁴⁴Hooker's defense is to question the date and authorship of the passage. However, this argument is not an acceptable approach to those who hold a high view of Scripture. Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 64-65.

⁴⁵Ibid., 50.

in a sacrificial, retributive manner. Indeed, the connection to the overall context of Isaiah 53 is made by the early/archaic titles used by Luke (Servant/Holy One) in association with passion narratives that not only reach back to Jesus' teaching on Isaiah 53 but point one directly to the text of Isaiah. Therefore, any thought of atomistic references to Isaiah 53 (divorced from context) are ruled out.

Christ as the Ransom for Sin

As noted above, Mark 10:45 is an important passage in the present discussion precisely because this passage portrays Christ as a sacrificial ransom. Although this passage was considered part of the discussion on Isaiah 53, nevertheless, its teaching on ransom can stand apart from its connection with Isaiah. Indeed, Mark 10:45 makes use of the term "ransom" (λύτρον), which in this context bears the meaning of a price paid. Christ's life is the price paid to ransom his people. This concept is clearly a Levitical one and carries with it the notion of satisfaction for sin (see previous chapter on כִּפּוּר).⁴⁶

However, when one takes into account the broader context of Mark 10:45, the case for Christ suffering God's retributive wrath is strengthened. For instance, earlier in Mark 10, James and John are vying for the highest place in God's kingdom. In order to discourage the disciples from their misguided aspirations, Christ asks them if they are able to drink the cup that he drinks and be baptized with his baptism (Mark 10:38). The cup metaphor in this section of Scripture is significant because within the context of Mark 10:38-45 the cup is most naturally understood as a reference to Christ's impending death (Mark 10:45). However, in Christ's case, the cup would include more than simply death. Surely when Christ refers to "the cup" he has in mind the numerous Old Testament passages in which "the cup" refers to the cup of God's wrath that is poured out

⁴⁶As noted above, Belousek disagrees with this conclusion. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 146-56.

upon rebellious Israel (Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15-16; Ezek 23:32-34). In the present context, “the cup” that Jesus must drink is the cup of death that includes God’s wrath reserved for sinners in which Christ takes their place. James and John will drink, a similar cup of suffering and death, although it will not carry the same wrath-bearing significance.⁴⁷ Therefore, in summary, Christ is God’s ransom (λυτρον; כִּפּוּר) who gives his life as the price to satisfy God’s retributive justice.

Christ as God’s Passover

Another important passage for the current discussion is the account of the Last Supper (Luke 22:19-20; cf. Mark 14:22-24). Luke 22:19-20 reads, “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” What is significant in this passage is that Jesus redefines the Passover meal in terms of his death on the cross.⁴⁸ As he does so, he makes several significant connections for the disciples. First, by linking his death with the Passover, Christ connects his sacrifice with the Old Covenant sacrifices. In this case he is connecting himself with the Passover lamb that, as was argued in the last chapter, is a sacrifice that clearly averts the wrath of God from Israel during God’s final judgment upon Egypt.⁴⁹

⁴⁷For a full discussion of this matter, see Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 68.

⁴⁸Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 498; Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts,” 152.

⁴⁹Belousek disagrees with the retributive interpretation of the Passover and instead understands Christ’s reference to the Passover as a link to the exodus from both Egypt and Babylon. Therefore, Belousek interprets Christ’s death as a non-retributive liberation of God’s people. However, Belousek is incorrect in his interpretation. The Passover clearly averted the wrath of God from the firstborn of Israel. Indeed, if the Israelites do not apply the blood of the Passover Lamb to their doorposts their firstborn

Second, as he makes this connection, Jesus also draws the disciples' attention in another direction by describing his death as the "blood that is poured out." In Mark 14:24, the text is expanded so that Christ's blood is poured out for *the many*. The reference to blood being "poured out for the many" (Mark 14:24) is quite likely a reference to Isaiah 53:10-12, where the Servant is said to "pour out" (Isa 53:12) his life as a guilt offering (Isa 53:10) for "the many."⁵⁰ Indeed, as seen above, given the many allusions to Isaiah 53 in the Gospels, it seems reasonable to suggest that Mark 14:24 is making this subtle connection where the Servant is said to pour out his life unto death (Isa 53:10-12).⁵¹ If this connection is the case, then Christ, like the Servant of the Lord, suffers God's wrath as a guilt offering for his people.

The final connection that Christ makes for the disciples is the most significant. In this text, Christ refers to his death as "the New Covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). This notion is important because by referencing sacrificial blood, Luke (or Jesus) draws a conceptual connection between the Old and New Covenants (Jer 31:33-34; Exod 24:8). Christ is establishing the fact that his death inaugurates the New Covenant like the blood sprinkled upon Israel inaugurated the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 24:8). Waltke notes that the portion of the sacrificial blood that was sprinkled upon the Israelites served to effect

will die (Exod 12:13). Belousek objection that the firstborn of Israel have committed no sin and therefore have no reason to be shielded from God's wrath is unconvincing. Indeed, one need only read the accounts of Israel's sin after leaving Egypt to understand that Israel is not innocent before God. Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 159-67.

⁵⁰Although the connection to Isa 53 is made through Mark 14:24, according to Stuhlmacher, the Lukan phrase ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον recalls the verb παραδίδωμι used in the LXX version of Isa 53:6, 12. Stuhlmacher makes this connection because he sees the message of Isa 53 appropriated first by Jesus and, as a result, embedded in the message of the apostles. Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," 152.

⁵¹Gentry notes that the phrase "the many" or "the numerous" occurs 4 times in Isaiah 53:11-12. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 499; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 61; Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," 152.

their cleansing from sin.⁵² As noted in the last chapter, this cleansing prevented the breaking forth of God's wrath upon the camp. In summary, the allusions to the Passover, the guilt offering of Isaiah 53, the Covenant ratification of Exodus 24:8, and the New Covenant in Jeremiah demonstrate that the crucifixion anticipated in the Last Supper was understood by Christ himself as an act of atonement that satisfied God's wrath and inaugurated the New Covenant age.⁵³

Christ's Work on the Cross

As seen in the previous discussion, because the death of Christ is connected with sacrifice it is also connected with atonement (Lev 17:11) and therefore, with the satisfaction of God's wrath. If this is the case, then evidence of God's wrath must be seen at the crucifixion. Indeed, this idea seems to be the case in Mark 15:33-39, where one reads the following account of the crucifixion: "At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" A very similar account is given in Matthew 27:45-54, while Luke (Luke 23:44-48) records the darkness but not Christ's cry of despair.⁵⁴ Concerning the

⁵²Belousek understands the covenant blood (Exod 24:8) as a non-retributive seal of the relationship of love and loyalty between God and Israel. However, it is only after this sacrifice that the elders of Israel may safely enter the presence of the Lord (Exod. 24:9-11). Therefore, it appears that the covenant sacrifice does shield Aaron and the elders of Israel from the wrath of God. Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 164; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 435.

⁵³Gentry also sees in the Supper a reference to the new exodus proclaimed in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 499.

⁵⁴Green and Baker, and Belousek assert that if Christ is judged retributively at the cross then this divides the Trinity. However, if one maintains the ontological/person distinction contained within the doctrine of the Trinity then Green and Baker's accusation is undercut. For instance, to say that Christ was forsaken by the Father should not be interpreted ontologically. Indeed, during his judgment on the cross the Son maintains the

darkness, it is clearly a supernatural display of God's anger. This reality can be gathered from the many passages in the Old Testament that associate darkness with God's judgment and in particular the Day of the Lord (Isa 13:9-11; Joel 2:31; Amos 5:18;-20; Zeph 1:14-15).⁵⁵ For instance, Joel 2:31 foretells, "The sun will be darkened and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." When taken in conjunction with Jesus' cry of dereliction in Psalm 22—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—it seems clear that this display of God's anger is directed toward Christ. Christ was indeed suffering God's wrath in place of his elect. This certainly would correspond to the themes presented in Isaiah 53, where the Servant is presented to God as a guilt offering in order to pay for the transgressions of Israel (Isa 53:10-12).

Conclusions Concerning the Earthly Ministry of Jesus

The presentation of Christ in the Gospels as the Servant of God who bears the wrath of God for the transgression of his people seems to be a theme that is drawn from Jesus' teaching and that is embedded in the Gospels. As seen above, while Hooker, Green, and Baker deny the connection of the Gospels with Isaiah 53, Stuhlmacher makes a good case for its embedded presence in the apostolic teaching. Moreover, Christ presents himself as the ransom for sin, the Passover Lamb, the guilt offering, and the ratification of the New Covenant. All of these images are sacrificial in nature and contain the concept of satisfying God's retributive justice. Finally, the wrath of God seems to be

identical nature with the Father. The "forsaking" of Christ occurs between the Persons of the Father and Son in which there is a relational loss of fellowship not an ontological break. Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 83. For a discussion of the incarnation, see Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 292-312.

⁵⁵Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 71-72.

clearly present at the cross where it is exercised upon Jesus. Therefore, it seems clear that the Gospels present Christ's sacrifice as retributive in nature.⁵⁶

⁵⁶In spite of these connections Travis refuses to concede that Christ suffers the direct wrath of God. While Travis does give lip service to Christ's punishment on the cross, he characterizes the punishment as the intrinsic consequences of sin. Aside from being deistic, this characterization of God's judgment is reductionistic. When Christ describes his impending death on the cross he associates it with sacrifice (Passover, the guilt offering of Isa 53, and the blood that inaugurates the Mosaic Covenant). These associations cannot be reduced to the simple act of bearing human consequences. The Passover, as pointed out in the last chapter, averts a display of God's wrath upon the Jews. The direct nature of this wrath is demonstrated in the loss of Egypt's firstborn sons. Additionally, the association of the Last Supper with Isa 53 drives this point home even further. In Isa 53:10 God is said to be responsible for bruising the Servant for the transgressions of his people. The text specifically states that it was God's will to crush the Servant. Travis, in another attempt to escape the concept of retributive justice, asserts that the Hebrew notion of sacrifice does not clearly communicate the idea of atonement. By equivocating on the nature of Levitical sacrifice, Travis can do the same on the nature of Christ's sacrifice. However, as seen in the last chapter, the primary function of Levitical sacrifice was to avert the wrath of God from the camp of Israel through both ceremonial cleansing and atonement for sin. Lev 17:11 states that Levitical sacrifices are given to make atonement for God's people. The association of Exod 30:11-16 with Lev 17:11 makes it clear that the concept of ransom is communicated in Lev 17:11. As Peterson states, "The means of atonement for a human life in Exod 30:11-16 is a monetary payment, whereas the means of atonement in Lev 17:11 is the blood or 'life' of a slaughtered animal" (David Peterson, "Atonement in the Old Testament," in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet*, ed. David Peterson [Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001], 11). Further, Lev 17:11 states the general purpose of sacrifice as atonement, thus implying that every sacrifice in the Levitical system has atoning value. As a result, Israel cannot enter God's presence apart from God's approved sacrifices or else she will be consumed. Certainly, the incident of Nadab and Abihu demonstrates that God's order of sacrifice must be followed precisely or the worshiper will be consumed (Lev 10:1-3). Therefore, when Christ points to the sacrifices of the Old Testament he intends one to understand the concept of appeasement, which is communicated in those sacrifices. Travis' reductionistic view of Christ's sacrifice simply does not fit the Biblical model that includes the concept of retributive justice, a concept that Christ himself references. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 189–90, 196; Lee Daniel Tankersley, "The Courtroom and the Created Order: How Penal Substitution Brings About New Creation" (Ph.D. diss.: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 147–48.

The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment

Perhaps the most obvious place one would expect to find the concept of God's retributive justice would be in the New Testament's teaching on eternal punishment. This cornerstone of Christian theology has been in place for over sixteen centuries.⁵⁷ While one can find challenges to this doctrine in the history of the church, nevertheless, the fear of God's retributive justice in hell has been a major motivating factor in calling sinners to repentance and faith from the earliest times.⁵⁸ Indeed, the concept of eternal fire and punishment are quite common among the early church fathers.⁵⁹ Moreover, the general consensus on the doctrine of hell continued throughout the medieval and reformation periods of the church and was only called into question by outlying sects.⁶⁰ One need only read the preface to Luther's Galatians, or (in later colonial America) Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" to understand the important role that the doctrine of hell has played in understanding and presenting the gospel of Christ.⁶¹ However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the doctrine of hell fell under intense scrutiny. The Socinians (seventeenth century) began the assault by arguing for the annihilation of the wicked, while the eighteenth century saw a broad rejection of the doctrine among non-conservatives who favored various forms of universalism and

⁵⁷R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Disappearance of Hell," in *Hell under Fire*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 16.

⁵⁸For a history of the church's view of eternal punishment, see Mohler, "The Disappearance of Hell," 15–41.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 18.

⁶¹Martin Luther, *Lectures On Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4*, vol. 26 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 4–12. Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. Edward. Hickman, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 7–12.

inclusivism.⁶² These pressures, combined with growing concerns about the integrity of the Bible and its message, have in the last century blossomed into a full-fledged assault against eternal punishment. Indeed, in modern times the subject has fallen into disfavor among a variety of critics.⁶³ For instance, John Hick embraces both pluralism and universalism, believing that, in the end, all will be saved.⁶⁴ Theologians such as Edward Fudge and Stephen Travis, while rejecting universalism, nevertheless hold to the annihilation of the wicked rather than the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment.⁶⁵ Midway between universalism and annihilationism is the concept of post-mortem evangelism in which there is a chance of salvation extended to those who have rejected Christ or not heard the gospel in this life.⁶⁶ Finally, there is the theological objection that the wrath of hell is inconsistent with God's love.⁶⁷ These alternatives to the traditional

⁶²Mohler, "The Disappearance of Hell," 19–25.

⁶³Karl Barth's universalism, Bultmann's program of demythologizing Scripture, Moltmann's theology of hope, and the Pope Paul II's rejection of the traditional view of hell all were major contributions that helped prepare the way for a more comprehensive questioning of hell among evangelicals. The first major cracks in the evangelical ranks came from John Wenham and John Stott, who both embraced the annihilation of the wicked. For a discussion of the various modern objections to the doctrine of hell, see Mohler, "The Disappearance of Hell," 25–36.

⁶⁴John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Melbourne, 1966).

⁶⁵Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1994); Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*.

⁶⁶Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). For a discussion of post mortem evangelism, see Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 150–58. The purgatorial view of hell would certainly fit within this category. For a defense of this view of hell, see Zachary J. Hayes, "The Purgatorial View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 91–118.

⁶⁷Fiddes and Chalke address their objections to retributive justice in the context of penal substitution. Nevertheless, their arguments still apply. Steve Chalke and Alan

view of hell are quite common and form the basis around which much of the modern debate on hell takes place.⁶⁸ In all four cases, the concept of retributive justice suffers. In both universalism and the over-emphasis of God's love, retributive justice ceases to exist entirely while the concepts of annihilation and post-mortem evangelism soften the doctrine considerably. Therefore, the following section will be devoted to the examination of Jesus' teaching on hell in order to understand better the biblical doctrine and to determine if the traditional doctrine on hell and its related doctrine of retributive justice is biblically accurate.

Jesus' Teaching on Hell

There are numerous texts on hell in the Gospels. In fact, it is well known that Jesus taught more on hell than any biblical author. As a result, what Christians believe on hell has been drawn almost entirely from Jesus' teaching.⁶⁹ Therefore, understanding Jesus' message on this subject is vital. Of course, one could take the position that the Gospels do not accurately represent Christ's original teaching on this subject. For instance, one could claim that Christ's teaching on hell represents later interpretations of the early church that have been projected back onto the Gospels.⁷⁰ However, as

Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182–83; Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: A Study in the Christian Doctrine of Atonement* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 103.

⁶⁸Belousek claims that there are diverse, contrasting images that depict divine judgment and therefore he takes an agnostic position on the nature of eternal punishment. However, as will be demonstrated momentarily, Christ presents a very consistent view of eternal punishment that is retributive in nature. In light of the clarity of Christ's teaching, Belousek's agnosticism is unacceptable. Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 429–33.

⁶⁹Robert W. Yarbrough, "Jesus on Hell," in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 71–72.

Stuhlmacher has observed, in light of the closely controlled nature of the apostolic message, it is far more likely that what one possesses in the Gospels is the authentic teaching of Jesus.⁷¹ Moreover, if one removes Christ's teaching on hell from the Gospels, a different message begins to emerge altogether. This, at least, should give one pause in doubting the reality of this central warning of Jesus (Gal 1:8-9), that hell is real and that it exists as a place of eternal punishment for those who refuse to repent and accept God's offer of salvation. Therefore, the following discussion will assume that Jesus' teaching on hell can be relied upon to reflect accurately what he taught on this important subject.

What then does Jesus teach on the subject of hell? The Sermon on the Mount provides two clear insights. For instance, in Matthew 5:21-22 Christ applies the prohibition against murder to anger, warning that the consequences of an unforgiving heart will be dire. Christ states, "anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." In this passage, Jesus is presenting the concept of God's judgment under three different images.⁷² According to this reading, judgment (in the first phrase) would refer to the day of God's judgment. The mention of the Sanhedran (second phrase) would refer to God's heavenly court of judgment.⁷³ In the last phrase, the imagery is removed entirely and

⁷⁰For example, see David J. Powys, *"Hell": A Hard Look at a Hard Question*, Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1997), 419.

⁷¹Stuhlmacher makes this observation in reference to his discussion on Isa 53 and its use in the Gospels. However, the principle also clearly applies to the present discussion. Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," 149.

⁷²Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 183–84.

Jesus refers to the judgment of hell itself (cf. Matt 3:12). In all three instances God is pictured as the judge who pronounces sentence upon unrepentant sinners.

In the last portion of the text Jesus goes on to describe God's judgment with another familiar but vivid image, the concept of imprisonment. Matthew 5:25-26 states, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary . . . or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny." Clearly the prison sentence referred to in this text is another reference to hell in which Jesus describes its nature. The phrase "the last penny" refers to the second smallest Roman coin that could have been earned with only a few minutes of labor and so communicates the degree to which God holds one accountable for sin. The reference to debtors' prison would have called to mind the Roman court system where prejudice against the poor was common and therefore to be avoided at all cost.⁷⁴ Taken together, the two metaphors communicate both the fearfulness of God's judgment and the hopelessness of ever repaying one's debt to God. Within the context, release from prison seems to be impossible.⁷⁵ In summary, the passage emphasizes the urgency of maintaining one's personal relationships because once sentence is imposed, it is dreadful and without remedy.

A similar urgency of avoiding hell is presented in Matthew 5:29-30, where Jesus states, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into

⁷³Keener notes that if Jesus has capital punishment in mind (since he is equating anger with murder), then the reference to the Sanhedrin must refer to God's court of judgment because the Sanhedrin of Jesus' day could not carry out capital punishment. See Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 184.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 185.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 185. Blomberg also notes that the sequence that is set in motion in the parable seems to be inevitable and irrevocable. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 108.

hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” This time Jesus applies the seventh commandment (Exod 20:14) to the concept of sexual lust. In doing so, he uses two graphic illustrations: the gouging out of one’s eye and the amputation of one’s hand. By using these metaphors, Jesus is urging his hearers to take drastic measures in order to avoid sexual sin and thereby avoid God’s judgment.⁷⁶ The point made is that loss of sight and limb is preferable to the horrors of hell.⁷⁷

That hell is a place of misery and torment is communicated by Jesus in Matthew 18:23-35. In this parable, Jesus presents a servant who is unable to pay his master an enormous amount of money and so is slated to be sold into slavery along with his family. The broken servant begs for an extension and is instead granted full forgiveness of his debt. After leaving the presence of the master, the servant is presented with a similar situation in which a fellow servant is unable to repay a much smaller sum of money. Rather than forgive the debt, the servant has his fellow debtor thrown into prison until the loan is fully settled.⁷⁸ When the master discovers the unforgiving behavior of his servant he responds with the following: “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on you fellow servant just as I had on you?” In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart.”

This gripping parable presents the severity of God’s judgment in two specific ways. First, the punishment experienced as a result of God’s judgment is unending.

⁷⁶Blomberg, *Matthew*, 109.

⁷⁷Yarbrough, “Jesus on Hell,” 80.

⁷⁸Hick sees the possibility of release because Jesus is speaking of a finite debt that can eventually be paid. However, the parable envisions just the opposite, because in practical terms, the debt is too large to be settled. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976), 244; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 285.

Because the servant's enormous debt has been reinstated, release is now impossible and therefore his situation is hopeless.⁷⁹ Second, God's punishment involves torment. The parable pictures the servant not as a simple captive but as one who is tormented in his captivity (cf. Matt 25:30). Indeed, the concept of torment in hell is confirmed in Mark 9:44 and Luke 16:19-31, although different metaphors are used.⁸⁰ In addition, Christ affirms that the servant's torment is specifically a work of God the Father (Matt 18:35). Carson notes the propriety of this attitude when he says, "Jesus sees no incongruity in the actions of a heavenly Father who forgives so bountifully and punishes so ruthlessly, and neither should we." Of course, one should certainly qualify this understanding with the caveat that God's punishment of the wicked is just, regardless of its severity. Indeed, this passage seems to reflect both the bountiful mercy and the fearful justice of God that was uncovered in the previous chapter (Deut 28:15-68).

That the punishments of hell are eternal is specifically contained in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46). In this section of Scripture the Son of Man

⁷⁹Keener equates the sum to over 250,000 years of wages for the average worker. See Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 459.

⁸⁰Yarbrough notes that many scholars assume that because the account in Luke (16:19-31) is parabolic it is not intended to furnish specifics about hell. Nevertheless, the major aspects of the parable (punishment, conscious torment, eternal separation from God) are compatible with Jesus' other teachings on the subject. Moreover, even if one understands the rich man's thirst metaphorically, certainly one must understand the metaphor to communicate that hell is a place of torment to be avoided at all costs. Jesus tells the parable for the very purpose of motivating his listeners not to exhibit the same behavior as the rich man and so end up in the same condition. Indeed, the rich man requests that Lazarus be sent to warn his own family so that they will not suffer similar consequences. Therefore, the reality of hell and the necessity of avoiding it is a central piece of this parable and so the parable must be understood to communicate vital information (not every detail) on the subject. Otherwise, Jesus is posing an empty threat to his audience. Moreover, even if the rich man is in an intermediate state and not the final destination of hell (described in other portions of the New Testament), the point still holds because the two destinations have much in common. As a result, Luke's account should be considered as providing valuable information on the subject of eternal punishment. See Yarbrough, "Jesus on Hell," 73-74.

returns to execute final judgment upon the earth (Ps 2; Dan 7:14). As judge, he begins to separate the sheep from the goats, granting to each their proper due. The sheep represent those who exhibit true character change (by identifying with “the least of these”) while the goats are those who demonstrate no transformation at all (Matt 25:35-36; 42-43).⁸¹ As a result, the sheep inherit eternal life while the goats are sentenced to an eternity in hell. Christ states, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). What concerns the present discussion is the characterization of hell as a place of eternal fire. The phrase “eternal fire” clearly communicates endless duration of punishment. Indeed, this interpretation is confirmed in Mark 9:48 where Christ, speaking of the wicked, states, “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Of course, it goes without saying that normal fires go out and the worms that feed on rotting corpses eventually consume their host and perish. However, in describing hell Christ notes, in graphic terms, that the suffering never ceases.⁸²

In conclusion, it appears that Christ understood hell as a literal place where the wicked are justly condemned after this life to suffer punishment away from the presence of God. Moreover, there appears to be no indication that one can escape the consequences of hell once sentence is imposed. Furthermore, Christ describes the suffering of the wicked as including both physical and mental anguish that is unrelieved for all eternity. Indeed, Christ uses the fear of hell as an urgent warning to call unbelievers to repentance and faith in God. As a result one can conclude that Christ’s teaching on hell is a direct evidence of God’s retributive justice against sin. Just as Christ must suffer God’s retributive wrath to atone for the sins of his people, so the wicked will

⁸¹Keener sees the goats as those who have rejected the gospel messengers (refusing them food and drink) and therefore the gospel. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 604–06.

⁸²Yarbrough, “Jesus on Hell,” 82.

suffer to atone for their own sin. However, their suffering will never cease because they will never be able to pay their debt in full.

The Objection of Universalism

John Hick, originally an evangelical, but now a pluralist and leading advocate of universalism, uses a variety of techniques to question the evangelical view of hell⁸³ and the related doctrine of retributive justice.⁸⁴ Hick's main tactic is to use the moral argument to prove that hell is incompatible with God's love.⁸⁵ Indeed, Hick argues that universal salvation is the only morally acceptable outcome for God's created order because only in universalism is evil truly eradicated. On the other hand, eternal suffering of the wicked in hell never leads to any constructive end and so it must be rejected.⁸⁶ As a result, Hick's criterion of universal love becomes his measure of scriptural interpretation and theological truth.⁸⁷ This fact leads Hick to make some rather forced interpretive decisions. For instance, Hick attempts to turn Paul into a universalist by citing such passages as 1 Corinthians 5:22, and Romans 5:18. However, even Hick is

⁸³I understand the evangelical view of hell to include eternal conscious punishment of the unbelieving wicked. Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 114.

⁸⁴For a sample of Hick writings on universalism and pluralism, see John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*; idem, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1973); idem, *God Has Many Faces* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); and idem, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Melbourne, 1966).

⁸⁵The argument that God's love must triumph over hell is typical of universalists. Hayes uses the same argument in explaining his view of purgatory that provides the potential for everyone to be saved. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 199, 201, 456; Nels F. S. Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper, 1951); J. A. T. Robinson, "Universalism: Is It Heretical?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2 (1949): 139–55; and Hayes, "The Purgatorial View," 114.

⁸⁶Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 377–78.

⁸⁷Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 146.

forced to admit, in light of certain non-universalist passages (1 Thess 1:8-9) that he is unclear where Paul stands on this issue.⁸⁸ Further, Hick suggests that Jesus' statements on eternal judgment should be interpreted as statements on God's postmortem redemptive purposes.⁸⁹ Therefore, Hick sees all divine judgment in a redemptive, non-retributive light. However, this understanding is reductionistic and results in a forced interpretation of Jesus' message. As seen above, there simply is no scriptural evidence of anyone's destiny being reversed after death.⁹⁰ Rather, the emphasis in Jesus' teaching is that once the threshold of death is crossed, one's destiny is sealed. Indeed, Hebrews 9:27 states this fact when it says, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that the judgment." Therefore post-mortem repentance is not an evangelical option.

In addition, Hick attempts to harmonize Christ's statements on eternal punishment with Paul's so-called universalism by making use of logical distinctions. For instance, Hick asserts that Christ, in speaking of eternal punishment, was speaking hypothetically as a preacher while Paul, in treating universalism, was writing from the detached mode of a theologian.⁹¹ Hick states, "The two truths are formally compatible with one another because the one asserts that something will happen if a certain condition is fulfilled (namely, permanent non-repentance) while the other asserts that this same condition will not in fact be fulfilled."⁹² Although Hick denies it,⁹³ in light of his

⁸⁸ Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 248.

⁸⁹See also Nels F. S. Ferré, *Evil and The Christian Faith*, Essay Index Reprint Series (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 117–20.

⁹⁰Peterson, *Hell On Trial*, 151. Pinnock's appeal to 1 Pet 3:19-20 as evidence for postmortem evangelism is contradicted by the overall context of 1 Peter (cf. 1 Pet 4:17-18). Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 169.

⁹¹Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 143.

⁹²Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 249.

analysis, it seems impossible to see Christ's threats on hell as anything less than empty rhetorical language. However, if one drops Hick's moral argument, it is quite reasonable to assume that Jesus employs the threat of hell because hell is a reality to be feared. Paul Helm, commenting on Hick's analysis, writes, "The serious threat of hell entails the possibility of hell, and the possibility of hell is inconsistent with there being no possibility of hell. Professor Hick has therefore failed to establish, by interpreting the synoptic sayings of Jesus as he does, that there is no possibility of hell according to the teaching of Jesus."⁹⁴ Moreover, it is reasonable to assume in light of such passages as 1 Thess 1:8-9 that Paul was not a universalist, as Hick attempts to prove. Instead, Paul understood justice in light of Jesus' teaching on hell in the Gospels. For instance, Hick uses Romans 5:18 to assert Pauline universalism. "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men." This verse certainly appears to support Hick's claim of universal salvation and therefore a possible contradiction in Paul's theology (cf. 1 Thess 1:8-9). However, as Schreiner notes, the previous verse (Rom 5:17) seems to provide the reader with a clue that grace is not universally dispensed to all without exception.⁹⁵ In verse 17, Paul states that reigning in life is possible only for those who "who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness." The participle *οἱ λαμβάνοντες* indicates that only those who have chosen to receive the gospel are in Christ⁹⁶ Moreover, to suggest an inconsistency in Paul's theology, or

⁹³Ibid., 250.

⁹⁴Paul Helm, "Universalism and the Threat of Hell," *Trinity Journal* 4 (Spring 1983): 40.

⁹⁵Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 291.

⁹⁶Schreiner, *Romans*, 291. Packer notes that the scriptural passages cited by universalists are generally limited in scope by their context, so that it is impossible to

between Jesus and Paul, as Hick does, is against the evangelical belief of biblical inerrancy. Therefore, one must contend that Hick's view of Paul as a universalist is forced. Indeed, Hick's entire program of universalism is a distortion of Christ's teaching and undercuts the urgency of the gospel message by selling short the retributive justice of God.

Moreover, Hick's universalism is philosophically and biblically out of step with God's justice. It is philosophically out of step with God's justice in that universalists are forced to admit the final salvation of heinously unrepentant sinners. As Packer states, "Universalism thus asserts the final salvation of, for instance, Judas, Hitler, Genghis Khan, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein, to name a few. These are test cases to have in mind when assessing the universalist claim."⁹⁷ This criticism could be answered by a concept like purgatory in which the guilty through suffering finally receive the grace of God. However, as previously noted, this is not a scriptural solution.⁹⁸ Next, universalism is biblically out of step with God's justice in that it underestimates the magnitude of God's glory and therefore the magnitude of sin. As Aquinas notes, "Further, the magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin. . . . Now a sin that is against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom it is committed, the graver the sin—it is more criminal to strike a head of state than a private citizen - and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed

maintain that every human being, past, present, and future has been or is destined for salvation. J. I. Packer, "Universalism: Will Everyone Ultimately Be Saved?" in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 187.

⁹⁷Packer, "Universalism: Will Everyone Ultimately Be Saved?" 171.

⁹⁸Hays admits that the concept of purgatory arose from church tradition and has little scriptural support. Hayes, "The Purgatorial View," 118. Hick even suggests the concept of reincarnation as a means of reforming the wicked. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 414–15.

against him.”⁹⁹ This last point would certainly match the biblical data. Indeed, one need only recall the sin of Adam and Eve (a seemingly simple act, yet an act of rebellion nonetheless) and its dire consequences (death for the entire human race), or Isaiah’s encounter with God (Isa 6:1-7), or even Jesus’ threat of eternal condemnation for unrepentant anger, to understand the point of Aquinas. Therefore, universalism is seriously defective in its doctrines of God and of sin. While the Scriptures declare that God is filled with mercy, yet he also remains holy (Exod 34:6-7). It is only through faith in Christ’s atoning work on the cross that one may enter God’s presence (Acts 16:31).

The Objection of Annihilationism

A second challenge to the evangelical view of hell comes from those who endorse annihilation. According to this view, the unbelieving wicked will not suffer unending punishment in hell but instead will simply be terminated. Although this view does not eliminate God’s retributive justice completely, nevertheless, it significantly softens the doctrine by removing the concept of eternal suffering. Major proponents of this view include William Fudge, John Wenham, John Stott, and Clark Pinnock.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the most influential evangelical to defend this view is Stott who, in 1991, outlined his defense of the matter. William Fudge, a British scholar, is also a leading proponent who has written an entire book on the subject. Therefore, the following discussion will seek to interact with both Stott and Fudge in order to determine if annihilation is indeed a viable alternative to the evangelical doctrine of eternal punishment.

⁹⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1974), 87.

¹⁰⁰Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*; John Wenham, *Facing Hell: An Autobiography* (London: Paternoster, 1998); David Lawrence Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*.

The main tactic used to defend the concept of annihilation is to attempt to redefine the biblical terms of destruction used to speak of hell. For instance, Stott argues that one should understand the term “destruction” as annihilation. Stott makes this clear when he states, “It would seem strange, therefore, if people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed.”¹⁰¹ The same type of argument is used to debunk the idea of eternal fire in hell. Stott notes that the main function of fire is to consume what is burned, not to cause pain.¹⁰² Fudge makes the same case, citing numerous passages in which sinners will be burned up like chaff (Mal 4:5-6; Matt 3:12) or useless trees (Matt 3:10; 7:15-23) and therefore finally destroyed, not tormented. The same concept is applied to the passages that refer to the fires of Gehenna. Fudge notes that the term refers to the large garbage dump near Jerusalem where fires were always burning to consume the refuse.¹⁰³ Accordingly, Christ is using this image to point to the final destruction (annihilation) of the wicked, not their eternal punishment.¹⁰⁴ Similar tactics are used with the term “eternal.” For instance, Fudge argues that the term “eternal” in the passages that speak of hell refers not to an endless duration of time but to the endless effect of judgment. As a result, the judgments of hell are eternal because the effect of being annihilated is eternal. Therefore, by redefining terminology Stott and Fudge make the case that Jesus is arguing for annihilation of the wicked, not their eternal torment.

However, upon closer examination these arguments fall apart. Indeed, a number of biblical terms and phrases used to describe hell cannot be reduced to the concept of annihilation. For instance, Jesus employs several descriptions for hell

¹⁰¹Edwards and Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 316.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 96–101.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 99–101.

(darkness and/or separation, fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth, punishment, and death and destruction). Of these five descriptions, only fire fits the category of annihilation.¹⁰⁵ However, the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” while signifying extreme suffering and remorse, is also used to communicate ongoing existence in a state of agony. This can be seen primarily in Matthew where the expression is used in conjunction with pictures of darkness (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Luke 13:28).¹⁰⁶ Matthew states, “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (22:13). Fudge objects that the “darkness” in this and similar texts is a reference to the final day of judgment and therefore pictures only a temporary scene of remorse over the impending sentence of annihilation.¹⁰⁷ However, Fudge fails to see that the darkness in these texts is the judgment into which one is placed. Therefore, in that place of judgment there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Moreover, there is no indication from these texts that suffering is temporary or terminated, but, rather, it seems to be an ongoing state. Only in Matthew 24:51 is there a possibility of temporary suffering where “weeping and gnashing of teeth” occurs at the point of final judgment.¹⁰⁸ As a result it appears that the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” can be used to describe ongoing suffering in hell.

In a similar manner, Stott’s definition of the term “destruction” as “annihilation” does not hold up. A good example can be seen in Revelation where destruction is predicted for the beast and the false prophet (Rev 17:8, 11). In chapter 19, this prediction is fulfilled when the beast and false prophet are thrown alive into the

¹⁰⁵Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 164.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 164–65.

¹⁰⁷Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 103.

¹⁰⁸Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 165.

burning lake of sulfur. What is significant to this discussion is that both the beast and false prophet are described as still existing in agony in the lake of sulfur one thousand years later (Rev 20:7, 10). Moreover, in Revelation 20:10 John teaches that the beast, the false prophet, and Satan will be tormented forever.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the concept of destruction as annihilation cannot be sustained in this section of Scripture.

The same conclusion arises when one considers the term “punishment” in relation to the concept of hell. This idea can be seen in Matthew 25:46 where one reads, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” The term for “eternal” (αἰώνιον) modifies both life and punishment. Therefore, it is logically consistent to conclude that Matthew has the same quality of existence in mind for both. In other words, just as eternal life conveys the idea of endless existence, so eternal punishment would convey the concept of facing eternal wrath. To demand a different understanding of eternal punishment is to force one’s theological conclusions upon the text.¹¹⁰

A similar conclusion must be reached concerning the nature of Jesus’ words in Mark 9:47-48: “It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” In commenting on this verse Fudge continues to insist on his view of annihilation when he states, “The devouring worm is aided by unquenchable fire that cannot be put out and that therefore continues to destroy until nothing remains. When that destruction is completed, it will last for all eternity.”¹¹¹ Fudge is clearly limiting the concept of eternity in this passage to the effects of annihilation. To support his claim,

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 163–64.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 165.

¹¹¹Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views Of Hell A Biblical And Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 44.

Fudge appeals to the fact that the devouring worms in Isaiah 66:24 are feasting on corpses that are already dead (destroyed) and therefore Isaiah is not referring to an ongoing death.¹¹² However, Isaiah is recording a vision of judgment and new creation in which the redeemed gaze upon the eschatological wrath the Lord has visited upon his enemies. In his vision, Isaiah pictures both worm and fire feeding forever upon the damned in an endless display of God's anger. Therefore, the text seems to communicate the concept of ongoing, eternal death rather than annihilation.¹¹³ Indeed, this text is similar to Revelation 14:11, where the smoke of torment rises forever from the host of those in hell. Therefore, Fudge is wrong to simply see the effects of destruction in this passage. Indeed, Fudge's comments are in direct contradiction to the most obvious reading of the passage.¹¹⁴ Moreover, Fudge's understanding of this passage is logically incoherent. As Yarbrough states, "A fire that 'continues to destroy until nothing remains' is not unquenchable, it is rather quenched - if 'nothing remains,' as Fudge claims, the fire must go out."¹¹⁵

Indeed, Fudge insists that the term "fire" used in eschatological texts communicates the concept of annihilation. Fudge supports his view by pointing to the fact that Gehenna was most likely an actual garbage dump near Jerusalem where refuse was continually burning. Fudge also asserts that when Jesus uses this term to refer to the

¹¹²Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 44; Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 62–65.

¹¹³Judith 7:17 provides strong evidence that the intertestamental Jews understood this passage to teach eternal, conscious suffering. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 349; Yarbrough, "Jesus on Hell," 83; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 526.

¹¹⁴Yarbrough, "Jesus on Hell," 82.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

conflagration in hell, he has Gehenna in mind as a visual illustration. Moreover, Fudge further supports his position by using the logical argument that the most natural understanding of fire is that it consumes, burns up, or destroys all things in its path. Indeed, this truth is evident to everyone who has seen a fire do its work. As a result, Fudge bases his view of annihilation on the common concept of fire.

However, there are several reasons to question Fudge's conclusions. First, Fudge misinterprets the significance of Gehenna. Yarbrough states, "He does this in part by committing the exegetical fallacy of confusing referent (the Valley of Hinnon outside of Jerusalem and the mundane burning that allegedly occurred there) and sense (a place of extraordinary punishment prepared by God for his enemies)." By focusing so wholly on the former, Fudge gives short shrift to the latter."¹¹⁶ Indeed, the focus in the passage is not on the historical place but the actual reality of hell. Therefore, Gehenna is an analogical, not a univocal reference. Moreover, as seen above, the book of Revelation demonstrates the eternal nature of the eschatological fires of hell. In Revelation 20:10, the beast and false prophet are said to be continually tormented in the burning lake of sulfur forever (Rev 20:10). This passage should certainly inform Fudge's analysis by demonstrating the unending nature of perdition's fire. Finally, Mark 9:47-48, referenced above speaks of an unquenchable fire that will (by definition) endlessly consume the damned. As a result, the term "fire" used in eschatological contexts does not support the concept of annihilation.

The Objection that God's Love Trumps God's Justice

This objection rests upon the premise that God's nature is primarily love. Therefore, it is suggested that God's retributive justice, in general, contradicts Jesus' message of love. Indeed, according to this position, the very teaching of Jesus requires

¹¹⁶Ibid., 79.

unconditional forgiveness of one's enemies. This is seen in Matthew 5:38-39; 43-45a, where one reads,

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . You have heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

According to this passage, Jesus requires his followers not only to resist evil. He also requires them to offer unconditional forgiveness to their enemies. Therefore, the doctrine of eternal suffering in hell presents God as demanding from his people what he is unwilling to grant: unconditional forgiveness.¹¹⁷ As a result, the doctrine of hell and retributive justice should be discarded because they demonstrate a potential conflict in God's nature and Jesus' teaching.

In spite of its apparent persuasiveness, this position is flawed. As demonstrated in the last chapter, the Scriptures never depict God as overlooking his justice (Exod 34:7). He certainly is merciful and therefore makes a way for sinners to be forgiven through sacrifice (Lev 17:11).¹¹⁸ However, according to Scripture, God is both a God of mercy and justice (Exod 34:6-7). God will enact justice on the earth by crushing his enemies (Ps 2). Jesus' doctrine of hell is simply an application of the Old Testament principle of righteousness in which God will call the nations before him and judge them accordingly (Ps 7; 9, Isa 1:26; 11:4-5; Jer 11:20; Dan 7:9-10; Rev 20:12). Therefore, to suggest that God's nature is only love is to ignore significant portions of Scripture that describe God as just. Indeed, Jesus' teaching on hell clearly contradicts the objection that God is only love.

¹¹⁷While Chalke and Mann address their objections to penal substitution, nevertheless their arguments clearly apply to the doctrine of hell. Chalke and Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 182–83; Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 103.

¹¹⁸Edmund P. Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," in *Right With God*, ed. D. A. Carson (London: Paternoster, 1992), 26.

Moreover, the objection that the doctrine of hell presents a contradiction in God's nature and Jesus' teaching can be answered by understanding that God reserves some things for himself.¹¹⁹ For instance, Romans 12:19 states the principle that vengeance belongs to God alone. Therefore, while believers are to forgive their enemies, they do so on the basis that justice will eventually be served by God. Therefore, there is no contradiction in Christ's command for us to love our enemies. Indeed, in judging sin, God remains true to his nature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems clear that Jesus understood hell as a place of eternal torment designed by God for those who will suffer his retributive wrath for eternity. Any attempt to mitigate this doctrine through universalism, post-mortem evangelism, annihilationism, or a focus on God's love is scripturally unsound. Indeed, in light of the Gospel data on hell, universalism and post-mortem evangelism are very difficult to support from the New Testament. As a result, many evangelicals, including Stott and Pinnock, have opted for the view of annihilation. However, as seen above, the success of this concept depends upon one's ability to redefine key biblical terms, which cannot be easily done. Indeed, the traditional doctrine of hell is the most natural reading of Scripture; a reading that presents a balanced view of God's justice and God's love.

¹¹⁹Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 235.

CHAPTER 5

THE RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE OF GOD IN PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Introduction

Retributive justice in the New Testament is most evident in the doctrine of Christ's atonement and the eternal punishment of unbelieving sinners. This concept is almost indisputable because it is primarily at the cross and in final judgment that God deals decisively with sin. Moreover, because Paul's treatment of Christ's death is central, systematic, and detailed, the Pauline epistles have formed the battleground, not only for the Reformation debate on justification but, more recently, they are at the very heart of how the atonement should be understood in contemporary theology.¹ At the center of these debates are the questions about how Paul understands God's righteousness, his wrath and his justice.² The debate with the new perspective has placed this issue into

¹Following is a sample of material concerning the modern debate around the subject of God's righteousness and justice in Pauline theology. James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (January 1992): 1–22; idem, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice," in *Book Title*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35–56; Henri Blocher, "The Sacrifice of Christ: The Current Theological Situation," *European Journal of Theology* 8 (1999): 23–36; Mark A. Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 39–74; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965). D. A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21–26," in *The Glory of the Atonement Biblical, Historical & Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger R. Nicole*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

sharp relief. Does Paul understand God’s righteousness primarily as an ethical standard that proceeds from his holiness, or is God’s righteousness his covenant faithfulness?³ In other words, is Paul concerned about how a sinner stands before an absolutely holy God who demands complete purity of heart, or is Paul treating other issues?⁴ The matter of God’s righteousness has been discussed in Chapter 3, and it was discovered that God’s righteousness in the Old Testament is both his commitment to an ethical standard and his covenant faithfulness to deliver his people. In saving his people, God satisfies his holiness by subduing and conquering evil. However, an examination of Paul’s writings is now necessary to determine if Paul understands God’s righteousness and justice in the same light as the Old Testament. Because Paul’s focus is so often upon the atoning sacrifice of Christ, this chapter will deal with God’s retributive justice as it appears in

²The terms $\pi\tau\tau\epsilon\sigma$ and $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta$ are often used interchangeably to translate the concepts of righteousness and justice. For instance, $\pi\tau\tau\epsilon\sigma$ denotes righteousness in Gen 15:6 while the same term communicates the concept of justice in Deut 33:21. Similarly, in Heb 11:22 $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta$ is translated by “justice” while in Rom 3:21 the term used is “righteousness.” One might say that God’s righteousness is his ethical standard of what is right while his justice is the application of that standard to his created order. John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 345–48; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 446–58; Seifrid, “Paul’s Use of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background,” 58. Lee Daniel Tankersley, “The Courtroom and the Created Order: How Penal Substitution Brings About New Creation” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 66 n. 15.

³For opposing viewpoints, see Dunn, “The Justice of God”; Seifrid, “Paul’s Use of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background.”

⁴For instance, Dunn sees Paul’s dilemma with Judaism not in terms of works-righteousness but in terms of Jewish covenant markers, ceremonies, and rites (circumcision) that separate Jews from Gentiles. Dunn’s view creates a wide gulf between the Reformation’s understanding of Paul’s dilemma and that of the new perspective. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 334–89.

Paul's presentation of the gospel.⁵ The discussion will first treat Paul's understanding of God's retributive justice in Romans 1:18-3:26 and then move to a brief analysis of God's retributive justice in Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Romans

Any study of Pauline theology must take the book of Romans under careful consideration. Dunn notes that of all of Paul's epistles, Romans is "the fullest and most carefully constructed statement of the Christian gospel."⁶ That it has significantly impacted Christian theology is apparent from Schreiner's comment:

The magisterial character of Romans is apparent to any careful reader. . . The impact of Romans on Martin Luther's theology is well known. He formulated his understanding of sin, law and gospel, faith, salvation, and the righteousness of God by conducting an extensive exegesis of this letter. . . . Luther's understanding of Romans and Pauline theology constituted the most significant shift in exegesis and theology since Augustine.⁷

Indeed, the book of Romans, although an epistle, is like a Christian manifesto that grounds both Christ's work and Christian practice in the doctrine of God.⁸ Therefore in the study of God's retributive justice, Romans must take primary place of honor.

⁵Because the doctrine of hell is dealt with thoroughly and explicitly in the Gospels, no additional treatment is necessary in Paul. For a discussion of Paul's doctrine of hell, see Douglas J. Moo, "Paul on Hell," in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 91–109; Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 77–82.

⁶James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38a (Dallas: Word, 1988), xiii.

⁷Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1.

⁸John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 19. Paul links Christian practice specifically to God's redemption accomplished in Christ (Rom 12:1).

The first three chapters of Romans explain the necessity of Christ's death on the cross. Within this discussion Paul employs three key concepts to make his case: God's wrath, his righteousness and his justice. For instance, Paul connects the theme of God's righteousness with the gospel when he states in Romans 1:17, "For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith."⁹ After broaching the topic of God's righteousness, Paul immediately begins a lengthy discussion of God's wrath and man's guilt which is finally resolved by a brief but crucial section on God's righteousness and justice in Romans 3:21-26. Therefore, Paul clearly wishes the reader to understand that salvation in Christ is tied to God's righteousness, wrath, and justice. The following section will seek to unravel these connections in order to understand better how they function in God's plan of salvation.

Romans 1:18-32

Romans 1:18-3:20 is an extensive explanation for the striking need of Christ's righteousness for both Jews and Gentile.¹⁰ Because all men stand under the wrath of God,

⁹The literature on the term "righteousness" in Rom 1:17 is voluminous. The older Protestant-Catholic debates centered around whether righteousness is forensic or an infusion of grace that effects change in the convert. With the rise of the new perspective a third partner entered the discussion, posing a different question. Is the righteousness spoken of in this verse God's covenant faithfulness? In light of the study in chap. 3 it seems quite likely that Paul has both a forensic and a covenantal idea (salvation) in mind. For instance, Paul speaks of righteousness as both a gift (Rom 1:17) and as God's salvation power revealed in history (Rom 1:21-22). Therefore one may interpret the term "righteousness" in verse 17 as "salvation," understanding that "salvation" also includes the forensic concepts encountered in Rom 3:21-26. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 192-217.

¹⁰Seifrid notes that Paul associates God's wrath with revelation not simply because he is explaining the need for salvation but because the wrath of God spoken of in this section is comprehended within the gospel itself. Indeed, Paul quotes Hab 2:4 because he wants his reader to comprehend the prophetic theme that deliverance comes through God's judgment. The saving event of Christ brings with it the consummation of this judgment as Christ suffers the judgment of God. See Mark A. Seifrid, "Unrighteousness by Faith: Apostolic Proclamation in Romans 1:18-3:20," in

Paul sees all men in need of salvation. As Schreiner states, “The theme of this section, then, is that God’s wrath is being righteously revealed against all people. . . since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).”¹¹ Therefore, in making his case Paul breaks his argument into two sections. First, Paul treats the Gentile dilemma (Rom 1:18-32) and then he moves to the Jews (2:1-3:8).¹²

In discussing Gentile sin, Paul begins by announcing the revelation of God’s wrath and man’s culpability. Paul writes (Rom 1:18-21),

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that we are without excuse.

That the demonstration of God’s wrath is a current activity is shown by the parallel usage of the present tense of ἀποκαλύπτεται in verses 17 and 18.¹³

Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 112–13.

¹¹Since the revelation of God’s righteousness is a current event in v. 17, one would expect the same for the revelation of his wrath in v. 28. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 78.

¹²Recent scholarship has questioned whether Rom 1:18-32 is speaking specifically of Gentiles and instead is a more generic address. Indeed, the term “Gentile” is not found in the passage. However, the fact that the knowledge of God in 1:18-32 comes solely from natural revelation gives significant weight to the understanding that Paul was addressing Gentiles in this section. For a full discussion of the issue, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 96–97. Schreiner, *Romans*, 81–82. For an opposing view, see Seifrid, “Unrighteousness by Faith”; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 105–06.

Moreover, that man is deserving of God's wrath is demonstrated by the fact that man has chosen to suppress and exchange the truth of God's general revelation for the lie of idolatry (Rom 1:21-22).¹⁴ As a result of this suppression and rejection of God's natural revelation, God's justice is set in motion. Moo notes Paul's sequential statements in Romans 1:21-31 that highlight the cause-effect sequence in God's retributive response to man's sin:

vv. 21-24: People "exchange" the truth of God for idols—God hands them over

vv. 25-26a: People "exchange" the truth of God for a lie—God "hands them over"

vv. 26b-31: People "exchange" natural sexual practices for the unnatural—God "hands them over"¹⁵

In each case God is said to hand man over to judgment.

The phrase "hands them over" has its roots in Old Testament language and is used in stereotypical formulas in which God is said to "hand over" Israel to her enemies (cf. Lev 26:25; Josh 7:7; Judg 2:14; 6:1, 13).¹⁶ This principle is seen in Leviticus 26:25 where God describes his just vengeance against Israel that will occur if she chooses to break his covenant. The text reads, "And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the

¹³Schreiner, *Romans*, 85–85; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 36.

¹⁴The knowledge of God described in this section is derived from the created order by simple observation (not philosophical deduction) and concerns God's eternal power and divinity. However, there is no indication that this knowledge is saving knowledge. Instead, Paul implies that while this knowledge is universally available, it is universally suppressed. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to argue that all men are guilty of rejecting the light they have in the created order and so deserve God's wrath. Schreiner, *Romans*, 85–87.

¹⁵Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 96; Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 120–21.

¹⁶Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, 110.

breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands.” Clearly the context of this verse demonstrates that God takes an active role against Israel as he hands them over to their enemies. Even though secondary means are used in God’s discipline, God is still seen as the principal party behind the action.

One of the most vivid examples of this concept is seen in Isaiah 10:8-15 where God uses Assyria to punish rebellious Israel. The use of secondary means by God to accomplish his task is clearly in play in this passage. Indeed, Assyria is completely unaware of her place in God’s plan of discipline. Assyria’s only purpose is her self-centered desire to destroy (v. 7). Yet God, speaking of Assyria, calls her the rod of his anger and the club of his wrath (v. 5). Moreover, Isaiah goes on explain Assyria’s true role when he states (v. 15), “Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood.” Clearly, Isaiah wishes the reader to see that God plays the primary role in disciplining Israel, even though he uses a secondary means. Therefore, when Paul speaks of God handing over the Gentiles to judgment, it is appropriate to think that he has this particular view of God’s justice in mind.

Moo notes that this discipline is not just a passive act on God’s part: “God does not simply let the boat go—he gives it a push downstream. Like a judge who hands over a prisoner to the punishment his crime has earned, God hands over the sinner to the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin.”¹⁷ Indeed, the ‘therefore’ in verse 24 indicates that God’s handing over of human beings to their chosen path of depravity is his response to their rejection of revelation. Moreover, this thought is intensified in verse 27 when Paul speaks of homosexuality as the just penalty for the rejection God’s truth.¹⁸ Finally, in

¹⁷Ibid., 111. See also Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 120–21.

verse 28 this rejection leads to God handing men over to every kind of wickedness. Indeed, the theme of rejecting God’s truth and the associated just recompense is repeated three times (1:21-31), each with devastating consequences. Moo states, “This correlative relationship underlines the close correspondence in this verse (28) between sin and retribution, a relationship that Paul enhances with a wordplay in Greek between ‘see fit’ (εδοκίμασαν) and ‘worthless’ (αδόκιμον).”¹⁹

No doubt there is a natural progression in this “handing over” that includes various types of secondary processes—psychological and physical addictions that occur as a result of this behavior. Nevertheless, as seen above, the use of secondary means to accomplish God’s judgment does not mean that God is uninvolved in the process. In fact, the very opposite is true. Paul represents the entire process in verses 18-32 as God’s just punishment against the rejection of his natural revelation.²⁰ Therefore, to characterize this section of Scripture as non-retributive, as Stephen Travis, does is to seriously misunderstand the text.

Travis argues that if consequences for sin are inherent in the process of sinning as they are in verses 18-32, then they are not retributive because retributive justice is an

¹⁸The penalty in this verse could refer to future punishment. However, given the context in which depravity is a present judgment of God, it is quite likely that the penalty referred to is also a present depravity, the homosexual behavior. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 116–17.

¹⁹Ibid., 117.

²⁰Belousek recognizes the distinction between primary and secondary causes used in Rom 1. However, he does not allow the text to define the judgments spoken of in Rom 1 as retributive. Instead, he moves in a deistic direction, attributing judgment primarily to the natural order, of which God is the primary cause. While there is an element of truth in Belousek’s description, it nevertheless lacks the sense of God’s direct engagement that characterizes Rom 1. See Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 217-19.

external act of judgment.²¹ However, Paul seems to argue in the opposite manner. According to verses 18-32, inherent consequences for sin are actively overseen by God. Therefore they are his retribution for rejecting God's revelation. Surprisingly, Travis seems to agree when he says that Paul's terms "receive" (απολαμβάνοντες) and "penalty" (αντιμίσθια) carry a retributive notion (vv. 27-28).²² However, because the penalty for sin lies within the process/person, and is not external, Travis rejects the notion that the passage is retributive.²³ Rather than let the context define retribution as a process that includes inherent consequences, it appears that Travis has smuggled in an extra-biblical concept to make his case.²⁴ As a result Travis' definition of retributive justice should be rejected as unbiblical.

²¹Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 9–10, 62.

²²Ibid., 62.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Travis cites Oppenheimer's maxim—"there is no quantitative relationship between retributive punishment and moral guilt"—as the reason to define retributive justice as a purely external/impersonal process. In other words, in retributive justice there is no proportion (nor can there be) between punishment and guilt. On the other hand, Travis sees misdeeds that contains intrinsic consequences (e.g., Rom 1:18-32) as providing the connection between punishment and guilt. Intrinsic consequences are proportional to the deed, and they allow one to experience the inherent consequences of rejecting God on a very personal level. Therefore, intrinsic consequences directly address one's character unlike the purely external punishment of retributive justice. Because God always deals with people on a personal and relational level, never in an external manner (Rom 2:16), Travis defines God's wrath as intrinsic as opposed to retributive. However, Travis creates a false dichotomy between intrinsic consequences and retributive justice. This division is wrong for two reasons. First, Rom 1:18-32 defines retributive justice as including intrinsic consequences overseen by God. Second, Travis's definition of God's retributive justice as a purely external act is incorrect. According to Paul, bodily punishment is not simply an external judgment but can be equated with man's guilt. If one considers passages like Rom 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death," it would appear, contra Oppenheimer, that God does see a relationship between bodily suffering and guilt. In other words, death is the price to be paid for sin. The same concept is seen in the Levitical law, where God ties penalties for disobedience to the

In summary, this section of Scripture teaches that God's retributive justice is actively being visited upon Gentiles who have exchanged God's natural revelation for various forms of idolatry. While judgment may be internal to the individual sinner, it is nevertheless retributive in nature because Paul defines it as such. As a result, Gentiles, without exception fall under the wrath of God (Rom 3:23).

Romans 2:1-3:20

After addressing God's just judgment upon the Gentiles, Paul now moves to God's judgment against the Jews²⁵ In addition, the subject now turns from an intrinsic expression of God's wrath (Rom 1:18-32) to an extrinsic expressions of God's justice. Paul begins his argument by equating the guilt of the Jews with that of the Gentiles. In Romans 2:1 Paul states, "You, therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." Paul's opening point that he will reiterate throughout chapter 2 is that Jewish covenantal privilege is discredited by

transgression of his holiness and, as a result, with human guilt (Lev 19:1-2). Finally, this concept is demonstrated in the Old Testament where God as judge uses retributive punishment to address the sin of man in the fall, the flood, and at Sodom and Gomorrah. Therefore, God defines retributive punishment as both an external and intrinsic process used to address man's guilt before God. As a result, it would appear that Travis is operating on unbiblical assumptions that lead him to define incorrectly and restrict retributive justice. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 8-9; Heinrich Oppenheimer, *The Rationale of Punishment*, University of London Monographs on Sociology (London: University of London Press, 1913), 193; Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 185, 217-19.

²⁵Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 127; Schreiner, *Romans*, 102. Seifrid does not see ethnic classifications in chap. 2. Instead, Seifrid believes Paul is addressing various issues common to the moralist and common to Jews. Regardless of one's stance on these issues the matter of God's retributive justice is unaffected. For a discussion of the various interpretive issues in Rom 2, see Thomas R. Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works? Another Look at Romans 2," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3 (1993): 131-55. See also Seifrid, "Unrighteousness by Faith."

disobedience to God's law. Therefore, Jewish disdain towards the Gentiles is hypocritical because Jews are just as guilty before God as Gentiles.²⁶ As a result, the Jews, like the Gentiles, stand under God's wrath (Rom 2:5) and will receive their just due (Rom 2:8-9). In making his case Paul methodically strips the Jews of any claim to righteousness before God. For instance, in Romans 2:5 Paul lays the foundation for Jewish guilt when he states, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed." Paul notes that the core problem for the Jews is inward.²⁷ The issue is not simply outward transgression but blindness of soul and stubbornness of heart.²⁸ Indeed, God's law addresses one's innermost being (Deut 6:5). Whereas the kindness of God should have led the nation to repentance, the Jews have responded to God with inner contempt. As a result, Israel is now storing up God's wrath that will be revealed in the final judgment of God.²⁹ The Day of Wrath referred to in this verse has reference to the Old Testament Day of the Lord (Zeph 1:15-18; 2:2-3; Joel 2:1-2) in which God unleashes his fury upon the nations. Describing that day, Zephaniah states,

That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. . . I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men because they have sinned

²⁶Schreiner, *Romans*, 109.

²⁷No doubt Paul has in mind passages in the Old Testament that refer to Jewish unwillingness to obey God as a hard or uncircumcised heart (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Ezek 3:7). What Paul seems to be saying with this statement is that unbelieving Jews who do not have God's law written on their hearts are not beneficiaries of the New Covenant blessing. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 108.

²⁸Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 61.

²⁹Paul is warning the Jews that God's patience with the nation must not be mistaken as a mark that God is pleased with Israel or that he is complacent in judging. In time, God's retribution will be revealed against Israel. Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, 134; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 61.

against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. (1:15-17)

Zephaniah goes on to describe this day as a day in which the whole world will be consumed by the fire of God's jealous anger (3:8). Moreover, in Romans 2:8, Paul describes God's actions on this day with the terms "wrath" (ὀργή) and "fury" (θυμός). This combination occurs only once in Paul but is a frequent occurrence in the Old Testament.³⁰ In fact, it is quite likely a reference to Psalm 78 in which God is said to unleash his fierce anger, wrath, and indignation against Egypt.³¹ No doubt, Paul wishes to capture his Jewish reader's attention by classifying Israel in the same dire straits as Egypt.

After exposing the unrepentant heart of the Jews, Paul then explains the equitable, retributive nature of God's judgment in verses 6-11. Moo notes the chiasmic pattern of the verses that clearly lays out Paul's thought.³²

A. God will judge everyone equitably	v. 6
B. Those who do good will attain eternal life	v. 7
C. Those who do evil will suffer wrath	v. 8
C*. Wrath for those who do evil	v. 9
B*. Glory for those who do good	v. 10
A*. God judges impartially	v. 11

In verse 6 Paul states the retributive and remunerative principles that God will give to each man in proportion to what he has done. He then summarizes the reward for righteous works (eternal life) and the reward for unrighteous works (eschatological wrath). Paul makes it clear that only two outcomes await each person who stands before God on the Day of the Lord; eternal blessing or eternal wrath. Moreover, these two

³⁰Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 63.

³¹Ibid.

³²Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 135.

outcomes are directly associated with the good or evil works one does in this life.³³

Therefore, both retributive and remunerative justice are in view in these verses.³⁴

However, the above analysis exposes an interpretive difficulty in the passage. The difficulty can be articulated by the question, what is the relationship between works and salvation? In other words, is Paul suggesting in Romans 2:6-11 that salvation by works is a possibility? If so, does this contradict Romans 3:20, which declares that no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law? There are at least two possible evangelical solutions that do justice to the text and resolve the issue.³⁵ First, one may say that the promise of eternal life in exchange for good works (Rom 2:7) is valid. However, that promise goes unfulfilled due to the fallen nature of man. Therefore, according to this option, Paul is arguing for hypothetical obedience rather than an actual set of events. While this solution is an option, there are a number of issues that preclude this choice.³⁶ The second option, and one that is becoming increasingly popular, is to see

³³No doubt Paul understands obedience in light of Deut 6:5 in which God claims one's entire being. Indeed, Paul will state that this can only be fulfilled by the New Covenant promise of the Spirit (cf. Rom 26-29 and Jer 31:33). Therefore, Paul, in chap. 2, is not attacking Jewish ethnocentrism. Rather he is addressing the blindness of those who have ceased to examine their personal failures and have now set themselves up as judge over more overt sinners (Rom 2:1-4). Seifrid, "Unrighteousness by Faith," 124-25.

³⁴Schreiner, *Romans*, 112-14; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 62.

³⁵It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully address the relationship between works and judgment in Rom 2:6-11. However, for a thorough outline and evaluation of the various possibilities for this passage see Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, 140-41; Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works?"

³⁶Perhaps the most powerful argument against the hypothetical position is that Paul states in Rom 3:26-29 that Gentile obedience stems from a work of the Spirit. Therefore, the previous verses should most likely be read in this light. For a list of difficulties with the hypothetical position, see Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works?" 139-55. See also Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 92-95.

Romans 2:7 as speaking of Christian Gentiles.³⁷ According to this interpretation, Gentiles have the law written upon their hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit as a gift of God. Therefore, the works spoken of in verse 7 (although imperfect) are actually evidence of the new birth and the Spirit's power to inscribe God's law upon converted hearts (Jer 31:34).³⁸ However, (as will be explained momentarily), because the works are gifts of God, they do not merit salvation. In other words, there is a qualitative difference between the way in which God evaluates the works of believers and the way in which he evaluates the works of unbelievers.

A difficulty that arises with the second interpretation is that Travis uses this way of understanding Romans 2:6-11 to discount God's retributive justice. Travis points to the fact that the deeds spoken of in 2:7 are a gift of God produced by the Spirit. As such, he argues that the deeds in general are not rewarded or punished but are simply markers that point to one's status before God. As a result, rewards for individual works

³⁷For a careful explanation of this position, see Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works?"

³⁸According to modern critics, retributive justice is useless because it does not address the need for transformation and soul cleansing that so many need today. In addition, it does not address the needed transformation in society. However, according to this passage, Paul is indicating that transformation takes place as the Spirit writes his law upon New Covenant believers' hearts. This, in the context of Romans 1-3, comes as a result of faith in Christ's atoning death. In other words, it is God's judgment of Christ that effects the New Covenant in which the Spirit writes the law of God upon the believer's heart. Therefore, retributive justice is at the heart of personal transformation. Indeed, this personal transformation/conversion, was what broke down the cultural barriers between Jew and Gentile in the New Testament. Therefore, retributive justice is extremely relevant to the kind of transformation, both personal and corporate, that critics call for. Moreover, it is this kind of transformation, rather than political revolution, that will effect real societal change. Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 188; Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 222–24; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973).

are ruled out in this passage.³⁹ Travis states, “Paul in fact overthrows a concept of retribution which sees deeds as individual acts of deserving rewards or punishment, by upholding the view that deeds reveal people’s fundamental faith or unbelief and thereby determine whether they belong to ‘those who are perishing’ or ‘those who are being saved (cf. 2 Cor 2:15).”⁴⁰ As a result, while Romans 2:6-11 might use retributive language, it is not retributive at all.⁴¹ In fact, Travis believes that the only way one can find retributive justice in Romans 2:6-11 is to understand the passage as teaching salvation by works.⁴²

Scripture does not support Travis’s assertion that deeds are only markers of character that are never judged retributively by God. As Moo notes (see above), Romans 2:6-11 clearly points to the fact that God will reward/judge all people according to their deeds.⁴³ Moreover, in 2:8, Paul connects his “wrath” (ὀργή) and “fury” (θυμός) with the evil deeds done by unbelieving Jews. Travis is correct to note that deeds are markers of character, which is also a marker of one’s inclusion or exclusion in the kingdom. But to separate deeds from faith or unbelief is to make a move that Scripture does not. Indeed, Paul in Ephesians 5:5-6 (cf. Matt 25:31-46) states, “For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of

³⁹Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 92–95.

⁴⁰Ibid., 96.

⁴¹This fits well with Travis’s view of eschatological judgment in which Travis sees one’s state after death as self imposed, and subjective, but not an external punishment of God. See Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 96, 111.

⁴²Ibid., 63.

⁴³Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 135–36; Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 146. As noted previously, the deeds of believers never merit salvation. However, their presence is necessary.

such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient." The clarity of this passage seems beyond doubt. Nevertheless, Travis defends his position by stating that the wrath spoken of in Ephesians 5:5-6 is equivalent to not inheriting the kingdom of God. Therefore, this verse only concerns one's relation to Christ, not ones deeds.⁴⁴ However, Travis is wrong on two fronts. First, the wrath of God spoken of in Ephesians 5:6 is not to be taken passively as a simple lack of inheritance. Instead, as seen in Romans 2:5 above, this wrath should be understood as eschatological and therefore as an active display of God's fury on the Day of the Lord. Second, Travis is wrong not to associate deeds and judgment in this passage. Speaking of the Day of the Lord, Zephaniah 1:17 states, "I will bring distress on the people, and they will walk like blind men because they have sinned against the Lord." The text clearly makes the point that distress comes because of sins committed. Moreover, Paul refers to the same day of wrath in Ephesians 5:6 and makes the same connection between deeds and judgment when he says that God's wrath comes because of immorality, greed, and impurity. Indeed, Paul's whole point is to warn professing believers to avoid such actions because God will judge those whose lives are characterized by such deeds. Therefore, to say that Paul is simply pointing to one's lack of inheritance in Christ and that sinful deeds will not be judged is to strain the text beyond what it can bear. However, Travis is forced to make this kind of distinction because he has committed himself to the belief that God's wrath cannot be retributive.⁴⁵ Therefore, these kinds of exegetical gymnastics (Paul calls them empty words in Eph 5:6) are necessary to maintain his argument. However, they are not biblical, as these texts demonstrate.

⁴⁴Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 69.

⁴⁵Ibid., 8–9.

However, if God evaluates works in relation to salvation, would this mean, as Travis asserts, that Romans 2:6-11 would be teaching salvation by works?⁴⁶ In answering Travis, one must keep in mind the primary purpose of Romans 2, which is to indict the Jews because of their lack of obedience to God's law. In other words, Paul's purpose is to prove that covenant privilege is meaningless apart from covenant obedience. In this context, Paul brings up Gentile obedience in order to discredit the Jews (v. 7) so that they will be driven to faith in Christ. The focus in 2:7 is not to determine or comment on the source of Gentile obedience.⁴⁷ That comment will come in 2:26-29, where true obedience is attributed to the Holy Spirit. Rather, the focus in 2:7 is to recognize the principle that God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience. This principle is true regardless of the source of one's works (Matt 16:27; 2 Cor 5:10).

Travis is correct to trace the source of obedience to faith and the source of disobedience to unbelief. However, Travis goes astray when he attempts to strip out any reference to rewards or punishment in 2:7. Travis assumes that because obedience in 2:7 does not earn one eternal life (and it does not) that rewards cannot be in view.⁴⁸ But even though good works do not merit salvation, nevertheless, God does require, evaluate, and reward the works of believers in the final judgment. This idea is clearly seen in the sheep and goat judgment where Christ takes account of believers' actions (Matt 25:37-46):

⁴⁶Ibid., 63.

⁴⁷One could also add that Paul is not concerned to explain why Gentiles and their works are ultimately acceptable to God. That will be treated in 3:21-26. Rather, Paul is simply content to point to the genuine obedience of Gentile Christians that is unmatched by Jews and that this obedience will be rewarded on the day of judgment. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), iii.xviii.1; Cranfield notes that in this verse there is no strict equivalence between works and salvation. C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Works of The Law' in the Epistle to the Romans," *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 43 (1991): 146.

⁴⁸Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 63.

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you. When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ . . . Then they (the righteous) will go into eternal life.

This concept seen in Matthew is the principle operative in Paul. In other words, taking the full measure of Paul’s theology into account, even though works are markers of character, as Travis states, nevertheless, they are markers that God clearly examines to determine the genuineness of one’s conversion and therefore if one may enter into eternal life.⁴⁹ The Scriptures establish this principle in a number of places (Matt 25:34-35; John 5:29; Luke 6:23; 1 Cor 3:8; 2 Cor 5:10; Jas 1:12).⁵⁰ Indeed, the principle of reward is stated quite clearly by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10: “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Paul, while never arguing for salvation on the basis of merit, understands that even his works will be evaluated and rewarded on the day of judgment.⁵¹ As Schreiner notes, “Even though Paul insists that no one can attain salvation by good works, he also insists that no one can be saved without them, and they are necessary to obtain eschatological inheritance.”⁵² Calvin, speaking in an even stronger tone, states,

⁴⁹Schreiner, “Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works?” 154; Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 147.

⁵⁰Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, iii.xviii.1; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 63.

⁵¹The principle of rewards can be stated quite strongly at times (cf. Matt. 25:34-35). No doubt this is done to show the necessity of their presence and their inseparable union with faith. Schreiner, “Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works?” 154.

But when the promises of the gospel are substituted (for obedience to the law), which proclaim the free forgiveness of sins, these not only make us acceptable to God but also render our works pleasing to him. And not only does the Lord adjudge them pleasing; he also extends to them the blessings that under the covenant were owed to observance of his law. I therefore admit that what the Lord has promised in his law to the keepers of righteousness and holiness is paid to the works of believers, but in this repayment we must always consider the reason that wins favor for these works.⁵³

In summary, certainly one will want to understand God's remunerative justice for believers differently from God's retributive justice for unbelievers. For instance, believers never, in any sense, merit eternal life, whereas unbelievers truly merit eternal death. Indeed, as Calvin states above, believers are rewarded for the gifts of obedience they have been given. Nevertheless, they are rewarded. And this is the point of Paul in 2:7. Therefore, Travis is wrong to deny the general principle of retributive and remunerative justice in Romans 2:6-11.

Having demonstrated that God will impartially judge both Jews and Gentiles according to demonstrable works, Paul begins systematically to dismantle the Jewish claim to righteousness. In verses 12-16, Paul addresses the Jewish defense that possession of the law will protect one from God's judgment.⁵⁴ Paul notes that even unbelieving Gentiles possess an inner law of conscience. Therefore, simple possession of the law, without obedience, is of no advantage. Instead, both Jew and Gentile will be judged by the standard that each possesses (Torah/law of Conscience). Indeed, this judgment will be carried out by Christ and reach to the secret thoughts of the heart (v.

⁵²Ibid.; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 64.

⁵³The distinction between reward and merit is pointed out by Calvin. While the works of believers can never merit eternal life, God does reward their works based upon the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, works are not judged on merit but are rather evidence of one's salvation. Moreover, Paul, in Rom 2:6-11, is not speaking of perfect obedience but rather of obedience that, as Schreiner states is "significant, substantial, and observable" (Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works?" 155). See also Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, iii.17.3.

⁵⁴Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works?" 118-27.

16). Therefore, if anyone thinks that Paul is reducing obedience to simple outward actions, he is mistaken.⁵⁵ Paul then presents a litany of sins that demonstrate the national calamity of Israel's rebellion (Rom 2:17-24) and discredit any claim to covenant obedience.⁵⁶ Finally, Paul argues that even the covenant sign of circumcision will not count in a Jew's favor if he breaks the law (Rom 2:25-29).⁵⁷ Indeed, in God's eyes, the circumcised man who rebels is counted as uncircumcised while the man who obeys God's law (by the power of the Spirit) is truly a circumcised Jew. Here Paul is hinting at the power of the New Covenant (Jer 31:34) and salvation in Christ.

In chapter 3, Paul begins by arguing that God's faithfulness in no way precludes God from judging the Jews.⁵⁸ Paul then summarizes the arguments begun in chapters 1 and 2 by stating that both Jews and Gentiles, without exception, are guilty of sinning against God by rejecting his revelation (v. 9). To prove his point Paul quotes numerous Old Testament texts and then concludes with the following verdict: "Now we know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (v. 19). The term

⁵⁵Schreiner links v. 16 with 15. According to this interpretation, the inner accusation of conscience (because of sin) that begins in this life will be completed by Christ's judgment. By extrapolation one can say that if this is true of the Gentiles it certainly is true of the Jews who possess the law. As a result, Christ's judgment will examine the depth of all men's hearts. Paul seems to be hinting at what he will make plain in 3:20. No one will be justified by the works of the law. The only solution is in the New Covenant forgiveness and obedience produced by the Spirit (2:26-29; 3:21-26) in which God justifies the sinner and writes the law upon his heart (Jer 31:34). Schreiner, *Romans*, 124–25.

⁵⁶Whether this passage refers to individual Jews or the nation of Israel, the point remains the same. Israel's possession of the law is irrelevant because she has not obeyed the law. Therefore Israel, like the Jews, will fall under God's wrath. Schreiner, *Romans*, 128–35; Carson, "The Glory of the Atonement," 119–20.

⁵⁷Schreiner, *Romans*, 136–45.

⁵⁸Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 180.

used for “accountable” ὑπόδικος conveys the legal concept of “answerable to” or “liable to prosecution.”⁵⁹ As Moo notes, “Paul pictures God both as the one offended and as the judge who weighs the evidence and pronounces the verdict. The image, then, is of all humanity standing before God, accountable to him for willful and inexcusable violations of his will, awaiting the sentence of condemnation that their actions deserve.”⁶⁰ What Paul leaves the reader with is a rather dire and hopeless picture of humanity in which both Jews and Gentiles stand waiting for the axe of God’s retributive justice to fall. In conclusion, Paul states, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.”⁶¹ This statement by Paul is certainly more than a description of one’s chosen destiny that ends in non-retributive judgment.⁶² It is a destiny that will end in God’s just vengeance against sinners who have rebelled against their creator.

⁵⁹Ibid., 205.

⁶⁰Although Paul seems to indict only those “under the law,” Moo notes that Paul is probably arguing from the greater to the lesser. If God’s chosen people cannot keep the law then surely the Gentiles’ case, under natural revelation, is hopeless. See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 205.

⁶¹The text removes any confidence in being acquitted by observing the law. To be declared righteous (δικαιωθήσεται) should be taken forensically and refers to God’s final judgment of all men. The meaning of ἐργα νόμου (works of the law) is debated. For example, Dunn sees “works of the law” as a technical reference to Jewish covenantal markers only, while Moo see the phrase as a description of general obedience. However, the context of the passage seems to preclude Dunn’s interpretation. For instance, most scholars agree that the term “works” refers to a general keeping of commands. Moreover, the term “works” and “works of the law” are used in passages that convey parallel meaning (cf. Rom 4:2-6; Rom 3:20, 28). Therefore, it would seem that both terms must convey a similar nuance (keeping the commands). For a full list of arguments against Dunn’s position, see Schreiner, *Romans*, 169–73; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 211–17; Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 159.

⁶²Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 64.

Romans 3:24-26

Having made the case that all mankind stands under the retributive wrath of God, Paul now presents the solution to this grim plight. Indeed, Romans 3:24-26 not only answers the dilemma presented in chapters 1:18-3:20. It is the impetus for everything that follows in Paul's letter. As a result, this portion of Scripture could be regarded as the heart of the epistle. Although scholars agree that this portion of Romans is central to Paul's argument, there is significant disagreement over key terms that affect the overall meaning of the passage.⁶³ The most important issues in relation to this debate are how one understands God's righteousness and the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, the heart of the discussion will focus on discovering the meaning of these key concepts within the context of the passage.

Paul begins this section by disclosing the new state of affairs that exists in Jesus Christ. According to Paul, God has revealed a righteousness apart from the law that comes through faith.⁶⁴ Paul's mention of the law is a reference to the Mosaic covenant and its inability to justify before God.⁶⁵ Although the law cannot justify, nevertheless, Paul states that the Old Testament anticipated, by way of prophecy, the new

⁶³Schreiner, *Romans*, 178; Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 199. In the process of exegeting this passage, the overall goal will be to understand Paul's doctrine of justice. As a result, not every issue in Rom 3:21-26 will need to be addressed in detail.

⁶⁴The phrase πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ can be translated "faith in Jesus Christ" (objective genitive) or "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (subjective genitive). Proponents of the latter translation state that it prevents a tautology evident in the original language but hidden in English—"through faith in Jesus Christ to all who have faith." However, Carson argues that the repetition of faith is actually intended by Paul to emphasize the availability of the gospel to all, Jew and Gentile (Rom 1:18-3:20). So, the translation should be "through faith in Jesus Christ—to all who have faith in him, with an emphasis upon 'all.'" For a complete defense of this interpretation, see Carson, "The Glory of the Atonement," 125–27.

⁶⁵Carson, "The Glory of the Atonement," 122–23.

state of grace, thus guaranteeing the continuity between the old and new covenants. No doubt, Paul is anticipating the objection from the Jews that he is presenting a novel approach to God and thus departing from the Scriptures. In answer, Paul points his reader to the law and the prophets who are witnesses of the righteousness available in Christ. Indeed, this new way is not only good news, but in light of Paul's argument in Romans 1:18-3:20, it is the only way available to a covenant relationship with God. Paul punctuates this point by repeating the theme of the previous two chapters when he states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In other words, the new way through faith in Christ is the only way open to God.

After introducing his topic Paul gets to the heart of his message in verses 25 and 26. Paul states,

[We] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so that he might be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Evangelicals have traditionally understood these verses to communicate the gospel message that Christ died on the cross as a propitiatory sacrifice to bear God's retributive wrath against sin. Moreover, this act of judgment upon Christ was necessary because, although God in forbearance had passed over sin, nevertheless, God's holy nature demands justice. Paul's argument implies that if God had not punished Christ then his justice would have been impugned.⁶⁶ Therefore, God's retributive wrath as outlined in Romans 1:18-3:20 must be propitiated by the sacrifice of Jesus.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 119–20.

⁶⁷For a traditional understanding of these verses, see Schreiner, *Romans*, 176–99; Carson, "The Glory of the Atonement," 119–39; Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, 218–43.

However, this interpretation has been criticized on two fronts. First, the traditional understanding of the concept “the righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεου) has been questioned. This criticism is significant because the term is central to the passage. As Moo notes, “[The phrase] occurs four times (vv. 21, 22, 25, 26 [‘his righteousness’ in the last two]), while the related verb ‘justify’ (*dikaioō*) is found twice (vv. 24, 26) and the adjective ‘just’ (*dikaios*) once (v. 26).”⁶⁸ According to Dunn, the term δικαιοσύνη should be understood (in light of its Hebrew background) to communicate a relational concept of God’s covenant faithfulness (to save) without any concept of retribution.⁶⁹ Therefore, the cross demonstrates that God fulfills his covenant obligations to save but it has nothing to say about the satisfaction of God’s wrath.⁷⁰

If Dunn is correct, then this interpretation could produce a significant shift in how one interprets the cross. For instance, the concept of penal substitution would be invalid and a new model for the atonement would be necessary.⁷¹ Indeed, this is exactly

⁶⁸Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 219.

⁶⁹Dunn, like many modern theologians, denies any kind of retributive notion in the righteousness of God. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 214–15, 340–46; Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 188–94; Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 103; Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2011), 173; Colin Greene, “Is the Message of the Cross Good News for the Twentieth Century?” in *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St John’s College, Nottingham*, ed. John. Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 103.

⁷⁰Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 181–82.

⁷¹Wright defines God’s righteousness as his covenant faithfulness, he, nevertheless, gives a surprising endorsement to the concept of propitiation in his commentary on Rom. However, he fails to endorse this concept in his more recent writings on Galatians. Therefore, one is left with a mixed opinion of Wright’s view of penal substitution and the related concept of retributive justice. See N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, in vol. 10 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 474; idem, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (London: SPCK, 2002), 34; idem, *Paul In Fresh Perspective*; idem, *The Climax of the Covenant Christ and the Law in Pauline*

the path that Dunn follows.⁷² However, there are several reasons why Dunn’s interpretation should not be accepted. First, as noted in the chapter 3, it is incorrect to define righteousness (קִדְּוָה/הִקְדִּישׁ) only as God’s covenant faithfulness because it fails to take into account the full range of meaning in the Old Testament. Indeed, Old Testament usage conveys the idea of God’s intervention in human history whereby he establishes/vindicates what is right (Ps 26:1; 35:24) and conquers/destroys what is evil (Pss 11:6-7) according to his ethical holiness.⁷³ As Seifrid states, “(God’s) acts of ‘justification’ do not represent mere ‘salvation’ for Israel, or even merely ‘salvation.’ They constitute the establishment of justice in the world which Yahweh made and governs.”⁷⁴ This Old Testament background is a significant factor in understanding Paul’s use of righteousness language in the New Testaments. Dunn states, “‘Righteousness’ is a good example of a term whose meaning is determined more by its Hebrew background than by its Greek form.”⁷⁵ While Dunn’s definition of “righteousness” is deficient, nevertheless, the principle he articulates still stands.⁷⁶

Theology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); and idem, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

⁷²Penal substitution is also related to how one interprets Christ’s sacrifice. Does Christ’s sacrifice propitiate God’s wrath or cleanse/destroy sin? This matter will be addressed below. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 182; Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 166–84.

⁷³Mark A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 415–42.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 441.

⁷⁵That Paul draws his idea of righteousness primarily from the Old Testament is a well-attested fact. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 79; Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross.*, 269; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 341.

Therefore, one would expect to see the Old Testament concept of ethical justice (including retribution) within Paul's use of righteousness language. Indeed, this concept is the case. For instance, Paul speaks of a righteous decree (δικαίωμα, Rom 1:32), righteous judgment (δικαιοκρισία, Rom 2:5), and just condemnation (ἔνδικος, Rom 3:8). All of these references occur in retributive contexts, and all refer to a standard of justice. This notion is especially true in Romans 2:13 and 3:20 where the term "righteousness" bears a forensic notion of being right before God.⁷⁷ Indeed, the way Paul uses terminology in Romans requires one to understand that retribution is included in the definition of "righteousness." As Seifrid states,

Even when one takes into account the accidental character of language, it is simply not imaginable that Paul can move from speaking about the revelation of God's righteousness (Rom. 1:17) to the unrighteousness of idolatry (Rom. 1:18), to God's righteous sentence upon ungodliness (Rom 1:32), and, finally, to the day of God's "wrath and righteous judgment" (Rom 2:5) without having some way of holding these utterances together. . . Any interpretation of God's righteousness or justification in purely salvific terms is forced into the untenable position of ignoring a significant element of Paul's language and argument as it appears in Romans.⁷⁸

Therefore, as Seifrid notes, the overall linguistic data in Romans support the concept of retribution within Paul's use of "righteous" language.

The second reason why the term "righteousness" cannot be equated with God's covenant faithfulness is because of Paul's argument in the early chapters of Romans.⁷⁹

Paul's purpose in Romans 1:18-3:20 is to prove that all men are liable to God's

⁷⁶Dunn's definition of righteousness is based upon the study of Hermann Cremer. For an evaluation of Cremer's study, see Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism"; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 342 n. 27; Hermann Cremer, *Die Paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre Im Zusammenhange Ihrer Geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1900).

⁷⁷Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 86.

⁷⁸Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language against Its Hellenistic Background," 58–59.

⁷⁹Tankersley, "The Courtroom and the Created Order," 125.

retributive judgment that will be displayed on the Day of Wrath (Rom 2:5; 3:19). Therefore, the concern that Paul answers in 3:21-26 must relate to this purpose by explaining how unrighteous sinners can have a “right standing” (Rom 3:20) before a holy God who is ready to unleash his eschatological fury against them. Paul answers this question when he states that one “[is] justified freely by his [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” In this verse, Paul is speaking of an act of God by which sinners are granted right standing in the Day of Judgment. Indeed, the verb δικαιόω means to acquit, or declare one to be in right standing (cf. Rom 5:1).⁸⁰ This gift of justification is what defines the concept of the “righteousness from God through faith in Jesus Christ” that introduces this section (v. 22). Indeed, it is Paul’s answer to the problem of God’s wrath. In other words, God’s righteousness (v. 22) saves by justifying. Moreover, because God will impartially judge both Jews and Gentiles, acquitting no one (Rom 2:5), justification must involve appeasement of God’s wrath. The argument of Romans 1-2 requires the solution of retribution because God does not simply allow sin to go unpunished. Indeed, as the reader shall see in a moment, this retribution will be accomplished through atoning sacrifice. Therefore, the concept of righteousness spoken of in this pericope must include God’s retribution as well as his salvation.

A final argument against understanding God’s righteousness as limited to his covenant faithfulness can be seen in the last phrase of Romans 3:25. In this verse Paul states, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to prove his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.” The traditional evangelical understanding of this verse has taken Paul to mean that Christ’s sacrifice has satisfied the need for righteousness (retributive justice) created by God’s restraint in punishing old covenant transgressions.⁸¹

⁸⁰Schreiner, *Romans*, 227; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 387.

As Moo states, “The clause makes an important contribution to our understanding of the ‘internal’ mechanism of the atonement, explaining the necessity of Christ’s propitiating work in terms of the requirements of God’s holy character.”⁸² However, this understanding has been challenged, most notably, by Kümmel, who makes several interpretive decisions that result in a very different understanding of the verse.⁸³ Kümmel argues that ἔνδειξις means “demonstration” or “showing,” not “proof”; that δία should be translated “through” not “because”; that πάρεσις should be translated “forgiveness,” not “passing over”; and that δικαιοσύνη refers to God’s saving righteousness.⁸⁴ In light of these changes in terminology the verse should be read as follows: “He did this to demonstrate his saving faithfulness through the forgiveness of sins committed beforehand.” In other words, God sent Christ not to satisfy God’s retributive justice but rather to demonstrate his faithfulness to save. However, there are several reasons this interpretation is incorrect. First, to translate the term πάρεσις as “forgiveness” is lexically incorrect.⁸⁵ The term can only mean “forgiveness” in certain contexts from which the present verse is excluded. Second, Piper has shown that regardless of the translation of πάρεσις and ἔνδειξις, the traditional understanding of the verse is not necessarily excluded.⁸⁶ Third, to assign δία plus the accusative an instrumental meaning

⁸¹Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, 238; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 116–20.

⁸²Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 238.

⁸³Werner G. Kümmel, “Paresis and Endeixis: A Contribution to the Understanding of the Pauline Doctrine of Justification,” *Journal for Theology and the Church* 3 (1967): 1–13.

⁸⁴Schreiner, *Romans*, 196; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 238–39; Kümmel, “Paresis and Endeixis.”

⁸⁵Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 238.

is to choose a rare translation that is not demanded by the context of the passage. Indeed, δία plus the accusative most commonly means “because,” a translation that best fits the present context.⁸⁷ Fourth, this interpretation demands a meaning for the term “righteousness” that is not warranted. As seen above, to restrict the meaning of δικαιοσύνη to simple covenant faithfulness is too narrow a definition. Indeed the present context necessitates the inclusion of God’s retribution. Finally, this interpretation demands a meaning from the term ἀνοχή (“forbearance”) that is contextually incorrect. According to Kümmel’s understanding of the passage, God demonstrates his faithfulness to save by forgiving sins committed beforehand during God’s patience (ἀνοχή). However, ἀνοχή is consistently used by Paul to communicate the delay of God’s judgment rather than a simple display of his patience.⁸⁸ Therefore the word “forbearance” is a better translation of ἀνοχή than the term “patience.” As a result, when one considers all of the evidence it is exegetically more sound to decide in favor of the traditional interpretation that understands the text as a demonstration of God’s retributive justice as opposed to his covenant faithfulness. Therefore, the phrase “his [God’s] righteousness,” according to lexical data, context, and grammar, must be understood in a retributive sense.⁸⁹

⁸⁶John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 120–23.

⁸⁷Schreiner, *Romans*, 197.

⁸⁸Simon J. Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter Thomas O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 181.

⁸⁹The same thought is repeated in v. 26. However, Paul addresses sin in the present as opposed to the previous age. He states, “He did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time.” Paul then explains the purpose of this demonstration: “so as to be just, and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” Since Paul’s thought is parallel to the previous clause, “justice” must bear the same meaning: God’s retributive

The second significant interpretive factor found in Romans 3:24-24 concerns the way one understands the term ἵλαστήριον. Does the term refer to the propitiation/appeasement of God’s wrath or the expiation/cleansing of sin? C. H. Dodd, in his much debated study, suggests that while the term may convey the concept of propitiation in secular Greek literature, in the LXX the term means to expiate or cover.⁹⁰ In other words, according to Dodd, the concept of appeasing God’s wrath is not in view in the Old Testament and therefore not in view in the term ἵλαστήριον. However, both Nicole and Morris have demonstrated that Dodd’s study is deficient and that the ἰλάσκομαι word group is used to translate propitiatory concepts in the LXX.⁹¹ As Morris notes,

Examination of this word-group brought us inevitably into the circle of ideas associated with *kipper*, where we have seen reason for postulating a close connection between *kipper* and *kōpher*. This further strengthens the conclusion that ἰλάσκομαι, etc. retain the idea of putting away the divine anger, since it means that in the cultus itself there is the thought of a ransom being paid, a ransom which we may not unjustly regard as a propitiation.⁹²

righteousness as opposed to his covenant faithfulness. Moo sums this up well when he states, “Paul’s point is that God can maintain his righteous character (‘his righteousness’ in vv. 25 and 26) even while he acts to justify sinful people (‘God’s righteousness’ in vv. 21 and 22) because Christ, in his propitiatory sacrifice, provides full satisfaction of the demand of God’s impartial, invariable justice” (Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, 242). Therefore, Dunn’s assertion that the justice spoken of in this clause refers to God’s covenant faithfulness and not God’s internal standard of justice is off point. See Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 174–75.

⁹⁰C. H. Dodd, “*Hilaskesthai*, Its Cognates, Derivatives and Synonyms in the Septuagint,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1931): 352–60.

⁹¹Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 144–78; Roger R. Nicole, “C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1955): 117–57.

⁹²For an examination of the Hebrew sacrificial system and the terms *kipper* and *kopher*, see chap. 3 of this dissertation. See also Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 174.

Therefore based upon word usage alone, there is strong evidence understand ἵλαστήριον in propitiatory terms.⁹³

However, there are also significant contextual reasons for understanding ἵλαστήριον in terms of propitiation. First, as noted above, Paul develops his argument in terms of God's wrath. According to Paul, both Jew and Gentile are guilty of sin (Rom 3:9) and therefore stand under God's condemnation that he will reveal in the Day of Judgment (Rom 2:5; 3:19). Indeed, the possibility of right standing before God by observing the law (and by implication, the law of conscience for Gentiles) is ruled out (Rom 3:20). Therefore, the reader is left with the inevitable impression that God will exhibit his retributive wrath on sinful man. Because this dilemma is solved by Christ's death (Rom 3:24-25), one would logically expect retribution to be involved in Paul's solution. Therefore, it is logically consistent with Paul's argument to understand ἵλαστήριον in a retributive sense.⁹⁴

⁹³Belousek comes to the conclusion that ἵλαστήριον, in the Septuagint and therefore in Romans, refers to the concept of expiation rather than propitiation. Belousek reaches this conclusion by recognizing that ἵλαστήριον consistently translates the term "mercy seat" in the LXX. He then concludes that Paul in Rom 3:25, by using ἵλαστήριον ("mercy seat") is referring to the Day of Atonement, which, in Belousek's view, expiates sin rather than propitiates God's wrath. Belousek's conclusion is wrong for two reasons. First, one cannot separate the concept of propitiation from atonement terminology and, therefore, from the Day of Atonement. As a result, even if one understands ἵλαστήριον as a reference to the Day of Atonement, it will include the concept of propitiation. Second, Belousek's word study in the Septuagint was confined to the simple term ἵλαστήριον and did not consider the broader range of meaning contained in ἰλάσκεσθαι and its cognates. Indeed, as Morris has demonstrated, when this broader range of meaning is taken into consideration there is significant reason to understand the term ἵλαστήριον to communicate the concept of propitiation. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 254-56; Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 144-178; Schreiner, *Romans*, 191; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 235.

⁹⁴Belousek believes that one is begging the question by using Rom 1:18-3:20 to determine the meaning of ἵλαστήριον in Rom 3:25. However, one might counter-charge that Belousek is in danger of ignoring the context of the passage. Schreiner notes that the mention of God's wrath is placed at key junctions in Paul's argument (Rom 1:18; 2:5; 3:5) so that his discussion is anchored in the concept that the

However, there is a second contextual reason to understand ἵλαστήριον in terms of propitiation. As noted above, Christ's death is the demonstration of God's justice necessitated by God's forbearance as he passed over old covenant sins (Rom 3:25). Moreover, as noted previously, the term for God's forbearance (ἀνοχή) communicates the delay of God's judgment, not a simple act of patience. If, then, God has finally met the requirement of justice (required by this delay) it must mean that Jesus suffers God's judging wrath in his death.⁹⁵

In light of the above evidence, the assertion of modern theologians that Christ's sacrifice is not retributive is simply not supported by Scripture.⁹⁶ Indeed, Dunn's understanding of God's righteousness as his covenant faithfulness is reductionistic.⁹⁷ It fails to take into account significant data from the Old Testament that defines God's righteousness as including both salvation and retribution. Travis's view of Christ's death as an act that simply absorbs the consequences of human sin is deistic and

wrath of God is his righteous response to sin. As a result, it is contextually accurate and logically consistent to interpret ἵλαστήριον in terms of propitiation. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 246; Schreiner, *Romans*, 191; Tankersley, "The Courtroom and the Created Order," 129–30.

⁹⁵Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood," 181.

⁹⁶Stump asserts that because God requires payment for sin one cannot truly say he forgives. Indeed, according to Stump, one either demands payment or one forgives a debt. However, one cannot do both. Stump's analogy fails because it equates God's forgiveness with a human debt. As the Triune God, the Son took to himself human nature in order to fulfill God's righteousness for his elect. Therefore God bestows right standing based upon Christ's sacrifice. In other words, God incarnate fulfills what he requires and then grants that gift to his elect. This does not contradict the idea of forgiveness since God is the author of the righteousness he requires. Eleonore Stump, "Atonement According to Aquinas," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, University of Notre Dame Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 62.

⁹⁷Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 340–46.

unscriptural.⁹⁸ As noted earlier in this chapter, Travis imports extra-biblical presuppositions to define his concept of God's wrath. As a result he is forced to see God's anger as non-retributive and totally intrinsic to human actions. Finally, Green and Baker's criticism of retributive justice is evidenced in their vigorous rejection of penal substitution. However, Green and Baker build upon Dunn's view of God's righteousness and Travis's view of retribution in order to redefine the concept of God's wrath.⁹⁹ As a result, their articulation of Christ's work on the cross is non-retributive and therefore far from what Paul describes in Romans.

Conclusion

After examining the linguistic, exegetical, and contextual/logical evidence, the traditional interpretation of Romans 1:18-3:26 seems to offer the best understanding of Paul's argument. This interpretation understands the apostle to articulate that both Jews and Gentiles justly stand under the retributive wrath of God due to their rejection of his revelation (Rom 1-2). As a result, all mankind is waiting for the day of wrath in which each person will be condemned because of the evil works they have committed (2:5; 3:19). In other words, Paul argues that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (3:23). In response, Paul articulates the solution to this dire problem that involves Christ bearing the retributive wrath of God as a sacrifice of atonement (3:25). Those who place their faith in this sacrifice will have right standing on the Day of Judgment (Rom 3:24). Therefore, retribution is at the forefront of Paul's argument in both the presentation of the problem and in the presentation of the solution.

⁹⁸Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 199.

⁹⁹Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 121, 173.

Galatians 3:10-13

Galatians 3:10-13 is arguably the most important section in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Therefore, it is not surprising that this portion of Scripture is also the most debated in the letter.¹⁰⁰ Central to this dispute is how one understands God's law and therefore the curses associated with the law. Indeed, there is a wide chasm that separates the traditional interpretation of Galatians 3:10-13 from the way many critics of retributive justice approach this passage. Therefore, in order to contrast and evaluate the major views of this passage, the traditional interpretation will be outlined first. This presentation will be followed by a typical critical view of retributive justice, intermingled with analysis. The focus of the discussion will be to determine if this portion of Scripture presents God's retributive justice or if some other understanding better suits the context.

The traditional interpretation of Galatians 3:10-13 has understood the passage to communicate that God's retributive justice will be exercised against all who put themselves under the Mosaic law as a means to justification. In a statement similar to Romans 3:19 (but using covenant terminology), Paul declares that observance of the law is futile in rectifying one's standing before God.¹⁰¹ Paul writes (Gal 3:10), "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" To place this argument

¹⁰⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 199.

¹⁰¹For a thorough examination of this passage, see Schreiner, *Galatians*; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990); Gordon D. Fee, *Galatians: Pentecostal Commentary*, Pentecostal Commentary Series (Dorset, England: Deo, 2007); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993); Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Wright, *Paul for Everyone*.

in context, Paul has just pointed out that right standing before God (justification) comes by faith through the Spirit (Gal 3:5-9; Rom 1:26-29; 4), not by keeping the law. Paul, then, sets up a connection between the law and the covenant curses by quoting from Deuteronomy 27:26.¹⁰² The traditional interpretation of this passage understands Paul to rest his case upon the unstated premise that no one can observe the law.¹⁰³ As a result, the flow of the argument should be as follows:

1. Those who do not carry out the law perfectly are under a curse.
2. No one can observe the law perfectly.
3. Therefore, all who rely on observing the law (for right standing before God) are under a curse.

Having established a connection between the law and the covenant curses, Paul draws a distinction between the law and faith in verses 11-12. Quoting Habakkuk 2:4, Paul affirms, “The righteous will live by faith.” The Old Testament context of Habakkuk 2:4 seems to convey the concept that the man of righteous faith will grasp God’s promise

¹⁰²This exposition understands the best explanation of the opponents of Paul in Galatia to be Judaizers who were requiring circumcision and other Mosaic legal observances in order for one to be included within God’s Christian covenant community. For an explanation of the various positions taken on the opponents of Paul in Galatia, see Schreiner, *Romans*, 40–51; Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxxxviii-c.

¹⁰³The objection that an unstated premise is unlikely in this passage is without warrant. Certainly, the proposition that all human beings sin without exception is a valid scriptural assumption (1 Kgs 8:46; Prov 20:9, Rom 3:23). Moreover, logical gaps requiring an unstated premise are present in every Old Testament citation by Paul in Gal 3:6-14. Further, this type of argumentation (that includes logical gaps) is typical among Jewish rabbis of the time. Therefore, the assumption of the unstated premise is reasonable and likely. Also, one must keep in mind the point in salvation history. Even if the Judaizers were to rely upon a law-keeping that included reliance upon Torah sacrifices, those sacrifices are now invalid due to Christ’s work on the cross. As a result, the Judaizers would be required to obey the law perfectly. For a complete discussion of this matter as well as the various positions taken on this passage, see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 205–07; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible? A Re-Examination of Galatians 3:10,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 27 (June 1984): 151–60; Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 229–32; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 92–93.

of deliverance in spite of his dire circumstances.¹⁰⁴ As a result, faith alone results in right standing before God. The Habakkuk quote is immediately followed by Leviticus 18:5: “The man who does these things will live by them.” Paul seems to be making an absolute contrast between the “doing” (Lev 18:5) that is required by the law and the righteousness of faith.¹⁰⁵ Paul will allow no middle ground, not even a partial role, for works in his doctrine of justification.¹⁰⁶ As Fee argues, “One either comes to life, and continues to live, on the basis of faith, or one is condemned to living by the law and that alone, and that quite excludes living by faith.”¹⁰⁷ This contrast reaches its climax and resolution in verses 13, where Christ becomes both the curse and the source of redemption. Paul writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” Paul assumes in this verse that the curse of the law lies upon all men (Rom 1:18-3:20), supporting the previous principle that perfect obedience to the law is impossible (Rom 3:19-20, 23).¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the same curse has fallen upon Christ so that all law-breakers who have faith in his redeeming work will have right standing before God. Paul’s citation of Leviticus 27:10 brings to mind the prolific, and often hair-raising curses pronounced by Moses in Deuteronomy

¹⁰⁴Schreiner, *Romans*, 209.

¹⁰⁵Luther understands Paul’s point to be similar to the command Christ gave to the rich young ruler in Luke 10:28: “Do this and you shall live.” The clear implication from the unstated premise seems to be that perfect obedience is required by the Law (cf. Rom 3:19, 23). Martin Luther, *Lectures On Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4*, vol. 26 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 272.

¹⁰⁶Schreiner makes the important point that Paul is not rejecting the role of the law in the lives of Christians (Gal 5:13-15). Rather, one is justified only by faith, and obedience plays no part in the act of justification. Instead, the Spirit is responsible for writing God’s Law upon the justified man’s heart so that he obeys (Jer 31:34; Gal 6:2). See Schreiner, *Romans*, 211–12.

¹⁰⁷Fee, *Galatians*, 121.

¹⁰⁸Schreiner, *Romans*, 215.

(Deut 27; 28:15-68) which fall upon any Israelite who would disregard God's law (cf. Rom 3:24-26). Moreover, to bolster his point that the curse of God's wrath has fallen upon Jesus, Paul describes Christ's death as one who is "hung upon a tree." This description finds its explanation in Deuteronomy 21:23 where the man guilty of a capital crime must be put to death and hung upon a tree (pole) as evidence that he is under God's curse. As Craigie states, "The body was not *accursed of God* (or lit. 'curse of God') because it was hanging on a tree; it was hanging on a tree because it was accursed of God."¹⁰⁹ Paul explains the purpose for this act when he speaks of Christ's act upon the cross as redemption from God's curse. As Morris notes, both the Old and New Testament concepts of redemption convey the idea of a price paid to deliver.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Christ becomes a curse in the sinner's place to redeem him from the curse of the law.¹¹¹

In light of the above, Galatians 3:10-13 exhibits God's retributive justice in at least three ways. First, Galatians 3:10 asserts that all men are liable to God's covenant curse and therefore his retributive wrath because they fail to keep God's law.¹¹² Second, Christ, as our sacrifice, has become liable to God's curse, and therefore falls under the retributive wrath of God as our substitute. Indeed, as Paul notes, the curse of God is evidenced by the very manner in which he was put to death. Third, because Jesus' life is the price to redeem one from the curse of the law, it seems clear that he must suffer in the

¹⁰⁹Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 285.

¹¹⁰Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 27, 61.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹²As explained in chap. 3, the curses of Deut 27-28 are clearly retributive. Even Travis, who will admit to very little in the way of God's retributive justice, is forced to admit the retributive nature of the Mosaic curses in Deut. See Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 187.

sinner's place. The price that is paid is the death that Christ suffers on the cross.

Therefore, God's retribution is clearly evident in this passage.

As one would expect, the traditional interpretation of Galatians 3:10-13 has fallen under considerable attack. For example, Dunn understands this passage as one that addresses the problem of Jewish ethnocentrism.¹¹³ According to Dunn, Israel's sin is not a failure to keep the law perfectly. Indeed, Dunn does not understand Paul to be assuming perfect obedience to the law at all (Gal 3:10).¹¹⁴ Instead, Israel's failure is her

¹¹³Wright sees a reference to Israel's exile in Gal 3:10, 13. According to Wright, the passage does not focus on individual sins but the corporate nature of Israel's failure and the ensuing exile that, in Wright's opinion, is still ongoing. Christ recapitulates the history of Israel and exhausts the curse of exile in his death. The Galatian Christians risk being placed back under the curse of exile by placing themselves under the law. There are several issues with Wright's interpretation. First, there seems to be a softening of the concept of retribution in Wright's proposal. Christ is not described as suffering the wrath of God for sin but rather exhausting the curse of the exile. Second, Wright incorrectly attempts to limit the idea of curse to exile. However, the Scriptures define the concept of curse in a broader sense. For instance, the sins listed in Deut 27:15-26 are all personal sins that have nothing to do with exile. The same is true with many of the curses pronounced throughout the Old Testament (Gen 3:17-19; Josh 6:26; 1 Kgs 16:34). Moreover, the concept of exile has only the nation of Israel for its primary reference while the curse indicated in Romans, is a problem for all humanity, not simply Israel. According to Pauline theology, both Jews and Gentiles are under God's wrath because they transgress the law (natural/Mosaic). Therefore, it is more consistent with Pauline theology to understand Gal 3:10-13 in light of Paul's understanding of sin in Romans. Therefore, Wright is incorrect to restrict the meaning of curse to the concept of exile. Third, there is no reference to the exile in Gal 3. Paul does not provide a historical review of Israel's past so as to prepare the reader for a covenant reference like the concept of exile. Instead, he simply warns his readers that if they rely upon the law they must keep it perfectly. Therefore, there is no reason to supply the concept of exile to the text. Fourth, Paul enumerates other primary sins that the Galatians have been redeemed from. For instance, Paul states in Gal 4:3, and 4:8-9 that God has redeemed Gentiles from idolatry, and Jews from the law. These are certainly different issues than the problem of exile. For a complete discussion of this matter, see Wright, *The Climax of The Covenant*, 137-56; idem, *Paul for Everyone*, 31-35; idem, *Paul In Fresh Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 139-40; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 206-07; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 93-95.

¹¹⁴James D. G. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3. 10-14)," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 533.

insistence on defining God's people exclusively through the Jewish national boundary markers (circumcision, religious feasts/days, etc.) and thus excluding Gentiles from God's blessing.¹¹⁵ As such, Israel is guilty of misusing the law and therefore finds herself under God's curse.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the Gentiles, because of this exclusionary policy, are themselves under God's curse.¹¹⁷ In summary, the curse of the Law for Jews amounts to the ill effects upon Gentiles that result from a wrong understanding of God's law. Moreover, both the wrong understanding of the law and the "ill effects" are what Christ dies to remove. Dunn states,

The purpose of Christ's redemptive work can be specified quite properly as the removal of *that* curse, as the deliverance of the heirs of the covenant promise from the ill effects of the too narrow understanding of covenant and law held by Paul's Jewish contemporaries, so that both Jew and Gentile can enter into the fuller scope of the covenant promise.¹¹⁸

According to Dunn, Christ suffers essentially as a Gentile (outside the covenant blessing), and is raised, in order to demonstrate that national Jewish boundary markers no longer communicate God's blessing but instead that God is now for the Gentiles.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵According to Dunn, works of the law are actually the national boundary markers of which circumcision is the most obvious. See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 361–62.

¹¹⁶In v. 10, Dunn states that the Jews fall under the curse of the law (Deut 27:26) because of their wrong understanding of the law. In v. 13, Dunn subtly shifts his definition of curse to the "ill effects" on Gentiles that result from a wrong understanding of the law. Presumably Dunn's last definition is what he means to communicate. Dunn, "Works of the Law," 533–37; Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 132–33.

¹¹⁷Dunn, "Works of the Law," 536.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 537.

¹¹⁹Dunn's view of Christ's death is complex. He lists six metaphors that, he believes, capture the nature of Christ's work on the cross: representation, sacrifice, curse, redemption, reconciliation, and conquest of powers. The curse of Gal 3:13 represents only one facet of Dunn's model and should not be taken as a complete representation of his thought on the matter. Nevertheless, Dunn is consistent in his rejection of God's

Compared to the traditional understanding of this passage, Dunn's argument falls short in a number of ways. First, as seen above in footnote 114, there is a contradiction in Dunn's terminology. Dunn subtly shifts his definition of curse from an actual curse pronounced by the law to the "ill effects" of a nationalistic understanding of the law. Clearly Dunn has made a significant change that is unsupported by the text. In verse 10, Paul speaks of the curse that comes from the law and that is defined by Deuteronomy (Deut 27:26; 28:15-68). Moreover, the curses enumerated in Deuteronomy are clearly retributive and are an expression of God's wrath upon the sinful disobedience to God's law, not upon ethnocentric exclusion of the Gentiles.¹²⁰ Indeed, it is the curse for disobedience that is said to be visited upon Christ in verse 13. Therefore, Dunn's definition of God's curse as "ill effects" and "misunderstanding" is a clear distortion of the text. Indeed, it removes the retributive justice that Paul clearly intends to communicate and that Dunn communicates in his original comment on verse 10.¹²¹ Moreover, Dunn's interpretation has a clear gnostic tendency. According to Dunn, salvation for the Jews consists in their receiving a correction of their misunderstanding of the law while the Gentiles seem to receive the more substantial benefit of being delivered from the ill effects of Jewish misunderstanding. However, this gnostic tendency and the

retributive justice as a reason for Christ's death. See Dunn, "Works of the Law," 537; idem, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 207–33.

¹²⁰The meaning of ἔργα νομίμου ("works of the law") is debated. Dunn sees "works of the Law" as a technical reference to Jewish covenantal markers, while Moo sees the phrase as a description of general obedience. However, usage in the book of Romans seems to preclude Dunn's interpretation. For instance, the term "works" and "works of the law" are used in passages that convey parallel meaning (cf. Rom 4:2-6; 3:20, 28). Therefore, it would seem that both terms must convey a similar nuance (keeping the commands). For a full list of arguments against Dunn's position, see Schreiner, *Romans*, 169–73; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 211–17; Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 159.

¹²¹Dunn, "Works of the Law," 534.

division in Christ's purpose for Jew and Gentile seem to torture the text to the point that one must abandon Dunn's attempt to salvage his concept.¹²² Indeed, Dunn's interpretation makes no sense of the overall context of Galatians. For instance, in Galatia, Judaizers were not excluding Gentiles from their circles but attempting to assimilate them into their legal culture. Moreover, to accept Dunn's interpretation, one must ignore the broader theological context of Romans in which the wrath of God is the central issues that is solved by the death of Christ (Rom 1:18-3:20). According to this section of Scripture, salvation is more than a correction of a misunderstanding of the law or the exclusion of Gentiles from the covenant brought about by Jewish nationalism. The real exclusion of Jews and Gentiles is brought about by their rejection of God's revelation (revealed/natural) and the resulting wrath of God that comes upon them (Rom 1:18-32). This point of theology most naturally corresponds to the traditional interpretation of the curse spoken of in Galatians 3:10 and 13.

Finally, Dunn's interpretation of this passage requires a very limited view of the atonement. As noted above, Dunn argues that Christ's death is like an object lesson to the Jews to demonstrate that God is for the Gentile outsiders, and therefore the Jews should not restrict God's blessing to Israel alone. As a result, the atonement, while benefitting Gentiles, is actually aimed at correcting the misunderstanding of Jews. Westerholm notes, "So limited a view of the atonement would have astonished even the most dogmatic TULIP theologian."¹²³

However, it is Dunn's narrow interpretation of Christ's atonement that Travis picks up. While Travis admits a measure of God's retribution in Christ's death, like Dunn, he limits its focus to Jewish nationalism. Travis states, "When Paul writes in verse

¹²²Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 132.

¹²³Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 317–18.

13 that ‘Christ has redeemed *us* from the curse of the law’, ‘*us*’ is not a straightforward reference to all humanity but more specifically to Jewish people and the ways in which their resistance to God is manifested.”¹²⁴ However, the attempt to limit God’s curse to Israel simply cannot be sustained by Scripture. As seen above, Romans 1:18-3:20 teaches that both Jew and Gentile are liable to God’s curse as a direct result of their rejection of revelation (natural/special). Therefore, in Pauline theology, the work that Christ accomplishes on the cross applies to both groups. Moreover, in Galatians 3:10 the curse is not limited but extends to “all who rely on the works of the law.” In context, Gentiles would have been included in this designation because the issue that Paul is addressing is Torah keeping by Christian Gentiles. By definition, these Gentiles now fall under the curse of the law (Rom 2:5-11; 3:20). As a result, Paul’s is not limiting the curse of 3:10 or 3:13 to Jews but instead applies it (in this special situation) to both groups.¹²⁵

In conclusion, Travis, like Dunn fails in his attempt to redefine the scope and nature of the atonement and thus limit God’s retribution at the cross. Therefore, the traditional reading of Galatians 3:10-13 that understand Christ to suffer God’s retributive curse to redeem sinners is the most contextually and theologically consistent position to take.

¹²⁴Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 183, 201 n. 11; Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 86.

¹²⁵Any attempt to limit the audience by demarcation of pronouns does not succeed. As Schreiner notes, “Paul’s reference to ‘*us*’ in 3:14 raises serious problems for the idea that Paul uses pronouns to distinguish Jews from Gentiles, for it is clear that the Gentiles are included in the ‘*we*’ in 3:14. Indeed, the heart of Paul’s argument is that Gentiles have received the Spirit (3:1-5), and hence 3:14 functions as an *inclusio* with 3:1-5” (Schreiner, *Galatians*, 215). See also Longenecker, *Galatians*, 121; R. V. G. Tasker, “The Biblical Doctrine of The Wrath of God,” *Themelios* 26 (2001): 170–73.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul presents what has been called the great exchange. Paul writes, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” According to the traditional interpretation of this passage, sin was imputed to the sinless Christ, so that one might have right standing before God.¹²⁶ According to the immediate context this righteousness involves the process of reconciliation with God. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” According to verse 19, reconciliation is initiated by God and becomes effective when God does not count men’s sins against them.¹²⁷ As a result of this reconciliation process, sinners now have right standing (righteousness) before God (2 Cor 5:21).¹²⁸

Although unstated, the cross of Christ is clearly in view in these verses, and the gift of reconciliation (not counting men’s sins) comes through the death of Jesus. Romans 8:3 and Colossians 2:14 are parallel verses that reinforce Paul’s concept.¹²⁹ Romans 8:3 states, “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 (cf. Rom 3:25). In similar fashion, Colossians 2:13b-14 states, “He forgave us

¹²⁶Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 202.

¹²⁷Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 245.

¹²⁸Schreiner notes that righteousness defined solely as God’s covenant faithfulness cannot be in view in this passage. Instead, righteousness, in this passage, involves God’s saving act which grants men right standing in his presence. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 201; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 358.

¹²⁹Dunn is very close to the traditional interpretation of this verse. However, he refuses to see any retribution in the passage even though he acknowledges that Christ bore our sin, sacrificially. See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 219.

all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” Romans 8:3 explicitly states that Christ’s death is a sacrifice while the Colossians passage links transgression of the law with the forgiveness accomplished at the cross. The correlation of 2 Corinthians 5:19, Romans 8:3, and Colossians 2:13 provide strong evidence that the death of Christ in 5:21 should be understood in sacrificial terms as an appeasement of God’s wrath.¹³⁰

The thought of culpability before God is further enhanced by the use of the term “counting” (λογίζομαι) in verse 19—“counting men’s sins.” This expression is an accounting term and has the pejorative sense of marking a matter against someone.¹³¹ Further, the term “transgression” (παράπτωμα), also used in verse 19, refers to deliberate or willful sin.¹³² Taken together the thought conveyed is that God (the aggrieved party) will hold man (the guilty party) responsible for transgressing the law. In other words, man’s alienation from God involves enmity from God due to sin (Rom 5:10).¹³³ Consequently, reconciliation must involve the appeasement of God’s enmity, a concept that is implicit in this passage and explicit in parallel passages (Rom 3:19; 5:10). In summary, 2 Corinthians 5:21 states that Christ has borne the penalty due to transgression

¹³⁰Furnish notes that the reference to the sinlessness of Christ in verse 21 is possibly an allusion to the suffering servant of Isa 53. If this is the case then the concept of sacrifice and retribution are further enhanced in this passage. See Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, trans. Victor Paul Furnish, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 351.

¹³¹Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 444.

¹³²David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 294.

¹³³Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 307.

in order that sinners might have right standing with God.¹³⁴ The reconciliation effected is Godward, but is now extended to man on the basis of Christ's work.

Interestingly, Travis, in treating this passage, acknowledges the reality of God's wrath. However, he refuses to classify God's wrath as retributive wrath. Travis states, "God's wrath is not so much a *retributive* penalty for human sins . . . as the experience of alienation from God."¹³⁵ Travis's statement has at least two difficulties. First, in order for Travis's definition to apply, God's wrath in this passage would need to be characterized as simple estrangement without enmity. However, as seen above, the text clearly states that God is not only estranged. He counts men's sins against them. This brings to mind Romans 1:18-3:20 in which God's wrath is being stored up to be revealed in God's eschatological wrath on the Day of the Lord. This display of wrath, as previously argued, is certainly retributive.

Second, in order for Travis's definition to apply, only man must be the subject of alienation, not God. Indeed, this is the position that Green and Baker take. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, Green and Baker state, "Importantly, Paul does not speak here of any need for mutual reconciliation. 'The world' is estranged from God and needs to be brought back into relationship with God. God, however, is not estranged from 'the world'"¹³⁶ However, according to 2 Corinthians 5:19 reconciliation with God

¹³⁴Belousek uses this section of Scripture as an occasion to note that if the Father judges the Son in a penal sense this ontologically subordinates the Son to the Father. Therefore, it is inappropriate to speak of the Son suffering at the hand of the Father. However, if one bears in mind that Christ's subjection applies to his Person and not his nature this difficulty can be overcome. In other words, the Son remains ontologically equal with the Father while, at the same time, willingly suffering God's wrath in his person. A similar concept occurs in the incarnation (cf. Phil 2). Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 295-301; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 281-86.

¹³⁵Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 187-88.

depends upon the legal reality of God not counting men's sins against them.¹³⁷ This legal reality is accomplished by Christ being made sin, an obvious reference to the exchange that occurs between believers and Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Therefore, the assumption that God is not reconciled to man cannot be sustained biblically (Rom 1:18-3:20). Instead, reconciliation, according to 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, is accomplished by God when he removes the enmity caused by man's rebellion against the law. This work then opens the way for God to recreate the heart of sinful man (Jer 31:34).

Dunn takes a different approach to this passage. For instance, Dunn acknowledges the sacrificial nature of Christ's work in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. However, Dunn insists that the nature of that sacrifice, and sacrifice in general, is non-retributive.¹³⁸ According to Dunn, sin is identified with the sacrificial victim in such a way that it is destroyed in the death of the sacrificial victim. So then, destruction of sin rather than appeasement of wrath seems to be in view in Dunn's analysis of this passage. Moreover, Dunn, commenting on the phrase "not counting men's sins against them" (v. 19), gives the impression that God simply overlooks the wrongs done to him without receiving any compensation for sin.¹³⁹ However, Dunn's analysis of this passage is flawed. As seen above, the reason that God does not count men's sins against them is that Christ has made the great exchange by taking the penalty due to sinful men, thereby appeasing God's wrath. Therefore, Paul is working with the biblical category of retribution rather than

¹³⁶Green and Baker cite the new creation 2 Cor 5:17 to justify their contention that only men need to have their hearts changed and reconciled to God. However, they fail to mention verse 19 in which God is reconciled to man because God does not count men's transgressions against them. See Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 84.

¹³⁷Tankersley, "The Courtroom and the Created Order," 145.

¹³⁸Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 229.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*

Dunn's category of destruction. Moreover, that retribution is in view in this passage is confirmed by the propitiatory nature of Levitical sacrifice (Lev 17:11). As seen in chapter 3 and in the analysis of Romans, Christ's sacrifice must be seen in a retributive light. As a result, Dunn's interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 falls short.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

After examining a number of central Pauline texts it appears that Paul's primary concern within these passages is the satisfaction of God's retributive justice. For instance, it was demonstrated that the primary issue at stake in the Book of Romans was the wrath of God. God's wrath is presently being demonstrated against Gentiles (Rom 1:18-32) and will be fully demonstrated against Jews and Gentiles on the final Day of Judgment (Rom 2:12; 3:19-20). According to Paul's scenario, all will perish under natural or Mosaic law (Rom 3:23) unless God intervenes. Paul's solution to this dire problem is the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It is Christ's sacrifice that satisfies God's wrath through atonement according to Levitical law. Any other scenario is inadequate because any other scenario fails to address God's wrath, which is the primary issue that men face.

The same is true with Galatians 3:13. Christ becomes the redeemer in order to save us from the curse of the law. As seen in chapter 3, the covenant curses are clearly retributive in nature. Therefore when Christ is said to redeem by becoming a curse it is clear that his death is the price to ransom sinners from the wrath of God.

¹⁴⁰Wright has suggested that 2 Cor 5:21 refers to Paul's apostolic ministry only, a ministry that is a demonstration of God's covenant faithfulness. Therefore, this passage does not address the work of Christ in general. Schreiner has characterized this interpretation as strange and implausible. See N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (Westminster: SPCK, 2003), 66; idem, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God: 2 Corinthians 5:21," in *Pauline Theology*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series, vol. 2 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 200-08; Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 201 n. 22.

Finally, 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, under the terminology of reconciliation, communicates the same message. According to the context of this passage, it is God who is estranged from man and who must therefore be reconciled. It is Christ's act of sin-bearing that grants right standing before God.¹⁴¹ Indeed, in all the passages studied,

¹⁴¹Now that the analysis of God's retributive justice in Pauline theology is complete, a final word should be briefly addressed regarding some of the more practical objections to God's retributive justice. For instance, according to Green and Baker, the concept of God's retributive justice is culturally irrelevant because it is unintelligible and outdated. Therefore, Green and Baker believe that a new metaphor is needed. A similar criticism is leveled by Colin Gunton, who states that what the modern psyche needs is cleansing and transformation rather than satisfaction of God's justice. Parallel to these criticisms are those who argue that retributive justice has little to say about social sin and injustice. Specifically, the satisfaction of God's retributive justice has no implication for poverty, racial reconciliation, social decline, etc. Regarding the argument that retributive justice is irrelevant and that a new metaphor is needed, there are two responses. First, cultural barriers do not present an insurmountable obstacle to the doctrine of God's retributive justice. Indeed, retributive justice in the form a penal substitution has been embraced by countless diverse cultures. Second, Romans informs the reader that man's rejection of the gospel occurs because of his hard heart that constantly seeks idols, not because the gospel message is irrelevant. This means that what a culture perceives as a central need may simply be a self-constructed, self-serving idol that has nothing to do with man's real need. Indeed, Rom. states that the real necessity is reconciliation with God (Rom 3:19-20). As such, one must present the true nature of man's need in spite of what the culture demands. Indeed, this was the method that the apostle Paul followed. Although his message of the cross was a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness to Greeks, nevertheless, Paul continued to preach his message of atonement and resurrection to both Jew and Gentile alike (1 Cor 1:23-24). Therefore, the gospel is relevant because it proclaims the real need of man, which is reconciliation with God through atonement. Indeed, this provides the genuine peace with God that will result in the cleansing and peace of soul that Gunton speaks of. Moreover, this reconciliation, while not calling for social revolution, does provide a real answer for modern societal ills. According to the gospel of Christ, the kingdom of God has begun to invade this world in a significant way with the advent of Christ (Luke 11:20). Moreover, in his death, Christ effects the new covenant by atoning for sin and writing God's law upon the hearts of men (Jer 31:34; Mark 14:22-24). This conversion effects significant change in individual believers (Rom 6). Indeed, it is the removal of God's wrath through Christ's work on the cross that unleashes the Spirit within the lives of men and the kingdom of God (Rom 8). While this conversion does begin on an individual level, nevertheless it is meant to effect significant behavioral patterns that will truly affect society. Christians are meant to be salt and light to their communities, true agents of change (Matt 5:13-16). Therefore, it is not true to say that the satisfaction of God's retributive justice affects God's ledger book or the individual alone. Rather, atonement lays the basis for the genuine change of heart needed

Paul's central concern is the satisfaction of God's wrath, a wrath that cannot be ignored, a wrath that must be addressed by the sacrifice of God's only Son.

for true societal change to occur. This should be seen in contrast to the numerous political movements in the past century, which attempted to realize utopia but were doomed to fail because they could not effect the change of heart that only the gospel can bring. In summary, the book of Romans, through Christ's atoning sacrifice, presents the real need, solution, and change necessary for true transformation to occur within man and society. Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 48, 192–209; Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 188; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 223.

CHAPTER 6

THE RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS AND THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to explore God's retributive justice in the non-Pauline literature of the New Testament. While there are numerous books that could provide examples of God's retribution, nevertheless the book of Hebrews¹ and the Book of Revelation provide large, systemic content in which to contemplate the subject. The Book of Revelation is especially rich in regard to God's retributive justice because of its constant focus upon God's judgment. Moreover, the book of Hebrews provides a unique connection to the Levitical sacrificial system, which forges connections with chapter three of this dissertation. As a result, the following discussion will use the Day of Atonement and the establishment of the New Covenant to present God's retributive justice as it occurs in the book of Hebrews. Following this discussion, the writer will turn to the book of Revelation, where Christ's reception of the scroll (Rev 5), and the Great

¹I assume the non-Pauline authorship of Hebrews. For a general discussion of non-Pauline authorship, see Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47a (Dallas: Word, 1991); Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). For a specific defense of Lukan authorship, see David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010). For a defense of Pauline authorship, see Robert L. Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian* (Dublin: Mentor, 2003).

White Throne Judgment will be used to demonstrate the concept of God's retributive justice.

The Book of Hebrews

Hebrews is a word of exhortation to Hellenistic Jews who, because of rigorous trials are being tempted to abandon the Christian faith and return to the cultic practices of the Mosaic covenant.² In an effort to exhort the congregation to maintain their allegiance to Christ, the author presents a number of comparisons between Christ and the Mosaic covenant in order to underline the superiority of the New Covenant and the seriousness and futility of defecting from the Christian faith.³ Central to the analysis is the comparison of the Levitical sacrificial system to the priesthood of Christ. According to the author, it is Jesus who has now exceeded Aaron's priesthood and through his body has offered the final sacrifice for sin that the Levitical system could only typify (Heb 9-10). As such, Christ is the end of all to which the Mosaic or Sinai covenants point. It is within this comparison of priesthoods (Aaron/Christ) that the subject of God's retributive justice surfaces. Specifically, as Christ enters the most holy place with his own blood, the concept of sacrifice shines forth. Therefore, the following analysis will focus on

²O'Brien notes the many references to the Levitical system that would commend this letter to a Jewish audience. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 12–13. I assume a pre-AD 70 date for Hebrews. For a discussion of this matter and other introductory matters, see Hughes, *Hebrews*; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*; Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank D. Gaebelin (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981), 3-158; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews," in *Hebrews James*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Johannes G. Vos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956); William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Daily Study Bible Series, trans. William Barclay (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

³Hughes, *Hebrews*, 4–10.

Hebrews 9 in an effort to determine if the author understands Christ's sacrifice as retributive. Two themes in relation to sacrifice will be treated: Christ's sacrifice as it fulfills the Day of Atonement, and Christ's sacrifice that inaugurates the New Covenant.

Christ's Retributive Sacrifice and the Day of Atonement

The Book of Hebrews understands Christ as the final sacrifice made for the sin of God's people. Hebrews 2:17 states, "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." The principle of incarnation, articulated in this verse, also embodies the claim that Christ's work consists primarily in his making atonement for sin. Indeed, Christ is called a high priest in 2:17 as opposed to a mere priest because the author wishes the reader to understand his work in terms of the Day of Atonement.⁴ It is this theme that is resumed and expanded upon in chapters 9 and 10 and that links Christ's sacrifice to God's retributive justice. Therefore, a brief review of the Day of Atonement is necessary in order to unfold how the author understands Christ's work as a satisfaction of God's wrath.

As noted by the author of Hebrews, once each year the high priest would enter the most holy place with sacrificial blood to atone for the sin of Israel (Heb 9:6-7; Lev 16). However, before atonement could be made, it was necessary for the high priest to receive cleansing by offering a bull as a sin offering at the brazen altar in the courtyard of the tabernacle. The blood of the bull was then sprinkled on and before the mercy seat in the most holy place, thus effecting cleansing and forgiveness for the high priest.⁵ After atoning for his own sin, the high priest would then make atonement for the sins of the

⁴Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 87 n. 85.

⁵Hughes, *Hebrews*, 320.

people. In order to accomplish this task, the high priest would cast lots over two goats to determine which one would serve as a sacrifice to God and which one would bear the sins of Israel. As with the sacrifice for the priest, the blood of the sacrificial goat would be sprinkled on the mercy-seat in order to cleanse the sanctuary from the ceremonial contamination of Israel's uncleanness (Lev 15:31). Emile Nicole compares this process to a type of decontamination: "All sacred places and furniture were to be decontaminated by a man wearing special clothes, almost like an atomic power station. Thus, not only ritual impurity but also sin itself was to be driven out like pollution in this graphic rite of the so-called scapegoat."⁶ Uncleanness in any form is perilous and must be dealt with through sacrifice because it draws the wrath of God. This idea is clearly seen in Leviticus 15:31 when God warns Israel: "You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them." Therefore, the purification rite on the Day of Atonement serves not only to cleanse from sin but to protect Israel by removing God's wrath; a wrath that, according to Leviticus 15:31, would otherwise break forth on the camp.

However, in addition to removing the defilement of sin, the ceremony also appeases God for transgressions committed by the Israelites. According to Leviticus 16:16 the blood of the sacrificial goat is said to atone for the rebellion and sin of Israel. The term for rebellion עֲשֵׂה only occurs in the priestly code and refers to willful acts of sin. The term for sin חַטָּאת is more general in nature and refers to transgressions regardless of their degree. When the two terms are combined with the prepositions מִן (from) and לְ (to) the idea conveyed is that sin of every kind would have been atoned for, from accidental to rebellious. However, high-handed sin was a repudiation of the

⁶Emile Nicole, "Atonement in the Pentateuch," in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and James A. Frank III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 48–49.

covenant and so was not covered by the Day of Atonement.⁷ Indeed, this notion seems to correspond to the thought of the author of Hebrews when he says that the Day of Atonement covered sins committed in ignorance. In this case, one should not think of only inadvertent sin but sin that results from one's wayward nature (cf. Heb 5:2).

In summary, the Day of Atonement was the rite through which national uncleanness and sin were atoned for. Because both ceremonial uncleanness and sin drew the wrath of God it was necessary to remedy this breach between Israel and YHWH. It was the Day of Atonement that effected this reconciliation by offering retributive sacrifices (i.e., a scapegoat and sacrificial goat) to God.

After orienting his audience to the Day of Atonement, the author of Hebrews moves into an explanation of how Christ has fulfilled this most important Old Testament rite. In a central and climactic section of the letter, the author explains how Christ has become both high priest and sacrifice (9:11-14).⁸ Instead of entering the Old Covenant tabernacle with the blood of bulls and goats, Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood (9:12). Instead of effecting temporary forgiveness, Christ has made a full atonement for sin by becoming a ransom. Indeed, this sacrifice has no need of repetition because it has effected true reconciliation with God that results in a clean conscience from sins that lead to death (9:14). As a result, believers may now, as priests, enter the very presence of God with a clean heart, free from the presence of guilt and judgment (10:22)

⁷John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), 240. Capital cases would have been omitted from atonement and would therefore merit the death penalty (Num 15:30). For a list of these offenses, see Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 406.

⁸O'Brien suggests that this section of Hebrews in which Christ enters the heavenly sanctuary is the climax of the book. One could compare Christ's entrance to Rom 3:21-26. See O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 317.

In drawing this comparison, the author brings to light God's retributive justice in a number of ways. First, the comparison of Christ's sacrifice to the sacrificial offerings on the Day of Atonement draws a clear line between how redemption was accomplished in Levitical rite and how it is accomplished on the cross. Just as the sacrificial goat appeased the wrath of God that would have broken forth upon Israel, so the blood of Christ propitiates God for the sins of believers. As Lane states,

Just as the immolation of the calf and goat was an integral aspect of the Day of Atonement ritual, so are the passion and death of Christ regarded by the writer as an integral part of the heavenly liturgy. . . . The antithetic formulation of v 12a suggests a stark contrast between the involuntary, passive sacrifice of animals and the active obedience of Christ who willingly made himself the sacrifice for sins (9:26; 10:5-10).⁹

Therefore, while Christ's work on the cross is parallel to the Day of Atonement, it exceeds it by the quality of sacrifice and by actually accomplishing the eternal redemption that the first ritual could only typify. This thought brings to mind Romans 3:25 in which God is said to have demonstrated forbearance upon sinners until Christ satisfied the demands of justice with his sacrifice on the cross. As a result, just as the Day of Atonement demonstrated God's retributive justice by propitiating God's wrath through animal sacrifice, so also the sacrifice of Christ, which fulfills this rite, demonstrates the propitiation of God's wrath as Christ offers his life to God at the cross.

Second, this passage illustrates God's retributive justice by the very use of the term "atonement" in the "Day of Atonement." As noted previously in this dissertation, in the Old Testament the term כִּפֶּר (*kipper*) conveys the meaning of both cleansing and ransom. Concerning cleansing, sacrificial blood is regularly associated with purification rites (Exod 29:36-37; Lev 8:11-15, 23-30).¹⁰ However, because uncleanness is often the

⁹William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b (Dallas: Word, 1991), 238.

¹⁰Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 26.

result of sin, atonement rites cannot be reduced to simple ceremonial purification. Instead a moral component is often involved.¹¹ More importantly, because uncleanness, regardless of its type—moral or ceremonial—will draw the wrath of God (Lev 15:31), the concept of cleansing atonement involved shielding the congregation from God’s retribution.

Concerning the concept of ransom, the idea of a substitutionary payment to satisfy God’s wrath seems to be the best understanding of the Old Testament usage. As seen in Chapter 3, this meaning results when כִּפֶּר (*kipper*) and כָּפַר (*kōper*) occur in the same context. Although this usage occurs in non-cultic contexts, nevertheless the concept of ransom can be extended to animal sacrifice, by noting the connection between Exodus 30:15-16 and Leviticus 17:11. The exact Hebrew phrase “to make atonement for yourselves” occurs in both passages suggesting a close conceptual link between the verses.¹² As Peterson notes, “The means of atonement for a human life in Exodus 30:15-16 is a monetary payment, whereas the means of atonement in Leviticus 17:11 is the ‘blood’ or ‘life’ of a slaughtered animal.”¹³ In Hebrews 9:12, (cf. v. 15), the author picks up the theme of ransom when he states, “He [Christ] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.”¹⁴ The term “blood” is significant in this passage because it points to Christ’s death on the cross, which is the sacrificial price of

¹¹Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 23.

¹²Ibid.

¹³David Peterson, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 11.

¹⁴The concept of ransom is clearly in view in v. 12. However, given the overall context of the passage, the concept of cleansing is also in view (cf. “cleansing of our consciences” in verse 14). Both concepts involve the appeasement of God’s wrath. See O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 322.

redemption.¹⁵ As Morris states, “But the sacrificial conception is blended with that of redemption, and ‘his own blood’ must be regarded as indicating the price of redemption, as well as pointing to the sacrificial process (cf. 1 Pet 1:18, 19 for this blending of the sacrificial with the redemptive concept).”¹⁶ Indeed, the concept of Christ as the one who redeems his people with the price of his life is prominent in the New Testament. For instance, Paul asserts that believers have been bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 3:13; 4:5), while the Gospels state that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). Therefore, because ransom is a central theme in this section of Scripture (cf. v. 15), so is God’s retributive justice.

Third, the sacrifice of Christ is said to remove the consequences of sin, which involve guilt and death, both of which are retributive. In Hebrews 9:13-14 the author writes,

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God?

Technically speaking, the author is moving away from his discussion of the Day of Atonement and broadening his theme to the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system in general.¹⁷ This idea can be seen in verse 13, where the author mentions the ashes of a heifer in combination with the blood of bulls and goats. As Lane notes, “By grouping ‘the blood of goats and bulls’ and ‘the sprinkled ashes of a heifer,’ the writer implies that all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant were able to provide merely an external and

¹⁵O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 321.

¹⁶Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 39–40.

¹⁷Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 239.

symbolic removal of defilement.”¹⁸ The author specifically mentions the ashes of the heifer because they are a perfect example of the external nature of the Old Covenant. While God honored these temporary measures, they simply addressed outward defilement. However, the sacrifice of Christ is said to cleanse the conscience from acts that lead to death (Heb 9:14).

The term “conscience” (συνείδησις) is important in this passage because it points to an awareness of God’s impending judgment. In the book of Romans, “conscience” refers to one’s inward faculty that distinguishes right from wrong (Rom 2:15; 9:1). However, in the book of Hebrews the term seems to have a more narrow focus, namely, to express an awareness of guilt before God. As O’Brien argues, “It (conscience) is the point which a man or a woman confronts God’s holiness. Apart from Hebrews 13:18 the term has negative overtones, such as a guilty or uneasy conscience, which can be cleansed or purified only by Christ’s sacrifice of atonement.”¹⁹ Indeed, if one repudiates the atonement then all that remains is a “fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Heb 9:27). Although the term “conscience” is not mentioned in this last verse, nevertheless it is clear that apart from Christ’s sacrifice there is nothing to still the soul from the awareness that God will destroy sinners. Indeed, whereas bulls, goats, and the ashes of the heifer only reach to the external man, Christ’s sacrifice cleanses the conscience because it effects eternal reconciliation with God (Heb 9:12).²⁰ As Hughes writes, “The ceremonial involved did

¹⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 239. While the sacrifice of the heifer is described as a sin offering, its primary purpose was to effect ritual cleansing. The ashes of the heifer were combined with the water of cleansing to purify ceremonially a defiled Israelite (Num 19). Failure to cleanse oneself from defilement (e.g., from touching a dead body) would result in banishment from the community of Israel (Num 19:13, 20). See O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 323.

¹⁹O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 325.

not penetrate to the heart of man's need, which is the cleansing of his conscience whereby he knows himself to be condemned as guilty before God."²¹ Therefore, the term "conscience" in this verse clearly refers to an awareness of God's retributive justice that every person deserves and will experience apart from faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice.

The concept of death spoken of in Hebrews 9:14 also points to God's retributive justice. The phrase "dead works" can be interpreted in two ways.²² First, it can be understood as works that spring from a life of spiritual death. Second, "dead works" can be understood as one's practices and attitudes that lead to the judgment of death.²³ In the context of this verse, it appears that the last interpretation is the best understanding of the phrase because the author is speaking of works that lead to guilt before God and the sentence of eternal death.²⁴ Therefore, one's works serve only to indict one before God. As such, there is the need of Christ's sacrifice to cleanse one from the guilt he bears before God so that a new life can take place (Jer 31:34). Again, within the context of this passage, the great exchange between Christ's death and the sinner's judgment seems to be taking place. In verse 14, this exchange occurs in the context of a renewed heart in which the conscience of man is cleansed from an awareness of judgment to an awareness of eternal forgiveness that has taken place by what Christ has accomplished at the cross as he bears God's judgment for the guilty.

²⁰Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 241. Perhaps there is a reference in 9:14 to the New Covenant (Jer 31:34) as God not only forgives sins but writes his law upon the believer's heart. This inner awareness of cleansing is a work of God's Spirit that is a result of the New Covenant.

²¹Hughes, *Hebrews*, 356.

²²*Ibid.*, 360–61.

²³O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 325.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 322.

In summary, the ninth chapter of Hebrews refers to God's retributive justice by referencing the Day of Atonement, atonement terminology, and the concepts of conscience, death, and judgment. However, Green and Baker, in reference to Hebrews 9, refuse to see any reference to God's retributive wrath. According to their analysis, the author's discussion of the Day of Atonement points to the necessity of Christ's work to cleanse the sinner from the defilement of sin rather than to bear God's retributive justice at the cross.²⁵ Indeed, Green and Baker argue that the author of Hebrews purposefully chooses to discuss the sacrificial goat instead of the scapegoat because the cleansing of sin was uppermost in his mind.²⁶ However, they are wrong on several fronts. First, as seen above, uncleanness of any kind (moral/ceremonial) will bring the wrath of God upon the camp of Israel (Lev 15:31).²⁷ Therefore, when Green and Baker reduce Christ's sacrifice to an act of cleansing they accomplish nothing. Christ would still need to face the wrath of God for the uncleanness brought about by sin. Second, Green and Baker are incorrect to limit the sacrificial goat (used at the Day of Atonement) to an act of ceremonial cleansing from pollution. Leviticus 16:16 speaks of the sacrificial goat making atonement for both rebellion and uncleanness. As seen in Exodus 32-34,

²⁵Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 106–07.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 106.

²⁷Nicole, "Atonement in the Pentateuch," 48–49. In Lev 16:2 Aaron is warned, on pain of death, not to enter the most holy place unless he strictly follows the rites described in 16:3-34. These rites include purification ceremonies, bathing, cleansing of garments, etc. In addition, the sacrifice of the goat for the congregation in Lev 16:16 is said to be for uncleanness brought about by sin. According to our text, if Aaron enters the most holy place in an unclean state, he will die (Lev 16:2). Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that uncleanness does expose one to the wrath of God. There seems to be a similar warning in Lev 15:31 where the Israelites are warned to keep themselves ceremonially clean so that they will not defile God's dwelling place that is among them and die as a result of God's wrath.

rebellion draws the wrath of God. Moreover, atonement terminology used in Leviticus 16:16 has reference to ransoming the people of Israel from the wrath of God. Therefore, the scapegoat sacrifice as well as Christ's sacrifice cannot be reduced to a simple act of cleansing. Third, as seen above, the concepts of conscience, and death point to the fact that Christ has rescued sinners from God's retributive wrath. Indeed, Christ's sacrifice results in the reversal of all of these consequences that are retributive in nature. In conclusion, it is simply not possible to avoid retributive concepts in Hebrews 9:11-14.

Christ's Retributive Sacrifice and the Establishment of the New Covenant

In Hebrews 9:16-22 the author begins a parenthetical discussion on the necessity of blood sacrifice to effect the Old Covenant and thus grant Israel forgiveness and access to God. Ultimately, this theme will be linked to Christ as the cleansing sacrifice that inaugurates the New Covenant (Jer 31:34) through his shed blood upon the cross.²⁸ In verses 16-17 the general point is made that a death must occur for the ratification of a covenant.²⁹ The author then applies this point of theology specifically to the Mosaic covenant by describing what took place at its enactment. The author writes,

When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet and wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said "This is the blood of the

²⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 242.

²⁹There is debate over whether the term διαθήκη should be translate as "covenant" or "will." Regardless of one's decision on this matter, the point of the text remains the same: death is required to enforce either instrument (covenant or will). A strong case can be made for either translation. However, the translation of "covenant," although not without problems, presents a better fit contextually. For a discussion of this matter, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 397 n. 54; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 242-43; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 328-32; George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 973.

covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.” In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies.

According to the text, after Moses read the stipulations of the law, he then took the blood of calves sacrificed as fellowship offerings (Exod 24:5) and sprinkled them on both the people and the scroll of the law.³⁰ He then made the official proclamation that the covenant had been established: “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exod 24:8). It is the blood of the covenant and what it accomplishes that the author wishes to emphasize. Specifically, the Exodus text informs the reader that after sacrifice was made, the elders of Israel, along with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu were able to draw near and see God while they had a fellowship meal in his presence (Exod 24: 9-11).³¹ Previously, only Moses was able to approach God and live (Exod 24:2). Now that the sacrificial blood has been offered, access to God is granted. The implication is that the sacrificial blood has not only cleansed Israel, the elders, and the tabernacle from the defilement of sin—ceremonial and moral that would have otherwise drawn the wrath of God—but that reconciliation with God has also taken place. The author of Hebrews seems to have this concept of forgiveness through blood sacrifice in mind when he acknowledges that nearly everything connected with the Mosaic covenant had to be cleansed with blood and that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb 9:22). Here, the author

³⁰This description is a brief account of what occurred in Exod 24. Moreover, water, scarlet wool, and branches of a hyssop are not mentioned in the Exodus text but may be a reference to what was done in ceremonial sprinklings in general (Exod 12:2; Lev. 14:4-7, 51-52; Num 19:6, 18). See Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 973; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 333.

³¹Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 973. One should compare the meeting at Sinai in Exodus 19 to the meeting described in Exod 24. There is a shift from the fear of death to a time of fellowship between God and the elders of Israel. This shift is clearly effected by the blood of the covenant that placates God’s holy wrath against sin. See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 435.

connects the cleansing blood of sacrifice with the forgiveness of sins (cf. 10:2) and fellowship with God.³² In other words, the demand for blood to secure forgiveness of sins is what the covenant demands. As Kistemaker argues, “Transgression of the laws of the covenant that were agreed upon and ratified by the Israelites constitutes a serious offense. This sin can be removed only by death, that is, the substitutionary death of an animal whose blood is shed for the sinner.”³³ As a result, the author does not reduce sin to simple defilement on man’s side but rather connects it to that which must be forgiven, implying that reconciliation to God must be effected.³⁴ In the context of Leviticus 16 and Exodus 19-24, this would certainly involve the appeasement of God’s anger in regard to sin. This point is important in light of Green and Baker’s assertion that sacrifice does not relate to retributive anger but instead only addresses the pollution of sin.³⁵ However, is it clearly the ceremonial blood of the Old Covenant that prevents the outbreak of wrath against Aaron, the elders, and the camp of Israel (Exod 24:9-11; Lev 16:2; 15:31).³⁶

³²Schreiner notes that the author of Hebrews prefers to use the language of cleansing and purification to refer to the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, the author clearly connects defilement with the need for forgiveness. This would imply that a breach that requires reconciliation exists between God and man. See Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 397; Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch,” 49.

³³Indeed the covenant curses of Deut 28 were the consequences of breaking the Mosaic covenant. See Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 260.

³⁴O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 335.

³⁵Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 76. One has to wonder what Green and Baker are referring to when they state that sin repulses rather than angers God. If indeed sin is revolting to God’s holiness, one can certainly imagine a point of repulsion where God would destroy the contaminated individual. Therefore, repulsion and pollution seem to argue in favor of God’s retributive wrath, not against it (Zech 3).

³⁶In Leviticus, ceremonial uncleanness may or may not result from sin. However, it is viewed like a contagious disease that can be transmitted to people, society,

Indeed, to make this point one has only to imagine what would have occurred if Aaron and Moses had ignored God's instructions in Leviticus 16 and attempted to approach God empty-handed. Therefore, Green and Baker are wrong to suggest that sacrificial blood does not address God's wrath.

Having demonstrated the importance of sacrificial blood in establishing the Mosaic covenant and cleansing the temple, the author now begins to show how Christ's sacrifice on the cross has cleansed the heavenly temple and ultimately fulfilled the New Covenant (Heb 9:23-28). Guthrie suggests that the cleansing spoken of in verse 23 is the ceremony connected with the Day of Atonement and referred to in Leviticus 16:16 where the high priest enters the most holy place in order to atone for rebellion and uncleanness.³⁷ It is Christ, the high priest, who effects this cleansing, once for all, with his own blood, which was shed on the cross (Heb 9:24-26). Indeed, the contamination of sin seems to reach to the heavenly realm, where it should be interpreted as a breach of access to God. Lane notes this reality when he argues, "The writer conceived of defilement as an objective impediment to genuine access to God. It made necessary a

and even inanimate objects. An unclean person must avoid that which is holy and remedy the state of uncleanness at the first opportunity. Neglect of purification by an average citizen would place the unclean person in danger of death (Lev 15:31) or excommunication (Num 19:12-13). Neglect of purification rites by the high priest would result in death (Lev 16:2). Therefore, to attempt to reduce sin to pollution or defilement in an effort to avoid retributive justice is a futile exercise. Belousek's protest that the book of Hebrews does not mention the appeasement of God's wrath is irrelevant. The reader would have implicitly understood from the context of Leviticus, namely that the unclean/polluted person was under the threat of condemnation. Indeed, to attempt to enter God's presence in a ceremonially unclean state made one liable to God's wrath (Zech 3). See Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 247; Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), s.v. "Clean, Unclean," by Joe M. Sprinkle; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 106; Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 188-91.

³⁷Guthrie, "Hebrews," 975; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 336.

decisive purgation that was comprehensive in scope, reaching even to the heavenly things themselves.”³⁸

That Christ’s sacrifice is retributive is clarified in verses 27-28, where the author writes, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” In verse 26, the author states the principle that, after death, man must face God’s final judgment. This statement refers to both the death sentence that was pronounced upon Adam (and every man since that time, Gen 3:19; Rom 5:12) and the final sentence that will follow for all who have broken God’s commandments (Luke 16:19-31).³⁹ What is noteworthy is that Christ is presented as the sacrifice that prevents this final judgment. Indeed, the use of the passive voice—“was sacrificed”—suggests that God is the agent who appointed Christ’s sacrifice.⁴⁰ Moreover, because Christ is presented as the sacrifice of atonement (Day of Atonement) the author indicates that Christ bore God’s retributive wrath in order to remove the impending judgment of God due to sin and rebellion (Lev 16:16).⁴¹ This fact is further enhanced by what appears to be a reference to Isaiah 53 in verse 28.⁴² The author states that “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of the many.” In regard to this phrase Bruce writes, “The language here is a plain echo of the fourth Servant Song—more especially of Isa. 53:12, ‘he bore the sin of many,’ but also of vv. 10, ‘he makes himself an offering for sin,’ and 11, ‘by his knowledge shall the

³⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 247.

³⁹Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 265.

⁴⁰O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 341.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Hughes, *Hebrews*, 388; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 232; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 341.

righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”⁴³ As noted in chapter 4 of this dissertation, Isaiah 53 clearly indicates that the Servant bears the retributive wrath of God in place of God’s people. The author of Hebrews is referencing Isaiah 53:10-12 in order to indicate that Christ fulfills this Scripture by bearing the judgment of God so that believers in Christ will not have to face God’s wrath. It is this retributive sacrifice that establishes the New Covenant and effects forgiveness of sins. That Christ’s sacrifice should lead the reader to understand that Christ is the initiator of the New Covenant is suggested by the previous references to the covenant (9:18) and the direct statement in Hebrews 10:16-17. Indeed, after reiterating the permanent nature of Christ’s sacrifice in Hebrews 10:11-12 (cf. 9:25-26), the author quotes Jeremiah 31:34. Therefore, the overall conclusion is that the retributive sacrifice of Christ establishes the New Covenant by atoning for the uncleanness of sin, uncleanness that would otherwise draw the wrath of God.

In conclusion, Christ has enacted the New Covenant by offering himself as a sacrifice on the cross. This sacrifice is characterized as that which both cleanses the heavenly temple and appeases the wrath of God (Isa 53:5, 10-12). Moreover, it is clear from the context of Leviticus and Hebrews 9 that the concept of sin, while related to purification, cannot be reduced to a simple act of non-retributive cleansing as Green and Baker suggest.⁴⁴ Rather, God’s retributive justice is satisfied in Christ’s sacrifice, for he is the offering that cleanses the heavenly temple and the sacrifice that is crushed by the wrath of God (Heb 10:28; Isa 53:5, 10-12).

⁴³Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 232.

⁴⁴Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 106.

The Apocalypse of John

The Apocalypse of John is one of the most difficult books in the Bible. The pervasive and bizarre symbolism presents the reader with a host of challenges. Indeed, there are numerous interpretive positions on these issues. For instance, should one understand the book of Revelation as applying to the time of John alone (preterist), to the future (futurist), to the history of mankind (historicist), or finally to doctrinal realities alone (idealist)?⁴⁵ Moreover, should one understand the millennial data in a pre, post, or amillennial fashion?⁴⁶ Thankfully, the current discussion will not need to solve these complex issues. Instead, while acknowledging the various interpretive difficulties, the present discussion will attempt to point out God's retributive justice as it occurs in the Revelation regardless of one's interpretive stance.⁴⁷ This act will be accomplished by examining Christ's role as Savior and judge in Revelation 5 and God's retributive justice at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11-14).

⁴⁵Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20 of *The Revelation of St. John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 17–25.

⁴⁶Craig A. Blaising et al., *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

⁴⁷For a thorough discussion of the issues in Revelation, see G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, "Revelation," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 919–96; Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011); Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

Revelation 5

Revelation 5-11 focuses on God's retributive justice as it is exhibited, first, in the sacrifice of Christ for his elect (Rev 5: 6-11), and then against the world, which is in rebellion against God and his Messiah.⁴⁸ Furthermore, chapter 5 provides the introductory material that both explains the significance of Christ's work on the cross and alerts the reader to Christ's role in the judgments that will follow in chapters 6-11. Therefore, a brief exposition of Revelation 5 is necessary in order to comprehend God's overall plan of judgment accomplished in his Son.

Revelation 5 is a continuation of the heavenly scene of worship that begins in chapter 4 and reaches a climax at the end of chapter 5 where the Son is celebrated as both the redeemer and judge of the earth. Beale notes that chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation exhibit a striking resemblance to Daniel 7:9-28 and Ezekiel 1-2.⁴⁹ Indeed, in both Daniel 7 and Revelation 4-5, the reader is presented with a vision of God's heavenly throne, his attendants, a book, and a heavenly figure who approaches God.⁵⁰ The significance of this similarity lies in the fact that Daniel 7:9-28 and Ezekiel 1-2 precede announcements of retributive judgment upon sinful Israel or the nations in general. Therefore, the Old Testament connection with Revelation 5 would suggest that the reader will encounter a theme of judgment as this passage progresses.⁵¹ Moreover, Revelation 5 stands out in the additional detail that the reader is given concerning the one who approaches the throne of

⁴⁸Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 340, 353.

⁴⁹Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1098.

⁵⁰Beale argues that Dan 7 provides the primary background to Rev 4-5. This link is clearly seen when Dan 7 ties God's court of judgment to the opening of the books; a scene which is very similar to Revelation 5. For a complete list of similarities between Dan 7:9-28, Ezek 1-2, and Rev 4-5, see Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1098-99.

⁵¹Chapter 5, like Dan 7 and Ezek 1-2, introduces the judgments of chaps. 6-11. See Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1099.

the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:22). First, he is described in dual fashion as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9-10) and the Root of David (Isa 11:1). Both titles are Messianic references that have military overtones. For instance, the title “Lion of the tribe of Judah” occurs in the context of the conquest of Israel’s enemies (e.g., as a lion returns with its prey in Gen 49:8), while the title “Root of Jesse” refers to one who is both a banner of war (Isa 11:10) and sovereign ruler who will strike the earth with the Rod of his mouth (Isa 11:4b).⁵² This last image recalls the words of Psalm 2 and its messianic imagery in which God’s installed ruler is said to crush the nations who rebel against him with a rod of iron. Finally, the detail given in Revelation 5:7 concerning the reception of the book from the one who sits upon the throne is significant because it involves the installation of the Messiah as the one who will exercise retributive justice against the enemies of God, as described in Revelation 6-11.⁵³ As Osborne states, “There is a transfer of authority from God to the Lamb, who now takes over.”⁵⁴ Indeed, all authority now belongs to Christ, who will open the seals of the book and begin to execute justice upon the earth. As a result the opening scene of Revelation 5 is filled with images of impending retributive judgment that will be carried out by the Messiah.

Although space does not permit a detailed examination of the judgments described in chapters 6-11, nevertheless, one example will suffice to underscore the retributive nature of the justice that the Lamb will visit upon the earth. A poignant example is contained in the prayer recounted in Revelation 6:10 (fifth seal) in which the saints cry, “How long Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Contained in this supplication is a specific request that

⁵²Osborne, *Revelation*, 253–354.

⁵³For a discussion of the various view of the nature of the book taken by the Lamb, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 339–44.

⁵⁴Osborne, *Revelation*, 257.

God take vengeance upon those who have oppressed the saints. Moreover, the descriptive phrase “holy and true” in the prayer contains an implicit plea that God uphold both his truth (for his own glory) and the just cause of his saints.⁵⁵ That God approves of this sentiment in the martyred saints is demonstrated, first, by his gift of white robes given to each suppliant. The white robes quite likely symbolize a declaration of right standing before God and an annulment of the guilty verdict pronounced by the world.⁵⁶ Second, God’s approval of the saints’ request is demonstrated by the positive answer that is given in verses 6:12-17. As Beale states, “God will finally vindicate the reputation of his name and display his justice by punishing the opponents of his people.”⁵⁷ The severity of that punishment that is carried out by Christ can be seen in verse 16 where one reads, “They [unbelievers] called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” In this text, God’s clearly demonstrates his fearful retributive justice in order to vindicate his holy name and validate the cause of his persecuted saints. Indeed, the reception of the book in 5:7 is for the very purpose of carrying out God’s retributive sentence that repeatedly occurs in the Book of Revelation.

However, returning to Revelation 5:6, a dramatic change of imagery which takes place as the heavenly figure approaches the throne of God, a change of imagery that reveals yet another aspect of God’s retributive justice in Revelation 5. The one who takes the book from God is described by John as none other than the Lamb who has been slain. The term that John uses, ἐσφαγμένον (“slain”), refers to sacrificial animals that are

⁵⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 392.

⁵⁶Ibid., 394.

⁵⁷Ibid., 395.

slaughtered. The term also appears in Revelation 5:9 where it is used of Christ's redeeming work as he purchases his elect with his sacrificial blood.⁵⁸ This terminology suggests that John wishes his readers to associate the Lamb with the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Indeed, numerous evangelical commentators see John making a reference to either the Lamb of the Old Testament Passover or, perhaps, the Lamb of Isaiah 53:7 (cf. Isa 53:8-12) who bears the sins of Israel.⁵⁹ While it is impossible to be sure, it is quite likely that the Apostle John has both images in mind since both have the common sacrificial picture of a lamb associated with them.⁶⁰ Indeed, if one were to choose between these two options, one could reasonably opt for the concept of Passover, since this was prominent in Jesus' explanation of the cross to the disciples (Luke 22:7-23). In any event, as has been demonstrated previously in this dissertation, regardless of one's choice, both the Passover sacrifice and the sacrifice of Isaiah 53 are demonstrations of God's retributive justice. In the case of the Passover it is the blood of the lamb upon the doorposts that averts the wrath of God, while in the case of Isaiah 53, it is the Servant, described as a lamb, who propitiates God (Isa 53:7-12) by his sacrifice. As a result, the concept of retributive justice is seen in the satisfaction of God's wrath as the Lamb appears as the propitiatory sacrifice for his people. Indeed, in the context of Revelation 5-11, it is the blood of the Lamb that saves the elect from the impending wrath of God.

The concept of God's retributive sacrifice is further enforced by the song that the four creatures and the twenty-four elders sing to the Lamb in Revelation 5:9: "You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain, and with your

⁵⁸Osborne, *Revelation*, 256.

⁵⁹Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1101; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 132; Osborne, *Revelation*, 255–56; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 206.

⁶⁰Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1101; Osborne, *Revelation*, 256.

blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” According to this verse, the Lamb is said to be worthy to take the scroll and instigate the judgment of God because of the work of salvation that he has accomplished.⁶¹ Moreover, this work is described as an act of redemption in which the price for God’s people is the blood (life) of the Lamb. Indeed, John combines sacrificial terminology (ἑσφάγης, “slaughtered/slain”) with commercial terminology (redemption) in order to convey the idea of freedom through sacrifice.⁶² Although the compensated party is not mentioned in the text, it is contextually consistent with the concept of the Passover, the sacrifice of Isaiah 53:7-12, and the coming wrath in Revelation 6 to see God as the one to whom payment has been made.⁶³ Therefore, the sacrifice of Christ referred to under the image of the Lamb is associated with the satisfaction of God’s retributive justice in the Old Testament.

Finally, it is important to notice that John has actually combined the concepts of sacrifice and conquering warrior under the term “lamb.” For instance, John appears to have chosen the term ἄρρωϊόν (lamb) instead of the more common term ἄμωός in order to

⁶¹Osborne, *Revelation*, 269.

⁶²Again, the lamb terminology is most likely a reference to the Passover or the sacrifice of the Servant in Isa 53. Aune traces this verse back to the Passover when he notes that the term σφάζειν (slain) refers to the slaughtering of an animal while the related term θύειν is used of the death of Christ as the Passover lamb in 1 Cor 5:7 and of the slaughtering of the Passover lambs in Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7. Osborne traces the passage back to Isa 53:7 in which the Servant’s sacrifice is described as being “like a lamb to the slaughter.” Again, it is quite likely that John has both references in mind. See David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a (Dallas: Word, 1997), 361; Osborne, *Revelation*, 260.

⁶³There is no thought of a ransom paid to Satan in this passage. Indeed, the sacrificial imagery contained in the Passover and Isa 53, and the context of God’s wrath displayed in the seven seals (Rev 6:1ff.) suggests that the ransom is paid to appease God’s wrath. See Charles E. Hill, “Atonement in the Apocalypse of John,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and James A. Frank III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 201.

add the concept of authority and triumph to the concept of meekness and humility communicated by the sacrificial images in the passage.⁶⁴ This warrior imagery is further enforced both by the titles “lion of the tribe of Judah” and the “root of Jesse,” both of which communicate military conquest. However, the theme of conquest is clearly indicated in the vision that depicts the lamb as possessing seven horns (Rev 5:6). Indeed, the symbol of horns in the ancient world depicts the concepts of power, strength, and conquest.⁶⁵ As Osborne states, “The ‘horns’ are found in 1 Enoch 90:9 and the Testament of Joseph and depict the Warrior Messiah who will destroy his enemies.”⁶⁶ As a result, John, by combing the themes of sacrifice and conquest, presents a comprehensive view of God’s retributive justice that has been satisfied in the sacrifice of Christ and will be satisfied as he conquers his enemies.

This picture of Christ as the conquering lamb who both bears and executes the wrath of God is clearly a contrast to Travis’ presentation of God’s wrath. Indeed, Travis characterizes God’s wrath in the book of Revelation as simply the outworking of destructive human pride: “The outworking of divine judgment in the history of ‘Babylon’ is described in ways which echo the thought of Wisdom 11 and Romans 1, suggesting that God’s judgment is enacted through his allowing the evil empire to implode under the self-destructive force of its own *hubris*.”⁶⁷ However, Revelation 5 sets the stage for

⁶⁴John appears to have chosen the term ἀμώιον (“lamb”) instead of the more common term ἀμώος in order to add the concept of authority and triumph to the concept of meekness communicated by the sacrificial images in the passage. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 256.

⁶⁵Osborne, *Revelation*, 257.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 257.

⁶⁷Belousek acknowledges the existence of retributive language in Revelation and in Pauline literature. However, he attempts to minimize this by referring to other metaphorical passages that characterizes judgment in non-retributive terms. Belousek claims that the Scriptures are agnostic on the subject of retribution because such events

God's judgment upon the world in such a way that we see the incarnate Son receiving authority from the Father in order to actively carry out judgment upon the earth. Indeed, the very titles, "Lion" and "Root of David" conjure up military images similar to Psalm 2 in which the Messiah actively crushes his enemies. As seen above, this crushing takes place as Christ, with his Father, visits his wrath upon the enemies of his people (Rev 6:12-17). Therefore, in light of Revelation 5, Travis' understanding of God's justice as non-retributive becomes increasingly difficult to support.

The Great White Throne of Judgment

A second, clear example of God's retributive justice in the book of Revelation is the Great White Throne judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15. This judgment will occur at the end of human history and will encompass the entire human race. John describes this judgment when he writes,

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:11-15)

A number of items alert the reader to the presence of God's retribution. For instance, the vision of the great white throne points the reader back to the throne in Revelation 5:7 to

are not open to human scrutiny. However, this position directly contradicts John's claim in Revelation 1:1 that John's vision was given in order "to show his servants what must soon take place." While one may grant that the language of Revelation is highly symbolic, nevertheless, to claim that one has no insight into how God might exercise final judgment is to ignore the entire book. Indeed, although the day and time is not given, it is Christ who will unleash the seven seals that are replete with references to God's vengeance against unrepentant sinners (cf. Rev 6:10-17ff.). See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 429–33; Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 298.

which Christ was inaugurated to execute the judgments of God upon the earth. As noted previously, Revelation 5:7 has significant parallels with Daniel 7:9 in which the theme is one of retributive judgment. The repetition of the throne vision in Revelation 20:11 is meant to connect the passages and alert the reader that the retributive judgments begun earlier in the book are now reaching their climax in one final judicial act.⁶⁸ Second, the fact that the dead are judged according to their works alerts one to the retributive nature of what is occurring. Indeed, this passage is similar to Romans 2:5, in which God grants to each according to what he has accomplished. However, as noted in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, a doctrine of salvation by merit is not implied in Romans 2 or by John in this passage. Rather, the implication is that there must be evidence of one's true transformation by the Spirit of God (1 John 1:5-7). As Mounce argues, "The issue is not salvation by works but works as the irrefutable evidence of a person's actual relationship with God."⁶⁹ Therefore, the fact that God rewards one according to deeds is a clear indication of God's retributive justice. Finally, the nature of the reward that God grants to the wicked speaks clearly of his retributive justice. Revelation 20:15 states, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." The nature of this punishment is eternal and irreversible. Indeed, this judgment serves to validate the holiness and truth of God that the wicked constantly questioned during their time on earth. In addition, it underscores the limitless nature and value of Christ's death because it underlines with clarity what he has redeemed his people from.

⁶⁸Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1031.

⁶⁹The passage in Rev 5:9 would contradict any notion of salvation by merit. In addition, 1 John 1:5-7 provides a proper context to understand this verse. Moreover, it is clear from Scripture that only unbelievers truly merit their reward of eternal death while believers receive rewards out of God's grace. Moreover, the book of life implies that God's grace is what spares one from the God's judgment (cf. Rev 13:8 where the book is called "the book of life of the lamb who was slain"). See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 376.

In spite of the clarity of Revelation 20:11-15, Travis attempt to remove the notion of God’s retributive justice from this passage. For instance, concerning the book of deeds in Revelation 20:12, Travis quotes Smalley when he states, “[The book of deeds] does not imply a legalistic idea of retributive justice, but rather a determination of spiritual loyalty: either to God or to the Satan.”⁷⁰ Again, Travis is repeating the argument he used in Romans 2 to claim that deeds are simply markers of one’s faith or lack of faith in Jesus. As such, deeds are not rewarded or punished. Instead, deeds serve only as a marker to demonstrate where a person belongs.⁷¹ Only if there are degrees of punishment could one say that God has truly rewarded one according to his works.⁷² However, what Travis fails to recognize is that there is one penalty for all sin. That penalty is death—the *lex talionis*. While death may not be the penalty for most transgressions in Israel’s civil code, nevertheless death is the penalty for transgression when one considers approach to God. The Scriptures are clear that the wages of sin before God is death (Rom 6:23; cf. Gen 2:17). Therefore, to claim that justice is not retributive because punishment is not proportional to the crime is to confuse human civil code with God’s holiness. Moreover, to suggest that deeds are simply markers for God to place one where he belongs is to under-interpret Revelation 20:11-15. God is said to throw unbelievers into the lake of fire. This act is an active, irreversible condition that God takes full responsibility for performing. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the obvious meaning of the text. As a

⁷⁰Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 286; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 517.

⁷¹Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 92–95.

⁷²In relation to sacrifice, Belousek reiterates the argument that punishment cannot be retributive unless it somehow varies in proportion to the sin committed. See Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 185; Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 93.

result, Travis' attempt to remove God's retributive justice from God's final judgment fails.

Conclusion

In summary, both the Book of Hebrews and the Book of Revelation affirm the concept of God's retributive justice. In the Book of Hebrews, the Day of Atonement points to the necessity of Christ's work to cleanse the sinner's conscience from the defilement of transgression and the awareness of God's impending judgment. In like fashion, the establishment of the New Covenant requires the sacrificial death of Christ so that, as in the Old Covenant, access to God can be possible without annihilation. Indeed, the free access to God that was only typified under the Mosaic Covenant has now become reality in the New Covenant. In the Book of Revelation, there are similar affirmations concerning the doctrine of God's retributive justice. The titles used of Christ in Revelation 5 are combined under the term "lamb," which serves to emphasize the retributive nature of Christ's sacrifice, calling to mind the Passover and Isaiah 53 and the retributive nature of his coming judgment. Indeed, it is Christ who executes vengeance against the world by unsealing the book he receives from the one sitting upon the throne. Finally, these judgments that begin in Revelation 6 reach their climax at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) in which God, in one last retributive act, destroys his enemies by casting them into the lake of fire. Therefore, both the book of Hebrews and the book of Revelation are rich testimonies of God's retributive justice, justice that affirms God's saints and upholds God's holiness.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The Old Testament

Concerning God's retributive justice in the Old Testament, four scenarios were examined: the fall, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and God's justice within the Mosaic Covenant. In all four instances, God's retributive justice is clearly evident within the biblical material.

In the case of the fall, it was determined that God's retributive justice was evident in both the entrance of death into mankind's existence and the curse of the primary callings of each gender. For example, God cursed the ability of men to provide for their wives and children while a woman's ability to bear and raise children will be filled with trouble. In essence, as a result of Adam's sin, God's retributive justice permeates man's entire existence.

God's retributive justice is confirmed and intensified in the flood where the text informs the reader that God grieves over the sins of mankind. This fact demonstrates the important principle that God is not a prisoner to an external ethical demand. Instead, God's very nature demands justice. Moreover, according to this section of Scripture, God deals with mankind in a methodically judicial and merciful, manner granting time for repentance. However, in conjunction with his mercy, God executes his justice with thoroughness. Indeed, the flood becomes a paradigm of judgment for God's future dealings with man. For instance, the judgment of Jerusalem is compared to the flood of Noah's time (cf. Isa 54:7-9) while the final judgment on the earth is compared to God's wrath poured out from the windows of heaven (cf. Isa 24:18; Gen 7:11; 8:2). These clear

references to the flood point to the fact that this section of Scripture does not give one an isolated caricature of God's justice but defines his judicial nature for future generations.

Sodom and Gomorrah reiterates the theme of God's retributive judgment and, like the flood, becomes a test case that defines righteousness for future generations (Gen 18:19). Indeed, as this passage unfolds, God's righteousness is defined in terms of an ethical norm that places the standard of righteousness within God himself. As a result, it is to God's standard of ethical righteousness that Abraham appeals when he pleads for Sodom. This text is another indication that God judges according to his holy nature rather than, as critics claim, according to an external standard of justice.

Concerning the Mosaic Covenant, there are numerous indications of God's retributive justice. For instance, the Passover stands as a monument to God's retributive justice. In order to leave Egypt, Israel's sin must be atoned for by sacrificial blood in order to escape the wrath of God that engulfs Egypt's firstborn. Moving forward, the very structure of the Mosaic covenant presupposes God's retributive justice. The suzerain vassal nature of the covenant provides blessings for obedience and penalties for disobedience. This aspect of the covenant is clearly evidenced not only in Israel's history but in the golden calf incident as Israel runs the risk of being annihilated by God's wrath when she breaks faith. Indeed, one can see in Exodus the great danger of God's wrath as God draws near to Israel. While his indwelling is certainly a blessing, it also poses great danger in that the close proximity of God to an unholy people can lead to sudden death. The possibility of death is around every turn for Israel as she interacts with her Holy God. Indeed, propitiatory sacrifice is the means by which an unclean people can be cleansed from moral and ceremonial impurity and thus enter the presence of God. It is the tabernacle and the Levitical sacrificial system that are inextricably bound to God's covenantal presence without which there is no hope of surviving an encounter with God. At the heart of the Levitical system stands the concept of atonement (Lev 17:11), which conveys the ideas of cleansing and ransom—both of which serve to remove the wrath of

God from the community of Israel. Blood sacrifice is the means by which God's holy wrath is appeased and Israel receives forgiveness from her sin. Nowhere is this more evident than on the Day of Atonement when both ceremonial defilement and forgiveness for rebellion are dealt with through blood sacrifice and the vicarious death of the scapegoat. Indeed, the author of Hebrews summarizes the entire Levitical system by the concepts of cleansing and forgiveness when he writes, "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22). Certainly this verse affirms what was discovered in chapter 3 of this dissertation. If the unholy/unclean comes into contact with a holy God it will be destroyed. Only blood sacrifice can cleanse and ransom one from this wrath and thus reveal the presence of God.

Concerning God's retributive justice in the Psalms, God's rule through the Davidic messiah presupposes that he will bring order to his creation by imposing his will upon all nations (Ps 2). Moreover, in bringing his kingdom to bear, God, as judge, will adjudicate the nations according to an ethical standard of righteousness (Ps 1; Ps 72). This standard includes not only God's faithfulness to save, but his ethical standard of holiness by which he distinguishes between right and wrong, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. Therefore, the Psalms by preaching the coming messianic kingdom, preach the coming of God's retribution upon the wicked and his salvation of the righteous.

The prophets, while they preach God's salvation, also emphasize God's coming retribution—in compliance with the covenantal curses—to both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. The prophets see Israel as having passed the point of no return in relation to God's forbearance and God's judgment is thus now inevitable. Indeed, Israel must pass through God's judgment before she can experience his salvation. This judgment is often described in graphic terms and reflects God's holy opposition to sin. Nevertheless, God promises redemption once judgment has occurred.

In summary, in spite of the many critics of God's retributive justice, the Old Testament presents rich evidence that God's justice is exercised according to an ethical norm against those who transgress his standard of holiness. The main accusations against God's retributive justice were outlined and debated within the main body of this dissertation and therefore do not need recitation at this point. However, it is sufficient to say that the critics fail to make their case given the Old Testament data.

The New Testament

Concerning God's retributive justice in the New Testament, three areas were examined: the Gospels, Pauline literature, and the books of Hebrews and Revelation. In the Gospels, Christ is presented as the Servant of God who bears the wrath of God for the transgression of his people (Isa 53:7-12). This servant imagery is drawn from Isaiah 53 and permeates Jesus' teaching. According to Stuhlmacher, it is also embedded in the apostolic message. Indeed, Christ presents himself as the ransom for sin, the Passover Lamb, the guilt offering, and the ratification of the New Covenant, all of which find their fulfillment in the crucifixion of Christ. These images are sacrificial in nature and present the concept of propitiation.

A second facet of the gospel message that was focused on in this dissertation was Jesus' teaching on the doctrine of hell. Jesus understood hell as an actual place of eternal torment designed by God for those who will suffer his retributive wrath forever. Any attempt to mitigate this doctrine through universalism, post-mortem evangelism, annihilationism or a focus on God's love is scripturally unsound. Indeed, the traditional doctrine of hell is the most natural reading of Scripture, a reading that presents a balanced view of God's justice and God's love.

Concerning the Pauline literature, after examining a number of central Pauline texts, it was shown that Paul's primary concern is the satisfaction of God's retributive justice. For instance, it was demonstrated that the primary issue at stake in the book of

Romans was the wrath of God. According to Paul, God's wrath is both a present reality (Rom 1:18-32) and an impending doom that will be fully demonstrated against Jew and Gentile on the final day of judgment (Rom 2:12; 3:19-20). According to Paul's scenario, all will perish under the natural or Mosaic law (Rom 3:23) unless God intervenes. Paul's solution to this problem is the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It is Christ's sacrifice alone that satisfies God's retributive wrath in accordance with sacrificial law. Any other scenario that attempts to explain Christ's death is inadequate because any other scenario fails to address God's wrath, which Paul presents as man's primary problem.

The same is true with Galatians 3:13. According to this passage, Christ becomes the redeemer in order to save his people from the curse of the Law. The covenant curses of the Law are clearly retributive in nature. Therefore, when Christ is said to redeem by becoming a curse, it is clear that his death is the price to ransom one from the wrath of God. As a result, retributive justice is clearly in view in Galatians 3:13

Second Corinthians 5:19-21, using the terminology of "reconciliation," communicates the same message. According to the context of this passage, it is God who is offended and estranged from man. Therefore, it is man who must be reconciled to God. Moreover, it is Christ's act of sin bearing that grants reconciliation and right standing before God. Indeed, in all the passages studied, Paul's central concern is the satisfaction of God's wrath, a wrath that cannot be ignored, a wrath that must be addressed by the sacrifice of God's incarnate Son.

Finally, both the books of Hebrews and Revelation affirm the concept of God's retributive justice. In the book of Hebrews, for instance, the Day of Atonement points to the necessity of Christ's work to cleanse the sinner's conscience from the defilement of transgression and the awareness of God's impending judgment. In like fashion, the establishment of the New Covenant requires the sacrificial death of Christ so that, as in the Old Covenant, approaching God can be possible without annihilation. Indeed, free

access to God that was only typified under the Mosaic Covenant has now become a reality in the New Covenant.

In the book of Revelation, similar affirmations concerning the doctrine of God's retributive justice can be seen. The titles used of Christ in Revelation 5 are combined under the term "lamb," which serves to emphasize the retributive nature of Christ's sacrifice, calling to mind the Passover and Isaiah 53, and the retributive nature of his coming judgment. Indeed, it is Christ who executes vengeance against the world by unsealing the book he receives from the one sitting upon the throne. Finally, the judgments that begin in Revelation 6 reach their climax in the Great White Throne of Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) in which God, in one last retributive act, destroys his enemies by casting them into the lake of fire. Therefore, in conclusion, both Hebrews and Revelation are rich testimonies of God's retributive justice, justice that affirms God's saints and upholds God's holiness.

In conclusion, one cannot escape the fact that the biblical data present a God of holiness that will judge sin. Judgment occurs either on the sacrificial Lamb, Jesus Christ, or on sinners for eternity in hell. To deny one is to deny the other for both truths rest upon the same foundation of God's eternal, holy nature.

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ABSTRACT

THE RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE OF GOD

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The primary task of this dissertation is to demonstrate from the Old and New Testaments that given the creation and fall of man, the moral character of God will necessarily express itself in retributive justice so that God will impartially and equitably judge and punish sin.

Chapter 1 introduces briefly the subject of God's retributive justice by presenting the current theological climate in which the topic exists. Numerous opponents of retributive justice are cited in an effort to clarify the relevance of current work. Finally, the subject of retributive justice is linked to God's holiness in an effort to show its theological relevance.

Chapter 2 catalogues the various arguments against God's retributive justice. The major objections to retributive justice are discussed in detail in order to better understand those who opposes it. In addition, the discussion is classified into exegetical, theological, and practical objections to God's retributive justice.

Chapter 3 unfolds God's retributive justice as it appears in the Old Testament. After drawing the exegetical connections between God's holiness and retributive justice, biblical examples from the Pentateuch are cited in order to show that the concept of retributive justice appears early and often in Scripture. From here, the study examines numerous Psalms in an attempt to demonstrate that God's retributive justice is apparent in this genre of Scripture as God, the just judge and king, imposes his just rule upon the

earth. After treating the Psalms, I show that God's retributive justice is apparent in the covenant curses of the prophets, which come to fruition as a result of Israel's rebellion.

In chapter 4, I argue that the New Testament Gospels adopt the Old Testament's doctrine of God's kingdom but combine it with the Old Testament concept of the priesthood. God imposes his justice in a twofold manner. First, in the inaugurated kingdom, Christ, as the suffering servant and perfect sacrifice, bears the burden of man's sin at the cross as he suffers the wrath of his Father. Second, to consummate the kingdom, Christ promises to return as the Messiah of Psalm 2 and impose his final judgment upon mankind.

In chapter 5, I extend the argument by concentrating on the writings of Paul. I argue that the idea of God's retributive justice is on display in both the realized and future aspects of Christ's kingdom. Focusing on the book of Romans, I show the sustained emphasis on God's wrath that is exhibited at the cross. As in the Gospels, however, the resurrected Christ will return to judge mankind.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the eschatological themes of God's retributive justice in the rest of the New Testament writings, especially those themes in the book of Revelation. Finally, in chapter 7, I conclude by recounting briefly the various arguments in favor of God's retributive justice in order to summarize the persuasive case for my dissertation.

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