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THE DECALOGUE OF JUSTICE: A COVENANTAL APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my life partner and love of my life, my wife, Petra, who endured many nights caring for our children while I was studying. She stood by my side through all the twists and turns of my academic and ministerial life. She is an anchor for our family and my hero. If I tried, I could not quantify the level of help my wife supplied me until I completed this incredible milestone. Indeed, words cannot describe my gratitude to the beautiful wife of my youth.

10 An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. [...]
27 She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
29 “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” - Proverbs 31:10–11, 27–29 (ESV)

Soli Deo Gloria
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Abstract

This dissertation aims to establish a biblical theology of justice (מִשְׁפָּט), ascertaining the commands and references to justice in Scripture are comprehensively and exclusively rooted in the Moral Law of the Torah, summarized in the Ten Commandments, and embedded in the Covenant of Grace (Old and New), making it binding on New Covenant believers and inextricably attached to the church’s Great Commission mandate. To this end, the study examines the concept of justice in the OT and the Moral Law, contrasting Reformed evangelical hermeneutics with the modern iteration of Liberation Theology in connection with the application of biblical justice. Additionally, the study examines the Reformed understanding of the Torah’s historical meaning and canonical significance to the church of the Old and New Covenants. The study will present three pericopes as expositional evidence supporting the thesis undergirding this dissertation: Exodus 21:1-23:33, Psalm 119, and James 2:1-13.

First, the study will show how the Covenant Code (Exod. 21:1-23:33) is itself an exposition of the concept of justice found in the Decalogue, which is the Moral Law. The other two expositions represent the application of the Moral Law in the devotional life of an OT saint (Psalm 119), and another represents the application of the Law to the NT saints (James 2:1-13). Afterward, the research applies the findings to a contemporary case study to demonstrate the covenantal applicability of the Moral Law in the New Covenant. Indeed, a Reformed hermeneutical framework applies a covenantal understanding of the Moral Law, demonstrating its revelatory and practical function to the New Covenant saints. Finally, the study concludes with principles for applying the Moral Law to the New Covenant church because it is the same commandments Christ delivered and commissioned his followers to teach the nations.
CHAPTER 1
RESEARCHING BIBLICAL JUSTICE: INTRODUCTION, SURVEY, AND METHODOLOGY

Research Introduction

All people from every era have possessed the same hope and desired the same goal, a just society. Indeed, humanity longs for justice because they were created in the image of the God of justice and righteousness. However, humanity is corrupted by the depravity of sin caused by the fall of their first parents, Adam and Eve. This fall separated man from his Creator and obscured the divine standard of morality but, by God’s grace, did not obliterate it. Nevertheless, fallen man’s longing for justice is unclear, unsatisfied, and compromised. For this reason, the Lord did not leave man wondering about the moral demands he expects from his moral and rational creatures. On the contrary, he has provided man with a blueprint, so to speak, a conscience that is rooted in the natural order and granted God’s common grace to know right from wrong, human sinfulness notwithstanding. John Frame insightfully remarked that God first gave moral precepts “to Adam in the Garden, such as labor (Gen. 1:28ff), marriage (Gen. 2:18-25), Sabbath (Gen. 2:3, cf. [sic] Exod. 20:11), and republished [the Moral Law] in the ten commandments. These are still in effect, perpetually binding on all persons.”¹ These assertions may seem simple, straightforward, and uncontroversial. Still, they are not so, especially when some claim their validity for all time over every sphere of human society to establish true justice.

Some call this era the postmodern era. This is an era when truth is relativized, and objectivity is minimized or completely disregarded to the trash bin of history along with the modern and the premodern eras. This is why the evangelical church faces greater scrutiny than ever before to respond to the rallying cries for justice in an ever-growing complex set of anti-supernatural presuppositions and greater hostility to objective reality and transcendent truth. The evangelical church can say one thing: the Word of God is the answer. This answer would suffice, except some may want to keep the proverbial door ajar for other perspectives that may help Christians be more effective at fighting social injustices. Even those who agree with the former assertion that the Word of God is sufficient may present a follow-up inquiry demanding a more specific set of propositional truths that find their root in the One who inspired Scripture.

At this juncture, the evangelical church is proverbially dispersed and scattered, with some claiming the standard of justice is found exclusively in God’s revealed Word. They affirm God “is the moral plumb line who determines what is good and right for all peoples, for all eras. And because God doesn’t change, this standard doesn’t change.” Even so, others insist on greater clarity and specificity so that the response may be the law of Christ. But what is the law of Christ? Is it not to love God and neighbor? If so, then how can someone love others? More specifically, how can someone love by acting justly? Does the church possess answers for social justice issues, like racial tensions and reconciliation and discrimination based on skin color or vaccination status?

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3 Ibid.
Considering the above questions, among others, some may argue traditional biblical answers are insufficient. As a result, they encourage Christians to integrate some non-Christian ideas and join others in a combined effort to tackle social injustices. This is the call of Bruce V. Malchow, who wrote, “At times adherents of other world religions and non-religious people will create new concepts in relation to social justice that have not been part of the Christian heritage. If we evaluate them and find them useful and compatible with our theology, we can simply add them to our tradition without change.”

Undoubtedly, issues of social injustices are complex and require a thoughtful response. While many popular books seek to respond to these issues from a biblical perspective, academia has also produced its fair share of studies and research around the standard of justice and social justice. Most notably, the controversial movement of Liberation Theology originally sought to address concerns regarding the poor and oppressed in Latin America in the 1970s. Today this gave rise to a complete set of hermeneutical principles and presuppositions that attempt to understand the biblical text and draw morally binding applications on the church and society.

One scholar defines this Liberation Theologies along with its associated hermeneutics as follows:

A socio-critical framework through which the dominant approaches to theology and biblical studies are critiqued, potentially unmasked as oppressive, and reimagined as liberating. Reading the text with a socio-political agenda, liberation (and feminist) theologians prioritize the reader over the author and text to varying degrees and apply to various extents the hermeneutical principles of reader-response theory to their biblical interpretation.

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5 Ibid., 79.


7 Ibid.
This critical approach to Scripture has dire consequences for biblical theology and the broader evangelical movement. First, this theology was reinvented with modern iterations that often pose as evangelical and biblical. For example, Paul Louis Metzger maintains:

While dominant cultural and theological traditions may and often do provide invaluable insights into the biblical revelation, each theological tradition must understand that it is limited by human frailty and sin. Thus, dominant cultural voices must encourage and foster dynamics for open table conversations involving a dialogical posture and hermeneutic of humility that seeks to draw from the riches of Scripture and develop an ethic that cultivates human flourishing, especially for those often marginalized.8

In line with the reader-response hermeneutic, Metzger seems to believe hermeneutics differ based on the culture to which the interpreter belongs, a dominant or a marginalized one. However, despite his cultural heritage, the interpreter must first be concerned with the authorial intent and the cultural context in which the biblical author is embedded. Additionally, he suggests there is a special “hermeneutic of humility” (as opposed to grammatico-historical?) that can draw from Scripture information for the benefit of the marginalized.

Second, these hermeneutical systems tap into common societal grievances and attempt to offer answers that often find no biblical warrant, producing counter-productive solutions that undermine true biblical justice, even the gospel. For example, “Marxism share[s] a hermeneutic of suspicion towards powerful social structures—a commitment to identifying, explaining and confronting gross inequality, social domination and abuse, particularly economic.”9 This interpretive method can jeopardize the whole hermeneutical enterprise, as it may impose an anachronistic framework that makes the biblical data fit certain applications based on


preconceived notions contrary to the biblical worldview. Thus, presupposing sociological models that espouse concepts of societal structures and conceptions of justice alien to biblical historiography can undermine the interpretation and application. Traditional evangelical theologians have thoroughly responded to this type of hermeneutic in the past; however, this research is not intended to be so. To be sure, this dissertation does not constitute a response, per se, but instead an attempt to answer the same questions around biblical justice sought by Liberation theologians.

Undeniably, many evangelical works have sought answers to the same concerns and explored the biblical theology of justice, such as Timothy Keller’s *Generous Justice*.\(^{10}\) However, there remains a sincere sense of unsatisfied longing for more contributions to the study of biblical justice. In the words of Walter J. Houston, “There is therefore ample room for a book with a sharper focus and more intensive study of some texts.”\(^{11}\) Indeed, there is still room for further studies in this area, especially from a Reformed evangelical standpoint. For this reason, this dissertation attempts to contribute to the ongoing discussion on biblical justice by applying evangelical hermeneutics with a theologically robust and historically Reformed perspective. To this end, this dissertation will establish a biblical theology of justice (*מִשְׁפָּט*), ascertaining the commands and references to justice in Scripture are comprehensively and exclusively rooted in the Moral Law of the Torah,\(^{12}\) summarized in the Ten Commandments and embedded in the


\(^{12}\) The Torah here is a reference to the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy).
Covenant of Grace (Old and New), making it binding on New Covenant believers and inextricably attached to the church’s Great Commission mandate.

**The Research Methodology and the Delimitations of this Study**

The concept of justice has been at the center of theological journals, books, and academic treatises for a long time. Indeed, biblical justice has been an area of interest for many theologians and enjoyed significant treatment in many scholarly works. This dissertation is certainly not innovative in that sense; nevertheless, it hopes to contribute to the discussion through its unique treatment of this topic and distinct approach. Two primary approaches to dealing with this crucial theological subject seem to be differentiated by their hermeneutical methodologies and theological presuppositions. The first is the social hermeneutics; the second is a traditional evangelical hermeneutics with a distinctly Reformed group of presuppositions. Indeed, these two approaches will be contrasted in Chapter Two. Chapter Two will highlight some of the recent and most relevant literature dealing with the issue of justice from a biblical, theological paradigm. It will interact with several works that present either a hermeneutical methodology or a significant engagement with biblical texts from its historical, literary, and theological perspectives as opposed to philosophical or other theological treatment, as insightful and helpful as these other works may be. For now, this section will present this research’s methodology and delineate its limitations.

This section will be divided into two, concise sub-sections. The first sub-section will deal with the approach to the data, in this case, the hermeneutical method. The second will outline the data sets (i.e., the biblical pericopes) and the reason behind choosing these particular pericopes. Before discussing the two sub-sections, it may be helpful to begin by setting forth the delimitations of this study. The delimitations may be explained by negating what this dissertation
does not aim to do. That is, determining the research’s limitation will facilitate delineating what it seeks to accomplish as it advances to establish the thesis. Hence, though the next chapter will provide a brief discussion on Reformed Christian ethics and present a brief survey of the historical development of ethics and various approaches to the Mosaic Law in the Reformed tradition, the research does not aim to produce either a theological or a philosophical treatise on the topic of ethics. Instead, it seeks to mine Scripture to establish a universal framework for ethics—more broadly—while specifically in the area of justice. Simply put, this research falls squarely under the discipline of biblical theology, which means the data is primarily restricted to Scripture (more on this in the second sub-section).

Furthermore, this research is broad enough to examine many biblical data sets, and extensive intertextual and intrertextual connections are used to broaden the scope even wider. Still, it falls short of being an exhaustive investigation of all biblical data relevant to the concept of justice. Accordingly, the study is macro in scope, examining a large set of biblical data, which makes it akin to works like Houston’s impressive treatment of this topic in his *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*. At the same time, the study goes into a greater depth than theological works like Houston’s, as it will present detailed expositions of various texts (data sets) representing both an expansive range of biblical genres and taking into account the chronological progression of revelation (e.g., Exodus, Psalms, James). In this sense, this dissertation presents a micro study of each book and genre represented.

Notwithstanding the expositional nature of the study, it will not go into significant depth in each book it cites since other works are purposely geared towards this sort of exposition (i.e., book-specific commentaries). Instead, this research will cover a representative portion of a particular book, such as a chapter from each examined book. Therefore, this study aims to strike
a balance between broad-scope works with superficial treatments of a wide-ranging collection of biblical data on a particular topic on the one hand (e.g., Houston’s book on justice). On the other hand, it aims to be broader than other works, with extensive treatment of specific texts and a narrow scope focus on a single biblical book with no particular topic of study (e.g., a biblical commentary on James).

Moreover, this research is not an exposition of the Ten Commandments or the Torah; instead, it is a study that investigates the biblical writers’ own understanding of the pursuit and application of biblical justice in their lives and the lives of God’s people. Consequently, it aims to retrace the universal standard of justice that emanates from the character of God and translates into a biblical mandate to be applied in the lives of New Testament (NT) saints as it did to Old Testament (OT) saints. Considering this preunderstanding, the study will seek to establish the thesis through an in-depth investigation of the concept of justice, its canonical implications on biblical revelation, and its application in the original context. In other words, examining the concept of justice will rely on biblical texts from the OT to the NT, with a primary focus on the OT. As the research progresses, each chapter will draw practical insights and make a canonical bridge to the New Covenant. The research will culminate by testing the thesis’ conclusions against a contemporary real-life situation, highlighting impartiality as a fundamental universal principle of justice. In the final chapter, the study will provide a hermeneutical framework for applying the principles of biblical justice today as well as a summary of its findings.

The Research Approach: Traditional Evangelical Hermeneutics

This sub-section seeks to establish the dissertation’s approach to biblical data. The approach is based on traditional evangelical hermeneutics. Hence, this is neither a novel nor innovative approach in any way. But novelty is not the aim since such an approach may be
contrary to the Reformed evangelical method. Indeed, a tried and tested method is preferable because it will bolster the credibility of the findings and attest to the conclusions of this research. In light of this, this dissertation assumes the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture as outlined in the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (CSBI), which testifies to many principles vital to sound, traditional, evangelical hermeneutics. Foremost among them are the following: Scripture is the supreme authority binding the consciences of men (Art. I) because it is the Word of God, a divine revelation, not a mere witness to divine revelation, or it becomes one when it is encountered by faith (Art. III). It is God’s Word and the only divinely inspired writing; whether one accepts such claims or not, it remains so.

Additionally, the meaning and purpose of biblical teachings are knowable despite the finitude of man and language and the sinfulness of the interpreter (Art. IV). Scripture is internally consistent and coherent in all of its parts, such as that later revelation (i.e., NT teachings) does not correct or contradict earlier revelation (i.e., OT teachings), denying the claim that “Jesus’ teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or any natural limitation of His humanity,” as per articles V, XIV, and XV.\(^\text{13}\) Accordingly, all Scripture, including every word of the original language, is written by human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit (verbal plenary inspiration) and is infallible, inerrant, trustworthy, and accurate in all of its assertions, whether it be historical, theological, or otherwise (Art. VI-XII).

The only valid method of interpretation is grammatico-historical exegesis, considering literary genres and features and using Scripture itself in context to interpret other portions of Scripture, denying “the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims of

\(^{13}\) James R. White, *Scripture Alone* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 76.
authorship,” according to Article XVII. Thus, utilizing analytical tools such as social-scientific theories or applying social models must be rejected if it is determined it undermines sound exegetical practices. This also means this research will assume traditional evangelical views on authorship and biblical historiography, rejecting the historical-critical method (i.e., higher criticism), such as Graf-Wellhausen’s perspective on the Pentateuch’s composition (i.e., “the documentary hypothesis”) and Martin Noth’s “Deuteronomistic history hypothesis” (DtrH), to name a few propositions undermining the theological cohesion and integrity of biblical writings, not to mention, biblical inerrancy, even divine inspiration.

It is fitting, therefore, to end this sub-section with the concluding article (Art. XIX) as written in the Chicago statement:

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ. We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.15

As a result, the CSBI forms the foundation of sound, evangelical hermeneutics. For this reason, these principles form the basis for this dissertation’s approach and its essential presuppositions against the tenants of Liberation Theology and its sociological models of exegesis.

The Research Data: Selected Biblical Pericopes

This dissertation seeks to develop expositional research in the area of biblical justice. It is expositional because its primary data set is a collection of relevant biblical pericopes. Indeed, the research findings will be governed by the methodology and presuppositions outlined in Chapters

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14 White, Scripture Alone, 79.

15 Ibid.
One and Two to produce text-based evidence to support the thesis underpinning this study. More specifically, the study seeks to establish that the universal Moral Law of God is summarized in the Ten Commandments, becoming the basis for biblical justice and the mandate given to the church of Christ throughout the ages. The passages are Exodus 21:1-23:33; Psalm 119; and James 2:1-13. The study will present a detailed exposition of each of these passages in their historical context, deriving a robust theological understanding of a universally applicable standard by which all moral actions must be measured.

Moreover, the selection of the data took into consideration the theological relevance of the pericopes to the subject matter: justice. The passages are chronological and genre diverse to provide evidence for canonical uniformity and covenantal continuity. The study begins with the Torah’s teachings in the Covenant Code (CC), highlighting the Ten Commandments as the divine standard revealed from God to Moses and Israel, embedded in the covenant he made with them after he delivered them from slavery, and anticipating the Messiah who fulfills the Law and changes the hearts of his people to obey all his precepts.

The second study is in the Psalter, which has much to say about God’s law through the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119. This psalm represents the climactic Torah Psalm, expressing pious devotion and reverent love for the law of God. Such articulation can hardly be considered transient piety of an obsolete dispensation. On the contrary, this type of conscience-binding devotion is a living manifestation of a faith animated by a holy disposition towards the things of God. More than that, an upright life lived in obedience to God’s moral law is the genuine outworking of a circumcised (i.e., regenerated) heart motivated by a love for God and neighbor. Finally, James 2:1-13 is the culmination of this divinely instilled love in action during the Messianic age, which continues till today. In this passage, the apostolic exhortation harks
back through the corridors of time, as it were, to anchor itself back to the same Moral Law expounded by the Prophets and delighted in by the Psalmist.

Moreover, the exposition of James will leave no room for any other conclusion but that the apostle of justice meant for the Jerusalem church and, by extension the universal church, to heed the law of God, which finds expression in the Ten Commandments. And this law remains binding on the New Covenant church since James cannot conceive of any other standard of justice. For this reason, he grounded his understanding of justice in the Decalogue. These passages form the selected passages for this dissertation because they represent a uniform and cohesive understanding of justice as a central biblical motif and mandate. Indeed, these passages collectively articulate notions of justice and ethical tenets that could not exist outside of a transcendent moral lawgiver, the Triune God of Scripture. The biblical writers’ collective voices unite in unison to elevate God’s standard of justice and point to the divine source of such teachings, which reflect God’s holy character.
CHAPTER 2
UNDERSTANDING JUSTICE: THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
AND CONTEMPORARY LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Two lays the groundwork for the remainder of this dissertation. It provides a cursory view of the concept of justice in the OT, survey related literature, and establish critical hermeneutical presuppositions. Consequently, this chapter can be divided into three complementary sections that lay the foundation to answer the thesis of this dissertation. To this end, the first section of this chapter will analyze the OT concept of justice as it relates to lexical and theological data, including any intersecting concepts, specifically the Torah, commandments, righteousness, and law. It will also investigate the moral law’s relationship to the Mosaic Covenant with its theological implication to the New Covenant. Second, it will also survey recent related literature that attempts to do the same through a historical and theological examination of social justice in ancient Israel.

Third, it will address the hermeneutical presuppositions of this dissertation, represented in the Reformed evangelical perspective. This will be presented through two presuppositions, the first is *sola scriptura*, and the second will expound on the relationship between natural law and the moral law, solidifying the binding nature of the Decalogue on New Covenant believers. It is also important to note this chapter will employ the research methodology and follow the research limitations highlighted in Chapter One. Indeed, this chapter will define biblical justice, its assumptions, and theological implications, drawing distinctions between the approach of this research and others (i.e., modern Liberation Theologians) who deal with the same subject, the interpretation, and ultimately, the application of a biblical theology of justice. As a result, this
chapter will frame the discussion on biblical justice by laying necessary foundations so
subsequent chapters may present the biblical evidence undergirding this research’s thesis.

**Biblical Justice**

Justice, Righteousness, and the Law

The Hebrew word for justice is *mišpāṭ* (םִשְׁפָּט) occurs around 422 times in the OT with a primary reference to “the realm of justice, judgment, and law.”¹ In this sense, the meaning refers to the activity of determining what is right.² Consequently, it seems reasonable to think of *mišpāṭ* as a multifaceted word underscoring both a conceptual ethical imperative and a corresponding moral application. Johnson suggested OT writers used the term *mišpāṭ* in several different contexts.³ However, it primarily denotes a general sense of justice exercised by someone in a position of authority, such as a king, priest, or a judge (e.g., Judg. 4:5), referring to “the substance and consequences of the decision.”⁴ Alternatively, *mišpāṭ* may strictly refer to the process of jurisprudence, namely, in legal cases, rendering a verdict or decision for either a punishment or a deliverance (Is. 5:16).⁵ Thus, *mišpāṭ* may include a judicial procedure with a judgment or ruling of forensic nature (Num. 27:5) or, in a more general sense, one that

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² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 90-91.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.
encompasses a comprehensive understanding of justice (2 Sam. 8:15; 1 Kings 3:28; Jer. 9:24; Job 9:19). This may certainly apply to both God and man, depending on the context.

Moreover, mišpāṭ may refer to rights in a twofold sense, a legal right and righteousness. In the first, mišpāṭ denotes the vindication of the innocent party through a righteous or just verdict (Ps. 119:84; 149:9). Put negatively, it refers to upholding the cause of the oppressed over the innocent (Isa. 53:8). Accordingly, it is “possible to deprive individuals of their right, the mišpāṭ that is properly theirs.”

This understanding is reflected in the following verses: “Exodus 23:6; Deuteronomy 16:19; 24:17; 27:19; 1 Samuel 8:3; Proverbs 18:5; Lamentations 3:35.” These passages presuppose certain rights that were violated through a perversion of justice (e.g., partiality toward one party over another).

For this reason, the second sense, namely, the convergence between the concept of justice proper (a judicial sense of mišpāṭ) with righteousness (ṣe’dāqâ) is in view. In this sense, justice and righteousness are closely related. One may even go as far as saying they are interdependent because only a righteous judge will enact justice, and the man who is just is acting righteously. Johnson explains it thus:

[Righteousness as a] just cause coincides with the substance of a right verdict. In this context mišpāṭ often has the meaning “what is right and proper, righteousness.” Here mišpāṭ stands as an absolute entity, almost “world order,” “the God-given norm to ensure a well-ordered society.” Proper conduct in all spheres is to be done in mišpāṭ or in conformity with mišpāṭ.

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7 Ibid., 91-93.
8 Ibid., 91.
9 Ibid., 91-92.
10 Ibid., 92.
11 Ibid.
Furthermore, the concept of right becomes a principle of justice. Hence, defending a right is upholding righteousness and establishing justice. In the OT, Yahweh often correlates justice (mišpāt) and righteousness (ṣeḏāqā), as if one cannot do without the other (Gen. 18:19). This is also evident in the context of the following references from the Prophets and Wisdom Literature: Job 37:23; Ps. 33:5; 72:1; 99:4; Prov. 8:20; 21:3; Isa. 9:7; 28:17; 59:14; and Amos 5:24. For this reason, some scholars suggest mišpāt underscores the “restoration of a situation or environment which promoted equity and harmony (šālôm) in a community.” This understanding can only make sense if the biblical writers presupposed a standard of justice against which a wronged party may demand justice to rectify a perceived injustice. This standard is God’s Law (mišpāṭīm).

This is when God’s Law (mišpāṭīm) becomes central to the concept of both justice (mišpāt) and righteousness (ṣeḏāqā). The question then becomes about the relationship between mišpāt and mišpāṭīm, which means law or commandments. Johnson rightly asserted “God’s mišpāṭīm are the individual commandments as well as the summary of the entire law.” Consequently, mišpāt must be understood as judgment or justice in accordance with a standard of law by which justice is administered. Accordingly, one can safely conclude mišpāt cannot be understood without a specific reference to a particular custom. More specifically, mišpāt is a set

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12 Johnson, “מִשְׁפָּט,” 93.


14 Johnson, “מִשְׁפָּט,” 94.

of laws and regulations through which justice is recognized and, if obeyed, realized. 16 For this reason, apart from the linguistic semantic range of the word mišpāṭ, its theological connection to tôrā should be considered, lest its theological intent in relation to justice is obscured. Therefore, the attention will pivot to the theological relationship between mišpāṭ and tôrā.

In OT theology, the Torah is the heart of both justice (mišpāṭ) and righteousness (ṣeḏāqā) because it is the law (mišpāṭîm) teaches the godly the paths of righteousness and justice as per Ps. 19:9; 119:7, 39, 75, 106, 137 (see also Isa. 58:2). 17 There are other words associated with the law or commandments, such as tôrā, ḥōq, and miṣwâ. 18 Johnson argues the “conjoining of synonyms serves to emphasize the multitude or totality of the commandments rather [than] the specific meanings of the individual words.” 19 He further argues Psalm 119 employs various terms to refer more to “tôrâ piety” than to highlight the “differences between mišpāṭ and other terms for the law” 20 (this is explored in greater detail in Chapter Four).

Nevertheless, some scholars, such as Temba L. J. Mafico, may disagree, as the latter argued, “It is not piety which God required of humans, but the practicing of justice and righteousness (Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8).” 21 This is an unnecessary dichotomy. It is true מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāṭ) can refer to acting justly and administering justice rather than the concept of justice

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16 This assertion is the heart of this dissertation. The rest of the research will unpack this further with supporting biblical evidence and argumentation.


18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 95.

20 Johnson, “מִשְׁפָּט,” 94.

itself (see 1 Kings 3:28). However, those who practice justice and righteousness are obeying the precepts of the \( t\text{"orâ} \) (compare Deut. 32:4 with Neh. 9:13). Thus, Mafico’s claim is an unsustainable attempt to jettison the Law for a nebulous conception of righteousness and justice. Hence, behavioral practices without a moral standard are either acts of adiaphora (a mere opinion) or activities that can be judged based on their merits (i.e., moral vs. immoral), for no one can judge whether a practice is righteous or just without a standard against which one’s actions can be measured. Indeed, a consistent reading of the OT will reveal the importance of obeying the Law of God as fulfilling one’s ethical duties towards God and others. This is the Moral Law found in the Torah.

The Commandments, the Torah, and the Covenants

The Torah (\( t\text{"orâ} \)) means “law, statute, teaching; custom.” A Hebrew word that denotes a similar concept is \( \text{mi\text{"swâ}} \), which means “commandment, stipulation; teaching.” Together, \( \text{mi\text{"swâ}} \) and \( t\text{"orâ} \) can often refer to the whole law that was given to Moses in the books traditionally attributed to him (see Exod 24:12; 2 Chron. 14:4). In distinguishing between the two words, one scholar writes: “Whereas \( t\text{"orâ} \) comes to mean the whole law, \( \text{mi\text{"swâ}} \) is generally reserved for individual injunctions; hence the typical phrasing of ‘law (\( t\text{"orâ} \))’ in the singular and “commandments (\( \text{mi\text{"swâ}} \))” in the plural.” Consequently, \( \text{mi\text{"swâ}} \) denotes the collection of 613

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\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
מִצְׁוֹת (miṣwōt, “commandments”) within the Torah, tôrâ. This is clearly seen in Yahweh’s commendation to those who keep his miṣwōt according to Exod. 20:6 and Deut. 5:10. Interestingly, the last two references are in the context of the covenantal relationship the Lord made with his people. This is an important observation because faithfulness to the covenantal relationship with the Lord expects or demands obedience to his miṣwōt as prescribed in the tôrâ, which he will consider as š’eḏāqâ and mišpāṭ.

In OT theology, tôrâ often refers to the whole Mosaic law, even though it may sometime denote specific teaching or set of commandments. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, tôrâ indicates primarily the written law, which included the two tablets of the law, the Ten Commandments (see Exod. 24:12; Deut. 1:5; 4:44-45; 28:61; 31:26). In much of the OT, the tôrâ becomes “the default name for the Sinaitic covenant (Josh. 1:7-8; 2 Kings 22:8; Neh. 8:1-18), including its elements of narrative and wisdom.” Likewise, in the Prophets, the tôrâ becomes the standard against which Israel and Judah are chastised and judged (Jer. 44:10; Dan. 9:11; Amos 2:4). In the Greek translation of the OT—the Septuagint—and in the NT, the word that typically translates תּוֹרָה (tôrâ) is νόμος (nomos, “law” or “Law”) and מִצְוָה (miṣwâ) is ἐντολή (entolē, “commandment” or “commandments”), referring to the Law of Moses and the covenantal system in which it is embedded (see Matt. 5:18-19; Heb. 9:19). Generally, the Law refers to the five Mosaic books and the entire “law” or “commandments” therein. Additionally, it is remarkable that in Heb. 9:19-20, the writer cites Exod. 24:8 mentioning the “law” (νόμος) and

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27 Gabrielson, “Law.”
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
the “covenant” (διαθήκη, diathēkē) in direct reference to the Decalogue and the CC (Exodus 20-23), which are embedded in the Mosaic Covenant. This further cements the assertion that the NT’s reference to the “law” can refer to the Moral Law of the Mosaic Covenant.

Therefore, the dominant view of biblical writers makes it clear they understood the Law is primarily a reference to the Mosaic writings (the Pentateuch), which they also view as the fountainhead of OT revelation and the heart of righteousness and justice. Indeed, “For much of the Historical and Prophetic writings conformity to the law is the mark of righteousness, though different authors stress different commands.” However, biblical writers also understood the Ten Words (or the Ten Commandments) are grounded in the covenantal relationship between God’s people and Yahweh, the Redeemer of his people (see the preface of the Decalogue in Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). Psalm 19 shows God’s creation reveals God’s character and attributes while his law reaffirms them. In the Torah Psalm (Psalm 119), the Psalmist elevates the law in the life of the faithful in Israel in such a way that it demonstrates the faithful Jew would view the law as “both gift and obligation.” For this reason, the Lord reminded his people the law is the wisdom of God, the pride of Israel, and the envy of all nations because of its righteousness and justice (Deut. 4:5-8).

Consequently, it is remarkable that when the NT writers refer to the abolishment of the Law, they are referring to the Law under the theocratic state of Israel in the Mosaic Covenantal economy. Simultaneously, the NT writers emphatically demand Christians to obey God’s

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31 Gabrielson, “Law.”
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
commandments (John 13-15; compare 1 John 3:22-24; 2 John 4-6). Also, note the apostolic commendation of practicing δικαιοσύνην “righteousness” and the contrast with ἀνομίαν “lawlessness” in 1 John 2:28-3:11. As a result, righteousness is upholding a certain moral law.

This dissertation contends the Christian moral law is identical to the Moral Law embedded in the Mosaic Covenant. This will be further developed throughout this study. For now, it is important to note the connection between the Christian mandate to obey the commandments of Christ with the Ten Commandments. For example, 1 John 3:10-11 (compare John 13:34-35) connects righteousness with loving a fellow brother in Christ, indicating a connection to the summary of the second table of the Law, namely, loving one’s neighbor. Accordingly, loving God and loving neighbor are the summary of the Law since it summarizes the two tables of the Law and, indeed, all of God’s commandments in the OT, according to Jesus in Matt. 22:36-40.

Indeed, one can safely conclude when NT writers exhort believers to obey the commandments, they are referring to the Ten Commandments, the Moral Law, which is the summary of the Torah (see Mark 10:19; Rom. 13:8-10; Eph. 6:2). If this assertion is correct, it will carry a remarkable theological implication for accepting the binding nature of the Moral Law on the New Covenant believers. In this way, the Ten Commandments will function as a canonical and covenantal bridge indicating the continuity between the OT and the NT by presenting the divine moral standard revealed in the OT as the NT writer’s ethical presupposition. This is precisely one of the primary contentions of this dissertation and is the working assumption of this research.

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34 Gabrielson, “Law.”

35 Ibid.
This is essential to recognize; otherwise, any conception of justice in the OT will be significantly diluted if this is not presupposed (see also this chapter’s third section: Hermeneutical Presuppositions). This is not to flatten the application of justice across various administrations of God’s covenantal relationships in redemptive history since Israel was a theocracy and the NT church is not. Nevertheless, the moral standard of justice and righteousness cannot change if one accepts the Moral Law of God is derived from his nature and character as per Exod. 34:5-7; Deut. 32:4; 1 Kings 3:28; 10:9; Job 34:12; Isa. 5:16; 30:18; Jer. 5:4-5; Amos 5:15; Micah 6:8; Mal. 2:17 (compare Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42; Rom. 7:12; Gal. 5:23).

The following chapters will further demonstrate these conclusions from the biblical texts. At this juncture, it is essential to note as one attempts to understand the correspondence between the four interwoven theological terms justice, righteousness, Torah/Law/Commandments, and Covenant, one must consider its theological implication to the New Covenant believers. Otherwise, one may jeopardize the immense applicability of such findings. Consequently, understanding the role of each of these theological concepts is essential for this dissertation because one can only define biblical justice after understanding the nature of the relationship between these intersecting concepts. For this reason, it is critically relevant to expound on these concepts further, especially the covenantal relationship between the Old and New Covenant (i.e., Covenant Theology). As a result, the standard of justice is found in the Moral Law, which is integral to the Torah and affixed in God’s covenantal relationship with his people. The remainder of this chapter presents a shift in focus to contrast two different hermeneutical approaches to studying the biblical concept of justice. The first represents the so-called social hermeneutics (a

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36 Chapter Three investigates this more closely.
variation of Liberation Theology) and the second represents this dissertation’s methodological approach, the Reformed evangelical hermeneutics.

**Perspectives on Biblical Justice: An Overview of Related Literature**

A Divergent Hermeneutic: Social Hermeneutics (A Modern Form of Liberation Theology)

In his multivolume work, *Social Justice and the Hebrew Bible*, Norman K. Gottwald articulates a particular hermeneutical method that applies sociological analytical tools and approaches to studying the biblical text.\(^3^7\) It presents four interlinked procedures, which form the basis of biblical interpretation through the social-scientific paradigm: “social description, social history, social theory, and sociological exegesis.”\(^3^8\) First, social description entails a broad study of various organizations in the biblical world in an attempt to construct a portrait of societal patterns in relation to various historical events and social norms. This approach is an intersection between sociology and history. This leads to the second procedure, social history. In this procedure, the study is concerned with the development of one or more of its institutions over time.\(^3^9\)

Moreover, Gottwald notes that “social history is ‘diachronic’ (tracing society ‘through time’) whereas social description is ‘synchronic’ (examining society ‘with time’ frozen so to speak).”\(^4^0\) The two procedures are often intermingled. Social history assumes those who wrote the records are “‘the makers and shakers’ of ancient society,” which are “generally the wealthy

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38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
and powerful, or their servants.”41 This description alludes, albeit implicitly, that such ancient records may be inherently biased; in turn, at best unrepresentative or misrepresenting the general populous. Third, social theories are the body of proposals that seek to explain why specific organizations or societal patterns have behaved in a particular way, proposing an explanation to account for a perceived societal or organizational development pattern.

However, Gottwald noted, “Social theory is a tricky, even slippery, business. It is not at all agreed what constitutes an “explanation” of social realities.”42 Indeed, such assessments or reconstructions could become mere conjecture of artificial reality, often of subjective nature. Moreover, the social realities are usually more complex than any particular social theory would suggest, especially when keeping in mind some of these theories attempt to advance a broad or comprehensive view of society. This assumes much of the inner social workings of a wide range of institutions and people with little to no historical evidence, as this section will later demonstrate. Finally, sociological exegesis is the fourth procedure in applying a social hermeneutic. Gottwald defines this type of exegesis as one that leverages all the above procedures, including social description, history, and theory, to locate social assumptions and context behind the text.43

This type of hermeneutic is reflected in the writings of Walter J. Houston, who argues the Bible is a human document arising from the culture and interests of its writers.44 Thus, Walter does not believe the Bible can be a human product and, simultaneously, the Word of God that

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Houston, Contending for Justice, 7.
transcends the time it was written.\textsuperscript{45} As a result, he asserts that this hermeneutical method exposes the thoughts and desires of the upper strata of the ancient Israelite society; however, the interpreter may be able to discern the voices of the poor and oppressed, albeit filtered through the minds and writings of the dominant class. He further argues that interpreters from the tradition of Liberation Theology must adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion to be able to derive from the dominant ideology the voices of the lower classes.\textsuperscript{46} This hermeneutic assumes a class struggle between the poor and oppressed, on the one hand, and the dominant class, on the other. Consequently, biblical writings are inscribed in such a way that favors the elite group.\textsuperscript{47} This rationale necessitates adopting a hermeneutic that can discern the voice of the general population. This is called a hermeneutic of suspicion. This hermeneutical methodology presupposes Houston’s low view of Scripture and applies Gottwald’s fourfold procedures to reach its interpretative conclusions and application.

Scholars who adopt this hermeneutical of suspicion are divided into two camps. The first holds a relatively conservative view of the authority of Scripture, believing the Bible is the Word of God, and all of it can be interpreted to support the liberation of the oppressed, such as Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak.\textsuperscript{48} The other group believes since the Bible is the product of the sophisticated elites, it does not always side with oppressed and exploited people groups.\textsuperscript{49} For example, this suspicious reading may be seen in the interpretation of Itumeleng Mosala who

\textsuperscript{45} Houston, \textit{Contending for Justice}, 7.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 8. Some in this camp may even identify themselves as evangelical and/or Reformed.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
interprets Isaiah 40-55, which remembers Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian slavery in the Exodus, as the nostalgia of the elite to return to Jerusalem and rule once again. The repetitive theme of this hermeneutic reads some form of a social group or class struggle into the inner-working of ancient Israel or Judahite society is unconvincing. Another example can be seen in his interpretation of Micah’s denunciation of the oppressors, the once-upon-a-time Judahite elites. This denunciation is not interpreted as an expression of vengeance against the adversaries of Judahite elites because they were not considered the oppressors of the poor since they were the guilty party.50

Moreover, Walter asserted that both Gottwald and Mosala advocate for a reader-response approach to the biblical text because they contend scholarly objectivity in biblical interpretation is an illusion.51 In their view, the reader, a supposed working-class member, should identify with the struggles of the oppressed in ancient Israel; in turn, the readers are in a position to understand the text and the class struggle within. Walter views Mosala and others like him as reading into an ancient text the labor movement’s struggle as they are perceived in a modern capitalist society, which does not equate with the ancient Israelite context. Indeed, there is little to no evidence of such a class struggle in the ancient northern or southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah, respectively.52 Although Walter disagrees with the class “struggle” as an interpretive key, he accepts those of oppression and dependency. Walter views the oppressed of Israel as the most oppressed people in the world, passively suffering as they resisted covertly for fear of their

50 Houston, Contending for Justice, 8.

51 Ibid., 9.

52 Ibid.
oppressors. However, this is a distinction without a difference, which will be clarified in his interpretive method.

Walter agrees with Mosala that the voices of the oppressed are not heard in the Bible. He suggested, at best, the reader may only observe the voices of those “sympathetic to the poor and indignant at their oppression.” Nevertheless, he adds this assessment should not be understood to infer that the Bible is irrelevant to social justice issues. Walter argues the study of the biblical text must never take for granted the basic information provided by the text itself, such as the occasion, author, audience, or purpose, because they are often inaccurate. The interpreter must study and evaluate several proposals on their ability to adequately describe the sociological relationships between the oppressive class and others in Israelite and Judahite societies from the eight-century B.C. onwards. At the same time, he notes that no one could ascertain the author’s original intent or the audience’s original setting. Therefore, the interpretation and application of the biblical text are ultimately left to conjectures and relegated to the reader response method, Gottwald’s social procedures, and Mosala’s hermeneutic of suspicion.

Walter adds that “people have perceptions of justice or injustice which depend on their traditions and the concrete situation rather than on supposedly objective measures of exploitation, which we cannot calculate in any case.” If one cannot objectively discern any of the basic information from the text and cannot determine an objective standard of justice, then how could Walter, or others who hold to the same presuppositions and hermeneutic, derive

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54 Ibid., 11.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.
anything of value from the biblical texts, whether it concerns justice or anything else of universal applicability. Even if one were to draw some universal principles of justice from the biblical text, one must wonder if such principles are truly universal. Also, to complicate matters further, one must contend with the objection that will ensue regarding the authority behind such ancient principles of justice, especially when one adopts Walter, Mosala, and Gottwald’s presuppositions and hermeneutical methodology. As seen above, such a hermeneutical approach assumes the moral standards or ethical mores of Israelite society are relative to that people group and often inferior to modern human rights, rendering the entire interpretive enterprise and the by-product of the interpretive task (i.e., application) ultimately irrelevant.

Applying Social Hermeneutics

Paul S. Evans argued the Bible, OT, and NT alike, show considerable concern for issues related to justice and righteousness, in general. The OT demonstrates that social justice concerns are significant in biblical theology, with implications extending far beyond OT times. The role of the OT prophets was to exhort God’s people to return to the Torah in obedience to God. Consequently, the prophetic literature emphatically addresses social justice issues by pointing to the legal collection of the Torah, primarily the CC, as presented in Exod. 21:1-23:33. Evans identifies two groups who have misunderstood OT morality, hence, misappropriated the CC. The first group viewed the CC as a part of God’s Word and held it up as the ideal for Christian morality; meanwhile, the other group viewed the CC as a mere legal collection meant for ancient Israel, carrying no relevance to modern-day Christians. The latter group viewed the

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morality of the OT, as expressed in the CC, as inferior to twenty-first-century ethical standards and principles of social justice. As a result, Evans advocates a third alternative.\(^{58}\)

Evans argues that the Israelite legal code is not unique; instead, it shares a common heritage with other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) legal collections, such as the Stele of Hammurabi, Hittite, or other Assyrian laws.\(^{59}\) All of these predate Israel’s CC. He further asserts this should mean God was working through other nations.\(^{60}\) Like Bruce V. Malchow, Evans believed this should be seen as a biblical precedent for joining non-Christian social justice and secular humanitarian efforts in modern times. Throughout the article, Evans showed how the CC transcended the morality of the ANE, even Greece and Rome, in its elevation of human dignity and emphasis on compassion for the poor, widows, and orphans. However, he also asserted, “Despite the high morality evinced by the CC in light of its ANE cultural context, the CC cannot be said to represent ethical ideals so that it would be appropriate for its laws to be applied literally in our modern context.”\(^{61}\)

As a result of his conclusions, Evans proposes a new hermeneutic, which he claims to be emulating Jesus’s interpretive methodology.\(^{62}\) He argues Jesus employed a hermeneutic of suspicion, suggesting the CC is an accommodation to human depravity, implying the CC represents God’s attempt to move his people in a “redemptive direction.”\(^{63}\) He states:

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\(^{58}\) Evans, “Imagining Justice for the Marginalized,” 19.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{63}\) Ibid. 34, 37-38.
Jesus’ statements in Matthew 19 regarding the interpretation of Mosaic divorce law may provide a hermeneutical key to aid an interpreter in understanding the CC as Christian Scripture. Jesus himself noted the frequent tension between what was legislated by Moses and what was the ethical ideal. Jesus clearly stated that some parts of the law express ideals while others make allowance for human hard-heartedness. Consequently, he argues the CC cannot be taken at face value but interpreted within its historical context. In this interpretive endeavor, the interpreter must question the motives behind such laws by understanding that laws serve the interest of the dominant class, “allowing the CC to justify slavery and help maintain a patriarchal, hierarchical ideology.” Accordingly, he advocates for what he calls “a suspicious reading” to deconstruct “gender roles, and/or class identities based on an ancient cultural context,” which the CC accommodated rather than promoted. This interpretation and subsequent application will be countered in Chapter Three of this dissertation. For now, the point is to contrast this hermeneutical method and theological presuppositions with this research, as the following section, coupled with the previous chapter, will amply demonstrate.

As Evans moves from interpretation to application, he advocates for a pragmatic approach to social justice. For example, in the spirit of protecting the vulnerable, one can pursue “laws allowing abortion only in limited cases (in efforts to protect the lives of many or most of the unborn), or laws decriminalizing prostitution (in efforts to protect sex-trade workers).” In recognition such pursuits do not uphold what he terms the “ethical ideal,” he cautions against

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64 Evans, “Imagining Justice for the Marginalized,” 38.
65 Ibid., 39.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 40.
68 Ibid.
rejecting them *a priori* on such grounds because they may be a starting point toward eventual abolishing.\(^\text{69}\) However, Evans falls into the same cycle he highlighted. His argument needs to be questioned and deconstructed as it serves the interests of sinful and depraved humanity instead of the “ethical ideal” to which his argument aspires. One must ask where can the “ethical ideal” be found. And when it is located, should Christians not advocate for the ideal no matter the cost instead of supporting subpar morality?

**Hermeneutical Presuppositions: A Reformed Evangelical Perspective**

First Presupposition: *Sola Scriptura*

Social exegesis and the hermeneutics of suspicion are rooted in a deconstructionist paradigm, seeking to supplant the text’s plain meaning with another superimposed meaning based on a pre-existing commitment to generalized assumptions focusing on various groups based on an assumed power struggle between them.\(^\text{70}\) Due to the nature of this methodology, no particular method can unite all theologians that use several elements from the hermeneutical approach detailed in the previous section. The reason for that is this methodology incorporates various socio-scientific studies, contemporary theology, and biblical theology to call upon the church to embrace its central claims that God is the God of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized, giving way to their particular interpretation and subsequent call to action, which requires the church to fight the oppressors based on an alien hermeneutic.\(^\text{71}\) It is undeniable that

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\(^{69}\) Evans, “Imagining Justice for the Marginalized,” 40.


God shows special care for the needy and oppressed, a theme repeated throughout Scripture. However, there is no need to resort to Liberation hermeneutics or social theories to draw this from Scripture. For this reason, this sub-section and the dissertation contend that such approaches to the biblical text, especially in discerning God’s will for justice and righteousness, are unhelpful and misguided; at best, they assume what the text does not necessarily affirm. However, the social approach not only applies a hermeneutic methodology that is, broadly speaking, alien to traditional evangelical hermeneutics but is especially repugnant to the historic Reformation hermeneutic.

Furthermore, there is a distinction between social history and social science. The first uses standard tools and controlled analysis to draw historical information based on actual evidence, such as archeological and literary data from the same period and geography related to a particular biblical text. The latter infers, rather than deduces, information from the texts by employing theoretical models and methods imported from social sciences. The result may be historically anachronistic, lacking past-present “incommensurability.” Additionally, the root of this methodology “lies in a hermeneutic of suspicion that is hostile to theology and the supernatural; and it tends to reduce the meaning of particular historical realities to the level of their social function in relation to general underlying needs and forces.”

In contrast, reformation hermeneutics possess clearly defined parameters and time-tested methodology with a single purpose, that is, mining the text for the single meaning it possesses

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73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.
based on the authorial intent. This vital concern must be understood as the essence of the grammatico-historical method championed in Reformation and post-Reformation hermeneutics (i.e., traditional evangelical hermeneutics). Any tools used to draw out the meaning from the text must not only submit to this single purpose but also the authority of Scripture. Consequently, the interpreter must not see himself above the text but under its jurisdiction, humbly submitting to its dictates as it is plainly and literally understood, unless otherwise permitted by another clearer text without any contradiction or confusion. These ground rules must be presupposed before moving forward. Having said that, it may also be helpful to expound on these concepts from a Reformed confessional standpoint. Reformation hermeneutics views Scripture as the ultimate source of authority on all matters it affirms (see the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith [1689 LBCF] 1:1; 1:4; 1:10). Hence, the primary hermeneutical principle is *sola Scriptura*. Scripture must be viewed as infallible and inerrant if it would be the supreme standard that it is (see Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] 1:4; 1:6; 1:10).

Another principle is that Scripture interprets itself according to the 1689 LBCF 1:9. Additionally, clearer passages interpret the unclear (1689 LBCF 1:7). Indeed, the Reformation affirmed internal witness of the Holy Spirit, which, among other things, informed the Reformed understanding of the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, especially in matters relating to divine authorship and canonicity (WCF 1:5; 1689 LBCF 1:5). In interpreting Scripture, the Reformer John Calvin was concerned “with the literal, historical sense of the text.”

He affirmed progressive revelation, acknowledging the OT is incomplete without the NT.

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76 Ibid.
Indeed, this framework clarifies the level of fulfillment (already and not yet) and areas of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and the New based on the interpretation of NT writers. Also, the Reformed framework encompasses the Christological interpretation, especially of OT passages. More could be said about the methodology and approach of traditional evangelical hermeneutics in contrast to sociological interpretive methods and models; however, the previous chapter has already presented the necessary qualification and methods of the present approach for this research. Therefore, it is crucial to concede the dissertation’s first presupposition as it relates to the nature of Scripture and its interpretation, contrasting it with social exegesis and the hermeneutic of suspicion. The following sub-section will deal with the second presupposition of this dissertation.

Second Presupposition: The Binding Nature of the Moral Law

In Adversus Haereses, Irenaeus argued for the binding nature of the Moral Law as revealed in the Decalogue, equating it with the natural law. Irenaeus asserted Christ never abrogated the Decalogue. Indeed, the NT reaffirms and expounds on the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments (e.g., Matt. 5:18). Thus, the NT affirms humanity is not released from its moral obligations towards God’s ethical standard, especially not God’s covenant people. Irenaeus added that even the Sabbath could not be abrogated but was replaced by continuous worship to God, noting all men are obligated to be consecrated to God and live to glorify and

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77 Köstenberger and Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 74.


79 Ibid., 480.

80 Ibid.
worship him. He remarked that “the Sabbath of God (requietio Dei), that is, the kingdom, was, as it were, indicated by created things; in which [kingdom], the man who shall have persevered in serving God (Deo assistere) shall, in a state of rest, partake of God’s table.”

Moreover, Reformer John Calvin viewed the “law, especially the Ten Commandments, retained relevance because they were in accordance with natural law.” Indeed, Calvin grounds natural law (lex naturalis) in the inner witness of the innate knowledge of God as the Creator per Romans 1. Consequently, God is known in a general manner by way of creation but in a unique and salvific manner by way of Scripture. Calvin follows Augustine’s formulation of the distinction between “heavenly” and “earthly” intellect, with each functioning in its proper sphere. One may call it spiritual and human knowledge. The former is unadulterated knowledge of God, his justice, and righteousness; the latter employs God-given minds in governance, medical and mechanical skills, liberal arts and philosophy, the discipline of ethics, and the like. Calvin believed humanity is endowed with “natural light,” enabling mankind to fulfill “the dictates of God’s will for right and orderly conduct.” He stated: “God provided

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81 Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” 481.

82 Köstenberger and Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 74.


84 Ibid., 71.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.
man’s soul with a mind, by which to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong; and, with the light of reason as guide, to distinguish what should be followed from what should be avoided.”

It is vital to affirm natural theology to agree with Scripture that renders mankind inexcusable, for humanity possesses an inner knowledge of God (*sensus divinitatis*). At the same time, one must affirm natural law (*lex naturalis*) to acknowledge human culpability for sin and humanity’s actual transgression against the moral law due to their inherent depravity (see also Rom. 2:14-15). Calvin, then, acknowledged the inward condemnation of the law as it is written on man’s heart by means of natural law (*lex naturalis*). Simultaneously, the law of God (*lex divina*) or the written law (the Decalogue) stands as an outward witness against mankind. Calvin taught “the *lex divina* is a republication—although in a more particularized form—of the same moral content underlying the broader and logically prior *lex naturalis*.” That is, Calvin viewed the Moral Law (i.e., the Decalogue) as a republication in written form of the natural law binding all mankind.

In volume 1 of *Reformed Ethics*, Herman Bavinck expounded on the Reformed view of natural law. He explained human beings, created in God’s image, possess certain faculties that

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89 Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 73.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

were not obliterated at the fall.95 Accordingly, the image of God in humanity manifests itself in
two primary ways: reason and morality. Both of these work together for the natural order.
Human beings execute these faculties in various spheres of society, such as in the institution of
marriage and family, friendship and community, and the state. Therefore, “moral character,
morality, virtue, family, household, nurture, friendship, occupation, science, art, and the state—
are products of natural morality.”96 Bavinck asserted natural morality does not require
regeneration as it exists in natural man, as it was evident in pagan societies who manifest all of
the fruit of natural morality. He also noted Christianity could and does improve human society
through applying the precepts of God’s Word.97 This last point is an interesting one. However, it
is not one under dispute in the present discussion.

Bavinck highlights three-fold perspectives that must be presupposed to advance the
discussion on the role of the moral law in both the natural (natural law) and the regenerative state
of man (covenantal law).98 First, from a heavenly perspective, natural law may carry a superficial
resemblance to the Kingdom of Heaven but can never purchase an entry; no amount of morality
can merit salvation but the work of Christ.99 Accordingly, there is an unabridged chasm between
morality done by natural man and one done through a regenerated man in the name of Christ.100
The first is unacceptable to God, but the latter is pleasing to him because it is anchored in a

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95 Bavinck, Reformed Ethics, 229-34.
96 Ibid., 232.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
covenantal relationship with God and purposed for the glory of God. For this reason, Bavinck remarked that the virtues done by natural man “are nothing but splendid sins.”

Second, from an earthly perspective, natural morality has a threefold benefit:

1. It acknowledges the Creator is holy and just, expecting the man to conduct himself according to God’s standard of justice and righteousness, which was imprinted on his heart by his Creator. Thus, it condemns evil-doers.

2. Natural law restrains the evil in the heart of men.

3. It promotes civil society, making life tolerable, a gift of God’s common grace.

The final perspective is the heavenly working through the earthly. Faith must presuppose natural law because the Holy Spirit sows the seed of the Word in man to bear fruit, using it to convict of sin and sanctify. “Regeneration presupposes natural birth, recreation presupposes creation, and Scripture presupposes nature. The world, the earth, is the foundation of the church; without the one, the other would be impossible, just as revealed theology is impossible without natural theology.”

John Frame argues that appealing to natural law as the basis of Christian morality, the well from which justice and righteousness spring, is without foundation unless it presupposes Scripture. Because the objector will constantly challenge the source and authority of natural law and the defender must eventually revert to Scripture as the basis for his argumentation.

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102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 234.


105 Ibid.
Therefore, a Christian must have a biblical foundation for making moral demands. Otherwise, he is making philosophical arguments, which become mere personal opinions unless it finds their basis in God. And if natural law finds its origin in God, then God expects humanity to adhere to such a standard, the measure by which he judges in justice and righteousness; thus, God must have revealed that somewhere. As a result, Scripture is the final answer. Therefore, no one can posit natural law unless they presuppose Scripture.

Frame concedes natural law arguments attempt to posit moral demands without recourse to the Word of God; however, natural law exists because God created the natural order, and God’s will was revealed explicitly in Scripture.106 Though man can know, to a certain extent, the moral law through fundamental conceptions of right and wrong, yet he suppresses or twists such knowledge to indulge in whatever he pleases (see Rom. 1:18ff). One may argue the same could be said of Scripture, namely that natural man can also twist Scripture. This may be a persuasive argument if one presupposes there is no objective truth. In other words, one must assume no one can know with certainty the original meaning and correctly apply biblical moral demands. Indeed, this is akin to arguing that because one can twist the Canadian parliamentary legislation, thus, no one needs a written law. This would be an unpersuasive argument.

Moreover, this line of argumentation must be dispelled because it contradicts the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (CSBH), a statement intended to elaborate on the CSBI, which is the evangelical hermeneutical standard and the one that governs the methodology of this research. CSBH Articles 5-9 particularly affirm the ability to know the meaning of the biblical text as originally intended and apply its universal principles if it was rightly interpreted and applied. The point is that natural law is explicitly revealed in the Decalogue, which can be

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interpreted and applied universally regardless of the cultural or situational context in which it is related (see also CSBH Articles 5-9).

For this reason, Frame employed Aquinas’s defense of natural law when he argued human law might be derived from natural law. ¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Aquinas qualified his claim by stating: “Even if human law should not enforce Divine law, it should not violate it either—not any more than it may violate natural law.” ¹⁰⁸ Indeed, God’s moral law, whether written through special revelation, as in the Torah, or unwritten revelation, as in the natural law, both “carry a universal and ‘natural’ obligation that [are] appropriate to the Creator-creature relationship, apart from any question of redemption.” ¹⁰⁹ Therefore, if one argues natural law is a binding ethical standard of justice and righteousness, then so is the moral law revealed in the Decalogue. Still, the latter must be preferred since it is revealed explicitly in God’s inspired and inerrant Word and can be universally understood and applied.

In contrast, Theonomists would argue “natural light” is inadequate to articulate morality clearly and precisely. ¹¹⁰ This dissertation concedes this point. For this reason, there has been debate within the Reformed circles regarding the interpretation and application of the Torah, including the Decalogue and casuistic laws. Theonomists, like Bahnsen, reject the distinction between civil and moral law, preferring a more literal interpretation, making Pentateuchal civil penalties normative for modern civil law, such as the penalty for homosexuality, adultery, and


¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Italics in original.


blasphemy. Post-Millennial Theonomists may add the caveat that the literal application of the Mosaic law can only be implemented in a future Christianized society. The affairs of a future Christianized society are not directly relevant to the present discussion. Yet, it may be helpful to clarify the Theonomist position as the present author understands it.

In his response to Bahnsen’s article, Willem A. Vangemeren argued against Bahnsen’s literal application in favor of the Westminster’s general equity principle, which uses natural law to determine the severity of punishment and develop laws suited to new circumstances without being tied to the specific Mosaic sanctions. Vangemeren appealed to Calvin’s conception of the natural law, which is undergirded by two primary principles. First, natural law must be derived from the natural order, which is constant due to God’s ordained design, human sinfulness notwithstanding. Second, natural law employs the human faculty of reason to deduce from creation a moral order. Though natural law is constant, human conscience is variable due to its sinful nature. For this reason, Calvin never meant to dispense with God’s law for natural law; instead, one must recognize God’s law agrees with natural law and never contradicts it because they both have the same author. Vangemeren quotes Cochrane, who wrote of Calvin’s view on natural law: “His point is that God’s law is in harmony with the true order of man’s creatureliness which is itself known from God’s law.”

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114 Ibid.

115 Ibid. Italics in original.
Furthermore, the classic Reformed position as outlined in WCF Ch. 19 (e.g., 1689 LBCF Ch. 19), and the Belgic Confession article 25 are what John Frame adequately articulated when he asserted, “Ethical norms, including those in Scripture, are always somewhat general. Scripture does not describe every situation in which we find ourselves each day, nor does it prescribe norms specifically for each of those situations. The work of applying its general norms to those specifics belongs to us, making use of both special and general revelation.”\textsuperscript{116} Therefore, this dissertation proposes God has provided a framework for Christian ethics through the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, and summarily applied casuistic laws. However, this does not oblige Christians to impose casuistic penalties today, but it can certainly be used as a guide for a spectrum of sentencing (minimum to maximum). For this reason, Frame appealed to the reality that the Torah is not exhaustive.\textsuperscript{117} Hence, it must be used as a guide or a framework for universal ethics and standards of justice and righteousness.

In contrast, some like John and Harvey Walton would have serious reservations about making the Decalogue universal per Calvin and many in the Reformed tradition. In their view, the Decalogue, like the rest of the Torah, is a historical document used in the context of Yahweh’s covenant with ancient Israel for their purposes with limited contemporary applicability. In \textit{The Lost World of the Torah}, John and Harvey Walton argue that “[t]he Decalogue stands as a list of illustrations that serve to circumscribe in part the realm of legal wisdom,” similar to other such collections in the Ancient Near East (ANE), not the summary of

\textsuperscript{116} Frame, \textit{The Doctrine of the Christian Life}, 234.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
God’s universally applicable moral law.\textsuperscript{118} The Waltons’ alternative view contradicts the
Reformed perspective advocated here.\textsuperscript{119} As relevant and intriguing as the Waltons’ argument
may be, this research will not directly interact with their book due to the scope and space
limitations underlying this study. However, the above discussion, even the remainder of this
dissertation, may be contrasted with their view.

Finally, this study argues the framework of universal ethics and standards of justice and
righteousness is succinctly and explicitly provided in the Decalogue. Accordingly, one may
discern principles of justice and righteousness from the Decalogue, which remain morally
binding on all humanity, especially on the Christian church whom Christ mandated to teach the
nations all he commanded as per Matt. 28:19-20. Indeed, the Decalogue is universally binding
because it is rooted in the character of God; thus, all are commanded to emulate such holy
character.

\textsuperscript{118} John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, \textit{The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in
Ancient Context} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019), 257, Logos

\textsuperscript{119} At the beginning of their appendix on the Decalogue, the Waltons remarked: “The Decalogue, then, like
the rest of the Torah, is focused on instructing Israel as to the nature of the societal order that would reflect the
reputation God desires for himself. The ten ‘words’ provide information about the shape of the covenant
community, both in terms of how the community interacts with Yahweh and how the Israelites interact with one
another. […] As stipulations to Israel’s covenant with Yahweh, the words are not intended to establish morality;
they characterize the ways that Israel, Yahweh’s covenant people, can retain God’s favor and thereby receive life in
the land. They describe the sort of society that Yahweh wishes to establish for the reflection of his identity in the
context of the cultural river of the ancient Near East (ANE) as he administers favor, blessing, and presence as
opposed to curses, abandonment, and exile.” Walton and Walton, \textit{The Lost World of the Torah}, 232.
CHAPTER THREE

CONTOURS OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE IN THE TORAH

Introduction

This chapter is the heart of this research as it will investigate several critical points that converge to uphold a thorough understanding of the Mosaic writings (i.e., the Pentateuch) in its original context and its exegetical, canonical, and theological relation to the NT, especially as it is applied in the lives of New Covenant saints. The chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section will address the historical meaning of the Torah in the mind of a faithful Israelite. It will attempt to discern the historical role the Torah played in establishing the faith of Israel, including notions of justice and righteousness, especially in its covenantal context and as it relates to the rest of the canon.

The second section will be the turning point of this dissertation, with its focus on the exegetical data. This section will be dedicated to a brief exposition of the Covenant Code (CC) (Exod. 21:1-23:33), the first of three sets of expositional evidence supporting the thesis undergirding this dissertation. The other two will be drawn in the subsequent chapters from pericopes representing the application of the Law in the devotional life of an OT saint (Psalm 119) and another representing the application of the Law to the NT saints (James 2:1-13). The current chapter lays the foundation for the subsequent expositions in the proceeding chapters, making for a robust and dynamic theological and expositional treatment of an otherwise complex set of data.

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1 This chapter is an adaptation and augmentation of two previously submitted research papers as a part of this Ph.D. program: “The Principles of Justice in the Covenant Code,” dated October 10, 2020; and “Delighting in the Law of God,” dated March 5, 2021. Used with permission.
A Covenant of Justice: The Torah’s Historical Meaning and Canonical Function

Delighting in the Torah and living by its precepts may not be the first thought in the mind of contemporary evangelicals. This may be due to the low view of the Mosaic Law and its perceived authority and usefulness for the everyday Christian life. Indeed, the Pentateuch’s theology, teaching, and overall message are often pitted against those of the NT. Evangelical ministers bear the brunt of responsibility for the lack of appetite for learning the Torah and applying the Law of God. If learning the Pentateuch and living out its teaching is part-and-parcel of the Christian life, then the contemporary evangelical church requires a course correction. The solution to restoring a healthy relationship between the Pentateuch and the Mosaic Law, on the one hand, and the NT message and Christian life, on the other, centers around the robust understanding of the revelatory nature and practical function of the Mosaic Law for New Covenant Christians, which is one of the purposes of this dissertation. Therefore, this section is one part of cumulative discussions exploring the purpose and role of the Pentateuch in the life of OT saints and the Mosaic Law’s applicability to NT saints as it will unfold in the following chapters.

This section will focus on two fundamental questions. First, how did the OT Law function within the event space of ancient Israel? Second, what is the meaning of the Pentateuch within the canon of Scripture, and how is that “meaning” determined? The following chapters, especially Chapter Five, will address how the OT Law functions within the current theological and experiential life of the church. In answering the first two questions, this section will primarily address thematic development from a biblical theology perspective. However, due to the nature of this discussion, aspects of systematic theology will also be addressed. In The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation, Sailhamer presented an adaptation of the Reformed perspective on the historical meaning and function of the Pentateuch.
This section will critically interact with insights from Sailhamer’s book. It will also incorporate some of his helpful insights in support of this dissertation’s thesis.

The Historical Meaning and Function of the Torah

The Reformers viewed biblical history in a way that might be unnatural to post-enlightenment contemporary minds. They perceived the words of Scripture to be pointing to divine action in human affairs, forming historical events intended to convey timeless theological realities. In other words, biblical history is not a mere recounting of past divine-human interactions; rather, it is intentionally orchestrated in real time-space to be later conveyed in Scripture in a particular order to function as theological instruction on God’s covenants. John Calvin viewed all covenants as “one and the same” in substance but different in administration. So, the New Covenant is the same in substance as the one administered by the Mosaic Covenant, now administered anew. 2 He wrote in his magnum opus, the Institutes of the Christian Religion, “the Law was given, not to restrain the folk of the Old Covenant under itself, but to foster hope of salvation in Christ until his coming.” 3 In biblical theology, this view is called Covenant Theology, in contrast to Dispensationalism, which views two separate groups in God’s redemptive history, Israel, and the church. 4 Dispensationalism proposes a more significant discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants than the traditional Reformed view through Covenant Theology. 5

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3 Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1:348.


5 Ibid.
Covenant Theology views the Covenant of Redemption in the Godhead as the basis for all biblical covenants, beginning with the Covenant of Works of Adam and Eve and culminating in the Covenant of Grace, which first appeared as a promise in Genesis 3:15. This approach to history as redemptive history was made possible through the covenantal approach to biblical theology developed by Johannes Coccejus, who built on the works of John Calvin and other Reformation-era theologians. In his book, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation*, John H. Sailhamer traced such development in detail. Sailhamer asserted that for Coccejus biblical history is controlled by divine providence; thus, he wrote: “there was no thought of a history whose central events and meaning could be known apart from the biblical text.”

In the search for authorial intent in the Pentateuch, one must draw a complete picture of the Mosaic message by linking the compositional themes of the collection to the metanarrative of redemptive history. Sailhamer proposes the following four key themes that represent the main thrust of the Pentateuch. First, the prophetic critique, which began in Genesis from the recounting of the failure of Adam and Eve, causing the fall, to the continued rebellion of mankind in subsequent narratives (i.e., Cain and Abel, Noah and his people, the tower of Babel, Abraham and Sarah, Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers). The Pentateuch continues a pattern of human failure when it stitches the continued rebellion of the recently delivered Hebrews in the books of Exodus and Numbers, which included the

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7 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 243.
punishment for Moses’s disobedience. This punishment resulted in denying all of their generation from entering the Promised Land, with exception of two, Joshua and Caleb, who through faith took hold of the covenantal promise (Num. 32:13; Deut. 1:35-38; 2:14). Moses warns of the impending cycle of apostasy that will continue to engulf Israel, according to Deut. 31:29. This pattern is repeated throughout prophetic literature (Former and Latter Prophets).\(^\text{10}\)

The previous theme may lead to despair, but it gives way to the hope found in the Pentateuch’s second theme, which is the centrality of faith. The Pentateuch emphasizes the centrality of faith by presenting Israel’s father, Abraham, as the Law-keeper before Moses introduced the Law in Sinai. Moses effectively said this is the pattern by which all the faithful throughout all generations will relate to the immutable, covenant-keeping, and holy God, Yahweh. The Torah continually presents those who trust in the promises of God (faith) as righteous, whereby their outward actions are reflective of an inward change of disposition.\(^\text{11}\)

According to Gen. 15:6, Abraham had a fruitful faith credited to him as righteousness.

This outlook points to greater fulfillment in the New Covenant, which all the prophets anticipated (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36; e.g., 1 Pet. 1:10-12). This theme leads to a critical question about how God will fulfill his promises amid an unrelenting cycle of rebellion. The answer, of course, is the third theme of the Pentateuch: the coming eschatological king of Num. 24:7 (e.g., Ezek. 38-39; Rev. 20:8-10). This future king is a part of the messianic eschatology in later prophetic literature that will use particular phraseology such as “in the last days” (e.g., Isa. 2:2; Dan. 10:14).\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{10}\) Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 243.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 244.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 243.
Subsequently, the fourth theme centers around the connection between the Pentateuch and the Prophets through the Messianic posture of the entire OT compositional themes. The Pentateuch and the Prophets focus on God’s Covenant, meaning the fulfillment of his promises did not depend on the Law written on stone but on a circumcised heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; e.g., Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11-14). That is, God’s covenantal obedience is fulfilled through faith in God’s promise of a royal messianic redeemer who, through his obedience to the Law and judgment on the cross, will save Israel and the nations. The messianic composition of the Pentateuch and the rest of the OT is arranged in such a way to declare the future hope can only be accomplished through the Messiah, the Prophet like Moses (Exod. 33:20; Deut. 18:15-19, 34:10; e.g., Luke 7:16, 24:44; John 1:17-18; Acts 3:22, 7:37).

Therefore, the Mosaic authorial intent can be traced through the intentional compositional strategy that stitches an interwoven series of narratives with an interplay of theological motifs that drives the four themes discussed above. These motifs are as follows: human failure, divine grace (blessing), faith, Law, and covenant. The progressive development of these theological motifs will not only shed light on the authorial intent of the Pentateuch, but their effect stretches beyond throughout all of redemptive history. Yahweh sovereignly and graciously initiates the blessing for Israel through the Patriarchs, which extends to bless all the elect from every nation in the world (e.g., Gen. 22:16-18). The blessing was anchored in faith, bringing obedience to the Law, and grounded in God’s covenant with his elect. Sailhamer asserted, “Blessing, faith and law become operative (or nonoperative) through the making (and breaking) of covenants.”

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14 Ibid., 245.
Pentateuch describes how human failure impedes the redemptive plan’s success, which is then met with divine grace within a covenantal framework.15

*Sailhamer and Authorial Intent*

Sailhamer draws a confusing distinction between the original author of the Pentateuch and the final editor of the collection, whereby each authorial intent may differ, since they wrote in different stages of redemptive history.16 In his review article of Sailhamer’s work, *Magnum Opus and Magna Carta: The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, Stephen Dempster remarked, “I am also left pondering at times the difference between Pentateuch 1.0 and Pentateuch 2.0. At times I feel that Sailhamer believes that there is a minimal difference and at other times a large difference. While he speaks of a definite difference, he mentions, ‘it is impossible to determine how different the two editions were’ (p. 24)”.17 Sailhamer’s view of the editorial intent, as opposed to Mosaic authorial intent, distinguishes between the original form and the final canonical form of the Pentateuch. As a result, the editorial intent may not possess as clear a vision as Calvin’s take on the Mosaic authorial intent in his covenantal approach to said covenant. Thus, some of Sailhamer’s conclusions are not only unconvincing but also cause unnecessary complications. For example, accepting Sailhamer’s premises will undermine the single-meaning hermeneutical principle. Such premises also suggest a dual human authorial intent, undermining the ability to clearly discern the proper meaning and role of the Pentateuch.


16 Ibid., 602.

Moreover, although there is much merit in Sailhamer’s argument, his understanding of the Law’s insertion because of transgression does not fit the divine authorial intent because he believes it was somehow not originally intended.\textsuperscript{18} For example, Sailhamer argued the Levitical priesthood (Priestly Code: Exodus 25-Leviticus 16) was a reaction to the golden calf incident, and the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) was added to guard against sacrificing to “goat-idols.”\textsuperscript{19} As a result, Sailhamer argued Law codes were added later in reaction to Israel’s transgression. In essence, it seems he believed Paul’s argumentation in Galatians 3 supports the notion that the Mosaic Covenant was “originally” intended to be received by faith, but, in response to transgressions, the Law was later added to regulate every area of life.\textsuperscript{20}

Sailhamer also argued significant portions of the Mosaic Law could be viewed as an addendum to the Mosaic Covenant while maintaining they are essential to the literary strategy of the Pentateuch and critical to understanding the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) as a whole.\textsuperscript{21} At the end of his tenth chapter, Sailhamer wrote, “The goal of reading such laws was likely not to strip them of their context in order to uncover an embedded principle.”\textsuperscript{22} He continued, “The way to gain wisdom and a sense of what is right and just from the Pentateuch is to read it as wisdom, looking for an accumulation of the sense of what justice looks like in concrete and qualified situations.”\textsuperscript{23} Sailhamer argued the goal of certain portions of the Mosaic Law (e.g., culturally limited

\textsuperscript{18} Dempster, “Review Article,” 45-46.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. See Chapter Six of this dissertation for a response to this claim.

\textsuperscript{21} Sailhamer, \textit{The Meaning of the Pentateuch}, 560.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
casuistic laws) was not to demand obedience to culturally bound precepts but rather to provide the framework to guide the saints to apply certain transcultural (i.e., universal) principles of justice. For now, the following discussion will lay the foundation for the covenantal application of biblical justice.

*The Law and the Gospel for Old Testament Saints*

To determine the extent of applicability of the Law on New Covenant saints, one must first analyze the relationship between the Law and faith in the OT. To that end, Sailhamer analyzed the Reformed approach to the relationship between the Law and the gospel. He focused his attention on Calvin, who was among the foremost biblical theologians of the Reformation. Calvin’s biblical theology of the Torah was based on two foundational doctrines: the covenantal relationship between God and Abraham’s descendants and the incarnation of the promised Mediator of the one and only eternal covenant (i.e., the Covenant of Grace). For Calvin, there are no “old” and “new” covenants as such; rather, there is one, eternal covenant between God and his elect through Jesus.24

Furthermore, Calvin has a multifaceted approach that coincides with his two foundational doctrines, which shape the superstructure of the theme of the covenant in Scripture. First, the first and last hope of all the saints, whether pre- and post-incarnation, was Christ alone, the hope of glory (Col. 1:26-27).25 Second, since Christ’s Covenant is foremost and eternal, then it is immutable, and his role as Mediator is central and unrivaled, then there was never any other

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25 Ibid.
covenant but the one and only Son’s Covenant of Grace (Is. 54:10, Lk. 1:55). The ‘Old’ Covenant possessed many types and shadows to point to the one and only ‘New’ Covenant; hence, it is only ‘new’ in the way it reveals the real intent of the previous ancient ‘Old’ Covenant, according to Hebrews 8-10.

Therefore, since the fall, all biblical covenants have been essentially the same covenant, and all external differences are incidental (see WCF 7:3-6). In other words, the external or superficial administration of various covenants is not to be confused with the core and essential basis of the covenant, which is Christ’s eternal covenant made with his precious blood. On the matter of the Mosaic Law, Calvin asserted Christians ought not to disregard the Decalogue (Ten Words) as nonessential because it was essential in bringing the knowledge of Christ to the OT saints. He also understood the Mosaic Covenant as the renewal rather than a replacement of the Abrahamic Covenant. Some later Covenant theologians proposed the remainder of the Law should be viewed as nonessential to the Decalogue, which is problematic for several reasons.

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27 In a helpful response to possible objections to the classic Reformed interpretation of Hebrews, Cara writes: “For some, the problem with the Reformed view is usually the Mosaic covenant and the antithetical contrasts between it and the new covenant in Hebrews. The problem, however, should be mitigated upon realizing that (1) the contrast is primarily between the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic covenant’s priesthood and sacrifices as compared to the reality of Christ’s priesthood and sacrifice, and (2) the heavenly reality did exist during the Old Testament, and the Mosaic covenant is a shadow of this reality. ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (Heb. 8:10). This core promise of the covenant of grace reflects the character of our gracious God and his covenantal love toward believers” (author’s italics). Robert J. Cara, “Covenant in Hebrews,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 265-66, Logos Electronic Edition.


29 Ibid., 290.

30 Ibid.
First, providing an exegetical argument rendering all the Law, except the Ten Words, as nonessential is hard. Second, the Ten Words would be undefined and unknowable. How would one know how to love their neighbor or not pervert justice unless the Law explains it via apodictic and casuistic laws (e.g., the CC)? Since the remainder of the Law is essentially an exposition of the Decalogue by applying it to the lives of the original audience, then it cannot be considered incidental by any stretch. Instead, the Law of God was purposeful and intrinsic to the Mosaic Covenant, which is an administration of the overarching Covenant of Grace. The issue lies in a contextual understanding of the gospel for OT believers, which is as follows. Yahweh sovereignly entered into a covenantal relationship with the Hebrews because of a covenantal promise that he sovereignly initiated with their fathers (Gen. 17:7; Exod. 2:24; 3:15; Deut. 1:8). He graciously presented the Law for their good to be obeyed with grateful hearts, not as a prerequisite for eternal salvation, but as the fruit of faith in their Lord and Savior (Exod. 19:4-6; Deut. 4:7-14; 7:6-11).\(^31\) Indeed, Calvin was right in his covenantal approach to salvation, whereby justification was always a result of faith in the promise of the covenant God made with his servant Abraham (Romans 4; e.g., Gal. 3:19-29).

Therefore, obedience to the Mosaic Law’s role was the faithful response to Yahweh’s covenant as per Moses’s Deuteronomic exposition of the Law itself. Obedience to the Law of God was and will always be the response of a circumcised heart (i.e., regenerated).\(^32\) For this reason, Daniel I. Block remarked:

God and Moses perceived true obedience to the law to be the external expression of an inward disposition of fear and faith in God and covenant love toward him. True biblical religion has always been a matter of the heart. This internal transformation is referred to


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 128.
metaphorically as a circumcised heart (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6-10; Jer 4:4), a heart transplant (Jer 24:7; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26), the placement of God’s Spirit within a person (Ezek 11:19; 36:26), and the writing of God’s תּוֹרָּה (tôrâ) in the heart (Jer 31:32). While these are occasionally viewed as future eschatological events to be experienced by all Israel, it is clear that they have always been true of the remnant of true believers in ancient Israel (e.g., Caleb, Num 14:24; also Pss 19:8-15 [Eng 7-14]; 37:31; 40:8 [Eng 7]; 51:18-19 [Eng 16-17]; 119:11; Isa 51:7).33

For example, the Noahic Covenant required the fruit of faith, demanding obedience to the requirements outlined in Genesis 9. In Genesis 17, the Abrahamic covenantal requirements add that the faithful of Abraham’s family should walk a consecrated life before the Lord in obedience to his commandments, beginning with the covenantal sign, circumcision; otherwise, the disobedient will be cut off from the covenant promise.34 Similarly, Moses in Deuteronomy teaches obedience to the Law is the fruit of the grateful love to Yahweh, who graciously fulfilled his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by delivering them from Egypt and giving them the Promised Land (Deut. 4:32-40; 10:12-11:1). In Exod. 19:4-6 and Deut. 6:20-25, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt preceded the revelation of the Law and the commands to obey it.35

Moreover, Block proposed obedience to the Law was not only the fruit of salvation but also the precondition of fulfilling their God-given mission of possessing the Promised Land and receiving its blessing.36 According to Deuteronomy 11, obedience to the Law was motivated by Israel’s desire to retain and flourish in the inheritance they have received. Block noted, “Contrary to prevailing contemporary evangelical opinion, for the genuinely faithful in Israel obedience to the law was a delight, in part because of their deep gratitude for God’s grace experienced in

36 Ibid.
salvation and covenant relationship, but also because they knew that God would respond to their obedience with favor (Deut 6:20-25; Ps 24:3-6)".37

Simply put, the Law’s chief end was faith, and the fruit of faith is obedience to the Law. There is no contradiction between the Mosaic Law, rightly applied, and the gospel of Jesus rightly understood. The gospel was the mystery hidden (implicitly) in the Law in ages past and now revealed explicitly through Jesus of Nazareth and explained by his apostles, according to Ephesians 3 (e.g., Rom. 3:21-31). This is the perspective defended in this dissertation.

Nevertheless, some perverted the Law’s original purpose, misappropriating its function to be a means of justification rather than the fruit of regeneration (e.g., the Galatian heresy, which will be briefly addressed in Chapter Six of this work). In Matthew 23, Jesus joined the OT prophets in condemning such unlawful use of the Law, according passages such as Isa. 1:10-17, Jeremiah 7, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-24, and Micah 6:6-8.38

The Canonical Significance of the Torah

The Big Idea of Moses (Pentateuchal Compositional Strategy)

The Mosaic Covenant is part of the Pentateuchal composition; thus, an inseparable relationship ties them together on both literary and theological levels. The Pentateuch’s relationship with the remainder of biblical revelation, including the NT, centers around what Sailhamer calls the big idea of the Pentateuch. The big idea of the Pentateuch is faith in God’s covenant. Sailhamer defines covenant as a “promissory agreement” mediated through God’s


38 Ibid., 129.
Word and guaranteed by God’s divine nature, his holy faithfulness.\textsuperscript{39} From Eden to Sinai, in the Pentateuch Moses emphasized the covenantal nature of God’s interaction with his people. The Covenant blessing is the living promise fulfilled in Christ and will be fulfilled in Christ (the already and the not yet).\textsuperscript{40} The emphasis on covenant is clear in Genesis 15 and 17, when Abraham, the father of the Israelites, received the covenant promise God sovereignly made with him.\textsuperscript{41} The Abrahamic covenental promise was fulfilled, albeit partially, in God’s deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt and entering with them into a covenantal relationship through the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 3:6-8; Deut. 10:15-16; e.g., Gen. 15:13-14; 17:7-13; 19; 28:13).

That is, the Abrahamic covenant was the foundation for the Mosaic covenant, wherein the blessings of the promise were given to the faithful and the curses of the covenant were threats to the disobedient. The blessings and the curses of the Mosaic covenant were not an added afterthought but were implicit conditions in the Abrahamic covenant made explicit in the Mosaic (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; e.g., Gen. 17:14). In the same way, what was implicit in the Mosaic Covenant became explicit in the New Covenant. Sailhamer follows Calvin’s theological framing of the big idea in the Pentateuch (Torah), whereby Calvin views the New Covenant as implicit to the Mosaic covenant by way of the Abrahamic foundation, revealed in the coming of the Messiah (Gen. 12:7; 15:6; e.g., Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:16; Heb. 11:8-13, 23-29).\textsuperscript{42} The covenantal concept of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience is not unique to the Torah but is

\textsuperscript{39} Sailhamer, \textit{The Meaning of the Pentateuch}, 435-36.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 525.
also evident in the New Covenant. Indeed, the New Covenant also encompasses eternal blessings and curses, according to Eph, 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 1:5-12; Heb. 10:16-31; and Rev. 14:6-13.

Furthermore, the covenantal language in Exod. 2:24 and 6:4-5 points to an already existing covenant, namely, the Abrahamic.\textsuperscript{43} John Goldingay observes:

\begin{quote}
Actually Israel is in the midst of a liminal experience, located between Egypt and Canaan, delivered from the first but not delivered into the second. Towards the end of its time at Sinai Yhwh will restate a covenant commitment in the most sustained piece of covenant argument since Genesis 17 and easily the most sustained piece of covenant argument in Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers. It promises that obedience to Yhwh will mean Yhwh blesses the people in manifold ways and thus fulfills the covenant (Lev 26:9)…. On the eve of arriving in Canaan, Israel will receive another reworking of God’s expectations that will take more overt account of the life that it is about to begin in the land. After its arrival in the land there will be another confirming of the covenant.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

So, the account in Exodus 19-24 is not of “covenant-making” per se, but to fulfill an existing one, advancing it forward through purposeful “reworking.”\textsuperscript{45} This led some to misunderstand the covenant to be a newer covenant through Moses, hence, the term “Mosaic Covenant.” In reality, the Mosaic Covenant itself is an act of fulfilling and advancing the original Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 15 and 17 (e.g., Lev. 26:9-13).\textsuperscript{46} The Abrahamic promise, then, is the root of the interwoven Pentateuchal motifs of creation, grace, faith, deliverance (the Exodus), which leads to the mediated presence of God in a microcosm of the new creation (Promised Land), sustained within a covenantal framework of promise and fulfillment (Isa. 65:17; 66:22-23; Rom. 8:19-23; 15:8-13; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-2).\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[44] Ibid., 370-71.
\item[45] Ibid.
\item[46] Ibid.
\item[47] Ibid., 371.
\end{footnotes}
So, such motifs overlap and complement the theological motifs suggested by Sailhamer: human failure, divine grace (blessing), faith, Law, and covenant. Goldingay also wrote of the Pentateuchal covenantal framework, “In the covenant, Yhwh is bringing the purpose of creation itself to completion in the experience of blessing and of the very presence of God.” There is a sense in which the Lord is directing redemptive history in incrementally progressive stages through various covenantal administrations of the sole salvific covenant, the Covenant of Grace. Therefore, the ultimate blessing of the covenant finds its eternal fulfillment in the New Covenant in Christ’s blood, which secures an imperishable inheritance (a new heaven and a new earth) for the redeemed individuals (the elect) (Isa. 65:17-25; e.g., 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-8). The following sub-section will develop the progressive nature of the divine revelation of the Pentateuch and its function in the rest of the Canon.

The Torah and Divine Revelation (Canonical Functionality)

The canonical functionality of the Pentateuch (Torah) and its relationship to the rest of the OT and the whole divine revelation (OT and NT) is critical to assess the extent of continuity of theological motifs and practical expressions. One must begin with the proper understanding of the OT Canon, which depends on the hermeneutical approach that would consider the theological


50 As Thomas also added, “Reformed theology has given nuanced and careful attention to the way that the covenant of grace is to be viewed as unilaterally established but bilaterally administered. All covenants, by definition, involve two parties. But in the case of the covenant of grace—God’s purposeful, inviolable intention to save the elect—Scripture gives no hint that it is a contract in which two parties have come to a mutual agreement. The covenant of grace is unilateral in the establishment of its terms and conditions. It is sovereignly initiated, its terms carefully and meticulously set out by a sovereign God…. While the covenant of grace is unilaterally designed and initiated, it functions bilaterally. In no sense whatsoever can the believer remain passive in the outworking of salvation” (author’s italics). Derek W. H. Thomas, “Covenant, Assurance, and the Sacraments,” in Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 580-81.
construct of Scripture as a whole.\textsuperscript{51} This Reformed approach employs the hermeneutical controls of \textit{analogia fidei}, which is the belief that individual doctrines are to be understood in light of the whole system of Christian faith and difficult passages in light of the clearer ones.\textsuperscript{52} The second hermeneutical control is \textit{analogia scripturae}, the belief that Scripture possesses an overarching unity, where passages should elaborate on and complement each other.\textsuperscript{53} As a result, such controls take into account the role of progressive revelation in illuminating the purpose and role of the antecedent revelation (e.g., Mosaic Law) in the life of later saints in the OT and NT.\textsuperscript{54}

Sailhamer suggested the Pentateuch is not a mere promise awaiting fulfillment, as if one needs to read back the NT into the OT in order to grasp its meaning.\textsuperscript{55} Instead, the Pentateuch stands as a light that projects into the future.\textsuperscript{56} He argued the Pentateuch is a “story of the covenant” rather than the “book of the Covenant.”\textsuperscript{57} This might seem like a distinction without a difference, but it is important to note how it informs the Torah’s canonical functionality (Pentateuch). The Mosaic Law must be understood against the backdrop of the Pentateuchal narrative. Doing so allows the reader to connect the Mosaic Law to the redemptive-historical metanarrative of covenants that impacts all aspects of a believer’s life, whether understood in its historical context or applied to contemporary life. Consequently, the Mosaic Law will be viewed

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{51} Sailhamer, \textit{The Meaning of the Pentateuch}, 550.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Sailhamer, \textit{The Meaning of the Pentateuch}, 550.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 552.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
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as an expression of covenantal fidelity rather than a stagnant system of laws. If the Mosaic Law is an inseparable part of a living covenant within the Pentateuchal narrative, then it follows that it must be inseparably connected with the Covenant of Grace, which was progressively revealed until its culmination in the coming of the Messiah.

In other words, the Mosaic Law is a part of the covenant where it is embedded, the only Covenant of Grace. If it were not so, there would be several such covenants, each independent of another with their respective conditions and modes of justification, as per Calvin’s argument put forth in an earlier part of this section. However, biblical covenants are suited for their time in redemptive history, each building on the one that preceded, fulfilling its promises and executing its judgments; there is essentially one overarching covenant, the Covenant of Grace. Thus, there is greater continuity than discontinuity between the Pentateuch and the rest of the divine revelation in theological substance and practice. This is the reason why the prophets were heavily dependent on antecedent revelation, especially the Pentateuch.  

Sailhamer expressed this dependence when he wrote, “The prophets did not merely bounce the words of Moses back and forth to the other prophets; they sent those words back freighted with their own prophetic commentary.” Sailhamer borrowed the term “echo,” which was first used by nineteenth-century evangelical OT scholar Ernst Hengstenber to describe the prophetic dependence on antecedent revelation, primarily the Torah (or the Pentateuch).

Therefore, the Torah is the base that prophets build upon, a cornerstone of sorts to biblical revelation, whereby all prophetic words must be tested (Deut. 13:2-3; 18:21-22; see also

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59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.
1 Kings 22:28; Isa. 8:20; Jer. 28:9). Indeed, the prophets aligned themselves with the Torah, interpreted its meaning, and applied its teaching to the lives of the people. For instance, Deuteronomy represents the Mosaic-inspired commentary on the Decalogue and its authority was recognized immediately after it was written and placed inside the ark. Deuteronomy is considered the conclusion of the Pentateuch, which heavily influences subsequent revelation. The books from Joshua through Kings were called “Deuteronomistic History” due to their literary style and theological composition that echoes Deuteronomistic teachings (e.g., 1 Kings 8 and Deuteronomy 12). This does not validate the compositional theory espoused by those who hold to Martin Noth’s Deuteronomistic History hypothesis (DtrH). Still, it points to an interesting theological correlation between the Pentateuch, represented in the book of Deuteronomy, and the Former Prophets. Accordingly, the books from Joshua through Kings recount historical events against the backdrop of the Pentateuch, advancing the theological motif of human failure in response to divine grace, causing the manifestation of the covenantal curses detailed in Deuteronomy.

Moreover, the Latter Prophets echoed Mosaic orations, such as in Hosea and Jeremiah, wherein explicit prophetic pronouncements of judgment and promise of restoration were uttered in accordance with covenant curses and promises from Deuteronomy 28 and 30, respectively. The prophet Malachi (4:4-6) also called for a return to the Mosaic Law, following the Deuteronomistic expositions of the Law. The same influence is evident in the Psalms, such as the Torah Psalms (Psalm 1; 19; 119). The NT is also filled with references to the “Law of Moses,”

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62 Ibid.
“Moses and the Prophets,” and “the Law,” to name a few (e.g., Luke 24:44; Rom. 3:21; 1 Cor. 14:21, 34).63

Indeed, Paul could be considered a second Moses, as he led the New Covenant church into a deeper understanding of the revelation of Yahweh, the Son, in the Messiah Jesus of Nazareth. Paul’s exposition of the New Covenant in Romans may be considered a parallel to the Mosaic exposition of the Old Covenant (i.e., Deut. 1-11; compare Rom. 1-11).64 Indeed, the Torah functions as the bedrock or the fountainhead of all subsequent biblical revelation in the OT and the NT. Hence, the Pentateuch’s (or Torah) role stretches far beyond the Mosaic era’s original audience to include all of whom God has called and will call his own, albeit in varying degrees of implications. In the following section, the revelatory and practical function of the Pentateuch in the lives of the OT saints will be elaborated on and expounded through the exposition of the CC, which will also be further developed in Chapter Six.


**Historical Background & Literary Unity**

The previous section established the Pentateuch is a narrative in which the Mosaic Covenant, with its embedded stipulations, carries both theological and practical relevance to the rest of the OT and even the NT saints. This section will serve as evidence of this relevance, highlighting the concept of justice and its covenantal implications for ancient (Israel) through the exposition of the CC. The CC is the name given to the portion of the book of Exodus following

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63 Block, *Deuteronomy*, 33-35.

64 Ibid.
the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue). The CC is found in Exod. 21:1-23:33 and it mostly follows a case-law style (casuistic), whereby it stipulates a situation and prescribes the just judgment in that case. Since case-laws (casuistic laws) do not address all possible situational variations, they cannot always function in a literal sense. However, it would be safe to say their primary function is to become the basic principles of justice observed by God’s people. According to Exod. 24:7, the CC became binding on redeemed Hebrews because it was embedded in the Mosaic covenant, which was later ratified by the people’s acceptance.

Moreover, these civil statutes are not entirely foreign to the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) peoples, as the CC has some similarities with the famous Code of Hammurabi, which was established by the king of the Babylonian dynasty in 1792-1750 B.C. This similarity was primarily due to the general way of life in the ANE. Nonetheless, there are significant departures of the CC from the generally acceptable custom of ANE societies. For example, the CC judicial laws are bracketed by regulations for worship, emphasizing the civil legislation’s spiritual nature. It also contains a comparably extensive treatment of a humane and just dealing with slaves. In contrast, of all the 282 laws in the Code of Hammurabi, only five address slaves.

Some redaction-criticism scholars may speculate the CC was in continuous development in the Israelite society because of its chronological order’s seemingly arbitrary nature. The

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68 Ibid.

69 Mackay, *Exodus*, 357-60.
evidence for the seemingly arbitrary nature of legislative order is evidenced in stylistic change from direct command (apodictic laws) in 20:22-26 to case-law style (casuistic laws) in 21:2-22:17, then returns to direct commands (apodictic laws) in 22:18. This has prompted some scholars to suggest the central portion of the CC was a later redaction. However, other scholars provide reasonable arguments that maintain the unity of the CC and its Mosaic origins. These scholars argue it is normal for an OT book literary style to depart from the conventions of the modern writing style. In fact, the literary style of the CC is not foreign to the OT writings. For example, the beginning and end of Job are prose portions that bracket the poetic portion in the middle. Similarly, Daniel begins and ends in Hebrew, bracketing the Aramaic portion in the middle. Some scholars argue Exod. 24:4 should incentivize everyone to accept the current form of CC, along with the ‘Ten Words’ or commandments, should be taken as a united portion or section, representing the earliest codified Law by which Israelites should be governed. Therefore, it is not untenable to trust the CC’s Mosaic origins and the homogeneous nature of its whole.70

Contextual Relationship to the Decalogue

God demonstrated his majestic presence and initiatory interaction through a magnificent sight beheld by the redeemed Hebrew slaves, who are now God’s people (Exod. 20:18). God addressed his people directly by giving them the Ten Commandments, but the terrifying experience prompted the people to request Moses become the mediator between God and them (Exod. 20:19). Following the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20:1-17, Moses went up to the top of the mountain to meet God (Exod. 20:21), who continued to give him the

70 Mackay, Exodus, 357-60.
legislative section of the CC (Exod. 21:1-23:33). The legislative case-law section of the CC is connected to the Ten Commandments compositionally and theologically.\textsuperscript{71} This is evidenced by the reiteration of the first two commandments (Exod. 20:23), connecting the section that followed with the Ten Commandments. Indeed, altars laws become a segue into the rest of the legislative section of the CC, thus indicating the spiritual nature of the CC. The bracketing of legislative casuistic laws further confirms the spiritualizing of the CC with laws concerning religious practices, such as altars (Exod. 20:22-26) and the Sabbath and festivals (Exod. 23:10-19). Therefore, the CC’s legislative section governs Israel’s societal relationship, functioning as the Ten Commandments’ legislative framework.\textsuperscript{72}

Justice in the Covenant Code

The middle section of the CC outlines approximately forty-two definitive decisions based on illustrations of real-life scenarios.\textsuperscript{73} These hypothetical case-laws are stemming out of the Ten Commandments.\textsuperscript{74} It is clear this section was not purposed to be an all-encompassing law nor attempt to become exhaustive in any way.\textsuperscript{75} Rather, God was laying the foundation of a just and equitable society that reflects his nature. Israel was to function as a beacon of hope and light that permeates the ANE world and beyond (see Deut. 4:5-6). Indeed, Israel was to become an archetype of a just and righteous society that reflects what humanity lost in Eden and the hope of a promised future kingdom where righteousness and justice reign. The various case-laws in the

\textsuperscript{71} Stuart, \textit{Exodus}, 473.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Mackay, \textit{Exodus}, 364.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
CC form the basis for ethics and morality for just and righteous judicious renderings. These stipulations focus on human relationships and the rule of law that governs infringements of human dignity and justice. In essence, casuistic laws illustrate the justice of the Decalogue.

Moreover, the case-laws provide the basic principles that attempt to be restorative in nature. In other words, it attempts to restore relationships and equity through a divinely ordained restitutive framework. Indeed, divine restitution aims to restore fairness and equity to a society ravaged by sin, which results in hate, violence, partiality, and greed. The judge or king was expected to prioritize justice by exercising the rule of divine law (see Deut. 17:8-20). The ruler was also expected to employ the proverbial sword of justice to rectify wrongs and restore fairness, inspiring hope through faith in the divine lawgiver (YHWH) who is the light in the midst of a dark and broken world. Indeed, restitutive justice amends societal injustices and tackles oppression towards various sections of the redeemed Israelite society. The CC laws were meant to address several societal categories, such as slaves, sojourners, the needy, families, property owners, judges, etc. In addition, these laws emphasize justice for the most vulnerable, such as the poor and slaves.

The following expositional section is intentionally succinct and brief because its purpose is only to survey Exod. 21:1-23:33, a large portion of Scripture in a limited part of a single chapter. The survey aims to attest to the validity of some critical premises undergirding this dissertation. The brevity of this interpretation does not detract from its ability to prove the following twofold vital contentions of this chapter and even the dissertation.

76 Mackay, Exodus, 364.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
First, the exposition will delineate the precise relationship between the CC’s various laws and the Decalogue, especially the second table of the Law, which the Lord summarizes as loving one’s neighbor (see Matt. 22:37-40; see also Lev. 19:18; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8; 1 John 4:20-21). Second, the exposition will also demonstrate the moral use of the Mosaic Law through its apodictic and casuistic laws from a portion of its judicial corpus (the CC), reinforcing the Reformed principle of general equity (see 1689 LBCF and WCF 19:4). Indeed, the exposition will present the practical ways in which a faithful Israelite was expected to love his neighbor, according to the CC, and ultimately, the Decalogue of justice.

The Laws of Justice (Exodus 21:1-23:33)

Justice for Slaves (Exodus 21:1-11)

The Hebrew word translated as “slave” in the ESV is ‘ebed or ‘āmâ and šiphâ, for the female equivalent. A better alternative for the ESV translation for the word ‘ebed in Exod. 21:2 could have been “servant,” which would convey the contextual meaning. This should signal to the reader the foreign conceptualization of the term and practice in Israel and most of the ANE. Nonetheless, it is critical to understand that the modern assumption of Western race-based slavery did not exist in the ANE. Instead, slavery could happen to anyone due to war (which was likely more tribal than ethnocentric) or debt; thus, it is better to use the term “serfdom.”

It is critical to distinguish between chattel slavery and indentured serfdom. First, indentured serfdom was more common in the ANE than chattel slavery, which did not occur on a large scale such as those of the ancient Greek and later Roman societies. Second, chattel

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80 Ibid.
slavery usually occurs to conquered peoples, while indentured serfdom occurs to free people who cannot pay their debts. The latter type varies in severity, from the seizure of land and property to the sale of one’s dependents.\(^{81}\) While the first type does not necessarily have a future chance of gaining freedom, the latter are able to obtain freedom once debts are paid.\(^ {82}\) “Later Jewish law softened the term to mean ‘hired man,’ and restricted its role. _Mekilta, ad loc.,_ ‘one sold into bondage for stealing.’”\(^ {83}\)

At this point in the Hebrew or Israelite journey to the Promised Land, no one owned more than what they took from Egypt (Exod. 12:31-39). No one had property, nor did anyone inherit wealth from their forbearers. In essence, this was a society being prepared by God to become the witness of his faithfulness and glory. They were to function as the mediators between the nations and the creator of heaven and earth, YHWH (see Rom. 3:2). Therefore, it was incumbent on them to live a life that would exemplify their unique status as God’s set-apart people and reflect the holiness of the one who called them out of slavery (Exod. 19:3-6; 33:12-17). All the following case-laws, beginning with regulating slavery, aim to fulfill this theological motif.

The Israelites were called to inherit the land God promised to give them (Exod. 6:7-8). Once they take possession of their Promised Land, all the Israelites will receive their inheritance according to the land division allotted by God (Josh. 13-21). This section takes for granted that varying circumstances may lead some Israelite community members to lose their God-given

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\(^{82}\) Ibid.

inheritance and fall into indentured slavery (serfdom) (see Deut. 15:12-15). Thus, this section intends for the Israelites to care for each other when such hardships occur, in turn, glorify YHWH by becoming a light to the nations (Deut. 15:1-11).

The CC’s case-laws begin with slavery because of contextual relevance to the Israelite audience, who themselves were slaves in Egypt but were rescued by YHWH.84 This section of the CC, though not exclusively, is primarily concerned with regulating all types of slavery, especially the indentured type.85 The CC also condemns, under the threat of capital punishment, the type of chattel slavery resulting from peoples’ kidnapping (Exod. 21:16).

Nevertheless, the section highlights the following regulations. First, the indentured servant should legally be set free, having cleared all his legal obligations (Exod. 21:2). Second, the servant would leave the house of his former master the way he came (Exod. 21:3) unless willingly submitting himself to lifelong slavery (Exod. 21:6) for the sake of his children, wife, and master, who gifted him a wife in the first place (Exod. 21:4-5). Third, Exod. 21:7-11 addresses the case of the serfdom of one’s dependents, whereby the Law distinguishes between genders. The female servant can become her master’s servant or his son’s wife, treating her as a daughter; otherwise, she must be redeemed by her family and not sold to foreigners (Exod. 21:7-9).86 Fourth, if the son takes another wife, he should not be partial to the new wife but treat them equally, giving them their conjugal rights; otherwise, she can be set free without any redemption payment (Exod. 21:10-11).

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Restitutive Justice (Exodus 21:12-36)

This section is concerned with restitutive justice, which means it aims to amend violations resulting from an incurred personal and financial injury. This section continues with case-laws (casuistic laws) concerning general guidelines for restitutive justice, whereby the judiciary has the power to punish violations of the Law. All case-laws have an explicit or implicit relationship with the Ten Commandments; this section is related to the fifth, sixth, and eighth commandments.87 Beginning with the sixth commandment that prohibits murder (Exod. 20:13), the following verses address the consequences of murder for all Israelites, slave or free, male or female, adult or infant.88 Exodus 21:12, 20, 23, 28, and 29 are examples of casuistic laws that entail capital punishment for murder.

Verse 12 is a general case intended to become the general principle for which the following cases are circumstantial derivatives.89 The principle is set that whoever takes a life, his life shall be taken. The following verse lays out circumstances that judges should consider during a trial before rendering a murder conviction. Verses 13 and 14 begin with a Hebrew conjunction or relative conjunction (וְׁכִי and וַאֲשֶׁר), which both are translated in the ESV as “but if.” These conjunctions allow for a variation in the commanding principle (v. 12) to be altered according to the ensuing circumstances. First, v. 13 considers the premeditated intentionality to commit first-degree murder or not (unintentional manslaughter). If the trial determined the first, then the v. 12

87 Enns, Exodus, 445.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
principle applies; if it is the second, then the perpetrator may flee the avenging family to a city of refuge that will be determined later in Num. 35:6-32 and Deut. 19:1-13.90

Second, v. 14 gives an example of premeditated intentionality that led to murder, which carries the application of the general principle given in v. 12, namely, capital punishment. The next case-law that deals with the general principle of v. 12 (linked to the 6th commandment prohibiting murder) is vv. 18-19. Verses 18-19 prescribe compensation to redeem Israelites who were assaulted and suffered an injury that committed them to bed for recovery. In such a case, the compensation shall cover the loss of time and the expenses associated with their healing. The next case-law dealing with the general principle of v. 12 is v. 20, whereby the variation is the victim’s socio-economic status as an indentured slave. Verse 20 affirms the slave’s death equals that of their fellow free Israelites.

Moreover, the same compensation offered to free Israelites (vv. 18-19) applies to the slave Israelites, the difference is the owner must let them recuperate, according to v. 21. The case is the same because the perpetrators in both cases must incur financial loss and compensate the victims. However, if the victim was his slave, he had already lost his indentured servant’s labor. The implication is the owner has a vested interest in ensuring his complete recuperation in order to benefit from his servant’s labor; otherwise, he will suffer more loss, namely, setting the slave free if the slave were to lose one of his faculties or incur permanent injury (Exod. 21:26-27). Verses 22–25 involves a pregnant woman and follows the same general principle of v. 12, along with applicable compensations to be given to the family of the victim (mother and unborn infant) who has been victimized. These case-laws demonstrate the equal dignity of all image-bearers of God, including unborn infants.

90 Enns, Exodus, 445.
The sixth commandment continues to influence more case-laws, such as Exod. 21:23, 28-29. Verse 23 reinforces the general principle mentioned in v. 12, wherein the individual responsible for the crime is proportionally liable to the victim or his direct family members. There is no endorsement of intergenerational liability or compensation, rejecting contemporary notions of intergenerational communal guilt. Thus, it provides an anchor for the theology of interpersonal (or societal) justice in the Torah (vv. 23-27). Verses 28-29 advance other variations related to the sixth commandment (Exod. 20:13) and its societal and judicial implications (Exod. 21:12, 23). In v. 28, the animal responsible for killing a man or a woman is liable and stoned. In v. 29, the negligible owner whose animal killed a person should lose his animal and be liable for murder (capital punishment).

Verses 30-32 impose various compensations on the animal’s owner, depending on the person who lost their life. The same rule applies to children, but not slaves, whereby the animal should be stoned and the slave master compensated. The violation of the fifth (Exod. 20:12) and eighth (Exod. 20:15) commandments may also carry capital punishment. According to Exod. 21:15-17, capital punishment is in effect against anyone who verbally or physically assaults their parents and anyone who steals another human being (kidnapper/chattel slave trader; 21:16).

Verses 33-36 address the various fair compensation for property loss (i.e., cattle).

*Justice for Property Owners (Exodus 22:1-15)*

This section deals with remedial compensation (retribution) for financial injury to property through negligence or theft. In addressing property theft, the fifth commandment is highlighted one more time in this section. Verses 1-4 are examples of case-laws aimed at addressing thieving situations. First, the convicted thief must compensate the victim four to fivefold for his unjust gain. Second, if the victim kills an unidentifiable (at night) intruder out of
self-defense, he should not be held liable for the perpetrator’s death.\textsuperscript{91} Nevertheless, if the thief can be identified (in daylight), the victim must seek retribution through proper channels, preventing vigilante justice.\textsuperscript{92} Third, if the convicted thief cannot compensate the victim, he shall become an indentured slave, paying what he owes through his sale and serfdom.

The remaining ten verses from 5-15 address compensation for arson, theft, and negligence (breach of trust). The standard value of restitution is of an equal commodity or restorative remedy; otherwise, the financial compensation shall be double the value of the loss. These verses also highlight the importance of due process in a trial through evidence and proportional restitution (Exod. 22:8-13). Restitutive justice is accomplished by conducting a trial on an individual level (perpetrators and victims) instead of holding families, communities, or tribes to whom they belong collectively accountable (contra modern notions of social justice).\textsuperscript{93}

\textit{Social Justice (Exodus 22:16-31)}

This section addresses societal injustices by presenting some case-laws with intervening apodictic commands that dominate the section. Casuistic examples illustrate these commands. Verses 16-17 address a virgin’s seduction in two ways: the seducer should marry her or compensate her father. This is not foreign to the ANE societies because virgins were dependent

\textsuperscript{91} Enns, \textit{Exodus}, 449.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{93} An exception may be made in cases where a specific group or community was actively involved in perpetrating an act of injustice. This is not the same as the pang of intergenerational guilt. For example, in 2 Sam. 21:1-9, the punishment was restricted to the living sons of King Saul, who possibly were involved in killing the Gibeonites. David acted against Saul’s House in fulfillment of God’s direct command. God’s wrath came upon Israel because their King blasphemed the Name of the Lord by his actions (see Josh. 9:16-20). Therefore, there is hardly any similarity between Saul’s covenantal violation against the Gibeonites and his Lord and the contemporary intergenerational notion of reparation.
on their future husbands to provide for them; otherwise, their fathers will have to do so.\textsuperscript{94} Hence, a man cannot take advantage of a virgin without being held responsible for her since she would be less likely to secure another marriage after losing her virginity. Enns suggests this case-law could fall under property laws rather than social laws, whereas a virgin daughter could be viewed as “damaged goods;” the father can accept to save face by marrying her to the seducer or just accept the financial “bride-price” compensation, which must be paid either way.\textsuperscript{95}

Verse 18 marks the beginning of the new section of the CC where casuistic laws end, giving way to an apodictic law-dominated section (with their associated punishments).\textsuperscript{96} Verse 18 commands capital punishment to sorcerers. The ANE societies punished sorcery, so the biblical command was not novel in that sense.\textsuperscript{97} Nonetheless, Childs argues this command is comprehensive in its scope because it implies extermination out of the land (see similar notions of extermination in the following references: Deut. 20:16; 1 Sam. 27:9-11).\textsuperscript{98} Although this command specifies the female sorceresses, there is no reason to assume it did not include male sorcerers (see Lev. 20:27).\textsuperscript{99} Verses 19-20 are tightly linked to the command in v. 18 because pagan ritual tends to have a mix of sorcery, bestiality, human, and animal sacrifices.\textsuperscript{100}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{95}] Enns, \textit{Exodus}, 450.
\item[\textsuperscript{96}] Childs, \textit{The Book of Exodus}, 477.
\item[\textsuperscript{97}] Kaiser Jr., “Exodus,” 439.
\item[\textsuperscript{98}] Childs, \textit{The Book of Exodus}, 477.
\item[\textsuperscript{99}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{100}] Ibid., 478; Mackay, \textit{Exodus}, 391.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
These commands can also be linked to the first commandment.\textsuperscript{101} There are other verses connected to the first commandment in this section, such as vv. 28-31. These verses are concerned with the covenant community’s relationship with YHWH’s institutions (religious rites and establishment, i.e., judges).\textsuperscript{102} The theocracy of Israel demanded the faithful consecration and wholehearted devotion of God’s covenant people in all areas of life. The remainder of the verses in this section (Exod. 22:21-27) focused on vulnerable Israelites, such as the poor, sojourners, widows, orphans. Like the Israelites, when they were in Egypt, the sojourners were without a tribe to protect them or a title of land or property. Oppression would probably refer to the mistreatment and harsh enslavement of such vulnerable fellow Israelites or proselytes. Other disadvantaged persons are the widows and orphans because they are susceptible to becoming prey for the wicked.\textsuperscript{103}

Moreover, the needy are economically vulnerable Israelites and must borrow money to sustain their livelihood.\textsuperscript{104} Such economically disadvantaged persons must be helped by interest-free loans and not become a target for greed and unjust gain.\textsuperscript{105} These verses demonstrate God’s compassion towards the most vulnerable, whereby he warns his wrath will abide over those who oppress such people. These laws also emphasize the need to love their neighbors, whereby no one from God’s people would be abandoned because God did not abandon the Israelites, who

\textsuperscript{101} Childs, \textit{The Book of Exodus}, 478.

\textsuperscript{102} Mackay, \textit{Exodus}, 395.

\textsuperscript{103} Enns, \textit{Exodus}, 452.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
were vulnerable in Egypt. These laws function as a reminder of God’s covenantal love and providential care for his people, which they must also emulate amongst themselves.

*Principles of Judicial Justice (Exodus 23:1-9)*

Building on the previous principles of justice, Exod. 23:1-9 continues to employ a predominant apodictic legal style. Unlike the above, these laws are without a prescribed punishment. 106 This section outlines the principle that would ensure a fair and impartial trial per the casuistic and apodictic laws mentioned in the CC. Indeed, this section establishes the guidelines for exercising justice, which collectively become the very definition of justice for the rest of the OT. The principles are as follows: first, a trial witness must be impartial and honest (v. 1). This is an application of the ninth commandment (Exod. 20:16). Second, the witness shall not be under duress nor be swayed by the predominant popular opinion and, thus, pervert impartial justice (v. 2). 107 Third, the witness shall not be partial to the needy out of a perverted sense of compassion (v. 3). It is a perversion of justice if God’s people, particularly the judiciary, should show preferential (partiality) treatment to the needy against others.

Fourth, a person should not harm his enemy but rather be of help to him (vv. 4-5). This principle implies two opponents would choose to pursue their grievances through appropriate channels instead of vigilante justice. Fifth, justice must be both impartial and decisive to vindicate the victim against his oppressors (v. 6). Sixth, true justice requires due diligence; otherwise, the innocent will be condemned instead of the guilty (v. 7). Seventh, bribes should be rejected and condemned so justice can spring forth (v. 8). This may be considered a practical

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107 Ibid.
implication of the tenth commandment (Exod. 20:17) because covetousness entails desiring what is not one’s own, which is one of the primary motivations for accepting bribes. Eighth, God’s people, including the judiciary, shall not oppress foreigners by exploitation or injustice (v. 9). These principles set God’s people apart from the surrounding nations. These standards are not mere cultic regulations but a representation of God’s holiness and grace, which the Israelites were required to live out and practice.

Furthermore, this section affirms the judicial principle of the objectivity of truth. Truth is not relative because God is truth (see John 14:6). He commands his people to pursue truth wherever it leads without distorting it for self-serving purposes or selfish gain. Therefore, misplaced affections that distort the objective truth, even if it were for the sake of the vulnerable, are considered evil and a perversion of justice. The same is true for currying favor with the wealthy or the majority of the populous over the unpopular and vulnerable. If justice should not be perverted through partiality, the ends cannot justify the means. God is impartial toward all people (Deut. 10:17; Rom. 2:11; compare 2 Chron. 19:7; James 2:1, 9). For this reason, he called Israel to conform to his image by rejecting any perversion of objective truth in the pursuit of true justice, which can only be achieved when justice is impartial. True justice transcends the life


109 Ibid., 471.

110 Ibid.

circumstances and the station of any person, powerful or helpless, friend or foe, innocent or guilty, wealthy or poor, all of whom stand equal before the Law of God in the CC.  

*Principles of Justice in Religious Laws (Exodus 23:10-33)*

In this section of the CC, YHWH continues the apodictic format of commands. Verses 10-12 focus on resting (Sabbath) and feeding the poor, sojourners and slaves, and even animals, demonstrating God’s compassion and care for all his creatures, including the voiceless. These commands directly apply the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:8-11). Verses 13-19 are ceremonial laws concerning three annual festivals: Unleavened Bread (Passover), Harvest (Weeks or Firstfruits, and later Pentecost), and Ingathering (Booths or Tabernacles). These regulations remind God’s people that all they have comes from YHWH, including their deliverance (Exod. 20:2; 22:21; 23:9) and their inheritance (Exod. 13:5; 23:20). In his covenantal faithfulness, YHWH graciously provided the Israelites with an abundance of his rich promises. Therefore, the regulations function as a reminder to Israel to obey the One whose salvation and providence they enjoy (Exod. 20:2). In doing so, they continually affirm their covenantal obligation of honoring God as holy, becoming a kingdom of priests and a light to the nations (Exod. 19:5-6).

The first two commandments (Exod. 20:3-6) directly influence Exod. 23:20-33. The first commandment requires God’s people not to worship other gods while the second charges

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114 Mackay, *Exodus*, 405.

them not to serve them. Verses 20-33 emphasize two direct theological implications of these two commandments: the first is Israel’s covenantal obedience and the second is God’s covenantal faithfulness. On the one hand, Israel is commanded to obey the voice of the Angel of the Lord (vv. 20-22), maintain fidelity in worship (vv. 23-25), wage a holy war (vv. 31), and stand firm without compromise (i.e., enter into covenant with the nations of the land, vv. 32-33). On the other hand, the Lord will ensure the victory of his people (vv. 23, 27), protect and provide for the people (vv. 25, 28-30), and bless the people with prosperity and posterity (vv. 25-26, 31). There were a few implications of the conquest of Canaan in this section. First, victory will not occur immediately, but it will be gradual and over an extended period. Second, assurance of success is dependent on the Israelite’s trust in their covenant-keeping God. Third, YHWH is the center of the people’s worship. God’s justice can be observed through his judgment against Canaan’s wicked nations because he does not acquit the guilty (Gen. 15:16; Exod. 23:7; 34:7). God is faithful to his word, fulfilling his promises (Exod. 13:5; 23:23). YHWH commands his people to live by and conduct their judicial and social justice according to his holy and righteous character.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter set out to explore the purpose and role of the Pentateuch in the life of OT saints, providing a cursory exploration of the CC and its relationship to the Decalogue. Evidently, the Decalogue and the accompanying judicial laws can be of moral use for Christians (the Reformed principle of general equity), explaining how one loves the Lord and his neighbor. This brief exposition presented a principled hermeneutic for theological and exegetical consideration of the purpose and role of the Pentateuch as a compositional work and the Mosaic Covenant as a redemptive-historical expression of the Covenant of Grace. Therefore, the Mosaic
Law is part-and-parcel of God’s will in the lives of the elect in Christ, whether they lived before or after the incarnation of Jesus. For this reason, Gilbert Meilaender writes:

The commandments that have Israel’s Messiah as their goal become for Christians instruction in “the law of Christ,” and the Decalogue gives direction and shape to their life. On the one hand, the whole law is fulfilled in the command to love one’s neighbor. But, on the other hand, the various commands of the Decalogue are needed to give specificity to the meaning of this neighbor-love.116

Indeed, the Law of God is eternally holy, righteous, and good (Rom. 7:12). It deserves the utmost diligence in study, interpretation, and application. Forthcoming chapters will continue to prove the fruit of regeneration produces obedience to the Law of God and is a living testament to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers (Deut. 30:6-14; Isa. 1:11-20; Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 3:8-12; Eph. 5:8-9; Phil. 1:9-11; and 1 John 2:3-6). Ultimately, the command to love the Lord by obeying his Moral Law, summarized in loving God and neighbor, is as old as Adam and as new as Christ (Deut. 6:5-15; 11:1; compare Romans 6).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STANDARD OF JUSTICE: THE TORAH AND THE COVENANT IN THE PSALTER

Introduction

The fourth chapter traces the theme of justice in the Psalter through an exposition of Psalm 119, which addresses the role of the Law in the lives of faithful Israelites. Indeed, Psalm 119 may provide a canonical bridge between OT faithful obedience to God’s moral standard and its practical implications without sinful distortions and the NT’s application of the same moral standard. To that end, the following chapter will explore the biblical theme of Law, which began in Genesis, through an exposition of Psalm 119. In Gen. 26:5, Yahweh affirms the faith of Abraham as evidenced by his obedience to the Law (תּוֹרָּה, tôrâ). The Law motif is interwoven throughout biblical books and genres, transcending both, as this study will demonstrate. Accordingly, biblical writers emphasized obedience to the Law as a sign of faith in Yahweh. For this reason, the Law motif is present in various genres, from historical and wisdom to poetic writings, demonstrating its prevalence in the whole of Tanakh.

Moreover, submission to the just and righteous precepts of the Law not only transpires through the Torah (Pentateuch), the Former and Latter Prophets, and the Writings, but also extends to the NT, wherein the writers refer to the Law by employing the word νόμος (nomos). This may be seen in the NT authors, in that the Law is fulfilled through the life of Jesus, the Messiah (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:27, 44; Heb. 10:16). For this reason, the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law should not be equated with the abolishment of the Moral Law of God (see Matt. 5:17). So, the biblical motif of Law, or Torah, is present in both the OT and the NT since

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1 This chapter is an adaptation and augmentation of a previously submitted research paper as a part of this Ph.D. program: “Loving Yahweh and His Torah: The Covenantal Implications of the Torah Motif in Psalm 119,” dated February 26, 2022. Used with permission.
obedience to the Decalogue (the Moral Law) is associated with the knowledge of God, trusting and loving God because such is saving faith in Yahweh as Lord and Redeemer. Herein lies the significance of Psalm 119. The psalmist expands the Torah motif to incorporate natural law (see Ps. 119:89–90).^2^ If this interpretation is valid, then the Torah is more encompassing than a set of moralistic teachings that may or may not be relevant to New Covenant believers. This exposition will demonstrate the psalmist views obedience to the Torah as the natural outworking of a faithful heart (regenerated). He sees the Torah as comprehensive and relevant to all aspects of a believer’s life.

This Psalm presents the most extensive treatment on this topic in the whole of the Tanakh and NT, demonstrating to the saints throughout the ages that the possession of faith necessitates obedience to Moral Law revealed in and through Torah motif and expressed exquisitely in the psalmist’s heartfelt admiration and pious yearning to unreservedly devote his life through worshipful obedience to Yahweh in the face of opposition and affliction (Ps. 119:107–110). Therefore, this chapter aims to present a canonical and theological connection between the Psalter and the NT, demonstrating covenantal continuity through the Torah motif. As a result, the exposition of Psalm 119 will present the reality that obedience to the Torah stems from faith and love for Yahweh and a recognition of the universality of his moral demands. This chapter will establish the authorial intent behind Psalm 119, highlighting the interplay between the Torah and the covenant motifs with their practical implications on the life of the God-fearing, Torah-obedient, faithful follower of Yahweh.

The chapter can be divided into three key sections. The first section studies the Torah concept in Scripture and the Psalter. This section explores inner-textual or intratextual (within the Psalter) and intertextual (canonical) references, such as Wisdom and NT literature. The second section will expat Psalm 119 and expand the inner-textual and intertextual connections of the previous section. Finally, the third section explores the canonical application of the Torah motif in light of the exposition. Indeed, this section will aim to establish the Torah motif is essential to Covenant Theology, forming a thematic bridge between the Old and New Covenants. In other words, the OT concept of obedience to the Torah becomes the New Covenant teaching of obedience to the commandments of Christ (John 14:15), that is, the Moral Law.

The Torah in Scripture and the Psalter

Scripture employs a broader and more diverse meaning of the concept of the Law than mere moral obligations. This understanding is critical for one to define the Law of God accurately. Determining the various theological nuances of God’s Law requires contextual sensitivity and canonical awareness. Nevertheless, the Law of God may thus be generally defined as “the system of rules that reflect God’s character, are built into the created order, and are revealed in Scripture.” This system of rules may be referred to as God’s standards. For example, the word “law” (νόμος) in Rom. 2:14-15 refers to natural law existing innately in the consciences of moral agents. The conscience operates as a moral compass of sorts, pointing to a standard that transcends the individual. In turn, people may act according to the standard or rebel against it. For this reason, Scripture considers all people moral agents responsible for their

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4 Ibid.
thoughts, words, and deeds. In turn, Yahweh views some to be righteous and just through faith, evidenced by the extent of their conformity to the divine standard, which is the Moral Law (see Psalm 1).

Moreover, the Law of God often refers to the Ten Commandments impressed on the heart of regenerated believers (Jer. 31:33; cf. Heb. 10:16; 2 Cor. 3:3).\(^5\) Of course, this dissertation argues the Ten Commandments are the most succinct summary of Moral Law and the republication of natural law, as discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Hence, the Decalogue encompasses the Moral Law. However, God’s Law can also be a reference to the Tanakh, which is the whole Hebrew Bible, the OT (see John 10:34).\(^6\) Finally, the most common reference to the concept of God’s Law is through using the term “Torah” (תּוֹרָּה, tôrâ). This is because the Torah (or the Pentateuch) is the collection of Mosaic books, wherein faithful Israelites understood God’s nature, covenantal promises, blessings and curses, and God’s requirements for civic, moral, and ceremonial duties.\(^7\) It is this latter understanding that constitutes the Torah motif in the whole canon, especially in the Psalter.

It can be argued the Torah motif in the Psalms forms the basis of the canonical theme of God’s Law and its implication in the life and worship of the saints in the Old and New Covenants. In other words, the Torah motif is the heart of a theology that seeks to understand the concept of right worship and righteous living as it relates to covenantal obedience. The centrality of God’s Law cannot be relegated to the periphery of the theology of biblical worship and the life of Yahweh followers. Indeed, a proper understanding of the Torah will presuppose a

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\(^5\) Collins, “God’s Law.”

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid.
covenantal framework through which a relationship between God and his people occurs, establishing the context for biblical obedience in the life and worship of God’s people in the Old and New Covenant.

However, it is important to note here that the Torah motif observes the distinctions between the different administrations of each covenant. In other words, the Torah transforms in a manner appropriate to each covenant administration. This means the Torah motif, like other theological motifs (e.g., kingship, priesthood, etc.), observes changes in fulfillment and applications. Therefore, Torah obedience in the New Covenant does not have to be identical to that of the Old to be considered Torah obedience because observing God’s Law must correspond to the appropriate covenant under which it is administered according to the various stages of redemptive history. Consider, for example, how a Torah obedience Israelite observed God’s law in their worship life and other practical applications when they were in exile. There was no temple, nor did they reside in the land given to each tribe as an inheritance, which would complicate a host of Torah commandments, such as most of the commands in Leviticus. This was under the same Mosaic covenant but a different stage of redemptive history similar to the ones that preceded the temple’s establishment in Jerusalem and the Davidic kingship.

Therefore, the Torah must be understood in the context in which it is applied, accepting areas of continuity and discontinuity of applying God’s Law under the Old Covenant with its theocratic judiciary and temple worship and the New Covenant’s Messianic age with its associated fulfillments. In the Psalter, the Torah falls under the former covenant. Accordingly, Torah observance refers to obedience to all aspects of the Mosaic Law, especially the moral aspects. Indeed, the psalmist of Psalm 119 is primarily concerned with the Moral Law, as revealed in the Ten Commandments. This should not be surprising since the Ten
Commandments are central to the Mosaic Covenant, as seen in the previous chapter. With that in mind, the Torah theme in Psalm 119 becomes increasingly relevant to the argument of this dissertation as it forms a theological bridge between the Old and New Covenant in observing the Moral Law.⁸

Furthermore, it is vital to highlight the historical background of Psalm 119 in order to elucidate its meaning in the context in which it was embedded. Psalm 119 was likely written between 1000 and 537 B.C. because the Psalter’s historical framework resides within the Davidic era to the return of exiles from Babylon.⁹ Consequently, the historical context of the Torah Psalms (Psalms 1; 19; 119) restrains the reference to the Torah to the Pentateuchal record. However, this does not limit its wide application to saints from all stages of redemptive history, including those in the New Covenant. Because an accurate understanding of Moses’s Torah necessitates going beyond the specifics of the Mosaic legal and moral precepts to learn more about the character of the one who inspired it, the Lord Yahweh.

Thus, the Torah must be understood as a witness of God’s redemptive acts in history, such as his election of Israel, all of God’s covenantal dealings, including his promises, blessings, and curses, all of which teach the Torah observant the holy nature of God and his spiritual and moral demands.¹⁰ The concept of Torah is often not a code word referring to the Mosaic writings, nor a mere reference to the superficial and legalistic. It goes beyond into the depth of knowing God, the worship he is due, and the life that must be lived by those who profess his name. As a result, the Torah becomes central to the faith of the psalmist and vital to the life of

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⁸ Also see the third section, *The Canonical Function of the Torah Motif*, for a further discussion on this.


¹⁰ Ibid.
any faithful follower of Yahweh. For this reason, Deut. 6:6-25 exhorts all faithful Israelites to remember God’s Torah, observe all its commandments, and teach them to future generations.

It is crucial to observe that one of the Psalter’s primary theological themes is Torah obedience, evidenced by the deliberate locations of the three Torah Psalms in Book I (Psalms 1; 19) and Book V (Psalm 119). In Book I, Psalm 1 functions as an introduction to the Psalter, emphasizing the centrality of the Torah in the worship and life of faithful Israelites. In the same book, Robertson argued that Psalm 19 highlights the function of the Torah as “revealing the way of the Lord alongside the revelation embedded in creation.” In Book V, Robertson added that Psalm 119 “magnifies the law in all its various applications to life.” Grafius also argued that Psalm 119 “serves as the center of a chiastic structure, in the midst of the ‘liturgical frame’ of the Hallel Psalms 113-118 and 120-134, the Psalms of Ascent, indicating that ‘the idea of Torah holds together the entire Book in a thematic inclusio.’” Hence, the Torah theme permeates the theology of the Psalter since it presents the undeniable implication that Torah obedience separates the righteous from the wicked.

As a result, the Torah becomes the principal artery in the anatomy of the faith in the life of all covenant members. In turn, the psalmists understood that rejecting the precepts of the Torah is the most repugnant expression of rebellion against Yahweh, the Lord of the Covenant. Before moving to the exposition section, it may be helpful to restate the objectives here. The objectives can be divine into three. First, this chapter aims to explore the concept of the Torah in the Psalter along with its canonical ramifications, which was the purpose of the present section.

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12 Ibid., 43.

Second, it is to understand how the faithful Israelites, like the author of Psalm 119, viewed the Law of God. Third, it is to explore the Torah motif further and draw timeless applications to the life of followers of the Messiah in the New Covenant.

To that end, the following section will present an exposition of Psalm 119, serving as the Scriptural basis of the underlying objectives of this chapter and, by extension, the whole dissertation. Through its literary and theological presentation, Psalm 119 is the archetypal manifestation that will amply demonstrate the significance and role of the Torah in the life of a faithful Old Covenant member. Building on the present and the following expositional section, the final section will establish the canonical function of the Torah motif. It will argue for the integral nature of the Torah motif to a covenantal application of God’s Law, such as biblical justice. Consequently, Torah obedience becomes a New Covenant obligation because it is adherence to the timeless moral standard, the Ten Commandments. Indeed, this is the same standard by which the psalmist lived and delighted.

The Exposition of the Text (Psalm 119)

Aleph: Walking in the Torah (Psalm 119:1-8)

This Psalm’s first strophe functions as an introduction to the rest of the Psalm. It presents a list of Torah-related concepts, which ultimately praises Yahweh as it recognizes him as the source of the righteous Law. The psalmist understood faithfulness entails conformity to God’s standard of righteousness and justice. Meditating on the Law is meditating on God’s holiness, praising the Law is praising God’s attributes, and obedience to the Law is the worship due to him alone who inspired it because he is the source of all righteousness. In seeking to understand Psalm 119, it is crucial to understand the psalmist’s diverse references to God’s Law.
Some biblical scholars, such as Sean Burt, argue the various references to the Torah in the Psalm are nothing more than poetic playfulness. In his words, “The primary orientation of Ps 119 is, in other words, playful rather than pedagogical, ludic rather than lucid.”\textsuperscript{14} He also adds that “torah in Ps 119 emerges as an immanent presence in the poem, unfolding as the series of its parts, the stream of synonymous terms that flows through the poem.”\textsuperscript{15} This may be an overstretch of the scholarly opinion such as that of Garcia-López and Fabry, who argued, “In addition to tôrâ, the author of Ps. 119 uses a wide range of synonyms: ’ēḏût, piqqûḏîm, mišwâ, ’imrâ, mišpâṭ, hòg, dāḇār, ’ōraḥ, and derek.”\textsuperscript{16} However, this view may be adequate if it considered that each of these, though synonymous, carries various nuances of God’s law based on the context in which it is employed. For this reason, Ringgren remarked, “It can be stated in general that in the Psalms—as in the parenetic sections of Deuteronomy and H[oliness Code] ‘legal terms such as hōq/ḥuqqâ, mišpâṭ, ’ēḏût/ʿēḏâ, etc. are used for the most part as synonymous expressions, by which Yahweh’s covenant will in all its variety may be extolled in fresh ways.’”\textsuperscript{17}

While the view of some, like Sean Burt, may flatten the multifaceted dimensions of God’s Law, Derek Kidner argues for a more nuanced understanding of the psalmist’s meaning based on contextual consideration. Kidner believes the psalmist refers to various aspects of the


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.


Law based on the different words the author employs, such as “Law” (tôrâ) (v. 1b); “testimonies” (ʿēdôt) (v. 2a); “precepts” (piqqūdîm) (v. 4a); “statutes” (ḥuqqîm) (v. 5b); “commandments” (miṣwôt) (v. 6b); “rules” or “judgments” (mišpāṭîm) (v. 7b).\(^{18}\) First, “Law” (tôrâ) (v. 1b) is a common term used throughout Scripture and also this psalm. It comes from the verb “teach” or “direct.” Therefore, Kidner argues since the teaching to which this psalmist is referring is supernaturally inspired by God, then it becomes “revelation.”\(^{19}\) Garcia-López and Fabry also confirm this, arguing, “In the Psalter tôrâ appears to denote God’s revelation and its promulgation.”\(^{20}\) They further argued that “[o]f the 36 occurrences of tôrâ in the Psalms, 32 refer explicitly to Yahweh and 2 to Elohim (37:31; 40:9[8]); 119:72 speaks of the ‘covenant of Yahweh.’”\(^{21}\)

At the same time, this teaching is not only passive but imperative revelation, directing God’s people to believe certain doctrines about God and his ways while denying others.\(^{22}\) Thus, it possesses divine directives becoming “law.” Kidner adds the term tôrâ could either point to one commandment or references a whole corpus of laws (i.e., Pentateuch), even all of God’s inspired Word through the prophets.\(^{23}\) However, it is more likely tôrâ refers primarily, but not exclusively, to the Pentateuch (more on this in the third section).

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Garcia-López and Fabry, “תּוֹרָּה,” 629.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 454.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
The second term that appears throughout this Psalm is the word “testimonies” (ʿēdōt) (v. 2a), which refers to the “high standard” of the Pentateuch or Torah, considering it a “faithful and true witness” because it reveals God’s holiness (Ps. 19:7-9; compare Deut. 31:26). Jenni and Westermann also argued “testimonies” emphasized the guidance of the Torah with “a view to Yahweh’s saving deeds and will.” They later added “ʿēdût may have involved the background notion that the tôrâ, particularly the Decalogue, functioned for Israel as a ‘witness’ or ‘testimony’ of God’s saving activity (Exod 20:2; cf. Ps. 81:7f., 11) and, esp., of his will (Exod 20:3ff.; cf. Psa 81:10).”

Furthermore, Kidner argued the third term “precepts” (piqqūdîm) (v. 4a) denotes the intricacies and particulars of the Torah, highlighting its relevance to all areas of life, providing all that is necessary to live righteously (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Meanwhile, André argued the term highlights Yahweh’s righteous ordinances imposed on his covenant people. The fourth term the psalmist used is “statutes” (ḥuqqîm) (v. 5b), which, communicates “the binding force and permanence of Scripture, as of laws ‘engraved’ or inscribed,” signifying the importance of law observance (Isa. 30:8). Also, in Ps. 2:7, hōq “refers to the divine oracle to the king, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’; and in 148:6, hōq means a limit that is not to be crossed.”

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24 Kidner, Psalms 73-150, 454.
26 Ibid.
27 Kidner, Psalms 73-150, 454.
29 Kidner, Psalms 73-150, 453-54.
30 Ringgren, “יָצְדִיק,” 146.
The fifth term is “commandments” (miṣwôt) (v. 6b), emphasizing the law’s divine origin and authority. Rüterswörden argued that in Gen. 26:5, the author equates hearing the voice of God with obeying his commandments. He added, “Here heeding Yahweh’s voice means heeding his law (cf. Jer. 9:12[13]; 26:4; 32:23; 44:23; Dnl. 9:10).” This term can guard against any notions that regard the law as nothing more than optional wisdom for general guidance, while they are divine directives that necessitate obedience on the part of the faithful. The final term “rules” or “judgments” (mišpāṭîm) (v. 7b) highlights the Lord’s position as the righteous judge whose judgments are wise, including regulating the “rights and duties” in all spheres of life and between all people. “For mišpāṭ the focal point clearly lies in the realm of justice, judgment, and law,” Johnson asserted.

Indeed, the term mišpāṭ often points to OT jurisprudence, highlighting “the entire judicial procedure, the forensic situation in its widest sense,” such as in Ps. 1:5. For this reason, Kidner observed, “Scripture, then, as the standard given for fair dealing between man and man, is a predominant sense of this term.” Kidner’s insightful explanations of the numerous terms the psalmist uses to refer to various aspects of God’s Law facilitate the exposition of this strophe,

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31 Kidner, Psalms 73-150, 453-54.


33 Ibid.

34 Johnson, “מִשְׁפָּט,” 87.

35 Ibid., 89.

36 Kidner, Psalms 73-150, 454.
even all of Psalm 119. In the table below, Christopher J. H. Wright provides a helpful reference for the key terms discussed:37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Hebrew word</th>
<th>Approximate meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Torah</td>
<td>“The law as a whole; basically meaning guidance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘edoth</td>
<td>“Statutes, testimonies, witness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Piqqudim</td>
<td>“Precepts, detailed instructions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Huqqim</td>
<td>“Decrees, inscribed and binding”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Miswoth</td>
<td>“Commands, orders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mispatim</td>
<td>“Laws, judgments, decisions, precedents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dabar</td>
<td>“Word”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>‘imrah</td>
<td>“Promise”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, Simian-Yofre and Ringgren view the various terms mentioned above as a comprehensive encompassing of “Yahweh’s promise, his word, his revelation, or his decisions, and on the way all these intervene in the concrete history of the world and of human beings.”38 They also described the term tôrâ as an overarching term frequently used in Psalm 119 and possessing various synonyms that reveal the multifaceted and comprehensive nature of God’s Word because tôrâ is “laden with secondary meanings derived from Deuteronomistic, prophetic,


and wisdom thinking underscoring the fundamental character of the ethical-religious demands of the “law.”\textsuperscript{39}

Now, in this strophe, obedience to the Law is rewarded by favor from the Lord, but not as a result of works-based salvation, but rather founded on an active faith that desires obedience. The psalmist presupposes a covenantal framework through which he relates to the Lord of the covenant by way of his obedience to his king’s Law. The psalmist’s obedience is also evidence of his faith in Yahweh (see also Ps. 111:10; 112:1; 115:13; 128:1, 4; compare Gen. 17:1). The psalmist understood that the righteous must endeavor to honor his king’s will because King Yahweh sovereignly chose Israel, revealing himself and his way of salvation through the covenant he cut with them. The psalmist resides within this covenantal context and through which a covenant member may be blessed for obeying or cursed for disobeying (e.g., Deut. 28). The blessed man of this strophe is the regenerate believer, who wholeheartedly desires to obey the will of his Lord by adhering to his holy “law” (tôrâ), as it testifies of Yahweh’s righteous redemptive acts (“testimonies,” ʿēdôt; see vv. 1-2; see also Ps. 1:1-3; compare Josh. 1:8).

This blessed man recognizes Yahweh is the lord of all, including in all the details of his personal life. Consequently, the blessed man applies the Lord’s “precepts” (piqqūdîm) to the minutest details because nothing in God’s Law is negligible (vv. 3-4; see also Ps. 72:5-14). This man’s faith is evidenced by his persistent observance of God’s “statutes” (ḥuqqîm) because he recognizes their source is the Eternal One (vv. 5-6; Ps. 19:7-9). Yahweh’s eternal and immutable nature is the reason the blessed man can be assured of his reward. For this reason, the blessed man can never “be put to shame,” nor will he be “forsaken” (vv. 6, 8; Ps. 9:7-10; 27:8-14; 112:6-8). Instead, the psalmist can continue to learn God’s righteous “rules” (mišpāṭîm), knowing that

\textsuperscript{39} Simian-Yofre and Ringgren, “דוע,” 515.
God’s righteousness means he will rescue and reward the righteous who perseveres in obedience (vv. 6-8). The inspired James to reiterate the same when he wrote: “But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).40

**Beth: The Purity of the Torah (Psalm 119:9-16)**

The second strophe presents two theological terms that broaden the understanding of God’s Law. The first term is “Word” (dābār) (v. 9b) and the second can be translated as “promise” or “word” (ʾimrâ) per v. 11a.41 In discussing the first term, Kidner observes that “word” (dābār) in v. 9b is a comprehensive term encompassing all explicit or implicit biblical propositional truths in all of its forms: promises, casuistic or apodictic commands. As for the second, it is akin to the first, but it may be distinguished in that it stems from the verb “to say” based on the context in which it is applied. Kidner adds ʾimrâ may also be understood as theological references to Yahweh’s self-revelation (word, e.g., vv. 11; 67; 103; 172; compare Prov. 30:5, Isa. 5:24) or to Yahweh’s immutable decrees (promise, e.g., vv. 38, 41, 123; compare Lam. 2:17).42

In this strophe, however, the psalmist seems to retain both theological references to embrace the totality of divine revelation. This way, the psalmist guards against relegating any portion of Scripture to an inferior status, which is unbecoming of any faithful follower of Yahweh. The implication is that all of God’s people, especially young men, must have high

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40 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).


42 Ibid.
regard for all Scripture. Accordingly, they must submit themselves under the holy divine revelation without subjecting it to personal evaluations but render complete obedience to it, conforming all aspects of their lives to it, whether thought or behavioral patterns (vv. 9-12). Therefore, the psalmist’s whole-hearted commitment is not only evidenced by his conformity to the Word but by incorporating it as a part of his own worldview or being (vv. 9-10). This is confirmed by his reference to the storing up of God’s Word in the heart in v. 11a.

Moreover, v. 9 poses a rhetorical question to which an answer is provided if one understands this strophe in light of the preceding one, wherein the psalmist shows the conflict between the “ideal” and the “reality” along with his struggle to reconcile them both. ⁴³ William Michael Soll observes, “The ideal is expressed in vv 1-3 in terms of the bliss (ʼašrê) of those whose way is perfect (tāmîm) in YHWH’s Torah. The psalmist’s own more precarious condition is expressed in v 5 (note the similarity to v 9 in both content and syntax).” ⁴⁴ The psalmist strives for the ideal by dedicating his whole life to the study and application of God’s Word, submitting to its scrutiny and examination for the sake of obedience (v. 11; cf. vv. 33-40, 67, 71). In using phraseology such as “Blessed are you, O Lord,” Herman argues the psalmist echoes Temple worship, wherein the Levites read and exposit the Law to the people, who in turn respond by praising the Lord according to vv. 12-13. ⁴⁵

If one accepts Herman’s view, it is easy to follow the psalmist’s ideas through the rest of this strophe. The psalmist seems to follow the Deuteronomic worship pattern, which described Moses’s exposition of the Law, possibly the CC or the Deuteronomic Code, on the hearing of the

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⁴⁴ Ibid.

first two generations out of Egypt (see Deut. 31:9-13). For this reason, he “delights” in the Lord’s “testimonies” according to v. 14 (compare with the “delight” extended to the Lord’s “statutes” in v. 16). The testimonies (ʿēdōt) refer primarily to the document that reveals God’s holiness, the Ten Commandments, which was in the Ark of the Covenant (see Exod. 25:16).

This understanding of Temple worship is not isolated, but it was the standard pattern from the time of Moses and after the return of the exiles from Babylon (see also Josh. 8:34, 35; 2 Kings 23:2; Neh. 8:1-3). In vv. 14-16, the psalmist esteems the Lord’s testimonies above the riches of the world and desires to diligently study the Law with meticulous details (precepts), resisting the temptation to go astray. He commits his way to follow God’s “ways” and will rejoice in them. As a result, he will never forget God’s “Word” because he delights in it.

Gimel: A Wonderful Torah (Psalm 119:17-24)

The interpretations of the preceding two strophes furnish the path forward, providing the interpretive method to this psalm. By now, it became apparent the psalmist deliberately inserts certain terms into different stanzas, demonstrating his intent. As stated earlier, the psalmist uses each of the following terms to denote a particular aspect of the Pentateuch, such as “Law” (tôrâ); “testimonies” (ʿēdōt); “precepts” (piqqudîm); “statutes” (ḥuqqîm) (v. 5b); “commandments” (miṣwôt) (v. 6b); “rules” or “judgments” (miśpāṭîm) (v. 7b); “word” (dābār) (v. 9b); and “promise” or “word” (ʾimrâ) (v. 11a). Consequently, each of the terms points to the theological idea appropriate to the context of each verse and its corresponding strophe (see above). In this particular strophe, the psalmist employs the following terms: word (v. 17b); law (v. 18b);

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46 Harman, Psalms, 846.
47 Ibid.
48 Kidner, Psalms 73-150, 454.
commandments (vv. 19b, 21b); rules (v. 20b); testimonies (vv. 22b, 24a); and statutes (23b). All of them are pregnant with covenantal inferences because they hark back to the Mosaic Torah and its CC. Accordingly, this strophe can be succinctly interpreted in the paragraphs that follow.

This strophe is a turning point in Psalm 119 as it provides an insight into the circumstances of the psalmist, who, like other psalmists, integrates a lament with a petition. He pleads for Yahweh’s compassion, invoking covenantal allegiance that was demonstrated by Law-keeping (v. 17). It is important to note the psalmist’s petition is couched in covenantal language. For example, he identifies himself as the Lord’s “servant” or “slave” (ʿebed) in v. 17. In the same verse, the psalmist’s desire for life is motivated by or coupled with an equal desire to know his Lord and obey him in the land of the living. He implies God’s Word is life-giving and the obedient life is worth living (see also Lev. 18:5; Deut. 6:24; 8:3). The author’s petition advances both an implicit proclamation of trust in God’s covenantal promises and an explicit pledge of obedience to Yahweh’s Word if the Lord would spare his life.

The writer demonstrates his theological prowess by implying the concealing of the Torah’s treasures (“wondrous things”) from the “insolent” and wicked, who do not obey the Law, as he petitions the Lord to reveal them to his loyal servant in vv. 18-21. In doing so, he points to the reality that the knowledge of God must be through the illumination of the Spirit, who also empowers his people to obey God’s “rules at all times” (see Deut. 29:29, 30:11-17; note the similarities with Matt. 11:25-30; 13:14-17; Luke 24:31-32).

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50 Harman, Psalms, 849.

51 Ibid., 847.

52 Ibid.
In vv. 22-24, the author presented the permanence of the Ten Commandments inscribed in the tablet of the testimony by employing the terms “testimonies” twice and “statutes” once in this strophe. He highlights the role of the Moral Law in condemning the sinner and guiding the righteous (e.g., Deut. 31:26-29; Rom. 2:15-21; 7:7-23). The psalmist was being persecuted by “princes,” probably due to his obedience to God’s Law (see Ps. 82; 86:2; 118:9; 146; 1 Tim. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:12). The psalmist’s allegiance is in his true King Yahweh rather than ungodly princes. Consequently, he will obey the Lord’s testimonies as opposed to the laws of man that contradict Scripture (see also Acts 4:18-21; 5:29).

\[Daleth: \text{A Life-giving Torah (Psalm 119:25-32)}\]

In this strophe, the psalmist continues his thoughts from the previous strophe. In v. 25, the author affirms the vanity of life, which becomes more futile as one departs from the life-giving Word of Yahweh (e.g., Ps. 71:20). He discloses his helplessness in the face of death and adversity. He advances pictures of his agony in vv. 25 and 28, describing their intolerable nature; at the same time, he trusts the Lord to save his life because he is the one who can grant temporal and eternal life (e.g., Ps. 34:4-22). The psalmist’s relationship with Yahweh is evident through the exchange between him and his Lord. First, the psalmist prayed, and the Lord answered, and now the former wants to obey his Lord forever (v. 26).

In vv. 27 and 29-30, the author is devoted to a life-long journey of growing the intricacies (precepts) of the Torah through meditating on the redemptive acts of God, departing from evil, and learning the Law (e.g., Deut. 27-28). Additionally, in vv. 30-32, the author beseeched his

\[^{53}\text{Harman, Psalms, 849.}\]

Lord to grant him an understanding mind (v. 27) a willing and a faithful heart that desires obedience (vv. 30, 32). Finally, he demonstrates that a faithful life is one spent learning God’s “rules” (miśpāṭīm), diligently adhering to his “testimonies” (ʾēdōt), and joyfully obeying his “commandments” (miṣwōt). It is important to note that he prayed for the sovereign Lord to grant such a life out of his abundant grace as only he can.\(^{55}\) Ultimately, such a fruitful life will “not be put to shame” but will rest securely in Yahweh’s salvation and eternal rest (v. 31).

**He: Understanding the Torah (Psalm 119:33-40)**

In this strophe, the psalmist believes the carnal cannot beget the spiritual. Indeed, notice how the psalmist asks the Lord to teach him (v. 33), grant him understanding (v. 34), and guide him in the path of obedience (v. 35; see also 1 Cor. 2:12-14). Knowing the Lord’s “statues” are spiritual, he pleads for divine aid in comprehending and applying them (e.g., Rom. 7:14; 8:5-10). Thus, in vv. 33-35, he petitions Yahweh to grant him a willing spirit to obey the tôrâ fastidiously, even to delight in it.\(^{56}\) Indeed, such Spirit-wrought yearnings change the carnal dispositions of the inner man to inclining his desires to obey the testimonies, summarized in the Ten Commandments (v. 36). Accordingly, he recognized that submission to God’s tôrâ is not merely an external conformity to a dead letter based on selfish motivations. Instead, in vv. 37-38, he recognizes that God’s ways lead to life as a part of the covenantal promises, but it requires a circumcised heart (as in the NT, a regenerated heart) that fears the Lord and turns away from evil for the sake of God’s glory.

Indeed, in vv. 37 and 39, the writer confirms his spiritual understanding of the Law when he petitions the Lord to help him overcome his sinful dispositions, such as covetous and


\(^{56}\) Ibid., 404-05.
idolatrous thoughts and the pride of life. It seems the primary reference here is to idolatry ("worthless things," see also the use of נָּוָּּ֑וְׁא in Ps. 31:6). The psalmist recognized the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 condemn such desires and actions (see also Deuteronomy 29; Matt. 5:17-30 and 1 John 2:15-17). For this reason, he hopes the Lord will not forsake him, knowing he will not defile the covenant of which he is a member. Nevertheless, he dreads the Lord’s enemies and their reproach; still, he trusts in the covenantal “promise” (ʾimrā), which guarantees the deliverance of the righteous according to Deuteronomy 27-28 (see also Ps. 34:19-22). Subsequently, in v. 40, he reiterates his allegiance to the Lord through his faithful longing to meticulously observe the Mosaic “precepts” that will lead to life.

*Waw: Keeping the Torah (Psalm 119:41-48)*

The covenant takes center stage in this strophe with strong covenantal language and allusions. First, the psalmist emphasized his trust in Yahweh because of the steadfast (or unfailing) love (ḥaṣāḏîm), which often denotes God’s covenantal faithfulness. Indeed, “The OT frequently uses the term hesed to denote an aspect of God’s character as it relates to his covenant with his people.” This term has been used twenty-six times in Psalm 136 in the refrain, “for his (hesed) endures forever.” Back to Ps. 119:41-42, the psalmist’s faith in the Lord’s covenant assures him of his “salvation” (rʾšūʾāḥ) because of the divine promises (ʾimrā), Yahweh inscribes in his “word” (dābār). The covenantal implications here are vital to the authorial

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59 Ibid.

intent. The psalmist has explicitly expressed his faith in Yahweh through the Covenant of Grace (see also Ps. 25:1-14; 106:1-8).

Second, the author added that he places his hope in the Lord’s “rules” (mišpātim) in v. 43, which should not be taken as faith in the works of the Law but in the promises that accompany them, namely, the reward of the righteous by faith, an active faith.61 This was echoed by VanGemeren: “The affirmation of trust in the Lord receives further emphasis here.”62 The same is confirmed elsewhere in the psalm, such as vv. 49, 74, 81, 114, 147. In the remainder of this strophe, namely, vv. 44-48, the psalmist reaffirms his fervent fidelity to Yahweh, providing examples of obedience and faith displayed through active devotion, meditation, and personal sanctification (vv. 44-45, 48); self-jeopardizing confrontations with kings (v. 46); loving and delighting in the Lord’s commandments (vv. 45, 47-48), continued worship as prescribed in the Torah (v. 48; see also Ps. 28:1-2; 33; 77; 143:5-12; Matt. 10:18-25; John 14:15; 15:8-11; Acts 26).63 The psalmist is not merely writing words of devotion, but he demonstrates his commitment through a self-sacrificial life of obedience, being ready to pay the cost of discipleship.

Zayin: Comfort in the Torah (Psalm 119:49-56)

In this strophe, the psalmist commences this strophe by imploring the Lord to act in accordance with his promises using the word “remember,” which is a term shared in other lament literature (v. 49; see also Ps. 25:6; 74:2).64 In comparing vv. 52 and 55, the psalmist remembers


63 Ibid.

the Lord when everyone is sound asleep. In his affliction, he pleads with the Lord to remember him (v. 49). DeClaissé-Walford argues such a plea “generally conveys the idea of ‘the presence and acceptance of something in the mind.’ Interestingly, the word instruction (tôrâ) occurs three times in this stanza (vv. 51, 53, and 55).”65 The frequent mention of tôrâ is related to the comfort the psalmist draws on (v. 50), considering Yahweh’s historical redemptive deeds that fulfilled his covenantal promises as per the Pentateuch (see Gen. 9:16; Exod. 2:24).66 Thus, the author is comforted in remembering God is an ever-present help in trouble (see Ps. 46:1-4).

In vv. 51-53, the writer exposed more specifics regarding his persecution on the hand of the “insolent” and “wicked” who, having forsaken the tôrâ, disparaged him through slanderous words and unjust actions, which likely damaged his reputation and caused him or others harm. Still, such afflictions and hardships did not seem to dissuade the faith of this ancient saint, who continues to obey the tôrâ exemplifying his enduring trust in the name of the Lord. He remembers the one who lives in obedience to the Lord’s “statutes” and in fear of his holy name endures and is eventually delivered (vv. 54-56; see also Ps. 15:4; 19:9; 25:14; 27:1; 103:17; 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Deut. 8:6; 10:12; 11:25; 17:19; 28:58; 31:12; 1 Pet. 3:9-17).

Moreover, in vv. 53-56, the author not only abstains from sinning but also is indignant against transgression, signaling reverent fear and fervent zeal (see v. 139; see Ps. 69:9; Rom. 12:11; 2 Cor. 7:11). As one of God’s people in a fallen world, the psalmist acknowledges he is sojourner through life, longing for eternal rest (see Ps. 39:7-13; 105:4-15; 119:19; 146:3-10; Rom. 12:17-21; Jas. 1:9-12; 1 Pet. 1:1-9, 13-18). In the final verse (v. 56), the author also acknowledges the Lord’s “blessing,” which is likely a reference to “all the benefits with which

66 Ibid.
he had been crowned; or, at all events, he declares God had borne testimony, by some signal deliverance, to the integrity of his conduct.”67 Ultimately, the author intended to convey the righteous will always be rewarded for their piety (v. 56) and, eventually, exalted over the “wicked” (v. 53) because the Lord is an impartial judge who is faithful to his “word” (v. 49).68

*Heth*: Remembering the Torah (Psalm 119:57-64)

In this strophe, the author pledges unreserved devotion to Yahweh, characterized by obedience to his “words” (v. 57). At the same time, the psalmist urgently entreats Yahweh’s kindness and grace to haste his deliverance (v. 58). In v. 59, the author turns to self-examination in a posture of humility before the “testimonies” (the Ten Commandments) of the Lord. In v. 60, the writer hopes in the Lord’s hastened salvation as he hastens to obedience. The saint is not bargaining with the Almighty, as he recognizes it is God’s prerogative to save him, but he must obey his Lord. This should not be surprising since the context of this psalm presupposes a covenantal relationship between the King of Kings and one of his devoted servants. So, in v. 61, the ancient saint’s tôrâ observance is as resolute as the evildoer’s remorseless “ensnares.” Finally, in v. 62, the psalmist contrasts his midnight worshipful meditation on the Lord’s “righteous rules” with the wicked who (“forgets”) the tôrâ of his God in the previous verse.

The author then turns to an essential characteristic of the righteous, which is his companionship and fellowship with those who “fear” the Lord and “keep” his “precepts” (piqqûdim) (v. 63). Accordingly, this verse echoes Psalm 1 (see also Ps. 119:1; 101:6). That is, those who fear the Lord do not disregard any part of God’s rules or teachings but obey them all to the glory of the Lord their God. Thus, the psalmist is one of the Lord’s righteous servants who

67 Calvin and Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 442.

68 Ibid.
worships Yahweh for his righteous judgments because of his providence and holiness, both of which demonstrate God’s covenantal love and faithfulness (v. 64). In this strophe, the psalmist becomes the example of godly perseverance amid affliction and persecution, as he places his trust in his Lord (see also Ps. 25:1-7; 27:11-14; 37:29-34; 38:15-22; 130:5-8; Gen. 49:18; Prov. 20:22; Rom. 5:2-5; 12:12; 2 Tim. 2:24; Heb. 6:15; 9:28; 10:13; Jas. 5:7-8; Jude 21).

_Teth:_ The Precious Torah (Psalm 119:65-72)

This strophe takes an interesting turn away from lament and focuses on the wicked’s transgression against him. However, the psalmist attributes his affliction to his own sin against the Lord (v. 67). Based on a cumulative understanding of this Psalm thus far, the writer seems to recognize three things. First, the psalmist’s righteousness is through faith, not works. This is evident because he recognizes his own sinfulness while simultaneously being a servant of the holy, righteous, impartial, and good Lord. Second, he is only righteous in contrast to those who defy Yahweh’s Torah without repentance (compare the righteous in vv. 29-32 with the wicked vv. 21, 51, 53, 69-70).

Third, it is important to note throughout this psalm the writer implores the Lord to teach him the Torah (vv. 66-71). As Augustine noted, the psalmist understood learning is not simply theoretical knowledge gained but, more importantly, righteousness performed.69 Consequently, the psalmist acknowledges that a part of learning by performing is enduring the Lord’s discipline. For this reason, in vv. 67 and 71 the psalmist recognizes his need for sanctification

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through the Lord’s chastisement, affirming his affliction is from the Lord and it is good because
the Lord is good and he disciplines those he loves (see Prov. 3:5-7, 11-12; Heb. 12:3-14).

This strophe highlights the Moral Law as the standard by which all actions must be measured, rendering judgment against mankind and discerning the good from the evil. It is interesting to note when the psalmist specifies the transgression against him, he points to a violation of the Moral Law as opposed to a Ceremonial Law. This is because Moral Law is the basis for horizontal relationships. For one to claim harm from another, a person must refer to the Moral Law, which is precisely what the psalmist does here. In v, 69, the psalmist charged “insolent” with violating the ninth commandment (Exod. 20:16) because of the smearing of lies, making the accused a false witness and a slanderer. This may be considered an elaboration on the last strophe, making the sin of the wicked more explicit.

As a result, the wicked ensnare the righteous with “cords” (hebel) of “lies” and “falsehood” (šeqer) (vv. 61, 69, 78). It is a transgression against the ninth commandment, bearing false witness (Exod. 20:16). Ultimately, it is a violation of the command to love one’s neighbor; the wicked’s actions demonstrate his hatred (see Ps. 18:4; Deut. 19:11-13; 27:19, 24-26; Ps. 129:4; Prov. 5:22; Job 36:8; Isa. 5:18; cf. Hos. 11:4). This strophe concludes with the psalmist’s praise of Yahweh’s tôrâ, which he esteems more than the fleeting fortunes of a vain world (see also Ps. 19:10; Prov. 8:10; Matt. 6:19-24; John 6:68).

Yodh: Delighting in the Torah (Psalm 119:73-80)

In this strophe, the psalmist presupposes the Moral Law (i.e., the Ten Commandments) of Yahweh is the standard by which the judge of all the world will render judgment. For this reason, he continues to make his case that he is blameless in the accusations and falsehood brought against him (v. 78). He emphasizes the only shame that counts is the shame before the judgment
seat of the Almighty (compare vv. 78 and 80). Accordingly, he contrasts his life with that of the “insolent” who transgressed God’s standard, which led to harming him. Interestingly, the psalmist acknowledges the providence of the Lord in bringing affliction into his life for his good, and in the same breath, he assigned the blame and responsibility to the one who sinned against him (v. 75; cf. v. 78; see also Gen. 50:20; Job 42:2-3). After all, the Lord God is the creator and sovereign over all men and the one whose ways are always righteous (vv. 73, 75; see also v. 68). The psalmist is reminded that as the Creator creates affliction and calamity, he also is intimately acquainted with all the ways of the psalmist (v. 73a). Thus, the Lord is the one who can enable the psalmist to understand his “commandments” (v. 73b). Consequently, he throws himself at the mercy of his God and King to vindicate him against his enemies (vv. 76-77).

In verses 74, 78-79, the author distances himself from those who deny Yahweh’s “commandments” by wronging their neighbor. At the same time, he associates himself with those who fear the Lord, obeying his “testimonies” (i.e., the Ten Commandments). For this reason, the “blameless” saint is pleading his case before the tribunal of the Lord based on his eternal “statutes” (v. 80). He is assured those who obey the Lord are those who trust in his righteous judgment. Hence, the psalmist is making the case that he is to be numbered among the God-fearing saints who will never be “put to shame” because they will be vindicated in this life or the next. The righteous will be declared as such in the sight of all, even when they are “put to shame” by the insolent’s “falsehood” (v. 78; cf. v. 80). Ultimately, the only adjudication that matters is from the eternal tribunal of the Holy One of Israel.

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70 Note how the psalmist associates with the righteous and endures persecution for the sake of righteousness in vv. 29; 46; 53; 63; 74; 79; while enduring suffering in vv. 21; 23; 51; 61; 69-70; 78; 85-87.
Kaph: Salvation in the Torah (Psalm 119:81-88)

The psalmist builds on the previous strophe confirming the interpretation set forth above. The difference in this strophe is regarding the psalmist’s elaboration on the mounting persecution he is facing from the wicked, rendering his pleas more urgent. In the opening vv. 81-83, the psalmist’s pain and angst rise from between the lines, yet his hope in the Lord rises even higher as he clings to the “word” (dābār) of the Lord, referring to all Scripture. In v. 83, the author employs the metaphor “wineskin in the smoke” to refer to the prolonged period for the skin sack filled with dairy to become yogurt as it heats up over low-heat ashes. Matthews suggested the author refers to waiting on the Lord without an apparent response. Accordingly, the word of the Lord provides comfort and assurance to the psalmist, who awaits his imminent deliverance according to the will of his Savior. However, the psalmist’s anxiety brings about the insistence through his impassioned pleas of Yahweh’s mercy and compassion (see vv. 82; 84; e.g., Exod. 20:24; Ps. 39:1-8; 101:2; 71:12-24; John 14:23).

Moreover, the writer recognizes the Lord will judge the “insolent” according to his “law” (tôrâ), the defined divine standard (vv. 85-86). In verses 87-88, the author is experiencing difficulty reconciling the Lord’s covenantal promises with his ordained suffering, even when the wicked rebels against the Lord while the righteous pleads for mercy (see also 1 Kings 8:28-32). In all his perplexed confusion, the psalmist trusts in the “steadfast love” of the Lord that grants “life” according to the covenantal promises (v. 88). Indeed, the author may be downcast but not


72 Ibid.
hopeless, stricken but not forsaken, for he who promised is faithful, and the steadfast love of Yahweh endures forever (v. 88; see also Psalm 118; Heb. 10:23).

*Lamedh: Natural Law and the Torah (Psalm 119:89-96)*

In this strophe, the psalm takes a slight turn away from the immediate circumstances of the author to look beyond his affliction to be relieved by his delight in the Torah’s flawlessness and excellence. The psalmist begins with the “word” (dāḇār) of the Lord as the foundation of creation and the rule that governs all the affairs of both the universe and humanity.73 He views the Word’s excellence, magnificence, profundity, and in some cases, mysterious nature analogous to that of the “unlimited expanse” of the cosmos (vv. 19, 89-91, 96; see also Ps. 19:1-9; Eph. 3:14-21).74 All of these are fitting descriptors of the Word of the Lord, which explains the author’s desire to grow in his knowledge of it.

In vv. 89-93, he maintains God’s providence, which power upholds the cosmos, is akin to the sustaining power he received from the Word.75 After all, the cosmos stands as “a witness to the power of God’s word, and generation after generation have a testimony, for nature confirms God’s steadfastness.”76 For this reason, the affliction is not overwhelming him, nor does it diminish his delight in obeying the “law” (tôrâ) (v. 92). Indeed, he cannot forget the life-giving “precepts” in any aspect of his life (v. 93) for he belongs to the Lord who saves his faithful covenant-keeping saints (v. 94).

73 Reynolds, “Psalm 119: Promoting Torah, Portraying an Ideal Student of Torah,” Abstract.

74 Ibid., 23, 138.

75 VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 752.

Moreover, it is vital to note the theology of the psalmist affirms the universality of the Moral Law. Just as the natural law rules the cosmos as a servant, so does the “tôrâ” direct the life of humanity (vv. 89-90, 96).\footnote{Harman, \textit{Psalms}, 864-65.} Since Yahweh is the Lord over both, then his Word governs all aspects of creation, especially his moral agents (see Ps. 33; Gen. 1:14-18; Deut. 4:15-19, 29-31; Mark 13:31; John 1:1-5; Rom. 1:18-25; Col. 1:16-17).\footnote{Ibid.} Consequently, vv. 94-96 does not only show the psalmist’s trust in the faithfulness of the Lord (v. 90), but also in the Lord’s rescue of his righteous servant, and the sure damnation of the wicked as per the holy Torah (see also Exod. 20:5-6; 34:6-7; Deut. 5:9-10; Jer. 32:17-19).

\textit{Mem: The Wisdom of the Torah (Psalm 119:97-104)}

In vv. 97-100, the writer presents how the Torah is not an absent-minded to-do list. Instead, the Torah is divine wisdom that makes the psalmist wiser than his enemies, teachers, and even the wise aged. Undoubtedly, the author’s love of the Torah stands in contrast to the lawless who reject the law of God to their detriment and eternal destruction (see Ps. 1:4-6; Job 21:14-20; Isa. 5:18-24). Between the three following references, “commandment” (v. 98), “testimonies” (v. 99), and “precepts” (v. 100), and the two all-encompassing terms “law” (tôrâ) in the opening verse (v. 97) and the “word” (dābār) in (v. 101) in the first half of the strophe, the psalmist seems to move from the general to the particular and back to the general in a manner that demonstrates his thorough understanding of Torah. In the second half of this strophe, the author presents the Torah’s subsequent influence on his life as he transitions from the theoretical understanding of the Torah (vv. 97-100) to its practical implications, affecting every aspect of his life (vv. 101-104).
The author wanted to highlight that his delight and ceaseless meditation on the Torah led to the fruit of godly wisdom with faithful and obedient living (vv. 103-104). As a result, the psalmist can discern truth, reject falsehood, spurn evil, and live righteously (vv. 101-102, 104; Ps. 1:1-3). Ultimately, the psalmist’s righteous living is rooted in his love for the Torah and he shows his understanding and godly living are a direct result of the transformative power of the Word of God (vv. 97, 101-104; e.g., Rom. 12:1-2). The psalmist epitomizes the Torah-observant believer, who obeys the two tables of the Law, loving the Lord his God and his neighbor as himself (e.g., Mark 12:28-34).

**Nun: The Light of the Torah (Psalm 119:105-112)**

This strophe highlights three critical truths: the spiritual nature of the Torah, the eternal nature of the Moral Law, and the eternal reward of the faithful. The following interpretation will substantiate the three claims above. At the beginning of the strophe, the psalmist employs the metaphorical term “a lamp.” In ancient times, lamps “were used indoors or in a cave where neither sunlight nor moonlight illumined the darkness.” Therefore, the author elaborated on the reality of the Word’s spiritual illumination in the believer’s inner life (v. 105; see also Deut. 10:12; Matt. 22:37; Luke 11:33-36; 2 Cor. 3:12-4:18; Eph. 5:6-20). “The LXX has ‘Your law’ instead of ‘Your word’ as the lamp to the feet.” If the first reading is correct, it may highlight the moral function of the Law, wherein the saint may learn to lead a godly life and be holy like the Lord his God is holy (see Exod. 19:5; Lev. 11:45; Isa. 4:3; 1 Thess. 4:7). For this reason, the

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author pledges to live by the “righteous rules” of the Lord in the face of persecution and suffering because he trusts in God’s “word” (vv. 106-07).

In vv. 107-10, even amid tumultuous times and at great personal risk, the psalmist’s unfltering devotion to the pure worship of Yahweh is ever-increasing as he perseveres in learning the Torah so as to persist in living obediently.\(^{81}\) It is vital to take note of v. 108, wherein the psalmist is offering a sacrifice of praise to the Lord using strikingly similar ideas in Heb. 13:14-16. This is not a coincidence. Indeed, if the context in Hebrews provides any insight, it shows even the saints of the OT must have understood the Ceremonial Law is a type and shadow of the real and eternal things (see also 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Ps. 40:6-8; 51:15-17; Joel 2:12-13).

At the conclusion of this strophe (vv. 111-12), the author (who may have been a Levite) implies the Lord’s “testimonies” are in themselves a “heritage” (e.g., Jer. 3:18), which is far superior to the land inheritance allotted to God’s people because it is a heritage that can never be taken away (e.g., Heb. 9:15, 12:22-29; 1 Pet. 1:3-7). Accordingly, the Old Covenant saints received two inheritances, one physical and another spiritual. While the former could be lost to the wicked, the latter could not (Deut. 18:1-2; Josh. 11:23; 13:14; 18:7; Matt. 6:19-24).\(^{82}\) Although the ancient saint could have lost it all, yet he stood firm on God’s Law, never conceding nor compromising his faith in the Lord Yahweh who rewards the righteous with an everlasting heritage (see also v. 57; Psalm 16; Mic. 2:2).

**Samekh: Hope in the Torah (Psalm 119:113-120)**

In v. 113, the psalmist’s “love” for the tôrâ contrast with the “hate” of hypocritical Israelites (e.g., Isa. 29:13; Luke 12:1-12), for one cannot love obedience and associate with the

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\(^{82}\) Ibid., 869.
disobedient (see Psalm 1). Because the idolators possess corrupt and adulterated minds which causes them to either enslave themselves by worshipping pagan deities (e.g., Isa. 30:9-12; Jer. 51:17-19) or the plethora of good things that can become life-idols, such as wealth, children, success, and power, among others (Eccl. 2:1-11; James 4:2-12). In vv. 114-115, the righteous trusts in the Word of the Lord, while the wicked put their hope in vanity. In turn, the righteous separates himself from the wicked and his man-made religion and hypocritical righteousness to keep Yahweh’s divine “commandments” with sincerity of heart (see Josh. 24:14-20).

Therefore, the righteous are upheld by their Lord and anchored in his promises, but the wicked follow the desires of their own hearts and man-made commandment in self-exalting diabolical schemes (vv. 116-118; see also Ps. 1:4-5; 25:1-7; 1 Kings 18:21; Eph. 4:11-14; Heb. 13:9; James 1:6-8; 4:8; Jude 12). Consequently, Yahweh shields his covenant-keepers, who esteem his “statutes,” and destroys those who spurn them (v. 119; see also Ps. 27:1-5; Deut. 33:7-12). For this reason, the righteous “trembles for fear” of Yahweh’s “judgment,” preferring to hope in his “promises,” trust in his “word,” love his “law,” honor his “testimonies,” stand firm on his eternal “statutes,” and obey his “commandments” so to live and be saved on the day of judgment (vv. 113-120; see also Phil. 2:12-18; 1 John 4:18).³³

Ayin: The Promises of the Torah (Psalm 119:121-128)

In this strophe, the writer turns back to a heavy dose of lamenting his circumstances and imploring the Lord to act on his behalf (v. 126), providing at least three reasons for such an urgent plea. First, the psalmist invoked the justice of God against his oppressors (vv. 121-22). It is vital to note again that oppression is an act(s) of injustice. However, such characterizations can

³³ Harman, Psalms, 871.
only make sense in a world with a universal standard of morality by which acts can be seen as just and righteous or the opposite. The psalmist considered the Moral Law operative in his context. However, the author must have understood that the oppression he is experiencing is universally condemned by the Lord, who transcends the redemptive-historical context in which the psalmist finds himself. The phraseology of v. 121 evidence this, wherein the psalmist asserted that he has “done what is just and right.” Therefore, the author appeals to universal moral imperatives that transcend the boundaries of the theocratic state to which he belongs. Indeed, he is not assuming the Lord is God over Israel alone but the judge of all the world.

Second, the righteous psalmist invoked the promise of salvation as per Yahweh’s Covenant (vv. 123-24). Although this salvation can be restricted to temporal deliverance, it would be difficult to argue the psalmist does not, by the same standard, hope for an eternal one (see Isa. 45:17-25; Rom. 14:8-12; Phil. 2:10-16; Heb. 5:7-10). Third, the psalmist implores the Lord to grant him life to grow in his understanding of the “testimonies,” the Ten Commandments (v. 125; see also vv. 129, 138, 144, 146). It is significant to note the use of the word “servant” denotes covenantal implications, as in Ps. 116:16-19; 143:12; 113:1 (e.g., Isa. 41:8-10; 44:1-2). As this strophe concludes in vv. 127-28, the psalmist tells of his “love” for the “commandments” by delving into all the intricacies of the Torah’s “precepts” to live by them and holding them as the ultimate standard of morality, the moral ideal that enables him to discern “every false way” and teach him what is “right” (see also vv. 72, 160; John 17:17).

*Pe*: Redemption in the Torah (Psalm 119:129-136)

In this strophe, the author reveals more of his theology and missiology against the backdrop of his arduous circumstances. Daniel L. Akin highlights the movement of this strophe
in the three human parts: the mouth (v. 131), feet (v. 133), and eyes (v. 136). The psalmist is communicating his desire to grow in understanding all facets of God’s revelation with his mouth, his readiness to walk in obedience to them with his feet, and his tearful sorrow over those who reject God’s Word. Indeed, the psalmist begins by proclaiming the “testimonies,” which are the Ten Commandments (e.g., Deut. 4:44-45; 6:17-20; Ps. 25:10; 78:56), are the delight of his most inner being (v. 129). Next, he depicts the Torah’s critical significance in the life of the faithful covenant member through two wonderful metaphors that speak to its function as an essential source of sustenance.

Also, he describes God’s “word” as a light that illumines the understanding of the simple by imparting godly wisdom and transcendent knowledge, which is an image often used throughout the canon of Scripture (v. 130; Ps. 19:7; Prov. 1:4; Luke 1:17; Acts 4:13; 1 Cor. 2:13, 3:19; Eph. 1:17, 3:10; Col. 1:9, 28, 2:3, 23). Second, he implies the Lord’s “commandments” satisfies the thirst for righteousness like the water that satisfies and rejuvenates the thirsty (v. 131; Ps. 42; 81:10; Job 29:23; Matt. 5:6; John 4:10-14; 7:38). For the psalmist, Yahweh is the only one who anchors the righteous in the way he should go (vv. 132-133a; see also 1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10; Rev. 15:4; 19:8).

In vv. 133b-135, Yahweh is guiding the life of the righteous, providing help to understand, trust, and obey all his “precepts” and “statutes,” rescuing his righteous servants from the oppression of sin and men (e.g., Deut. 4:4-14; Ps. 19:10-14; Prov. 14:6, 33; Job 38:36). Nevertheless, the psalmist is arrested by the reality that many reject the Torah’s instructions for

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85 Ibid.
which they will receive a just recompense, eternal damnation, and ruin. Finding no solace, he wept for those whom the Lord’s Torah is veiled so they could not believe nor obey (vv. 136, 155; Prov. 28:26; Isa. 6:9-10; 13:9-13; 43:7-12; 47:8-15; Ezek. 33:11-20; Matt. 13:14-23; Rom. 9:2-5; 11:25-36). By implication, as a recipient of Yahweh’s Covenant of Grace, the psalmist can rest in the assurance of salvation because he fulfilled his covenantal duties, the fruit of faith wrought by the Spirit of God (e.g., Phil. 1:29; 2:12-16).

**Tsadhe: The Torah is Truth (Psalm 119:137-144)**

In this strophe, the Torah’s veracity is intertwined with Yahweh’s righteousness (see vv. 137, 142). The following interpretation will demonstrate the former cannot be undermined without affecting the latter. In vv. 137-38, the writer insists Torah is inspired by Yahweh, making the Moral Law not only universally applicable but also covenantally binding, for it is the standard of righteousness representing absolute truth (see also vv. 151-52, 160; Deut. 5:22-33; 6:20-25). For this reason, v. 139 depicts the psalmist as consumed by righteous zeal and indignation as he considers those who reject Yahweh’s “Word” his enemies for they profane the Holy One of Israel (vv. 53, 139, 158; see Ps. 69:9; 1 Kings 19:10; Jer. 6:11-19). As a result, the psalmist defends the sacred Torah by praising its “promises” and commending its historical and theological veracity (v. 140). As for the Torah’s historicity, it reports factual history (see Deut. 4:32-40; 8:1-20). As for the Torah’s theology, it made promises of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience that materialized throughout the history of God’s people, both physically and spiritually (Deut. 27-28; see also Psalm 12:).

In v. 141, the author reveals his lowly status as he holds no authority nor possesses any fortune; yet he finds his treasure in keeping the Lord’s Torah in all its details (see also vv. 72, 162). From the psalmist’s vantage point, the Word of God is the ultimate source of truth and
standard of righteousness, and therefore, inerrant, for Scripture cannot be broken (vv. 142, 144a; see also 2 Sam. 23:1-7; John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Amid affliction and tribulations, he delights in the “commandments” of his God because it reminds him of his holiness and faithfulness (vv. 143-144). In effect, the psalmist trusts the Lord because his Word proved true and righteous. For this reason, he can trust Scripture again for its promise of salvation, vindication, and justice at the hand of an omnipotent and omniscient God (vv. 50, 107, 149; Heb. 13:8, 20-21). Ultimately, the Lord’s justification is not based on the psalmist’s inherent righteousness but on the former’s grace (vv. 142, 176; Ezek. 33:11-20; Dan. 9:17-19; Rom. 5:1-11).

Qoph: Keeping the Torah (Psalm 119:145-152)

In this strophe, the psalmist reiterates his grim reality at the hearing of the heavenly court, hoping for Yahweh’s swift aid since the Lord is near the righteous and hates the wicked and unjust. In vv. 145, 147, and 148, the psalmist makes a desperate entreaty, conveying his torment and misery through his sleepless nights, persistent prayer, and constant meditation before dawn. The psalmist reveals his intimate knowledge of the character of Yahweh, as he expects a favorable response from the covenant-keeping God who loves justice and those who faithfully obey him and despise evil, such as the evil perpetrated by those who deny the Torah (vv. 137, 144, 149-150), showing grace to the former and judging the latter in justice (vv. 151-52). Accordingly, he pleads with the Lord to save his life from the hands of his persecutors, as he vows to dedicate his life to obeying the Lord’s Moral Law for the glory of his Sovereign King.
Resh: The Righteousness of the Torah (Psalm 119:153-160)

In this strophe, the author demonstrates that his hope is placed in none other than the Lord his God, the only One who can deliver him and judge the evildoers. In vv. 153-57, despite his hardship and agony, the author trusts in Torah’s promises for he knows salvation is only for the righteous but destruction is the end of the wicked. While many may have surrendered their hope, the psalmist’s faithful love for the Lord and persistent Torah obedience proves his God-given tenacity that provides such unmistakable stability of faith in the Lord and unwavering trust in his inevitable justice. The author shows his love for Yahweh by imitating his character, hating evil but loving righteousness (vv. 158-59a; see also vv. 104, 113, 128, 163; Exod. 34:6-7).

In this strophe and throughout this beautiful Psalm, the psalmist repeatedly affirms his hope in covenantal promises, which undoubtedly find their origin in the Mosaic Deuteronomy (see Deut. 30:11-20; Ps. 119:37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). His faith, unphased by his circumstances, the author’s trust stems from his understanding of the righteousness of Yahweh as mirrored in his Torah (v. 160). Also, in v. 160, the psalmist is purposely reiterating the heart of this psalm, namely, that the Word of God is the foundation of all truth and the Lord’s Moral Law is the pinnacle of morality, and the standard against which all righteousness and wickedness defined and measured, for his time and forever, as such propositional truths transcend temporal boundaries (see also Ps. 12:6, 19:7; 111:8; 119: 89, 142, 144, 152, 164; Prov. 30:5; Eccl. 3:14; Deut. 4:8; Matt. 5:18; John 8:32, 17:17; Eph. 5:26; 2 Tim. 3:16).

Sin And Shin: Peace in the Torah (Psalm 119:161-168)

In this strophe, the author perseveres in his prayer, voicing grief and revulsion at the “princes” who treat him unjustly for standing up for the truth according to the Torah (vv. 161, 163). Simultaneously, he rejoices and praises his God for granting him grace and peace to endure
Additionally, in vv. 161-63, during what seems like the psalmist's confrontation with "princes" with the truth, the psalmist's persecution began. He provides reasons for his bold stance, namely, his love and zeal for the Torah and hatred of sin (see vv. 155, 157-58, 163; also compare v. 141 with v. 161; and Isa. 1:23; Jer. 5:28; Ezek. 22:6, 27; Mic 3:1-4, 8-10). Finally, in vv. 164-68, he always praises Yahweh's righteous Torah (vv. 137, 142, 160; see also Exod. 23:6; Deut. 16:19, 27:19) because it brought peace to him, knowing the wicked will not escape divine justice but the righteous will inherit salvation (Ps. 50:15-23; 91:14-16; Prov. 15:3; see also Deut. 10:12-21; Matt. 5:3-12; 2 Pet. 2:1-9; 1 John 3:20-24).

At the near conclusion of this psalm, the writer strings together various intense emotions, from love (of the Lord's Torah) to hatred (of wickedness) (vv. 163, 167) and from the distress and oppression of persecution (v. 161) to feelings of joy and peace in the Lord and his Torah (vv. 162, 165). In a sense, this strophe builds to the climax of the psalm through a summary of the circumstances and the response that occasioned this magnificent supplication. For this reason, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld rightly remarked, "The supplicant gives testimony of the Torah in front of kings of nations without being put to shame. In Verses 23 and 161, the upper class of princes belongs to the opposite party and the enemy."86 In other words, "The antagonism exists in the irreconcilable differences of existential life designs or rather life concepts: a life with a lie that negates the Torah versus a life with the Torah of YHWH."87 Furthermore, Hossfeld argued the psalmist could be seen as a microcosm of Israel, whom the Covenant Lord has called to praise him and live in obedience to his Torah despite being surrounded by wickedness and evil people.

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87 Ibid.
who hate him and rebel against his Torah. Hence, as the psalmist did, so should Israel, Yahweh’s covenant people, have done.88

_Taw: Praying the Torah (Psalm 119:169-176)_

In this final strophe of this wonderful Psalm, the author ends his beautiful prayer with humble adoration befitting a Torah-obedient servant, embellished with a worship posture and affixed in faith to the covenant Lord, Yahweh. Indeed, the beauty of this strophe centers around how it echoes essential concepts of the psalm, such as the importance of divine illumination for apprehending and applying the Torah, growth in faith in and the knowledge of Yahweh, perseverance in obedience and affliction alike, the way of the righteous and the insolent, and their respective attitudes towards the totality of the Word of God. But, perhaps the most significant reiteration is the ancient saint’s delight in, love for, and trust in the promises of the Torah.

In contemplating the character of God through his Law, the psalmist is assured of Yahweh’s righteous and justice ways that will eventually bring about the eternal ruin of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous through faith according to the covenantal promise of the Mosaic Torah. The psalmist acknowledges Torah obedience is the evidence of faith, not the means of salvation. Thus, he is saved through faith, evidenced by his obedience to the Law of God and perseverance in affliction as he awaits his salvation. However, the psalmist also knew that if the Lord tarries, he will still hope and live for the glory of his covenant Lord and Redeemer, who sought him first and will fulfill his promised salvation in due time as he did

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before (see also Exod. 2:23-25; Deut. 32:35-43; Ezek. 34; Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 John 4:10, 19). 89

The Canonical Function of the Torah Motif

The canonical functionality of the Torah motif can be observed in its comprehensive and encompassing nature, becoming a unifying theme that bridges the OT with the NT. This motif presumes a high view of Scripture and a practical dimension that transcends covenantal administration, as will be further explained below. For now, it is crucial to understand the composer of Psalm 119 provided a far-reaching theology of Scripture. Soll notes that Deissler, whose work on Psalm 119 is one of the most extensive, argued that the psalmist draws from all Scripture, especially from Deuteronomy, the Prophets, Job, and Proverbs, “to create his own theology of Scripture, …whereby the psalmist extracts material from Scripture, applies that material to Scripture and thereby makes it his own.” 90 Still others, argued Soll, asserted that the author’s theology has been “saturated” with “the spirit and language of Deuteronomy.” 91

Nevertheless, the exposition-based evidence above, reinforced by inner-textual and intertextual cross-references, points to the reality that the psalmist’s Torah motif, represented in terminology such as “Law” (tôrâ); “testimonies” (ʿēdôt); “precepts” (piqqûdim); “statutes” (haggûm); “commandments” (miṣwôt); “rules” or “judgments” (miṣpâṭîm), refer chiefly, but not exclusively, to the Mosaic Pentateuch. However, Reynolds advanced the notion that the

89 VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 763.


91 Ibid., 11.
repetition of terms representing the concept of Torah is meant to expand it to include far more
than a mere collection of a legal code.⁹² For this reason, he wrote:

The concept of Torah in Ps 119 extends beyond the commandments, statutes, and
regulations—that is, the legal sphere. Deissler comments, “Our psalm is not a psalm of
the law, but rather a psalm of the word of YHWH. What is more, word is to be taken in
its most inclusive sense.” Within this inclusive category of word and under the idea of
speech, one can include “divine creation, control of things and mankind, requirement and
prohibition, promise and threat of God.” Deissler concludes that the psalm works at times
like a magnifying glass and at times like a prism; thus one can discern “the unity and
diversity of the divine speech” in Ps 119.⁹³

Therefore, one cannot restrict the Torah motif to the Mosaic legal code in the Mosaic
dispensation but must look beyond to an expanded covenantal application of the Torah that
considers the wholistic view of God’s Word the psalmist of Psalm 119 espoused. Indeed, this
exposition advanced sufficient evidence to conclude that the Torah motif is intertwined with the
covenant motif, even presupposing it. Accordingly, the psalmist understands Torah obedience as
covenantal faithfulness and vice-versa. In his thought-provoking dissertation, Kevin J. Moore
concluded the meaning of “תּוֹרָּה” in the Psalter refers to the Pentateuch in conjunction with the
stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant.⁹⁴ He states:

Based upon the linguistic evidence within the psalms that employ תּוֹרָּה, this dissertation
finds that the term is used in three semantically distinct ways. There is significant
evidence to support that תּוֹרָּה signifies the Pentateuch in Psalms 1; 37; 40; 94; 119 and in
Ps 78:5, 10. Second, the data suggest that תּוֹרָּה refers to the stipulations of the Sinaitic
covenant in Psalms 89 and 105.⁹⁵

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⁹² Kent Reynolds, Torah As Teacher: The Exemplary Torah Student in Psalm 119 (Bronx: BRILL, 2010),
107, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁹³ Ibid.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 257, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses
%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fmeaning-hebrew-word-torah-book-psalms%2Fdocview%2F1285506094%2Fse-
2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

⁹⁵ Ibid.
Paul R. House also emphasizes “Psalm 119 anchors the nation and its covenant in the written word here, just as Psalm 19 does in part one.”96 Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the Torah motif expects believers to obey the covenantal stipulations highlighted in the Pentateuch. In turn, faithful covenant members show evidence of their allegiance to their covenant Lord by obeying his Torah. More specifically, the psalmists insist believers obey the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, which represent a succinct summary of the Law in the Mosaic Covenant, as per Exodus 20.

Consequently, if the Torah motif is attached to covenantal obedience in the context of the Mosaic covenant, then one may ask how this carries forward to the New Covenant? At this junction, the canonical function of the Torah motif takes center stage. In the Psalter, obedience to the Torah presupposes a covenantal relationship. J. A. Grant writes, “Covenantal ideas provide the backbone to the presuppositions of Israel’s wisdom worldview, and the three books of the Wisdom literature cannot be understood apart from covenant.”97 Longman also highlights this concept when he writes of “the Psalms as a Covenant book” or a book about the covenant; he notes:

It is true that there are relatively few psalms (only twelve) which explicitly reflect on God’s covenant with his people. A smaller number of psalms have covenant as a major theme (for instance, Ps 89 and 132). Nonetheless, we can’t ignore the fact that the psalmists speak out of the context of covenant. These are people who speak to God and about God on the basis of being in a covenant relationship with him. Thus, covenant is a concept which ties together many strands of the theology of the Psalms.98

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Also, Robertson emphasized the connection between the Psalter’s theme of covenant and the relevance of the Moral Law in the practical lives of Old Covenant believers. He writes, “More critical for the psalmist is the moral law, particularly as summarized in the Ten Words…. So the covenantal law of Moses in all its different dimensions is recognized by the various psalmists as having ongoing relevance for the lives of God’s people.”99 The purpose of the Torah motif is to highlight obedience to the Moral Law as an essential covenantal expectation. This also means the biblical theme of covenant necessitates a moral dimension. That is, obedience to the Moral Law must be attached to all biblical covenants; hence, obedience to the Moral Law is an essential characteristic of a faithful covenant member.

The question may be asked: “Can the same be expected of New Covenant believers?” The short answer is that canonical consistency dictates a positive response to this question. However, more needs to be said before cementing this conclusion. Undoubtedly, the answer carries significant canonical ramifications that impact how a New Covenant believer relates to the Lord of the Covenant, Yahweh. As already discussed in Chapter Three, both the Old and New Covenant are inseparable administrations from the Covenant of Grace, which means the elect members of the Old or the New are members of the overarching Covenant of Grace. All this to say the NT presupposes the same logic as the psalmist, namely, linking salvific covenantal membership with obedience to the Moral Law. For this reason, “Calvin saw the psalm as an exhortation to godliness and the study of the law.”100

Therefore, the NT affirms the uniformity of the principle, dictating New Covenant believers are reckoned faithful only as they provide evidence of conformity to the Moral Law,

99 Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*, 45, 47.

according to Matt. 7:12-23; John 14:15, 21, 23, 15:10; Rom. 7:12, 14; James 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3-6, 5:3; 2 John 6. So, is the Moral Law in the New Covenant the same as the Mosaic? Yes, it is. However, it is important to note the threefold division of the Mosaic Law mentioned in the previous chapter is helpful here. In the Pentateuch, all the ceremonial, judicial, and moral commandments are embedded within the Mosaic Law and Covenant. Accordingly, the laws commonly grouped under the ceremonial and judicial rules are no longer binding as they have expired with the theocratic state of Israel, which was under the Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 8:13; see also WCF Ch. 19). Only the “general equity” of judicial laws remains binding, which means the moral principles they presuppose endure as they elaborate on the Ten Commandments.

As seen through the expositional data, the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue (Exod. 20) constitute the Moral Law, which is forever binding on humanity, especially covenant members, as it reflects what God requires of his faithful covenant people. Indeed, the Decalogue becomes the standard of morality and constitutes the divine rule of faithfulness to the holy covenant Lord, who established it (see also Westminster Larger Catechism Questions 91-98). Therefore, regenerate New Covenant members must follow the example set by the psalmist of Psalm 119, who understood the integral role of moral obedience to an active faith in Yahweh. Ultimately, this is the example set forth by the righteous man par excellence, Jesus. For this reason, Christians understand conforming their lives to the image of the Son is not a condition but the fruit of salvation (John 15:1-10). Indeed, New Covenant believers have the Moral Law of God written on their hearts in fulfillment of Heb. 8:10-12 and 10:16-18, quoting Jer. 31:33-34.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the exposition of Psalm 119, this chapter established the connection between the concept of the Torah in the Psalter and the canonical theme of the covenant, providing the necessary foundation for a covenantal application on the New Covenant members. Accordingly, New Covenant believers can apply the same concept of moral obedience to their lives as the psalmist applied it to his. Subsequently, New Covenant believers, like the psalmist of Psalm 119, can love Yahweh and delight in the perfection of his Word, devoting their life to live according to the precepts of the Moral Law for the glory of the Triune God. This is the life of one created anew, having been born again, becoming a person who desires to live a righteous life filled with good works to the glory of Christ (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 2:10, 4:20-25; Titus. 2:11-14, 3:3-8).

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. (Titus 3:3-8)
CHAPTER 5

BIBLICAL JUSTICE IN ACTION: A COVENENTAL APPLICATION
OF THE MORAL LAW

Introduction

This chapter presents a final turning point in preparation for the conclusion of the thesis
underlying this dissertation. This chapter explores and applies the findings of previous chapters
to the NT in order to discern covenantal applicability to New Covenant saints and their Great
Commission mandate. To that end, the letter of James becomes a prime candidate to assess the
level of commensurability between obedience to the Moral Law under the Old Covenant and the
New. Indeed, James’s letter is unique in the NT literature for at least four reasons. First, James
stands unique as the single letter representing the genre of Wisdom. Second, James is helpful for
this dissertation because it is entirely practical to the life of NT saints.2 Third, it contains plenty
of references to the Law. Fourth, the letter brings together themes of OT Wisdom and the Mosaic
Torah only to apply them anew to members of the New Covenant. Consequently, the letter of
James becomes one of the most distinctives books of the NT, presenting unique literary and
theological features uncommon among the rest of the NT canon.

The distinctive features of this letter may set it apart from the rest of the NT canon but
also positions it as a primary canonical bridge for the theme of justice between the Covenants.
As such, it brings together a medley of teachings from the Tanakh to the forefront of covenantal
obedience. Even more, the Moral Law is presented in direct relationship to Jesus’s teachings and

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1 This chapter is an adaptation and augmentation of a previously submitted research paper as a part of this
dated May 01, 2022. Used with permission.

his lordship over all areas of church life and governance, including all aspects of the lives of his elect saints. This chapter argues James demands obedience to the Ten Commandments as a direct consequence of faith in the gospel of Jesus.

More specifically, the Torah’s teachings find a place in the New Covenant as James applies the commandment to love one’s neighbor, which is the summary of the second table of the Law and lies at the heart of the OT teachings (see James 2:8; compare with Lev. 19:18; Matt 7:12; 19:19; 22:39-40; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27-28; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14). Nevertheless, the moral teachings of James demand absolute submission to the Lord through the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, with a comprehensive application to all areas of the Christian life. As a result, the Torah plays a central role in James’s teaching in James 2:1-13, making it relevant to New Covenant saints of every age. For this reason, this letter’s theology is critical to understanding and applying the Moral Law today. However, this chapter will limit the scope of the research to James 2:1-13, giving way to exploring an intriguing contemporary application, which will function as a case study for the thesis undergirding this dissertation. Through historical, literary, exegetical, and canonical analysis of James 2:1-13, this chapter aims to explore the contemporary application of the Torah to the ecclesiastical controversy of barring unvaccinated Christians from attending the corporate gathering of the saints on the Lord’s Day.

**Historical Analysis**

**Authorship, Date, Audience, Location, and Occasion**

Scholars have debated the authorship of this letter. However, the author may be deduced through the process of eliminating the least likely candidates for authorship until one emerges as the most judicious choice. According to historical data, at least three individuals carry the same
name as the title of this letter. The NT refers to three individuals named James. The three persons named James are among the most prominent in the first-century church, such as James, the son of Zebedee, James, the son of Alphaeus, and James, the brother of the Lord. The last one seems to be the most likely candidate, which is the traditional view. First, James, the son of Zebedee, is not the author because, according to Acts 12:2, it appears he met his end under Herod Agrippa I, circa A.D. 44. This date is earlier than the likely date of composition, which is estimated between A.D. 45-62. Second, the apostle James, the son of Alphaeus (or James the younger?) mentioned in Mark 3:18, 15:40; Matthew 10:3; 27:56; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13, is an unlikely candidate because the author of the letter seems to have been much more prominent than this apostle.

Furthermore, Moo asserted the son of Alphaeus seems too obscure for such a brief introduction that does not take the time to elaborate on the authority of the person who wrote it. The epistle was intended for a broad audience, challenging the view that suggests the author was anyone less prominent than the brother of the Lord Jesus, the leader of the church in Jerusalem (see James 1:1). Indeed, the author of this epistle was prominent enough that Jude identifies himself as his brother in Jude 1 (compare with Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). Hence, it is very likely that James, the son of Joseph and Mary and Jesus’s brother, was this epistle’s author. If this view

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3 Moo, The Letter of James, 9.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
is correct, this letter can be dated to the fifties of the first century, per Richardson.\footnote{Richardson, James, 39.} Also, the letter may not be dated after his martyrdom in A.D. 62.\footnote{Moo, The Letter of James, 25.}

In support of the prominence of the author of this letter, the author seemed to be well known because he could direct his letter to a broader audience of mostly Christians of Jewish heritage, according to James 1:1, “the twelve tribes in the dispersion.”\footnote{Daniel M. Doriani, James, Reformed Expository Commentary, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 12, Logos Electronic Edition.} According to Daniel M. Doriani, the author’s original audience was very familiar with the Judean and Israelite seasons as he mentioned the two rainy seasons (5:7) as well as suggesting the synagogues were the primary meeting place of his readers, also suggesting a Christian audience with a local Jewish background ($\sigmaυναγωγή$ in 2:2). Doriani has persuasively argued the writer recognized his readers take pride in monotheism (2:19), a conspicuously Jewish and later Christian distinctive which had set that community apart from the surrounding Greco-Roman pagan society. Thus, one may conclude that James’s primary audiences were Christians of a Jewish heritage who resided somewhere in Judea and Galilee.\footnote{Ibid.}

Alternatively, Richardson was among other theologians who argued “dispersion” probably refers to diaspora Jews or Jewish Christians living outside Galilee and Judea.\footnote{Richardson, James, 39.} This is possible since they may have learned about the climate of the Promised Land through religious education or have traveled to the region for religious purposes to perform pilgrimage or other ceremonial rights or even visit family for some important occasion. Nonetheless, there seems to
be a scholarly consensus regarding the Jewish nature of the letter’s content and theology, which makes it more likely the original audience was predominantly Jewish Christian congregations.\textsuperscript{12} Another feature of these congregations was their leadership structure. They were led by a plurality of elders/teachers (3:1; 5:14).\textsuperscript{13} This leadership structure parallels first-century synagogues (see James 2:2; Luke 8:49; 13:14; Acts 18:8, 17).\textsuperscript{14} At the same time, the letter of James is distinctly Christian, reflecting the apostolic church, notwithstanding its Jewish heritage.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, the theology of this epistle shows James relies on the Torah and Wisdom literature as the basis of his exhortation, as the following exposition of the text will demonstrate.

Additionally, it is challenging to point out particular reasons that occasioned this letter because of the need for more relevant sociohistorical and other information that could help determine the context. However, one can ascertain that the letter has been addressed to several congregations with a solid Jewish background, which explains the author’s expectation that his readers are conversant with the theology of the Torah and Wisdom literature. Richardson, for example, argued the original audience may have been middle class in terms of their socioeconomic, evidenced by the presence of both wealthy and poor, as the majority did not belong to either crowd (2:1-4).\textsuperscript{16} At the same time, it seems most of the members of these congregations have experienced persecution from the Greco-Roman wealthy, which is why James believed they would resonate with what he said in 2:6 and 4:13-5:6. It is also plausible the

\textsuperscript{12} Moo, \textit{The Letter of James}, 23-24.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{15} Richardson, \textit{James}, 39.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 38-39.
wealthy oppressors were not represented among their number since it is not unusual for the
Hebrew prophet to preach and teach against absent foes. 17 Even Moo proposed the congregation
may have been composed of diaspora Jewish Christians living away from their homeland,
contributing to their modest socioeconomic state. 18

The Influence of Historical Information on the Interpretation

In light of the previous discussion on the letter of James’s authorship, audience, and
occasion, hermeneutical concerns may arise, beginning with concerns with the letter’s canonicity
and ending with its theology. Indeed, questioning the author’s authority could undermine the
letter’s canonical status. The letter of James is considered a General/Catholic Epistle because its
audience is undefined, making it universal to general Christian audiences of the apostolic age. 19
As a result, its authenticity has been questioned at various times in church history. James’s
epistle was extensively relied upon in Christian churches that even writers such as 1 Clement
(late first century) and the Shepherd of Hermas (early or mid-second century) were theologically
dependent on it. 20 Notwithstanding James’s pervasive use among Christians, both Eastern and
Western churches have hesitated to recognize its canonicity officially. 21 In the late fourth or early
fifth century, the Eastern church finally recognized James’s letter following Chrysostom’s and
Theodoret’s recognition of the epistle’s canonicity. 22

17 Richardson, James, 38-39.
18 Moo, The Letter of James, 24.
19 Ibid., 2.
20 Ibid, 3.
21 Ibid., 2.
22 Ibid., 3-4.
Similarly, the Western church canonized James’s epistle around the same time as their Eastern counterparts, following Jerome and Augustine. It is important to note that the late canonization was not a debate of the letter’s theology but of its apostolic authority. Eusebius remarked: “Among the disputed works, but yet known to most, are extant the so-called Epistle of James.” The epistle’s lack of apostolic authorship and its Jewishness may have contributed to diminishing its authority. History repeated itself during the Reformation era since Luther raised doubts about the author’s theology when he wrote: “mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture (LW [Luther’s Works] 35:397).” However, John Calvin was among the Reformers who recognized the apostolic authority of James’s epistle, contra Luther, when he remarked:

There are also at this day some who do not think it entitled to authority. I, however, am inclined to receive it without controversy, because I see no just cause for rejecting it. For what seems in the second chapter to be inconsistent with the doctrine of free justification, we shall easily explain in its own place.

Despite these debates, Moo argues Christians can rest assured that God’s providential hand ensured the canonization of James after leading them to recognize its divine origin. This information is quite pertinent to the exposition of James 2:1-13 because issues of canonicity may undermine the authority and impact of the ethical exhortations on the contemporary church.

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Moreover, the hermeneutical task may be undermined if one adopts Luther’s position regarding what he viewed as a divergent doctrine of justification or if one endorses the view that the purpose of the letter centered around issues surrounding the original audiences’ socioeconomic disparity. As for a divergent doctrine of justification, Luther argued the epistle’s author seems to stray away from the Pauline doctrine of justification. Luther argued James 2:24 proves the author believes in a doctrine of justification by works, which caused him to relegate the letter to secondary status next to what he termed “chief books.” In contrast, Calvin and other reformers “accepted the full apostolic authority of the letter and argued that Paul’s and James’s perspectives on justification could be harmonized so as to maintain the unity of Scripture.”

Furthermore, Moo argued James’s teachings enrich biblical theology, providing a foundation for the meaning of active and obedient faith that should be characteristic of a regenerated life. For this reason, Brandon D. Crowe separates James’s conceptualization of justification, as in James 2:24, from the Pauline one. He remarked: “Paul uses **justify** in connection with genuine faith in Christ, whereby one can move from condemnation to acceptance before God. James uses **justify** to indicate the manifestation of one’s confession of faith.” There are two reasons why this is relevant for an accurate interpretation of James 2:1-13 and a balanced understanding of the Moral Law’s role in the life of New Covenant saints. First, James 2:24 is a vital component of the author’s argument appearing in the immediate context of

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 5-6.

the selected pericope. Second, the author’s ethical exhortation assumes genuine faith will bear its fruit through obeying his application of the Moral Law, not as a requirement for salvation but as an expected outflow of the faith his readers profess.

As for the original audiences’ societal backdrop, including socioeconomic disparity, the interpreter may use the data to either inform or control the interpretation. Historical background information should only inform rather than control the authorial intent, which itself is derived from the intrertextual (i.e., from within the letter itself) and intertextual (i.e., canonical) context as opposed to extrabiblical data. For example, D.J. Smit discussed the social backdrop that marked the Greco-Roman world in which Christian communities existed that undoubtedly affected the interpersonal relationships James addressed in this pericope. Smit highlighted the work of Frankemölle, which illumines pertinent background information for a better understanding of the historical context of James 2:1-13. He wrote:

Frankemölle uses Theissen’s well-known analyses of forms of early Hellenistic Christianity to show that those Christians indeed had to deal with serious problems of solidarity and integration, because they, contrary to other religious groups of the time, did not limit their membership to people from a specific social class or life-sphere, but included everybody. Instead of being the religious component of a homogenous social group, restricting their worship as something “apart,” they deliberately chose to be heteronomous and to include everyone. This obviously caused serious and painful problems for their internal coherence.32

This historical information can certainly inform the interpretation.

However, historical information, such as the social background and socioeconomic conditions of James’s audience, should not be considered the controlling hermeneutic of the interpretation that draws theological and ethical implications out of biblical passages, as informative as they may be. For example, Mongstad-Kvammen argued a “postcolonial optic”

might be implemented to determine the relationship and identity of the oppressor and the
oppressed. According to Mongstad-Kvammen, the oppressed (namely the prejudicial
Christians) take on a “hybrid identity,” being themselves oppressed by the Romans and the
oppressors of others in the congregation. This hermeneutic sees partiality as the byproduct of a
“relationship of dominance” and a power struggle between the “colonizer” and “colonized.” A
similar example is presented by LeAnn Snow Flesher when she wrote:

> It seems the church has been struggling since the first century with issues of class. Even
> at the time of Luther’s great reformation, the poor were not recognized as equals in the
> fight. In the early twentieth century, Rauschenbusch wrote his theology of the social
gospel also addressing the need for the church to recognize issues of class (among other
> things) as one of the fundamental mandates of the gospel message.

She later added the following:

> James is calling for a righteous peace (3:18), and according to his understanding of the
> wisdom from above, that peace will come when equity and equality become the norm. If
> the poor covet and commit illegal acts to obtain what they desire, the answer for the
> people of faith is not violent retaliation or physical punishment. The answer, according to
> James, is selfless service and honor given by the haves to the have nots.

Flesher’s conceptualization of class distinction as James’s motivation and her interpretation of
his teaching on impartiality misses the mark, as she presupposes concepts alien to the author and
far removed from the original context, jeopardizing the entire interpretive enterprise.


34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.


37 Ibid., 406.
Flesher’s assumptions are representative examples of the core tenets of Liberation Theology that arose in the 1960s in Latin America, which can be “traced to the work of Walter Rauschenbusch in the 1920s in North America.”  

Indeed, “Liberation theology is an endeavor to interpret the message of the Christian gospel primarily in terms of social revolution in solidarity with the poor or oppressed people of society.” This “social gospel” distorts the true Christian gospel. J. Gresham Machen, commenting on the social good Christianity can bring to societies, said the following:

> [T]he relationship to Christ takes precedence of all other relationships, even the holiest of relationships like those that exist between husband and wife and parent and child. Those other relationships exist for the sake of Christianity and not Christianity for the sake of them. Christianity will indeed accomplish many useful things in this world, but if it is accepted in order to accomplish those useful things it is not Christianity.

For this reason, Moo warned against following the hermeneutical method of Liberation theologians and others like them, who allow the socioeconomic conditions of the audience to dictate the exegesis. Like Liberation Theology, a postcolonial reading of Mongstad-Kvammen also applies a similar hermeneutic which overthrows the evangelical grammatico-historical method discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Consequently, this study rejects such methods as they distort the authorial intent, obscure canonical connections, and undermine any attempt to provide accurate applications and theological deductions. Instead, this study views the central thread throughout the letter as James’s admonishment against hating God by disregarding

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39 Ibid.  


his standard of judgment and opting for a worldly one, which is akin to befriending the world and condoning its methods (see James 4:4).\textsuperscript{42}

Contextually, however, James wanted his readers to love God and others by applying the biblical standard of judgment, which is objective because it is the divine and righteous standard against which all actions must be measured. Although partiality, whether resulting from socioeconomic prejudice or a clash rooted in the lack of social cohesion, was the cause of James’s exhortations, it is not the principle he is teaching but the circumstances that occasioned it. Thus, James’s purpose was to call Christians back to submit themselves to God’s Law for their sanctification and to the glory of Christ’s name (see James 2:7). Therefore, it should not be surprising that the pericope cannot be limited to socioeconomic disparities or issues of social integration. Instead, the teaching principle of James’s exhortation, rightly understood, can be more broadly applied to all forms of unbiblical discrimination and favoritism. In other words, James’s teaching principle in 2:1-13 can be summarized as follows: Christians may not condone any pattern of sinful behavior, in this case partiality and favoritism, against God’s Word. Rather, they should apply the Moral Law and condemn any unjust and unrighteous behavior that departs from the divine standard.

As a result, James described friendship with the world as the practice of sinful traits and patterns of behavior that creep into Christian communities unnoticed in the form of partiality (2:1-4); lack of self-control, such as unbridled speech (3:9-12; 4:11-12; 5:9); worldly and unspiritual wisdom, which may be demonic (3:15); violence (4:1-3); pride and arrogance (4:13-17); hypocrisy and double-mindedness (1:5-8, 21-27; 2:14-26; 4:8), which leads to living a life that is inconsistent with the purity of the faith (1:27).\textsuperscript{43} It is evident, therefore, that the social

\textsuperscript{42} Moo, \textit{The Letter of James}, 24-25.
backdrop and socioeconomic conditions were not in themselves the sin with which James was concerned, but the partiality and prejudice (i.e., the sinful behavior) accompanying them were underlying the authorial intent.\(^{44}\)

Accordingly, socioeconomic conditions should not drive the interpretation but only inform it. Ultimately, the socioeconomic disparities and the lack of social cohesion were only the catalysts that exposed the desperate spiritual conditions that occasioned the author’s ethical admonishments and exhortations in 2:1-13.\(^{45}\) For James, these sinful patterns of behaviors are not simply departures from normative Christian conduct in a general sense; more poignantly, it is a rebellion against the divine standard of justice and righteousness, that is, the Moral Law. James was concerned about the obedience to God’s Law that accompanies faith as the fruit (or the vindication) of regeneration (2:14-26).

**Literary Analysis**

There have been some debates regarding the genre the Epistle of James represents because it departed from the conventional epistolary formulations, such as opening greetings that go along with the author’s exhortations.\(^{46}\) Additionally, James lacks situational and circumstantial details (i.e., persons, places, events, travel plans, and so on) that tend to accompany the epistolary genre.\(^{47}\) However, Peter H. Davids argues James’s literary style is generally consistent with the style of other epistles in the NT, notwithstanding the

\(^{41}\) Moo, *The Letter of James*, 5.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 25.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
aforementioned departures.\textsuperscript{48} For this reason, scholars such as Moo may prefer classifying James as a general epistle intended for several congregations as opposed to particular churches like most of the Pauline epistles, such as the First Epistle to the Corinthians.\textsuperscript{49}

Furthermore, the fact that the epistle of James does not address a particular church does not mean he did not structure his epistle to suit specific audiences with a particular set of circumstances. The data suggests James, in fact, had in mind particular churches that practice sin and can benefit from such strong-worded admonishments, while other churches can be encouraged by kinder exhortations (2:2-3, 15-17; 4:13-17).\textsuperscript{50} For example, James addresses his readers as “my brothers” in 1:2; 2:1; 3:12; 5:12, while in other areas he admonishes them “you adulterous people” in 4:4 or “you rich” 5:1.\textsuperscript{51} Indeed, the author seems to not only assume particular groups within congregations but also assume a specific geographical location(s).\textsuperscript{52} Besides, the author also is aware of the ethnic composition of the congregations he is addressing and their structure of governance, as highlighted in the previous section. All of the above makes it reasonable to accept James’s writing as a general/catholic epistle. Still, it should be recognized as an epistle, nonetheless.

Moreover, the epistle of James can simultaneously be identified as Wisdom literature since it employs many wisdom themes. Some of the common wisdom themes James highlights are also found in the OT, such as godly wisdom opposing worldly wisdom (3:13-18; Prov.


\textsuperscript{49} Moo, \textit{The Letter of James}, 6-7.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Doriani, \textit{James}, 13.

\textsuperscript{52} Moo, \textit{The Letter of James}, 6-7.
11:18), praying for and seeking after biblical wisdom (1:5; 3:18; see also Prov. 2:3-6; 11:18);
vanity of life and the fleeting wealth and comfort of the world (1:10; 4:14; Job 7:7; 14:2); self-
initiated temptation (1:14; Prov. 19:3); warning against partiality and pride (2:1; 4:6; Prov. 3:34;
24:23) among others.53 Accordingly, James 2:1-13 can fit within the scope of Wisdom literature.
Resembling the sages of wisdom in the OT, James contended that genuine wisdom is grounded
in obedience to God’s Moral Law (1:25; 2:11; 3:18; Ps. 19:7; Prov. 11:18).54

For James, Torah obedience is obedience to the Moral Law, a theme that is pervasive
throughout his epistle.55 It is crucial for the readers to be cautioned against misplacing the
authorial intent by wrongly assuming, as previously discussed, that James believes in works-
righteousness, which is repugnant to Paul’s gospel (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). Again,
James’s defense of biblical justice is represented in his commands to obey the Moral Law, which
is in line with the whole scope of biblical teachings on similar subjects as seen in previous
chapters, including in the exposition of Psalm 119. James wanted his readers to understand
righteousness and wisdom are the expected consequence of regeneration and sanctification. For
this reason, Richardson remarked:

For James the law is more than a prescribed list of commands; it is the revealed will of
the one Lawgiver and Judge (4:12; cf. 2:11, “he who said”). The law is synonymous with
the word of God. This Word is to be believed; its models of great faith are to be
emulated; its wisdom is to be heeded; its commands to perform acts of mercy consistent
with the character of the God of the exodus are to be obeyed.56

The previous discussion on James’s theology and genre classification should illumine the
interpretation of the selected passage of James 2:1-13 because James understood biblical justice

53 Richardson, James, 31-33.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 30.
56 Ibid.
and godly wisdom find their roots in the Torah, and more specifically, the Moral Law (i.e., the Ten Commandments). As a result, NT ethics is derived from an application of the Torah to the circumstances of some of the Judean churches. James’s teaching can be traced to a covenantal application of biblical justice since one must assume a literary and theological dependence on the Wisdom literature and the Torah, especially the latter, in order to interpret the selected passage correctly. James applies the Moral Law directly to his readers, presupposing its moral validity on New Covenant believers.

James’s epistle is well organized and carefully composed to convey the author’s objectives coherently and consistently. The epistle begins with opening formulae and greetings, followed by intertwining theological themes throughout the work. For example, the body of the letter is bracketed with appeals to persevere in trials and exhortations to petition God according to 1:2-8, 12; 5:10-18.57 This organization is similar to other NT writings as Pauline epistles, which often end with something regarding prayer (James 5:13-20; see also 1 Thess. 5:17, 25; 1 John 5:14-17). James’s ending is also similar to other general epistles, such as 1 John, wherein the closing paragraphs also invoke an eschatological contemplation of the present age (see James 5:7-8; see also 1 John 5:5-12; and 1 Thess. 5:1-11).58

The flow of James’s argument centers around the threefold themes of testing, wisdom, and wealth. He develops each theme consistently throughout the epistle and attaches them with actionable items for his readers to apply to their situations. Interestingly, the moral actions he demands, especially concerning biblical justice (i.e., impartiality), are consistent with God’s Moral Law and presuppose its continued validity in the New Covenant. Davids proposed that

58 Ibid.
each of the threefold themes is associated with exhortations; the first is to endure trials, the second is to follow biblical wisdom, and the third is to be upright and charitable.\textsuperscript{59} In James’s proposed discourse, the selected pericope falls among a group of ethical exhortations concerning wealth and charity. To that end, James 2 may be divided into two sections (1-13 and 14-26).\textsuperscript{60} The first section can be further divided into an illustration based on an OT precedent (2:1-4), a rational argument (2:5-7), and a biblical argument (2:8-12), followed by an exhortation to obedience (2:13).\textsuperscript{61} The following section will begin the exposition of 2:1-13 based on the discourse analysis provided in this section.

**The Exposition of James 2:1-13**

The Illustration: Judicial Assembly (2:1-4)

This portion of Scripture is the first of a fourfold division of the whole pericope (vv. 1-13), which addresses the sin of partiality. The circumstances of this letter suggest the form of partiality in focus here is economic-based prejudice, falling under the theme of wealth and charity. However, it is important to note the circumstances which occasioned James’s teaching do not negate the overarching principle set forth by him. Indeed, prohibiting partiality is the primary teaching of this passage. In other words, the circumstances do not exclude the necessary corollary teaching that James condemns all forms of partiality. For this reason, Felder remarked:

The phrase ἐν προσωποπολημψίαις reflecting the dative plural probably has the comprehensive sense of “in/through any act of partiality,” as Sophie Laws argues. James does not say in this verse what he thinks constitute “acts of partiality”; he rather

\textsuperscript{59} Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 25.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 105.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 27.
generalizes that Christians should not exhibit such as they maintain the faith of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{62}

The author addressed a congregational sin that made financial means the basis for elevating someone’s honor above the rest based solely on wealth or other material or external factors. Brown remarked: “James raises the question of whether the believing community can truly demonstrate its trust in Jesus Christ while at the same time showing partiality. The implied answer is, of course, no.”\textsuperscript{63} Thus, condemning economic-based discrimination includes all other forms of prejudice, favoritism, and sinful discrimination. It is important to note the use of “mercy” in v. 13, justifying a broader scope of James’s teaching, which does not restrict “mercy” to a single situation. Likewise, partiality cannot be reduced to a variation of socioeconomic-based discrimination. Instead, James’s condemnation of partiality must be seen with a broader scope, as the remainder of this exposition will thoroughly demonstrate.

The author addressed one or more congregations guilty of this heinous sin, using the phrase “my brothers.” His exhortations echo judicial contexts found in the OT (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 10:17; Ps. 82:2; Prov. 6:35; 18:5), carrying it forward to incorporate as a part of the New Covenant’s ethical teachings (see also Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17).\textsuperscript{64} Additionally, James connects his exhortation against partiality with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in v. 1. He means to make obedience to this ethical teaching a necessary consequence of genuine faith in Christ. In other words, a Christian must be impartial because partiality is repugnant to the holy Triune God. In turn, a Christian’s character must imitate his Lord, conforming his dealings


\textsuperscript{64} Davids, \textit{The Epistle of James}, 105-06. More on this in the following section: Canonical Analysis.
with others to God’s according to his revealed Word (see Gal. 2:6; 1 Tim. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:14-17). For this reason, NT writings often exhort Christians to conform to the character of Jesus, who is the perfect representation of God’s holy nature (Heb. 1:3; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:45-49; Phil. 3:17-21; Col. 3:1-17; 1 Jn. 3:1-10).

Indeed, partiality is not an easily identifiable sin because of the subtle nature in which it can be practiced and the ease with which it can be excused. Some Christians may be tempted to dismiss partiality as a trivial misdemeanor that does not bring into question one’s faith in Jesus. But this is not James’s view because of at least two implications of his proposition in 2:1. First, there is no such thing as an acceptable sin in the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, the author connects impartiality to the very essence of faith in the Messiah because it reflects the holy character of the Son of God. As a result, James presented the gravity of such sin in the sight of the Head and Judge of the holy Church, Jesus Christ (5:9). By doing so, the author turns the reader’s attention to the reality of sin, namely, partiality. His teaching here seems to expect a swift mending of this evil practice and sincere repentance. He believed such actions were necessary to demonstrate their faith in Christ by conforming to his exhortation.

In vv. 2-4, James illustrated the depravity of the sin of partiality through the use of a hypothetical example. He connects the previous verse with this one with the conjunction γὰρ (gar, for), conjoining the prohibition with an example that makes apparent the evil behind the sin. For this reason, he used economic-based partiality because it is unambiguous (vv. 2-3). Furthermore, there seem to have been clear parallels between the situation James was addressing in his example, wherein his audience could relate their circumstances to a near identical hypothetical scenario (note the use of ἐὰν, “if” in vv. 2-3). Besides the linguistic elements, another reason why James’s description is of a hypothetical scenario as opposed to a reported
fact is apparent from the discourse, which seems more of a hypothetical conversation than an actual incident. James did not say he had received a report to which he was responding. This may be regarded as an argument from silence; yet coupled with the above reasons, it becomes more compelling. For this reason, Carson writes: “James casts his argument hypothetically, and for his readers his logic would be self-evident.”

Nevertheless, what is clear is that James views partiality as a prejudicial sin that focuses on a man’s superficial, material, and external instead of his substance and God’s given value (vv. 2-3). In other words, the sin of partiality undermines, to the point of denying, four critical components which are fundamental to a biblical understanding of God’s justice: the shared *Imago Dei* in all people (vv. 4, 8; see also Luke 10:25-37); the free offer of salvation to all people with no respect of persons (vv. 1, 5; see also Rom. 10:10-13); the shared salvation of God’s people with no respect of persons (vv. 1, 4-5; see also Gal. 3:28); and the neglect of God’s justice that discriminates based on actions with no respect of persons or their social status or anything superficial and external (vv. 3, 8-9; see also Rom. 2:1-16), as per the OT precedent (Lev. 19:11-18). The author did not expect his audience would disagree with his basic premise or teaching that God abhors impartiality. “They do not, however, according to him, *practise* what they believe, and he wants them to see this discrepancy and to admit that. The illustration [i.e., the hypothetical scenario] is intended to serve such a purpose of unmasking [the sin that lurks beneath the surface].”

Consequently, in verse four, expecting his readers to respond positively, the author probes with a pair of rhetorical queries to make his point even more apparent. In the first

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rhetorical question, he condemns his original audience of unlawful distinction or discrimination for distinguishing between people in the church of Christ. The second rhetorical question condemns them of blasphemous self-exaltation because their actions assume they are “judges,” proverbially ousting God from his rightful place as the supreme judge. Undoubtedly, James used the word “judges” in a pejorative sense to emphasize their evil motivation that saw fit to honor some over others based on a subjective self-seeking, self-righteous, and self-exalting discriminatory reasoning that is unjustifiable (see also James 4:12).

Ultimately, they replaced God’s standard with their own, man-made moral compass and made it worse by applying it in Christ’s church. For James, the guilty individuals saw fit to dispense judgments grounded on corrupt human reasoning that values what the flesh esteems over the Spirit (see John 7:24; Gal. 5:16-17). Thus, they spurned God’s objective moral standard of judgment in favor of a carnal one motivated by “evil thoughts.” For this reason, James expects Christians to repudiate as evil prejudice any standard that discards God’s because no law can replace God’s righteous Moral Law, especially not in his holy church to be used against those coming into the assembly of the saints to hear the gospel of Jesus and worship the Living God.

The Rational Argument (2:5-7)

James goes into a two-step argument to establish the rationale for prohibition against partiality. First, he commences with the rational argument (vv. 5-7) to segue into the biblical argument (vv. 8-9). Thus, the two-step argumentation forms a far-reaching rationale that

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68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.
anticipates repentance and course correction on the part of his readers after recognizing the sinful pattern of their actions and the malice of their undeclared intentions. Verse 5 initiates the rational argument as the author appeals to the brethren with unpretentious logic that expects the response to follow. Next, he poses a rhetorical question to which the answer must be agreeable. He queries whether God’s sovereign election considered socioeconomic affluence or was free from it. He certainly expected his readers to recall God’s sovereign election is free from any carnal consideration, seeing the Lord often chose the poor and lowly by worldly standards to be rich through faith (i.e., by their election unto salvation). Indeed, “The concept of election was deeply rooted in both Jewish and Christian thought [since] God chose Israel and thus the Jews thought of themselves as God’s elect.”

This teaching becomes a canonical bridge, connecting OT themes of justice and impartiality to the NT, as the canonical section will further explore.

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize v. 5 highlights the grace of God, which he bestowed on people who could not have possibly earned such an honor. So, if the benefactor freely granted an unmeasurable favor to those unworthy of such honor, then it follows the beneficiaries of such magnificent privileges could not turn around to honor people based on nothing but their socioeconomic condition or some other man-made external distinction. James expected his readers to ponder such truths to treat each other based on the divine metric rather than a human one. Since Christians are the beneficiaries of an unmerited favor from God who pays no regard to one’s social status, they also ought to reflect that in their dealings. They should not discriminate based on any standard other than God’s.

Indeed, God graciously and liberally has offered magnificent salvation for his people, who, in turn, ought to honor liberally and graciously those whom God honored (see also Matt.

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Smit, “Exegesis and Proclamation,” 64.
It stands to reason that the members of the household of God ought to honor each other by imitating the one who equally honored them through their impartial treatment of one another. In other words, no one has the right to discriminate against or separate from those whom God joined together by his grace (see also Gal. 2:11-14; Eph. 2:11-22). To do so is tantamount to standing against the decree of the Lord’s sovereign election anchored in the council of his unchangeable and perfect will. Additionally, it would mean members of God’s household replace the Lord’s objective moral standard with their own in an undeniable encroachment of God’s authority in his very church whom he redeemed by his own blood (see also James 2:4; 4:11-12).

Consequently, v. 6a teaches all partial prejudices, discrimination, and judgments are evil unless grounded in God’s Moral Law, which is the standard of righteousness. It may be that some of the churches James wrote to practiced blatant partiality against the poor and lowly, dishonoring them in favor of others of higher socioeconomic status. However, ironically, partiality also dishonors those who practice it. In v. 6b, this becomes clear when James adds another rhetorical query to highlight the absurdity of a church-endorsed partiality that favored those who belonged to a socioeconomic elite that oppressed first-century Christians by dragging them to the Roman courts, presumably to plunder them. Therefore, partiality dishonors the poor among God’s people and harms the partial people themselves because they join their oppressors in oppressing their brethren, which is counterintuitive even from a worldly perspective. In other words, James was pointing to the irony of partiality, which harms its practitioners in both the human and the supreme divine court.

James added another rhetorical question in v. 7 to reason with the churches that practiced such a horrid sin. He urged them to ruminate the implications of their sinful behavior, which did
a disservice to themselves, as it resulted in blasphemying the Name by whom they are called. Again, James exposes the irony behind the self-harming practice of partiality, which honored the rich at the expense of Christ as they humiliated those whom Christ honored by virtue of his redemption and elevated those whom Christ will eventually put to shame by virtue of his divine judgment. In turn, Christ was dishonored, and they, too, because of their association with him. Hence, James intended to convey that partiality dishonors Christ and his Church by honoring those who merited no special honor (e.g., James 5:1-8).

The Biblical Argument (2:8-12)

The author’s argument takes a turn in vv. 8-12, wherein he develops his argument by pointing to the divine standard of justice revealed in the Torah. He does that by anchoring his exhortations in the Moral Law, according to Exod. 20:13-14 and Lev. 19:18 (see also James 2:1; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 16:19). Evidently, James presupposed the ongoing validity of the Moral Law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21), which Christ’s teachings further summarized into two: loving God and neighbor, as per Matt. 22:37-40. In inviting his audience to self-examination and honest contemplation of his exhortation, the author commences v. 8 with the Greek conjunction (adverbial conditional) Εἰ (translated “if”), probing if they obeyed the “royal law” that demands loving one’s neighbors according to Lev. 19:18 when they practiced partiality.

James referred to Lev. 19:18 as the “royal law” for three reasons. First, the “statement, ‘love your neighbor as yourself,’ forms a climax to this first major section [of the legal code in Leviticus 19], and it was regarded by some as the central principle of the Law.”71 Second, it is

“royal” because the Messiah is King Jesus. Moreover, the title “royal law” emphasizes the reality that “love your neighbor as yourself,” forms a comprehensive summary of the second table of the Law, which is concerned with man-to-man relationships, such as impartiality (Mk. 12:28-34; Jn. 15:12-17; see also Gal. 5:14; 1 Pet. 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:11, 24; 4:17).72 Accordingly, this statement is another canonical bridge with covenantal implications because the Messiah understood it as not only the summary of the Torah but its fulfillment (see Matt. 22:34-40).73 Luke Johnson remarked:

The text of Leviticus did not guide the order of his exposition, nor did it, by any means, exhaustively dictate the contents of his message. But the clear thematic connections, together with the formal characteristics involving law, judgment and prohibition shared by many of these passages, point this way: that James regarded the “Royal Law” by which Christians were to live, and the “Law of Liberty” by which they were to be judged, as explicated concretely and specifically not only by the Decalogue (2:11), but by the immediate context of the Law of Love, the commands found in Lev 19:12-18.74

Indeed, Carson also persuasively argued the “royal” designation does not only apply to a single commandment but the whole corpus of the Law of God. He wrote:

[T]he word “law” (nomos) in the NT usually refers to an entire corpus of law, such as the law of Moses, rather than to a single commandment. That comprehensiveness is suggested by the way that further individual commandments within the law are cited in the ensuing verses (see below). That in turn suggests that the expression “royal law” does not refer to the specific love commandment but rather to some larger corpus.75

Third, the author’s designation of this law as royal not only obligates obedience on the part of the King’s servants (i.e., the Christians) but it implies caution for disobedience of such


73 Ibid.


75 Carson, “James,” 1000.
weighty matters of the law (note the use of “justice” and “mercy” in Matt. 23:23).\textsuperscript{76}

Consequently, the messianic community must strive to live free from prejudice in “liberty” from man-made laws that transgress the royal law of Christ and promote self-seeking partiality (2:12).\textsuperscript{77} It is vital to note how James quoted the Moral Law without feeling the need to justify his use, making Torah observance take “a new expression” in the New Covenant.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, in commenting on v. 8, Allison remarked: “One doubts that this verse shows knowledge of or anticipates readers who justify preference for the rich by appeal to Lev 19:18. The point rather is to make explicit that showing partiality to the rich is not an issue of etiquette but a matter of Torah.”\textsuperscript{79}

Like OT prophets, James denounced all those who acted partially in v. 9, charging some of his readers with being “παραβάται” (transgressors) of God’s “νόμος” (law). For Christians who are bound by a covenant with their Savior, the latter will be faithful to the former, and the former is expected to be devoted to the latter. Christian allegiance is exhibited through submission to the Moral Law of God, summarized in the Ten Commandments. This submission is the fruit of faithfulness to the covenant. After all, the writer’s exhortation assumes the covenantal and binding nature of the Moral Law of God, evidenced by his biblical citations from the Torah. Indeed, first-century Judaism understood the centrality of the Decalogue and that it is the summary of the whole Torah. For this reason, Philo wrote, “Enough on this subject, but also we must not forget that the Ten Covenants are summaries of the special laws which are recorded

\textsuperscript{76} McKnight, \textit{The Letter of James}, 206-07.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

in the Sacred Books and run through the whole of the legislation.” 80 James also argued the same, as will be further demonstrated in the remainder of this exposition.

In v. 10, he further supports the interpretive conclusions of v. 9 when he asserts Christians risk transgressing the whole Torah (or law) if they transgress a single precept of God’s commandments. Carson argued New Covenant members cannot disregard any portion of God’s Moral Law because James demonstrated its “indivisible unity.” 81 Daniel K. Eng also argued that “the author of James argues an all-or-nothing view of the law. One who shows partiality does not demonstrate singular adherence to the law, transgressing the entire law (2:9–11).” 82 Therefore, Christians are obliged to keep the whole Moral Law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, if they were to be considered law-abiding (or Torah-observing) Christians because they are accountable to all of Christ’s commandments according to Matt. 28:20 (see also Acts 2:42).

Referring to the Ten Commandments in v. 11, specifically the seventh and sixth (Exod. 20:13-14), the author bolstered his argument, postulating one lawgiver with a single universal moral standard that should rightly bind the consciences of believers and govern the church’s conduct. The original context of the Ten Commandments is within the Mosaic Covenant, meaning James presupposed an aspect of continuity whereby Christians must govern themselves by the moral regulation of the Mosaic Covenant. Yet, it is one ultimate and overarching covenant, the Covenant of Grace (see Chapter Three). In other words, the moral code is universal and unchanging, binding the consciences of Christians and obligating their perpetual obedience.


81 Carson, “James,” 1002.

For this reason, theologians such as Johnson, believe the Decalogue carries continued relevance to New Covenant believers. Darian Lockett remarked:

James argues that partiality and faith in Jesus Christ are incompatible because the Scripture says, “love your neighbor as yourself.” Therefore, just as one should not commit adultery or murder, one also should not show partiality because the law is whole. Many have noted how Leviticus 19 itself alludes to and interprets the Decalogue. The significance of this observation is that Jas 2:1-13 seems to be an exegetical reflection on Leviticus 19 and, though influenced by Deuteronomy 5, the reference to two of the “ten words” (in Jas 2:11) could very well reflect the interpretive concerns regarding the Decalogue that are present in Leviticus 19 itself.83

Thus, conformity to the standard of righteousness as expressed in the Ten Commandments is conformity to the character of Christ and a demonstration of covenantal fidelity. For this reason, the author asserted this objective standard is the measure by which his readers will be judged because it is the divinely appointed Moral Law, which he called the “law of liberty” (see v. 12). As a result, partiality against certain people based on personal or social preference is a blatant violation and an evil pretention against God’s law, paying no deference to his sovereign claim as the head over the church and the lord over creation (Col. 1:15-18).

In v. 12, James concludes his argument by asserting the conformity of Christians to the Moral Law is not optional but obligatory since it is the commandment of God Almighty, the Lord of the Covenant. He reasoned the incentive for obedience is the impending judgment of God, who will judge all people impartially according to his infallible “law of liberty” (1:25; 1 Pet. 1:14-17). James uses the term “law” to remind his primarily Jewish background audience of the Torah, maintaining that it remains the Christian standard of conduct and the ethical rulebook by which God’s covenant people find moral direction to righteousness and godliness (3:13-18).84


84 McKnight, The Letter of James, 219-20.
He also supplemented the word “law” with an intriguing descriptor “of liberty,” indicating Messianic interpretation of the Torah as opposed to the Old Covenant understanding of the role of the Torah, as in the examples of Matt. 5:17-48; 7:15-23; Mark 12:28-32 (see also Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18; John 8:31-32; Gal. 5:13; James 1:25; 1 Pet. 2:16). Therefore, James argued disobeying any of God’s just precepts is an act of rebellion against the “one lawgiver [who] stands behind the lot, so that breaking any one of them is still defiance against the seamless fabric of his authority. It is in that sense that the whole law is broken by the transgression of any part of it.”

An Exhortation to Obedience (2:13)

James emphasizes the notion of divine judgment at the end of this pericope, expanding on the previous verse. He argued that “God’s judgment will be ‘without mercy’ to those in the messianic community who persist in prejudice against the poor and marginalized.” Therefore, the implication is for his readers to conform their actions to this apostolic teaching and refrain from favoring some over others who are disadvantaged in obedience to the law of liberty that prohibits prejudice and partiality. For in so doing, they will receive God’s mercy, escaping his wrath. For James, receiving mercy from the Lord on the day of judgment is fulfilling the promise of blessing by way of Christ because such people fulfilled the second table of the Law evidenced by their impartiality towards others (1:25, 27).

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85 McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 220.

86 Carson, “James,” 1002. More on this in the following section: Canonical Analysis.

87 McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 221.

88 Ibid.

89 Doriani, *James*, 75-77.
Conversely, those who practice partiality should expect the full measure of the promised judgment, as they demonstrate the disingenuous and lifeless nature of their empty profession of faith (2:14-17). Indeed, by supplying the final phrase “mercy triumphs over judgment,” James demonstrated God expects conformity to his Moral Law as the evidence of regeneration since his mercy through Christ is only extended to his faithful covenant people (see also James 1:22-27). In other words, James’s readers are reminded the profession of faith is vindicated by its accompanied obedience to the Lord, and for them, God’s mercy in Christ is sure to triumph over his judgment.90

Canonical Analysis

The above exposition has presented several canonical connections. This section will further explore the OT and NT intertextual (canonical) links with James 2:1-13. James strongly depended on the teaching of the Torah to support his arguments. As will be alluded to below, he also utilized other OT literature, such as Wisdom writings. As for his NT interaction, James drew on Jesus’s teaching to make an application to the lives of New Covenant believers. In effect, James’s theology reflects the apostolic church’s application of the Torah in the messianic age as per the messianic interpretations expounded in the gospel accounts.

For this reason, James expounded on Jesus’s teachings (e.g., Matt. 22:37-40; see also John 15:12-17) and elaborated on their implications on the doctrine and life of the church. The intertextual examples below are not an exhaustive list of findings but a representative set of evidence to support the conclusions of the preceding exposition and the following contemporary application, as well as bolstering this dissertation’s thesis. To that end, it may be helpful to start

90 Doriani, James, 75-77.
by exploring the OT theological concept of partiality and judgment, followed by intertextual cross-references with James 2:1-13.

The Lord is just in all his dealings because he is impartial to all, irrespective of anyone’s socioeconomic status (e.g., Deut. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7; Job 34:19; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25), ethnicities (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11), or any other type of distinction (Gal. 2:6).91 Not all discrimination is partial, but all partiality is unlawful discrimination because God’s people did and must discriminate between the holy and the unholy (see 1 Pet. 1:13-16). This basic biblical concept requires no further elaboration and it will be assumed here. Indeed, the OT prophets and NT apostles alike denounce any man-made discrimination that is not anchored in God’s revealed will (see John 7:24; 1 Tim. 5:21). For this reason, divine justice is not a standard by which God judges; rather, it is rooted in God’s holy character. In other words, justice is so because it aligns with God’s holy nature and character (Deut. 32:4).

In redemptive history, God communicated his divine character by way of his redemptive acts, on the one hand, and his revealed will, on the other. For example, his historic election of the nation of Israel (Deut. 7:6-11) and his salvific election of individuals (1 Cor. 1:26-29) reveal God’s impartial character. Another way God communicated his character was through his Moral Law, which was to be the divine standard for justice (Exod. 34:5-7; Ps. 19:7-9; Rom. 7:12). In both instances, the same concept is communicated. God is impartial and just, which is expressed explicitly in passages such as Deut. 10:12-22 and Luke 18:7. Therefore, Scripture is abundantly clear that God abhors partiality (James 2:4, 9; 3:15; Deut. 10:17; 16:20; Prov. 24:23; 28:21).

James’s presuppositions can be traced back to the OT understanding of judgment (2:4, 12, 13; 4:11-12; 5:9, 12) and partiality (2:1, 9; 3:17). In the Hebrew Bible, judgment signifies a

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verdict or rule set forth by a person in a position of authority in cases of judicial proceedings or governorship; thus, the concept of “ruling” is naturally linked with “judging.” 92 Both can be exercised by either God or men; however, the emphasis here is on human judgment (e.g., Deut. 1:13-18; Ps. 141:5-6). 93 After all, James’s exhortations addressed human judgment in light of the divine one, not the reverse. Although ruling and judging are closely connected, judging is often related to judicial cases (e.g., Isa. 28:7 Eze. 23:45; Esth. 1:13) wherein judges were expected to render a negative (e.g., Jer. 25:31; Job 11:10) or a positive (e.g., Prov. 18:1) verdict. 94

Moreover, OT Law condemns partiality in all forms, including but not limited to the perversion of justice by way of favoritism with respect to persons through esteeming the wealthy and mighty over the lowly and destitute or vise-versa (Exod. 23:3; Lev. 19:15). 95 Partiality also comprehends preferential treatment of one over another by honoring the preferred party for selfish interest, which may take the form of bribery or any advantage (Deut. 16:19). The prophets, likewise, condemned all manner of partiality, whether it was a judicial perversion of justice or exploitation of those under one’s charge, such as the partiality of the sons of Eli in 1 Sam. 2:12-17 (see also Mal. 2:8-9). The wise sages of the OT also join the prophets in denouncing this abhorrent sin, according to several verses in Proverbs (17:15; 18:5; 24:23-25; 28:21; Job 13:8, 10) and Psalm 82:2, to name but a few examples. 96 Evidently, James’

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93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Opperwall, “Partiality; Show Partiality; Be Partial,” 672.

96 Ibid.
condemnation of partiality does not stand alone in Scripture but finds its root in the Torah, alongside other corroborating biblical witnesses from the rest of the Tanakh.

The remainder of this section will explore more canonical connections between James’s teaching, and the same canonical motif found elsewhere in both the OT and NT. As mentioned earlier, the author grounds his denunciation of partiality and censures those who practice it according to two basic biblical assumptions that are ultimately rooted in God’s character. These assumptions require further elaboration. First, impartiality is anchored in God’s will of decree (or decretive will), which is only known by way of his works of redemption (i.e., his sovereign and impartial election). Second, impartiality is anchored in God’s revealed will, his special revelation through his Word, and summarized in the Moral Law as seen in the Torah’s prohibition of partiality.

First, God’s impartiality has been illustrated in his sovereign redemptive election of those he is saving through Christ, which is the result of his free choice apart from any external factors. Correspondingly, in v. 5, James highlighted God’s choosing of the poor among the congregation as proof of the impartiality that must be present in God’s Kingdom. James links God’s salvific election of some to the practice of impartiality. This way, he brings to bear God’s impartial character in interpersonal relationships whereby Christians are expected to emulate God’s impartial election without considering superficial and vain human valuations out of self-interest and preservation.

Indeed, God’s choice often seeks to flip human rationale on its head by electing the lowly of the world to shame the strong, revealing his own self-sufficiency and holiness in contrast to human fallenness shown in the impartial and self-seeking treatment of people of each other (1 Cor. 1:26-31). For this reason, God’s salvific election becomes the basis through which God’s
people should treat one another, becoming impartial because everyone sinned and have fallen short of the glory of the One who called his people out of darkness into his marvelous light (Rom. 3:9-18, 23; Col. 1:9-14). Therefore, since God’s election is free from any man-made distinction (i.e., ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or any carnal circumstances), it follows that his church should operate the same way (Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Isa. 46:8-10; Eph. 1:9-11).

Furthermore, James’s teaching in this selected pericope showcases a number of God’s characteristics related to an aspect of the Moral Law. For example, as seen above, James’s readers had to change their behavior in light of the Lord’s character demonstrated through his election, whereby they must contemplate God’s sovereignty (authority and lordship), his power (ability to save the weakest), and his holiness (impartiality). Accordingly, James’s teaching becomes more profound than it may have been estimated initially, as it is now connected to a host of other biblical doctrines prevalent throughout Scripture, forming cross-testamental and cross-thematic canonical bridges.

Consider God’s historical (as opposed to salvific) election of Israel and his deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It can be readily observed the Lord’s actions were free from any consideration of Israel’s prominence among the nations. After all, they were slaves in Egypt. Meanwhile, Egypt was the most dominant and affluent nation in the ANE (Deut. 7:6-11). Still, God chose to redeem Israel, showcasing his glorious grace, wherein he sovereignly and powerfully delivered the lowliest people from the snare of slavery. Israel certainly was not the only enslaved people in the ancient world. Nevertheless, the Lord chose Israel and used them to reveal his holy character and for the glory of his name in all the earth so the whole world knows there is no god but the Lord and his glory is shared with no one. Consequently, there is salvation in no other name but Yahweh, for he is holy and worthy to be feared, worshipped, and praised.
Indeed, no one merits salvation since grace cannot be meritorious (Eph. 2:8). Instead, God freely bestows his special love on whom he chooses without partiality for his own glory as per Deuteronomy 9:4-5 (see also Deut. 8:17-20; Ps. 49; Jer. 9:23-25). The NT echoed the same motif whereby God looks for those who humble themselves so that he would be exalted (Eph. 1; 1 Pet. 5:6). Indeed, the Lord’s teaching in the Gospel of Luke provides further support (Lk. 18:14; Matt. 5:2-10). Like other NT writers, Pauline theology highlighted God’s impartiality and his opposition to self-exalting attitudes, especially by way of wealth: Romans 10:11-12; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 4:7-8; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 8:9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19 (compare with Matt. 6:19-24; Lk. 6:45; 12:20-21, 33-34; Jas. 5:3; Rev. 2:9).

Second, God’s revealed will becomes another anchor for the apostolic censuring against partiality, which is also grounded in God’s holy character. This is clear in James 2:12, wherein the author connected the Torah to the liberty in Christ. Accordingly, helping the vulnerable, standing in solidarity with the oppressed, and caring for the poor and marginalized is the duty of all members of the messianic community (e.g., Deut. 15:7-15; 24:10-25:4; Lev. 25:39-43). Indeed, the gospel binds up the wounds of the oppressed, breaks down barriers of the marginalized of society, and removes man-made boundaries and godless distinctions for the sake of Christ (e.g., Gal. 3:25-28; Eph. 2:11-22). For this reason, confronting the heinous sin of congregational partiality, the apostolic exhortation emphasized the law of liberty as a direct implication of loving others as oneself (i.e., James 1:25; 2:8). Indeed, God’s Law becomes the remedial solution for congregations that diminish the work of the cross by their actions (e.g., Eph. 2:11-22). As a result, the Moral Law is the corrective cast for the brokenness in the Judean church and the gospel is the bonding agent that must be applied to all sin-infested congregations.

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Ultimately, the Torah, God’s standard of justice, condemned the wicked discrimination the Messianic community committed against one another. Nevertheless, some, like Jackson-McCabe, have argued the following:

the Stoic theory of law was adapted by various Jewish and Christian authors, it was, naturally, variously modified to accommodate aspects of these authors’ thought which were alien to Stoicism. Most common is the identification of some body of instruction - the Torah or the teaching of Jesus as a verbal expression of this innate natural law (Chapter Three). It is my contention that the Letter of James, with its correlation of implanted logos with the “perfect” law, a “law of freedom,” presents another example of the Christian adaptation of this philosophical conception of law.98

Jackson-McCabe’s research is helpful; however, it is unconvincing to this author for the following reason. Jackson-McCabe does not seem to consider the divine inspiration of the Letter of James, which led to neglecting the cumulative canonical support that could have informed his interpretation of James’ authorial intent. Indeed, Jackson-McCabe seems to elevate the extra biblical witness over the intertextual evidence (i.e., canonical analysis).

Meanwhile, Benjamin Wold asserted that “Νόμος in Jas 2.8-12 and 4.11-12 refers to Mosaic Torah, and yet this same law is reinterpreted in James in reference to God's rule over his renewed people in a messianic and eschatological context.”99 Wold also found Jackson-McCabe’s argument unconvincing when he remarked:

The conclusion reached by Jackson-McCabe, that the ἐμφύτως λόγος is a technical term, is hardly substantiated based upon only a few inexact references. It may well be the case that the ‘implanted word’ and ‘perfect law’ in James are to be identified with one another, but objections remain to the view that these are terms derived, as Jackson-McCabe concludes: ‘from the Stoic identification of human reason as a divinely given natural law’. Moreover, that the ‘implanted word’ refers simply to human reason is unconvincing


because reason does not, as is found in Jas 1.21, save one’s soul nor can it be ‘welcomed’ (δέχομαι).  

For this reason, it is vital to point out that James presented a canonical interpretation of the Torah, which is to say he applied the Law in light of Jesus’s teachings (compare, for instance, James 2:12 with Matt. 25:31-46). In other words, the Torah can only be applied in the Messianic age (i.e., the New Covenant age) through the Moral Law, as summarized in the two tables of the law. Indeed, Jesus already summarized the Law and the Prophets in two commandments. The first is to love God and the second is to love one’s neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40). Blomberg insightfully remarked:

For many, the letter of James is an outlier to the theme of fulfilment, but it appears significant that he suggests that he views the law as fulfilled in Christ, just like the more major New Testament witnesses do. In 2:8, as we briefly noted, he opines, ‘if you really fulfil the royal [or “kingdom”] law ...’ While it is difficult to conclude that this is the Mosaic Law unaltered, it still includes the Mosaic Law, supremely summarised in the double love command.

However, these commandments are fleshed out in the whole canon. One can only obey God rightly if he understands his Word rightly. Consequently, to love God and neighbor, one must take into account the whole scope of biblical revelation, beginning with the Torah all the way through to Revelation. Simply put, God is the only standard of justice and righteousness and he revealed what he requires of man in his Word. Indeed, God revealed his will for those saved by the gospel to live in perpetual obedience to his Moral Law, succinctly expressed in the Ten Commandments.

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100 Wold, “Universal and Particular Law in the Letter of James and Early Judaism,” 97. In an associated footnote, Wold comments: “Jackson-McCabe 2001: 154; elsewhere, when he turns to the ‘perfect law of freedom’ in Jas 1.25, he identifies it with the Torah as interpreted by the author James (186).”

101 Ibid.

Case Study: A Theological Application of Justice Based on the Moral Law

Background on the Contemporary Context

This section will apply the collective findings based on the historical, literary, exegetical, and canonical analyses derived from the cumulative study of this dissertation, especially as a consequence of James 2:1-13. This case study will apply such findings to the recent ecclesiastical controversy that affected churches worldwide, including Canada. The study will examine the church’s response to the Quebec law restricting entrance to local Christian assemblies for worship on the Lord’s Day without proof of vaccination against COVID-19. This proof was called a vaccine passport. It was an electronic, government-issued document functioning as proof of inoculation against the COVID-19 virus.

This case study is not to examine medical data or assess the sociopolitical ramification of the Quebec mandate. This study aims to discuss the theological implications of implementing and enforcing such a mandate in local churches in light of this dissertation. This research attempts to apply the precepts of biblical justice to God’s covenant people. It aims to test the validity of the thesis underlying this dissertation before moving to Chapter Six. This section is concerned with the practical application of justice in local churches. Indeed, the church cannot fully fulfill the Great Commission unless she can recover her prophetic voice. All biblical prophets relied on the Torah to indict, call to repentance, and teach the ways of the Lord according to Psalm 119. Also, the church would not be able to disciple the nations to obey all Jesus commanded without knowing precisely what he commanded in all areas of life, including biblical justice. Consequently, this case study seeks to function as a practical, covenantal application of biblical justice, proving to the reader that the standard of justice is universal and binding on born-again Christians.
It is crucial to provide a background to the circumstances that gave rise to this ecclesiastical controversy that changed the Christian landscape in Quebec and, by extension, Canada and even has the potential to affect Western evangelicalism. Some may consider this an overstatement; they would be incorrect. Nevertheless, it is needless to argue for this point since it is not integral to the study at hand. It is necessary, however, to provide a succinct summary of the COVID-19 situation to be able to assess and apply biblical principles of justice correctly.

Here are the facts as the author understands them. COVID-19 is a highly infectious respiratory virus causing its victim to suffer symptoms akin to the influenza flu. This disease does not affect everyone the same. It was reported that it is more hazardous for persons with core morbidities and the elderly. The rest of the population may suffer symptoms ranging between mild to medium in severity.

Moreover, the response to this disease varied from one country to another. It also varied from one province/state to another. Nonetheless, it seemed the global response was generally similar. As time progressed, the epidemiological response morphed. The initial two-week period to slow the spread of the disease and protect the most vulnerable became a three-year-long ordeal. In the beginning, the “stay-at-home” orders were understandable and nearly all churches cooperated, thinking this was a temporary measure with harsh mandates that would soon end. Unfortunately, everyone later found out this was far from over. Indeed, some of Quebec’s restrictions remain in place; as of this writing, the rest of the world did not return to the pre-pandemic world it used to be. Many think it will never do.

In the first two years of the pandemic response, the Canadian government nearly shut down all land and air travel. Likewise, the provincial governments proceeded to order all local restaurants, retail stores, barbershops, and the like to close their doors until further notice.
Indeed, the government of Quebec applied some of the most stringent regulations in the Western hemisphere to quell the pandemic infection rates and reduce hospitalizations. The Quebec government implemented a categorization system that classified as essential or non-essential various businesses and institutions, from grocery stores and markets to transportation services and charitable organizations. It did not surprise anyone the essential list was extremely short, as it did not include museums, casinos, gyms, cinemas, and restaurants.

The arbitrary nature of such classification was readily apparent since all businesses are essential to the livelihoods of their owners, employees, and families. Not to mention this classification fails to account for the good of the consumers who require specific services. The Quebec government was unable to achieve what it may have seen as the greater good because government officials did not seek to apply God’s Law. Consider, for instance, Lev. 13:45-46, wherein only the diseased individual may be isolated without treating the sick, the vulnerable, and the healthy alike. That is an injustice. Nevertheless, the focus here is on the regulations which affected churches directly.

Regrettably, but perhaps unsurprisingly, churches were also considered non-essential, even when the mission of God on earth required the church to do what it was commanded. Indeed, God has ordained his churches be essential for his mission of salvation to a depraved and lost world and for the building up of the body, the saints of Christ. In the beginning, all local evangelical churches in Quebec complied. However, as time passed and more medical data emerged, church leaders realized the heavy-handed restrictions and mandates were not only arbitrary but also unreasonable. Arguably, it yielded more harm to people than COVID-19 could have done without governmental intervention. The human cost was immense and many people suffered as a result.
It is easy to get bogged down in all the competing socioeconomic and medical data that support this argument or another. Still, the reality is such mandates have harmed the unity of many local congregations and sin reared its ugly head as it did in the Judean churches during James’s time. Indeed, unprecedented ecclesiastical challenges emerged in many evangelical churches across North America, especially in Quebec, where the government required local assemblies to effectively implement its policies by barring all unvaccinated churchgoers from participating in church worship. Indeed, the theological ramification and the consequences associated with either obeying or disobeying the governmental mandates are serious, while their complexity far exceeds the scope of this section.

Thus, this section will focus on one aspect that parallels the moral implication of the Judean churches in James’s day. In the final analysis, the moral parallel comes down to the reality that Christians were required to discriminate against their healthy yet unvaccinated brethren by barring them from participating in congregational worship, relegating them to virtual seats away from the assembly of the saints. To be sure, this moral dilemma intersects with a host of other theological sub-doctrines or disciplines within the overarching theological doctrine of ecclesiology and Christian ethics. Among such intersecting theological doctrines are the role and authority of elders (e.g., church membership and discipline), the worship of God in the church (e.g., the duty to worship God and the regulative principle of worship), the Christian liberty of conscience and the function of the Moral Law in such circumstances, and the separation between civic and ecclesiastical authority (e.g., the separation between church and state authority under God).

For the purposes of this section, the Moral Law’s role in governing Christian interpersonal relationships must be isolated and examined in light of the apostolic prohibition of
partiality and judgment against the backdrop of mandated discrimination based on vaccination status. Therefore, this section will explore the moral dimension highlighted above against the apostolic teaching in James 2:1-13. Prior to investigating the theological implications of apostolic teaching and the thesis of this dissertation on the contemporary situation, some objections must first be noted to clear the way for the reader to accept the conclusions of this section and the subsequent concluding chapter.

The preemptive responses to the objections can be divided into two, imitating James’s own argument. The first may be considered a rational argument; the second is theological. Undoubtedly, the rational argument presupposes a biblical worldview from which the answer flows. The second argument is a theological application of God’s Moral Law. It will demonstrate the sinfulness of barring healthy, unvaccinated churchgoers from worshipping with others on the Lord’s Day (Heb. 10:25). If successful, it must follow that Quebec Christians must obey God rather than man even if they should suffer governmental penalties for their actions (see Acts 5:29-32). Indeed, the Lord is faithful, rewarding the obedience of his faithful people (James 1:25). Ultimately, the theological subsection will demonstrate how obeying the Quebec mandate is disobedience to the Moral Law as revealed in the Ten Commandments and applied by this researcher’s interpretation of James 2:1-13.

The Rational Argument: A Preemptive Response to Possible Objections

This sub-section will preemptively respond to two possible objections that may hinder the reader from accepting the conclusions of this case study. First, one objection may be posed as follows: barring unvaccinated Christians from church gatherings protects the vaccinated Christians. Thus, the church is duty-bound to protect the flock, even from transmissible disease, if at all possible. At the very least, the argument goes, the church cannot be responsible for being
the infection spreader. This objection assumes vaccines prevent infections, which is a debatable assertion. The fact is no one can claim requiring a vaccination of two vaccine injections for joining a church service is based on conclusive, peer-reviewed scientific data. This subjective policy does not seem to be based on definitive scientific consensus; otherwise, it would have been universally applied in all jurisdictions in Canada, which it was not. In other words, some provinces did not require vaccination passports everywhere, let alone in the churches. Therefore, it is unrealistic to claim such a policy is necessary to protect churchgoers.

This objection assumes certain hypotheses about the nature of the disease and the efficacy of the vaccination that is, to say the least, debatable. The point is the church cannot, under the pretense of preserving life, apply extrabiblical laws to worship and church attendance that have never been commanded by the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Such requirements are akin to Pharisaical legalism, which in the name of God’s law and keeping the people from transgressing the sixth commandment (Exod. 20:13) the church places man-made regulations (i.e., provincial health mandates) which discriminate against members of the Christian community. These regulations effectively nullify God’s law (see Matt. 15:6-9; 23:13, 23-25; Luke 11:45-46, 52). Even worse, such legalism passes man-made regulations as biblical prerequisites to worshiping the Triune God. The church cannot use government policy as a cover for transgressing God’s law.

Nonetheless, the correct response to this objection does not need to be complicated. Ultimately, the burden of proof is on those who desire to bind the consciences of Christians who are free in the Lord to engage in any activity they deem to be within a reasonable risk. Christian living does not require a risk-averse lifestyle. Indeed, godly living has often led to a dangerous lifestyle, such as the life of Paul (see 2 Cor. 11:23-33). Accordingly, Scripture does not suggest
godly living should be a risk-free endeavor, but quite the contrary. It is strange, and indeed unbiblical, to assert Christians should abstain from all potentially risky behavior that may or may not cause harm. Otherwise, how can anyone preach the gospel in countries like Iran for fear that those who come to faith may be persecuted and even murdered for the gospel? So, to agree with this objection is not only unreasonable but also unbiblical.

More specifically, mandating Christians adhere to government vaccine mandates as a prerequisite for in-person worship and fellowship thrusts the church into the political sphere. Indeed, this adulterates the church transforming her into a government policy enforcer. This undermines the church’s lifesaving mission of calling people who are under eternal condemnation to repentance. The church is a divinely commissioned embassy of Christ in a world with much more severe disease than COVID-19, which is the sin that leads to death and eternal judgment. As a result, the church is dutybound to proclaim Christ’s free gospel and teach the nations to obey his holy commandments without the burdensome yoke of men (i.e., two injections of a government-sanctioned vaccine). Otherwise, the church effectively prohibits, even if some, hell-bound men from hearing the saving gospel. Additionally, barring blood-bought saints from receiving the means of grace by imposing an extrabiblical precondition that the Lord has not sanctioned is both unrighteous and unjust (e.g., Isa. 10:1-3; 59:4, 13-15).

One may say the church had no choice but to obey the government since it could punish church members. But why would ecclesiastical authorities take it upon themselves to enforce government mandates? If the government has the power to enforce its own policies, it can unilaterally implement what it wishes without the church’s leadership participation in its injustice. Still, this is not a part of the church’s mission. The church cannot be implicated in discriminating against people. Also, the “they-made-me-do-it” rationale is not a persuasive
theological objection, nor can it be the reason to offend the Creator and fail to shepherd his church, whom he redeemed.

Indeed, God’s Word does not command adherence to man-made regulations as a prerequisite to hearing the gospel and worshiping God. One must accept that discriminating between Christians based on vaccination status is a form of sinful partiality. Consequently, ecclesiastical authorities cannot implement political policies since it is beyond their jurisdiction. Therefore, Christ’s church has no right tomandate human laws as a condition for congregational worship and fellowship. All people, most of all Christians, must be free to join the corporate worship of the saints without fearing government-mandated discrimination based on certain medical procedures.

Second, another objection may argue that discrimination against the unvaccinated is not akin to partiality against the poor because the former chose not to be vaccinated. In contrast, the latter did not choose to be poor. However, one can use the same reasoning against the poor, arguing the poor are idle or keep evil company, and so on. In other words, anyone can say the poor (or the unvaccinated) brought poverty (or discrimination) upon themselves for one reason or another. This objection cannot stand because it is self-refuting unless one can argue all the poor never made immoral or unwise choices that led, directly or indirectly, to their poverty.

Regardless, the church is still called to minister to the poor, even when they make bad choices. Christian ministry should be accessible to all who want to hear God’s Word. Then why not unvaccinated persons? Therefore, the church cannot be the vehicle of governmental policies nor be a party to implementing unethical mandates. The church cannot be the witness of the impartial Lord who freely gave himself to undeserving sinners while simultaneously being
defiled with the very sin (i.e., impartiality) she, in her prophetic role, was supposed to reject (see James 2:1; compare with Rom. 2:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:18-6:10; Eph. 5:11, 6:19-20).

Finally, the church is a divine institution with a unique calling, being accountable to God for implementing and teaching his laws and proclaiming liberty to the captives through the gospel of salvation to all nations. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her (Matt. 16:15-19; 28:18-20). Consequently, the church cannot neglect God’s objective moral standard because she is the custodian of God’s pure and perfect Word, becoming the vehicle of divine grace to all (1 Tim. 3:15, 4:6-16). For this reason, the church cannot practice partiality by discriminating against a portion of the population she’s supposed to serve.

The Theological Application: Church Discrimination Based on Vaccination Status

The above exposition demonstrated the sin of partiality is a grievous infringement of the Moral Law. James warned of a swift judgment against those who presumptuously spurn the law of God (2:13; 5:9). According to the selected pericope, James urged the Judean churches of his day against transgressing God’s law, namely, through the practice of partiality. Therefore, it was incumbent on Judean churches to obey God’s commandments as it was incumbent on the evangelical churches of Quebec to do the same and submit to his admonition no matter the cost. For this reason, Doriani writes: “The law will be our judge. Why? Above all, because God gave the law. To break the law is to contradict God’s will. Moreover, when we break the law we fail to act like his children. We neither walk in his ways nor imitate him.”

Ultimately, Quebec churches that discriminated against the unvaccinated have transgressed God’s law and the Lord will hold them accountable. Such churches have unjustly

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103 Doriani, James, 75-76.
barred God’s covenant people from joining the assembly of the saints to worship and fellowship, effectively relegating them to unfavored “seating,” namely, the virtual seats away from the congregation. This is a sin against the brethren and a heinous sin against the holy Father of these rejected saints and the judge of all. Considering this, this subsection will show how barring healthy Christians from gathering the saints on the Lord’s Day based on vaccination status is sinful partiality which should be rejected in the church of Christ, as commanded by God in James 2:1-13. In other words, it will demonstrate how discriminating against Christians based on vaccination status is unjust partiality, violating God’s Moral Law. More specifically, the below table will show how this contemporary sin of partiality (favoritism and unlawful discrimination based on vaccination status) violates the whole law (James 2:10), namely, the Ten Commandments.

This subsection understands the Ten Commandments as interpreted by Westminster divines who drafted the Westminster Larger Catechism. The Westminsterian principles of interpreting the Ten Commandments are outlined in their answer to Question 99 of the catechism. First, they assert the perfection of the law and its abiding validity to all, requiring absolute and perpetual obedience and conformity to it in all matters of life and righteousness. The Moral Law demands utmost diligence and forbids all and any degree of sin (see Ps. 19:7; Matt. 5:21-22; James 2:10). Second, the Moral Law is spiritual, which means it ought to penetrate to affect the regenerate’s “understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures. (Rom. 7:14, Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37-39, Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 37-39, 43-44).” Third, the commandments may overlap in forbidding or

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requiring the same thing from various angles (see Col. 3:5, Amos 8:5, Prov. 1:19, 1 Tim. 6:10).¹⁰⁵

Fourth, the Ten Commandments are to be taken in their duality, meaning that where “a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden” and vice versa (Deut. 6:13; Isa. 58:13; Matt. 4:9-10; 15:4-6; 5:21-25; Eph. 4:28).¹⁰⁶ The same principle applies to promises and warnings of the Law (see Exod. 20:7, 12; Ps. 15:1, 4-5; 24:4-5; Prov. 30:17; Jer. 18:7-8). Fifth, what God forbids or commands is always a human duty (Deut. 4:8-9; Job 13:7-8; 36:21; Rom. 3:8; Heb. 11:25), but not every duty is to be simultaneously done all the time (Matt. 12:7). In other words, God’s people must always obey their Lord. Still, some of his commands are time constrained (e.g., the Lord’s Day is only on Sunday). Sixth, the same category of sin or duty encompasses all kinds of similar sin or commands “together with all the causes, means occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, Matt. 15:4-6, Heb. 10:24-25, 1 Thess. 5:22, Jude 23, Gal. 5:26, Col. 3:21).”¹⁰⁷

Seventh, every person is bound to fulfill what God called him to obey and avoid all that he forbade, according to their station and calling in life (see Gen. 18:19; Exod. 20:10; Lev. 19:17; Deut. 6:6-7; Josh. 24:15).¹⁰⁸ In commenting on this principle, Vos writes: “It is our duty to encourage righteousness and discourage sin on the part of others.”¹⁰⁹ Eighth, every person is

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¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

therefore bound to help others fulfill their duties as commanded by the Lord by either counseling them or refusing to participate in their sin against others and the Lord, according to 2 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:22.\textsuperscript{110}

Moreover, in his commentary on the Letter of James, Doriani demonstrated how partiality, according to James’s teaching, violated all the commandments of the Decalogue. He argued, “Favoritism prefers the rich man because it covets the riches that the rich can bestow, breaking the tenth commandment.” It also “bears false witness because it implies that a poor man has less worth,” violating the ninth. He further argued partiality “robs the poor of the dignity they deserve,” breaking the eighth commandment. Furthermore, he added, “To favor the rich is a kind of unfaithfulness to the bond of Christian fellowship,” which trespasses the seventh commandment.\textsuperscript{111}

In violation of the sixth and fifth commandments, favoritism “kills the spirit of the poor by demeaning them, even in the church” and “dishonors the poor, but we must honor all who deserve honor, including one another.” He added that favoritism in the church defiles worship of God on the Lord’s Day, breaking the fourth commandment. “Every believer is a representative of God. If we favor the rich over the poor, we misrepresent God and his name, for he does not play favorites.” Finally, since this violates God’s Moral Law, it is likewise a denial of his lordship, transgressing the first and second commandments simultaneously.\textsuperscript{112}

Considering Doriani’s application and the Westminsterian principles discussed earlier, the following table will demonstrate the covenantal applicability of the Decalogue on the lives of

\textsuperscript{110} The Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer 99.

\textsuperscript{111} Doriani, James, 72-73.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
New Covenant saints, even applying it to the contemporary issue of barring unvaccinated Christians from joining the worship of God in the Church of Christ. Consequently, the below table follows the definitions and parameters set by the Westminster Larger Catechism of each of the Ten Commandments. It would be superfluous to reproduce the catechism’s canonical application of every commandment here. However, the reader is strongly encouraged to refer to the catechism’s definition of each commandment as he examines the contemporary application provided. The corresponding catechism entries have been provided to facilitate the cross-referencing procedure to aid the reader. Therefore, the table will provide some examples how succumbing to the previously described unjust governmental mandate violates the Moral Law, as the writer suggested in James 2:10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Moral Law (As interpreted by the WLC)</th>
<th>Contemporary Application (Barring Christians from church gatherings based on their vaccination status as per governmental policies)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Ninth Commandment:</strong> Prohibition against bearing false witness (includes passing unjust judgment and calling the good-evil) (Exod. 20:16; see also WLC Questions 144-45)</td>
<td>It is good and godly to obey God in the corporate gathering and worship of Christians on the Lord’s Day (Heb. 10:23-25). Barring unvaccinated Christians from church gatherings implies they are defiled or unclean (e.g., spiritually profane, diseased, or pose a danger to others) because of their governmental status despite being healthy persons and holy in God’s sight. If welcoming all people without distinction renders Christian gatherings unloving (or evil) in the sight of the world while it is not, then to follow the world’s assessment bears false witness because it calls evil and unloving what God calls good and loving (e.g., Isa. 5:20–21). This is also motivated by self-interest rather than self-sacrificial love (i.e., John 15:12-14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Sixth Commandment:</strong> Prohibiting murder (Exod. 20:13; see also WLC Questions 135-36)</td>
<td>Barring unvaccinated Christians from church gatherings is unloving, promoting anger and hatred in Christ’s family (Matt. 5:21-24; Isa. 1:11-23). Partiality attacks Christian unity. It demeanes, provokes, oppresses, and wounds Christians at the hands of their fellow brothers and sisters. The church must protect and defend the unvaccinated who are unjustly oppressed by society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(James 2:6). Instead, local churches must be a sanctuary for the oppressed and a haven for the outcasts and marginalized of society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Fifth Commandment:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honoring the parents (Exod. 20:12; see also WLC Questions 126, 129-32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination against unvaccinated Christians dishonors those who must be honored as equals and fellow brothers and sisters. The elders (governing superiors and under-shepherds of Christ) in the church must protect the body of Christ, provide for their spiritual nourishment, and preserve their dignity as the beloved of Christ (see also 1 Pet. 5:1-11). Accordingly, the elders cannot command anything the Lord has not commanded or exclude whom the Lord has welcomed. Christ alone is Lord and the Head of the Church. He alone reserves the right to receive and excommunicate according to his revealed will in Scripture and through qualified church officers (elders).</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Fourth Commandment:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Remembering and sanctifying the Christian Sabbath (Exod. 20:8; see also WLC Questions 116-17, 121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sin of partiality (favoring the vaccinated against the unvaccinated) defiles Christ’s church and her worship, profaning the Lord’s Day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Additionally, it causes barred Christians to neglect the Sabbath, promoting irreligiosity and impiety. It also gives Satan a foothold to make Christians stumble. Besides, Christ alone regulates worship since he is the Lord of the Sabbath, not civil magistrates (Matt. 12:1-13; Lk. 20:25).</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Third Commandment:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Defiling the name of Christ and his ordinances, which are rooted in his character (Exod. 20:7; see also WLC Questions 112-13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Christian represents Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:14-20). Thus, favoring the vaccinated over the unvaccinated dishonors Christ and defiles his glorious name. For in doing so, Christians disregard the Lord’s commandments (Ps. 50:16-17; 1 Thess. 2:16). The Lord abhors partiality and does not deal in unequal weights and measures (Prov. 20:10). So, too, Christians must reject such practices in obedience to Christ and conformity to his image.</td>
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<tr>
<th>The First and Second Commandments:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no God besides Yahweh, and he must be obeyed above all else. God’s worship is his, and due to him alone in the manner he prescribed without any addition or subtractions (Exod. 20:1-6; see 113 Leon Morris, <em>The Gospel According to Matthew</em>, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 304-05, Logos Electronic Edition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To mandate vaccine passports is to build barriers that create a godless, double-tier system based on worldly standards that promote favoritism and partiality and demand allegiance to a government above God. Thus, it is unfaithfulness to Christ’s covenant, as it elevates Man’s law above God’s. It is also an affront to the bond of Christian unity and fellowship (see Eph. 2:11-22). God commanded worship and prescribed how he ought to be approached in the church’s worship. Therefore, all</td>
</tr>
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</table>

deviations from his commandments are acts of disobedience. Furthermore, such actions embody a blatant rejection of God’s sovereignty, authority, and lordship over his church. Those who implement man-made decrees as a prerequisite to the church’s worship of God challenge his authority to invite whom he pleases, namely, the outcasts and marginalized of society (i.e., the unvaccinated). They also profane his holy name because he is an impartial judge, treating justly all people, especially those whom he sanctified by his Holy Spirit (see also Acts 10:34-45; 11:17-18).

**Conclusion**

The collective findings of the historical, literary, exegetical, and canonical analyses corroborate the conclusions of the theological application section above. Accordingly, the partiality experienced by some in the messianic communities of James’s day can parallel the partiality experienced by unvaccinated Christians, who were not even allowed unfavored seating but excluded from the assembly of the saints on the Lord’s Day altogether, notwithstanding circumstantial differences. Ultimately, the circumstances experienced by the messianic communities did not cause them to sin against each other; instead, they merely exposed existing spiritual conditions that occasioned James’s ethical exhortations and admonishments. Likewise, the government mandates were the circumstances that exposed the spiritual conditions of many congregations in Quebec, whereby they discriminated against their own Christian family based on vaccination status alone. For this reason, partiality should be seen as a symptom of the spiritual condition of some, who, like those in James’s day, allowed their carnality to rise to the surface. They then acted unjustly against many and, in the process, spurning God’s ethical standards.

Therefore, the admonitions in James 2:1-13 remain pertinent to the vaccination passport controversy. Indeed, Quebec churches need to return to God’s standard of justice as revealed in
the Moral Law if they were to address the sin of partiality that lurks beneath the surface, damaging the body of Christ and its witness. Quebec churches must submit themselves to God’s law, thereby relenting from all forms of partiality; these forms include prejudice, favoritism, and unbiblical discrimination. As the enemy entices Christ’s family to turn inward, God’s people must, in turn, heed James’s exhortation to obey the Moral Law (e.g., 1 John 5:2-4) and discern the times (see 1 Chron. 12:32; Eph. 4:13-16). James’s teaching encourages God’s people to be critical thinkers, self-sacrificial, and obedient. In response, the church must reject the carnal temptation to discriminate unjustly and trust the Lord by submitting to his Word. Only then will the church be wise, discerning, courageous, and able to stand up for biblical justice and righteousness by rejecting all forms of partiality for the glory of the Triune God.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 3:13-4:12)
CHAPTER 6

BIBLICAL JUSTICE FOR TODAY: A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR APPLYING JUSTICE

Introduction

This final chapter functions as the conclusion of the research in a manner that will address some vital contentions advanced by this dissertation’s thesis, namely, the covenantal nature of the Ten Commandments and the universality of the Mosaic concept of justice as revealed in the Torah and represented in the Covenant Code (CC). In other words, the concept of justice in the Torah, as presented here, lays the foundation of the prophetic and apostolic understanding of justice. Indeed, the writers of Psalm 119 and the letter of James, for instance, share common assumptions about justice and its applications. So, whether it is a prophet’s extolling of the Law of God and his condemning of those who disregard it or James’s exhortation to the Judean churches to obey it, both appeal to the universal principles of justice set forth in the Torah, as was demonstrated in the prior two chapters. This dissertation has addressed a critical portion of Scripture that defines the biblical concept of justice, the CC, and provided two detailed expositions as a covenantal application of the Torah and its justice. This was followed by a contemporary case study to demonstrate its real-life applicability.

As this dissertation closes, this chapter will function as a fitting conclusion tying the start of the dissertation with its end as it seeks to address key areas of applying the biblical concept of justice in light of the New Covenant. This chapter aims to answer potential objections to the findings and assumptions of this dissertation by elaborating on and defending the Reformed

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1 This chapter is an adaptation and augmentation of two previously submitted research papers as a part of this Ph.D. program: “The Principles of Justice in the Covenant Code” dated October 10, 2020; and “Delighting in the Law of God” dated March 5, 2021. Used with permission.
evangelical application of justice as set forth here. To that end, this concluding chapter can be divided into three sections. The first section will return to address the hermeneutical divide between Liberation and traditional, evangelical theologies, as discussed in Chapter Two. The first section will give way to the second, which will address the revelatory and practical function of the Mosaic Law for the New Covenant church. This section will propose a principled approach that addresses the issues of application considering various elements of discontinuity and continuity between Old and New Covenants. The approach is an adaptation of Roy E. Gane’s *Progressive Moral Wisdom* (PMW) model based on his book *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application*. Therefore, it will present conclusions stemming from a robust hermeneutical framework sensitive to the chronological development of the Covenant of Grace within the metanarrative of redemptive history. The final section will summarize the dissertation and conclude with final thoughts on the church’s role.

**A Hermeneutical Divide: Liberation Theology and Evangelical Theology**

Among the inquiries this dissertation sought to answer is how a Christian can observe or apply the Law according to the CC, Psalm 119, and James 2:1-13. Maybe the better inquiry could be: how can a Christian live out and promote the morality of justice in her society? This dissertation aims to lay the foundation for understanding the principles of justice according to God’s revealed will. One can understand biblical justice after applying the proper interpretive methodology (i.e., evangelical hermeneutics), being aware, at the same time, of hermeneutical issues surrounding this endeavor. If one accepts the methodology put forth here, he will be

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obliged to apply the Moral Law. Once the exegesis enables the interpreter to map out such principles, it is incumbent on Christians to emulate and apply them in their lives.

As a result, the biblical concept of justice can be extrapolated from the CC, bearing in mind its historical and canonical perspective. As discussed in chapter three, the stipulations of the CC are applications of justice based on the Decalogue (i.e., the Ten Commandments). The matter at hand presents a slight shift in focus, as it will address hermeneutical concerns that undermine an accurate application of justice on contemporary issues. This section will also presuppose the approach and methodology highlighted in Chapters One and Two, affirming Scripture’s inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility per the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” of 1978. This hermeneutic strives to uncover the authorial intent through a grammatico-historical exegesis.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize most of the application of the Moral Law on New Covenant believers is primarily an intertextual issue, which entails examining the NT use of the Decalogue in its application. Childs suggests modern interpreters may be challenged by how Jesus applies the CC, for example, to his hearers in the Sermon on the Mount. In his Exodus commentary, Childs critiqued a flawed Christian exegesis of Jesus’s application of the CC’s stipulations:

It is a basic misunderstanding of these verses to see here evidence that Jesus merely sought to abrogate a particularly cruel law for a more humane, liberal approach. As if he offered a higher spiritualized ethic to replace Israel’s primitive morality!... The law of God transcends completely the limits set by human society in demanding a complete and limitless response to God. The positive formulation comes in v. 44: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” This is not intended to be a social program (Tolstoy), but an imperative which grows out of a highly theological reflection on the stark discontinuity between God’s call and the rules of human society.³


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Evangelical theologians stand in sharp contrast with those, like Gottwald, who believe the Marxist Political-Economic theories could be beneficial in analyzing the biblical social structure and power relations among various “classes,” “races,” and “genders.” This is called “sociological exegesis,” which uses social theory with the aid of social history and description to draw out meaning from the biblical text, as seen previously. Proponents of this method suggest “sociological exegesis” does not replace other methods but complements them (see extended discussion in Chapter Two).

However, there is an irreconcilable hermeneutical divide between the grammatico-historical and sociological methods of exegesis. For example, studying power relations between genders in ancient Israel cannot possibly contribute to ascertaining the authorial intent of Israel's prophets in conveying God’s message to his people because this type of hermeneutics is not looking for one. Some even go as far as lodging an accusation that Yahweh acts in a manner that is inconsistent with his own Law’s requirements, whereby his followers should not imitate him. Such theologians apply a different hermeneutic altogether.

Paul Evans applies what he called the “hermeneutic of suspicion” on the CC to draw out modern-day Christian application. For this reason, Evans writes:

In seeking the role of the CC in a biblical theology of social justice, our study cannot end with an examination of this legislation in light of its historical context, but must re-read the CC suspiciously and ask whose interest this law serves, and look for ways in which the CC allows for human sinfulness. This hermeneutic of suspicion is so essential that, without it, interpretations run the risk of allowing the CC to justify slavery and help maintain a patriarchal, hierarchical ideology.

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Moreover, the proponents of the “social justice gospel” would have interpreters presuppose hermeneutical praxis that rejects the so-called “status quo.” Indeed, a “hermeneutic of suspicion” is, in effect, a hermeneutic of “postmodern presupposition” that forces the postmodern socio-political and humanist framework of interpretation to bear on the biblical text, replacing the authorial intent with the interpreter’s own. Such exegetes must intentionally look for a thread of biblical revelation to apply an ideological superstructure that predefines concepts like “justice,” “righteousness,” “oppression,” and others, smuggling it into the biblical texts. One may think these words carry the same biblical definition, but afterward, one discovers he became engulfed in a power struggle of class, race, and gender. For example, Moshe Weinfeld proposes the purpose of “justice and righteousness” in OT stipulations are for “improving the status of the poor and the weak in society through a series of regulations which prevent oppression.” Weinfeld strongly emphasized justice in the OT has a strict relationship with social justice acts in the way of “social reforms.”

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8 Evans, “Imagining Justice for the Marginalized,” 29.


10 Ibid.


12 Ibid., 36. In the introduction of his book, Weinfeld writes: “[w]e shall focus in this study upon the practice of righteousness and justice in the social-political realm, seeking to demonstrate that the execution of righteousness and justice in the royal domain refers primarily to acts on behalf of the poor and less fortunate classes of the people. These were carried out by means of social legislation, initiated by the kings and the ruling circles.” (author’s italics) This dissertation contends that the Moral Law goes far beyond the socio-political realm to individual holiness, which Weinfeld does not seem to deny (see chapter ten of his work). Yet, this holiness is rooted in faith in the coming Messiah, his discussion of the eschatological king notwithstanding (see chapters three and nine). In other words, a proper understanding of the law must not view the Moral Law as a works-based system for mere universal social reform but, as God intended, a means to reveal man's sinfulness and calls for faith in the gospel, which is not present in Moshe’s argument. Likewise, Liberation Theology may be viewed as a hermeneutic that argues for a social reform program that is integral and inseparable from the gospel. As a result, this dissertation
Furthermore, any hermeneutic that does not allow biblical writers to define their concepts based on prior revelation (i.e., the Torah), such hermeneutics would import modern notions to define concepts and relationships. “Like the Judaizing in early Christianity, this understanding of the OT also fails to observe the proper distinctions between the acts and ordinances of God in the Old Covenant and those in the New.”

Russell P. Shedd quotes Ellis, who made an illuminating remark on the modern trend of the social justice hermeneutic (i.e., Liberation Theology):

But in terms of its biblical hermeneutic it must be classified as a reactionary, philosophical manifestation of an ancient error of salvation by works. For that the words of Augustine are not inappropriate. “It is because the philosophers will not believe in this beatitude (of eternal life) which they cannot see that they go on trying to fabricate here below an utterly fraudulent felicity built on virtue filled with pride and bound to fail them in the end.”

Therefore, a theologically consistent, historically aware, and contextually faithful biblical hermeneutic will show an adequate understanding of biblical justice contradicts modern notions of Liberation Theology (i.e., the social justice gospel). Indeed, Liberation Theology applies hermeneutical praxis that rejects societal structure and promotes the struggle against layers of oppression, proving its inadequate and misleading methodology. The hermeneutical limitations of Liberation Theology are exposed at the foot of such biblical texts because a section like Exodus 21:1-11 assumes the existence of slavery and seeks to regulate it without advocating for a “class struggle” between the “servant class” and their “masters.”

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14 Ibid., 218.
15 Ibid.
16 Enns, Exodus, 443.
On the one hand, the Exodus event is not about freeing “oppressed” slaves; if it were so, this section would have been about exterminating the practice altogether.\textsuperscript{17} This is not to justify slavery of any kind but to maintain a sound hermeneutic that aims to draw out the true meaning without reading socio-political ideologies into the biblical text. On the other hand, God intended to create a more humane society that would become a beacon of God’s light.\textsuperscript{18} God advances his purposes despite the tragedies that resulted from a sin-ridden world; he works through his people without removing them from their historical setting. Indeed, the Exodus is about fulfilling God’s promises by advancing his redemptive plan of salvation from the ultimate oppressor, sin, which no one could deliver from but the promised Messiah.

Now, the church stands on the other side of the advent of Christ, limiting the Mosaic Law’s judicial applicability (e.g., the CC).\textsuperscript{19} However, Chapter Three demonstrated how the CC’s judicial system stems from the moral foundation in the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20). This makes the Decalogue the universally applicable framework of justice. The Decalogue is the Moral Law, which transcends covenants and cultures because it is embedded in nature, as noted in Chapter Two. Therefore, the moral principles of biblical justice stand as real and true today as they once did in Moses’s time.\textsuperscript{20} The casuistic laws operated as practical examples of biblical justice, albeit within a different historical setting. For this reason, Mackay proposed Christians ought to study the circumstances which called for the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17} Enns, \textit{Exodus}, 443.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Mackay, \textit{Exodus}, 359-60.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
judicial application of the CC’s moral principles and transfer the same principles into a different set of modern circumstances.  

Consequently, the CC becomes the outworking of the Decalogue’s conception of justice and righteousness. The CC speaks directly to the concept of biblical justice. Indeed, God's definition of justice is carried forward in the remainder of the Torah and referred to by subsequent inspired writers, as represented by the expositions of Psalm 119 and James 2:1-13. Misunderstandings of the biblical definition of justice impact much of the biblical revelation, deforming its application in the lives of New Covenant believers. True biblical justice principles have a direct Christian application, but it assumes a prior understanding of justice in the Torah.

**Revelatory and Practical Function of the Mosaic Law for the New Covenant Church**

There are several views regarding the application of the Decalogue in the New Covenant within the Reformed tradition, such as the theonomic and classical views. Notwithstanding divergent views, there is a near-universal consensus that the Torah, summarized in the Decalogue, is both fundamental to the Mosaic Covenant and “an integral part of the Covenant of Grace.” However, according to Sailhamer, Coccejus diverges from the Reformed consensus espoused by the vast majority of Covenant Theologians (e.g., Louis Berkhof). Based on Gal. 3:19, Coccejus asserted the Law was added to the Mosaic Covenant for the Israelite transgression in the wilderness. This interpretation unnecessarily demotes substantial portions

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22 Ibid.


24 Ibid., 351-52.

25 Ibid. Sailhamer references the primary source, which is written in Latin. He cites “Johann Coccejus, *Summa theologiae ex scripturis repetita*, in *Opera omnia* [Amsterdam, 1701], 7:281-90.”
of the Mosaic Law to an appendage status. In contrast, Jesus seems to refute that interpretation in Matt. 19:8 saying the Law merely revealed the hardness of the people’s hearts, which agrees with Paul in Rom. 7:7.

Moreover, Coccejus’s position cannot be sustained based on his interpretation of Gal. 3:19 because Paul’s argument in the context of the whole book seems to contradict Coccejus. According to Galatians, the Judaizers’ demands were two-fold. First, they demanded the Gentile believers be circumcised as a prerequisite to faith in the Jewish Messiah (Gal. 6:12-15). Second, they demanded Gentiles observe the Mosaic Law as a condition to maintain their justification in the Messiah (Gal. 2:15-16). However, Paul insisted justification is by faith in Jesus alone because salvation is through faith in the promise of God according to the Abrahamic Covenant, which anticipated salvation by faith, not through meritorious works of the Law (Gal. 3:10-18). Evidently, Paul did not argue against the legitimate use of the law since his concern was on the illegitimate use of it.

As far as Paul is concerned, the Mosaic Law itself did not contradict the promise but also anticipated it as it fulfilled God’s purposes for a time (Gal. 3:21-26). In other words, the Law does not contradict the Abrahamic covenantal promise of the seed, who is Jesus (Gal. 3:16). Block argued Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith is anchored in the teaching of the Torah itself. Paul was not inventing a new doctrine but pointing to what has been already revealed, but had been misunderstood to think justification necessitated works-righteousness. So, Paul’s claim that the law was “added because of transgression” did not mean the Moral Law is now void. Instead, the Law was added to the Abrahamic promise as a part of God’s immutable will,

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revealing to the Israelites their transgression and their need for the promised seed to fulfill the whole Law, which they, in their flesh, cannot (see Gal. 3:19; Matt. 5:17; Rom. 7:7-14).

There was not a time in redemptive history when salvation came through works of the Law, but “faith working through love” by the power of the Spirit, which is the fulfillment of the Law (see Gal. 5:6, 14, 22). For this reason, Gal. 3:19 should not be interpreted as Paul rejecting the proper use of the Moral Law in light of the coming of Christ. Instead, he articulated that the Law’s purpose was to reveal transgression, as he explicitly stated elsewhere (see Rom. 7:7-14). In his commentary on Galatians, Calvin added critically important insights with a strong caution:

"The law has manifold uses, but Paul confines himself to that which bears on his present subject. He did not propose to inquire in how many ways the law is of advantage to men. It is necessary to put readers on their guard on this point; for very many, I find, have fallen into the mistake of acknowledging no other advantage belonging to the law, but what is expressed in this passage. Paul himself elsewhere speaks of the precepts of the law as profitable for doctrine and exhortations. (2 Tim. 3:16.) The definition here given of the use of the law is not complete, and those who refuse to make any other acknowledgment in favour of the law do wrong."\(^{27}\)

Moreover, Paul’s argument in Gal. 3:21-29 is that Christ is the sole and ultimate Mediator for the one God (vv. 20, 26-27), wherein the Law and the Prophets served to reveal sin and the need for the promise of the one Lord, Mediator, and Savior (e.g., Rom. 10:4, 2 Cor. 3:14-15, Eph. 2:12).

Paul’s argument implies the Law’s legitimate role, which is obedience to God. This obedience is not a prerequisite for salvation; rather it is the fruit of faith in the promise (Gal. 5:4-6). Hence, the fruit of regeneration is obedience to the Moral Law (Gal. 5:13-15; 6:2). John Calvin’s three principal uses of the revelatory nature of the Law of God are useful here. He proposed the Law’s revelatory function includes: first, the conviction of sin (see also Rom. 7:7-14); second, the restraint for moral evil (Rom. 2:13-15); third, the revelation of God’s will in the

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lives of believers to strive and seek after good works as per the holy moral standard of the Law (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 2:10; 4:17-24; James 2:14-20).^28

Additionally, Dempster argued Paul understood assigning salvific power to Law-keeping is an illegitimate use.^29 Instead, Paul called regenerate believers to live out their faith in obedience to the Law as a faithful response to the Covenant of Grace.^30 The Mosaic Law and the Prophets reveal human sinfulness in contrast to God’s holy nature, necessitating an all-sufficient Savior. For example, the ceremonial law was not an end in itself because its purpose was to reveal God’s holiness and expose man’s sinfulness by dramatizing the just judgment of sin in the shedding of the blood of sacrificial animals (e.g., Heb. 9:22-26). That is, Paul understood the Law as a “schoolmaster” or a “tutor” to Israel in anticipation of the coming of the ultimate Redeemer and Mediator (see Gal. 3:24, KJV and NKJV). For this reason, Sailhamer noted the OT prophets not only preached the Law to address societal concerns but also to look forward to the hope of the Messiah.^31 This Messiah will deliver the people from their sins and give them a new heart that desires to obey the Moral Law (e.g., Jer. 31:31-34; see also Heb. 8:4-13).

Therefore, Pentateuch (or Torah), rightly understood, sees the Messiah and his work as its fulfillment.^32 Thus, any reading that abrogates the OT must be rejected in favor of one that sees the Mosaic Law and the message of the Torah in light of the New Covenant. Consequently, the Moral Law can take its proper place in the life of New Covenant saints, becoming a framework for godliness and the guide for the good work God commanded his people to fulfill (see Eph.

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^29 Dempster, “Review Article,” 45-46.

^30 Ibid.


^32 Ibid.
New Covenant saints have their hearts circumcised and are now able to live out God’s Law written on them (see Deut. 10:16; 1 Kings 8:58; Ps. 37:31, 40:8; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26; Rom. 2:29; and Heb. 8:10). For this reason, it can be said the NT church explicitly manifests what the Mosaic Covenant implicitly reveals (or explicitly anticipates).

As for the practical function of the Mosaic Law, there are many approaches to the Mosaic Law within the Reformed tradition, which this section will not address; since the second chapter alluded to various positions, such as the Theonomist position. Instead, the focus will be applying an approach inspired by Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application by Roy E. Gane. It may be helpful to begin to lay the foundation of this modified approach through working assumptions adapted from Gane’s Progressive Moral Wisdom (PMW) model. First, the moral objectives of every precept of the Mosaic Law, whether apodictic or casuistic, must be maintained. Second, principles derived from the Mosaic Law’s practical directives, such as the regulative principle of worship, must be maintained.

Third, literalist interpretation is always preferred, even necessitated; otherwise, a minimal accommodation may be accepted for culture-specific directives. Fourth, all laws that accommodated and regulated Israelite pre-existing cultural norms (i.e., slavery and polygamy) must be identified and isolated. Fifth, all Mosaic Laws that restrict their applicability due to their inherent presupposition (i.e., Levirate marriage to maintain land inheritance) must also be made obsolete. Sixth, although the literal application of some of the laws, such as certain

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34 Ibid.

35 Such interpretation seeks the authorial intent and takes into account the connotative (figurative) and denotative (non-figurative) language.

ceremonial and judicial precepts, cannot be maintained for one of the controls given above, yet the spirit of such laws retains its authority.\(^3\) Indeed, Paul’s teaching in 2 Tim. 3:16 supports this principle.\(^3\)

Moreover, Gane warned against an antinomian interpretation of the Mosaic Law writing of a popular misconception that asserts “Christ’s commandment to love one another supersedes OT law.”\(^4\) He further critiqued such a sentimental notion as “hazardous for Christians to latch on to the word ‘love’ as their only responsibility if they assume they know what it means, according to their own subjective notions.” Gane also viewed the Mosaic Law through Christ’s person and atoning work, including the establishment of the New Covenant Church.\(^4\) This church is God’s eschatological covenant people, encompassing both Jews and Gentiles. The Old Covenant and ancient Israel gave way to the purpose for which it was initially instituted. That is the New Covenant Church established by the blood of the Messiah, a superior covenant for eschatological Israel, the true Israel (Heb 8; Rom. 9:4-8). For this reason, Reformed Evangelical hermeneutics require that Mosaic Law must be applied after it has been filtered through the Gospel.

The authors of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith wrote in concerning “the Law of God”:

> In addition to this law—usually called the moral law—God was pleased to give the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typological ordinances. In some ways these concerned worship, by prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and


\(^3\) Ibid.


\(^4\) Ibid.
benefits. In other ways they revealed various instructions about moral duties. Since all of these ceremonial laws were appointed only until the new order arrived, they are now abolished and taken away by Jesus Christ. As the true Messiah and the only lawgiver, He was empowered by the Father to do this.\textsuperscript{42}

Indeed, the Moral Law applies in the New Covenant age, as well as the general equity of the judicial and the spirit of the ceremonial laws. For this reason, they further wrote the following concerning the applicability of the judicial and moral laws:

To Israel He also gave various judicial laws, which ceased at the same time their nation ended. These laws no longer obligate anyone as part of that institution. Only their general principles of justice continue to have moral value. The moral law forever requires obedience of everyone, both those who are justified as well as others. This obligation arises not only because of its content but also because of the authority of God the Creator who gave it. Nor does Christ in any way dissolve this obligation in the gospel; instead, He greatly strengthens it.\textsuperscript{43}

Consequently, all hermeneutical exercises that apply OT Law must thoroughly examine the applicability level to contemporary case scenarios without the faulty notion that views the Mosaic Law as a flawed or abrogated moral system, which was replaced, in part or whole, by an improved one. Therefore, although this dissertation does not support the Theonomic view, yet in applying certain judicial precepts based on their general equity (i.e., general principles of justice), a note of caution written by Greg L. Bahnsen should be heeded:

Nothing that has been said above means that the work of Christian ethics is a pat and easy job. Even though the details of God’s law are available to us as moral absolutes, they still need to be properly interpreted and applied to the modern world. It should constantly be borne in mind that no school of thought, least of all the theonomist outlook, has all the answers. Nobody should get the impression that clear, simple, or incontestable “solutions” to the moral problems of our day can be just lifted from the face of Scripture’s laws. A tremendous amount of homework remains to be done, whether in textual exegesis, cultural analysis, or moral reasoning—with plenty of room for error and correction.\textsuperscript{44}


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Bahnsen, “The Theonomic Reformed View,” 115.
Furthermore, theologians such as David A. Dorsey maintain the OT’s legal code is not “legally binding” on Christians.\(^{45}\) Dorsey’s claim is inconsistent with biblical commands that exhort Christians to obey God’s Moral Law (e.g., John 14:15). If Dorsey believes the spirit of the Law retains its authority on Christians,\(^ {46}\) then how can he simultaneously maintain God’s Law is not binding? If so, the Moral Law becomes a divine suggestion for an ideal life. This stance is incompatible with this dissertation’s position because it not only contradicts its hermeneutical methodology and the theological presuppositions highlighted in Chapters One and Two but also alters, if not altogether contradicts, the concept of biblical obedience (Deut. 30:11-20; Ps. 19:7-11; John 14:15; 1 John 2:3, 5:2-3). Such a position cannot be consistent since it does not accept God’s commands are righteous and not burdensome, nor can it void the binding authority of the Moral Law, especially on the regenerate.

Similarly, Gane’s approach, although commendable, is inconsistent. For example, he applies the concept of moral hierarchy, which sees love as the moral ideal.\(^ {47}\) If the Law contains judicial and civil laws that carry moral imperatives that are subprinciples to other “higher ideals” (e.g., the prohibition against charging interest serves the higher ideal of loving one’s neighbor), then how does biblical justice factor into Gane’s equation of biblical love?\(^ {48}\) Or how could Gane’s relegation of judicial justice take seriously the moral implications in the realm of his highest moral ideal, namely, love? Is not the outworking of justice a way of loving one’s neighbor? If justice and love are derived from God’s own nature, then one cannot be subservient


\(^{46}\) Ibid., 331.

\(^{47}\) Gane, Old Testament Law for Christians, 199.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 205-17.
to the other. God is equally just and loving. One characteristic of God cannot supersede the other; they are all equally essential to God’s nature. So it is with his Moral Law. Therefore, to do justice is to love one’s neighbor.

Thus, from a Reformed perspective, Gane’s presuppositions may fall short of an adequate application of the Mosaic Law for NT saints. For this reason, the hermeneutical principle of *analogia scripturae* maintains later revelation cannot contradict an earlier one. While Gane’s “progressive” model does not directly overturn the principle, it undermines it by accusing the Law of moral mediocrity that strives toward a “new creation” ideal in an “egalitarian society.” Gane’s model also undermines God’s immutability. Later revelation cannot elevate earlier revelation to a higher moral plain, as if the former revelation was defective. If Gane’s interpretation views OT laws as subpar morality requiring improvements, then he is espousing an inadequate hermeneutic that is inconsistent with Scripture’s own witness (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Indeed, the NT is the fulfillment of the Old, not its correction.

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49 Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 64-65, Logos Electronic Edition. The authors wrote: “This raises an important issue concerning a distinction in God’s attributes. Reformed writers typically argued that the distinctions we posit among God’s attributes have no objective existence in God, but are merely the result of our limited power of comprehension. Therefore, all of God’s attributes are the ‘manifestation of the same absolutely simple essentiality of God,’ and so ‘it may justifiably be said (Braun I, ii, 2, 19) that ‘God’s righteousness is His goodness, is His knowledge, is His will…. But it would be wrong for me to say that the concept I have of the righteousness is the same concept which I have of the deity, mercy, or eternity.’” Francis Cheynell (1608-1665), in his penetrating work on the Trinity, affirms that though the attributes are “very many,” yet they are “nothing else but the single undivided Essence of God”; that is, the attributes of God belong to the essence of God, and so cannot be properly divided without dividing God’s essence. Leigh also speaks of God’s attributes as all essential to God, ‘for in him is no accident at all; whatsoever is in God the same is God. All these are also one in him; his Mercy is his Justice, and his Justice is his Mercy, and each are his essence, only they differ in our apprehension.’ Charnock, likewise, argues that God’s perfections are identical with His essence; ‘for though we conceive the essence of God as the subject, and the attributes of God as faculties and qualities in that subject, according to our weak model … yet truly and really there is no distinction between his essence and attributes; one is inseparable from the other. His power and wisdom are his essence.’”

Therefore, a Reformed evangelical hermeneutic must assume the NT teaching reapplys the Mosaic Law in light of the coming of Christ without contradicting or improving upon the Moral Law already revealed in the Torah. This hermeneutical exercise may require harmonization when necessary to maintain a lawful use of the Mosaic Law. Francis Turretin gave an example of such lawful use. In Matt. 5:43, hating one’s enemy seems to oppose Jesus’s command to love them in v. 44. However, Turretin suggested Jesus was not rejecting the Mosaic Law, accusing it of an inferior ethic, which Christ is elevating into a superior plain. Instead, Jesus was rejecting the “Pharisaical gloss” that unlawfully used the judicial Law, which has given the sword to the magistrates for punitive judgment (retribution for evil incurred) rather than private revenge, according to Gen. 18:25; Deut. 21:22; 2 Chr. 19:6-7 (cf. Rom. 13:3-4). For this reason, Turretin asserted the Moral Law remains binding on New Covenant believers since they remain under the eternal Covenant of Grace to which the Moral Law is integral. He remarked:

Third, “faith does not make void but establishes the law” (Rom. 3:31). Hence the gospel is often designated by the name law: “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2); “the royal law of liberty” (Jam. 2:8, 12). “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God” (Gal. 2:19) through the law of Christ, to the law of Moses. For it has the relation of a covenant, which is not only to be understood imitatively (mimētikōs) in relation to the mind of the Jews (because the gospel gives truly and perfectly to us what the Jews falsely sought in the law [viz., justification and safety], in which sense even faith is called “the work of God,” Jn. 6:29), but also properly (because the gospel is not without the law, which is now set forth in a certain sweeter manner, but nevertheless always binds man to obedience). Fourth, the moral law is of natural and immutable right (as was proved above). On this account, it pertains equally to all men in whatever state so that they cannot be released from their subjection to it.

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52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 142.
Moreover, although the classical Reformed categorization of the Mosaic Law divides it into three separate categories (moral, ceremonial, civil), Block preferred dividing it into five instead (cultic, social, familial, criminal, and civic); thus, taking into account typological figures while maintaining the continued authority of all precepts which possess a moral dimension or implication. He argued the hermeneutical principle might be transcultural or “couched in culturally specific terms;” in either case, they both maintain eternal divine authority, making them binding on all faithful Christians. This would necessitate maintaining the moral authority of all four categories of the Mosaic Law, excluding external cultic practices. Moreover, Turretin suggested cultic laws, for instance, are no longer functioning in the same way they did in the Mosaic Covenant. Hermeneutically, it must be viewed in two modes: “either with regard to doctrine and signification; or with regard to obligation and observance.” The first remains operative in the theology and life of the Church (substantive continuity) while the latter ended its


56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 134-35. Block noted: “Most Western evangelical Christians assume that unless the New Testament expressly affirms the continued relevance of an Old Testament ordinance, we may assume it has been abrogated in Christ. One should probably rather adopt the opposite stance: unless the New Testament expressly declares the end of an Old Testament ordinance (e.g., the sacrifices), we assume its authority for believers today continues. Third, we recognize that without the background of Old Testament law, Paul’s call for obedience to the ‘law of Christ’ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2) and Jesus’ call for adherence to the ‘commandments’ remain vague and empty, subject to anybody’s personal and subjective interpretation. Familiarity with the Old Testament laws is indispensable for an understanding of Jesus’ and Paul’s ethical exhortations.”

58 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 158.

59 Ibid. Turretin added: “The question is not whether it was abrogated as to doctrine. We confess that it still remains and is useful in many ways among Christians; and that the mystical truth, hidden under this shell, is always the same and of perpetual necessity. Hence on account of that analogy, the names are always retained (the ancient state being changed) and circumcision, sacrifices, altars, incense are attributed to Christians, not because these rites ought to prevail under the gospel, but because the truth of these figures always remains (in which we have the things adumbrated by these signs). Rather the question is whether it was abrogated as to obligation and obedience and whether believers are still in subjection to the ceremonial law (as the Jews of old) and are bound to keep it (as the Jews maintain). This was the opinion not only of the Jews of old (and is of those in our time), but also of the Judaizing false apostles in the time of the apostles. They urged the observance of ceremonies as necessary, rashly confounding the law with the gospel, Moses with Christ. However we, with the apostles and the whole church, deny it.”
purpose with regard to its historical administration (external/superficial discontinuity). This principle can be carried over to all the five categories highlighted above.

The NT church’s delightful obedience to God’s Law is grounded in the level of seriousness by which they take the Lord at his word when he said in Deut. 4:5-8 that his Law is wisdom and understanding, not only to Israel but also in the sight of all nations. Consequently, God’s Law possessed broad applicability from the beginning to include Gentile nations who were not a part of Israel’s theocracy. Therefore, the continuity advocated in this section is not foreign to the biblical witness. Still, it takes the Creator and Sovereign over the world at his inerrant word as per Lev. 24:22; Prov. 14:34; Isa. 51:4; Micah 4:2 (see also Rom. 7:12).

This does not diminish the work that must be put in on the part of the exegete to apply the Law in any contemporary scenario. This dissertation attempted to provide an example of such work in the case study put forth in Chapter Five. Any shortcomings the case study may have presented result from one or both of the following reasons: a rejection of the classical Reformed formulation of Covenant Theology; and/or an a priori rejection of the case study’s conclusions. Regardless of one’s view of the controversial case study, it should not reflect negatively on the view advocated here, even as it demonstrates a coherent approach consistent with this dissertation’s position. The merit of the covenantal application of the Decalogue to NT saints must be evaluated based on the hermeneutical methodology, the exegetical data, and the consistency through which the application follows from the interpretive approach and the theological information. If the application is consistent with both, it must be accepted as adequate and compatible with Reformed Evangelical hermeneutics and theology.


61 Ibid.
Final Summary and Research Conclusion

This chapter represents the culmination of this dissertation after three expositions and a case study. The first exposition was of the CC (Exodus 21:1-23:33), which itself was an application of the Decalogue for the Mosaic generation. The CC was, in effect, the original and authoritative explanation of justice. In other words, it was a covenantal application of biblical justice. This is the foundation of this dissertation, as it demonstrates the most fundamental premise of the thesis, which sought to establish a biblical theology of justice (מִשְׁפָּט), ascertaining that the commands and references to justice in Scripture are comprehensively and exclusively rooted in the Moral Law of the Torah,\(^{62}\) summarized in the Ten Commandments. The second exposition was of Psalm 119, which sought to ground biblical obedience to the Torah, as revealed in the Decalogue, becoming the covenantal standard of morality. Psalm 119 forms a poetic canonical bridge between the Old and New Covenants’ conceptualization of covenantal obedience to the moral imperatives of the Lord of the Covenant of Grace, which encompass both Old and New Covenants.

Therefore, there is a sense of covenantal solidarity between God’s people in the Old and the New, at least on the level of applying principles of justice in interpersonal relationships (not necessarily in the judicial sense). It is this understanding of covenantal application that this dissertation employed. For this reason, Chapter Four expounded on the psalmist’s delight of the Law of God in Psalm 119, becoming the delight of the Old and New Covenant saints alike. As a result, all of God’s elect throughout the ages become one people under one God, who is the Lord of the Covenant of Grace. Hence, any pursuit of justice must be a pursuit of obeying the Moral Law in imitation of the character of the lawgiver.

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\(^{62}\) The Torah here is a reference to the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy).
The third exposition was of James 2:1-13, which sought to establish the ongoing validity and relevance of the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, in the lives of the New Covenant church. This exposition was followed by a contemporary case study that applied biblical justice using the Decalogue. As a result, obedience to the Decalogue is not only expected of New Covenant members but is also directly related to the Great Commission mandate because the Lord has exhorted his disciples to teach the nations to obey all he has commanded (Matt. 28:20), which surely incorporates the Decalogue of justice, retaining its binding nature and applicability for today. Therefore, Christians must delight, obey, and teach the Decalogue to fulfill the Great Commission so that whomever God saves by the gospel can be holy and ready for every good work, including the pursuit of justice (Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14).
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