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The Scatological Scriptures: A Biblical Theology of Dung

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INTRODUCTION

In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, the Apostle Paul pens the following: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work,” (English Standard Version). The Apostle offers no asterisk or footnote to young Timothy, wherein Paul nominates an exception to the exhortation given to his protégé. While conservative Christian laymen, theologians, and scholars alike would be quick to affirm Paul’s counsel to Timothy, a fair number would likewise squirm when pressed to affirm 2 Timothy 3:16–17 regarding the controversial or culturally embarrassing portions of Scripture. Again, the Apostle Paul gives no footnote of exception.

The hesitancy to affirm the controversial or culturally embarrassing portions of Scripture likely intensifies when the scriptural meta-hermeneutic asserted by Christ in Luke 24 is held in tandem with the words of Paul. The scriptural meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 depicts the risen Christ, in two separate pericopes, doubly asserting that the entirety of the Scriptures find their fulfillment in him. Luke 24 blatantly asserts itself as the chapter to which all history, promise, and prophecy of the Scriptures finds fulfillment in and must be interpreted by.¹ Thus, the words of Christ himself in Luke 24 become the preeminent field guide for interpreting every promise, typology, and intertextuality of the Scriptures² – even the embarrassing portions.

One such biblical domain perceived as non-Christocentric, embarrassing, and of little value for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness is the domain of dung. Are

¹Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 119

² Ibid.

the portions of Scripture that speak of excrement profitable? Do these same portions of Scripture that speak of excrement really find their fullest meaning in Christ? Indeed, in every way. The hypothetical squirming and embarrassment that pertain to dung in the Bible are evidenced by the anemic amount of material written on the topic. While there are numerous academic articles, dictionary entries, and various points of commentary pertaining to particular passages associated with dung, a work focused on formulating a synthesis on what the Scriptures teach regarding dung seems to be lacking. Instead of atomized comments, what is required is a holistic handling of what the Scriptures teach concerning dung and an appropriate application of such teaching to the Christian life. Thus, what is required is a biblical theology of dung.

Biblical Theology and Biblical Worldview

As Greidanus keenly observes, “[a] Biblical theology has the task of providing summary interpretations of the final form of the individual Biblical documents or groups of writings and of presenting the longitudinal themes, motifs, and concepts that emerge from the Biblical materials.”³ Thus, formulating a biblical theology centered upon any given topic, theme, or doctrine is merely an attempt to take the words of both Christ and the Apostle Paul seriously.

Hence, biblical theology and biblical worldview are intertwined and cannot be divorced. As Bartholomew observes, “[w]orldview is a translation of the German word *Weltanschauung*. It was coined by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his 1790 publication *Critique of Judgment*. In Kant’s *idealism* there is a single set of determining categories in rational minds by

³ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 69.

which humans interpret and view the world.”⁴ Expanding upon the postulation of Kant, Sire notes:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁵

Thus, a biblical worldview focuses on how to view the world through the lens of the Bible, allowing the Bible to shape the thoughts, opinions, and processes of he who would look through such sacred spectacles.⁶ Since the totality of Scripture is profitable for shaping Christian thought and deed, the teaching of the Scriptures inevitably bring forth a robust, Christocentric worldview which includes a biblical theology of dung.

Nevertheless, why is a biblical theology of dung clearly lacking within the academic realm and the church at large? One reason is surely awkwardness. A second reason for the lack may be inconsistency of biblical thought due to embarrassment and a fear of potential blasphemy. Another still may be the tried-and-true conjecture of “familiarity breeds contempt.” It would seem that “[s]ometimes the Bible uses a term or concept so frequently, or a term or

⁴ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 102-03.

⁵ James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 116.

⁶ James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing A Biblical View of the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers: 1999,) 1. Cf. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 115: “It is like a pair of glasses; we look through them at the world, and only rarely do we look at the glasses themselves. Thus, it is easy to think that we see the world in an unmediated, objective, neutral fashion, until one becomes conscious that one’s perspective on the world is mediated through one’s worldview.”

concept becomes so commonplace in human vernacular, that its broader scope, or alternative potential meanings, remain veiled.”⁷

Regardless of any hypothesized answer concerning the anemic attention given to dung and theology, the development of a biblical theology of dung is pertinent since the Scriptures speak of the substance in various settings and in various systems. Dung is inescapable in the life of man, given that it is a byproduct that confronts all humans, from inside themselves and from without. Again, familiarity breeds contempt. Within a biblical worldview that takes the words of Christ and Paul at face value and in seriousness, familiarity should not breed contempt but rather consciousness. Therefore, the aim of this work is to formulate a biblical theology of dung.

Thesis

The thesis of this work can be summarized as follows: the Scriptures contain a theology of dung. When the semantic and conceptual⁸ cognates that pertain to dung are synthesized, the result is a scriptural scatology whereby dung is presented as a symbol for sin.

To clarify, the biblical exhibition of dung presents excrement as a central symbol employed by Scripture to concretize the abstract nature of sin. When each semantic and conceptual cognate that pertains to dung is examined, in nearly every instance where dung is mentioned, sin is in close proximity. The recognition of the dung–sin symbol enlightens particular aspects related to the nature of sin, which mirrors the physical production, elimination,

⁷ Eric R. Waller, “A Biblical Theology of Water” (Ph.D diss., Liberty University, Lynchburg, 2022), 3. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5037&context=doctoral>

⁸ The word “concept” will be used throughout this work and denotes that which may theoretically pertain to dung without being an explicit semantic reference. For example, a euphemism pertaining to the relief of the bowels would be a conceptual counterpart.

and basic attitudes regarding dung. The illumination of the nature of sin can be seen specifically in the aspects of rejection, ejection, mockery, and disgust.

Additionally, the Scriptures present the dung–sin symbol link in a trifold manner. First, the dung–sin symbol communicates that just as dung is created through a bodily process that involves rejection and ejection (elimination), the nature of sin itself also contains the twin concepts of rejection and ejection. Second, the dung–sin symbol communicates a scriptural attitude concerning sin — one of mocking revilement — which ironically involves rejection and ejection by both the divine and human. Third, the revelation of the dung–sin symbol also contains a depiction of grace which corresponds to elimination and attitude. Of the latter, cognizance of how Scripture views sin acts as a deterrent of commitment; of the former, the elimination of sin — mirroring the bodily process of rejection and ejection — brings forth restoration.

Methodology

Given the scope of this body of work, prefatory considerations concerning the hermeneutical and exegetical methodology employed within it are beneficial. These considerations are in no way intended to be condescending. Rather, they are an attempt to facilitate a clear framework to avoid miscommunication of the data and alleviate possible presuppositions. Likewise, methodological overview does not mean that each section of this work is atomized into the proceeding categories.

Hermeneutical and Exegetical Blueprint

Generally, the hermeneutical and exegetical blueprint of this work coincides with the hermeneutical triad presented by Köstenberger and Patterson.⁹ In forming a biblical theology of any sort, heavy attention must be paid to the triad of historical, literary, and theological contexts in any given pericope or pertinent verse. In addition to the hermeneutical triad, there are four hermeneutical tools employed in exegeting a biblical theology of dung herein that require further expansion: the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24, synchronic and diachronic analysis, biblical chronological considerations, and exegetical method.

The Meta-Hermeneutic of Luke 24

As mentioned previously, Luke 24 is the meta-hermeneutic of Scripture which recalibrates any given text from rigid, contextually locked to robust, Christocentrically full. Since Christ came not to abolish the Law or Prophets but to highlight their telos in him (Matt. 5:17), the historical and literary context of any given text of Scripture is thus preserved and enriched.¹⁰ The meta-hermeneutic of the Bible is unashamedly Christocentric.¹¹

Thus, seeking to formulate a biblical theology of dung – or any “theology” for that matter – apart from Christ would be anemic, “vain and confused,” and ultimately “mad” and “short-lived.”¹² Any biblical worldview and biblical theology that seeks to formulate a guiding hermeneutic apart from Christ, fundamentally undermines the biblical worldview and biblical

⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2011).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 85.

theology of Christ himself. To clarify by using a set of stricter literary rules related to typology: dung – symbolizing sin – is the type and Christ is the antitype.¹³ Indeed, “[f]or our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Since the Scriptures symbolize sin via dung, every scriptural implementation of dung is then recalibrated by the Christocentric hermeneutic of Luke 24. Thus, in light of such a meta-hermeneutic, 2 Corinthians 5:21 is seen as proclaiming the message of an incarnate Christ who was rejected, ejected, mocked, and reviled as dung for a gracious purpose.

Thus, a robust biblical theology of dung is required by the Scriptures to give ample attention to the person and work of Christ. This attention will be given intermittently throughout the initial five chapters of this work, with expansive detail pertaining to dung, sin, and Christ provided in chapter six.

Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis

The methodology of this work also utilizes the modern literary models of synchronic and diachronic analyses. An attempt to form a strict dichotomy between synchronic and diachronic approaches to a text is in vain given the various points of overlap. Nevertheless, most formalized biblical theology is intrinsically “synchronic.” A synchronic approach, “is less interested in the

¹³ Typology has generally been defined as “A method of biblical interpretation by which a person, event, or institution (“type”) in the OT corresponds to another one (“antitype”) in the NT within the framework of salvation history,” Friedbert Ninow, “Typology,” ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1341. However, this author would add to “person, event or institution” as type, the notion that objects can also be types. This fact is often overlooked and further demonstrates how the scientific division of strict modern literary standards applied to the Bible is not fully tenable. For example, in John 3:14, Jesus himself gives a “typological” understanding of the bronze serpent in the wilderness of Numbers 21:9 pointing to his redemptive work upon the cross. Christ does not point to the mere “event” of Moses raising the bronze serpent, but to the object within the event, i.e., the serpent, as a part of the “type.”

prehistory of the text and lacks confidence that the context can be discovered. Instead, the focus is on the existing text as a whole, as it was (or is) read by a particular reader. Various methods are applied within this approach, such as the application of rhetorical criticism, analysis of the possible unifying elements of the book, and various theological readings.”¹⁴ McKenzie puts it as follows: “[D]iachronic methods concentrate on the side of text production—the interaction of authors, editors, and tradents with the text. Synchronic methods, by contrast, focus on the other side of the communication equation—the interaction of readers with the text.”¹⁵ Hence, this work interacts largely with the finalized form of the canonical text.

This synchronic interaction does not exclude various diachronic elements. Leonard cogently observes the following regarding the intersection of synchronic and diachronic analyses: “In a synchronic reading, the intersecting relationships among texts are explored without reference to their chronological priority or actual dependence on one another. In a diachronic reading, an effort is made to determine the order in which texts were composed and whether one text relied directly on another.”¹⁶ Thus, this work presents a fusion of various elements of synchronic and diachronic analyses, particularly those elements related to intersecting inter-biblical relationships and chronology.¹⁷ The coordination of assorted synchronic and diachronic methods inevitably results in one addressing the historical-cultural,

¹⁴ Stephen J. Bennett, “Isaiah, Book Of, Critical Issues,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Steven L. McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books: Strategies for Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 35–36.

¹⁶ Jeffery Leonard, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation and Intertextuality,” in *Literary Approaches to the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum and Douglas Estes, vol. 4, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 128–29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

literary, and theological features of any given text.¹⁸ Additionally, the outcome of this work will give a gentle nod to a form of structuralism, although not *in toto*, given that this work is primarily concerned with symbolism.¹⁹

Chronological Consideration

The body of this work will progressively formulate a biblical theology of dung. Each explicit semantic and conceptual cognate that pertains to dung will be examined in the original language within the canonical-chronological setting. Examining each explicit semantic and conceptual cognate pertaining to dung via canonical chronology highlights both the historical and literary points of the aforementioned hermeneutical triad. This work follows the traditional ordering of the canon as presented in the Hebrew Bible (HB): the Pentateuch, the Prophets (divided into Former and Latter), and the Writings. Following the traditional Old Testament (OT) canonical order comes the traditional Matthew-Revelation ordering of the New Testament (NT). Examining the semantic and conceptual cognates that pertain to dung progressively results in allowing the biblical text to be its own catalyst in developing the biblical theology. Fuhr and Köstenberger offer the following remark: “The biblical text comes out of the interface of God and humanity, which took place over time. We shouldn’t read Scripture as if it was revealed apart from the progression of history.”²⁰ Thus, displaying how a word or concept like dung is

¹⁸ Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 66.

¹⁹ Suzanna Smith, “Old Testament Rhetorical and Narrative Criticism,” in *Literary Approaches to the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum and Douglas Estes, vol. 4, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 69.

²⁰ Richard Alan Fuhr Jr. and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016), 33.

used over the course of the biblical timeline within a frame of progressive revelation guards against forming an artificial and anachronistic biblical theology.

This in no way undermines the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24. The original canonical context of any given reference to dung can be examined within its own sequence of progressive revelation while simultaneously being conscious that said reference will ultimately find fulfilment in Christ. Thus, examining each semantic or conceptual cognate related to dung across the scriptural corpus in chronological fashion will logically result in synthesizing the original context of any given dung reference with the Christocentric meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 to produce a robust biblical theology of dung.

Exegetical Method

The exegetical method implemented throughout this work is largely inspired by the “literal-spiritual” exegetical method espoused by Stanglin²¹ or the “New Eyes” method of Jordan,²² although in part from each and following neither model fully. This exegetical method is not merely concerned with the literal-grammatical sense of any given pericope or passage. Rather, the literal-spiritual exegetical model aims to examine the various historical, cultural, and literary facets of any given passage to uncover the practical, spiritual, and ultimately Christocentric applications therein. Hence, the result of a literal-spiritual exegetical method is one of a full-bodied, biblical worldview, where all language, thought and action is shaped by Scripture.²³ This type of bibliocentric worldview exegesis and application is not a modern literary

²¹ Keith D. Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).

²² Jordan, *Through New Eyes*.

²³ Fuhr Jr. and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 217.

invention, but rather the natural outlook of the Scriptures. As Fuhr and Köstenberger cogently observe, “[S]uch a disposition toward the text, common among ancient interpreters, allowed them to employ the biblical idiom in unique contexts, primarily liturgical, but also ordinary and mundane. Using Scripture thus does not disregard or efface its original context but gives it a new context. Something like this is going on in much of premodern interpretation, including the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old.”²⁴

Thus, in formulating a biblical theology of dung, examining the original context of any given pericope or verse related to dung indeed requires seeking to understand authorial intent, historical context, and literary context. Yet, strictly exegeting a passage that pertains to dung in this manner truncates the task into narrow literalism, devoid of any practical application and ultimately undermines any Christocentricity. Certainly, there is one literal meaning to any given text in letter where the words indicate a specific meaning. However, the application of that same text is multifaceted.

Within this work, it is not sufficient to simply exegete each occurrence of dung and any semantic or conceptual cognates in a progressive manner, as if exegesis were a means to an end. Rather, inspecting each occurrence reveals that every semantic and conceptual reference to dung is contextually linked to sin. These links are the scriptural assertions of the symbolic correlation of dung and sin. Synthesizing the exegesis following these principles results in a harmonious scriptural message — a biblical theology of dung. Hence, examining the semantic and conceptual cognates reveals how the literal sense of a text expands to unveil something symbolic, typological, or even allegorical to be pondered relative to the entire corpus of Scripture. This expansion compounds when the moral, ethical, or doctrinal avenues are

²⁴ Fuhr Jr. and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 217.

perceived, or in other words, seeing the compounding expansion as profitable in every way and Christ-exalting.²⁵

Symbolic Considerations

Since the thesis of this work asserts that within a biblical theology of dung, dung symbolizes sin, adequate attention must be given to the concept of symbols and symbolism. Symbols may be defined as “either literal or figurative terms that carry a normally expected and frequently repeated pattern of meaning in specific contexts (whether literary or cultural).”²⁶ Striving to discover how the Scriptures speak of dung, both grammatically and contextually, leads to the extraction of such a hermeneutical pattern. However, before such an extraction can take place, observing the symbolic thought of Scripture in general is integral in formulating a biblical theology of dung, wherein dung symbolizes sin.

Symbolism: The Native Tongue of Scripture

Scripture reveals God as the creator and sustainer of the world who has as the lone authority to dictate how it is to operate.²⁷ Bavinck asserts the following in near poetic fashion: “The human being is not the creator and former of the world; his understanding does not write its laws on nature, and in his scientific research he does not have to arrange things according to his categories. To the contrary, it is the human who has to conform his perception and thinking to God’s revelation.”²⁸ Again, to take the Bible at its word is to progressively develop a biblical

²⁵ Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 207.

²⁶ Fuhr Jr. and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 115.

²⁷ Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 148.

²⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 25.

worldview, where thinking and living through a comprehensive biblical perspective (i.e., the Scriptures as the standard and point of reference for all thought) are the ultimate objective.²⁹ Furthermore, a biblical worldview means indwelling the Scriptures to the point of having them indwell the reader, where he or she succumbs to viewing any given topic within the scriptural “plausibility structure,”³⁰ or in a way that allows the Bible to set its own literary standards.³¹

Given the Bible is literature, “modern” linguistic tools display some usefulness in furthering the study of the majesty of Scripture. However, confining the biblical text to a modern English schema, such as “all comparative language which compares with ‘like’ or ‘as’ is simile,” is arbitrary and anemic. Modern literary standards are “scientific” in that they categorize and subcategorize language into strict, systematized categories.³² As Mendenhall observes, ancient biblical thought is “associational” and not “scientific, meaning that the literary self-presentation of the Scriptures “create[s] the maximum of relationships between experience, language, and art, not the minimum which is so characteristic of over-specialization.”³³

Hence, a biblical worldview predicated upon the aforementioned principles concerning the Scriptures, leads to a hermeneutic where the reader progressively synthesizes the various threads, implications, and nuances of any given topic in the Scriptures. The outcome of such a synthesis is a biblically informed impression which understands Scripture to be presenting itself

²⁹ C. Fred Smith, *Developing a Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God’s Way* (New York: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 8. Cf. Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, 1–4.

³⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 98.

³¹ James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 19.

³² For the philosophical underpinnings of such thought, see: Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 19–27.

³³ George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1973), 39.

as speaking primarily in a visual-symbolic language.³⁴ Since this is the case, one of the initial discoveries within a proper biblical worldview is that the Scriptures present all language as ultimately symbolic.³⁵

This fact that all language is fundamentally symbolic is a vital and preliminary assertion made by the Scriptures that goes widely unnoticed. A biblical worldview reveals an eternal, omnipotent God from which all created things germinate and who is the preeminent point of reference for anything that exists.³⁶ This omnipotent Creator is immediately described in Genesis 1 and 2 as one who creates via supernatural, divine, linguistic communication.³⁷ Thus, reality is ultimately theological; for reality speaks of God, since all of creation finds its origin in him,³⁸ dung included.

The glorious pinnacle of God's speech-act creation was mankind, whom God said was made "in his own image."³⁹ Thus, as the image of God, mankind is able to reflect the creative dominion of God, albeit only with that which has been made, since man is likewise a part of the creative acts of God.⁴⁰

Slowing down and meditating upon this basic scriptural truth reveals man to be a living, breathing symbol of God who represents God in a unique way, in a world full of other symbols

³⁴ Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, 12–13.

³⁵ D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (InterVarsity Press Academic, 2002), 62.

³⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *The Great Debate Today* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Nutley, NJ, 1970), 178.

³⁷ Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, 72.

³⁸ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 1987), 230.

³⁹ Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 30.

⁴⁰ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 206.

that also speak of God.⁴¹ Man and creation at large are not abstract thoughts, although they began that way in the mind of God.⁴² The scriptural revelation of the sheer power of God to speak these abstract, immaterial thoughts into existence—at once creating and assigning “pre-interpretive” material value to said divine thoughts—means the supernatural speech-act of God concretizes these divine-abstractions. The abstract thoughts of God being manifested as “creation” means all creation intrinsically represents something about the transcendent mind of the Creator.⁴³ Hence, all of reality is a mass of theocentric symbols, with man being the chief symbol. As the chief symbol, man is able to process the other symbols around him; he can interpret and even assign secondary meanings in conjunction with the primary meaning of said symbols, all in display of his reflective dominion.⁴⁴ Thus, the scriptural message of man as the image of God implies that the physical and spiritual cannot be divorced; the spiritual comes to light through the physical.⁴⁵

To perceive these above truths is to perceive the pregnant propositions therein: all communication is fundamentally symbolic.⁴⁶ Man, the “reflective ruler” of God, reflects his Creator by thinking immaterial thoughts and communicating said thoughts by pointing to other

⁴¹ Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, 17.

⁴² Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 230.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ E. R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem, and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*. (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Nutley, NJ, 1971), 321.

⁴⁵ Michael Foster and Dominic Bnonn Tennant, *It's Good to Be A Man A Handbook for Godly Masculinity* (Canon Press: Moscow, ID: 2021), 60.

⁴⁶ Meaning all forms, whether phonological, grammatical, etc. See: Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspective in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2018), 394–95.

concrete, materialized symbols. This communicative process of man is an exercise of fruitful dominion, whereby man cultivates the communicative aspect of the rest of creation.⁴⁷

While it is true that man may think abstract, immaterial thoughts analogous of his Creator, these thoughts are not autonomous and proto-abstract or pre-interpretive, given that man can only reflect and work with pre-established modes.⁴⁸ The first man, Adam, did not plant the Garden – God did; Adam merely cultivated and glorified what preceded him in the creation process of God. Therefore, language is the tool man wields to materialize and communicate the abstractness of any “thought.” Language and communication concretize the abstract via communicative signs that are ultimately based in the Creator.⁴⁹

To clarify, take the abstract concept of “love” as an example. How does one convey such an abstract concept? “Love” is undoubtedly a polyvalent, loaded idea. Nevertheless, Lakoff and Johnson provide one example of concretizing the abstract concept of love with a hypothetical, romantic relationship that is electric: “There is incredible energy in their relationship.”⁵⁰ Man cannot think in pure abstract thought because as an image, he is only a reflector, not an original. Yet, man can take the various symbols conveyed throughout creation and secondarily construct them – for better or for worse – to communicate his abstract thought.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, 30–31.

⁴⁸ Contra the Thomistic perspective which posits man as an autonomous thinker. See; Cornelius Van Til, *The Reformed Pastor and Modern Thought* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1980), 90.

⁴⁹ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 60–62.

⁵⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 49.

⁵¹ Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, 32.

Modern Language Tools and Scripture

While the above considerations may seem to be a complex, modern anachronizing of Scripture, meditating upon the opening chapters of Genesis reveals such thought as the default perspective of the Scriptures regarding communication, symbolism, and language. Reading past Genesis only further confirms the ubiquity of a world of symbolism, especially concerning language and communication. For example, Ecclesiastes 3:11 states that eternity is written in the heart of man. Genesis 1 and John 1 jointly illuminate for the reader that the only thing that is truly eternal is God. Thus, there is no way for man to escape his intrinsic, symbolic nature. Surely, he suppresses this truth in unrighteousness (cf. Romans 1:18–32). Even so, the suppression of the truth through ongoing rebellion only further implies that the truth is known to the image bearer.

Nevertheless, since man cannot escape being the *Imago Dei*, he will ultimately come to the same conclusions of Scripture, only to call these conclusions by different names, which is indeed the case. For example, within the past century, modern linguists and semantic philosophers have presented “revolutionary” breakthroughs concerning communication, with a chief breakthrough being that all thought is ultimately metaphorical.⁵² In other words, modern metaphor theory is merely Genesis 1 and 2 expanded and rebranded for rebellious man. Thus, utilizing various tools and schemas of modern linguistic analysis within a biblical worldview is not a form of eisegesis; these modern language tools only confirm the symbolic nature of

⁵² Sandy, *Plowshares*, 59. Note, this author adheres to the same principle posited by Sandy (74–75), wherein strict Western semantic categories are not necessarily helpful. Likewise, Jordan, *Through New Eyes*. Similarly, French linguistic philosopher Paul Ricoeur designates “metaphor” as “explain one thing in terms of another.” Hence, all thought is metaphorical, given, the concretized phonological or alphabetical is merely explaining the abstract of the mind. See, Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 233.

communication found within a biblical worldview and foster the notion one need not “reinvent the wheel.”⁵³

The coupling of a proper biblical worldview with that of even a cursory study of linguistic analysis provides a fertile field for any biblical theology to sprout in, especially that of a theology of dung. One such fertile field of linguistic analysis among many pertinent to any biblical theology is the schema of semiotics. Semiotics is a hermeneutical literary analysis tool that can be defined as a theory of signs or a theory of communicative symbolism.⁵⁴ Given that biblical theology is heavily steeped in the concept of a worldview replete of symbolism, it is easy to see how this particular field of linguistic analysis could be useful in the development of any biblical theology.

Semiotics was formally developed as a linguistic analytical tool by the structural-pragmatic philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce.⁵⁵ This specialized linguistic tool essentially seeks, in any given text, “the referential relation between signs and things or the differential relation between one sign and another.”⁵⁶ Expanding this definition, Evans observes the following: “Semiotics [...] includes three areas of study: (1) syntax looks at the relations signs have to each other; (2) semantics looks at the relations between signs and what signs signify; and (3)

⁵³ While it is beyond the purview of this work, for a comprehensive overview regarding biblical exegesis and linguistic theories, see: Wendy Widder, Michael Aubrey, Jeremy Thompson, and Daniel Wilson, *Linguistics & Biblical Exegesis*, Edited by Douglas Mangum and Josh Westbury (Lexham Methods Series. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁵⁴ Todd J. Murphy, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of Biblical Hebrew*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 150.

⁵⁵ C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 89.

⁵⁶ Charles A. Anderson and Michael J. Sleasmen, “Putting It into Practice: Weddings for Everyday Theologians,” in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, Cultural Exegesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 250.

pragmatics looks at the ways signs are used.”⁵⁷ Hence, while semiotics largely focuses on symbols and themes, it does not do so at the cost of the more minute analytical tools within the linguistic hierarchy. This is precisely the same outcome of a biblical worldview as presented in this work.

Thus, it should be clear that such a biblical worldview would naturally convey a “theosemiotic” understanding of reality, full of God-symbols; symbols which demand one to interpret and meditate upon them.⁵⁸ Formulating any given biblical theology within such a worldview surely requires examining the “smaller” parts of language, such as, syntax, etymology, grammar analysis, and even phonology. Yet, biblical theology is ultimately oriented toward facilitating an understanding of how the bible uses X term or concept to communicate Y over the entire scriptural corpus (i.e., large parts of language, but not at the direct expense of the smaller).⁵⁹ Hence, a “theosemiotic” biblical theology is not a philosophical exercise that postulates hypothetical “signs/signifiers.” Rather, it is something closer to the “letter and spirit” of biblical hermeneutics as presented by the early church fathers.

Poythress similarly posits a “perspective” on language theory, wherein attention is given to the use of symbols for communicating abstract thought, the prominence of the symbol system in any given context, and how the various individual parts of language work together, rippling concentrically from small to large.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics*, 106–07.

⁵⁸ Michael L. Raposa, “In the Presence of the Universe: Peirce, Royce, and Theology as Theosemiotic,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 2 (2010): 237–47.

⁵⁹ Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 15.

⁶⁰ Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, 388–96.

The Symbol of Dung

With the above methodological and symbolic considerations in view, formulating a proper biblical theology of dung can be undertaken without presuppositional ambiguity.

Examining each explicit semantic and conceptual cognate related to dung across the scriptural corpus reveals dung as a key symbol within a specific symbol system consistently employed the Scriptures in relation to sin. This dung–sin symbol is implemented by Scripture to concretize the abstractness of sin in order that mankind may properly perceive the scriptural attitude regarding sin and the graciousness of sins elimination, seen ultimately in the person and work of Christ. Synthesizing the results of the aforementioned methodological particulars engenders a biblical theology of dung.

Definition of Key Terms

Given the vast semantic and conceptual range covered by this work, this section provides preliminary definitions for the terms implemented throughout to assist its readability and synthesis. The scriptural semantic and conceptual references to dung are presented in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, along with an English transliteration, and various translatory designations provided to clarify terms. Scriptural definitions are not presented alphabetically; rather, they follow the canonical-chronological implementation of the terms (i.e., all Hebrew terms followed by all Greek terms). Lastly, for sake of clarity and readability, the main body of this work will reference the below definitions of dung by their English transliteration equivalents in italicized font rather than in the Hebrew or Greek script.⁶¹

⁶¹ In a few sections of this work, a pertinent Hebrew term not listed in the below ‘Definitions’ section will be presented in the original script with subsequent references to said term being the English transliteration. Pertinent Greek terms undefined will follow the English transliteration only, unless deemed necessary to reference by the author.

Old Testament Definitions

פֶּרֶשׁ (peresh)

Peresh is defined as offal ripped out when preparing a victim.⁶² Offal can be defined as “the entrails and internal organs of an animal used as food” and “decaying or waste matter.”⁶³

Peresh is used solely in reference to animal sacrifices and denotes the portions of the sacrificial animal that are wholesale considered “dung.”⁶⁴

שֶׁפֶךְ (shephek)

Shephek connotes a place of “pouring out,” as in the emptying of a container.⁶⁵ The lone implementation of *shephek* is the scriptural prototype for what is later termed the “dung hill” or “ash heap.”

צֵאָה (tseah) and צֵאִי (tsoi)

Tseah is rendered as “excrement” and “human dung” by the English Standard Version (ESV). Beyse notes the following: “The Heb. *šō`â/šē`â* is probably related to Akk. *zû* I, ‘dung, excrement, filth’. The Ugar. *zâ* developed a specialized meaning emphasizing the intense

⁶² Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 831.

⁶³ *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “offal (n.),” Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

⁶⁴ A. Caquot, “שֶׁפֶךְ,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 53.

⁶⁵ R. Liwak, “צֵאִי,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 431.

olfactory element or vapor in the positive sense of ‘fragrance’ (cf. also Eth. *ṣēʾa*, ‘to stink’).⁶⁶ Hence, the term connotes “waste matter (as urine or sweat but especially feces) discharged from the body.”⁶⁷ Likewise, *tsoi* shares the root and is rendered as “filthy” by the ESV. Thus, the implication of this term concerns something “befouled with excrement as the feature of an object.”⁶⁸

פְּרִשְׁדֹן (*parshedon*)

This is a hapax⁶⁹ rendered as “dung” in the ESV. *Parshedon* has an interesting history of translation disputes, which is discussed in the body of this work. Nevertheless, *Parshedon* can be rendered as either “fresh dung, i.e., the refuse of the intestinal area processed in the body,” or “air hole,” possibly referring to an escape passage.⁷⁰ Brannan takes a middle road by combining the two thoughts into “the solid excretory product evacuated from the bowels.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ K.-M. Beyse, “פְּרִשְׁדֹן, פֶּתֶר, פְּתִיחַ and צִאָה,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 195, transliteration original.

⁶⁷ *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, s.v. “צִאָה (n.),” Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017.

⁶⁸ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v. “צִאָה (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁶⁹ This term means a word used only once in a given body of writing.

⁷⁰ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v. “פְּרִשְׁדֹן (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁷¹ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, s.v. “פְּרִשְׁדֹן (n.),” (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

מְסִיךְ הוּא אֶת־רַגְלָיו (mesik hu et-raglay)

This term literally means “cover his feet.” It is a biblical euphemism for “a bowel movement, conceived of as covering one’s feet.”⁷²

אַשְׁפֹּת (ashpot)

Ashpot can be defined as a specific location in which garbage and refuse are dumped. Etymologically, “ash” and “dung” are used in tandem.⁷³ Thus, *ashpot* can be likened to modern “dumps” or waste management centers, which often incinerate garbage to make additional room on the landfill site.

גָּלַל (galal) and גֵּל (gel)

The term *galal* is rendered as “dung” by the ESV. Munderlein details that the root *gal* may derive from the Akkadian “to roll,” which evolved into a noun cognate that connotes something round.⁷⁴ Thus, this term may imply the idea of round piles of excrement or the rounded shape that excrement can take. The Brown–Driver–Briggs (BDB) dictionary agrees but formulates the idea of roundness from the “Arabic جَلَّاتُونَ (*jillatun*) dung of camels.”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the connotation is one that is consistently translated as pertaining to “feces, dung, i.e., excrement, with the associative meanings of something that can be destroyed, or something filthy or

⁷² The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible, s.v “סִכַּךְ (n.),” (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

⁷³ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v “אַשְׁפֹּת (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁷⁴ G. Munderlein, “גָּלַל,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 20.

⁷⁵ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 165. Arabic script original.

ceremonially unclean.”⁷⁶ Hence, the semantically related term *gel* is used synonymously with *galal* and consistently correlated to human excrement.⁷⁷

שִׁיג (sig)

This is a hapax and biblical euphemism for “is using the bathroom.”⁷⁸ The term connotes “*withdrawal* (into a private place).”⁷⁹ As Patterson notes, *sig* is a “byform” or secondary spelling of “dross” in Hebrew, which further alludes to the euphemism.⁸⁰ Put bluntly, *sig* implies the “elimination of fecal waste through the anus.”⁸¹

דָּמֶן (domen)

Domen conveys a mental image of unburied corpses. It also connotes the unburied corpse as no better than feces upon the ground.⁸² To be denied burial and relegated to mere *domen* is to highlight the accursed, decreed state of “being without distinct form.”⁸³

⁷⁶ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v “גָּלַל (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ W. Hall Harris III et al., eds., *The Lexham English Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 1 Ki. 18:27.

⁷⁹ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 115.

⁸⁰ R. D. Patterson, “1469 שִׁיג,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 619.

⁸¹ *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, s.v “שִׁיג (n.),” (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

⁸² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 199.

⁸³ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v “דָּמֶן (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

מַחְרָאָה (maharaah)

This is a hapax translated by the ESV as “latrine,” and it connotes a “non-plumbed privy, outdoor toilet, i.e., a place to relieve and contain bodily waste.”⁸⁴ The BDB dictionary renders the term as an appropriate synonym – namely cesspool.⁸⁵

חֲרָאִים (haraim)

Haraim is used within the OT as a synonym for excrement. The word is semantically linked with *maharaah* by the root *hr*, which means “to defecate.” *Haraim* is rendered by the Dictionary of Biblical Languages as “feces, dung, manure, i.e., the excrement of a mammal, considered as detestably unclean for consumption.”⁸⁶

סוּחָה (suhah)

Suhah can be defined as “refuse, garbage, rubbish, i.e., worthless and unwanted material normally thrown out, of a general kind.”⁸⁷ Hence, refuse is linked to dung and excrement, which are generally discarded. As Cline notes, *suhah* connotes “sweepings,” which surely conjures an image of someone cleaning out a vessel or household.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v “מַחְרָאָה (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁸⁵ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 351.

⁸⁶ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v “חֲרָאִים (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁸⁷ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v “סוּחָה (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁸⁸ David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011), 129.

מְדֻכָּה (madmenah)

This is another hapax term implemented to describe a “manure-pile, dung-heap, i.e., a pile of animal feces mixed with other straw or plant material.” It may also connote a “pit” rather than a pile.⁸⁹

צָפוּעַ (saphua)

This is a hapax expression that literally means “animal droppings.”⁹⁰ *Saphua* is used solely in relation to the dung of cattle within the HB. Hence, the term can rightly be deemed to mean cow manure or cow dung.

נְוָלוּ (newalu)

This term transfers from the Assyrian term *namalu*, which means “ruin.”⁹¹ Conceptually, this term is related to *maharoot* given that both convey a ruined area used as a latrine and refuse heap.⁹²

⁸⁹ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew, (Old Testament)*, s.v “מְדֻכָּה (n.),” (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁹⁰ *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, s.v “צָפוּעַ (n.),” (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

⁹¹ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1102.

⁹² Rick Brannan, ed., *The Lexham Lexicon of the Aramaic Portions of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons, s.v (נְוָלוּ (n.),” (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

New Testament Definitions

Γέεννα (geenna)

Geenna, more commonly *gehenna*, is a conceptual cognate associated with dung. It is the Grecized form of the Valley of Hinnom.⁹³ This ravine to the south of Jerusalem effectively became the city's landfill site or dung heap, where "rubbish from the city was constantly being burned."⁹⁴

ἀφεδρών (aphedron)

This peculiar term is defined as a "place of defecation" or "toilet."⁹⁵ The word is said to have originally derived from a Macedonian idiom that conveyed "the place into which the alvine discharges are voided."⁹⁶ Hence, this term is conceptually related to the various "latrine" renderings in the HB.

Κόπριον (koprion) and κοπρία (kopria)

These semantically related terms are translated as "manure" and "manure pile," respectively. Both terms are well documented in Greek sources.⁹⁷ They are conceptually related to the Hebrew "dung hill."

⁹³ William Arndt et al., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 191.

⁹⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹⁶ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 88.

⁹⁷ William Arndt et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 559.

Περικόθαυμα (perikatharma) and περίψημα (peripsema)

These *hapax* terms are rendered by the ESV as “scum” and “refuse” respectively. In context, the terms are implemented as synonyms for one another, each connoting “rubbish or garbage.”⁹⁸

Σκόβαλον (skubalon)

This is a *hapax* term rendered by the ESV as “rubbish.” The realm in which *skubalon* emerges is that of dung and excrement.⁹⁹ As Lang notes, the term is synonymous with *skubalisma*, which means “table crumbs.”¹⁰⁰ Hence, the idea conveyed is one of garbage and waste.

ῥυπαρός (ruparos)

Within the Septuagint (LXX), *ruparos* is used in place of the Hebrew *soi*. Hence, *ruparos* pertains to a soiled object, particularly clothing.

Organization of Work

Following this introduction, the formulation of what is presented herein as a biblical theology of dung unfolds over six chapters. The first chapter of the thesis considers each explicit semantic reference that relates to dung in the Pentateuch. The initial postulations of Scripture infer that dung is a substance that is rejected and ejected away from the presence of God. Each of the initial presentations of dung in the Pentateuch demonstrates the contextual connection to sin,

⁹⁸ Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 808.

⁹⁹ Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1616.

¹⁰⁰ Friedrich Lang, “Σκόβαλον,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 446.

a pattern that is repeated throughout Scripture. The opening references to dung come primarily within the domain of the sacrificial system, particularly in relation to “sin” offerings and rites of atonement and purgation.

The second chapter progresses to examining dung within the Former Prophets. It is within this collection of “historical books” that dung is highlighted as worthy of mockery. Within the Former Prophets, dung by no means loses the initial Pentateuchal display of rejection and ejection. Rather, the rejection and ejection aspects of the dung–sin symbol are amplified by highlighting that mockery is associated with rejection and ejection. The Former Prophets also exhibit the first scriptural euphemisms and conceptual cognates that pertain to dung.

The third chapter advances the scriptural considerations of dung into the Latter Prophets, where semantic and conceptual cognates of dung are shown to develop the dung–sin symbol in reviling ways. The aforementioned aspects of rejection, ejection, and mockery are also prevalent in the Latter Prophets, yet the dung–sin symbol is presented starkly as one of repugnance and shock, which underscores the disgusting nature of dung.

The fourth chapter advances to examine dung within the Writings. The Writings present the dung–sin symbol as a symbolic, undesirable state; to be reduced to a state of dung is to be given over to sin and to be rejected, mocked, and reviled. Furthermore, having the self or an enemy reduced to a state of dung is a subtle foreshadowing of the justice of God, which is discussed in the sixth chapter.

The fifth chapter bridges the gap between the OT and NT by examining the various NT implementations of semantic and conceptual counterparts that pertain to dung. While references to dung are fewer within the NT, its impact on the dung–sin symbol is substantial. The NT does not diminish the dung–sin symbol of the OT but rather amplifies each of the highlighted aspects

of the symbol as presented throughout the OT, displaying a continuity of thought between both Testaments.

The sixth chapter synthesizes the individual examinations of dung and conceptual cognates from both Testaments to formulate a biblical theology of dung. A recap of the material presented from the introduction through chapter five will be provided to begin the solidification of a biblical theology of dung. This recap will generate examining how the link between the concrete “dung” and abstract “sin” function within a broader theological-symbolic system. The theological-symbolic system which dung and sin are categorized within must be viewed at both a macro and finalized level. When viewed at the macro level, the various scriptural references to dung simultaneously display dung as a prime symbol for sin, where dung is used to concretize sin’s abstractness. Such a synthesized, macro view presents unique areas of overlap in symbols and concrete vehicles pertaining to a biblical theology of dung. Hence, examining the “contiguous hermeneutic” of these overlapping symbols and concrete vehicles of said symbols is pertinent biblical theology in general. This examination involves consideration of the various adjoining or contiguous symbol categories that pertain to dung and will display the robustness of a biblical theology of dung.

However, the contiguous hermeneutic of biblical theology must have guardrails. Thus, formulating any biblical theology similarly necessitates further consideration of the meta-hermeneutic of presented by Scripture in Luke 24. Considering both the contiguous hermeneutic of biblical theology and the scriptural meta-hermeneutic is integral for the finalization of any biblical theology, especially such a one as seemingly obscure as a biblical theology of dung. This finalized view displays how a biblical theology of dung as formulated via examining the dung–sin symbol across the Scriptures finds fullness in the person and work of Christ. Finally, brief

consideration regarding how a formalized biblical theology of dung affects the ethical realm is issued, since any biblical theology is meant to bolster orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Following the conclusion of this work is a brief appendix concerned with various potential problems related to teaching or preaching a biblical theology of dung. This appendix is less formal in tone and intended to be a field guide on how to use the tool of a biblical theology of dung within the context of preaching and teaching.

The outcome of this work is an unashamed biblical theology of dung, which is useful for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness, and exaltation of Christ.

CHAPTER 1

DUNG IN THE PENTATEUCH

The initial scriptural references to dung in the Pentateuch display the link between dung and sin as pertaining to rejection and ejection. The majority of these initial references come within the bounds of the sacrificial system where dung is explicitly mentioned as that which is rejected by YHWH and ejected out of the camp within specific sin and atonement rites. The Pentateuch also exhibits dung as that which deters the presence of YHWH, like the sin of Eden separating man and his Maker.

Sin and Sacrifice

The initial explicit semantic references to dung in the scriptural corpus are found within the context of the sacrificial system. The first overt reference to dung is in Exodus 29:14 through divine instructions concerning the consecration and installation of the Aaronic priesthood. The instructions given to Moses by YHWH in Exodus 29:14 are fully implemented in Leviticus 8.¹ This consecration and installation process involves “[a]n elaborate series of sacrifices, stretching over seven days, [and] pointed to their need of reconciliation with God before they could properly stand between him and the people.”² Within this ritualistic consecration of preparation and installation, the element of a sin or purification offering on behalf of the priest is instituted through a divinely sanctioned ritual that consists of a slaughtered bull, the first of its kind within

¹ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, World Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 393.

² John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2001), 491.

the Scriptures.³ This sin offering was the first and “biggest” within the series of priestly consecratory sacrifices because it was the most important.⁴

Within the rite, the bull is brought before the Tent of Meeting, where Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon its head in an act of identity transference (Exodus 29:10). This laying of hands upon the bull symbolizes the conveyance of the individual to the animal along with their sins. Correspondingly, this symbolic transfer connotes the idea of ownership. Since the priests are to be representative of YHWH’s people (i.e., his possession; Exodus 19:5), the bull as a substitute for the priest represents ownership by YHWH and his attitude toward sin.⁵

After the rite of symbolic transference, the bull is slaughtered in the presence of YHWH at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The bull’s blood is then used to purify the horns of the outer altar through smearing by thumb, with the remainder of the blood dispelled around the base of the altar (Exodus 29:11–12). Given that the “life of the creature was found within its blood” (Lev. 17:11), the shedding of blood “indicated life surrendered as the extreme penalty for sin. It was wholly dedicated to the Lord. The blood applied to the altar signified God’s acceptance of the sacrifice that had been offered.”⁶

The bloodless bull is then apportioned into accepted and rejected portions for the remainder of the ritual. The accepted portions are the internal fat and long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, which are burned upon the altar. The rest of the bull (specified as

³ T. Desmond Alexander. *Exodus*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2017), 595.

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 904.

⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2006), 622.

⁶ Mackay, *Exodus*, 493.

the flesh, skin, and *peresh*) is rejected and ejected from the presence of YHWH outside the camp, where the rejected portions are devoted to destruction by fire (Exodus 29:13–14).

The remainder of Exodus 29 reports a divine field guide regarding various elements of the Aaronic priesthood consecration and institution, including food sacrifices enjoyed by both YHWH and the priesthood, garment consecration, and tabernacle sanctification. Yet, in the proceeding details, which concern diverse animal sacrifices, it is only within the stipulations regarding the sin offering that YHWH explicitly sanctions what is to be done with the dung of the sacrificed animal.

The categorical connection between dung and the sin sacrifice is by no means random. The slaughtered bull is an expiation for sin, which bars an individual or individuals from being permitted into the presence of YHWH. Admission and acceptance into the presence of YHWH are expressed by YHWH in the sacrificial sanction in both positive acceptance and positive rejection. Positive acceptance by YHWH is demonstrated by his delight in a certain portion of the animal upon the altar and its blood upon the horns and around the base. Simultaneously, positive rejection is endorsed in the divine dispelling of other components of the carcass, which expressly includes the dung.

Hence, the elements of Exodus 29:14 that concern the accepted and rejected portions of sacrifice form a parallel: there are accepted elements that facilitate atonement for sin before the presence of YHWH and other elements that are rejected, both of which are burned. The former is pleasing to YHWH, while the latter is displeasing.⁷ Thus, although the atoning bull expresses cleansing and acceptance, the dung of the bull is a juxtaposition of an alternative facet concerning sin. The alternative aspect is as follows: While YHWH ordains a means for expiation

⁷ Stuart, *Exodus*, 623.

in the sensory form of a slaughtered bull, YHWH likewise ordains a sensory expression of sin rejected from his presence. The accepted portions of the bull are judged as pleasing in sight and smell by YHWH, while the rejected portions are judged as displeasing in sight and smell to both YHWH and his people. The duality of the sacrifice expresses the first biblical connection with dung as symbolic of sin.⁸

Peresh and the Priesthood

Leviticus 4–5 provides an expounded view of the sin offering first introduced in Exodus 29.⁹ The sin offering of Exodus 29—which acted as consecration and installation of the priesthood—expands to be included within the daily liturgy of Israel. Part of the daily liturgy communicated an archetypal truth—namely the necessity of a sin offering for both the priesthood and the general Israelite populace. The textual expansion of the sin offering in Leviticus 4–5 communicates that the sin offering concerns both intentional and inadvertent sins committed by either priest or Israelite. Thus, the identity transference within the rite simultaneously relates to priest and populace.

Additionally, while identity transference is an aspect of the sin offering, Milgrom fosters an auxiliary aspect where the offering acts as a “purification offering” that cleanses the sanctuary. Concerning the auxiliary aspect, Milgrom states the following: “Sinners may go about apparently unmarred by their evil, but the sanctuary bears the wounds, and with its destruction,

⁸ Durham, *Exodus*, 393.

⁹ Cf. Lev. 8:17, where the prescribed consecration of the priesthood in Exodus 29 officially takes place.

all the sinners will meet their doom.”¹⁰ Milgrom focuses on the sin offering as mainly expiatory for the sanctuary. Yet, sanctuary expiation is merely one aspect of the clearly multifaceted rite.¹¹

Nevertheless, the sin offering was to be handled just as it was initially prescribed in Exodus 29:14, with the flesh, skin, and dung (*peresh*) taken outside the camp, away from the presence of YHWH and the people, and cremated (Leviticus 4:11). The description in Leviticus 4 concerning the sin offering indicates three expansions in relation to the original decree of Exodus 29, which are described in the following paragraphs.

First, the rejected portions of the bull (deemed “all the rest of the bull”) not only include the flesh, skin, and dung but also the head, legs, and unused entrails. This textual expansion further indicates the totality of the rejected portion of the sacrifice.

Second, the rejected remnants of the bull are not merely taken outside the camp and burned haphazardly. Rather, they are taken outside the camp to a ceremonially clean place and burned on a wood fire at a specified ash heap. These additional elements of the sin offering in the Leviticus 4 account illuminate the strict adherence that YHWH demands regarding this sign-act ritual; that is, YHWH requires strictly specific inner delicacies to be consumed upon his sanctified altar, while the rest of the bull is strictly rejected and disposed of unto a strictly designated ceremonially clean place.¹²

¹⁰ Jacob Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 32.

¹¹ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2000), 110.

¹² The specified location of rejected sin offering cremation outside the camp being designated as “ceremonially clean” was likely to negate the priest allotted this task from being stuck in a perpetual cycle of defilement. Wright postulates the location being described as ceremonially clean was predicated upon the sacrifice as serving a holy purpose. Based upon the Pentateuchal sanctions as a whole, it seems probable that both ideas concerning the ceremonial clean place outside the camp may be viable. See: David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 134.

However, the location being deemed cultically clean does not mean that the actions undertaken there were bereft of ceremonial value. The clean place was likely a divinely allocated locale outside the camp where the holy ashes from the outer altar of burnt offerings were disposed of.¹³ The realm outside the sanctuary was neutral and certain sanctions were stipulated concerning various cultic situations that occurred there.¹⁴ Thus, while the clean place was ritualistically clean, the cremation of the refuse of the offering was considered one of repudiation since the process was enacted outside the presence of YHWH. The place of refuse disposal being outside the presence of YHWH further signified the seriousness of the sin being purged.¹⁵

Third, Leviticus 4 expands the sacrificial animal catalogue to include goats, lambs, and birds with a presumption that the sacrificial carcasses of each were to be handled similarly to the original bull unless otherwise noted. The expansion of the sacrificial animal catalogue appears to consider varying degrees of cultic rank and economic position.¹⁶ As representative of the priestly nation (Ex. 19:6), a priest had the responsibility to bring the prime and the preeminent animals to sacrifice; by contrast, the poorest of the general populace at the bottom of the societal scale could only bring the minutest and most meager of permissible animals as offerings.

Of course, the details surrounding the sin offering, such as what portion of the sacrificial animal was to be accepted and rejected, also have logical and practical underpinnings. If the organ delicacies were to be accepted, then what was to be done with the rest of the animal? Would the disposal of the rejected portions mean that the priest assigned to that duty was also

¹³ Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 134.

¹⁴ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible, (New York: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1998), 263.

¹⁵ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 111.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

rejected? The synthesized frames that Scripture presents for the sin offering in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 4 not only contain logical and practical answers but also a plethora of typological symbolism, given that the sacrificial ritual itself is a sign-act sanctioned by YHWH. The symbolic nature of any aspect of the sacrificial system is cogently summarized by Klawans as follows:

Briefly stated, the typical ancient Israelite sacrificial process involves the performance by Israelite laypeople and their priests of a number of activities which can be well understood in light of the concern to imitate God. The process of ritual purification may well involve the separation of people from those aspects of humanity (death and sex) which are least God-like. The selection, killing, dissection, and consumption of sacrificial animals also have analogues in the divine realm. God, too, selects, kills, looks inside things, and appears on earth as a consuming fire. Sacrifice, then, ought to be understood metaphorically—and I use the term advisedly. An analogy lies at the heart of sacrifice. The offerer and priest play the part of God, and the domesticated animals from the herd and the flock play the part of the people (and particularly Israel). This analogy can be fully appreciated only when both halves receive equal consideration: as God is to people, so too, during the process of sacrifice, are the people of Israel to the sacrificial animals. Indeed, one advantage of understanding sacrifice metaphorically is that we are encouraged to think of the roles played by both the people and the animals. Theories of sacrifice that identify the (usually innocent) animal with the (usually guilty) offerer without identifying the offerer with something or someone else—as analogy would require—can only hope to explain half of sacrifice at most. Another value of the approach suggested here is that we can understand the aspects of sacrificial ritual discussed above without recourse to scapegoating, substitution, or even expiation.¹⁷

Thus, the initial explicit semantic references to dung found in Exodus 29 and Leviticus Chapters 4 and 8 categorically and contextually yoke dung to sin. The first mention of dung comes within the context of the sin offering. The additional ordinances concerning how dung was to be handled within the atonement ritual further convey the scriptural symbolism within the rite as a whole. Sin is ultimately cleansed by the stipulations of YHWH, which remove sin through rejection and removal from his sinless presence. This purgation is a signification of sin. Sin is presented as a barrier, where on one side YHWH is rejected, while on the other side

¹⁷ Jonathan Klawans, “Pure Violence: Sacrifice and Defilement in Ancient Israel.” *The Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 2 (2001): 149.

YHWH rejects his people because of their sin. Clearly, sin is seen to mar both sides of the barrier that it intrinsically is. This obstruction must be removed and ejected for YHWH and his people to be reconciled.

Dung on The Day of Atonement

A hypothetical damaging blow to the dung–sin symbol would be if the atonement sacrifice *par excellence*, namely that on the Day of Atonement, omitted any particular reference to dung. However, the stipulations concerning the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 do indeed press the symbolism of dung as sin forward. Just as the consecratory and daily sacrifices for inadvertent sin were miniature types of the Great Day (Ex. 29:10–14; Lev. 4–5),¹⁸ the Day of Atonement included a sin offering of both a bull and a goat. The dual sacrifice of a bull and a goat as a sin offering was in accord with the provisions mentioned in the initial frames of Exodus 29 and Leviticus 4, where the dung (*peresh*) of each animal was taken outside the camp (Lev. 16:27–28). Consequently, the broader context of the Day of Atonement ritual issues the scriptural accentuation of connecting dung as a symbolic typification of sin.

The Day of Atonement ritual commences in similar fashion to the standard sin offering ritual of Exodus 29 and Leviticus 4 with a priestly sacrifice on behalf of the priests' own sins (Lev. 16:6). Conversely, given that this day is a high Sabbath day of observance for all sin, the priest who performs the ritual is no mere priest but rather the consecrated high priest (Lev. 16:2).¹⁹ In the ritual, the high priest would clothe himself in common Israelite garb, which visually associated him with the people he was representing in the ritual (Lev. 16:4). Since this is

¹⁸ Robert I. Vasholz, *Leviticus: A Mentor Commentary*, Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 196.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

the premier sin offering ritual, the cleansed high priest would first make atonement for himself and his house before proceeding past the veil into the Most Holy Place. Once inside, the high priest would create a cloud of incense smoke, reminiscent of the cloud of YHWH in the desert (Ex. 19:9). With the cloud produced, the high priest would sprinkle the blood of expiation directly upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, with both cloud and Ark acting as tangible signs and objects of the direct presence of YHWH (Lev.16:11–14).²⁰

After making expiation for himself, the high priest would proceed to perform two sin sacrifices on behalf of the entire Israelite community,²¹ which involved the slaughter of two goats chosen by lot for one active slaughter and one live rejection. The first goat was sacrificed in an identical manner to the bull of the sin offering for the high priest — that is, behind the veil with protective incense with blood sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat (Lev. 16:15). The high priest then worked his way back in the degrees of separation from the presence of YHWH, cleansing first the Holy Place, then the Tent of Meeting itself, and lastly the outer altar before the veil used for common sacrifices (Lev. 16: 15–19).²² The purpose of each section of the Tent being cleansed with the blood of the first goat was much like the blood of the sin offering prescribed in Leviticus 4, where the unclean barrier of sin constructed by the Israelite community in transgression defiles the presence of God, leading to rejection and ejection (Lev. 16:16).

Once the presence of YHWH had been cleansed from the defilement of the community and consecrated, the high priest then took the second goat alive and transferred identity through the laying of hands upon its head. The priest confessed the iniquity and sin of Israel upon the

²⁰ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 130–132.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

²² See Figure 3 in Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus*, 31.

goat, which acted as the culmination of the transference of identity. The goat was then given to a chosen man, who led it out into the wilderness where the sin-bearing animal was sent away from the presence of YHWH and his people to die far outside the camp (Lev. 16:20–22). The high priest would then bathe himself in ritualistic cleansing since he had been in direct contact with the holiness of YHWH and then redress in normal priestly garb.²³ The rejected portions of both the bull sacrificed on behalf of the high priest and the goat sacrificed on behalf of the people would then be taken by a separate appointed priest outside the camp, where “their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire” (Lev. 16:27).

Noteworthy, as opposed to the common sin offering ritual, the destruction of the rejected portion of the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement rendered the priest who was assigned this duty unclean, requiring him to ritualistically bathe before he could be readmitted to the camp (Lev. 16:28). However, Milgrom notes that “one can deduce that the burnt purification offering always contaminates the one who handles it; this, indeed, is the tradition of the rabbis.”²⁴ Hence, while the previous sin offerings of Exodus 29 and Leviticus 4 and 8 did not state that the one who burns the remainder of the sin offering outside the camp is rendered unclean—even in the “clean space”—Milgrom suggests that the ritual of the Great Day reveals that all “outside the camp” cremations did in fact require ritual bathing.

Even if Milgrom is incorrect, the destruction of the rejected portions of the sin sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, which rendered the priest ritually unclean, is likely grounded in the substance of what is being dealt with by the priest—namely the rank, defiling, intentional sins of the entire Israelite community. The mass of such sin would unquestionably render the priest in

²³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 172.

²⁴ Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus*, 172.

violation of the Law.²⁵ Contact with sin of this magnitude cannot permit readmittance into the camp unchecked.²⁶

Furthermore, the appointed “man of readiness” who led the live scapegoat to the wilderness was also rendered unclean and likewise had to ritualistically bathe before being allowed back into the camp (Lev. 16:26). Similar to the priest, the text connotes that this man is rendered unclean due to his contact with the sin-bearing goat. While the goat as an animal is not unclean, the sin laid upon it is.²⁷

It is with the scapegoat that the symbolism connecting sin and dung begins to cultivate clarity. One such point of clarity emerges in the character of the goats. While both goats are utilized in distinct roles concerning the rite at large, there is also the shared aspect of each goat bearing the transference of identity of the Israelite community.²⁸ Nevertheless, Milgrom cogently outlines the “two sides” function of each goat and grounds their distinction in the word “iniquities,” reporting that the word uniquely repeated at the close of the ritual.²⁹ The “iniquities” of Leviticus 16:22 seem to synonymous with the “impurities” of Leviticus 16:16, leading Milgrom to conclude that the blood of the one goat purifies the sanctuary, while the scapegoat purifies the people.³⁰

²⁵ Richard Hess, *Leviticus*, The Expositors Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 861–863.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus*, 168.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Thus, the ritual contains a plethora of rejection and ejection imagery. The rejected portion of the purification offering is ejected from the presence of YHWH and his people and consumed by fire given that it symbolizes sin. The scapegoat, bearing the putrid sins of the entire body of Israel, is rejected and ejected from the presence of YHWH and his people and sent into a place of abhorrence, where it will die under the fire of the hot sun in a realm of death.³¹

Tellingly, the prescriptions for the Day of Atonement ritual did not have to include instructions for what to do with the dung of the sin sacrifices, yet they did anyway. The fact that the dung of the rejected portion of the sin offerings is ejected outside the camp and the scapegoat as the representative sin-bearer is likewise rejected and ejected immediately initiates the solidification of the scriptural symbolic link between dung and sin.

Thus far in examining the initial implementations of dung within the Scriptures, each occurrence of dung is accompanied by sin. The sacrificial system expresses an initial scriptural attitude regarding sin and how sin must be dealt with; sin must be rejected and ejected. Since there is a clear contextual link between sin and dung in the initial references to dung, the symbolic link between each is ascertainable: dung concretely symbolizes sin which must be ejected and rejected from the presence of YHWH and his people.

The Red Heifer

Numbers 19 presents a perplexing purification law involving a red cow; a purification law unique to the OT corpus, but not necessarily to the ancient Near East (ANE).³² The rite involved immolating an entire red heifer for the purpose of creating a purifying substance, which

³¹ Hess, *Leviticus*, 860–63.

³² George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903), 243–44.

was then primarily used to cultically purify persons who had come in contact with a dead body (Num. 19:11).³³ The prescription of this rite entails the high priest receiving an unblemished red heifer outside the camp on which a yoke has never been used (Num. 19:1–2). Outside the camp, the red heifer is slaughtered and its blood sprinkled toward the Tent of Meeting seven times (Num. 19:3–4). Overlap in ritual procession clearly indicates that the rite of the red heifer was categorically linked to the sin offering in some way.³⁴ Although the cow is slaughtered in the open and not upon an altar, this unique sacrifice is not done to cleanse the Tent of Meeting but rather to purify those who would denigrate the Tent of Meeting due to their contact with a corpse.

Then, the entirety of the heifer is burned in the sight of the high priest—“[i]ts skin, its flesh, and its blood, and its dung”—along with cedarwood, hyssop and scarlet yarn (Num. 19:5–6). Two separate priests are involved alongside the high priest; one cremates the animal and secondary items, while the other gathers the finalized ashes to relocate them to a specified location still outside the camp. Ironically, all three priests are rendered unclean by performing this rite and must bathe and remain outside the camp until evening (Num. 19:7–10).³⁵ The ash of the heifer and secondary items is then mixed with non-stagnant water for the rite of purification from death, whereby the priest sprinkles the ash–water mixture upon the impure person on the third and seventh day of his impurity isolation (Num. 19:11–22).

The uniqueness of this rite is not as difficult to ascertain as some would argue. This is a law that concerns the purification of an individual who has come into contact with a corpse.

³³ David P. Wright, “Heifer, Red,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 115.

³⁴ Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus*, 34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

Thus, the individual, whether by conscious and unconscious corpse contact, could defile the Tent of Meeting.³⁶ Death separates YHWH and his people, unless it is the death of a substitutionary sacrifice that brings about life by “killing” sin. Therefore, to purify the living from death, the rite must occur within the realm of the dead, outside the camp, away from the presence of YHWH.³⁷ While it is beyond the scope of this work to explicate every detail concerning this rite, it is important to note how this particular rite of purification is linked to the previous examinations of sin offerings and the Day of Atonement.

In each of the sin offerings, that which is rejected and ejected by YHWH is taken outside the camp and burned. In the rite of the red heifer, the heifer is rejected and ejected from the camp, while still alive, which symbolizes that the individual has come into contact with the realm of death, the byproduct of sin, and the ultimate rejection and ejection. Of particular interest is the scriptural detail that even the dung (*peresh*) of the heifer is to be burned, unquestionably linking this rite with the previous sin offering stipulations. However, this particular rite now expands the link between dung and sin: They belong to the realm of death, which is the decisive form of judgment particularized in rejection and ejection.³⁸ Again, thus far in the Pentateuch, each time dung is mentioned, it is in relation to sin and sin judged via the modalities of rejection and ejection. Thus, the rite of the red heifer further reveals a clear scriptural connection between the abstract concept of sin and its concretized signification in the form of dung.

³⁶ Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus*, 34.

³⁷ Timothy R. Ashely, *The Book of Numbers*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1993,) 243.

³⁸ F. J. Helfmeyer, “הַרְשָׁה,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 15.

The Indecency of War

The final overt semantic reference to dung within the Pentateuch materializes in Deuteronomy 23:12–14 and is the original scriptural reference to human excrement. The context wherein human excrement is mentioned concerns various cleanliness considerations that relate to holy war within the war camp. YHWH provides a regulation concerning the disposal of human excrement (*tseah*), which is to be taken outside the camp to a specified location and buried (Deut. 23:12–13). Intriguingly, this is the only place in Scripture where human excrement is directly regulated.³⁹ While the hygienic usefulness of the stipulation is evident, the sanction is primarily theological: “Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he [YHWH] may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you” (Deut. 23:14).⁴⁰

Thus, from the very mouth of YHWH through the prophet Moses, human dung is relegated to the realm of the unholy and indecent, which further clarifies the OT outlook regarding the realm outside the camp.⁴¹ The excrement of the war camp is described literarily as “nakedness,” which at once connotes the opening chapters of Genesis with the nakedness of man and the nakedness of Noah.⁴² The designation of excrement as “nakedness” likely suggests the process of defecation, wherein the genitals are exposed.⁴³ Hence, the walking of YHWH within

³⁹ Mark K. George, “Watch Your Step! Excrement and Governmentality in Deuteronomy,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 26, no. 3 (2018): 303.

⁴⁰ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy*, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), 379.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 264.

⁴³ Michael Alan Grisanti, *Deuteronomy*, The Expositors Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 279.

the camp and the description of human excrement illustrate the war camp example of a “return to holy Eden.”⁴⁴ Given that Eden is where sin entered the world, to label human excrement as “nakedness” that will cause YHWH to reject the camp and eject himself away from it further substantiates the link between dung and sin.⁴⁵

It must be kept in mind that this stipulation is given within the context of holy war. This consideration engenders a secondary theological aspect in the form of the following underlying question: If the war camp is undisciplined in a normal task, such as defecation, how then will the camp be disciplined in greater tasks?⁴⁶ Hence, the link to Eden becomes apparent in the governance of YHWH; just as Eden was governed by the directive of YHWH, so too is the holy war camp.

Deuteronomy 23:13 indicates that the relief of the bowels of any persons within the camp of conquest is to be performed in a specific location outside the camp.⁴⁷ Immediately, the denotation of “outside the camp” recapitulates the idea of the area outside the camp being the realm of sin and death. Since human excrement would bring about rejection and ejection given its repulsive nature,⁴⁸ it must be taken outside the camp to the realm to which it belongs — the same realm where the dung of the various sacrificed animals is consumed.

⁴⁴ Grisanti, *Deuteronomy*, 279.

⁴⁵ H. Niehr, “עָרְבָה and עָרָה,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 347.

⁴⁶ George, ““Watch Your Step!”, 303.

⁴⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1994), 310–11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

However, within this particular text of Deuteronomy, human excrement is not burned like the dung of the sacrificial system. Alternatively, the human excrement of the war camp is to be buried. The stipulations of Deuteronomy 23:13 are clear: he who must relieve his bowels must go to the assigned place outside the camp with a specific digging utensil, possibly a tent peg.⁴⁹ The defecation process involves digging a hole and “turning back,” which possibly means that the individual would face away from the war camp and the presence of YHWH as he defecates. After the individual relieves himself, he is to cover his excrement, presumably with the soil removed to form the hole. The procedure here is replicated through an ironic wordplay in Deuteronomy 23:14. Since excrement is indecent and symbolizes sin, if YHWH sees the excrement, he would literally “turn back” from the camp. Hence, if the war camp is not careful in following divine governance, YHWH would seemingly consider the camp as excrement and bury it under his judgment through rejecting the camp and ejecting himself from its midst. Here, the stipulation of YHWH concerning the disposal of war camp dung is an example of the concretization of sin via dung: that which is unholy and contra YHWH must be rejected and ejected from the presence of both YHWH and his people. Deuteronomy 23:13–14 displays dung as symbolic of sin since failure to comply with the divine ordinance in how dung is to be handled within the war camp leads to divine rejection.

This specific stipulation concerning the regulation and disposal of human excrement within the war camp seems to also be a law presented in *a fortiori* fashion. If human excrement is indecent and would drive YHWH away from the presence of the camp, then human excrement in general is to be considered as such. Hence, it is highly likely that the governance of Deuteronomy 23:13–14 also became the standard for the regulation and disposal of human

⁴⁹ Currid, *Deuteronomy*, 379.

excrement for the general camp. This is further supported by similar statements about YHWH being in the midst of the general camp already stated in the Pentateuch (cf. Lev 26:11–12; Num. 5:3).⁵⁰

However, this hypothesis is not without opposition. Wright argues that this may not be the case, since the stipulations for the war camp were stricter than those for the general camp.⁵¹ While Wright may be correct, the fact that refuse being disposed of outside the camp was a normative practice in Israel for centuries at least indicates an awareness of both the hygienic and theological aspects of excrement.⁵²

The logic behind the specific stipulation in relation to the war camp is one of seriousness and urgency, primarily undergirded by the theology of the stipulation. The stipulations concerning human dung in Deuteronomy 23 indicate that human excrement is linked to sin. To have excrement exposed would cause rejection by YHWH and ejection from his presence. Thus, sin and dung are mentioned yet again within the same scriptural breath, further solidifying the symbolic link.

Chapter 1 Summary

The references to dung in the Pentateuch are primarily found within the sacrificial system. In each instance where dung is mentioned, sin is in proximity because dung is a chief symbol implemented in the Scriptures to concretize sin. In the Pentateuch, dung is rejected and

⁵⁰ Jacob Milgrom, "The Graduated Ḥaṭṭā't of Leviticus 5:1–13." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 1 (1983): 252–53.

⁵¹ Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 171.

⁵² John D. Currid and Jeffrey L. Gregg, "Why Did the Early Israelites Dig All Those Pits?" *Biblical Archeology Review* 14, no. 5 (1988): 54. Currid and Gregg note various pits have been discovered in archeological digs in Israel which some archeologists believe were used as refuse pits.

ejected from the presence of YHWH and his people via various acts of atonement and expiation for sin. Hence, dung symbolizes how sin is to be viewed and dealt with. This depiction and linking of dung and sin in the Pentateuch is the preliminary framing of a biblical theology of dung, where dung is presented as a chief symbol for sin.

Furthermore, the ultimate rejection and ejection of sin can be seen in Christ. The meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 would posit the notion of Christ being led outside the camp to expiate and atone for sin, at once the high priest and the sacrifice (Hebrews 13:11–13). Hence, the rejection and ejection of dung as sin is ultimately linked to Christ.

CHAPTER 2

DUNG IN THE FORMER PROPHETS

Considering the explicit Pentateuchal implementations of dung results in a preliminary linking of dung and sin, whereby dung symbolizing sin is rejected by YHWH and ejected from his presence. The next component of a biblical theology of dung is found in the Former Prophets. The foundation of rejection and ejection laid in the Pentateuch is built upon by the Former Prophets through highlighting the rejection and ejection of sin by mockery. Again, just as it was in the Pentateuch, sin is in proximity wherever dung is mentioned because dung symbolizes sin.¹ This is not to assert that only the Former Prophets highlight the mockery aspect of the dung–sin symbol, as the Latter Prophets likewise contain their fair share of mockery. However, given that this work follows a scriptural chronology, the Former Prophets set the stage for the next act of progressive revelation, which relays dung as symbolic of sin by highlighting the aspect of mockery contained within rejection and ejection.

The Former Prophets further explain the dung–sin symbol in various narratives.

Concerning communication through narrative, Murphey cogently observes the following:

Stories don't always make overt cognitive moral judgements, like "this is a bad person" or this is a good person doing something wrong." Equally important in storytelling is inclining the audience spontaneously to side against a person or their actions by making us laugh at them. Making an action or character risible is an effective way of guiding an audience to an implicit, precognitive normal judgment against them. It's as well to keep precognitive sense in mind, when stressing the moral point of the story, because, when one's mind wanders back to what is literally happening here, it is inescapably ridiculous.

¹ An exception to the examination of "dung" semantic and conceptual cognates within the Former Prophets would be that of 2 Kings 6:25. The text is concerned with a providential famine that besets Samaria in the midst of a Syrian attack. During the famine, 2 Kings 6:25 reports "a fourth part of a kab of doves dung [was sold] for five shekels of silver." While some have postulated doves dung was a common fuel source, the more likely references is to a common ANE plant known as doves dung which was an edible plant eaten mainly by the impoverished. See: John Hutton Balford, "Dove's Dung" in *The Plants of the Bible* (London; Edinburgh; New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1885).

Black or satirical comedy makes an opponent comical by showing how empty their self-constructions are, from the outside.²

This is surely the case regarding the dung–sin symbol as presented in the Former Prophets. The derision posited in the Former Prophets concerning dung progresses through the rest of the scriptural corpus and becomes a major hermeneutical key within a biblical theology of dung.

Empires of Excrement: Dynasties and Deities of Dung

The Mocked King of Moab

The preliminary semantic reference to dung within the Former Prophets appears in Judges 3:12–30, where the left-handed Benjaminite judge Ehud shrewdly assassinates the fat Moabite king Eglon, whose empire is oppressing Israel.

YHWH raises Ehud up to deliver Israel out of their 18-year oppression by the kingdom of Moab (Judg. 3:12–15). Ehud is sent as a dignitary on behalf of the oppressed vassal state to the king of Moab, Eglon, to whom he presents tribute while concealing a homemade double-edged blade on his right thigh (Judg. 3:15–16). Eglon, whose name literally means “calf,” is described as “a very fat man” who receives the imposed tribute from Ehud.³

After being sent away by the fat king, Ehud turns back and returns to the king’s chamber, where he suggests he has a secret message from God specifically for Eglon (Judg. 3:18–19). After ordering everyone out of the room, Eglon permits Ehud to approach him in close range. Seizing the opportune distance, Ehud reaches across his body with his left hand to brandish his

² Francesca Aran Murphy, *1 Samuel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 106.

³ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 158.

homemade blade, which he proceeds to thrust into the adipose-packed belly of Eglon, enough to cover the entire blade, hilt and all. The location of the stab wound causes the dung within the king to exit his body (Judg. 3:20–22). Ehud makes a dashing escape, locking the now-dead and soiled ruler in his kingly chamber.

After a while, Eglon’s guard approaches the chamber door and smells the excrement of his lacerated bowels, but the unit concludes that the king is relieving himself in a chamber pot. However, the combination of the stench and the abnormally long passage of time results in the royal guard becoming embarrassed and concerned. Upon opening the door, the royal guard finds the fat king dead on the floor (Judg. 3:23–25). Ehud escapes to the hill country of Ephraim, where he sounds the battle trumpet and declares that YHWH has delivered Moab into the hand of Israel. The oppression of Moab is overturned, and Israel rests for 80 years (Judg. 3:26–30).

The saga of Ehud and Eglon is clearly meant to be satirical given the ornate and intentional descriptions, which include direct and indirect references to dung.⁴ The direct reference to dung concerns the prolapsing excrement of Eglon, described with the *hapax legomenon*, *pereshedon*. *Pereshedon* being rendered as “dung” has been highly debated, with much of the debate centering around comparative studies regarding etymology. As Barre notes at length, much of the debate finds its origin in lazy critical engagement with potential Akkadian cognates.⁵ One example of an attempt to reconcile the debate is that the word relates to the opening caused by Ehud’s blade.⁶ However, given the context and structure of the pericope,

⁴ Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading*, vol. 46, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 129.

⁵ Michael L. Barre, “The Meaning of *Prsdn* in Judges III 22,” *Vetus Testamentum* 21, no. 1 (1991): 1–6.

⁶ Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 79.

pereshedon seems to pertain to the act of defecation or to the excrement itself.⁷ Hence, based on the broader context of the pericope and the aforementioned considerations, the ESV rendering of *pereshedon* as “dung” is valid.

Judges 3:12–30 also contains the first explicit conceptual cognate correlated to dung. The Moabite royal guard mistakes the smell of Eglon’s lacerated and emptied intestines for the king “relieving himself” in his upper chamber closet. “Relieving himself” (*mesik hu et-raglay*) is quite literally “he covers his feet.” Thus, the first biblical euphemism regarding a bowel movement is present in the text. It is meant to depict one who is stooped over either a chamber pot or hole with their robe or outer garment covering their backside while they defecate.⁸ Thus, stooping to perform a bowel movement in the common garb of ANE people would logically cause the attire to cover the feet.⁹

The contemptuous nature of this account, coupled with the explicit references to dung and a bowel movement, significantly contribute to the development of a biblical scatology. Fat King Eglon is the leader of his nation; thus, he symbolizes the gluttonous, prideful mindset of the Moabite kingdom at large. Moab is implied as a kingdom that has grown fat through sinful pride, unable to see that it is an instrument being used by YHWH to chastise his people.

Linking the Moabite kingdom under the rule of Eglon to the dung–sin symbol system becomes even more apparent when ramifications of Ehud’s assassination is taken into account. The assassination of Eglon leads to Moab being overthrown by the Israelites and Moab being

⁷ Barre, “The Meaning of Prsdn in Judges III 22,” 6–11.

⁸ Jack M. Sasson, “Ethically Cultured Interpretations: The Case of Eglon’s Murder (Judges 3)” In *Homeland and Exile* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 586.

⁹ Kenneth C. Way, *Judges and Ruth*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 37.

expelled away from the Israelite people. Hence, Ehud and Eglon are microcosms of the kingdoms they represent, with Moab ultimately being a kingdom of dung which is ejected and rejected by YHWH's people after being used to chastise the Israelites.

The aforementioned chastisement of YHWH is manifested in mockery, which is one of many ways in which Scripture pictures the chastisement of YHWH (cf. Psalm 2). The people of Israel recognize their sin and cry for deliverance, which is ultimately granted by YHWH. The fat king, symbolizing his pridefully fat kingdom, is assassinated.¹⁰ The sin of Moab, typified by and in Eglon, spills onto the floor in a putrid pile; the large kingdom is one that is bursting with excrement rather than power.¹¹ The kingdom is exposed for what it is—a pile of dung—and the people of the kingdom are mocked as being uninformed and ultimately an embarrassment, worthy of rejection and ejection. Block notes the following: “Taken as a whole, this literary cartoon of Eglon and his countrymen is not only aimed at the Moabites but is ironical as well. The man whom God had strengthened (*hizzēq*) will eventually be reduced to a heap of fat and excrement. The author's deliberate mockery of Eglon in particular and the Moabites in general should not blind the reader to the ridicule he is casting upon his own people. After all, the Book of Judges was not written primarily to mock foreigners; it challenges the Israelites to reflect on

¹⁰ James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985), 63.

¹¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 168.

their own condition.¹² Far from being the noble people they claim to be, in their Canaanized state they have been reduced to less than the Moabites.”¹³

Additionally, a scatological inuendo that goes largely unnoticed in this pericope is that of the “left hand.” In primitive societies, the left hand was generally used for cleaning the anus after defecation.¹⁴ Hence, the constant reference to “hand” in the Ehud–Eglon pericope may play upon this cultural aspect, thereby further exacerbating the satirical underpinnings. The “left hand” inuendo may also be present in Judges 5:26, where the “hand” of Jael facilitates killing Sisera with a “tent peg,” the very tool the war camp is advised to use in burying excrement in Deuteronomy 23.¹⁵ If this is the case, the scatological humor of Judges cannot be ignored.

With these considerations in view, the link between dung and sin is obvious. The kingdom of Moab is derided as a sinful empire of excrement and worthy of mockery. The dung–sin of Moab is rejected by YHWH on behalf of his people through embarrassing situational ridicule, which leads to the ejection of the dung–sin kingdom from the presence of Israel and YHWH. Eglon and his exposed excrement contribute an attitude of mockery to the formulation of a biblical theology of dung. Eglon and his kingdom of dung are expelled by the people of YHWH and mocked for what they are: sinful and full of excrement.

¹² Contra the book of *Ruth*, which is also set during the time of the Judges. While there are various purposes as to why *Ruth* was written, one is seen in the fact that “[w]hereas Judges had developed the theme of Israel’s increasing spiritual infidelity in the premonarchic period, [Ruth] highlights the presence and nature of genuine spirituality during this same period.” (See, Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 588–89). Hence, the concurrent historical setting of *Ruth* and *Judges* further exhibits the sovereign hand of YHWH regarding the dung–sin symbol: just as YHWH can sovereignly utilize a prideful kingdom of dung to chastise his own people, so too can YHWH take a “dungy” Moabite like Ruth and sovereignly cause her to go from lifeless to full of life and be a model of covenant faithfulness.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁴ Gershon Hepner, “Scatology in the Bible.” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: SJOT* 18, no. 2 (2004), 282.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 282–83.

Out of the Ashes of Dung

The song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2 contains a reference to the dung cognate *ashpot*. In praising YHWH for his mighty deeds in response to YHWH providing a child for Hannah, Hannah sings the following in 1 Samuel 2:8: “He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap (*ashpot*) to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.” Swanson notes that the ash heap was a “dumping place of worthless garbage and refuse, i.e., an ash and dung pile,” which became used as a figurative expression of “worthlessness and low status.”¹⁶ Notably, 1 Samuel 2:8 seems to be the first scriptural connection between a general dumping place for the refuse of the camp or city and that of the ash heap outside the camp used for the disposal of sacrificial dung and waste.

Within the context of the melodic pericope, Hannah is concerned with expressing her confidence in the redemptive power of YHWH against the sinful adversaries of YHWH, described in terms related to the self-exaltation of adverse men against YHWH.¹⁷ As Phillips observes, Hannah’s song is one that boasts of silencing “the voice of unbelieving mockery because of God’s saving grace.”¹⁸

The silencing of mocking voices of unbelief surely fits the historical context of Hannah’s song. After all, the song of Hannah and birth and life of Samuel takes place in the days of the Judges, the same general period in which Moab is rejected and ejected. Hence, Hannah’s song is contextually linked to the period in which it arises and desires for YHWH to yet again mock foes and mold them into feces just as he has done with Moab.

¹⁶ Swanson, *Hebrew*, (Old Testament), s.v. “תֵּשֶׁבֶת (n.)”

¹⁷ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

Nevertheless, since the song of Hannah is focused on praising YHWH for salvation, the description of the dung heap as a place where the outcasts of society reside reveals the dung heap to be a place of mockery. Hannah's song links the dung hill with the decrepit social state of poor individuals. The oppression of the poor and needy is a detestable act in the Scriptures (cf. Ezekiel 18:12).¹⁹ Condemning someone outside the camp to the realm of the dead, where he or she would scavenge for food upon the dung hill in a feeble and hungry state,²⁰ is an act evocative of passing the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28 upon that person.

Hence, to be destitute upon the dung hill implies the curse of affliction, illness, loneliness, and nearness to death.²¹ The nearness to death that resonates contextually within the song of Hannah is the shrill note of childlessness and poverty.²² Thus, the praise of Hannah centers upon the salvation of a lineage that appears fated to die like one scorned unto the lifeless dunghill (cf. 1 Kings 14; Heb. 13:11–13).

Furthermore, Hannah's song conveys a concern for the needy who are mocked unto the dung hill by the powerful. In other words, the song of Hannah contains concern for societal disparities. The salvation of YHWH is sung of as the needy upon the dung hill switching places with the princes and the upper class. The song finds a further resonating note in the pericope that

¹⁹ G. Johannes Botterweck, "אֶבְיָוֹן," ed. Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²² Eben Scheffler, "Royal Care for the Poor in Israel's First History: The Royal Law Deuteronomian 17:14–20), Hannah's Song (1 Samuel 2:1–10), Samuel's Warning (1 Samuel 8:10–18), David's Attitude (2Samuel 24:10–24) and Ahab and Naboth (1 Kings 21) in Intertext," *Scriptura: tydskrif vir bybelkunde*. 116, no. 2 (2017): 164.

involves Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), where the powerful Jezebelian–Ahabian dynasty relegates poor Naboth unto dung in order to steal his vineyard.²³

Markedly, 1 Kings 21 is not the only resonance of the song of Hannah. Psalm 113 is a near verbatim reverberation of her song, similarly depicting the dung hill as a place of deliverance that displays the might of YHWH. Moreover, Hannah's song is echoed in Luke 1:46–55, where the virgin Mary praises YHWH for the messianic Son in her womb and clearly confirms Hannah's song as prophetic.²⁴ Thus, salvation by YHWH involves reversing the curse of mockery; YHWH takes the oppressive upper class and relegates them to the dung hill while elevating the needy, who are eating dung for survival, to places of honor.²⁵

A further subtle, semantic link to dung may also be within the purview of Hannah's song. The needy upon the dung hill are paralleled in the preceding line of 1 Samuel 2:7 as being in the dust, אֶפְרָר (aphar). *Aphar* is the same word used in YHWH's cursing of the serpent in Genesis 3:14, where the serpent is doomed to crawl on his belly, eating dust for all the days of his life. Thus, a subtle association exists where being cast into the dust is analogous to being cast onto the dung hill, with both locations representing a realm of accursedness.²⁶ Nevertheless, while the

²³ Scheffler, "Royal Care," 171.

²⁴ As Evans reports, "It is worth noting that in the Aramaic version (i.e., the Targum) of 1 Sam. 2:1–10 Hannah's song of thanksgiving is transformed into an apocalypse foretelling the eventual triumph of Israel's Messiah." See: Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 43.

²⁵ This reversal is ultimately seen in the messianic Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is made to be sin in the place of his people as his people are elevated to his righteous status (2 Cor. 5:21). Furthermore, Christ being rejected and ejected outside the camp (Heb. 13:11–13) means he is in the realm of the ash heap and dung hill. While being rejected and ejected unto a dung heap certainly signifies mockery, Christ is brazenly mocked before he is lead outside the city (cf. Matt. 27:29,31,41). Thus, just as Samuel was to be a righteous son who would restore order to Israel in the time of the Judges, Christ is the true righteous son who brings full restoration in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4; Eph. 1:10).

²⁶ Surely, the diet of the serpent means much more than airborne dirt.

tone of Hannah’s song is positive, the content further exemplifies that where dung is mentioned within the Scriptures, sin is in proximity.

The Great Golden Hemorrhoids

1 Samuel 5–6 narrates the misfortunes that inundate the Philistines after they capture the Ark of the Covenant at the battle of Shiloh. In 1 Samuel 5:6–12, the text conveys that one of the judgments that befalls the Philistines by the hand of YHWH is an outbreak of “tumors” upon the men. The text details that just as YHWH had brought curses and plagues up on Israel’s archenemy, Egypt, so too would YHWH generate curses and plagues against the false deities and enemies of Philistia.²⁷

Later in 1 Samuel 6, in a desperate plea to alleviate the plague, the Philistine priests and diviners suggest returning the Ark of the Covenant to Israel, in addition to sending “[f]ive golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land” (1 Samuel 6:4–5). If the exhortation by the Philistine diviners is not strange enough, understanding the nature of the tumors only adds to the strange, satirical nature of the account.

The word used for tumor in 1 Samuel 5–6 is *ophel* (פֶּזֶל), which more literally translates as “hemorrhoid.”²⁸ Indeed, the King James Version renders *ophel* as hemorrhoid. The text does

²⁷ Robert D. Bergen, *1,2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1996), 98.

²⁸ Swanson, *Hebrew*, (Old Testament), s.v. “פֶּזֶל (n.)”

not merely attempt to convey some vague fatty mass, tumor, or boil. Rather, the judgment is quite literally a pain in the anus.

Broadly speaking, hemorrhoids are the deterioration and prolapse of various anal cavity muscular fibers. This deterioration and exposure may occur internally or externally of the anal sphincter, leading to extreme discomfort, bleeding, and other symptoms.²⁹

The term *ophel* is only used twice within the scriptural corpus: here in 1 Samuel 5–6 and in Deuteronomy 28:27. In both scriptural implementations, the root of *ophel* connotes “swelling.”³⁰ Deuteronomy 28:27 is situated within the pericope that expounds the curses of Mt. Ebal, which were aimed at Israel as a warning concerning the consequences of covenant infidelity (i.e., sin). The full curse of Deuteronomy 28:27 states the following: “The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed.” Note that these tumors are not mere boils and are related to itching. Intriguingly, the preceding verse, Deuteronomy 28:26, threatens a covenant breach will result in the Israelites becoming a mass of dead bodies in the open for the birds and beasts to feed upon; a threatened fate consistently recapitulated throughout the OT.

The Philistine capture of the Ark of the Covenant has brought the curses of YHWH upon them through the general principle contained within the original threat — namely contempt. Although the Philistines are not the chosen people of YHWH, the action of treating YHWH with contempt is an action not particular to one group of people. Hence, the Philistines will receive the official painful curse of YHWH so that the Ark may be resented and returned. Murphy offers

²⁹ Robert A. Ganz, “The Evaluation and Treatment of Hemorrhoids: A Guide for the Gastroenterologist,” *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, vol. 11, no. 6 (2013): 594.

³⁰ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 40.

the following quip concerning the astronomical mockery and satire in this pericope: “False self-constructions cannot hold up against itchy hemorrhoids in one’s private parts. The smiting and destruction of “the hand of the Lord” (5:6) results in bum-warts.”³¹

Moreover, Hepner observes a possible intertextual link between 1 Samuel 5–6 and Deuteronomy 23:11–15 which, when coupled with the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28, solidifies the connection between dung and the satirical plague of hemorrhoids upon the Philistines. Although lengthy, Hepner’s cogent and robust exegetical handling of the intertextuality is worth quoting from extensively, for it perfectly paints a picture of the scatological humor built into in the 1 Samuel 5–6 pericope:

In the Ark narrative the author of Samuel uses the verb כבד to say that the יד, hand, of YHWH was כבדה, heavy, on the Ashdodites (1 Sam 5, 6) in a narrative where the word יד appears 7 times (1 Sam 5, 4. 6.7.9.11; 6, 5.9). The author implies that the Philistines fail to remove feces from their camp as a result of the plague of hemorrhoids, presumably because hemorrhoids cause pain during defecation and therefore cause constipation. The rationale of the plague of hemorrhoids can be understood when it is recognized that the author of Samuel alludes to a Deuteronomic law threatening the Israelites that YHWH will withdraw from the camp if they do not remove feces from it: For YHWH your God walks around the midst of your camp to save you and deliver your enemies to you, and your camp shall be holy; and let Him not see among you any matter of nakedness and turn away from you (Deut. 23:15). Because the plague of hemorrhoids causes the Philistines to become constipated, a common consequence of this affliction related to the pain that hemorrhoids cause during defecation, the Philistines fail to remove feces from their camp despite the presence of the Ark of YHWH in it, thus violating Deuteronomic law. The primary rationale of the hemorrhoids is not to cause the Philistines pain but to cause the Ark to leave the camp because YHWH will not be present where feces are present. The Philistine priests attach two cows to the Ark and let them loose, leaving their calves in Ashdod in order to encourage them to return to their camp. However, because the plague of hemorrhoids makes it difficult for the Philistines to defecate God abandons their camp in accordance with the Deuteronomic language saying that He will abandon the Israelite camp if the Israelites do not remove feces from it. Further language of the Philistine priests proves the accuracy of this interpretation: “And you shall see: If it ascends by the road to its boundary, to Beth-shemesh, then it was He who brought upon us all this great evil, but if not we will know that His hand did not plague us: it was a מקרה, happenstance, for us” (1 Sam 6, 9). The word מקרה, which appears 6 times in Ecclesiastes but otherwise only three times other than in the Deuteronomic law and the

³¹ Murphy, *1 Samuel*, 107.

Ark narrative (Deut. 23,11; 2 Sam 20, 26; Ruth 2, 3) resonates with the term מקרה־לילה, a happenstance of the night, in the Deuteronomic law commanding the Israelites to remove excrement from their camp: When there is some man among you who is not pure, מקרה־לילה, a happenstance of the night, then he shall go outside the camp: he shall not come to the midst of the camp (Deut. 23,11). When the Philistine priests use the word מקרה they link the ostensible מקרה, happenstance, associated with the presence of the Ark to the מקרה־לילה, a happenstance of the night, that requires them to remove feces from the camp in which YHWH walks.³²

Thus, while the generic translation “tumor” is contextually viable, rendering “tumor” as “hemorrhoid” indubitably orbits the conceptual cognate category related to dung—and in a mocking fashion. Within the covenantal curse, sin can quite literally engender hemorrhoids. These painful curses cause a rejection of comfort for those who bear them as well as cause much pain through a loss of lifeblood when dung is eventually ejected. Thus, the narrative of 1 Samuel 5 and 6 further illuminates the symbolic link between dung and sin, given that where dung and related concepts are mentioned, sin is in proximity.

Covered in the Cave

The bowel movement euphemism “covering his feet” (*mesik hu et-raglay*) is implemented a second time within the scriptural corpus in 1 Samuel 24. The broader context of 1 Samuel 24 is that of David fleeing Saul. Saul, now undistracted by the Philistines, is told that David is hiding in the oasis town of Engedi. Saul rallies 3,000 troops and heads to the area in search of David (1 Sam. 24:1–2). Upon arrival, Saul needs to “relieve himself” and proceeds to “cover his feet” in private, inside the cave David and his men are using for asylum (1 Sam. 24:3).³³ David’s men urge David to kill Saul in this state of vulnerability, which David ultimately disregards, only after stealthily cutting off a corner of Saul’s robe while he defecates (1 Sam. 24:

³² Hepner, “Scatology in the Bible,” 284–85, Hebrew script original.

³³ Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel.*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 217.

4–7).³⁴ After Saul finishes defecating and leaves the cave, David exits and confronts Saul from afar displaying the cut piece of robe. Saul ultimately pronounces David as having yet again displayed himself to be the more righteous man, resulting in the two factions departing from one another in a truce which is ultimately short-lived (1 Sam. 24:8–22).

Within this account, sin and dung are linked together contextually. Within the broader context of 1 Samuel, Saul is shown to be the rebellious, sinful king who has been rejected by YHWH and who will ultimately be ejected from his throne (1 Sam. 15:23). Due to the painting of a holy veneer upon Scripture, the modern reader misses the mockery and satirical nature of this account. Oblivious Saul, preoccupied with his bowel movement, is unaware that his day of judgment is at hand.³⁵ David exiting from the same cave in which Saul relived himself, holding a corner of the royal robe, is an embarrassment to Saul and his company. The textual tension manifests satirically in the account through Saul being mocked as one who was worthy of dying in his own excrement.³⁶

The episode is symbolic of Saul's sinful reign and what YHWH thinks of it. By his own mouth, Saul admits that he will lose the kingdom, with the admission being based around his bowel movement (1 Sam. 24:20).³⁷ Saul's kingship has rejected the rule of YHWH in pursuit of Saul constantly relieving (i.e., gratifying) himself. Thus, the metanarrative of 1 Samuel concludes with YHWH relieving himself of Saul through scatological mockery and rejection, while simultaneously furthering the Davidic kingship.

³⁴ Bergen, *1,2 Samuel*, 239.

³⁵ Phillips, *1 Samuel*, 412.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Hepner, "Scatology in the Bible," 290.

Furthermore, 1 Samuel 31 similarly exhibits intertextual links to the previously examined sin-offering rituals. These links further solidify the correlation between the rejection of Saul and the dung–sin symbol. After Saul commits suicide on the battlefield, the Philistines take his body, remove his head, and nail his decapitated corpse to the wall of Beth-shan (1 Sam. 31:1–10). Much like the dung of the sacrificed animal, Saul is taken outside the camp, away from the presence of YHWH, and into the realm of death. However, valiant men from Jabesh-Gilead hear of the desecration of Saul and retrieve his body from the wall. The men proceed to burn Saul’s body, collect his bones, and bury them in the ground (1 Sam. 31:11–12). In the realm of death, rejected and ejected portions of the sacrificial animal, including the dung, are taken and burned with fire.

The rejection, ejection, mockery, and death of Saul, illuminate the symbolic link between dung and sin. The dung–sin link of Saul is presented via embedded intertextual links that pertain to both how the dung of the sin offering was handled in the Pentateuch and the stipulations of YHWH concerning what the war camp was to do with its excrement.

The Rejection and Ejection of Jeroboam

1 Kings 14 presents an account of King Jeroboam sending his wife to the prophet Ahijah to deceptively inquire about what will happen to the couple’s sick child (1 Kgs. 14:1–6). Jeroboam, in his wicked sinfulness, led 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel into gross idolatry, erecting two golden calves, instituting his own priests, and constructing his own altar in an attempted power grab against Judah (1 Kgs. 12:25–33). This state-sponsored idolatry of Jeroboam is described as a “sin” in 1 Kings 12:30. For Jeroboam’s rebellion, YHWH pronounces judgment upon him by decreeing that the house of Jeroboam (i.e., his lineage) will be burnt up “as a man

burns dung (*galal*) up until it is all gone” (1 Kgs. 14:10). The satirical mockery comes not only in the form of Jeroboam being considered as worthless as dung but also in two other forms.

First, Jeroboam’s name means “may the people increase.”³⁸ Ironically, the people under Jeroboam have increased, but in sin and idolatry. Second, the prophet further denigrates Jeroboam in how he describes his potential future lineage. The “every male” in 14:10 literally means “wall pisser.” Through the prophet, YHWH is essentially saying that Jeroboam’s lineage is good for nothing except for being indecent and urinating in public. As Jeroboam has rejected YHWH, so too will YHWH now reject and eject Jeroboam and his lineage as if the family were a pile of feces.³⁹ The language of judgment pronounced by YHWH through the prophet is nearly repulsive to the modern reader. Yet, as Leithart shrewdly observes:

“[v]ulgarity and scatology are weapons in the rhetorical arsenal of prophecy, and, from the perspective of the writer of 1–2 Kings, we cannot find fault with the language without finding fault with God himself, since Ahijah claims to be speaking the words that Yahweh delivered to him (1 Kgs. 14:7, 11). Yahweh uses shocking language when he calls useless men “those who piss against the wall” and speaks of an idolatrous royal house as a pile of [dung].”⁴⁰

Indeed, the use of vulgarity by YHWH himself essentially shocks the reader and highlights YHWH’s attitude concerning the various sins that Jeroboam has committed. Jeroboam is good for nothing, like urine and dung, and all that would come from him (i.e., lineage) will be just the same. Hence, for any future king to “walk in the ways of Jeroboam” (cf. 1 Kgs. 15:34) means that they will suffer the same fate.

³⁸ Carl D. Evans, “Jeroboam (Person),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 742.

³⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Iain M. Duguid, and Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 378.

⁴⁰Peter J. Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 139.

While the mockery is easily ascertained in this pericope, the judgment pronounced by YHWH of burning up the house of Jeroboam as a man burns up dung until it is gone has a potential alternate rendering, which if correct, only intensifies the mockery. In 1 Kings 14:9, YHWH angrily declares that Jeroboam has cast YHWH behind his [Jeroboam's] back. Interestingly, אָחַר (*a-hare*) which is rendered “behind” in v.9, is left untranslated by several translations. Furthermore, בָּעַר (*beayr*), which is translated as “burn,” is used most of the time within the HB to connote purgation.⁴¹ When the untranslated “behind” of 1 Kings 14:10 is considered alongside *beayr* being rendered as “purge,” the pronouncement of judgment by YHWH upon Jeroboam is plainly a divine bowel movement innuendo. Effectively, YHWH declares the following: “Jeroboam, you have shown me your rear end, so now I will show you mine by cutting off all your lineage; I will purge the ‘behind’ house of Jeroboam as a man purges (i.e., ejects) dung until it’s gone.” Jeroboam’s sin results in him becoming dung—rejected and ejected by YHWH. Thus, the demise of Jeroboam further connects the biblical symbolic link between dung and sin.

A Bathroom for Baal, Part 1

A conceptual cognate related to dung is described in 1 Kings 18:27, where relief of one’s bowels is adopted as a mocking judgment against sin. Within its broader context, 1 Kings 18 is primarily concerned with Elijah confronting the wicked King Ahab, who has allowed his pagan wife Jezebel to lead the people of YHWH into idolatry. Elijah’s confrontation with the wicked dynasty consists of a biblical *battle royale*—with the 450 prophets of Baal versus the single prophet of YHWH in public showdown between deities.

⁴¹ Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 2001), 379.

As 1 Kings 18 depicts, the prophets of Baal are ineffective in having Baal answer their prayers and self-mutilation to consume the sacrifice upon the altar. Thus, Elijah begins to mock the prophets of Baal. In 1 Kings 18:27, Elijah taunts the false prophets and their false god by stating that the reason for Baal failing to consume his altar and thus prove himself to be the true deity is likely due to Baal “relieving himself” (*sig*).⁴² Much debate has surrounded the proper translation of *sig*. In a seminal work, Rendsberg examines the various renderings of *sig* and concludes that the term is most accurately translated as an action that concerns a bowel movement.⁴³

Intriguingly, if the byform root of *sig*, (i.e., *swh*) is correct in indicating an act of defecation, then the first mention of dung and defecation within the Scriptures would be that of Isaac in the field before he meets Rebekah in Genesis 24:63. Issacs’s “meditation” may very well have been an evening bowel movement.⁴⁴ Applying this possible byform root gloss to the Genesis text is not as clear contextually compared with the situation atop Mount Carmel. Nonetheless, however “racy” the taunt⁴⁵ by Elijah may have been, there are conceivable historical-cultural underpinnings connected to Elijah’s mock that vindicate the prophet of mere random potty humor.

In a pioneering work, Pope surveys various rabbinic writings that recount ceremonial acts of defecation that were implemented alongside various sexual practices as ancient Baal

⁴² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, 487.

⁴³ Gary A. Rendsberg, “The Mock of Baal in 1 Kings 18:27,” *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* Vol. 50, no. 3 (1988), 415-16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 417.

⁴⁵ James Alan Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings.*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1951), 302.

worship.⁴⁶ Elijah's mock may therefore be levied at the indecent ceremonial defecation being undertaken before his very eyes — and nostrils — by the Baalist prophets in an attempt to exonerate their false god. If this is the case, Elijah's mockery is all the more appropriate for the situation presented in the text.⁴⁷

While Baal is mocked using an inuendo related to excretion, in a secondary fashion, the Ahazian dynasty is likewise mocked. The sinful national apostasy into Baal and Ashteroth worship has naturally reduced the nation to dung since the national patron deity spends much of his energy defecating and promoting worship of himself in a like manner. Thus, the mockery of Baal is also a mockery of Ahab and Jezebel, who prove to have the same political schema as Eglon.

Of course, YHWH is the deity vindicated at the prophetic *battle royale*, and the false prophets of Baal are slaughtered in the Kishon (1 Kgs. 18:40). The prophets of “bowel movement Baal” are rejected and ejected like dung and taken away from the altar of YHWH “outside the camp.” The battle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal further exemplifies where dung and related conceptual cognates are presented in the scriptural corpus a link to sin can be found.

Rancid Rule: The Dynasty of Ahaz and Jezebel

The symbolic rejection and ejection of the Ahazian dynasty as dung within the pericope of 1 Kings 18 advances through 2 Kings 9, where the queen of the Ahazian dynasty is herself reduced to dung.

⁴⁶ Marvin H. Pope, “A Divine Banquet at Ugarit,” *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1972), 196–97.

⁴⁷ Rendsberg, “The Mock of Baal,” 416.

In 1 Kings 21, shortly after the events of the prophetic *battle royale*, Ahab covets a man's vineyard. The man, Naboth, rejects Ahab's offer for the vineyard, which leaves the king sullen. Jezebel, the queen and wife of Ahab, ultimately has Naboth killed and gives the vineyard as a gift to her husband (1 Kgs. 21:1–16). YHWH inspires Elijah to confront the ruling house again because of its sinful acts. Through Elijah, YHWH pronounces a curse upon both Ahab and Jezebel for their sin, with each curse relating to dung. With this in mind, if the Ugaritic and Rabbinic sources provided by Pope are correct, then the ritual defecation in Baalism would only bolster the satirical side of YHWH's curse of reducing Ahab and Jezebel to dung.

The curse charged against Ahab is that his household and lineage will suffer the same fate as the house of Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 21:20–22 cf. 1 Kgs. 14:10). Thus, Ahab is fated to suffer being reduced to dung because of his sin — just as his predecessor was.⁴⁸ Ahab repents, but the fate of his lineage being rejected and ejected like dung still comes to pass.

YHWH curses Jezebel with a similar dung curse: “And of Jezebel the Lord also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel’. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country the birds of heaven shall eat” (1 Kgs. 21:23–24). This prophetic curse on Jezebel comes to fruition in 2 Kings 9:30–37. After Ahab is killed in battle, Jezebel is retained by the Northern Kingdom in an officiating role. The zealous Jehu, who is attempting to reform the nation through violent purgation, comes to Jezreel and intimidates a handful of royal eunuchs in Jezebel's court to defenestrate Jezebel.⁴⁹ The royal window cleaning results in Jezebel's death, which the text insinuates to be sustained through her impact with the ground and subsequent trampling by Jehu's horses (2 Kgs. 9:30–33).

⁴⁸ T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, World Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 163.

⁴⁹ Daniel Jütte, “Defenestration as Ritual Punishment: Windows, Power, and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe,” *The Journal of Modern History* 89, no. 1 (2017): 10.

After refreshing himself, Jehu decides to be merciful and orders that Jezebel receive a proper burial. This change of heart may have arisen from the common ANE mindset, which considered non-burial to be the worst of insults.⁵⁰ Hence, Jehu is likely honoring the office and not necessarily the wicked woman.

Yet, when the burial-brigade returns to where the corpse of Jezebel had been left, all that is found of her is her skull, feet, and hands (2 Kgs. 9:34–35). Jehu is told the gruesome report and responds as follows: “This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite: ‘In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung (*domen*) on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel’” (2 Kgs. 9:36–37). While the original prophecy by Elijah does not contain the pronouncement that Jezebel would be reduced to dung, the finalized form of 2 Kings 9:36–37 supplies this information, likely from the surrounding context of the original prophecy.⁵¹

However, more subtle content pertains to dung within this pericope. The name “Jezebel” is a *paronomasia* or a play on words meant to evoke intertextual allusion.⁵² As Hobbs asserts, Jezebel’s name is a play on words, with a component of her name being linked semantically to dung.⁵³ Although never used within the HB, the Hebrew word *zevel* is a well-attested Semitic word for dung.⁵⁴ Yee cogently clarifies the paronomasia: “As it is vocalized in the Masoretic Text, the name Jezebel is probably a two-layered parody. The original name *’izēbūl* (“Where is

⁵⁰ Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 237.

⁵¹ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 167.

⁵² Jonathan G. Kline, *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 1.

⁵³ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 167.

⁵⁴ Naomi Graetz, “Metaphors Connecting Jeremiah and Jezebel: The Case of *Domen*,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* vol. 14 no. 1 (2017): 7.

the Prince?") first became *'î-zēbūl* ("No nobility"). *Zēbūl*, a title of Baal, was then distorted into *zebel* ("dung"; cf. 2 Kgs. 9:37).⁵⁵ Hence, the curse pronounced upon the queen is merely a pronouncement of what her name signifies, even if her name is a later polemical redaction.

Jezebel's fate likewise recalls the curse of Mt. Ebal. Jezebel becomes food for the dogs, which is a beast of the field (Deut. 28:25–26). To become food for animals and be denied a proper burial is an act of grotesque dehumanization. In essence, Jezebel becomes food, which is ultimately digested and excreted. Ironically, within the context of Kings, given that Jezebel was a main proponent of Baalism, she ultimately becomes what she worshipped.

Furthermore, an additional *paronomasia* is present within the pericope that heightens the scatological humor: the location of Jezebel's death in the region of Jezreel. Within this pericope, Jezebel has Naboth murdered so that Ahab may have his vineyard. This seemingly useless reference actually relates to the well-attested fact that Jezreel was, and still is, a fertile area within the Levant.⁵⁶ Jezreel literally means "to sow or scatter."⁵⁷ The sound play between Jezebel and Jezreel — which is astonishingly well preserved even in English — indicates that the curse imposed upon Jezebel is ironic; Jezebel becomes as manure "scattered" on the face of the field in the territory of "scattering." Indeed, Jezebel has devoutly followed the "fertility cult" of Baal to the point of becoming fertilizer. For her numerous gross sins, particularly that of Baalism, Jezebel is mocked, reduced to dung, and scattered about the fields like manure, rejected and ejected by YHWH, further illuminating the biblical symbolic link between dung and sin; for where dung is mentioned, sin is close at hand.

⁵⁵ Gale A. Yee, "Jezebel (Person)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 848, transliteration original.

⁵⁶ Gratez, "Metaphors," 9.

⁵⁷ James Parks, *Wordplay in the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2021), Ho 1:4.

A Bathroom for Baal, Part 2

Similarly, 2 Kings 10 portrays the mockery of sin like that of Elijah in 1 Kings 18. After the Jezebel episode, the anointed, zealous Jehu continues his war of purgation on Baalism.⁵⁸ In 2 Kings 10:18–27, Jehu is portrayed as hatching a cunning plan where he hoodwinks the priests, prophets, and worshippers of Baal throughout all the land of Israel into gathering for a great state-sponsored sacrifice unto Baal in the House of Baal that Ahab built (2 Kgs. 10:18–24; cf. 1 Kgs. 16).

With the House of Baal packed with Baal’s people, Jehu performs a sacrifice to Baal to truly draw the rebellious worshippers into the plan. Jehu then orders his battalion stationed outside the temple to barricade the worshippers of Baal inside the temple, slaughter them all, and tear down the temple upon the slain (2 Kgs. 9:24–26). In 2 Kings 9:27, after completing the mission of mystique, the site of the demolished pillar and house of Baal — which contains the slain bodies of the worshippers — is converted into a “latrine” (*maharah*).

The mocking irony of this account is immense. The worshippers of Baal gather for a great sacrifice unto their god, only to find out in the end that they are the sacrifice.⁵⁹ The sacrifice of the false god and his worshippers is a clear act of de-creation and humiliation since dung is void of life and described as a heap of repudiation. While some scholarly debate has centered around semantic technicalities (i.e., whether the *maharah* is a constructed outhouse or a dung heap), the connection of dung and Baal is again apparent.⁶⁰ If ceremonial defecation was indeed a cultic practice within Baalism during this period, then the scatological satire contained

⁵⁸ Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 223.

⁵⁹ Patterson, *Kings*, 291.

⁶⁰ Stephen C. Russell, *The King and the Land: A Geography of Royal Power in the Biblical World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 53.

within this pericope is all the more intensified; Jehu helps to facilitate proper Baal worship by giving the false deity what he enjoys seeing: huge piles of dung. Thus, the belittling of Baal as a god who delights in dung exposes the biblical impression that Baal is the antithesis of YHWH, who is repulsed by excrement (Deut. 23:14).

Structurally, the episode of Elijah mocking Baal as preoccupied with relieving himself and the desecration of the temple of Baal by Jehu form a notable *inclusio*. Baal is mocked by Elijah as relieving himself of dung and ultimately has his [Baal] temple reduced to the place where dung is discarded by Jehu. Similarly, within the *inclusio*, Jezebel is reduced to dung, just the same as her god.

Furthermore, the curse concerning the house of Jeroboam being purged by YHWH as if it were dung, was pronounced against Jeroboam because of his state-endorsed calf worship. Bull or calf worship was pervasive in various ANE religions, particularly in relation to weather gods (i.e., Baal), who were depicted as using the bull or calf as a vehicle.⁶¹ While the sin of Jeroboam is not explicitly linked to Baalism, compelling evidence suggests that Jeroboam may have commandeered a pre-existing cult and retained the rites and vestiges.⁶² Whatever the case may be, *Kings* consistently links dung and the sin of idolatry, since idolatry is a fundamental rejection and ejection of YHWH.⁶³ Hence, the various implementations of dung within *Kings* alongside various sins, further depicts the biblical link between dung and sin.

⁶¹ N. Wyatt, "Calf," ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 181.

⁶² Helmer Ringgren, "גִּזְיָהּ," ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 449.

⁶³ The name Eglon (i.e., calf) may also insinuate some form of title related to a deity and bull. See: Parks, *Wordplay in the Bible*, Judges 3:17.

Eat Dung and Die

The dung–sin symbol is not solely a symbol implemented in relation to YHWH, his people, and their joint enemies. Dung can also symbolize sin in general, such as sin between two human parties, and 2 Kings 18 provides one such depiction.⁶⁴ Specifically, it gives attention to the reign of the reformist Judean king Hezekiah and the initial contact between Hezekian Judah and the rising dominant empire of Assyria. After acquiescing to a tribute demand by Assyria, Sennacherib sends an official dignitary (a “Rabshakeh”) to inquire as to why Hezekiah has aligned himself with Egypt over and against Assyria (2 Kgs. 18:13–22). The Rabshakeh speaks diplomatically to various Hezekian court officials in public, simultaneously taunting King Hezekiah and attempting to undermine public trust in the Judean king.⁶⁵ The royal court asks the Rabshakeh to speak to them in the *lingua franca* of the day, specifically Aramaic, in an attempt to keep the public from hearing his taunts.⁶⁶ However, this diplomatic request only fuels the taunts of the Rabshakeh in the vernacular understood by all who are present. The Assyrian dignitary mocks and taunts Judah and YHWH by proclaiming that Sennacherib has surely sent him to speak to the King and his court in private, not in the presence of the public, who are doomed “to eat their own dung (*haraim*) and to drink their own urine” (2 Kgs. 18:27).

The Judean–Egyptian alliance is perceived by Assyria to be a sinful allegiance that is impeding an Assyrian rise to dominance in the Levant. Ironically, the Assyrian dignitary echoes an underlying message of the Prophets concerning the fickleness of Egyptian reliance.⁶⁷ Since

⁶⁴ Cf. the parallel accounts in 2 Chronicles 32:1–20 and Isaiah 36:1–22.

⁶⁵ Montgomery, *Kings*, 487.

⁶⁶ 2 Kings 18:26 implies the general populace does not understand Aramaic.

⁶⁷ Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 256.

Judah has rejected becoming an Assyrian vassal state, Assyria rejects Judah and will eject the inhabitants from its land (2 Kgs. 18:28–35); thus, it will reduce the inhabitants of Judah to dung as they are oppressed to the point of eating their own excrement in slow, inevitable starvation.⁶⁸

While the scriptural text certainly highlights the dung–sin symbol in the Rabshakeh’s taunt, a few historical considerations are worth mentioning that bolster the dung–sin symbolism link and the mocking aspect therein. First, the taunt by the Rabshakeh is accurate in reference to other known Assyrian campaign reports. The Assyrians routinely mocked their enemies by reducing them to dung and urine. Patterson notes the following: “For the words “dung” and “urine,” the Masoretes euphemistically substituted “their going forth” and “the water of their feet.” The written text, however, preserves the Assyrian language of the street, words no doubt chosen to dramatize the horror of the coming siege. The Assyrians were not above the use of crude speech for dramatic effect. Thus Sennacherib reports in his eighth campaign that the terrified enemy charioteers “passed hot urine and left their excrement in their chariots.”⁶⁹ Hence, the mockery of the Rabshakeh and the referenced Assyrian campaign report convey the dung–sin symbol as one generally known throughout the ANE.

Second, the alliance between Judah and Egypt mentioned in the pericope only increases the scathing nature of the Rabshakeh’s rebuke. Concerning Egypt, one symbol has historically dominated Egypt as an unofficial “logo” — the scarab.⁷⁰ Amar cogently notes: “The sacred scarab (*Scarabaeus sacer*), also known as the Pharaoh’s scarab, was revered in Egypt from ancient times. This veneration was based on the behavior of the dung beetle, which collects

⁶⁸ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 308.

⁶⁹ Patterson, *1 and 2 Kings*, 345.

⁷⁰ Zohar Amar, “The Scarab.” *The Biblical Archaeology Review*. 46, no. 3 (2020).

animal droppings and forms them into a ball, into which it then lays eggs, rolling the ball with its hind legs and finally burying it in the ground. After the stage of the larva and pupa, mature beetles hatch and emerge from the dung ball. The Egyptians believed that this symbolized the creation of the world *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”) by the sun god.”⁷¹

Hezekiah electing to ally with a kingdom whose national symbol is a dung beetle clarifies the taunt of the Assyrian diplomat. However, Hezekiah did not merely align himself with the kingdom of the dung beetle; rather, he essentially assimilated the symbol as his own. In 1999, a monumental archeological discovery was made pertaining to Hezekiah—explicitly a royal seal. The royal seal of King Hezekiah of Judah was revealed to bear the iconography of a dung beetle. Hezekiah effectively embraced dung beetle iconography and possibly attempted to reengineer the scarab as a royal symbol for Judah.⁷² These historical considerations offer some logic and purpose to the taunts of the Rabshakeh. In the end, the Rabshakeh essentially makes the following declaration: “You will not feast off the dung beetle and be secure but will be ravished and eat your own dung as a means of pure survival; you will become like the dung beetle.”

Nevertheless, the outcome of the tension between Assyrian and Judea within the immediate context is one of irony, further contributing to the aspect of mockery within a biblical theology of dung. Assyrian is ultimately routed in the lifetime of Hezekiah. Like Moab, Assyria is rejected and ejected from the presence of people of YHWH bringing wholeness to the body of Judah. 2 Kings 19:32–37 conveys that the angel of YHWH struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers and that Sennacherib is assassinated in the comfort of his own home—much like Eglon

⁷¹ Amar, “The Scarab,” 53.

⁷² See: Meir Lubestki, “King Hezekiah’s Seal Revisited.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27, no. 4 (2001): 44–51.

being assassinated in the comfort of his palace. Thus, while the Rabshakeh mocks Judah, it is Assyria that is reduced to a state of refuse much like its Moabite predecessor.

Chapter 2 Summary

The mockery of the Former Prophets is an integral aspect of a biblical theology of dung. The semantic and conceptual cognates pertaining to dung employed by the Former Prophets display sin, like dung, as being rejected and ejected via an attitude of mockery. Each implementation of dung in the Former Prophets is contextually linked to sin, further forging the biblical symbolic link between dung and sin. The symbolic link between dung and sin the Former Prophets is also heightened by the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24. As sin, Christ is rejected and ejected outside the camp to the dung hill, where he is mocked. A robust biblical theology of dung recognizes the rhetorical device of mockery in the Former Prophets as communicating one of the scriptural attitudes regarding sin.

CHAPTER 3

DUNG IN THE LATTER PROPHETS

Whereas the Former Prophets emphasize the aspect of mockery related to the dung–sin symbol, the Latter Prophets emphasize an additional aspect contained in the symbol — that shocking disgust. Undoubtedly, the fecal matter presented within the Latter Prophets amalgamates the twin thematic expressions of sin typified by dung as sin rejected and ejected, just as the Pentateuch and Former Prophets do. Hence, while the Latter Prophets emphasize the shocking disgust of dung, they in no way mitigate the previous properties of the dung–sin symbol.

The Latter Prophets bring their typical sensory-shock rhetorical style to the topic of dung. Unfortunately, the Latter Prophets are generally polished and fitted with a whitewashed veneer that robs the texts of their intentional vitriol and violence.¹ The veneer is usually applied during the translation process, where attention is given to particular cultural mores and taboos that may create a stumbling block for the target audience. Yet, the Latter Prophet’s consistently push the boundaries for the purpose of shattering the veneer and making the reader uncomfortable. This is certainly true concerning dung in the Latter Prophet corpus.

Thus, a proper preface that warns of the whitewash is pertinent. Sherwood cogently observes that acknowledging the deliberate offense of the Latter Prophets ensures the prophetic writings ultimately achieve their purpose — even in modernity — and provides a four-fold frame explaining how the offensive nature of the Latter Prophets speaks across timelines.

¹ Yvonne M. Sherwood, “Prophetic Scatology: Prophecy and the Art of Sensation,” *Semeia*, no. 82 (1998): 212–213.

First, the Latter Prophets violently shift current perceptions regarding both present and past standards. The offensive nature of the Latter Prophets unveils the “actual” reality while dismantling the “fake” reality the audience has settled into.² Second, the Latter Prophets engender this perception shift by using extreme language; language of abuse, rape, excrement and indecent exposure.³ Third, the extreme language is purposed towards shocking the audience into the unveiled “actual” reality.⁴ Fourth, by implementing such a strategy, the Latter Prophets ironically force their audience to beg for some sort of “prettification,” simultaneously confirming the prophetic message by confirming the denial of the audience.⁵

Following Sherwood’s observations in relation to the dung–sin symbol within the Latter Prophets, the various implementations of relevant dung concepts are not meant to invoke the image of a small accident or a cute baby filling a diaper. Rather, the rhetoric effected by the Latter Prophets regarding dung envisions crushed taboos and shocked senses to the point of vitriol, all for the purpose of portraying how disgusting and vile sin is — which must be rejected and ejected like dung and mocked as useless, lest the sinner be relegated to that very state. The Latter Prophets lucidly display that where dung is mentioned, sin is in proximity, further drawing attention the biblical symbolic link of dung and sin.

Putrid Piles: Isaiah and Jeremiah

The Isaianic presentation of the dung–sin symbol arrives characteristically via putrid and potent pronouncements, the first of which comes by way of the vineyard parable of Isaiah 5. In

² Sherwood, ““Prophetic Scatology,” 212–13.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

the parable, YHWH pronounces calamity upon his sinful people for their egregious covenant infidelity. The level of covenant infidelity corresponds to the level of woe pronounced by YHWH, as seen particularly in Isaiah 5:25; YHWH declares that the corpses of the unfaithful will be “as refuse (*suhah*) in the midst of the streets.” The sin that reduces Israel to refuse is a deliberate rejection and despising of the law of YHWH (cf. Isa. 5:24). As Brueggemann notes, “[t]he consequence of such a rejection is [then] given in a series of metaphors—fire, rot, dust—all of which bespeak failure and nullification.”⁶ Thus, the rejection of YHWH results in his rejection and ejection of covenant breakers as if they were rotten and lifeless dung.

This reviling revelation from YHWH is by no means random. The curse pronounced upon Israel is in line with the curses promised at Mt. Ebal in Deuteronomy 28. Specifically, Deuteronomy 28:26 states the following: “And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away.” To render a body as refuse in the street is to have the corpse exposed to the unclean predatory birds and scavenging animals (cf. Lev. 11). Being reduced to refuse is an act of humiliating annihilation. The rejection of YHWH results in the rejection and ejection of the covenant breakers to the point that their life is digested and their useless corpses are ejected for the unclean beasts to feast upon.

Assuredly, the imagery implemented by Isaiah is meant to shock the senses. While dead bodies are shocking, being robbed of a proper burial and essentially de-created would have heightened the shock amidst a cultural milieu that linked the afterlife with proper burial.⁷ Hence, the imagery is ascertainable and striking: an unsightly pile of refuse and the stench emitted is no

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 55.

⁷ F.B.Huey Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 111.

better than the stacked bodies of sinful covenant breakers as they decompose in the open air rather than in a tomb. Hence, where dung is mentioned, sin is in proximity, for the scriptures communicate the abstract nature of sin through the concrete vehicle of dung.

Comparatively, the prophet Jeremiah further develops the symbolic depiction of the bodies of rebellious sinners as being as worthless as dung on the ground. Jeremiah likewise depicts YHWH enacting the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28.⁸ In Jeremiah 8:2, 9:22, 16:4, and 25:33, the sinfulness of Judah — and that of the entire world in Chapter 25 — yet again brings about the covenant curses of Mt. Ebal. Jeremiah consistently presents covenant breakers as bearing the covenantal curse by describing such breakers as being reduced to “dung (*domen*) on the surface of the ground.” Moreover, each implementation of *domen* in Jeremiah contains not only the link of sin to dung but also an express link to the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28 with the concept of being exposed to the birds of the air and beasts of the field.⁹

Thus, Jeremiah and Isaiah employ the dung–sin symbol in a comparable fashion. However, they do not merely associate sin and dung with the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28, although that is a major focus. Both Jeremiah and Isaiah present intertextual links to the Jezebel narrative to heighten the accusations levied against the covenant breakers in each respective oracle. As noted earlier in this work, the Scriptures present a microcosmic version of the curse of Deuteronomy 28 in the Jezebel narrative. Within it, Jezebel is consistently presented as the paradigm of a wicked and worthless woman.¹⁰ Broadly speaking, the Latter Prophets often

⁸ Huey Jr., *Jeremiah*, 111.

⁹ Jeremiah 7:30 in the context of 8:2; 9:10–11 in the context of 9:22 (the land becomes a land of jackals); 16:4 directly quotes the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28; 25:30,38 present YHWH as a lion (beast of the field) as ravaging his enemies who are reduced to dung.

¹⁰ Chet Roden, “Jezebel, Wife of Ahab, Daughter of Ethbaal,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

depict Israel as a sinning woman, linking the actions of Jezebel with the actions of Israel.¹¹ With these factors in mind, the intertextual links to Jezebel in Isaiah 5 and the four Jeremianic passages that pertain to dung become increasingly apparent.

The rebuke of YHWH unto the sinful nation of Israel, and the rebellious world at large in Jeremiah 25, focuses on the sin of idolatry. Jezebel was an ardent proponent of Baal worship and degraded the sociological structure of Israel during her reign, as seen particularly in the pericope surrounding Naboth's vineyard. The idolatry, vineyards, and agricultural undertones associated with Jezebel establish points of intertextual contact for Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jezebel.¹² In Isaiah 5, the pronouncement of judgment for sin unto dung involves a vineyard. Likewise, Jeremiah 8:13 portrays YHWH comparing the rebellious people to an unfruitful grape vine and Jeremiah 9:22 speaks of the bodies of covenant breakers being like dung upon the ground and "sheaves after the reaper." The context of Jeremiah 25 depicts all of the rebels of the earth as dung upon the ground, likening the wrath of YHWH to a cup of wine; wine is produced from the fruit of the vineyard.

Additional subtle intertextual links to Jezebel are found in Jeremiah 9:21 and 16:8. First, in Jeremiah 9:22, before YHWH declares that the dead bodies of the fallen shall be as dung upon the ground, a personified death is depicted as coming through the windows of the covenant-breaking nation. As Huey notes, it was well known that in the Baal myth, Baal refused to have windows in his palace because he believed that death (i.e., Mot) would climb through and steal

¹¹ Naomi Graetz, "Metaphors Connecting Jeremiah and Jezebel: The Case of Dometi," *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* vol. 14 no. 1 (2017): 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

his family.¹³ The Baal-worshipping Queen Jezebel was stolen away by death out of her window and reduced to dung.

Second, Jeremiah 16 presents YHWH rebuking rebellious covenant breakers, declaring them to be no better than dung (16:4). The divine rebuke climaxes in 16:8–9 with YHWH decreeing that the rebellious will be so distraught by the ensuing disaster that the thought of mirth and feasting will be inconceivable. Here, the subtle link to Jezebel is found in the textual echo of Jehu feasting after Jezebel has been tossed from the window. Hence, Jeremiah and Isaiah highlight the scriptural link between dung and sin via covenant-breaking Israel and the wickedness of Jezebel.

A Trip to the Pool: Isaiah's Depiction of Moab

Isaiah also presents a satirical picture of utter disgust concerning judgment against sin. Isaiah 25 envisions a wide-scale day of salvation by YHWH with Moab as a standing type for all of the enemies of God.¹⁴ Moab has previously been represented as a dung-filled empire in Judges. Thus, the previous connection with Moab and dung is recapitulated. YHWH declares that due to the sinful pride of Moab, which has rejected YHWH and his people, “the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, and Moab shall be trampled down in his place, as straw is trampled down in a dunghill. And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim, but the LORD will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill of his hands” (Isa. 25:10–11).

¹³ Huey, *Jeremiah*, 121.

¹⁴ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2000), 183. See also, John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 204.

The Hebrew text of Isaiah 25:10–11 contains biblical word play. Dunghill (*madmenah*) is a revocalization of the biblically attested Moabite town of Madmen (Jer. 48:2).¹⁵ Thus, the pronouncement of judgment against the sin of Moab is a deliberate and grotesque taunt. The taunt portrays a blind Moab working with his hands to build a fortified kingdom or city, presumably Madmen. The Moabite refuge is faintly presented as a refreshing oasis. However, the reality of the prophetic oracle pictures Moab as having merely built a dung pit of prideful rejection; instead of swimming about in refreshing water, Moab actually swims about in disgusting manure. The rejection of the feast of God that swallows death (Isa. 25:1–9) results in Moab being face down in “a barnyard of liquid manure,” doomed to eventually drown as he — the prideful swimmer — swallows mouthfuls of death.¹⁶

Yet, why is this the judgment pronounced upon Moab? Becking presents a cogent answer to this question in his examination of the phrase “as straw trodden down in the water of a dung pit.” He notes various ANE texts that employed the following specific proverb regarding danger: “Under straw, water runs.” This proverb likely connotes an agricultural manure pit, where straw is thrown on top of watered-down dung to cover the odor of the foul mixture as it transforms into fertilizer.¹⁷ It is possible that the Isaianic depiction of Moab swimming in manure could be a re-engineered version of this common ANE cultural proverb, used by the prophet to warn of the deceptive nature of pride.

¹⁵ George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, I–XXXIX*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 433.

¹⁶ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2003,) 250.

¹⁷ Bob Becking, “As Straw is Trodden Down in the Waters of a Dung-Pit,” in *Isaiah in Context: Studies in Honour of Arie Van der Kooij on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Eds. van der Meer, Michaël, van Keulen, Percy, van Peursen, Wido Th., and Ter Haar Romeny, Bas (Boston: Brill, 2010), 33.

Furthermore, within the great Banquet of Salvation text of Isaiah 25, there are various references that supplement the dung imagery. In his great act of salvation, YHWH prepares a meal for the people to swallow up in feasting as YHWH. The banquet represents a great exchange: YHWH takes his people from a feast of death and gives them a feast of life, while he “swallows up” the death that his people were originally feasting on. As Swanson notes, בלע (*billa*) connotes consuming something through the mouth and into the stomach.¹⁸ YHWH ingests the food of death to expel it on behalf of his people.

Further supplementation to the dung imagery in Isaiah 25 comes by “the hand of YHWH” and the “hands” of Moab.¹⁹ The “hand of YHWH” is the one of deliverance, while the hands of Moab stretch out to swim in dung. Hence, Moab is subtly depicted as having two left hands — hands suitable for being defiled with dung. Thus, Isaiah 25 plainly displays the concept that where dung is present in the scriptural corpus, sin is close “at hand,” since dung symbolizes sin.

Bread of Defilement: Ezekiel

The fourth chapter of Ezekiel presents an infamous account of scriptural scatology. In Ezekiel 4, YHWH commands Ezekiel to perform various public sign acts for the purpose of communicating the coming siege and exile of Jerusalem.²⁰ The sign ultimately reveals that

¹⁸ Swanson, *Hebrew*, s.v “בלע (n).”

¹⁹ John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, vol. 24: Revised Edition, World Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 517.

²⁰ Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 95–97.

YHWH is going to reject his people and eject them by exiling them out of the land because of their covenant infidelity.²¹

One such sign-act that YHWH desired Ezekiel to execute was cooking a “scraped together”²² peasant-style bread over a fire made with “human dung.” This sign-act multivalently symbolizes the impurity of the Gentile land to which the people of YHWH would be exiled, the impossibility of observing cultic purity laws, and the sheer desperation of the looming judgment.²³ This bread of defilement was a public attestation that the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 were coming to pass.²⁴

Furthermore, the dung that YHWH commands Ezekiel to cook the bread over in Ezekiel 4:12 is slightly obscure in the original language. There seems to be a compound thought regarding the definition of the dung that is to be the fuel source for Ezekiel. First, *gel* is implemented as a descriptor of the specific type of dung for Chef Ezekiel. The term *gel* was previously implemented in the Scriptures in Deuteronomy 23, where it is used to describe how the war camp is to go about regulating the place and modality of bowel movements. From a scriptural perspective, *gel* means generalized human excrement.

However, following *gel* in Ezekiel 4:12 in the original language is *סֵאֵת הָאָדָם* (*seat ha adam*), which translates to “dung of mankind.” Semantically, Ezekiel 4:12 displays a double

²¹ Daniel L. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 44.

²² *Ibid.*, 43.

²³ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation Bible Commentary (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 45.

²⁴ Deut. 28:17: “Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.” Deut. 28:36-57 speak of exile and enslavement resulting in abominable and extreme dietary measures. Lev. 26:26: “When I break your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven and shall dole out your bread again by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied.” Lev. 26:39 also speaks of exile as covenant curse.

pronouncement. YHWH clarifies any doubts over misinterpretation in the mind of the prophet. Nevertheless, Ezekiel is repulsed by the divine decree and declares that he has never defiled himself with any sort of unclean food. Ezekiel objects to the grotesqueness of the divine decree by generally appealing to his own strict observation of the dietary laws that act as a metonymy for the entire purity code.²⁵ His general objection immediately associates human excrement with the realm and concept of defilement *in toto* for the entire human race and not merely as defiling only for the war camp of Deuteronomy 23.

Then, in Ezekiel 4:15, YHWH makes a concession to the objection of the prophet, permitting Ezekiel to cook the sign-act bread of judgment over fire fueled by cattle dung (*sephue*) instead of “human dung.” The *hapax sephue* is provided as a substitution for the previously sanctioned human dung, which in 4:15 is now spoken of in Hebrew as אָדָם לֶגַל (*adam gel*). Thus, a clear “dung” synonymity is implemented between 4:12 and 4:15.

An additional element undergirding the grotesque sign-act is found in Ezekiel 2 and 3. In Ezekiel 2:8, in his initial prophetic calling, Ezekiel is told by YHWH to eat whatever is given unto him. In Ezekiel 3:1–3, Ezekiel is given a honey-sweet scroll to eat that fills his stomach. It represents the word YHWH. Hence, the sign-act of cooking peasant bread over human dung also contextually implies the word of YHWH passing through the digestive system of the prophet to then be recapitulated in a different way.²⁶ Whereas the word of YHWH was sweet to the prophet, it would be defiling to the rebellious nation who will respond to their own call to repentance by treating the word of YHWH like dung.

²⁵ Nathan D. Phinney, “The Prophetic Objection in Ezekiel IV 14 and Its Relation to Ezekiel’s Call,” *Vestus Testamentum* 55, no. 1 (2005): 80.

²⁶ Sherwood, “Prophetic Scatology,” 195.

This sign-act of Ezekiel is wholly outlandish. Western readers may improperly conclude the account as satirical, principally when YHWH accommodates Ezekiel's passive implication to allow the bread to be cooked in another way. The Western reader is likely to misinterpret the intent of the concession as focused on Ezekiel asking to cook with cow dung instead of his own dung. Moreover, to the Western reader, Ezekiel's request is just as odd as the original stipulation given by YHWH. However, in both the ANE and the modern Near East, dried animal dung was and is still used as an everyday fuel source.²⁷ As Cooper notes, trees in the Near East — both then and now—are rare, which makes wood an extraordinary commodity.²⁸ The rarity of wood naturally necessitates alternate fuel sources for life-sustaining practices, such as cooking in ovens or curing pottery in kilns.²⁹ Thus, the divine concession is one of compassion which, on the surface, lessens the shock-value of the sign-act. However, it is not outside the realm of possibility that Ezekiel “acted” as if he were excreting the cow dung from his own body to still publicly convey the ultra-defiling nature of the exile to come. The state of destitution enacted by the prophet certainly echoes the taunt pronounced by the Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18.

Moreover, what cannot be overlooked within the Ezekiel passage is how, for the first time within the scriptural scatological frame, YHWH seemingly breaks the very taboos that he has effected for his people. How can this be justified? The answer is only by recalling that the Latter Prophets in particular are used by God to shock sinners to their senses. Sherwood offers the following brilliant observation:

²⁷ G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 56.

²⁸ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 97.

²⁹ Oded Borowski, “Seasons, Crops, and Water in the Land of the Bible,” in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 415.

This violent, hacking quality, this refusal of beauty, becomes an integral part of (true) prophecy's self-definition. Alongside the criterion of fulfilment (which is hopelessly projected into the open-ended future), the prophetic texts seem to offer aesthetic criteria for distinguishing between the true (and confrontational) on the one hand, and the false (and soothing) on the other. Whereas false prophecy daubs reality with whitewash, soothes the eyes, generates "pretty songs," and smooth words (Jer 6:14; Ezek 13:8–13), true prophecy shocks, dislocates, refuses to pander to the eyes, produces unbearable visions and unseeable spectacles. In the competition for "truth," prophecy needs to legitimate itself in the here-and-now, needs to imagine a way for God to speak that will be sufficiently marked, sufficiently other, sufficiently striking. It needs to create a sense of a word that "comes" from elsewhere, a word marked by its own alien rules and perceptions (and how else to create otherness than by subversion and deviation?). The true prophet not only legitimates himself with transcendental, a-visual visions of a God barely seen, a God set-apart, he also creates a sense of a power that sends accepted categories and ways of speaking/thinking into chaos, and that pushes himself, his words and his God into a separate unnatural (or supernatural) space. That is why the prophets indulge in "crazy actions" as Maimonides puts it, and that is why God, in Ezekiel 4, transgresses his own Levitical commandments, breaks down the boundaries between clean and unclean, commands Ezekiel, absolutely unthinkably, to bake over his own faeces. This is not a deconstructive moment, where the distinctions between clean and unclean cave in because the logic is overstretched, but a deliberate depiction of a God outside his own system. At this strange moment-and the moment in Mal 2:3 where he rubs the priests' noses in the [dung] of their own mortality-Yhwh shows a brief affinity with the cannibalistic, incestuous gods of Greek mythology, in that he is displaying his godliness by flaunting taboos. In a society obsessed with divisions between unclean and clean that zealously guards the boundaries/orifices of the national/individual body with catalogues of unclean foods, spillages and emissions, the zone of the unclean symbolises both danger and power (Douglas: 95). By straying into this zone, Ezekiel collects his credentials as a "prophet" and outsider, and enters into the strange and dangerous zone of rejection-legitimation.³⁰

Therefore, because of the sin of the people of YHWH in rejecting and ejecting the word of YHWH, YHWH commands Ezekiel to perform a scandalous, public sign-act of judgment by making a bread of defilement baked over dung. Since the people of God had defiled themselves in sin, YHWH would give them what they desired. YHWH would reject his people and eject them into an unclean land, as if they were dung in the open field to be feasted upon by the pagan nations. Again, dung is shown to symbolize sin since Ezekiel portrays dung and sin in proximity.

³⁰ Sherwood, "Prophetic Scatology," 211–12. See quoted by Sherwood: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

Void of Life: Zephaniah

Zephaniah declares cosmic-level judgment against the leadership of Jerusalem for engaging in and promoting the syncretistic worship of YHWH with Baal, Molech, and various celestial bodies.³¹ In Zephaniah 1:17, YHWH declares through the prophet that the rebellious leadership and all who practice their ways shall have their “blood poured out as dust and their flesh like dung” (*galal*). Within this pericope, what is portrayed concerning the severity of the Day of the Lord is the utter destruction and de-creation process that occurs when the wrath of YHWH is made manifest — a judgment so cataclysmic that it can only be expressed through shocking grotesqueness.³²

The overtones of de-creation center upon the word “dust,” (*aphar*). *Aphar* carries a wide semantic range that is dictated by the context wherein the word is implemented. Nevertheless, *aphar* is associated with the creation of man in Genesis 2:7 and with his subsequent death-curse in Genesis 3:19, with the cursed serpent destined to lick the *aphar*.³³ *Aphar* is also further linked to the cursing of YHWH. Again, Deuteronomy 28 contains a covenant curse in verse 24, where YHWH will curse the land by turning the rain into *aphar*.³⁴ Thus, Zephaniah’s implementation of *aphar* highlights the judgment of utter de-creation and cursing by YHWH. This is highlighted by *aphar* being used in parallel with dung, which figuratively signifies YHWH deeming those judged to be utterly worthless. Under the wrath of YHWH, the individual(s) is de-created, with

³¹ Iain M. Duguid and Matthew P. Harmon, *Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 13.

³² Paul R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1988), 63.

³³ L. Wächter, “אֶפְרַיִם,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 259.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the lifeblood of his body poured out as if it were dust, thus being “reduced to a thing of no value” and treated as no better than dung.³⁵ Moreover, *aphar* was already ascribed to dung in previous pericopes, such as Isaiah 25 and 1 Samuel 2, where the word is used to describe the ash or dung heap.³⁶

The descriptor of judgment unto dung (*galal*) has seen previous scriptural deployment in 1 Kings 14 with the house of Jeroboam. Jeroboam rejects YHWH and ejects him as if from his [Jeroboam’s] bowels, to which YHWH concurs by doing the same to Jeroboam; similarly, in Zephaniah, *galal* is overtly connected to the bowels semantically, possibly providing a direct intertextuality with the curse of Jeroboam. The word rendered “flesh” by the ESV (לֶחֶם *lehum*) is more literally translated as “bowels.”³⁷ Hence, this pronouncement of judgment against the sin of the rebellious—likened to cosmic treason from the four corners of the Earth—may demonstrate the shockingly grotesque power of YHWH to turn individuals inside-out.

When the Day of YHWH comes upon those who are practicing sinful syncretism and leading others to do the same, the result will be nothing short of cataclysmic de-creation to the point of disgust. As the leadership has rejected YHWH and taught the masses to do the same, rendering themselves and their progeny as unclean as the pagan nations, YHWH likewise rejects the nation *in toto* and ejects the life out of them—life exposed to be accursed and putrid. Thus,

³⁵ Richard Duane Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 324.

³⁶ Another word within this pronouncement of judgment linking to previous mentions of dung and sin is that of שִׁפְךָ (*shuphak*) which was used to describe what was done with the blood of the bull of the purification offering in Ex. 29 and Lev. 4. Thus, here in Zeph. 1:17, YHWH creates his own dung hill or ash heap with the bodies of sinners.

³⁷ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 536.

the Day of YHWH in Zephaniah utilizes the symbolic link between dung and sin to communicate the seriousness of rebellion against YHWH and the extent of his judgment.

Gross Garments in the Night: Zechariah

Zechariah 3 depicts a heavenly courtroom vision where Satan stands to accuse the high priest, Joshua. Within this vision, Joshua concurrently represents the office of the priesthood that has become contaminated and impure through generations of sinful misconduct and propagation thereof as well as the people the priest officially epitomizes.³⁸ The accusation of Satan concerning Joshua pertains to the ineffectiveness of a contaminated priesthood. If the priesthood is impure, then no true mediator exists between YHWH and his people, which renders the people perpetually impure.

Within this scene, the sins of the priesthood and people are typified upon the priestly federal head as disgusting, excrement-laden garments. The garments are described in Zechariah 3:3–4 as “filthy” (*tsoi*). The root צוא (*tsw*) has previously been expressed in dung-related passages, such as excrement’s regulation in the war camp in Deuteronomy 23 and the bread of defilement in Ezekiel 4. The implementation of this term underscores the seriousness of the situation depicted in the vision.³⁹ Thus, the filthy garments upon Joshua within the heavenly court vision are clothes not merely soiled with dirt but rather with dung. Zechariah depicts the high priest as “not merely tarnished here and there, but is a veritable sewer of pollution.”⁴⁰ Given

³⁸ John Merlin Powis Smith and Julius August Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 150.

³⁹ Anthony R. Petterson, Haggai, *Zechariah and Malachi*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015,) 140.

⁴⁰ Richard D. Phillips, *Zechariah*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 68.

that dung symbolizes sin, sin should be close at hand contextually. Luckily, the filthy vestments are deemed garments of iniquity in Zechariah 3:4, quickly linking the dung–sin symbol to this passage.

This vision in Zechariah 3 is the fourth of seven highly symbolic—and often apocalyptic—visions within the book of the prophet. Structurally, the fourth vision contained in Zechariah 4 occupies a central position, thus highlighting this vision as the paramount vision of the work.⁴¹ As a whole, the vision deals with symbolic elements that pertain to sin. Joshua is presented as a defiled priest who appears before YHWH in tarnished priestly attire, against the requirements of a ritualistically clean and laundered priesthood found in Exodus⁴² and Leviticus.⁴³

The only way Joshua is permitted to stand before the presence of YHWH is if the excrement-laced garments are taken off and put away from the court and pure garments are provided for him. The excrement of sin that has soiled the priesthood cannot be tolerated and must be rejected and ejected from the presence of YHWH—and subsequently Joshua. Thus, in the removal of the unclean clothing, symbolization occurs of “the legal blotting out of sins, the rebuttal of Satan’s accusations, forgiveness, the imputation of the sins of God’s elect.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, the revesting of Joshua typologically signifies recreation. The new garments given to him in the excrement exchange further symbolize recreation and not attire reserved for special festivities. Winton notes the following: “The idea of a mere change in raiment, or of

⁴¹ Meredith G. Kline, *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-Theological Reading of Zechariah’s Night Visions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 95.

⁴² See prescriptions in Ex. 28–30 and Ex. 40.

⁴³ See prescriptions in Lev. 8 11; 14; 16.

⁴⁴ Kline, *Glory in Our Midst*, 112.

costliness or magnificence inherent in festival or state robe, is not the sense required here. The context calls for the sense ‘clean, pure.’ The ‘filthy garments,’ symbolic of sin, are to be removed from the high priest, who wears them as the representative of the people’s guilt, and hereafter he is to be clothed in pure, clean robes, symbolic of the removal of sin, both from the people and himself, and of his renewed eligibility for the high-priestly office. That this is the sense is shown by the ‘fair (Heb. “clean”) mitre’ of verse 5.”⁴⁵

Within the prophetic frame of a ludicrous sketch intended to shock the senses of the audience, Joshua’s excrement-laden garments generate a sense of embarrassment. The imagery of Zechariah is meant to evoke sensory overload with the sight of a man covered head to toe in feces and the imagined putrid smell that emanates from him before the most royal of courts. A divine wake-up call is issued by Zechariah through the symbolic vision to the sinful nation, who must realize the defilement of the high priest means that it is they who are also covered in their own excrement before YHWH and thus worthy of being rejected and ejected from his presence if not for his immense mercy. Hence, the descriptors implemented in relation to the dung–sin symbol in Zechariah further convey that the dung–sin coupling connects to the categories of contagion and pollution, whereby the contaminant must be purified via removal.⁴⁶

The Smear Campaign of Malachi

Malachi presents a unique and jarring assessment of the post-exilic priesthood, who in the prophet’s time, had become chief culprits in leading the people of God into apostasy. The excitement and reform of the early post-exilic period has fizzled out, with Israelite leadership

⁴⁵ Thomas D. Winton, “A Note on מְחֻלָּצוֹת in Zechariah Iii 4,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 131 (1932): 279.

⁴⁶ Yitzhaq Feder, “Defilement, Disgust, and Disease: The Experiential Basis of Hittite and Akkadian Terms for Impurity,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 1 (2016): 100.

promoting unholy lifestyles and performing worship in a cold manner of appeasement.⁴⁷ This apathy and apostasy lead to a scathing rebuke by YHWH in a paragon of prophetic scatological shock language.

YHWH's rebuke of the priests in Malachi 2 centers upon the general lament presented throughout the oracle, namely that the priesthood does not honor God and teaches the people to do the same, thereby bringing wrath and curses.⁴⁸ YHWH increasingly mocks the priesthood to shock the office into repentance. First, YHWH mockingly calls the apathetic priesthood to hear the specific divine instruction, with "hear" being verbally linked to the great *Shema*.⁴⁹ This new *Shema* promises "the curse" upon the priesthood and presumably the people they represent and facilitate instruction to. Within the Hebrew text, a definite article is attached to "curse," forming a rare definite direct object, found primarily in Deuteronomy 28.⁵⁰ Hence, the curse that YHWH promises in his mockery is that this *Shema* is the curse of Deuteronomy 28.

Second, YHWH mocks the blessings of the priesthood, promising to turn the blessings of the office into cursing. This mock is intertextually multivalent. The priesthood was tasked with pronouncing the priestly benediction upon the people in Numbers 6.⁵¹ Thus, the apathetic priesthood in Malachi is blind to the fact that they are cursing the people instead of blessing them. As Fishbane notes, "[t]he prophet has taken the contents of the Priestly Blessing—delivered by the priests, and with its emphasis on blessing, the sanctity of the divine Name, and

⁴⁷ Duguid and Harmon, *Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi*, 123–24.

⁴⁸ Smith and Bewer, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah*, 35–36.

⁴⁹ Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1998), 197.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 198–99.

⁵¹ Duguid and Harmon, *Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi*, 125.

such benefactions as protection, favourable countenance, and peace—and inverted them.”⁵² Fishbane also notes how YHWH’s rebuke is a direct exegetical inversion of the entire priestly blessing of Numbers 6, whereby YHWH sardonically dismantles the priesthood and desecrates the priests who are desecrating him.⁵³ Furthermore, there is a significant intertextual allusion to Numbers 22 where YHWH changes the curses of Baalam into blessings, which further highlights the inversion of the priesthood.

Third, YHWH mocks the priesthood by rebuking their “offspring.” The word rendered as offspring in the ESV is more literally translated as “seed” in Hebrew (*tsera*).⁵⁴ The ambiguity of “seed” points to a possible polyvalent intention where physical crops are cursed along with the children of the priesthood. Since the priesthood was a hereditary office, the latter possible intention is not out of the question (cf. Mal. 2:15). Moreover, it is with the cursing of the seed that YHWH seems to ramp up his scathing rebuke. The initial scriptural implementation of *tsera* is found in Genesis 3:15, where YHWH pronounces the initial post-fall curse with the *tsera* of the serpent and the *tsera* of the woman destined for war. Hence, YHWH subtly tells the priesthood that they are vicars of the viper rather than of YHWH; the apathetic and apostatizing priesthood who preside over the offerings and ministry in the typological Eden-temple are rebuked as surely being in the Garden in YHWH’s presence, but as his enemy.

The divine rebuke reaches a crescendo in Malachi 2:3b, where YHWH scathingly declares that he will “spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings and you shall be taken away with it.” The dung of the offering that is spread upon the faces of the apathetic and

⁵² Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015) 332–34.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ The LXX renders the initial words of Mal. 2:3 as “I will hew (cut) off your arm.” Contextually, the underlying principle of YHWH rendering the priesthood as disqualified remains if the LXX is followed.

apostatizing priesthood is that of *peresh*, implemented previously in the episodes of Exodus and Leviticus concerning the offering of purification and the Day of Atonement, as well as in the peculiar pericope of the red heifer. While the dung spread upon the face of the priesthood is technically that of offal,⁵⁵ merely relegating the rebuke to meaning some unwanted sacrificial parts completely robs the divine admonition of its gravitas. The divine rebuke skirts the edge of vulgarity, and attempting to soften the blow only diminishes the seriousness of the sin the priesthood is promulgating.⁵⁶

Sensing the general inclination to veneer Scripture, especially here in Malachi, Sherwood cogently quips that “[w]hen the God of Malachi hisses to the priests that he is going to ‘smear [dung] on [their] faces, the [dung] of [their] offerings’, a whole host of critics interject to say the [dung] is merely offal, surely only a technical difference if it is your face it is being spread on, and others wrap up the offence in pedestrian common-sense prose,” such as the imagery simply conveying being disqualified from the office.⁵⁷ Other scholars have also wholly neglected to comment on the dung-defilement of the priesthood.⁵⁸ To soften the rebuke or sidestep it all together weakens the prophetic sensory shock and call to repentance.

With a proper offense given by YHWH, the dung spread upon their faces renders the priesthood as not merely defiled and disqualified but rather, like in Zephaniah 1:17, as no better than the dung upon them given that they are taken away to or with it (2:3d). Thus, the sin of the

⁵⁵ Hill, *Malachi*, 126.

⁵⁶ Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 339.

⁵⁷ Sherwood, “Prophetic Scatology,” 198.

⁵⁸ For an example of respected scholarship that neglects commenting on dung in the passage, see: Ralph Smith, *Micah-Malachi, Volume 32, World Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014,) 317.

priesthood is so egregious to YHWH that it deserves destruction by fire outside the camp.

Interestingly, the dung spread upon their faces is said to come from their “offerings” (חַג *hag*).

While the rendering postulated by the ESV is legitimate, the truer sense of *hag* is that of a religious festival or feast day. Thus, the dung spread upon the face of the priesthood is not merely the dung of a purification offering that pertains to inadvertent sin; rather, it comes from the sacrifices of pilgrimage, which only heightens the rebuke and fortifies the disgrace. To be rebuked by YHWH and defiled by him with dung in the presence of fellow priests is one thing, but to be rebuked and reduced to dung in the presence of all those flocking to Jerusalem is another.

Further intertextual linkages and euphemisms add to the scathing nature of this smear campaign. First, the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24–26 petitions YHWH to turn his face toward the people. In Malachi, YHWH “blesses” the priest by smearing his face with dung. Second, the term “rebuke” (רָעָה *ga'ar*), when linked with dung as it is in Malachi, “raises the question of whether this passage does not preserve, in a secondary sense, something of the meaning attested by Arabic *ḡa'ara*—“to have a bowel movement.”⁵⁹ If the etymological hypothesis is true, then bound up within the rebuke of YHWH is a covert reference to dung that manifests in an overt smearing of it. Thus, the grotesque reviling of the priesthood and the clear connection to sin and dung within this pericope make it clear that dung symbolizes sin.

⁵⁹ A. Caquot, “רָעָה,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 53.

Chapter 3 Summary

The Latter Prophets further contribute to a biblical theology of dung by underscoring sin, symbolized as dung, as worth reviling. The sensory-shock rhetoric of the Latter Prophets is used to awaken audiences who have grown accustomed to their sin. Hence, one purpose of the biblical symbol of dung as sin is shockingly communicating the biblical attitude in regard to sin.

Furthermore, the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 illuminates Christ as sin reviled and judged within the biblical symbol of dung as sin. Christ became accursed on behalf of his people (Gal. 3:13) to the point of becoming sensory shock incarnate; stricken and afflicted by sin to the point that he was reviled and unrecognizable (Isa. 53: 4, 8).

A biblical theology of dung communicates sin as dung via concretizing the abstract nature of sin via the concrete vehicle of dung. The Latter Prophets further display that where dung is mentioned within the scriptural corpus, sin is in contextual proximity.

CHAPTER 4

DUNG IN THE WRITINGS

The presentation of dung in the Writings comes primarily within the bounds of Wisdom literature. The handful of references to feces in the Writings further foster the dung–sin symbol, yet often in an inverted manner when compared to the Pentateuch and the Former and Latter Prophets. While preserving the previous scriptural highlights related to the various aspects of the dung–sin symbol (i.e., rejection and ejection, mockery, and reviling), the Writings also present numerous pleas to be rescued from the sinful state of dung. In a likewise inverted form, the Writings simultaneously present petitions unto God that his enemies would be reduced to dung in righteous judgment, thus drawing attention to the justice of God regarding sin.¹

Delivered from Dung and Desiring Dung: The Psalms

To be delivered from a state of dung is a cry within the Psalter. One such plea for restoration and recreation of God’s people is found within Psalm 80. This psalter-centric hymn,² likely set around the Assyrian destruction and deportation of 722 BC, pleads for God to restore the vines (Israel) that have been burned with fire and cut down (Ps. 80:16). The word rendered as “cut” in the ESV is the same Hebrew word rendered as “refuse” in Isaiah 5:25 (*suhah*). With this rendering applied, a more literal translation of Psalm 80:16 would be the following: “They have burned it with fire, to refuse; may they perish at the rebuke of your face.” The multiple

¹ Note, Nehemiah 2:13; 3:13–14; 12:31 each reference the Dung Gate (*ashpot*). However, the “dung” reference within each of these respective passages is merely reporting the proper name of a historic gate of Jerusalem. Hence, the semantic references to dung within Nehemiah are briefly addressed here, given they are concerned with formal titles of Jerusalem city markers. The dung gate led to the dung hill. To have a specific gate for the purpose of disposal of impurity surely denotes the cultic seriousness related to where the gate led to.

² O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 130.

intertextual links between Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5 are apparent when this rendering is preferred, displaying links such as the vine and the vineyard, burning, the outstretched hand, and refuse.

Hence, the psalmist's plea is twofold. First, they plead with God that the broken vineyard of Israel be recreated from the dung heap it currently is.³ Second, Psalm 80:16 presents a penitent cry for deliverance from and judgment against the enemies of God by God, inverting the curse upon Israel to be transferred to her enemies. The psalmist calls for vengeance in the form of relegating the enemies of God to a pile of refuse.⁴

A second dung related petition in the Psalter, Psalm 83:16, displays a diligent plea to be rescued from the rejection and ejection of the dung of sin. The psalmist pleads with God to make his enemies like the Midianites Sisera and Jabin, “who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the ground,” (*domen*). The reference to *domen* in this psalm is particularly thought-provoking as it relates to Sisera and Jabin. As previously noted, a scatological innuendo links the terms “hand” and “peg” in Judges 4:22 and 5:26 to the assassination of the crapulent Eglon in Judges 3 as well as to the tool used for digging a hole to defecate in outside the war camp in Deuteronomy 23. Psalm 83:10 brings clarity to the innuendo by authoritatively asserting the connection of the peg, hand, and dung with Jael crushing the temple of Sisera. Within Psalm 83:10, Midian, with her leaders Sisera and Jabin, typologically represent the enemies of God.⁵ Thus, the psalmist pleads for the enemies of God to be destroyed and de-created to the point of

³ Allan Harman, *Psalms: A Mentor Commentary*, vol. 1–2, Mentor Commentaries (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2011), 611.

⁴ Naomi Graetz, “Metaphors Connecting Jeremiah and Jezebel: The Case of Domen,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* vol. 14 no. 1 (2017): 1.

⁵ Of import to note, the latter half of Psalm 83 further cross-references Judges by mentioning Oreb and Zeeb (Judg. 7:25–8:3) and Zebah and Zalmunna (Judg. 8:1–21). The heavy textual reference to Judges by the psalm may indicate the psalmist viewed the time he was living in as similar to the unstable time of the Judges. See: Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 309.

being turned into dung. Coupled with the prevalent head crusher imagery found within Judges and the curse of the dust of Zephaniah 1, the confident plea of Psalm 83:10 implies that the serpent who crawls on his belly in the dust ultimately dwells in a realm of dung and shall become just that.

In addition to the intertextual link to Judges, the *domen* of Psalm 83 also links the hymn to Jezebel and Jeremiah. As Jezebel became *domen* upon the surface of the ground and the covenantal curse expounded by Jeremiah resulted in slain bodies being a *domen* open to scavenging, so too shall the enemies of God be judged and scattered, robbed of a proper burial, and digested by wild animals. The semantic link to Jezebel and the sensory-shocking rebukes of Jeremiah further connotes Psalm 83:10 as exhibiting God reducing the bodies of battle-defeated enemies to mere fertilizer that will bring blessings to his people.⁶

A final dung related appeal in the Psalter, Psalm 113:7, contains a near verbatim echo of the Song of Hannah from 1 Samuel 2. Psalm 113 praises YHWH as the true God of gods and praises his works of salvation.⁷ The work of salvation wrought by YHWH is compared in Psalm 113:7 to being lifted from the “ash heap” (*ashpot*). Based on the previous examination of 1 Samuel 2, the ash heap or dunghill is a place of societal mockery where one is rejected and treated with scorn, a place of desperation to be rescued from.⁸

⁶ Nancy L.deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, Rolf A., and Tanner, Beth LaNeel. *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 495.

⁷ Harman, *Psalms*, 811.

⁸ Cf. Lamentations 4:5 where in judgment YHWH has reduced the higher echelons of Israeli society to “perish in the streets” and “embrace ash heaps,” (*asahpot*). Hence, given Lamentations is ultimately biblical plea, the author of Lamentations cogently observes that to “embrace ash heaps” is something to disdain and beg to be delivered from. Again, see Huey who notes the embrace signifies either dead bodies or the level of desperation wherein people are digging through the dung for food: F.B.Huey Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 481.

Synthesizing the various references to dung in the Psalter depicts dung as a state to be rescued from. To curse an enemy unto dung also depicts a desire for utter destruction on any force that would oppose prosperity for the people of God. Thus, the dung–sin symbol of the psalter further illuminates the accursedness of being relegated to refuse and contributes to a biblical theology of dung.

The Realism of Refuse: Proverbs

Proverbs 30:12 comes within a numerical grouping that describes the characteristics of an undisclosed wicked generation. Hence, the features are sweeping and logically apply to the individual level. The denunciation contained in Proverbs 30:12 is of a generation who ignorantly esteems themselves to be clean but in reality, is “not washed of their filth” (*tsoah*). *Tsoah* is applied three times within the Scriptures in a categorically broad manner. Contextually, the pair of employments in Isaiah 4:4 and 28:8 connote menstrual blood and drunkards’ vomit, respectively.⁹ The context of Proverbs 30:12 could certainly facilitate a suggestion of generalized filth such as vomit. However, two exegetical factors unequivocally lead to the *tsoah* of Proverbs 30:12 being rightly rendered as excrement.

First, the LXX renders the passage as: “ἔκγονον κακὸν δίκαιον ἑαυτὸν κρίνει, τὴν δὲ ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀπένιψεν” (an evil child judges his appearance as righteous, but his going out is not washed).¹⁰ As Fox notes, the phrase “his going out” is clearly a euphemism for the anus.¹¹ Second, the root of *tsoah* (טִּוַּח *tsw*) links previously applied words associated with dung in

⁹ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1993), 239.

¹⁰ Author’s translation.

¹¹ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs: An Eclectic Edition with Introduction and Textual Commentary* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 383.

Deuteronomy 23, Ezekiel 4, and Zechariah 3 to the implementation in Proverbs 30. Thus, the filth referenced in Proverbs 30:12 is specifically one's own excrement.

Functionally, this Proverb is a call to realism about proper self-assessment. Proverbs 30:11, 14 clarify “the rhetorical how” or what actions lead to the wicked generation being covered in the stench of excrement.¹² The soiled seeds dishonor their parents and are ungenerous to those around them.

The way in which Proverbs 30:12 utilizes the reference to excrement further develops the metaphorical sense of excrement as “ethical-moral or cultic transgression.”¹³ Although this Proverb is “ancient,” it finds modern equivalents that still purvey the same detestation. Thus, the intent of Proverbs 30:12 is multifaceted but clear. The sin of arrogance and dishonor is like defecating and never wiping oneself; one would walk around smelling the stench, but since one cannot see one's anus, the stench is ignored altogether.¹⁴

The dung–sin symbol is clearly perceived in this saying of Agur, given the primary sin elucidated is that of arrogance, or prideful rejection. The image of an individual—or an entire generation—walking about with a soiled backside defiled by their own excrement is worthy of mockery and vitriol. The proverb makes clear that this type of sin and the state that it reduces one to are to be avoided and clearly identifies the biblical symbolic link between dung and sin.

¹² Bruce K. Waltke and Ivan D. V. De Silva, *Proverbs: A Shorter Commentary* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 371.

¹³ K.-M. Beyse, “פִתּוֹן, פִתּוֹן and צִצְאָה,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 196.

¹⁴ Particularly satirical if *tsoh* finds etymological genesis in the Ugaritic term *za*, which means “fragrance.” See: K.-M. Beyse, 195.

Washed With Waste and Disappearing Dung: Job

The paragon of pleading to be delivered from a despicable state would be none other than Job. Within Job, there are two references to refuse that assist in elucidating the level of desperation that a state of dung enacts upon those who find themselves reduced to such ranks. The first is a conceptual cognate found in Job 9:31, where Job laments that no matter what he does, he cannot justify himself given that his attempts to do so will leave him plunged “into a pit” (*shahat*). Within the context of Job 9, “the pit” referred to is not the ordinary *sheol*; rather, this particular pit is a slime, slush, or manure pit.¹⁵ As Alden observes, *sheol* does not connote water or slime.¹⁶ Hence, the lamentation of Job could refer to the same style of manure pit that personified Moab found himself swimming in in Isaiah 5.¹⁷

Nevertheless, although *sheol* is the typical OT term for “pit” or “grave,” *shahat* is used as a synonym for *sheol* (i.e., Psalm 16). Furthermore, within the context of Job 9:31, *shahat* still alludes to the realm of the dead and to the staining nature of death itself.¹⁸ Yet, while *shahat* alludes to death—which is the telos of sin—the hyperbolic focus on the clothing of Job after he is thrown into the pit by YHWH signals that the stench and filth of the pit are what is being

¹⁵ Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 162.

¹⁶ Robert L. Alden, *Job*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 132.

¹⁷ Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Note*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1975), 75–76. Note: Pope asserts he does not think the pit of Job 9:31 is directly concerned with excrement, citing various sources to argue the watery nature and filth of the underworld was well attested in ANE literature. Pope also argues the distain of Job’s personified clothing is not concerned with Job’s stench but with the clothing itself being humiliated, given Pope asserts the clothing is related to the clothing of acquittal in Zechariah 3. However, it is the opinion of this writer that Job 9:31 allows for the facilitation of a “both/and” rather than “either/or” concerning the filth and clothing.

¹⁸ Jan P. Fokkelman, *The Book of Job in Form: A Literary Translation with Commentary* (Boston: BRILL, 2012), 219.

emphasized. Interestingly, Job 9:31 contains the only scriptural personification of clothing.¹⁹ Job's continually contaminated clothing is personified as getting "a whiff of him after soaking in the sewer again" and physically jumping off him "repulsed by the smell."²⁰

The personification of Job's clothing in response to being plunged into the mire is theologically significant when coupled with the other OT reference to dung-stained clothing in Zechariah 3. Clothing was given by YHWH to cover the shameful nakedness of the fallen due to sin (Gen. 3:21). As previously discussed, the excrement of the war camp of Deuteronomy 23 is relegated to the realm of "nakedness" and indecency. Hence, one damning aspect of the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28 is nakedness before one's enemies (Deut. 28:48).

Thus, the clothing of Job is personified in this text as characterizing a return to the initial minutes just after the Fall. The personified clothing rejects Job and ejects itself from his suffering body, leaving him abhorrently naked and exposed.²¹ This personification helps to underscore Job's extreme situation, impressing upon the reader the image of a naked man floundering in excrement. The entire lament of Job in the context of 9:31 pertains to his inability to cleanse himself, and that any attempt would result in YHWH covering him in filth again due to Job's complete infectiveness. De-creation is all that is available for sinners who believe they can cleanse themselves. Hence, Job 9:31 highlights the dung-sin symbol and demands that the reader plea to be spared from being consigned to such a state.

¹⁹ J. Gamberoni and Heinz-Josef Fabry, "שָׁרָר," ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 467.

²⁰ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Job*, ESV Expository Commentary (Vol. 4): Ezra-Job (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 473.

²¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The "Blank Bible": Part 1 & Part 2*, ed. Stephen J. Stein and Harry S. Stout, vol. 24, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), 433.

The second text that pertains to dung in Job comes from the lips of Zophar, who vainly attempts to comfort Job in 20:7. The miserable comforter Zophar begins his speech to Job in an outburst of anger, likely responding to an offensive expression used by Job in 19:22, where Job refers to YHWH abusing him [Job] in a homosexual manner.²² For all the mediocre advice Zophar provides throughout his speeches, within the initial declaration of Chapter 20, Zophar rightly declares that the wicked “will perish forever like his own dung” (*gel*). As noted previously, *gel* scripturally signifies human excrement, with the only other scriptural references being twofold in the bread of defilement narrative of Ezekiel 4.

Connecting the intertextual dots reveals that the wicked are wholly defiled like the proposed human dung fuel of Ezekiel 4, defiling everything it touches. Additionally, this work has already given attention to the concept of burning dung in the sections on Pentateuch and the Former Prophets. To be burnt up like dung is to be deemed unworthy of life, worthy of total annihilation by fire, and rejected by YHWH, ejected unto the realm of the dead. Thus, while Zophar misunderstands the position of Job within the metanarrative, his assessment is ultimately correct: the wicked must reject their sin lest in their sin they be ejected by YHWH and become as dung decaying into the ground or burnt upon the ash heap.²³ Hence, *Job* plays an integral role in developing a biblical theology of dung and further develops the symbolic link between dung and sin.

²² Pope, *Job*, 150.

²³ O'Donnell, *Job*, 546.

Desecrated unto Dung: Daniel and Ezra

The “historical” section of the Writings contains references to dung being further associated with the refuse heap. The references contained in Daniel and Ezra posit a unique term rendered as “ruins,” which is only used in these two books. *Newalu* is commonly translated as refuse heap or dunghill and is likely etymologically linked to an Akkadian loan word.²⁴ However, no scholarly consensus exists concerning the etymology and subsequent scriptural translation of the word.²⁵ Nevertheless, rendering *newalu* as dunghill is completely acceptable given that a king is ordering extreme punishment in each context, including being torn limb from limb. To render *newalu* as merely “destroy” or “plunder” seems to betray the grotesque nature of being torn limb from limb, which *newalu* is meant to parallel.²⁶

The book of Daniel forms an ironic *inclusio* with *newalu* in Chapters 2 and 3. In Daniel 2:5, Nebuchadnezzar threatens the various parties who have been called to interpret his dreams that if they fail to correctly interpret his dreams, they will be torn limb from limb and their homes be reduced to a refuse heap. The *inclusio* ends with Daniel 3:29 and showcases an interesting metanarrative thread where the same king who decrees such harsh punishment is ironically reduced to a dunghill by the true God. In Daniel 3:29, Nebuchadnezzar pronounces the same judgment against anyone who would speak against YHWH. The irony within the *inclusio* is centered around the inversion of Nebuchadnezzar’s decree. The transgression against

²⁴ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 1045.

²⁵ See: James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1927), 149 and John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress press, 1993), 148.

²⁶ John Goldingay, *Daniel, Volume 30*, World Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2019), 178.

Nebuchadnezzar that results in the de-creation of the transgressor to the point of a dung hill is inverted after Nebuchadnezzar is humbled by YHWH—the true king with greater decrees—in that, transgressing against YHWH will result in de-creation to the point of a dunghill. In effect, YHWH turns the edict of Nebuchadnezzar on its head, using it to protect his [YHWH’s] appointed people.

Ezra 6:11 presents a similar decree of protection for God’s people by threatening to reduce enemies to refuse heaps. The protective decree is presented as providentially proceeding from the lips of the pagan king Darius, who sanctions the finalized rebuilding of the Second Temple for political advantage.²⁷ Darius threatens anyone who would impede the Jews’ efforts to rebuild the temple as follows: “[A] beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill” (*newalu*). Like the decree of Nebuchadnezzar, the Darian decree links domicile desecration and ultra-violent execution. Thus, based on the context of the Danielic and Ezrine implementations of *newalu*, the following question arises: Can a case be made for “dunghill” being an appropriate rendering for *newalu*?²⁸ Scripturally, an intertextual linkage to Jehu desecrating the temple of Baal unto a dunghill indicates that this sort of sacrilege was common in the ANE. Furthermore, within each context where *newalu* is implemented, the idea of ritual violence for enacting a sociological deterrent is present.²⁹ To merely have one’s property plundered or torn down as a result of defying the order of the king seems less austere than the corresponding threats of dismemberment and impalement.

²⁷ Ironically, the Temple of YHWH has been desecrated and treated like a dunghill. Thus, part of Darius’ decree is threat of inversion: “If you mess with the Jews who are rebuilding their gods’ house which has been reduced to a dunghill, I’ll make sure your home suffers the same fate.”

²⁸ Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1913), 148.

²⁹ Saul M. Olyan, *Violent Rituals of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 103.

The ritual violence attached to the decrees of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius unquestionably worked as a social deterrent by signifying fear, disgust, mockery, and shame. Thus, the Scriptures further highlight aspects of contiguous realms that pertain to the dung–sin symbol—namely ruin and destruction. Being ruined unto dung, or being threatened to become such, is a state that one should seek to avoid, given that dung is to be rejected, ejected, and mockingly destroyed in disgust. Hence, the biblical symbolic link between dung and sin can be clearly perceived in the threats of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius.

Chapter 4 Summary

Although references to dung in the Writings is few, the contribution made to a biblical theology of dung by the scant references is substantial. To be reduced to a state of dung because of sin is an outcome of life to be avoided at all costs. However, there is an inverse principle presented in the Writings regarding being reduced to dung, namely, the justice of YHWH in reducing the enemies of his people to such a state of misery. The Writings consistently stress the link between dung and sin, revealing that where dung is disclosed within the Scriptures, sin is in proximity. Furthermore, the symbolic link of dung and sin are heightened by the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24, in that, the justice of God was displayed in the rejected person of Christ who is cast unto the dung-dust of death on behalf of his people (cf. Ps. 22).

CHAPTER 5

DUNG IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The continued development of a scriptural scatology in the NT mirrors what has come before in the OT. While both explicit semantic and conceptual cognates are fewer in number than those in the OT, the contribution of the NT corpus to the development of a theology of dung is meaningful. The concepts of ejection, rejection, mockery, and disgust are present within the NT corpus as it relates to dung. The NT consistently stresses the symbolic link of dung and sin, further demonstrating that where the Scriptures reference dung, sin is in proximity, since dung symbolizes sin.

The Dung “Hell”: Gehenna

One governing concept that pertains to sin and is exclusive to the NT comes via the assertion of an eschatological, eternal torment for sin after death.¹ Given that one aspect of sin is the rejection and ejection of God, sin must likewise be punished and eradicated.² This place of future and final punishment is consistently purveyed in the NT as being undertaken in *genna*, (or the Anglicized version *gehenna*), which is commonly translated as “hell.”

References to *gehenna* occur with near exclusivity in the Synoptics, with a solitary reference in James.³ In each of the 12 implementations⁴ *gehenna* connotes a place of final, fiery

¹ Frederick William Danker and Kathryn Krug, “Γέεννα,” *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 77.

² Benjamin M. Austin, “Afterlife,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

³ Joachim Jeremias, “Γέεννα,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 658.

⁴ Matt. 5:22,29–30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Lk 12:5; Jas. 3:6.

punishment for the sinful dead who have ultimately rejected God.⁵ The term *gehenna* is a shortened Hellenized rendering of the Valley of Hinnom.⁶ The Valley of Hinnom initially appears in Joshua 15:8 as “the Valley of the Son of Hinnom”—a topographical marker that pertains to Jerusalem within the Joshuaic pericope that describes land allotment for the tribe of Judah. The origins of the name of the valley are unknown and may be related to either a family name or to death in the euphemistic form of either “sleep” or “wailing.”⁷ In the latter scriptural narrative, the Valley of Hinnom becomes the site of ritualistic child sacrifice unto foreign deities by the kings Ahaz and Mannaseah (cf. 2 Kgs. 16:3; 21:6). Later, in his socio-cultic reforms, King Josiah desecrated the valley (2 Kgs. 23:10), which involved relegating the site to the regional refuse pile wherein sacrificial offal, human excrement, general garbage, and even the bodies of criminals were discarded and perpetually incinerated.⁸ The site was constantly burned to alleviate the disgusting stench of decomposing bodies and copious amounts of dung, rotten food, and other noisome waste.⁹

The desecration of the valley unto a dump progressed past the exilic period and into post-exilic Israelite culture. The post-exilic rebuild efforts of Jerusalem included a specific gate—or the Dung (*ashpot*) Gate—which led directly into the Valley of Hinnom below Jerusalem to the South-Southwest.¹⁰ Given the ultra-defiling nature of the valley and its putrid contents, this

⁵ Austin, “Afterlife,” *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 191.

⁷ Lloyd R. Bailey, “Gehenna: The Topography of Hell,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 49, no. 3 (September 1986): 187.

⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 111.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See Neh. 2:23; 3:13–14; 12:31.

specific gate functioned as a governmental threshold that directed all defiling refuse out of one locale to avoid defiling other areas of the city inside and out.¹¹

The valley's evolution into a symbol of eternal punishment for unrepentant sinners is directly related to the solidification of the intra- and post-exilic doctrine of the resurrection and the development of Second Temple-era apocalyptic literature.¹² Within these two elements of resurrection and apocalypse, the vitriolic identity of the valley—based on the duality of its pre-exilic connotations—facilitated conveying the alarming final state of wicked sinners and God's restoration of the world.¹³ The pre-exilic connotations concerning the valley that coagulated during this era centered on the valley as the Josian dung hill and as the Jeremianic dung hill. The Josian relegation of the valley unto a smoldering, communal dung hill is intertextually connected to the valley being the locale where the bodies of unfaithful Israelites would rot out in the open “like dung on the surface of the ground” (Jer. 8:2). This specific passage of Jerimiah has already been dealt with earlier in this work; however, the intertextual connection between the Josian desecration and initial reference to dung in Jeremiah is appealing.

As mentioned previously, Jeremiah 7:33 perpetuates the “dungness” of rebellious Israelites as one facet of the fruition of the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28, where the scavenging animals of air and land eat the rotting corpses of the rebellious. Within that same Jeremianic pericope, the prophet deplores definite sins of the rebellious Israelites—that is, the

¹¹ The location of the gate in relation to the rest of the city of Jerusalem was also strategic. See: W. Harold Mare, “Dung Gate (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 240.

¹² Mark Finney, *Resurrection, Hell and the Afterlife: Body and Soul in Antiquity, Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2016): 49–70.

¹³ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 239.

establishment of idols in the temple and the promulgation of child sacrifice through fire in the Valley of Hinnom (Jer. 7:30–33). The prophet pronounces that the valley will be known from that day forward as the Valley of Slaughter (Jer. 7:32), which portrays a dystopian depiction of rebellious Israel reaping what they have sown.¹⁴ Hence, the Jerimian pericope connects the Valley of Hinnom with the accursed dung—state of the covenant curse, which is perpetuated by the Josian desecration.

Consideringly, the scriptural fact that this physical valley—which was to be symbolically understood—is used almost exclusively by Christ as his primary descriptor of final punishment provides significant insight into his view regarding sin. Looking to the OT as a guide for this particular NT orientation regarding dung, the reflection is apparent: Sin must be rejected, ejected, and taken outside the camp—like the eye or hand that would cause the whole body to be thrown into the eternal, smoldering refuse heap outside the walls of the kingdom (Matt. 5:29–30). Moreover, sin is to be mocked in derision, like the hypocrite who, thinking that he is leading people into the presence of God, actually leads them to the blazing dung hill (Matt. 23:15). Sin is to be repulsive and shocking to the senses, like being called a snake who will slither in the excrement eternally or being told that the improper use of one’s tongue gives one the bad breath of a scorched dung heap, which bristles one’s entire life (Matt. 23:33; Jas. 3:6). Being declared a wretched sinner is a state that one must desire to be delivered from, lest all they are is thrown into an eternal pile of putridity (Lk. 12:5). Where there is dung, sin is in close proximity within the scriptural corpus. Thus, the NT at once portrays the dung—sin symbol in like manner with the

¹⁴ Rachelle Gilmour, “Remembering the Future: The *Topheth* as Dystopia in Jeremiah 9 and 17,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 44 no.1, (2019): 64.

OT, given the primary denotation of eternal punishment used by the Lord Christ himself is the NT equivalent of the OT dung hill.

In and Out: The Parable of Digestion

Matthew 15 and Mark 7 each contain an account of the parable of digestion.¹⁵ Within each account, Jesus scathingly rebukes the Pharisees for their elevation of extra-biblical traditions above the actual Torah. The Pharisees imply that Jesus and his disciples eat with unwashed hands and thus defile themselves perpetually. Indeed, this parable is contextually situated within the *inclusio* of the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000, wherein no one ritualistically washed their hands in accordance with the tradition of the elders.

Jesus scathingly rebukes the Pharisees for elevating various traditional oral teachings over and above the actual Torah, using the Pharisaic principle of *corban* as a chief example. This principle is a crucial hermeneutical key to unlocking the proper assertion of the pericope. In a seminal article, Baumgarten asserts that the idea of *corban* (vowing to dedicate one's goods unto the temple) at its core pitted one aspect of the Torah against another.¹⁶ This pitting of the Torah against itself came in various forms within the code of the Pharisees, particularly within the so-called "traditions of the elders"—suprabiblical rules that usually contained a principle of the Torah that had illogically been perverted many times. Hence, Jesus' retort to the Pharisees reveals how the overemphasis on keeping one's vow within the "traditions of the elders" neglected the weightier aspects of the Torah. The illogical structure of *corban* is used by Jesus to demonstrate how the washing of hands is an egregious pitting of the Torah against itself.

¹⁵ Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 458.

¹⁶ Albert Baumgarten, "Korban and the Pharisaic Paradosis," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 16, no. 1 (1984): 16–17.

The Matthean account presents the “catch words” of “lips” and “mouth”¹⁷ more cogently than the Markan account, which displays the logic implemented by Jesus in his rebuke. Quoting Isaiah 29, Jesus calls the elevation of the traditions of the elders—exemplified in the *corban* principle—hypocritical, given that these supra-scriptural rules are concerned with elevating the external appearance of righteousness while neglecting another, more potent source of defilement. Jesus finally arrives at answering the couched insult only after his disciples voice their confusion.

Following the “catch words” that concern the Pharisees’ oral traditions, Jesus mockingly rebukes their entire hypocritical mindset by highlighting their initial question. He quips that a person is not defiled by what goes into the mouth; a person is defiled by what comes out of their mouth. Hence, Jesus posits a connection between the initial question of eating with unwashed hands, oral teaching, and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Playing off the situation concerning defilement and the washing of hands, Jesus clarifies what he means to his bewildered disciples by stating the following: “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?” This rhetorical question clearly implies that the process of expulsion is that of digestion and defecation.

Interestingly, every major English translation of the Bible omits a rendition of the two words that follow “expelled” (*ekballetai*). The untranslated words pertain to dung and forcefully drive the point that Jesus is asserting—specifically the location of *eis aphedrona* (into latrine).¹⁸

¹⁷ G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 52–53.

¹⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 242.

Leaving these words untranslated robs the explanation of the parable of its immense scatological satire.

In addition, the Markan account is hermeneutically relevant since Mark includes an authorial explanation regarding Jesus' intended message. Following the scatological euphemism, Mark 7:19 adds that in Jesus speaking of food as not defiling a person, "he declared all foods clean." Brooks notes that this English rendering does not correspond to the Greek text, which "simply" and "very awkwardly" states "cleansing all foods."¹⁹ This syntactical ambiguity engenders a completely legitimate translation that is not focused on the abrogation of dietary laws, but rather on Jesus pushing the scatological satirical mock even further.²⁰ Adopting this rendering better serves the text by emphasizing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, which subsequently better suits the situational context.

The resultant scatological sarcasm in rendering the syntactically awkward phrase as "cleansing all foods" is that of a rhetorical comparison. Essentially, Jesus states that whether one eats permissible food or impermissible food according to the Torah or with unhygienic hands, the body does what it was designed to do; that is, it renders both categories of food the same, as excrement, with no one being able to tell the difference between the permissible and impermissible.

Furthermore, Jesus continues to draw attention to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, stating the following after the "cleansing all foods" phrase: "What comes out of a person is what defiles him" (Mk. 7:20). Compared with the Matthean equivalent of this verse (Matt. 15:18), the Markan account slows to allow the scatological humor to stew before eventually having Jesus elucidate

¹⁹ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 118.

²⁰ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26, Volume 34A*, World Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015). 387.

the meta-principle he has been aiming to teach the entire time. Jesus' statement in Mark 7:20 is clearly one that connects the previous scatological mock regarding excreted food with the concept of defilement.

As the Scriptures have already portrayed, excrement is contiguous to the realm of ritualistic defilement (cf. Deut. 23:14; Eze. 4:12–14; Prov. 30:12). Jesus does not deny that dung has some sort of defiling nature. If he were to do so, he would deny the word of the Prophets before him, who clearly expounded the defiling nature of dung. Rather, Jesus posits another rhetorical comparison, which is made clear in his exposition pertaining to the organ from which greater defilement protrudes—namely the heart (Mk. 7:21; Matt. 15:18–20).

Hence, the scatological mock subtly indicates that the sins that proceed from the heart are the true excrement, the heart as the true digestive system, and the people these “heart sins” are committed against as the true latrine. In a way, Jesus posits his own *halakha* toward the Pharisees, which may be hypothetically stated as follows: “The dung of a person is physically defiling in some way, but is it as defiling as the dung that comes out of the bowels of a corrupt heart? Which is worse? Obsessing about eating with unwashed hands, which defiles no one, or eating with washed hands and an unwashed heart from which spews all sort of sin?” Furstenberg postulates along the same lines, hypothesizing the intent of Jesus' explanation as follows:

“Contaminated food that enters the body defiles less than the defilement of bodily discharge.”²¹

Hence, Jesus' scatological rebuke is aimed at displaying the absurdity of the Pharisaical dichotomization of the intent of the Torah's codes of purity. A person rendered cultically defiled who undergoes proper absolution rites to gain cult readmittance is to do so with a heart of

²¹ Yair Furstenberg, “Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7.15,” *New Testament Studies* 54, no. 2 (2008): 194–95, 197.

desiring to commune with and please God free of sin, not out of a mere mechanism, as if the superficial acts are all God cares about. Any outward act of purification is never to be divorced from the moral and ethical implications that those acts signify. Undoubtedly, no Mosaic legislation required the common man to wash his hands before eating, nor did any legislation imply that ingested food was a source of contamination, unlike legislation that did imply bodily emissions to be a source of contamination.²² This idea was likely adopted by the Pharisees from the surrounding Hellenistic culture and enforced as a supposed theological guardrail.²³ This assimilated guardrail likely stemmed from the Pharisaic desire to “make a nation of priests,” and the OT priesthood had various ritual washings.

Thus, in the spirit of *corban*-esque consistency, the Pharisees took an aspect of the Torah meant for one thing (i.e., priestly washing) and attempted to implement it for another aspect of the Torah (i.e., dietary stipulations), resulting in a contorted pitting of the Torah against itself across multiple scriptural codes. Jesus highlights the general equity of *corban* that undergirds the question of handwashing and satirizes it. Jesus showcases his concern is in complete alignment with the Torah, which conveys human sin as the ultimate contaminant inwardly and externally; the Pharisees showcase they are only concerned about what happens when a person is contaminated from an external source so that their external posturing may be kept intact.

Thus, in this parable, Jesus displays the dung–sin symbol in a manner of mockery toward those who embodied the priests of Malachi 2 and the excrement-laden man of Proverbs 30:12. Jesus’ rebuke is subtly sarcastic and forms a judgment of mockery; what one eats turns to dung regardless of one’s washed hands, but the sin (dung) within oneself is what truly defiles and exits

²² Furstenberg, “Defilement Penetrating the Body,” 189.

²³ *Ibid.*, 178.

through an orifice much more defiling than the anus. Thus, Christ highlights the biblical symbolic link between dung and sin by utilizing feces to concretize the abstract nature of sin and expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Medical Manure

Luke is the lone NT author to use the concept of manure. Attempts to answer why this is the case are speculative. Nevertheless, as Plummer observes, the word that Luke implements for manure is “of a colloquial character” and may merely exemplify the author’s Hellenistic roots.²⁴ The two applications of the word rendered as “manure”— (*kopria*)—each arise within the context of judgment against sin. Thus, the dung–sin symbol should be readily apparent.

The first application, found in Luke 13:6–9, concerns the parable of the barren fig tree, which contains Jesus’ scathing rebuke of the sinfulness of mankind. Within the parable, in Luke 13:7–8, an upset vineyard owner wishes to cut a barren fig tree down since it merely takes up space and is good for nothing. A vinedresser suggests to the owner that the tree should be better irrigated and fertilized with *kopria*, and that the tree should be given one more year to bear fruit before being cut down. Beale and Carson rightly observe the paramount intertextual echo present in the parable as that of the vineyard of Isaiah 5.²⁵ The intertextual link is further strengthened when the previous consideration of Isaiah 5 is considered. Isaiah 5:25 pertains to the covenant curse upon fruitless Israel, wherein the sinful people’s corpses shall be as dung upon the ground as food for the scavenging birds and beasts.

²⁴ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 367.

²⁵ Beale and Carson, *Commentary of the New Testament*, 333.

In Luke 13:8–9, the dung is applied to the tree to facilitate fruit through the agricultural prospect of fertilization. However, Luke’s emphasis seems to be on the closing remarks that if the irrigation and fertilization falter, then the fig tree may, in effect, be relegated to a manure pile itself. This threat is substantiated by the fact that *kopria* is used by the LXX in Jeremiah 25:33 as the Greek equivalent of *domen*, a passage with similar prophetic threatening of the covenant curse. Therefore, the same calls to repentant and fruitful living first sanctioned in Isaiah 5 are recapitulated here by Jesus in Luke 13.²⁶ The implication of the parable presents a textual tension where the call to repentance and fruitfulness is left suspended and open-ended.²⁷ However, the ensuing implementation of *kopria* by Luke may be an intertextual foreshadowing aimed at aiding the reader to arrive at a conclusion concerning the fig tree before the Luke–Acts narrative concludes.

The second Lukan usage of manure is found in Luke 14:35 within a series of parabolic teachings from Christ. Jesus calls his hearers to consider the cost of being a disciple and to be committed unto kingdom usefulness.²⁸ Similar teachings of Christ are found in Matthew 5 and Mark 9, with each similar synoptic account including a “salt saying.”²⁹ Intriguingly, each of the Matthean and Markan salt sayings are contextually situated within a pericope that also mentions either fire or light. Awareness of this intriguing salt and light link within the Matthean and Markan salt sayings assists in understanding Luke 14:35.

²⁶ Beale and Carson, *Commentary of the New Testament*, 333.

²⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 62–63.

²⁸ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 409.

²⁹ John J. Pilch, “Salt for the Earthen Oven Revisited: Original Research,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011): 1.

Each salt saying conveys the basic idea of a potentially ineffective and uncommitted disciple being likened to salt that has lost its saltiness; saltless salt and ineffective disciples are useless. This hyperbolically conveys the sense that a “saltless” disciple “is worse than one who never started out” as one.³⁰ The uselessness of such a disciple is said by Luke to be good only “for the soil or the manure pile.”³¹

In Luke 14:35, the Lukan implementation of *kopria* immediately sounds cultural investigative alarms. “What hath salt to do with the ground or dung?” is an obvious question that seeks to understand how the original audience would have received such an exhortation.³² Christ’s hyperbolic statement initially leads to a hermeneutic of being more useless than dung. Considering this point, Garlington observes the following: “One might think that the dunghill was a fitting destination for insipid salt, but the language is rhetorical, even hyperbolic, intended to emphasize the worthlessness of such salt: it is not even good enough for that place of repulsion.”³³ Yet, within the Lukan pericope, there is an apparent symbiotic relationship to salt, ground, and manure that warrants further inquiry.

Salted Dung

In his seminal work on the symbolism of salt, Latham articulates a useful hermeneutic regarding scriptural symbols. Given that biblical symbolism is frequently ambivalent, when

³⁰ David E. Garland, *Luke*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2011), 627–28.

³¹ Alan J. Thompson, *Luke*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (B&H Academic, 2016), 239.

³² Anthony B. Bradley, “You Are the Manure of the Earth: Jesus’ Famous Metaphor About Salt is Actually About Fertilizer,” *Christianity Today*, 60, no. 8 (2016): 72.

³³ Don Garlington, “The Salt of the Earth” in Covenantal Perspective,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 4 (2011): 743.

faced with a symbolic statement, reflection is meant to occur, which may result in a plethora of possible meanings, which in turn may have primary and secondary meanings.³⁴ Following Latham's lead, Garlington proposes four symbolic or typological aspects of salt in relation to the covenantal perspective of the Scriptures.³⁵ While this may appear to be a relativization of Scripture, given that there is an obvious handling of symbolism in the texts, considering the polyvalency of said symbol is a worthy endeavor. Davis and Allison wisely postulate the following regarding this hermeneutical approach:

Given the various uses for salt (cf. Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 31:73–92, 98–105) and its several symbolic associations, it is quite impossible to decide what one characteristic is to the fore in Mt 5:13. Thus, while it would make sense to affirm that the disciples are, for example, the world's wisdom, it would also be reasonable to think that the pure in heart (5:8) purify the world, or (as Origen, *C. Cels.* 8:70 has it) that Jesus' followers preserve the world, or that they are willing to sacrifice themselves (cf. Schnackenburg (v), pp. 195–6). But, as is implied by two facts, the ambiguity of 'salt' need not trouble; for salt was probably equivocal and multivocal for our evangelist.³⁶

Therefore, the consideration of one aspect of the symbol of salt in relation to dung is pertinent to this work.³⁷

Jesus' opening remarks within the Lukan salt saying (14:35) do not directly pertain to the taste of salt, given that the word rendered as "lost" by the ESV is literally "*moraino*" (foolish).³⁸ Hence, there is an obvious personification of the salt, which signifies a link to the previous

³⁴ James E. Latham, *The Religious Symbolism of Salt* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1982), 233, 63.

³⁵ Garlington, "The Salt of the Earth," 743.

³⁶ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 473. Imbedded quotations original.

³⁷ To give attention to all possible symbolic aspects of salt here would detract from this work and cause a loss of focus. For in depth analysis concerning these symbolic systems of salt, see previously footnoted works by Latham and Garlington.

³⁸ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 398.

parables focused on the nature of being a disciple of Christ. A foolish disciple is an ineffective disciple, like useless, unsalty salt.

With this in mind, Jesus' remark in Luke 14:35 regarding "foolish" salt being useless for both the soil and manure pile signifies that the symbolism is not primarily concerned with taste or the induction of thirst. Commenting on why this passage does not insinuate the induction of thirst, Pilch notes: "Water was scarce and precious. If water was too scarce for peasants to observe all the requisite purity ablutions (Mk. 7:1–5), why would one intentionally induce thirst by using salt as a seasoning [...]?"³⁹

The contextual inclusion of soil and manure also indicates that this specific parabolic salt saying is predicated on an agricultural framework.⁴⁰ The agricultural framework is also linked by the word "fit," which Luke uses in a previous discipleship pericope concerning putting the hand to the plow and not looking back (Lk. 9:62).⁴¹ Thus, it is expressly clear that the salt symbolism here is primarily concerned with agricultural rather than culinary aspects.

The "manure pile" need not become a Lukan equivalent to the "dunghill" given that the agricultural connection concerns usefulness and not mere disposal unto refuse. Thus, an exploration of the connection between salt and dung within the context of ANE agriculture is crucial.

First, salt was used in the ANE as a preservative for agricultural dung (e.g., cow, ox, camel, and sheep) for the purpose of transforming the dung into useful fertilizer, rather than it

³⁹ Pilch, "Salt for the Earthen Oven," 2.

⁴⁰ Bradley, "You Are the Manure of the Earth," 74.

⁴¹ Garland, *Luke*, 627.

merely rotting into a state of decomposition.⁴² Additionally, salt was used in the Roman period to enhance the nutrient profile of soil, deter unwanted weeds, and prevent pestilence for certain crops.⁴³ Hence, while an overlap clearly exists in salt's functioning to preserve both food and dung, the difference is that salt as a preservative for food is purposed to conserve, whereas salt as a preservative for manure is proactive, fostering an altered state in the feces. This agricultural implication is intended to provoke the understanding of salt as a catalyst that brings about change, not merely preservation.⁴⁴

Furthermore, a similar and additional cultural background related to agriculture may likewise surround the Lukan salt saying. As already attested in this work, animal dung was a commonly used fuel source in the ANE; for example, it was used in common ovens and kilns for culinary endeavors as well as heat provision. The common oven or kiln was usually a ceramic pot turned upside down directly upon the soil; hence, it was referred to as an earthen oven.⁴⁵ Malina explains how fire was produced in an earthen oven as follows:

Fire in such an earth-oven was produced by burning dung. To make the dried dung burn, the bottom of the kiln was faced with plates of salt, and the dung itself was sprinkled with salt. The salt served as a chemical agent that helped the dung to burn. However, over time, the heat of the oven would cause the salt plates to undergo a chemical reaction which made the salt plates

⁴² Bradley, "You Are the Manure of the Earth," 74.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁵ Gloria London, "Ancient Technologies of Everyday Life," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 447–49.

impede and stifle the burning of the dung. It is when the salt crystals chemically change that they must be thrown out—the salt has lost its saltiness.⁴⁶

This cultural background transforms the Lukan salt saying to potentially convey the idea of commendable discipleship being such only by the catalyst of “salty,” unreserved fervor required to follow Christ. Thus, the Lukan salt saying can be understood to imply the goodness of a salt catalyst contrasted with the uselessness of an unsalty, defunct catalyst that is neither fit for the earthen oven or the fuel supply—it is only good for being cast out.⁴⁷

Additionally, the verb *ballusin* connotes a casting outside and away from one’s presence, not merely throwing something away.⁴⁸ The verb then gives way to a subtle intertextual echo of the dung hill, ash heap, or *gehenna*, located outside the realm of habitation.⁴⁹ The hyperbolic irony associated with this potential Lukan understanding of the symbolism of salt in Luke 14:35 is that of the uselessness of saltless, sinful discipleship. Being a “saltless” disciple results in being thrown into the dung pile, where the “saltless” disciple finds himself to be worse than dung, which could be used as fuel or fertilizer, if it was indeed salty.

With these exegetical possibilities in mind, the Lukan salt saying at once presents itself as being concerned with heat and light, just the same as the Matthean and Markan salt sayings. Thus, the same exegetical potentiality of the Lukan salt saying likewise applies to the Matthean and Markan implementations.

⁴⁶ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 119.

⁴⁷ Pilch, “Salt for the Earthen Oven,” 3.

⁴⁸ Garlington, “The Salt of the Earth,” 743.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The Matthean salt saying is presented within the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:13, where Jesus exhorts his hearers, saying: “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.” Here, the connection to the Lukan salt saying is immediately apparent. Again, while there is a plethora of valid, applicable symbolisms regarding salt, the connection to “earth” here, with a likewise implemented *moraino*, is indicative of the Matthean account being primarily unconcerned with the condiment and spice aspects related to salt; rather the Matthean salt saying is focused on the agricultural and fuel source aspects, similar to that of the Lukan counterpart.

Thus, the connection between salt, earth, and light (Matt. 5:14–16) should also evoke the earthen oven concept. If the “earth” of Matthew 5:13 actually connotes the earthen oven, then the connection between salt and the various light sources in Matthew 5:14–16 becomes grounded in a cultural understanding of dung as a fuel source.⁵⁰

A near scholarly consensus exists that the Markan salt saying is particularly difficult to interpret.⁵¹ Yet, similar to Matthew and Luke, the Markan salt saying presents a potential dung, fuel connotation, albeit a subtle one. The saying is preceded by Jesus’ admonition of those who stumble in sin and cause others to do so arbitrarily. The admonition is primarily predicated upon the exclusivist mindset of the Apostle John, who voiced concern regarding an unaffiliated disciple who appeared to be doing similar works to the official Christ-called group.⁵² Jesus’

⁵⁰ Pilch, “Salt for the Earthen Oven,” 3.

⁵¹ For a critical evaluation of the Markan salt saying, see: Daniel Frayer-Griggs, “‘Everyone Will be Baptized in Fire’: Mark 9.49, Q 3.16, and the Baptism of the Coming One,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 7, no. 3 (2009): 254–85.

⁵² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 377.

positive closing remarks in Mark 9:49–50, which follow a slew of negative rebukes, could be taken to highlight the symbolic nature of salt as catalyst upon dung-fueled fires.

In following this course of interpretation, Pilich keenly posits his hypothetical social commentary, which provides a latent alleviation to the textual difficulty. Giving a hypothetical account of Jesus commenting on the situational irony presented by John, Pilich presents his conjectural intention of the passage as follows:

Jesus observes: “You have just illustrated my point about salt for the fire with your argument about the greatest among you, and your dismissal of a person who believes in me and does what you and I do. Salt the catalytic agent is good. But if it can no longer perform its proper function but rather goes out of control, starting fires where none are needed, it is as useless as if it could no longer start or sustain any fire. So remain salty or catalytic and also remain at peace with one another. Hold fast to your agonistic cultural values but don’t allow yourselves to become vanquished by them.”⁵³

Thus, Luke’s salt saying, which includes a reference to manure, may well act as a compass for the Matthean and Markan salt sayings to display that they too have dung within the contextual background. Following this line of interpretation leads to a hyperbolic image connected to the dung–sin symbol, namely that there is a state worse than dung—saltless salt. The sin of being a fruitless fig tree and useless salt are linked via dung, further displaying the dung–sin symbol as one that portrays rejection and ejection, mockery, and repulsion.

⁵³ Pilich, “Salt for the Earthen Oven,” 4.

Disciple of Dung

Philippians 3:8 offers perhaps the most-known scriptural implementation of scatological language. Here, the apostle Paul juxtaposes his life pre-conversion with his post-Damascus Road life using the word *skubalon*: “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish (*skubalon*), in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:7–8). Paul’s line of argument is undoubtedly clear. Yet, examining *skubalon* and the controversy surrounding it, reveals Paul is stressing a sterner sketch than mere generic “rubbish.”

Punch notes that the lack of etymological certainty concerning *skubalon* may signify the collective Christian social questionability of the term: “Σκύβαλα is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, and perhaps because of the apparently questionable nature of the term, it is difficult to find many ancient Christian sources that discuss it.”⁵⁴ While an unquestionable anemia exists in ancient Christian sources regarding the word, it has a repertoire of usage within the parallel Greco-Roman world, where *skubalon* seems to manifest in the semantical sense.

It is commonly accepted that the word likely finds etymological genesis in the rare 3rd century B.C. late-Greek phrase “what is thrown to dogs.”⁵⁵ Osbourne expounds upon the possible etymological origin of the word, noting that if the etymological hypothesis is correct, then it connotes “the kind of rubbish or garbage thrown out for the wild dogs to consume.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ John David Punch, “Σκύβαλα Happens: Edification from a Four-Letter Word in the Word of God?,” *The Bible Translator*, 65 no. 3 (2014): 370, Greek script original.

⁵⁵ Friedrich Lang, “Σκύβαλον,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 445.

⁵⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Philippians Verse by Verse* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2017), 88.

While avoiding a fallacy of anachronism, there is a possible intertextual overtone, in which if the hypothetical etymology is true, *skubalon* finds loose connection to the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28. Hence, the semantic connotation is along the lines of refuse, rotted food, garbage, or the unwanted.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, Lang notes that while *skubalon* was a term in Greco-Roman popular culture, there seems to be only a fraction less the amount of hesitation by Greco-Roman authors to adopt the word into Greco-Roman writings as compared to their early Christian counterparts.⁵⁸ Indeed, Greco-Roman archeologists have uncovered various forms of what modern society would label as “graffiti” at sights such as Pompeii; graffiti which implements *skubalon*—or its Latin equivalent *caca*—in terms of potty humor or foul cursing.⁵⁹ Archeologist Jodi Magness notes one such foul graffiti message unearthed at Regio V in Pompeii: “If you [defecate] against the walls and we catch you, you will be punished.”⁶⁰ The denunciation propagated by the graffiti is unquestionably void of any modern civilities, such as “please refrain from using the bathroom here” or “please don’t relieve yourself on our wall.” The denunciation is obscene and, admittedly, humorous.

This obscene and humorous usage of *skubalon* is also reflected in a small sampling of Greco-Roman literature, with the humor likely arising from the lax latrine privacy standards common to the period. In the Greco-Roman era, public latrines and bathhouses served as social

⁵⁷ Lang, “Σκύβαλον,” 445. Note, a similar semantic connotation related to refuse and garbage is also implemented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:13 in the terms *perikatharma* and *peripsema*. Paul utilizes these *hapax* terms to contrast the sinful pride of the Corinthians against the humility of the apostles who are utterly dejected because of their message. This type of contrast is similar to the type of contrast Paul is making in Philippians 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Punch, ““Σκύβαλα Happens,” 369.

⁶⁰ Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 132.

spheres.⁶¹ Magness notes how the famed Roman poet, Martial, conveyed the sociability of the Roman public bathhouse—as well as the popular culture usage of “potty language”—in the following pithy poem: “You read to me as I stand, you read to me as I sit. You read to me as I run, you read to me as I [defecate].”⁶²

The undergirding concept of *skubalon* may also have amassed in the Hellenistic cultural tendencies toward dualism and Gnosticism. Lang notes that *skubalon* was used in Hellenistic religious and philosophical thought as a term contrasting the worthlessness of the human body and the treasure of the soul.⁶³ Given that the early church strained to combat a form of “Christianity” which sought to combine itself with either dualism or Gnosticism, Paul could very well be utilizing *skubalon* in Philippians 3 in soft polemic fashion.⁶⁴

Additionally, *skubalon* is used in Hellenistic Jewish literature, albeit just as rarely as the Greco-Roman and early Christian sources. One such employment is found in Sirach 27:4, which offers the following proverbial rumination: “When a sieve is shaken, the refuse appears; so do a person’s faults when he speaks,” (New Revised Standard Version). Noteworthy, the NRSV appears to sweat beads of translatory discomfort with this rendering of Sirach 27:4. The “refuse” of 27:4a is not *skubalon* but *kopria*. Hence, just as Luke employed *kopria* in an agricultural sense related to manure, so too does Sirach 27:4. The sweat beads bud upon the skin of the NRSV

⁶¹ Jodi Magness, “What’s the Poop on Ancient Toilets and Toilet Habits?” *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 75, no. 2 (2012): 80.

⁶² *Ibid.*, quoting Martial 3.44.

⁶³ Lang, “Σκύβαλον,” 446.

⁶⁴ Indeed, Paul says the true surpassing worth of his current life compared to his former is predicated upon “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” “Knowing” here is the genitival *gnoseos*, which may indicate an intentional polemic related to the proto-Gnostic issues that were prevalent in the early church. For a detailed semantic exegesis of *gnoseos* as implemented in Phil. 3:8, see; John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 490–91.

translation in Sirach 27:4b with the rendered word “faults,” which is *skubalon*. In the Greek, there is a clear association of manure to the words of a man. This association conveys in near obscene terms the tendency of shaken people to say putrid things, which at once displays the true nature of the heart.⁶⁵

Moreover, the prominent Hellenistic Jewish historian, Josephus, uses *skubalon* when describing the horrors of famine in Jerusalem: “[S]ome persons were driven to that terrible distress as to search the common sewers and old dung hills of cattle, and to eat the dung which they got there; and what they of old could not endure so much as to see they now used for food.”⁶⁶ Josephus clearly identifies *skubalon* as dung, with this particular account reminiscent of the needy upon the dung hill in the Former Prophets and the Writings.

Nevertheless, the ESV rendering of *skubalon* as “rubbish,” while semantically valid, seems slightly soft and as a possible translation committee veneer for covering up a perceived “slip up” in Paul’s mouth.⁶⁷ This white-washing of Paul’s supposed potty mouth is likely done in an attempt to save Paul’s own face—or rather mouth—as the same Paul exhorts the Ephesians to avoid obscene and crude language (Eph. 4:29). However, this wiping of Paul’s mouth with translatory soap is not necessarily based in utter embarrassment. The history of the canon, and the eventual formulation of church liturgy, may have necessitated the softening or “cleaning up” of the coarse language found within the Scriptures.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Lang, “Σκύβαλον,” 446.

⁶⁶ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 726.

⁶⁷ Punch, “Σκύβαλα Happens,” 370.

⁶⁸ Henry Minkoff, “Coarse Language in The Bible?” *Bible Review* 5, no. 2 (1989): 44.

Whatever the case may be, Philippians 3 presents Paul in Latter Prophet fashion: using a sensory-shock word to ensure that the audience grasps his message. Paul's *skubalon* does not slide from his quill for mere amusement but is rather strategically placed within the micro- and macrostructure of the context of Philippians 2 and 3, respectively.

Concerning the immediate, microstructure context, Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice and boast in the correct things, namely Jesus Christ. In Philippians 3:3–6, Paul offers a condensed autobiographical portrait of his former life, presenting himself as an example of someone who had every “right” to boast of his earthly accomplishments.⁶⁹ Each autobiographical statement regarding his pre-conversion life progressively intensifies to build the proper framework for contrasting his post-conversion life. Each succinct recollection of his former life can be formatted into three categories—his lineage, his training, and his ambition—which he progressively dismantles in vv. 7–8.

Paul begins the dismantling process in verse 7 by asserting that he regards his “previous life” as loss (*zemia*) since coming to know the person and work Christ. Paul then reaffirms his mindset in verse 8 with an emphatic statement, which progresses to a further dismantling of his previous life through the connection of loss (*zemia*) and *skubalon*. The progressive emphasis and intensity of the demolition of his former life indicate that Paul is asserting “that he has in fact lost all things. In other words, the language here goes beyond the arena of the mind into his actual experience.”⁷⁰ “Thus, as Melick exegetically observes, “[t]here is increasing intensity, as though

⁶⁹ Nina Nikki, *Opponents and Identity in Philippians* (Boston: BRILL, 2018), 170.

⁷⁰ Matthew S. Harmon, *Philippians: A Mentor Commentary*, Mentor Commentaries (Great Britain; Ross-shire: Mentor, 2015), 336.

the mere thought of that decision brought a renewed appraisal that his former life was useless compared to what really mattered [...]. Christ exceeded anything and everything else.”⁷¹

On a literary level, the juxtaposition hinges upon Paul’s implementation of *skubalon*, which he uses to express the very magnitude of such a consideration. Paul is not merely considering his previous life as old food scraps thrown to the dogs—although exegetically there is an intertextual link between the aforementioned possible etymology of *skubalon* and the “dogs” of Philippians 3:2. Rather, Paul is emphasizing that his former life, as successful as it was, is of the utmost uselessness and should be regarded as a steaming pile of feces when compared with the considerable worth of Christ.

However, it would be a misconception to believe Paul is claiming his former Judaism as an inconsequential pile of refuse. Here, Paul is underscoring the invaluable, preeminent, and overriding aspiration to know and be seated in Jesus Christ. The emphasis is that “Paul does not toss away junk to gain Christ; he tosses away that which was of tremendous value to him.”⁷²

For Paul, *skubalon* acts as a literary lynchpin for the context of Philippians 3. Misunderstanding Paul’s line of reasoning can lead to a pallid hermeneutic that perceives Paul to be blaspheming the Law. The strategic use of *skubalon* in the immediate context, when properly understood as hyperbole, nullifies such an accusation. Paul’s goal in implementing *skubalon* is to showcase the glorious conversion of life he has experienced in Christ. In so doing, his *skubalon*

⁷¹ Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Publishers, 1991), 131–32.

⁷² Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2011), 58.

conversion experience displays an ironic jab at his former life as a Pharisee, who as a group emphasized ritual cleanness.⁷³

Within the macro-context of Philippians, *skubalon* can be exegetically linked through the words “counted” (*hegeomai*) and “worth” (*hyperecho*). Each word finds previous deployment in Philippians 2:1–10 with Paul’s exhortation to follow the humble example of Christ, namely in avoiding the mindset of thinking the self as “more significant” (*hyperecho*) than others. The semantic link between Philippians 3:2–11 and 2:2–11 may literarily signal that Paul was intentionally thinking of these very words, which he had just penned.⁷⁴ The humble example of Christ comes via the *Carmen Christi*, a proposed early church hymn,⁷⁵ which describes the mindset Paul has called for as being that which Christ had, when Christ “did not count (*hegeomai*) equality with God a think to be grasped” when he humbled himself to the point of a human servant unto death.

Furthermore, given that Paul exhorts the Philippians to engender this humble mindset and praxis, he goes on to encourage them in 3:17 to join in imitating him (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11).⁷⁶ Imitating Paul’s outlook regarding one’s life before knowing Christ means that there is also a link between Paul’s consideration of his former life and Christ’s humiliation. Paul’s pastoral exhortations give the church at Philippi a prototype and exemplar typology; Christ is shown as deeming the glorification of the Father and salvation of his people as surpassing worth, while Paul deems

⁷³ Harmon, *Philippians*, 337.

⁷⁴ Gregory L. Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1992.), 180.

⁷⁵ Thaddeus Williams, “Jesus’ Humiliation,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

⁷⁶ Angela Standhartinger, “‘Join in Imitating Me’ (Philippians 3.17): Towards an Interpretation of Philippians 3,” *New Testament Studies* 54, no. 3 (2008): 435.

following Christ to be of the surpassing worth. Paul is by no means suggesting that Christ viewed his preincarnate state as dung, for that would blasphemously take the analogy too far. Rather, as Nikki cogently conveys, “[t]hat which was given up had to have value, if the actions of the hymnic Christ were to be evoked... Paul’s typological measure may be translated to prototypes and exemplars. The Christ of the hymn represents the actual prototype while Paul sets himself up as the real-life exemplar.”⁷⁷ In other words, Paul follows the example of Christ by giving up his entitlements and being rewarded for such a willing humiliation; a reward of gaining the gloriousness of Christ himself. Thus, Paul calls the Philippians to follow his example only because it is the motivating example given by the supreme Christ.⁷⁸

Thus, Paul conveys the dung–sin symbol in a polyvalent fashion. To regard anything above Christ is a sin and must be regarded as the sinful mess that it is. A proper following of Christ can be found in *skubalon*: everything else is dung when compared to Christ. Thus, Philippians 3 again highlights that where dung is mentioned, sin is in proximity. The hyperbolic and shocking statement made by Paul is one of the clearest scriptural synthetizations of the various aspects of dung that this work has covered, namely rejection, ejection, mockery, and shocking disgust.

Filthy, Filthy, Filthy

A final pair of conceptual references that pertain to dung in the NT corpus are the related adjectival *ruparos* and the genitive noun *rypos*. The adjectival form is found in James 2:2, which is rendered by the ESV as “shabby” in relation to clothing, as well as in Revelation 22:11 to

⁷⁷ Nikki, *Opponents*, 174.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

describe the moral filth of evil doers (i.e., “filthy”). The genitive noun is located as a *hapax* in 1 Peter 3:21, where the author clarifies a misunderstanding related to baptism, namely that the sacrament is not concerned with the washing of “dirt” from the body. While the context of each implementation reveals *ruparos* and *rupos* to be used by each respective author in a general way to describe dirt or filth, the intertextuality that links the three NT implementations with the OT is particularly notable.

The LXX rendering of Zechariah 3:3–4 translates the “filthy” (hb. *soi*) clothing as *ruparos*.⁷⁹ Thus, as previously indicated in the section of this work concerning Zechariah 3:3–4, the connotation of the clothing in the night vision is that of excrement-covered attire.⁸⁰ Concurrent Hellenistic and early Christian sources implemented *ruparos* in a similar fashion. Hellenistic examples of *ruparos* being used to describe soiled clothing can be seen in Homer,⁸¹ Josephus,⁸² and Philo.⁸³

James 2:2 certainly fits within the same jurisdiction as Zechariah 3, as it compares a rich man with fine clothing with a poor man in “shabby” clothing within the scheme of the sin of partiality. While the generalized connotation of “soiled” certainly fits the context, the LXX using this term in place of *soi* is interesting, as *soi* is unquestionably linked to excrement in the OT corpus.

⁷⁹ Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 564.

⁸⁰ Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 215.

⁸¹ Homer, *The Odyssey with an English Translation by A.T. Murray, PH.D. in Two Volumes* (Medford, MA: Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd., 1919).

⁸² Josephus and Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, 201.

⁸³ Philo, *Philo*, trans. F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker, and J. W. Earp, vol. 6, The Loeb Classical Library (London; England; Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann Ltd; Harvard University Press, 1929–1962), 191.

The same can be said for the Petrine and Johannine implementations regarding generalized filth being contextually valid. Nevertheless, the generalized renderings presented by the ESV for each of the respective passages are hermeneutically intensified when excrement is brought into the picture as a contiguous image to be extracted from the verses. Just as the excrement-covered garments of the poor man in James 2 intensifies the shameful of the sin of partiality that James is condemning, the waters of baptism washing not excrement from the body but “excrement” from the soul also intensifies the imagery that 1 Peter 3 purveys.⁸⁴ To this idea, by using the same term, Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* simultaneously links the “filth” of man’s wickedness being exchanged with Christ, much like the clothes of Joshua in Zechariah 3.⁸⁵ Certainly, the evil doers in Revelation 22:11 become that much more despicable when they are viewed as desiring to remain covered in the excrement of their moral defilement, rejected by the Lord.⁸⁶ Comparably, Plato illustrated the same concept when speaking of how to metaphorically describe the vileness of man.⁸⁷

Thus, while the NT undoubtedly follows the concurrent Hellenistic era in applying *ruparos* and *rupos* to connote generalized filth or sordidness—whether physically or symbolically⁸⁸—the semantic connection to the excrement-laced garments of Zechariah 3

⁸⁴ Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 215. See also James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 565. Moulton and Milligan note how *rupos* was used in Hellenistic medicine in reference to “ear wax.” Another term of disgust!

⁸⁵ Justin Martyr, “Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 257.

⁸⁶ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 399. See also: G. W. H. Lampe, ed., “Ῥύπος,” *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1219.

⁸⁷ Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes Translated by Harold N. Fowler.*, vol. 9 (Medford, MA: Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1925).

⁸⁸ See also James 1:21 which speaks uses the accusative *ruparia* in order convey the symbolic terms of moral filth: “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness...” See, Frederick William Danker and

provides a theoretical nod to excrement as being on the periphery in James 2, 1 Peter 3, and Revelation 22. Since this is the case, the dung–sin symbol—even if contextually “smelt” and not as clearly “seen —still evidences aspects of rejection, ejection, mockery, and disgust.⁸⁹

Chapter 5 Summary

The NT advances the frame of a biblical theology of dung as set forth in the OT. The symbolic link between dung and sin developed in the NT utilizes the same aspects of ejection, rejection, mockery, and revilement progressively posited in the OT. Furthermore, being reduced to a state of dung is emphasized in the NT as a paramount presentation of God’s just judgment for sin; a presentation primarily propagated by Christ. Hence, the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 is visible in the direct teachings of Jesus who uses the symbolic link of dung and sin to describe punishment for sin. Nevertheless, the NT further underscores that where the Scriptures speak of dung, sin is in proximity, since dung symbolizes sin.

Kathryn Krug, “Ρυπαρία,” *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 315.

⁸⁹ For example, James 2 presents the sin of partiality as something to be rejected and ejected out of the church by using a hyperbolic, mocking analogy. 1 Peter 3 presents the sin of man as intrinsic which is to be rejected and ejected via the sign and seal of baptism, which is contextually linked to the severity of Noah’s deluge in which God was disgusted by the pervasiveness of sin upon the earth. Revelation 22 posits those who would reject and eject the Lord receiving the same action in return by God as he mocks them and leaves reprobate to enjoy the filth he desired over him.

Excursus: Beelzebub

Within the Synoptics,⁹⁰ in a particular narrative scene dubbed the “Beelzebub controversy,”⁹¹ the Pharisees are presented as engaging in rhetorical combat with Jesus regarding his exorcism ministry.⁹² They declare that Jesus performs miracles and casts out demons by the power of “Beelzebub.” Jesus equates Beelzebub with some form of demonic deity, even Satan himself (cf. Lk. 11:18), but the NT text offers no elucidation concerning a definitive link between the demonic and Beelzebub.⁹³

Vast scholarly intrigue exists concerning the figure of Beelzebub, namely because the Synoptic mentions are the lone literary references to the figure in both early Jewish writings and comparable secular sources. Simply put, the figure of Beelzebub is an enigma.⁹⁴ This work does not seek to settle the debate with an audacious claim of authority. Thus, readers may ask the following question: Why present an excursus concerning Beelzebub? The answer lies in potential meanings regarding the title of Beelzebub, which are worthy of consideration given that these hypothesized etymologies directly pertain to dung.

Various hypothesized denotations of Beelzebub state that the name is linked to the Philistine-Ekronite god Baal-Zebub.⁹⁵ The potential reception of Beelzebub presented in the NT

⁹⁰ Matt. 10:25; 12:24–24; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15–19.

⁹¹ Beale and Carson, *Commentary of the New Testament*, 149.

⁹² Bradley L. Stein, “Who the Devil is Beelzebub?” *Bible Review* 13, no. 1 (1997): 42.

⁹³ David M. Emanuel, “Satan,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁹⁴ Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 100.

⁹⁵ W. Herrmann, “Baal Zebub,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 154. See also: Balz and Schneider, 211; R. A. Macalister, *The Philistines: Their History and Civilization* (United Kingdom: British Academy, 1914), 92–93.

text may be a result of translation from Aramaic to Hebrew, with a translatory variant in many manuscripts being “Beelzebub.”⁹⁶ Hence, as it stands, “Beelzebul” is likely a semantic corruption of some sort.⁹⁷ One explanation regarding the corrupted form of the name is that Beelzebul is a possible condensing of the name of the Philistine god. The abridgment of Baal-zebub to Beelzebul may indicate a “polemical dysphemism,” or intentional corruption, meant to demean the deity in the form of a slur.⁹⁸ Intentionally corrupting a title or name was a common polemical tactic in the ANE⁹⁹ and was intended to elevate scorn. Thus, when an intentional corruption became embedded in the sociocultural landscape, the ire for that which was being polemicized and all that it represented became embedded in the cultural consciousness. Hence, there is scholarly notation regarding the possible polemical dysphemism related to Beelzebul as originating from a corruption of the Aramaic form of Baal-Zebub (cf. 2 Kgs. 1).¹⁰⁰

Because no consensus exists concerning the etymology of Beelzebul attempting to transliterate the proposed original in “Baal-Zebub” only bolsters the enigma. A handful of possible meanings pertaining to the transliteration of Baal-Zebub exist.

First, “Lord of the Heavenly Abode” is a viable transliteration¹⁰¹ and may signify the common Second Temple-era belief that there was a hypothetical heavenly (i.e., spiritual)

⁹⁶ Lloyd Gaston, “Beelzebul” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 18, no. 4 (1962): 247.

⁹⁷ Werner Foerster, “Βεεζεβούλ,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 605.

⁹⁸ Hermann, “Baal Zebub,” 154. See also: Arndt et. al., 173; Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row: 1981), 278.

⁹⁹ Macalister, *The Philistines*, 92.

¹⁰⁰ Beare, *Matthew*, 278.

¹⁰¹ Gaston, “Beelzebul,” 249.

“pantheon” that was home to pagan deities.¹⁰² In Second Temple Judaism, said deities were thought to be demonic and worthy of destruction.¹⁰³

A second possible transliteration is “Lord of Flies” which may indicate a polemical parody aimed at deriding the false deity by fundamentally defacing the name.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, this potential transliteration may signify that the original god pertained to the buzzing pest in some way.¹⁰⁵

A third possible transliteration is “Lord of Heaven,” which may clarify why the first implementation of Beelzebul in the Synoptics (cf. Matt. 10:25) is connected to the master of the household, (i.e., the temple).¹⁰⁶ And still another possible transliteration is simply “Dung God.”¹⁰⁷

Furthering the obscurity of Beelzebul is the additional debate which centers around the etymology and subsequent transliteration of *zebub/zebul*. The debate generally dichotomizes between those who consider *zebul* to refer to an exalted position¹⁰⁸ or heavenly dwelling¹⁰⁹ and those who believe *zebul* to be a corruption that pertains to a broad Semitic cognate concerned

¹⁰² Craig Bloomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 1.

¹⁰³ O. Bocher, “Beelzeboul,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, eds. Horst Robert and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 211.

¹⁰⁴ E. C. B. MacLaurin, “Beelzeboul.” *Novum Testamentum*, 20 (1978): 156.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 49.

¹⁰⁶ W.E.M. Aitken, “Beelzebul,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 31, no.1 (1912): 51. Note, Aitken himself is hesitant to connect Baal-Zebub with Beelzebul. However, his postulations are pertinent to the discussions given his work seeks to locate the origin of the name. cf. MacLaurin who posits the Ugaritic for of *zebul* does not mean temple, but rather connotes Baal “prince” or “ruler.”

¹⁰⁷ Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Gaston, “Beelzebul,” 248.

¹⁰⁹ Aitken, “Beelzebul,” 35–53.

with dung.¹¹⁰ If Beelzebul represents a calculated corruption designed for the purpose of deriding a false deity, the result is an additional fistful of intrigue; a handful of hypothetical ramifications which further fuel the Synoptic Beelzebul controversy.

First, the Scriptures have previously presented a figure linked with Baal whose name has been potentially corrupted — namely Jezebel. “Jezebel” may have originally been “Jezebul,” meant to portray a woman of exalted position.¹¹¹ Even in English, it is clear how *zebul* can easily be corrupted to *zevel* or *zebel*, depending on how one transliterates and vocalizes the *bet*. Nevertheless, as Aitken acknowledges, the finalized form of Jezebel may contain a recognized Hebrew or Aramaic synonym for dung: “*zevel*.”¹¹² Hence, long before the scriptural presentation of the Beelzebul controversy, there is a high likelihood the Scriptures have already presented a subtle, intentional corruption of name linked to Baal and dung in Jezebel.

Second, and further considering Jezebel, the unifying link throughout the Jezebel narrative is her false god Baal. As previously mentioned, evidence suggests that one form of worship within the expansive Baal cult was ceremonial defecation. Again, the narrative of Jezebel, with satirical consistency, presents Baal as a god preoccupied with relieving his own bowels, letting his worshippers be reduced to dung, and even allowing his own “house” to be transformed into a pile of dung. Thus, since it would not be a stretch semantically to corrupt the name Jezebel, neither would it be a semantic stretch to corrupt a geographically specific version of Baal in Baal-Zebub.

¹¹⁰ Aitken, “Beelzebul,” 43.

¹¹¹ Naomi Graetz, “Metaphors Connecting Jeremiah and Jezebel: The Case of Domes,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* vol. 14 no. 1 (2017): 1.

¹¹² Aitken, “Beelzebul,” 41.

Third, the possible dung associated etymology of Beelzebul, may suggest a subtle intertextual connection between the ministries of Elijah and Jesus. At Mt. Carmel, Elijah and the prophets of Baal face off to demonstrate which deity is the true god. In the synoptic Beelzebul controversy, Jesus, like Elijah, battles the Pharisees on whom the true deity is. If Beelzebul is in fact related to dung, then the battle between Jesus and the Pharisees is yet again ironically another battle of YHWH versus Baal.

If the semantic corruption of Beelzebul is true, such a corruption only intensifies the Beelzebul controversy in relation to the dung–sin symbol presented in this work. Mark 3 and Matthew 12 each report that one aspect of the ongoing Beelzebul controversy linked to Jesus’ ministry was the connection of Beelzebul to the “unforgivable sin” of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. If the name corruption hypothesis is valid, then Jesus himself makes the implication that committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to consider the work of the Holy Spirit to be, not only demonic, but as filthy refuse. This connection also works in another direction, namely the link between Beelzebul and Jesus. The denunciation of the Pharisees imposed upon Jesus would essentially convey that Jesus is not the Son of David but rather the Son of Excrement.

Thus, the Beelzebul controversy could very well be—in more ways than one—a smear campaign run by the Pharisees to demean Jesus, which would further underscore the dung–sin symbol; the Pharisees sinfully reject and eject Jesus like dung, mocking him by reducing his ministry to dung, hating him with disgust, and teaching others to stay away from him. However, given the ambiguity and obscurity surrounding Beelzebul as presented in this section, no definitive assertion concerning the figure and the meaning of the name can be made.

CHAPTER 6

A SYNTHESIZED SCRIPTURAL SCATOLOGY

Thus far in formulating a biblical theology of dung, each explicit semantic or conceptual cognate related to dung across the scriptural corpus has been examined. Within each inspection, dung has been shown to symbolize sin; for where the Scriptures speak of dung, sin is in proximity. Before collating the previous examinations, a brief recap of the material presented thus far is needed in order to properly formulate a finalized biblical theology of dung.

The introductory chapter presents the undergirding methodological presuppositions of this work. The introductory guiding presuppositions within this work that pertain to the development of a biblical theology of dung, wherein dung symbolizes sin, can be summarized as follows:

First, the Bible is the Word of God, which reveals to humanity their origins, ethics and teleology.¹ Second, since the Bible is the Word of God, there is such a thing as a biblical worldview. Since God is the creator of the world in which we live, the truths within the Bible provide the lens (i.e., worldview) through which one can view life and live accordingly. Lastly, within a biblical worldview, information and illumination on any given topic or concept must be met by the reader in the terms in which the Bible presents them. Many times, this requires deliberate contemplation about micro and macro structures within the text, word choice, genre, semantic presentation, and historical factors.

¹ C. Fred Smith summarizes these concepts as, “Who are we? Where are we? What is wrong? What is the answer?” See: C. Fred Smith, *Developing a Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God’s Way* (New York: B&H Publishing Group, 2015).

Thus, this distilled summarization of the main components of the introductory chapter may be categorized in the general system of linguistic analytical exegesis, which ultimately concerns itself with hermeneutics and hermeneutics with epistemology.² Ultimately, the formulation of any biblical worldview is the formulation of interpreting life itself. Within this majestic, all-encompassing interpretation, there exists various constituents which engender a robust, biblical worldview. These various constituents, guided by the teaching of Scripture, are biblical theologies, or systematic modes of biblical thought meant to impact both contemplation and praxis. One such biblical theology is that of a biblical theology of dung, where dung symbolizes sin. This symbolization of sin via excrement communicates the biblical attitude regarding sin; just as dung is rejected, ejected, mocked and reviled from the body, likewise sin must be treated and regarded in similar manner.

The initial probe of the explicit semantic and conceptual cognates pertaining to dung is found within the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch presents the dung–sin symbol via the rejection of dung. In the Pentateuch, any mention of dung is always in proximity to sin. Hence, the Pentateuchal descriptions of dung and how it is to be handled, is how sin should likewise be regarded and handled. The Pentateuch renders the symbolic concept that sin, like dung, must be rejected and ejected away from the presence of God and his people.

The Former Prophets prolong the portrayal of the dung–sin symbol into the realm of mockery. Each representation of dung in the Former Prophets is aligned around an aspect of mockery. Dung and mockery in the Former Prophets are illustrated in narratives pertaining to prideful dynasties or false deities, both of which are mocked and reduced to dung. The Former

² Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspective in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2018), 394.

Prophets uniquely communicate the link between dung and sin through various representations of situational irony; situations where dung and sin are both present.

The Latter Prophets maintain the aspects of rejection, ejection and mockery related to the dung–sin symbol while adding the attitude of revilement. The Latter Prophets use dung to describe the heinousness of various sins and how said sins bring about rejection and ejection by God. The mockery of the Former Prophets is clarified within the Latter Prophets as mockery leading to derision, rather than mockery leading to humor. After all, sin is serious and brings about rejection and ejection. Hence, the Latter Prophets shock the senses by consistently conjoining dung and sin.

The references to dung and sin in The Writings describe a twofold sense of dung as judgment for sin. On the one hand, being reduced to a state of dung is to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, petitioning God to reduce his enemies to a state of dung is encouraged, for an enemy in such a state has received justice. Dung and sin are consistently linked in contextual proximity in the Writings and further solidify the preceding connections between dung and sin from the Pentateuch and Prophets.

The New Testament ripens the dung–sin symbol similar to that posited in the OT. The aspects of rejection, ejection, mockery, and revilement are each displayed in the explicit semantic and conceptual cognates pertaining to dung within the NT, whether that be in the eternal smoldering dung heap of Gehenna or in mockingly rejecting the world as dung for the sake of following Christ.

Lastly, each of the aspects of the dung–sin symbol across the scriptural corpus is further clarified by the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24. Like dung, Christ is rejected and ejected outside of the camp for sin. Like dung, Christ is mocked and reviled as he carries the sin of his people

upon him. Like dung, Christ is reduced to a state of dung under the wrath of God on behalf of his people.

Assembling the Biblical Theological Puzzle

When the aforementioned individual considerations of dung and sin are structured, the result is the initial framing of a biblical theology of dung. Being under the umbrella of biblical worldview, biblical theology in general is meant to be utilized to fortify orthodoxy and orthopraxy.³ In other words, a biblical worldview is lived out in both understanding and action. Since this is the case, every formulated biblical theology is shown to be an important facet of a consistent and committed biblical worldview. This is certainly true of a biblical theology of dung. What follows is a proper formulation of a biblical theology of dung. The formulation of a biblical theology of dung follows the process of formulating any biblical theology. The process of formulating consistent biblical theologies entails the following quadrivium of elements: a micro-theological perspective, a macro-theological perspective, the scriptural meta-hermeneutic, and application to the ethical realm of orthopraxy.

The element of the micro-theological perspective is what has been undertaken thus far in this work. The micro-theological perspective of any biblical theology considers the individual words, concepts, or components in their canonical context. Historical, literary, and theological context is heavily examined within the micro-theological perspective. To posit an analogy: the micro-theological perspective in biblical theology is like separating and carefully examining each individual piece of a puzzle.

³ Since the Scriptures are not mere literature meant to be studied only, this robust biblical hermeneutic ironically becomes “symbolized” in the concrete, real life praxis of the ethical and moral image bearer of God with whom the biblical worldview resides.

Whereas the micro-theological perspective is a magnified view of biblical theological components, the element of the macro-theological perspective is the augmented view pertaining to any given topic or concept in the Scriptures. The macro-theological perspective seeks to assemble the individual micro-theological perspectives and see them as a whole. Within this augmented perspective, individual topics and concepts can be viewed by how they interact, overlap, and adjoin similar and dissimilar biblical topics and concepts. Like the aforementioned puzzle, each piece can be examined on its own (micro-theological perspective), as well as in connection to immediate connected pieces and the completed picture.

Below, the element of the macro-theological perspective assembles and solidifies what has been presented thus far in this work, namely the cross-scriptural oversight concerning dung and related concepts. Amassing the biblical range pertaining to dung and viewing the augmented, “big picture,” reveals dung and sin as bordering other concepts and symbols. Thus, the “big picture” of a biblical theology of dung fundamentally reveals a robust biblical hermeneutic concerned with effectively communicating the revelation of God. Giving attention to this uncovered hermeneutic is pertinent to understanding not only how the dung–sin symbol functions, but also how the various messages (i.e., biblical theologies) of the Scriptures interact with one another on a basic level. In other words, the assembled puzzle is revealed to be a part of a set in a particular series of puzzles which, when seen together, are revealed to be likewise interlocking and connected.

The element of a scriptural meta-hermeneutic as presented in this work acts as a compass for the micro and macro-theological perspectives, indicating teleological direction for all biblical theologies which arise from a robust biblical worldview and subsequent biblical hermeneutic. The macro-theological perspective can lead to an expanse of various biblical theologies. Yet, the

Scriptures contain the stated meta-hermeneutic or meta-theology in Luke 24 which acts as an umbrella for which any valid biblical theology and hermeneutic must reside. To further clarify using the above stated puzzle analogy: each biblical theology is an individual puzzle arranged on the background of the meta-hermeneutic table. Without the stability of the singular table, the puzzles cannot be assembled.

Lastly, the element of the ethical realm is the “real life” application of the assembled biblical theology. Assembling any biblical theology is not a mere intellectual exercise. Rather, biblical theology is meant to be displayed in action. The puzzle table with the various biblical theological puzzles is meant to have a removable glass top upon it. With the glass top, one can eat and drink, while marveling at the pictures below the glass and continue to add to the puzzle beneath. The glass top gives the table practical functionality. Biblical theology, likewise, is meant to be practical and utilized, all while being enjoyed, further compiled and completed.

Thus, what follows is the solidification of a formal biblical theology of dung. The body of this work has focused on the magnified or micro-theological perspective of the explicit semantic and conceptual cognates related to dung in the Scriptures. Even at the micro-theological level, the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 has proven to be useful in connecting the individual references of dung and sin to Christ. What is now required is assembly of the individual into the augmented or macro-theological perspective. The macro-theological perspective is also fortified by meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24, which will likewise be expanded and examined. The result of such an examination of both the micro and macro-theological perspectives of biblical theology and the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24, inevitably call for ethical application which will be set forth afterwards.

Macro-Theological Perspective

To recapitulate the argument of this work, a methodical examination of Scripture reveals that wherever dung—and all its semantic and conceptual cognates—is mentioned, sin or specific representations of sin are in close contextual proximity. These consistent literary links of dung and sin across the Scriptures are like literary speed bumps, positioned to slow the reader down so that they may meditate upon the Word and apply it to their lives (Ps. 1). Given that God does not waste his words (Isa. 55:11), the strategic use of scat throughout Scripture can be deduced as important and integral for proper theology and proper living. Thus, contemplating the clear and intentional biblical bond between dung and sin generates a biblical theology of dung, wherein dung symbolizes sin.

Although not every culture shares in the same taboos related to dung,⁴ every culture would agree that defecation is a facet of life. Hence, at a basic physiological level, every culture displays awareness of the eternal symbol of dung as sin, even if that awareness is only subconscious. If everyone defecates, there is then the shared cross-cultural consciousness which recognizes that excrement derives from eating and the body's rejection of what it does not want through ejecting the unwanted away from the body. Whether human or animal, dung is ejected away from the body, particularly away from the face of the individual or animal, "outside the camp" of their body. In the process, it makes funny sounds, and it may even make the person defecating have funny feelings.⁵ Dung emerges with a disgusting appearance and smell. Even in

⁴ John G. Bourke, *Scatological Rites of All Nations* (Washington D.C.: W.H. Lowdermilk & Co, 1891), 2–4. Note, although over a century old, there are few modern works as extensive and intriguing as Bourke's concerning scatological taboos in various cultures.

⁵ As Schiedle notes, many toddlers form an anxiety toward defecating when reaching potty training age. See Bonnie Schiedle, "How to Deal with Toddler Constipation," in *Today's Parent (Online)*, Feb 28, 2019. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/how-deal-with-toddler-constipation/docview/2187026523/se-2>.

cultures that use dung for fuel or view it as sacred in some way,⁶ there are virtually no cultures that have made eating dung a normative, cultural act.⁷ Dung is something a person simply does not want to consume, typifying the inbuilt desire to also avoid being treated like it. Hence, it would seem that the basic components of a theology of dung are written upon the heart of man, waiting to be extracted and examined.

Biblical Theology and Symbol Systems

Thus, a biblical worldview as postulated in this work extracts and examines what seems to be written upon the heart of every culture. A biblical worldview reminds us that any biblical theology replete with signs and symbols considers them as segments of a grander macrostructure imposed by Scripture, which is interconnected in diverse ways and in different degrees. In the sphere of linguistic analysis, this idea can be posited as a symbol system, wherein (1) any given symbol is demonstrated to be bound by how Scripture presents the symbol in any given context and in (2) how the symbol is employed in the Scriptures within a specified “design” or “network.”⁸ To posit this concept succinctly, no symbol is autonomous in either classification or function.⁹ Hence, a biblical theology of dung, wherein dung symbolizes sin, organically gives

⁶ India is a prime example of a society which views dung as sacred, albeit cow dung given the extensive sacred cow worship. For elucidation concerning the Indian sacred cattle scat see: Cartein Notermans, “Prayers of Cow Dung: Women Sculpturing Fertile Environments in Rural Rajasthan (India),” in *Religions* 10, no. 2 (2019). Furthermore, the “worldview” of sacred cow dung in India has also led to recent developments of attempting to utilize cow dung and urine as a medicinal option in the treatment of COVID-19. See: Sohel Daria and Md Rabiul Islam, “The use of Cow Dung and Urine to Cure COVID-19 in India: A Public Health Concern,” *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management* 36, no. 5 (2021): 1950–52.

⁷ Although cow dung and urine are the fastest growing medical alternative to traditional medicine in India since 2021 (Daria and Islam, 1950–52), the consumption and topical application is of cow dung, not the particular Indians’ own dung. Bourke gives numerous examples of human dung being consumed, linked to minority groups such as the criminally insane or fringe religious groups, (Bourke, 29, 33, 42).

⁸ Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1987), 19–20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

way to bordering concepts and realms related to dung, where the layered scriptural contexts dictate the dynamic of the symbol regarding vehicle and tenor,¹⁰ all while confining the dynamic to a relatively static symbol system.¹¹ This is surely the case and has already been subtly displayed in the various examinations of dung and cognates undertaken earlier.

Ultimately, the symbol system that is intrinsic and particular to any given biblical theology is hermeneutically oriented. This scriptural symbol network can be conceived of in miscellaneous modes in relation to how the symbol system is hermeneutically implemented. Poythress conveys this system in terms of “prominence” and “periphery,” where a prominent piece of any given linguistic component—in this case a symbol—gives way to various related edge perspectives that facilitate theological clarification and formulation.¹²

Ricoeur postulates along these same lines, although with varied terminology. In his seminal work on religious metaphors for evil, Ricoeur conveys the symbol as a concretion of the abstract working with various contiguous realms, where these overlapping or bordering realms within a symbol network illumine one another.¹³ Thus, since all language is symbolic, all language infuses a resemblance of the abstract with the concrete vehicle used to convey the abstract, inevitably displaying overlap with other related concepts and concretizations.¹⁴ The reason for this inevitable overlap is due to the limited points of reference man has available to him to bring the abstract into concrete.

¹⁰ Ollenburger, *Zion*, 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, 392–93.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 8–11.

¹⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 225–233.

Lakoff and Johnson also make these same basic observations in relation to language, although while operating from a secular worldview. They convey that the abstract is communicated through metaphor (overtly symbolic language), which is built upon various substructures to form a coherent system of symbols. This coherent symbol system is where the “directionality” of the metaphor continually clarifies itself in comparison with other related metaphors.¹⁵

To summarize and synthesize, no symbol is a law unto itself and is ultimately contiguous; it overlaps and borders other abstract planes. In effect, these bordering planes of abstract concepts “grasp for symbols” to use as vehicles to concretize themselves with. Thus, any given symbol as a vehicle for the abstract will, like a bus taking passengers to the station, carry similar abstract thoughts to the same concretizing destination of communication. Thus, synthesizing these models together results in a “contiguous symbol hermeneutic” within biblical theology, a further natural byproduct of the worldview espoused in this work.

How does this contiguous symbol hermeneutic manifest itself within a biblical theology of dung? The principal process involves considering categorical connections, namely how dung is associated with other abstract conceptualizations presented in the texts examined in the expositional section of this work. However, undertaking an exhaustive contiguous hermeneutical endeavor related to each examined passage and pericope is beyond the scope of this work. Thus, an example related to the mechanics of a contiguous symbol hermeneutic shall suffice before some major contiguities related to a biblical theology of dung are surveyed. As will be shown,

¹⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 85–86, 112.

consideration of contiguous symbols and concepts categorically related to dung is pertinent to this work.

An Example of Contiguous Symbol Hermeneutic

Dung symbolizes sin, and a contiguous, abstract realm related to sin in which dung has been scripturally conjoined is the realm of defilement. In Ezekiel 4:12–15, the prophet objects to cooking his sign-act bread over his own excrement, implying that this would be sinful for him to do and would thus defile him, something he has never allowed to happen through his strict observance of the purity laws.

Here, the contiguous realms of sin and defilement present themselves as conjoined twins, distinguishable yet interconnected, with both “concretizing” themselves with the symbol of dung. This has massive interpretational (i.e., hermeneutical) repercussions, which manifest chiefly through two opposing ramifications.

First, enforcing a contiguous symbol hermeneutic results in the biblical worldview of the Scriptures communicating to the reader that abstract categories and concepts are meant to be read and applied across a spectrum, wherein the contiguous realms that use the same concrete vehicle clarify one another. In essence, a generalized contiguous hermeneutic is a microscopic version of the *analogia fidei*.¹⁶

An example of an actualized contiguous symbolic hermeneutic in action is presented in the following hypothetical analogy: Imagine a benevolent father attempting to communicate a difficult concept to his child. Much like Calvin said of God, who condescends to us to speak in

¹⁶ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 9.

lisps,¹⁷ the benevolent father in this analogy will try everything he can to help his child understand the difficult concept through questions. For example, imagine that the child asks, “Daddy, what is love?” The benevolent father will not convey to his child what he knows related to this complex concept in further metaphors and analogies that the child would not comprehend; rather, he will attempt to communicate with clarity across a dynamic yet interlocking range.

Hence, the father may respond hypothetically as follows: “Love is an emotion, a feeling; when you like something so much, you’d do anything in the world for it. You would die for it. You would do anything to see that thing live and thrive. It’s a special bond that is really seen best between two people. Like how I love your mother or how you get excited to go to Grandma’s. That excitement and just wanting to be with one another is love. That’s what a big heart symbolizes: that which you live for.”

A contiguous hermeneutic is the natural hermeneutic of man and ultimately the only system by which the symbol-supreme can communicate. A biblical worldview conveys that the contiguity of symbols and abstract realms is the native tongue of Scripture. Therefore, in reconsidering the adjacent realms of sin and defilement, a contiguous symbolic hermeneutic could be hypothesized as follows: “What is defilement? It’s a sinful action in a way. It’s something you don’t want to do or have done to you. It’s like owning fine clothing and having someone carelessly spray purple paint all over them, making them useless. It’s like emptying your bowels onto the pillow rather than the porcelain. It’s like taking the linen tablecloth and using it as a tampon and not caring at all. Defilement is like that.”

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 200.

It is clear from this example, which is related to a biblical theology of dung, that symbolic contiguity necessitates a spectrum of reading to facilitate a healthier fusion of the information being presented.

However, a second resultant ramification is reared by such a contiguous hermeneutic. A contiguous hermeneutic must be kept in balance; knowing contiguous realms and their sharing of any given symbol does not equate a sweeping direct substitution for symbol with abstraction. Related to this are the twin checks of (1) recognizing where context concretizes one abstract thought within a contiguous realm and (2) which symbols within the dynamic network related to that realm can be substituted for one another wholesale. An example of the former would be taking “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3) and making the text say “Dung is lawlessness.” An example of the latter would be the resultant defilement of idol whoredom in Ezekiel 23 being reimagined as defiling through dung, when the context clearly pertains to spiritual adultery expressed in terms of lewd sexual acts. Nevertheless, the contiguous realms and their shared and related symbols work in tandem to clarify one another. A brief examination of a handful of contiguous realms related to a biblical theology of dung will undoubtedly make the correlation of dung and sin more forceful.

Contiguous Systems Related to Dung and Sin

Death

Given that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), it should not be a surprise that a biblical theology of dung contains the symbol of dung as contiguous to death. The initial explicit references to dung within the scriptural corpus in Exodus 29, Leviticus 4, Leviticus 16, and Numbers are each situated within the frame of atonement offerings for sin. These offerings in

some way convey the following: “Since the Fall, no human being could approach the intimate presence of God without offering a sacrifice of an animal, whose death would substitute for the death of the worshipper.”¹⁸ The animal is killed, and the rejected parts, including the dung, are burnt up outside the camp,¹⁹ a location that itself has multivalent significations, one of which is the realm of death.²⁰ Thus, an obvious link exists between dung, sin, and death.

Since dung typifies sin and sin brings forth death, dung is also a contiguous symbol used to concretize the abstract concept of “death.” Death is to be rejected like dung, since dung is rejected to the realm of death outside the camp.²¹ Deuteronomy 23:13 also depicts the contiguity of dung and death. Since the realm of death is outside the camp, the burial of dung conveys the covering up of death.

The Former and Latter Prophets also link dung and death. For example, in the Former Prophets, 2 Kings 9:30–37 portrays the death of Jezebel at the hand of Jehu.²² Her death is the fulfilment of an earlier prophecy by Elijah. Jezebel is “reduced to dung” only in her death and her death is the result of her sins. Additionally, the Latter Prophets depict the contiguity of dung and death in Jeremiah 8:2, 9:22, 16:4, and 25:33. The bodies of the wicked who have died are left unburied, like unsightly dung.

¹⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship*, ed. Tremper Longman III and J. Alan Groves, *The Gospel according to the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 60–69.

¹⁹ Obviously, the red heifer of Num. 19 is taken outside the camp and completely “sacrificed” there. Nevertheless, the contiguity remains.

²⁰ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations Are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 289.

²¹ “The Lexham Figurative Language of the New Testament Dataset,” in *Lexham Figurative Language of the Bible Glossary*, ed. Joshua R. Westbury et al. (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016).

²² Chet Roden, “Jezebel, Wife of Ahab, Daughter of Ethbaal,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Thus, when one encounters a passage such as “You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord God will put you to death” (Isa. 65:13), a contiguous hermeneutic is able to concretize the abstract concept of death through the dynamic scriptural symbol system related to death. A hypothetical example of this would be, “The Lord God will put you to death; you shall be rejected and ejected away from his presence; your life-blood will stop flowing; you will be burnt up like wood and reduced to ash; you shall be reduced to dung.” Hence, death concretizes its “void of life-ness” in various symbols, one of which includes dung.

Indecency

Another contiguous realm related to the dung–sin symbol is indecency. In Deuteronomy 23:14, YHWH commands war camp excrement to be buried outside the camp because it is “indecent.” As described previously in this work, the fact that the genital nakedness of the Hebrew *ervah* is used in Deuteronomy 23:14 connotes intertextual echoes of the Fall of Man in Eden, where sin entered the world. Indecency connotes shame,²³ and Adam and Eve were unashamed (בוש *bosh*) in their naked state pre-fall, exposed genitals and all (Gen. 2:24). It was upon feeling the embarrassment of this shame that freshly fallen man hid himself in the brush.

Additionally, the initial explicit implementation of *ervah* comes in Genesis 9:22, when Ham sees the indecent nakedness of Noah. While an immense scholarly debate concerns what exactly Ham did to Noah,²⁴ there is a connotation that Ham violated his father in some sort of sexual way.²⁵ If the incident is paternal incest, then the connection between dung and indecency

²³ David J. A. Clines, ed., “עֶרְוָה,” *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 344.

²⁴ David Frankel, “Noah’s Drunkenness and the Curse of Canaan: A New Approach,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 140, no. 1 (2021): 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 64–67.

would become extraordinarily graphic, bridging from the exposure of the genitals to homosexual intercourse through the dung route.

Nevertheless, the contiguity of dung and indecency are primarily connected with ethical conduct. Undoubtedly, defecating within the war camp and leaving the putrid piles exposed would be shameful at a basic societal level; a higher level would be that the camp itself, which full of YHWH's presence, has become indecent by laxly treating the presence of YHWH like dung. Returning to Noah, regardless of the exact nature of the violation, one level of the sin of Ham was dishonoring his father by treating him like dung. Hence, when one comes to a prohibition such as Leviticus 20:17, which prohibits incestual relations between a brother and sister, specifically that they may not behold one another's "nakedness," the abstract concept is ethical and can be concretized along the contiguous symbol spectrum as treating God's law and one another like dung. A contiguous hermeneutic in relation to indecency may be proposed in the following hypothetical "divine" statement: "Your sin is indecent; it is shameful. I will expose your shameful deeds by stripping you naked, rejecting the covering I gave you. Your sinful acts are embarrassing. I will treat you like dung since that's how you've treated me and others."

Filth

The broad abstract concept of filth is also on the periphery of the dung-sin symbol. Interestingly, the connection between filth, sin, and dung is deployed heavily in the Scriptures but in the guise of wordplay. Overtly in Zechariah 3:3-4, the excrement-stained garments are rendered as "filthy," a term which shares its root with various dung-related texts examined in this work (cf. Deut 23:13; Prov. 30:12; Eze. 4:12). Concerning filth as a further abstraction related to

sin, Ricoeur notes that filth pertains to that which is dirty, like a stain.²⁶ Surely, the various texts listed above contain the idea of either something dirty or stained.

Upon examination of the shared *tsw* root, further stains of excrement breach the scriptural purview, illuminating the connection of filth, sin, and dung. The same root is shared in Isaiah 4:4, 28:8, and 30:22. In Isaiah 4:4 and 28:8, “filth” and “filthy” are used respectively to describe the sinful stain of the daughters of Zion being cleansed and having tables full of filthy vomit. Hence, these two passages are textbook examples of a contiguous hermeneutic being checked by the context. However, Isaiah 30:22 is of particular intrigue in relation to filth, sin, and dung. “Then you will defile your carved idol overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will say to them, ‘Be gone!’” The ESV rendering of “Be gone!” is a *hapax* and is a single word in Hebrew (טָסַת *tse*). While this root relates to The Exodus or “going out” of the Israelites from Egypt,²⁷ rendering the hypothetical-exclamatory phrase as “Dung!”²⁸ is the more likely connotation.²⁹ The way the idolatry in this passage is rejected and ejected is by considering the idols as made of excrement. The sin of idolatry is one that is filthy, for the idols themselves are to be rejected as feces.

It is this polemic coupling of idols and dung with idols and Egypt that gives way to one of the most unanticipated dung contiguities in the entire scriptural corpus. In Deuteronomy 29:17, Moses exhorts the Israelites to guard their hearts against turning back to the “idols of

²⁶Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 36.

²⁷ Horst Dietrich Preuss, “טָסַת,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 233.

²⁸ This shared rooted may cast a scatological light upon the Exodus narrative. The plagues sent by YHWH did not merely cause Pharaoh to let God’s people go; the plagues were like a laxative which caused the Israelites to be forcefully excreted out of the bowel of the house of bondage.

²⁹Swanson, *Hebrew*, s.v. “טָסַת (n).”

wood and stone, of silver and gold,” of Egypt from whence they exited. The rendering of “idols” by the ESV, while valid, completely misses the wordplay—one that has substantial theological interpretations across the scriptural corpus. “Idols” is literally (גִּלְלִימִים *gillulim*) and means “dung things.” *Gillulim* shares the root (גָּלַל *gll*) with the human *gel* of Ezekiel 4:12–15 and Job 20:7, as well as the *galal* dung of 1 Kings 14:10 and Zephaniah 1:17. The root *gll* likely means “to roll”³⁰ or “round.”³¹ Hence, *gillulim* is a compounded word that consists of *gll* and אֵלִיל (*elil*), the later meaning false or pagan gods.³² Moses’ exhortation, then, contains a possible polemic related to the Egyptian royal scarab dung beetle, which rolled balls of dung. Block postulates that “[t]he adoption of this word as a designation for idols may have been prompted by the natural pellet-like shape of sheep feces, or less likely, the cylindrical shape of human excrement.”³³ Even if this is not the case, what is clear is that *gillulim* is a polemic dysphemism that became embedded in the Hebrew language early on.³⁴ Pointedly, *gillulim* means false gods of dung. Thus, in the 48 usages of *gillulim* across the OT (39 being in Ezekiel), the word is meant to be a severe degradation and denunciation of idolatry. The rebuke and scorn by YHWH are much more pronounced when the dung gods are identified by their true nature.

³⁰ Horst Dietrich Preuss, “גִּלְלִימִים,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 2.

³¹ G. Munderlein, “גָּלַל,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 21.

³² Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

³³ Daniel I. Block, *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 103.

³⁴ M. I. Gruber, “Gillulim,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 346.

For example, speaking in Ezekiel 6:4, YHWH states the following: “Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain bodies before your gods of dung.” The filth of idolatry is one of immense irony: to sin against YHWH by treating him like dung results in worshipping false gods, which YHWH says are quite literally, gods of dung. Hence, when threats of reducing idol worshippers to dung are pronounced within Scripture, the end result is simply “becoming what you worship.”³⁵ Indeed, one of the prominent attitudes regarding idolatry within the Scriptures is obviously that of dung worship. If idols are nothing but piles of dung, made pretty with gold or silver, then the state of the hands that make them is one of disgusting filth with feces encrusted between the fingers and caked under the nails (cf. Isa. 44:10–20). Certainly, this only further satirizes the Baal pericopes of 1 and 2 Kings. Additionally, this dysphemism may further substantiate the idea of Beelzebul being “Lord of Dung,” since one of the prevalent semantic defaults of Scripture pertaining to false gods is that of dung.

Closely related to *gillulim* is שִׁקְּוֹשׁ (*shiqqus*), which is often linked to *gillulim* contextually.³⁶ *Shiqqus* is often rendered as “detestable” or “abominable” and connotes that which is off-limits.³⁷ The close connection to *gillulim* helps to clarify that *shiqqus* is also meant to convey that which is filthy, such as dung.³⁸

³⁵ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (InterVarsity Press Academic, 2018), 307

³⁶ David Noel Freedman and A. J. Welch, “שִׁקְּוֹשׁ,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 467.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See Nahum 3:6, where a personified Nineveh is threatened with filth (*shiqqus*) being thrown at them. The scatological reference is thus clear and may refer simultaneously to the false idols of the Assyrians. It is also pertinent to note that Nahum 3:5 talks of “lifting the skirt” over the face of Nineveh to “expose her nakedness.” Again, sin, nakedness, filth, dung. See: J. M. Powis Smith, William Hayes Ward, and Julius August Bewer, *A*

Filth is clearly contiguous with sin and dung. Dung renders that which is clean dirty, stained, and soiled. Even when filth is used in relation to moral wickedness, dung is a proper vehicle for the tenor of filth and that which is detestable. This applies for both OT and NT tests. For example, Titus 1:16 says the following of the ungodly: “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.” Detestable (*bdelyktos*) is consistently used by the LXX in place of “abomination” and “loathe” (cf. Isa. 1:13; 14:19). It is also used by the LXX to describe the abominable false gods in Deuteronomy 29:17. In the context of Titus, a contiguous hermeneutic adds gravitas to Paul’s rebuke, where the wicked can be thought of as detestable, abominable, walking piles of defiling dung, who are void of true life. Again, whether in the OT or NT, filth is contiguous to sin, both of which can be concretized as dung.

Defilement

A further contiguous realm that pertains to sin and dung, which was alluded to previously, would be that of defilement. Ritual defilement is contiguous to filth and may be envisaged as the active application or “filthyng” of that which is sacred. Religious defilement brings with it disorder and rebellion against systemic norms.³⁹ Thus, Ezekiel’s abhorrence regarding the bread of defilement pertained, in some way, to the Levitical system of ethics. The Levitical code as a system was a safeguard for separating the acceptable from the unacceptable on various cultic levels and for various purposes, which may never be fully grasped. Nevertheless, defilement gives way to the peripheral contiguities of contagion, pollution, and the

Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 339.

³⁹Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 2.

unclean. Regarding contagion, Feder notes how various sins in the ANE were concretized in contagion language—that which defiles and contaminates through spreading.⁴⁰ The excrement of the sanctuary-priestly sin sacrifices, as in Leviticus 4, were considered impure or unclean,⁴¹ descriptions which connote pollution and defilement.

Yet, this raises a logical question regarding why contact with human excrement or normal bowel movements does not require ritualistic cleansing in the Scriptures. Assuredly, there is no explicit Mosaic or Levitical code that strictly governs human excretion and cleansing thereafter in both physical ritual terms.⁴² Yet, Ezekiel offers prophetic insight into the “baked into the bread” subconscious notion that human dung defiles in some way.⁴³ Moreover, the exhortation by YHWH to have the war camp remove its human waste outside the camp indicates that human excrement was at least a secondary pollutant in the complex hierarchy of clean and unclean.⁴⁴ Later Second Temple-era sects, such as the Essenes, did view human excrement as defiling and abstained from defecation on the Sabbath. This sect also had rites of ritual and hygienic cleansing related to defecation.⁴⁵

Whatever the case may be concerning why there is no overt code related to human excrement and cleanliness systems, one can deduce that although the world of the Bible, particularly the OT, is far removed from the 21st century, the people of God still had common

⁴⁰ Yitzhaq Feder, “Contagion and Cognition: Bodily Experience and the Conceptualization of Pollution (*tum’ah*) in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (2013):158.

⁴¹ Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 134.

⁴² Eve Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford Academic: 2014), 163.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁵ Albert I. Baumgarten, “The Temple Scroll, Toilet Practices, and the Essenes,” *Jewish History* 10, no. 1 (1996): 12.

sense. Nevertheless, to label something as defiling, impure, or detestable is to label that something as requiring avoidance, like piles of dung. Obviously then, defilement, impurity and detestability are seen as contiguous realms related to the dung–sin symbol.⁴⁶

Justice

One final contiguous example considered here related to the dung–sin symbol is that of God’s justice. The concretizing of the abstract concept of “justice” does not come via the symbol of dung in and of itself but rather in how dung is treated throughout the scriptural corpus. Here, a couple of examples will suffice.

First, God’s righteousness demands justice against that which is unrighteous and unjust (i.e., sin).⁴⁷ Sin brings forth death, which is violence against the life of mankind. The justice of God, which also implies justification, means purging death.⁴⁸ Justice is founded upon the holiness of God, who will not tolerate the unholy.⁴⁹ Thus, sin as dung is rejected and ejected outside the camp and burned, purged, and destroyed. This further intensifies the visual imagery of Hell, or *gehenna* — the eternal flaming dung heap, where wicked sinners who reject God shall be thrown. The justice of *gehenna* is where sinners exchange the glory of Eden for the judgment

⁴⁶ Note, the NT usage of “detestable” (gk. *Maino*) conveys that of a stain as well. So, those that have a defiled mind in Titus 1:15 have sinful, dung-stained minds, which contaminates the rest of their being, rendering everything that is pure as unclean or impure by contact with them. See: Friedrich Hauck, “Μιάνω, Μίασμα, Μιασμός, Ἀμίαντος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 644–46.

⁴⁷ R. C. Sproul, *What Can We Know about God?* First edition., vol. 27, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust: A Division of Ligonier Ministries, 2017), 43.

⁴⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission*, ed. John R. Franke, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 225.

⁴⁹ Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 613.

of Sodom—which was originally described like Eden in Genesis 13:10; there they are reduced to an ash heap that smells of dung (sulfur) and is perpetually catalyzed by salt.⁵⁰

Second, the contiguous symbol hermeneutic gives way to concretizing the justice of God in scatological terms. Since dung symbolizes sin, sin shall also be burned, buried, and washed away. When YHWH acts justly, he righteously destroys his enemies to the point of reducing them to dung. Hepner makes a fascinating connection concerning a particular instance of the justice of God, one that contains a scatological euphemism. Hepner reports that in Exodus 7:15, when Moses announces the beginning of the 10 Plagues to Pharaoh, Pharaoh goes out into the waters that morning to release his bowels.⁵¹ Later in Exodus 10:1, YHWH tells Moses that, in judgment, he [YHWH] has caused Pharaoh’s heart to be “heavy.” The “heaviness” (כבד *kabod*) of Pharaoh’s heart and the association with Pharaoh releasing his bowels in the Nile are likely linked to the Egyptian belief that a failure to defecate would cause heart problems.⁵² Hence, Pharaoh received the initial pronouncement of YHWH’s justice while defecating.

This “heaviness” which Pharaoh unloads in the water is recapitulated in 1 Samuel 5, when the Philistines are being punished by YHWH with covenant-curse hemorrhoids. The Philistines declared that the “hand of YHWH” was “heavy” (*kabod*) upon them. On one level, the justice of God turns sinners over to what sin is—namely dung. On another level, God’s justice comes about in the destruction of his enemies by reducing them to dung with a heavy

⁵⁰ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press: 1985), 52.

⁵¹ Gershon Hepner, “Scatology in the Bible.” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: SJOT* 18, no. 2 (2004), 279–289. See also: Rashi on Ex. 7:15, Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu, trans. Samuel A. Berman, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Exodus.7.15.1?lang=bi&p2=Midrash_Tanchuma%2C_Vaera.14.1&lang2=bi&w2=About&lang3=bi

⁵² Ibrahim M. Eltorai, *A Spotlight on the History of Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2019), 122. Cf. Hepner, *Scatology*, 280.

hand; a heavy hand like the hand set to the dung-peg in the grip of Jael or the hand of destruction stabbing, exposing, and reducing unto dung like Ehud.⁵³ The righteous hand of the justice of God against sin, in all of its contiguous abstracts, can be concretized through the symbol of dung.⁵⁴

Macro-Theological Perspective Conclusion

To conclude regarding the macro-view related to a biblical theology of dung, it is clear that the symbol network that gives way to a contiguous hermeneutic regarding concretizing the abstract is not artificial. A biblical theology of dung exists, wherein dung symbolizes sin. Dung is void of life, dead, and a harbinger death. Dung is shameful and indecent; filthy and defiling; and must be justly done away with. The sins that may be described in the contiguous abstract, such as that which is abhorrent to God, can be concretized within a contiguous symbol system; that which is abhorrent to God is described as a pollutant; dung, menstrual blood (cf. Eze. 36:17), vomit (cf. Lev. 20:22), and wasted semen (cf. Gen. 38:9). These pollutants become the embodiment of the abstract of sin and resonate because they concretize sin in bodily language; sin personified for sinful persons to better understand.⁵⁵ These various contiguities in both tenor and vehicle operate in the way they do because any given symbol or abstract concept is brought to light by secondary symbols or abstracts.⁵⁶

⁵³ Gershon Hepner, "Scatology in the Bible." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: SJOT* 18, no. 2 (2004), 281–82, 284.

⁵⁴ Imagine the level of scatological connection if the Scriptures designated the vengeful hand of YHWH as his left hand.

⁵⁵ Feder, "Contagion and Cognition," 167. Cf. Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 54–55.

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 156.

The Meta-Hermeneutic of Scripture Expanded

Establishing a biblical theology of dung means recognizing that within—or rather outside of—any specialized biblical theology is the preeminent meta-hermeneutic of the Scriptures. As described in the introduction of this work, the meta-hermeneutic can be found in Luke 24, where the risen Christ, in two separate pericopes, doubly asserts that the entirety of the Scriptures finds their fulfillment in him. Luke 24 blatantly asserts itself as the chapter to which all history, promise, and prophecy of the OT finds fulfillment in and must be interpreted by.⁵⁷ Luke 24 acts as a recalibration of the internal hermeneutic of the Scriptures from beyond ridged, historical interpretations of the OT. The words of Christ himself in Luke 24 become the field guide for interpreting every promise, typology, and intertextuality of the OT.⁵⁸ Thus, Luke 24 operates in both the micro and macro-theological perspective levels.

How the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 functions can be clarified by Ricoeur's first- and second-level symbols. While the contiguous hermeneutic of biblical theology works at the lower level of interpretation and subsequent application, the Christocentric, scriptural meta-hermeneutic encompasses the lower level, ultimately exalting the Christ of the higher, meta-level. This reciprocal hermeneutic can be seen specifically in a biblical theology of dung: sin symbolized as dung is one contiguous theological system in a network of theological systems which ultimately pertain to exalting the redemptive work of Christ.

Since the Scriptures symbolize sin via dung, then every scriptural implementation of dung is recalibrated by the Christocentric hermeneutic of Luke 24. Thus, a robust biblical

⁵⁷ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 119.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

theology of dung is required by the Scriptures to give ample attention to the atoning work of Christ.

The Atonement Puzzle

Just as the symbol of dung and sin is multivalent, so too is the atoning work of Christ multivalent. Linking the meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24 with a biblical theology of dung logically engenders a link between dung and atonement. A presuppositional engagement with “atonement” is likely to lead to seeing a link between dung and the atoning work of Christ as borderline sacrilegious. However, defining atonement and elaborating various concepts that pertain to it, reveal the dung–sin symbol and the atonement of Christ as being organically linked.

Thus, what exactly does the atonement signify? Attempting to answer this question succinctly is nearly impossible because “the atonement” is not a painting of a solitary color but rather a mosaic.⁵⁹ Various systematic delineations have been postulated, each directed at covering the foremost emphases of the theological concept of “atonement,” with no one systemization being truly exhaustive.

Considering a few such systemizations related to atonement, Frame notes that the English word “atonement” originates from an Old English idiom that expresses reconciliation, or “at-one-ment.”⁶⁰ Frame further indicates that while atonement may be etymologically linked to reconciliation between parties, the concept involves much more than mere reconciliation.⁶¹ Thus, it would seem that the Scriptures assemble the multivalent mosaic through a host of terms, used

⁵⁹ Joshua M. McNall, *The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ’s Work* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2019).

⁶⁰ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 903.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

either synonymously or semi-synonymously, to paint particular portions of the picture of atonement. For Frame, this ebb and flow of the concept of atonement in the Scriptures echoes the person of Christ and his threefold office, which he rightly argues cannot be divorced from Christ's work.⁶² Thus, just as Christ is simultaneously Prophet, Priest, and King, so too is his work of redemption concerned with each of those offices, which Frame summarizes as the motifs of expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption.⁶³

Other theologians have provided similar and semi-synonymous definitions of atonement by focusing primarily on the other motifs that make up the multivalent mosaic. Erickson assembles the picture as sacrifice, propitiation, substitution, and reconciliation.⁶⁴ For him, substitution is distinct from expiation, whereas Frame includes substitution within the subset of expiatory work. Grudem, a protégé of Frame, summarizes the atoning work of Christ in similar terms — namely sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption.⁶⁵ While Morris is in lock step with Frame, Erickson, and Grudem, he adds the motifs of covenant and justification as being integral to understanding atonement.⁶⁶

Clearly, the concept of atonement is broad and intricate, consisting of numerous shades and hues which often blend, overlap, and highlight one another. In short, there is contiguity between atonement concepts and atonement symbols. There is the aspect of sacrifice, where

⁶² Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 901–02.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 902–03.

⁶⁴ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 741–44.

⁶⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 580.

⁶⁶ Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning & Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1983), 7.

Christ penally dies for sin.⁶⁷ Christ's atoning work is expiatory, a taking away of sin completely.⁶⁸ There is also the facet of propitiation, where peace is brought to the offended party and the offender.⁶⁹ The aspect of propitiation naturally borders and overlaps with reconciliation, where estranged parties are brought back together.⁷⁰ Likewise, redemption is contiguous to these various motifs, and involves the buying back and setting free of something or someone, even to the point of declaring the free as justified.⁷¹

Rutledge argues that the multivalent motifs can usually be distilled into the following two meta-motifs: "God's definitive action in making vicarious atonement for sin" (through sacrifice, offering, expiation, and substitution) and "God's decisive victory over the alien powers of Sin and Death."⁷² Thus, just as dung has contiguous realms that reveal various aspects of the multivalent nature of sin, atonement and the redemptive work of Christ are likewise multivalent and replete with contiguous realms and symbols, each revealing various properties of Christ's salvific work. The dung–sin symbol can be seen as a "new image"⁷³ that adds expressive character to the mosaic of the atoning work of Christ, at once drawing a gaze to the atonement as being essential for a robust biblical theology of dung. The dung–sin symbol in relation to the

⁶⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 580.

⁶⁸ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 902.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 903.

⁷⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 580.

⁷¹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 903.

⁷² Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 209.

⁷³ Leanne Van Dyk, "Vision and Imagination in Atonement Doctrine," *Theology Today* (Ephrata, Pa.) 50, no. 1 (1993): 10.

atonement can be described as a “new image” because the link between the two has rarely been formally espoused. Yet, the “new image” has always been in plain sight in the Scriptures.

This brief outline of atonement, unfortunately, displays the default concerning the atonement of Christ: a hyper-focus solely upon his death. Yet, since the atoning work of Christ is as multivalent as the sin that dung symbolizes, the death of Christ can only be one component of the atonement. The various aspects of the atonement display that “there is a unitary reality underlying the varying biblical accounts of Christ’s crucifixion (*and resurrection, for that matter*), and that the multiplicity of motifs attests to the same truth.”⁷⁴

In a relatively new work, Moffitt posits the idea of the Scriptures presenting the atoning work of Christ as encompassing his life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.⁷⁵ This “rethinking” of atonement provides a holistic focusing of the mosaic, properly highlighting and lowlighting the various motifs of the sacred picture.

It is true that the Scriptures proclaim that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:23). Yet, that is not the only depiction provided by the Scriptures regarding sin. For example, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), estrangement (Col. 1:21), and an abomination of disgust (Ezek. 36:31). To reduce the atoning work of Christ to only what his death accomplishes can be likened to flattening sin to something that only relates to death. Clearly, this is not the biblical hermeneutic; clearly, this is not the biblical mosaic.

Thus, the multivalency of the atoning work of Christ answers why there are numerous atonement theories.⁷⁶ Like the parable of blind men touching differing parts of an elephant and

⁷⁴ Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 208. Emphasis added.

⁷⁵ David M. Moffitt, *Rethinking the Atonement: New Perspectives on Jesus’s Death, Resurrection, and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2022), 30.

⁷⁶ It is beyond the purview of this work to explicate the various atonement theories. Indeed, that is an impossibility, for as Rutledge notes in *The Crucifixion* on page 209, there is no general consensus on how to group

relaying their understanding of what they are sensing, the various atonement theories rightly sense particular aspects of the multivalency of sin and the atonement of Christ. This is not to say that every atonement theory is fully correct or equally valid. The tusk of the elephant is hard while its skin is soft, and the elephant has much more skin than tusk. As Berkof notes, every party and camp, whether conservative or liberal, has a view of the atonement.⁷⁷ Berkof further articulates that the fact that all parties and camps feel the need to express such a theory proves that the disturbing presence of sin and its ramifications are universally recognized.⁷⁸ Thus, the various theories contribute to the mosaic in unique ways, albeit limited ones.

Concerning a combined theology of the atonement, Rutledge notes the following:

“Continuing controversies about cross-interpretation suggest that a dynamic, flexible *combination* of the various themes and motifs in the Old and New Testaments is the best way to proceed.”⁷⁹ Hence, the atoning work of Christ truly involves aspects of penal substitution, where the sinless Christ suffers the wrath of God in the place of sinners as a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation.⁸⁰ Likewise, it truly involves aspects of sinners being ransomed and freed — redeemed as it were.⁸¹ It also truly involves aspects of moral example and the gracious love of

and define the various atonement theories. Therefore, this work will merely mention various atonement theories with brief descriptions or aspects related to said theories.

⁷⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Vicarious Atonement through Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1936), 35.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 209. Emphasis original.

⁸⁰ Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 134.

⁸¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Is Victor!: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 44.

God.⁸² Moreover, it truly involves aspects of a governmental theory, where the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God's character and law are displayed.⁸³ The atoning work of Christ truly involves aspects of Christ coming as the better federal head in a model of recapitulation.⁸⁴ Since the atoning work of Christ engages aspects of recapitulation, such as that of Christ as the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:47), then it necessarily includes the incarnation, much to the thought of Irenaeus⁸⁵ and even aspects of Schleiermacher's mysticism.⁸⁶ Lastly, the atoning work of Christ truly includes aspects of *Christus Victor*, where Christ cosmically defeats Sin, Death, and Satan and consummates the Kingdom of God through his reconciliatory work and current heavenly reign.⁸⁷

The Atonement: A Representation of Refuse and Redemption

With atonement considered and being guided by the scriptural meta-hermeneutic of Luke 24, the redemptive work of Christ can now be seen as an integral aspect of a biblical theology of dung. Notice how the contiguous concepts and symbols of both the dung–sin symbol and the atonement are ascertained within the Scriptures:

Christ was the ultimate atonement offering, at once the accepted substitute and the rejected refuse portion — the reconciler and reconciled (Heb. 10:12; 1 Peter 1:19, 2:4 cf. Ex.

⁸² Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 904.

⁸³ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 740.

⁸⁴ McNall, *The Mosaic of Atonement*, 17.

⁸⁵ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 17–19.

⁸⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Jesus' Life in Dying: Friedrich Schleiermacher's Pre-Easter Reflections to the Community of the Redeemer* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020,) 4.

⁸⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4.

29:14; Lev. 4:11). Christ was taken outside the camp (Heb. 13:11–13; cf. Lev. 16:27), to the realm of God’s justice and death (cf. Num. 11; 15:35–36). There outside the walls of the city, like that of a filthy dung hill, Christ was “burnt up” in judgment, like *gehenna* on Earth (Matt. 10:28), humbled under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6 cf. Heb. 13:11; John 3:36). In that realm of justice and death, like a man who burns up his dung (Job 20:7), or as a wicked king perishes (1 Kgs. 14:10), the true king was cut off from the land of the living (Isa. 53:8).

As the true scapegoat (1 Cor. 5:7; cf. Lev 16), Christ was led outside the camp by a man of readiness (Matt. 27:32; cf. Lev 16). The true scapegoat was sent into a wilderness of wild beasts (Ps. 22:21), ultimately rotting like dung under the curse as the curse incarnate (Gal. 3:13 cf. Deut. 28; Jer. 8:2; 9:22; 16:4; 25:33). The living water (John 4:10–11; 7:38) was mixed with death and made to be the water of purgation (Eph. 5:26; 1 John 1:7–9; cf. Num. 19:5). The tattered and tortured skin of Christ was stained crimson (Lk. 22:44, 63; cf. Isa. 53:4) like a blood-red heifer (Num. 19:5) and immolated in sight of (wicked) priests (John 19:15–21 cf. Num. 19:5, Mal. 2:1–4). The true red cow drank from a hyssop branch (John 19:29; cf. Num. 19:5) and yielded cleaning water from his side (John 19:34; cf. Num. 19:9). Christ, the better red cow, was consumed upon wood as he drank from a hyssop branch, after being mocked with a scarlet robe (Matt. 27:4–42; Matt. 27:28; cf. Num 19:6).

The indecency of sin upon the sinless was displayed as he was stripped of his own clothes, naked upon the tree of forsakenness (Mk. 15:34). Christ, the God-Man, took the shameful sin of his people (Heb. 12:2) and left the camp, no longer to walk in its midst (Matt. 24:1 cf. Deut. 23:13). The “peg” was given unto Christ (cf. Deut. 23:13), not only in the form of the Cross but also in the form of the sour wine sponge the Roman officers extended unto him (Matt. 27:48). This sponge was likely the same type of sponge used in Roman area latrines for

wiping.⁸⁸ Thus, Christ was possibly reduced in his final pre-resurrection moments to eating and drinking remnants of dung and urine as his enemies taunted him (Luke 18:32, 23:36; cf. 2 Kgs. 18:27).

Furthermore, Christ was rejected and despised (Isa. 53:3), covered up like indecent dung as he was buried in the earth (Matt. 12:40; cf. Deut. 23:13). The King of Kings was mocked as if he were a crapulent king (Matt. 27:29, 37, 42 cf. Judg. 3). The power of God (Rom. 1:16) was rejected and ridiculed as being the power of a detestable dung god (Matt. 12:24). The royal robe of the true anointed was torn away (John 19:23–24 cf. 1 Sam. 24:3), and the true king seemed to have his kingdom taken from him (John 18:33–40 cf. 1 Sam. 24:3). The Romans mocked him with a fake regal mantle (John 19:2,5), one soiled with rejection, reviling the true priest-king who had eternal unstained garments (Zech. 3:3–4 cf. Rev. 3:4–5, 18). Christ hung upon the cross, as if torn by dogs who eat their own dung (Ps. 22:16), with a mocking crown placed upon his head (John 19:2).

The true God was treated like one who led others to false gods (Mk. 14:64 cf. 1 Kgs. 18:27; 2 Kgs. 9:37; Matt. 12:24). At the place of the Skull, his hands and feet were spread out in the open (Mk. 15:22; cf. 2 Kgs. 9:37; Jer. 8:2). He was trodden down to the point where he was unrecognizable, like dung scattered abroad (Isa. 53:3; cf. 2 Kgs. 9:37). His body was laid in a garden tomb, a Jezreel of death (cf. 2 Kgs. 9:30–37), only after dogs had encompassed him (John 19:41 cf. 2 Kgs. 9:36). The glorious temple of his body (John 2:19) was reduced to a pile of dung as zealous religious leaders declared him a filthy idol (John 10:33; cf. 2 Kgs. 10:18–27). A

⁸⁸ Ana Olga Koloski-Ostrow, "Roman Latrines," *Archaeology Odyssey* 7, no. 3 (2004): 49.

righteous Benjaminite⁸⁹ extended his “left hand” (Judg. 3:12–30) to deliver the dung-treated corpse of Christ to be covered (John 19:38).

Moreover, the true vine of the vineyard (John 15:1–5 cf. Isa. 5) was despised, cut down, and treated as no better than manure (Lk. 13:6–9). As the cup of wrath was poured upon him (Matt. 26:39), his lifeblood was poured out like dung upon the ground under true cosmic judgment (cf. Zeph. 1:17). The bread of life (John 6:35) had become the bread of defilement (Eze. 4:12–14), a sign of exile under the judgment of God. The true priest (Heb. 2:17) had the dung of sin smeared upon him, and he was surely taken away to it (cf. Mal. 2:2–4), laid in a tomb-pit (cf. Job:31).

The true temple (John 2:19) was treated like an enemy of the temple, with a ruler ordering that he be impaled upon timber and his life reduced to dung (cf. Ezra 6:11). The Prince of Peace (Lk. 2:11; cf. Isa. 6:9) was reduced to the ash heap (Lam. 4:5). The Word-made flesh (John 1:14) was treated as *skubalon* (cf. Phil 3:8) in the skin.

And all of this for what? Atonement; in all of its highlights and hues. Christ, the substitute, became as dung so that the justice of God could be satisfied on behalf of his people (Rom. 3:26; 5:12). Christ the victor became as dung so that the serpent would lick the dust of the heel of the Son of God (Gen. 3:16). The victorious peg of the cross crushed the snakish skull (cf. Rom. 16:20)—a dragon reduced to a smoldering pile of feces (Rev. 20:7–10), with sin and death defeated. Christ the victor became as dung so that the true crapulent king, Satan, fat on pride, would be stabbed through with righteous deception that he did not ascertain (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18, Col. 2:15); that old false god reduced to what false gods are.

⁸⁹ The location of Arimathea was attested by Eusebius and Jerome as being in the land of Benjamin. See: John D. Barry et al., eds., “Arimathea,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Christ the true Adam exchanged the sin-soiled garments of his people, so that they may be clothed with righteous priestly garments (Eph. 4:24, 6:14; cf. Rev. 3:18, 7:9; Zech. 3:3–4). Christ, full of love, emptied himself (Philp. 2:5) to the point of being manure, all sovereignly to bring forth everlasting life out of what seemed to be a useless death (cf. John 12:24). Christ drank the cup of sinful, dungy blood and ate the bread of defilement for his people under a holy law, and traded them for a salvific feast of pure cup and holy bread (Matt. 26:26–29 cf. Isa. 25). The perfect image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) restored the image of the accursed man of dust to the image of the God-breathed man of heaven (1 Cor. 15:49). Christ exchanged places with dead-as-dung sinners to bring them back into the kingdom, not by the dung gate, but by the Sheep Gate of the Shepherd King (John 10:7–18). The eternal Life (John 14:6) freely gave himself, incurring the dungy wages of death for his people (Rom. 6:23).

Yet, the death of Christ cannot be divorced from his resurrection and ascension. The aspects of the resurrection and ascension within the mosaic of atonement also pertains to a robust biblical theology of dung in unique ways. The eternal word of life (1 John. 1:1) redeemed his people and reconciled the world unto God (2 Cor. 5:19) by defeating the cosmic enemies whom he triumphed over by his death and resurrection (Col. 2:8–15). The love of God was displayed in Christ becoming dung, that which is void of life. But death could not hold him (1 Cor. 15:55) and he was raised on the third day for the justification of his elect (Rom. 4:25). He ascended to majesty on high (Eph. 4:8), where he continually intercedes as the Word-made flesh, the true priest-king (Rom. 8:34, cf. John 1:1, Heb. 7). Christ was spread out like manure on the ground. Manure by itself is disgusting — but, put upon the ground with a seed falling into it, life sprouts forth bearing fruit (John 12:24).

Thus, the atoning work of Christ in relation to the dung–sin symbol majestically displays the sovereignty and omnipotence of God. God sovereignly uses the dung of death to bring fruitful, everlasting life for his people (Rom. 5). The curse of thorns (Gen 3:17, cf. Heb. 6:8) is put upon the blessed savior who fertilizes creation unto restoration (Rom. 8:18–39). God mightily conquers sin and death in the most unexpected way, like a vineyard keeper bringing forth life by using foul manure (Lk. 13:8); eternal life budding out of the dung of death (Rom. 6:10).

The Ethical Realm

In his inaugural address as the newly established chair of biblical theology at Princeton in 1894, Geerhardus Vos stated the following: “A Biblical Theology imbued with the devout spirit of humble faith in the revealed Word of God, will enrich the student with all this wealth of living truth, making him in the highest sense a householder, bringing forth out of his treasures things new and old.”⁹⁰ As a pioneer of the specific field of biblical theological studies, Vos was keenly aware that biblical theology is not merely exegetical and systematic theory, but is rather ethical. A biblical theology of dung is surely one of exegetical insights and systematic framing. However, a biblical theology of dung that only remains within and never expresses itself in the ethical dimension is knowledge that puffs up, like spiritual indigestion and constipation.

Fusing the exegetical and hermeneutical propositions presented thus far suggests an ethical dimension that may be best displayed through descriptive analogy. Man not only comes into contact with dung outside of himself but also produces his own dung. A biblical theology of

⁹⁰ Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” in *Inauguration of the Rev. Geerhardus Vos, Ph.D., D.D., as Professor of Biblical Theology*, Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1894), 38.

dung brings forth revelation that, for example, a bowel movement is not a pure physio-biological process but is markedly theological, meant to structure orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The bowel movement of a symbol bearer is not one of mere relief but can and should be used as a concretizing of theological truth.

The ethical praxis engendered by a biblical theology of dung views a bowel movement as a relief, like sin being rejected and ejected out of the camp, away from the presence of God and his people; a relief like sin being driven into the realm of death that the unbound life of fellowship in Eden may thrive; a relief like the serpent cast to the dung heap where he can lick his fill unto death; a relief where the futility of sin is mocked as it squeaks out funny sounds as it leaves, creating a stink, drawing attention to itself like a false god; a relief where it piles itself up big but is ultimately nothing for the atoning waters of purgation, which will deluge it away; a relief that something so reviling and gross would be removed from the image bearer, like sin removed that man may stand before God clean like Joshua; a relief that in his mercy, God has burnt up that indecent sin rather than smear it all over the face in rebuke; and a relief that even in a sinful state, no better than a pile of dung, God lifted his people from the ash heap and promises that every enemy of holiness shall be brought low, cursed to rot in death, like dung upon the ground.

A biblical theology of dung gives way to the practical outworking of Calvin's famous opening sentence of his *Institutes*: "The whole sum of our wisdom which is worth calling true and certain is practically comprised of two parts: that is, the knowledge of God and of ourselves."⁹¹ To do the work of theology, even that pertaining to dung, is both knowing God and living in light of such knowledge — the symbol bearer being restored to a truer state of

⁹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 23.

reflection. This theological knowledge and application, as Frame asserts, is knowing God “as Lord; knowing him at his initiative, in obedient response to his Word, as the one in whom we live and move and have our being. Theology also is knowing our world and knowing ourselves in relation to him, through his revelation, and therefore knowing him under the situational, normative, and existential perspectives.”⁹² This gives way to “the application of the Word by persons to the world and to all areas of human life.”⁹³ A biblical theology of dung surely fits within this perspective, even if it is a biblical theology that may seemingly be thought of as embarrassing. Yet, as mentioned previously, a biblical theology of dung cannot truly actualize unless the person and work of Christ are rooted in the heart of the ethical observer. Every relief from sin, every mock of death, every rejection and ejection of defilement, find their telos in Jesus Christ who became as dung for the glory of his father and the good of his people.

⁹² John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 70.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 70–72.

CONCLUSION

The preliminary thesis of this work asserted that the Scriptures contain a theology of dung. The zenith of this biblical theology of dung comes when the semantic and conceptual counterparts pertaining to dung in the Scriptures are synthesized, resulting in dung as a key scriptural symbol for sin. The Scriptures employ dung as a key symbol for sin. Dung as a key symbol for sin concretizes the abstract concept of sin, expressing the scriptural attitude concerning sin. Thus, a methodical and measured march through the explicit semantic references and conceptual cognates pertaining to dung in the Scriptures was essential to establish the preliminary connection between dung and sin. This connection between dung and sin is seen across the spectrum of Scripture.

The Pentateuch portrays dung in connection to sin offerings, the purgation rite of the red heifer, and the excremental governmentality of the holy war camp. The fecal focus of the five books of Moses subtly asserts within the context of each occurrence of dung, that wherever dung is mentioned within the Scriptures, sin is in proximity. This contextual display preliminarily illuminates that sin, like dung, must be rejected and ejected. YHWH initiates this attitude regarding sin in the sacrificial rites, where he details the explicit rejection of the dung of atoning sacrifice, commanding the rejected portion of the animal to be destroyed by fire away from his presence. The purgation rite of the red heifer in Numbers 19 also displays a specific destruction of a specific sacrifice, dung and all, which issues purgation of impurity brought about through contact with death. Thus, the explicit details concerning dung's connection to sin and purification clearly link the dung-sin symbol to the realm of atonement and expiation; sin must be removed from the holy presence of YHWH and dealt with. Death, the byproduct of sin, must also be purged. The final Pentateuchal considerations of dung display fecal matter as an indecent

and obscene mass that YHWH abhors. Surely, the command to the war camp to relieve their bowels outside the camp and bury their feces does not indicate that dung itself is sinful. The strict governmentality of YHWH concerning the dung of the war camp acts as a parable; sin, like dung, must be rejected and ejected from the body of the camp, away from the presence of YHWH.

The Former Prophets display dung as something worth mocking. Hence, as sin is rejected and ejected, it is to be mocked. While mockery may include humor and satire, mockery does not imply that what is being ridiculed is inherently funny. Rather, mockery robs people and objects of their self-seriousness and prideful power; mockery is a tool of humiliation. The Former Prophets deride empires, individuals, and false gods as dung, further solidifying the symbolic link between sin and dung. Kings and queens who become full of sin are rejected and ejected, mocked as they are reduced to piles of dung. False gods are shown to be what they truly are: piles of dung. The worshippers of these dung gods are likewise mocked and reduced to the same fecal fate of becoming what they worship. The Former Prophets do not denigrate the initial concepts of sin as dung postulated in the Pentateuch—namely, rejection and ejection. Rather, rejection and ejection in the Former Prophets is heightened via mockery, which is a satirical form of rejection and ejection.

The Latter Prophets push mockery of sin into the realm of disgusting sensory shock. The sensory shock of the Latter Prophets underscores the scriptural attitude that sin, while worthy of derision, is not intrinsically humorous but disgusting and vile. To be reduced to dung in judgment is to become accursed, rejected, and ejected by YHWH, mocked for attempting to rebel against his sovereign reign. The Latter Prophets provide the broadest implementation of the

dung–sin symbol within the scriptural corpus and illuminate that being mockingly reduced to a state of dung because of sin is of the highest order of judgment by YHWH.

The Writings carry forward the various scriptural stances regarding dung and sin to show that being reduced to dung is a state to be delivered from. To find oneself or nation in a state of dung is to recognize the judgment and justice of God. Conversely, desiring to see an enemy reduced to dung or relegated to the dung hill is a call for justice. This inversion is a plea with the divine for atonement and expiation of sin and a reversal of judgment.

Finally, the NT advances the same ideas related to dung and sin initiated in the OT. Like dung, sin is to be rejected and ejected. Thus, the wicked who reject and eject God shall receive their reward of being rejected and ejected to Hell, the eternal, smoldering dung hill. Sin, like dung, is to be mocked, regardless the shape of the heap of iniquity; like putridly proud religious who foster fecal followers, leading them to their father Satan, who licks up and wallows in the refuse upon the ground. Sin, like dung, is vile and must be shown for what it is by comparing the gross to the glorious, like manure and Messiah. Sin, like dung, is a state one must avoid and be rescued from by God, lest he or she be perpetually burnt up in the eternal dunghill of judgment.

Collating the explicit semantic and conceptual counterparts related to dung from across the Scriptures exhibits dung to be a dominant symbol used by the Scriptures to concretize the abstract concept of sin and related abstract concepts. Thus, like dung, sin is full of death; sin is filthy; sin is indecent; sin is defiling. Realizing the symbolic nature of language itself and how the Scriptures concretize abstract concepts in general, is integral to a biblical worldview, biblical theology, and truly robust biblical hermeneutic. Since dung is a foremost symbol for sin, the sin-destroying person and work of Christ are thus connected to dung. Indeed, the rejection and

ejection of Christ in the atonement depicts the Messiah mocked unto manure, being treated as dung on behalf of his people.

Therefore, coming into contact with dung in the “real world” should cause those who operate within a biblical worldview to slow down and consider the implications of a biblical theology of dung. Such a biblical theology imparts the scriptural stance regarding sin; such a biblical theology teaches the glorious relief of sin being rejected and ejected, mocked and reviled, ultimately in the person and work of Christ.

Thus, with all that has been presented, the dung–sin symbol is clearly seen and forcefully felt. Far from being a farce, a biblical theology of dung exhibits theological gravitas, with the substance therein purposed towards application in the ethical realm. Since this is the case, the words of Paul to Timothy that consummated this work are indeed vindicated: all Scripture is God-breathed, profitable in every way, and Christocentric, even the points of Scripture that speak about dung.

And yet, one logically deduced question arises here at the conclusion of this work in need of an answer. Since the Scriptures present dung as a dominate symbol for sin, does this imply dung itself is evil or sinful? To answer precisely: no. God made the body of man good (Gen. 1:26–31). Although man sinned and brought the effects of sin upon his body, the good body God made for Adam did not mystically change to include a digestive and elimination system post-fall. While any and all consideration of how excrement functioned in Eden is ultimately speculative, a satisfactory answer is obtainable.

A careful contemplation of the entirety of Scripture leads to the notion that excrement before the Fall, likely didn't not emit a foul odor. It is conceivable the rank odor of excrement is merely a consequence of sin affecting the body of man in his digestive system. Sin not only

affected man, but all of creation. In fact, the very earth from which man was formed became subjected to the curse and byproduct of sin: death (cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:17). The covenantal curse of Mt. Ebal in Deuteronomy 28 implies sin against YHWH will result in the bodies of covenant breakers being left unburied to return to the dust by rotting upon the ground. This threat of YHWH was a deterrent against covenant infidelity which brought forth more death. Hence, the link of excrement rotting on the ground and the bodies of covenant breakers rotting similarly is linked with death and the smell of rot is simultaneously a reminder and deterrent.¹

In conclusion, the thesis of this work has been substantiated by a careful examination of the Scriptures and dissemination of its message as it pertains to dung. Thus, a biblical theology of dung as presented in this work is but a mere example of the words of Paul to Timothy — the very words which began this work—as being vindicated: all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable in every way, especially those that speak about dung. The scatological references of Scripture are profitable for teaching about the seriousness of sin, the foulness of death, the fierce justice of God, and the glory of the atonement; profitable for reproof and correction, for being judged unto dung is a wretched state the Scriptures call all to avoid; profitable for training in righteousness, for the symbol of dung translates to the attitude one should have in regard to sin. Indeed, a biblical theology of dung is profitable in every way, especially in “making one wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15) since Christ is theology incarnate.

¹ James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, TX: Institute of Christian Economics, 1985), 64–65.

Appendix: Potential Difficulties Preaching a Biblical Theology of Dung

Asserting that there is a definitive biblical theology of dung is likely to engender a response of laughter, an admixture of hilarity and humiliation. The inevitability of comedy within such a theology is due to potty humor being ubiquitous in the modern age. Western culture is replete with examples of jokes, movie scenes, song lyrics, and even fashion that exudes the humor of dung. Embarrassment of such a topic is likely to be expressed through awkward laughter and extends from either the taboo of impoliteness regarding such “low brow humor” or from the lofty position of progress. The hypothetically embarrassed person scowls as he internally monologues: “Surely society is past the point of potty humor! There need not be communication in that manner anymore. That kind of talk is not for the church.”

Yet, taboo and progress often overlooks the irony of the advanced “Jetsons” of the 21st century reverting to communicating mainly in hieroglyphs—with a staple emoji being the poop one. It is certainly one thing to assert there is a profitable biblical theology of dung in philosophical academic circles or maybe at the youth group campout where potty humor is the *lingua franca*, but heaven forbid there be poop in the pulpit. Surely, the snickering is sensible.

Yet, while a biblical theology of dung does contain some humor, such humor does not have the end goal of merely “being funny.” A biblical theology of dung pertains to sin. Sin is to be mocked and laughed at, following the example of our King (cf. Ps. 2) but mocked and laughed at because of the futility of sin, not because of anything inherently funny. Sin is not a jovial matter; sin is not a joke. Sin is to be mocked because it often manifests itself in the most obscene and absurd ways, warranting a hearty laugh that communicates knowledge of the wonderous works of God.

“Poop talk from the pulpit” has the plausibility of being deemed sacrilegious. Indeed, teaching with impure motives, such as desiring to be shocking or controversial, is very sacrilegious. As Keller rightly notes, “[L]ong stories, florid language, and dramatic gestures can captivate attention while the actual message is ignored.”¹ But, in the shadow of the office of ‘prophet,’ the preacher must acknowledge the Prophets of old, yea the True Prophet himself, who spoke about excrement in theologically significant ways and in particular circumstances. The very work of Christ has dung-theology undertones meant to stimulate sensory and theological shock, like a prophet baking bread over a pile of feces.

Nevertheless, much like the elimination process itself, propounding a biblical theology of dung must be governed, and the preacher must be discerning. Just as the relief of the bowels can’t be undertaken wherever and whenever, so it is with teaching and preaching a biblical theology of dung. Thus, this meta-perspective sheds light on the twofold difficulty pertaining to preaching a biblical theology of dung: presentation and context.

First, there is a legitimate strain in how a preacher or teacher would espouse a biblical theology of dung. A biblical theology of dung—in the estimation of this author—is not a theological focus that is worthy of its own sermon series. Rather, a biblical theology of dung should be seen as a tool within the biblical worldview toolbox that the preacher can utilize organically via exposition or application.

This organic exposition and application are multifaceted. For example, if a preacher were expounding Deuteronomy and giving attention to the war camp regulation of dung, drawing out the principle of sin being rejected and ejected because of its accursed nature is likely to guard the

¹ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 20.

integrity of the text and the attention of the audience. The preacher may even address the fact that this stipulation is odd, and we may find it amusing at first, but ultimately, there is a seriousness to the governmentality of feces in Deuteronomy 23.

On the other hand, organic application of a biblical theology of dung can arise out of exposition or the necessity to highlight the disgusting nature of sin. Far too often, the preacher falls into the homiletical trap of faithfully presenting sin as something bad while only ever staying within the metaphorical realm. Thus, a faithful preacher may come to a text that contains no direct reference to dung or similar concepts and refer to dung as it pertains to sin, helping the audience understand that “God views sin like that.” Using the tool of a biblical theology of dung in this manner drives the serious and appalling nature of sin into the heart of the audience, and if used properly, can be used to highlight the redemptive-historical aspect within the theology itself.² Remaining in the metaphorical realm is often the result of softening the scriptural presentation of sin out of fear of offending the audience.

Yet, this is not an expository phenomenon linked exclusively to sin. Commenting upon the biblical presentation of God, Peterson asks, “Will we let God be as he is, majestic and holy, vast and wondrous, or will we always be trying to whittle him down to the size of our small minds, insist on confining him within the boundaries we are comfortable with, refuse to think of him other than in images that are convenient to our lifestyle? But then we are not dealing with the God of creation and the Christ of the cross, but with a dime-store reproduction of something made in our image, usually for commercial reasons.”³ The core of Peterson’s observation can be

² John M. Frame, “Ethics, Preaching, and Biblical Theology,” https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/http%3A%5E%5Ethirdmill.org%5Earticles%5Ejoh_frame%5EPT.Frame.Ethics_Preaching_BT.html/at/Ethics%2C+Preaching%2C+and+Biblical+Theology.

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 114.

used regarding sin: “Will we let sin be sin? Are we willing to let the Bible shock us with its depiction and description of sin?” The mature and faithful Christian must be willing to oblige.

To give a hypothetical example of a preacher using the biblical theology of dung for application related to sin, consider Acts 17:16 where Paul is described as provoked to anger by all the idols he sees in Athens. Saying “he hates the sin of idolatry and wants Christ to be known” is certainly exegetically faithful. However, exegetical fidelity can be anemic in application. This specific text could make a lasting impression by utilizing the theological tool of a biblical theology of dung. Imagine hearing a preacher present an application from Acts 17:16 in this manner:

“Paul was angered and disgusted by the rampant idolatry he saw, and rightfully so. Did you know that in the Old Testament, the term for idols was a play on words that mean dung gods? That’s what God truly thinks about idolatry. When we bow down to false gods of any kind, God is calling us to realize we are bowing down to piles of feces. How disgusting is this sin of idolatry? God desires his people to think the same way. False gods are disgusting, maggot-covered piles of dung. If you’re uncomfortable, then the biblical presentation of sin, which is often manifested as connected to dung, has done its job. Paul sees the ubiquity of idol worship in Athens and explains how we should react if guided by the Scriptures. Paul’s reaction is not merely anger towards a vile sin or on the basis of a pricked conscience. Paul’s anger is provoked by how disgusting and vile idolatry is. Imagine if you went on vacation to the Mediterranean and, as soon as you stepped off the plane, at every corner there was a huge pile of feces, either from humans, animals, or both. Do you think you’d enjoy your time there? Of course not! Toleration of idolatry is like that, and that’s why Paul’s reaction is so pertinent to us and must be the example we follow.”

Further application of a biblical theology of dung is related to the biblical presentation of the atonement of Christ. This is a great difficulty to consider since relaying “Christ as refuse” may seem irreverent and, in some instances, come close to being sacrilegious if the preacher is not balanced. Yet, as has been presented in this work, there are aspects of the atonement that clearly present Christ as being reduced to metaphorical refuse. Using the tool of a biblical theology of dung regarding the atonement requires mature balance. Just as there is a mosaic of atonement theories, there must be a balanced mosaic in preaching the atoning work of Christ, which underscores the gravitas of that glorious work. A biblical theology of dung is one way to highlight this, but not the only way.

Nevertheless, utilizing a biblical theology of dung, whether in relation to sin, atonement, or some other contiguous realm, is fundamentally aimed at preaching Christ. Using the shocking language of a biblical theology of dung, within proper bounds, helps to reveal how every aspiration, desire, goal, failure, flop, or sin is fulfilled in or laid upon the glorious Suffering Servant.⁴

A second difficulty in preaching a biblical theology of dung is the various contextual difficulties. Is the audience mature enough to handle a reference or brief discussion of theological dung? Will they be the ones who deem such speech sacrilege? Or are they the audience who will hear it as a farce?

The contextual difficulty applies in reverse to the preacher as well. Is he mature enough to know when to wield the tool of a biblical theology of dung? Is he able to distinguish the texts of Scripture that highlight the mocking aspects of such a theology from those that highlight the reviling nature of dung? Is the preacher too immature to have this balance, falling into the trap of

⁴ Keller, *Preaching*, 20.

making a biblical theology of dung a joke? These are concerns that must be considered in each unique context.

If the preacher is mature and wise enough to brandish the tool of a biblical theology of dung within any given sermon, he will face the difficulty of assessing the receptibility of such a tool. A traditional, high-liturgy Presbyterian church is likely to be offended or turned off by such talk. An edgy, seeker-sensitive SBC mega-church likely won't. And even if they are, the youth group will certainly enjoy it.

Reading the room requires deliberate thought on how to use the tool of a biblical theology of dung. To press the tool symbol forward, a biblical theology of dung is like a folding multi-tool. A multi-tool is similar to a Swiss Army knife, only larger. It has pliers, various-headed screwdrivers, usually a serrated blade, a smooth blade, and other instruments, each of which folds out of the handle or stock. A biblical theology of dung is like this, in that a mature preacher must be able to know which aspect of the tool to use and for how long. A traditional church with a higher liturgy or a more affluent culture may only be able to handle flipping out the smooth-edged blade for the purpose of running it along the packing tape of the sermon. Or, in other words, nothing too dangerous; it's useful, and it's a gateway to the content of the text or application, which will truly edify that specific audience. Even with a text that is "hyper focused" on dung, like Malachi 2, an audience like this would likely benefit more from focusing on the tendency of God's people to fall into the mundanity of liturgical motions. Highlighting what God thinks of such worship, as dung, will likely be enough "prophetic speak" to capture the attention of that specific audience.

On the other end of the room, there is a need for sobriety and balance as well. The youth group of the modern church will likely be able to handle the pliers of the multi-tool as it pulls

them into the passage, even if first through laughter and intrigue. Such an audience will immediately be drawn to the abstract nature of such a tool, which the preacher must use craftily to highlight sin.

Further contextual consideration is that of the preacher sensibly assessing his homiletical maturity in relation to audience maturity. If he is going to use the tool of a biblical theology of dung to underscore the atonement, his communication must be of the utmost seriousness. He cannot allow himself to present Christ outside the camp as a joke. And if a snicker squeaks forth from a 14-year-old or a 41-year-old dad, digging down into the seriousness of the theology and lovingly addressing the fact that what is being espoused is not a joke is likely to aid in avoiding miscommunication. Often, a simple general rebuke from the pulpit can sober up those who are wandering off in the wrong directions and draw attention to what is being said.

Sobriety in assessment also manifests in knowing that with such a tool, there will always be the potential for miscommunication. For example, in America, dung is linked with potty humor. Even when used in a biblically accurate manner, dung is linked with potty humor, which engenders a difficult wall to scale regardless of homiletical prowess. To posit an example, actor Jim Carey is known for one thing: being a comedian. He has tried a handful of times to do a drama or thriller. While Carey can act across film genres, his non-comedic movies are not what he is known for. Jim Carey is known for Lloyd Christmas and The Mask, not whatever the name of his character was in The Number 23. So it is with preaching and teaching from the pulpit. The preacher may propound a biblical theology of dung in a pastorally serious way, and because of the “cultural caste,” the force and seriousness may fall flat upon the congregation or audience because they naturally want to giggle.

Such a reality should not deter a faithful preacher from using the tool of a biblical theology of dung but should cause him to be sober minded in his contextual assessment. Such a sober assessment is aware that even well-intentioned preachers may accidentally get stuck in the rut of potty humor within a biblical theology of dung. After all, dung symbolizes sin. Sin certainly deserves to be mocked and laughed at. But sin must ultimately be rejected and scorned. There is a fine line between mockery and laughing in lightness and celebration. For example, there is a youth-oriented book entitled “Finding God in the Bathroom: Enter the Throne Room.”⁵ The content ultimately makes light of sin and ends up presenting sin as a joke which only teenage boys — and desperate seminary professors — would find funny. Knowing where the line is and knowing that each specific audience may place that line at different positions is a vital awareness the preacher must have if he would utilize a biblical theology of dung in an edifying way.

In the end, the tool of a biblical theology of dung is ultimately a tool of ethical recalibration. Just as the pulpit in the shadow of the office of prophet, proper use of shocking language by the preacher calls the audience to change their thinking and behavior; and what better way to ensure memorability and enactment of such ethical recalibration than by extending such a unique theological application.⁶

Awareness of these issues is crucial for properly preaching a biblical theology of dung. Recognizing that a biblical theology of dung is a tool and not a sermon series is of great importance. Utilization of such a tool requires precision and discernment for the sake of maintaining the integrity of any given textual exposition or application. And yet, the preacher

⁵ Brian C. Johnson, *Finding God in the Bathroom: Enter the Throne Room* (Wordcraft Press, 2020).

⁶ Keller, *Preaching*, 178.

must not be afraid to utilize the language and imagery within a biblical theology of dung to shock any audience to the senses the Scriptures would require of them, even if it causes a few red faces.

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