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THE FORMATIVE WISDOM OF THE “BREAD OF LIFE”
DISCOURSE

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THE FORMATIVE WISDOM OF THE “BREAD OF LIFE”
DISCOURSE

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To my wife, Amy
for the conversations that have inspired my thoughts,
for the support that has sustained my efforts,
and for the love that has propelled me forward.

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PREFACE

The process of writing this thesis has been equally rewarding and challenging, and without the meaningful contributions of instructors, advisors, editors, and colleagues, it would have run the risk of falling completely between the cracks of chaotic life. First, and foremost, many thanks are due to the wonderful and godly faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Without the inspiration of such thought-provoking scholars, this project would lack a certain depth and spiritual authenticity. Professors Peter Gentry, Michael Haykin, Gregg Allison, and Jonathan Pennington facilitated transformative seminars that shaped the heart and sharpened the mind. Second, very special thanks are due to Jonathan Pennington, who also served as my faculty advisor and stimulated much thought in classroom discussion and informal conversation. He has taught me to engage with and embody, by the grace of God, the formative wisdom of the biblical text. Thanks are also in order to Ben Hussung who spent countless hours during a busy season in his own life reviewing my work and offering valuable input and advice.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This work is about the Gospel of John and how its narrative content instructs our hermeneutics. The whole scriptural narrative functions within the self-revelatory act of God and testifies to the centrality of Christ in the process. Several symbols and motifs are employed in service of the divine self-disclosure. The story of Israel is undoubtedly the conceptual infrastructure to which the Apostle John continually points and in which the Christ event (the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth) is to be understood. But John is not content for the story of Israel to be the predominantly controlling theme of his gospel. Indeed, the eternal Word takes center stage and the story of God's transcendent work in bringing about new creation comes to the forefront of the Fourth Gospel. It is clear from the outset that Jesus does not merely enter the story of Israel, but transcends it.¹ Indeed, the story of Israel finds its ultimate coherence when it is taken up into the preeminent story of Christ.

In short, the Christocentric and figural hermeneutic that is set forth in John's Gospel upholds the centrality of the eternal word as the one in whom all things come into existence. As a result, Israel's Scriptures are an interpretive matrix comprised of "latent prefigurations" and "anticipatory traces" of Christ, the eternal Word, as the self-revelation of Israel's God.² This

¹ It should be noted that "transcendence" is used in this project to capture the essence of John's presentation of the pre-existent Word. John describes Jesus as being "with God" in the beginning (1:2), the creator of all things (1:3), the one who can disclose "heavenly things" because he "descended from heaven" (3:12-13), and the one who is "from above" and is "not of this world" (8:23; 17:16). Because of Christ's transcendence, the Apostle John can say of Jesus that he knows the inner existence of all men (2:24-25), he redefines the locus of worship (4:21-24), and sees what the Father sees (8:38).

² The above quotations are from Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 448-9.

means that the Old Testament is conceived in light of God's ultimate self-revelation in Christ. At every turn, we encounter signposts, images, figures, institutions, and events whose foundational significance remains hidden until the unveiling of Christ in the fullness of time. In the Gospel of John, the story of the pre-existent Word serves a magisterial role in the Evangelist's hermeneutics. Christ is the one in whom (and by whom) physical life comes into being; he is the author of eternal life as well, the one in whom it finds inauguration and consummation. Thus, the story of Israel ultimately serves in a ministerial capacity, subservient in John's hermeneutics to the greater goal of God's self-disclosure.

In the following work, we will observe the many facets of John's Gospel in which the Old Testament story of Israel is transfigured in Christ, how the symbolic world of the narrative is taken up into—and transformed by—Jesus himself. Such facets will include the cyclical unfolding of Israel's calendar, with the various festivals celebrated throughout the year. We will also examine the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple, the Messianic expectations of the Jewish people, and the formative wisdom of Torah.

Because we are concerned about the narrative content of John's Gospel within a general framework of hermeneutic inquiry, the following work also presents a roundtable discussion on interpretive methodology. We will survey three hermeneutic methods that center on the worldview-story model of interpretation: Jeffrey de Waal Dryden, who accentuates the ethical (and/or moral) dimensions of narrative criticism; N. T. Wright, who reconstructs the history and worldview of Second Temple Judaism in order to sift exegetical golden nuggets from the riverbed of Israel's story; and Richard B. Hays, who prioritizes the imaginative processes of the human psyche within a retrospective and inter-textual reading of Israel's history. Each method has its merits; but each has its limitations as well. In the end, we will unpack and defend the following thesis: *the Spirit narrates all believers into Israel's story through participatory union with Christ, and the result is story immersion for worldview transformation.*

Through story immersion, we begin to think and behave differently. We are transformed. But the concept of story immersion for worldview transformation is more than mere

epistemology and ethics. As the Gospel of John unfolds, we begin to discern and assimilate an eschatological, apocalyptic, and biblically centered worldview. This happens through Spirit-union with Christ, which is the essence of story participation in Israel’s grand narrative. Thus, we must interpret Scripture in light of our double participation: we participate in the story of Israel because we have come to participate in Christ.

Once more, our goal in this project will be to develop a hermeneutic method that centers on story immersion for worldview transformation, according to the narrative content of John’s Gospel. To do so, we will first evaluate three approaches to narrative hermeneutics, distilling from each the valuable contributions toward the ultimate goal. The first approach is called wisdom hermeneutics, concerning which we will provide an in-depth analysis. The emphasis here is due to a few specific factors: (1) the thorough Biblicism of such an approach; and (2) its clear prioritization of synthesizing and recovering traditional methods of narrative interpretation. We have already introduced Dryden, a textual ethicist who seeks the moral philosophy and ethical instruction of biblical texts through the wisdom agenda they promote. He will be our first guide along the way.

The second approach, then, is essentially textual historiography. The method seeks to utilize the cultural and sociological elements of the text in order to reconstruct the worldview of its ancient author and recipients. This approach has produced invaluable tools by which modern readers of Scripture might gain entrance into the world of the text and apprehend—perhaps even be clothed by—some of its worldview commitments.³ Our guide in the second approach will be N. T. Wright, a textual archeologist who finds the significance of the biblical story in historical reconstruction and worldview evaluation. Because of his vast body of published materials, our

³ Wright discerns the major “signposts” of Israel’s story through the work of historical reconstruction and worldview analysis. He defines the term as follows: “*Signposts* name a reality and point us in a direction. Likewise... signposts name realities that all human cultures value as well as pointing beyond themselves to the meaning of life, to the meaning of the world. They indicate, in fact, how we ought to “make sense” of the world—how we ought to understand the way the world is and the challenge of being human within it.” N. T. Wright, *Broken Signposts: How Christianity Makes Sense of the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020), 5.

investigation of Wright will be mainly limited to his four volumes on Christian origins, though other works will be referenced to add clarity.

The third and final approach is centered on narrative theory (or narratology) and the fundamental role stories play in identifying people groups, shaping behaviors, and answering major worldview questions. Our guide here will be Richard B. Hays, a biblical philologist who discerns the meaning of the biblical story in the literary structures and devices employed by inspired authors of various texts.⁴ Hays is well known for his work in discerning textual echoes, identifying narrative substructures within didactic/epistolary texts, and reading Scripture retrospectively, beginning with the resurrection of Christ and working backwards.⁵ In addition, we will note Hays and his understanding of the Pauline Epistles. He believes that the Apostle Paul narrates Gentile believers into Israel's story by promoting and often effecting a conversion of the imagination in his Gentile audiences.⁶ As a result, these recipients are able to enact and advance the main themes of Old Testament Scripture.

Here, then, is the chartered course whereby we will proceed. We will devote the entirety of chapter 2 to a discussion of Dryden and wisdom hermeneutics. This is because of his foundational desire to promote recognition and participation in the wisdom agendas of Scripture. In terms of story immersion for worldview transformation, both these factors are of utmost importance. We will discuss an appropriate disposition by which the reader must approach the

⁴ For our purposes, the widely accepted definition of "philology" will be adopted here. Many sources define philology as the study of language—whether encountered in oral tradition or written documents—but more broadly understand it in terms of textual and literary criticism. Thus, philology is generally defined as the study of literary texts to establish their veracity and discern their meaning. It would seem fitting that Richard Hays, who has pursued this kind of biblical study, should be called a biblical philologist.

⁵ On textual echoes, see Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, as well as Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). Concerning narrative substructure, see Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002). And on the retrospective hermeneutic, see Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

⁶ See Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

biblical story and through which he begins to participate in its unfolding drama. Further, we will seek to uphold the legitimacy of Dryden's argument, that Scripture itself has an intentional formational agenda contained within it. Only when readers become aware of (and submissive to) this wisdom agenda is the foundational meaning and formative intent of Scripture realized. With biblical interpretation, there must be an accompanying action. Obedience must be appropriately motivated and accomplished. Branches united to Christ, the vine, must bear fruit. For Dryden, the Bible is rightly encountered as the reader identifies and emulates the moral exemplars in the textual narrative.

In chapter 3, we will introduce Wright and Hays as conversation partners in order to show how their hermeneutic methods complement and complete the goals of wisdom hermeneutics. Wright will shed light on the signposts of Old Testament theology that comprised the pillars of the First Century Jewish worldview. These signposts, transfigured in Christ and by the Spirit, serve as the points of entry into the biblical story. They set forth the worldview commitments that must inform—and indeed, transform—the presuppositions and biases of the modern reader of Scripture. Correspondingly, the major contribution of Hays will center on the Spirit-inspired imagination by which the biblical authors—most significantly, the Apostle Paul—narrated Gentile audiences into the story of Israel, making it their own.⁷ Far from a superficial or fanciful story immersion, the substance of Hays' participatory hermeneutic, through the converted imagination, is again centered substantially on Christ and the Spirit.

In chapter 4, we will synthesize the contributions of these three scholars and offer a corrective approach surfacing from the text of John's Gospel. We will unpack this approach more fully as the project unfolds, but let us offer a preview here. With Dryden, we will affirm that the biblical text is living and active, with a formational wisdom agenda at its core. With

⁷ For our purposes, the work of Hays will be adapted according to a Johannine theology, in which story immersion occurs through recognition of transcendence rather than a recovery of historical correspondence.

Wright, we will affirm that the biblical story is built on the backbone of Old Testament signposts, transfigured in Christ and by the Spirit. For Wright, this mean the gap between ancient and modern contexts is collapsed by the transcendent culture and worldview of Scripture. With Hays, we will affirm that story participation is often a matter of converted imaginations, in which the Spirit illuminates various ways contemporary believers actually do participate in the ancient story of Israel. In chapter 4, we will also draw attention to the hermeneutic model presented in the Gospel of John, through which we will seek to evaluate Dryden, Wright, and Hays. In short, my proposal is a hermeneutic model in which the interpreter:

1. *Inhabits a Historical Text.* The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the symbolic world of ancient Israel is fulfilled. The pillars of the Bible’s symbolic world resist all self-referential forms of definition, thereby calling for an abandonment of self to the new identity assigned by story immersion.
2. *Interprets a Living Text.* The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the signposts of Israel’s story are transfigured to unveil their transcendent significance. Believers of all generations participate in the cyclical recapitulation of Israel’s story, which is ultimately coherent within the divine story of God’s self-disclosure.
3. *Imbibes the Formative Intent of the Text.* The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the quality of the divine life is imparted. Any moral, ethical, or formative agendas in John’s Gospel are expressed in terms of union with (and conformity to) Christ, and the fruitful outworking of the divine life by the power of the indwelling Spirit.⁸

The final chapter in our project will focus on the necessary development of these three points. It will also be devoted to a brief review of Israel’s story in John’s Gospel, as taken up into (assumed, or appropriated by Christ) and transfigured in Christ, as well as a more thorough examination of the “Bread of Life” discourse. We will demonstrate how John develops hermeneutic principles within his gospel and thereafter apply them to the aforementioned passage. Our ears will be specifically attuned to the process of story immersion for worldview transformation. Together with our conversation partners, we will seek to enter into the new

⁸ In the end, a fresh perspective will also surface: that is, dogmatic (systematic) theological categories of christology, pneumatology, and soteriology—in which the centrality of Spirit-union with Christ is paramount—must inform our story immersion hermeneutics in order to connect a historical text to a living community, for the purpose of ethical transformation.

world of the biblical text and to find, as the journey unfolds, that our ways of thinking—our identities and ways of inhabiting the world around us... indeed, our very lives—have been irrevocably altered.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WISDOM HERMENEUTICS

The Bible is a wisdom text. We encountered this concept above and must now pause to examine it more carefully. Our task in this chapter will be to engage Dryden as our main conversation partner in order to discern the nature and purpose of the wisdom hermeneutic he advocates, to revisit and develop further the concept of fiduciary epistemology, and to outline the interpretive principles of wisdom hermeneutics.

The Nature & Purpose of Wisdom Literature

The wisdom text of the Bible is formative; it cultivates devotion, belief, desire, and action in conformity to its truth. The entire Bible, as a living text, has an intentional formative and ethical shaping agenda. Here the storyline of the biblical text is almost personified. Dryden leaves room for a biblical theology of his “wisdom text” idea. He argues for a cumulative formational agenda, though not a singular agenda. Different Scriptural genres will offer varying modes of formative intent. Because Dryden has not yet traced his idea throughout the entire biblical narrative, the question becomes, what formative agenda do we find in the text of each biblical book?¹ For our purposes, this will be answered according to the Gospel of John. Dryden is (implicitly, at least) very skeptical of N. T. Wright’s hermeneutic methodology. He says, “The majority of our current reading strategies and critical methodologies, while very good at historical reconstructions, ignore and usually deconstruct this wisdom intentionality. The tools

¹ We will partially answer this question in chap. 4, as it relates to the Gospel of John.

of NT research are designed to answer a set of questions about the origins of early Christianity: the evolution of certain beliefs and practices and the social forces that drove that evolution.”²

We will return to this methodology in chapter 3, when we engage N. T. Wright as one of our main conversation partners. For now, the hermeneutic of wisdom appears to embrace notions of the Bible as a *living text*—not buried in the archeological ash-heap of history—and an *active text* in its formative intentionality. Both of these concepts are right and balanced, according to the conclusions we will draw later on. Dryden is not primarily interested in historical reconstruction, which he neither embraces nor demonizes, because reconstructionist methodology relates more naturally to the historian than to the biblical or textual exegete. Historical reconstruction deals with issues behind the text, in history, and their application to ancient communities.

Implicitly, then, a hermeneutic of wisdom deals with textual (and/or, narrative) analysis of the Bible and is an inter-disciplinary approach to biblical interpretation. Here the exegete is more concerned with transcendence than historicity, attempting to deal with the issues that surface from within the text itself. Unresolved at this point in our investigation of Dryden is the issue of application. Where does the wisdom hermeneutic engage the world “in front” of the text? Where does the modern reader derive a sense of belonging in the grand scriptural storyline?

Dryden resists reading behind the text and prescribes reading at the level of the text. With Karl Barth, he affirms standing with the human author of Scripture, participating with him in the Spirit-revealed subject matter.³ This is the essence of narrative epistemology, or even an

² Jeffery de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 14. To be fair, N. T. Wright seems self-aware of his reconstructionist tendencies and, as such, pens a traditional “ethics” book entitled *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010) that is characteristically insightful and eminently accessible. Generally, however, Wright attempts to bridge the gap between antiquity and modernity through story participation and historical reconstruction.

³ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 15.

apprenticeship epistemology,⁴ in which the modern reader learns from the biblical authors, both human and divine according to a hierarchical order of priority. These authors are the trusted and trustworthy guides necessary for all learning, educating by apprenticeship the ones who engage in their narrative accounts. These readers discern previously undisclosed mysteries by their participation in the written story. As we will come to see, this does not primarily happen in an archeological or historical manner because, due to its transcendence, the text of the Bible is living and active (not dead and buried).

We move past modernism by embracing the function of the biblical text as wisdom formation. We move past the history/theology division and somehow blend them together holistically. Dryden believes that historical research is the path to embracing the wisdom formation of the text of Scripture (16). But, he insists, we must read Scripture in a way that is sensitive to its formative agenda. Historical research serves from behind the text to *inform* the reader. Wisdom hermeneutics serve from within the text to *transform* the reader. And a blending of both methods should yield a reader, in front of the text, who is a sympathetic participant in the biblical story.

One of Dryden's main presuppositions is located in his book's introduction. He believes that the gospel message itself, and the goal of the biblical text, as witness to the gospel message, is the transformation of human moral agency. In short, the Bible presupposes that God's saving work in Christ—and applied by the Holy Spirit—results in the believer's ability to engage in right actions, according to right reasons, and established properly upon right motivations. The gospel creates and sustains the human capacity for moral virtue. Curiously veiled in much of

⁴ One will easily recognize my inspiration for “apprenticeship epistemology” coming from David I. Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship: How the Bible Shapes Our Interpretive Habits and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016). Richard Hays will complement this idea when we engage him as conversation partner in chap. 3. Hays writes, “The interpretation of Israel’s Scripture was central to the Apostle Paul’s thought; we can learn from Paul’s example ample how to read Scripture faithfully; [and] if we do follow his example, the church’s imagination will be converted to see both Scripture and the world in a radically new way.” Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), Introduction, Kindle.

Dryden’s work, then, is a specific and sustained focus on the Holy Spirit. We will return to this notion in our evaluation of wisdom hermeneutics, but it behooves us to introduce it here. The claim that human moral agency is enlivened, and that virtuous behavior (entailing proper motivations) accords with the very formative agenda of Scripture, will need an explicit and repeated link to the transformative, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in order to be biblically sustainable and theologically responsible.⁵

However, the New Testament—and the Bible as a whole—does present a “moral vision” that ethically shapes our lives in the present and prepares us for the consummated Kingdom and the eternal state.⁶ The moral vision simultaneously orders our devotions and identifies objects of greater and lesser value to which we must properly assign our allegiance. As such, the Kingdom of God becomes a “primary orienting desire.”⁷ And as a result, the redemption of human moral agency remains intelligible only as human morality is directed toward God (as giver) and His glory (the proper τέλος of all things, including affections and actions).⁸

The Concept of Fiduciary Epistemology

In the first chapter of his book, Dryden introduces the interplay between epistemology and hermeneutics. In short, he is interested in the relationship between the knower and the known. His goal, as stated in the introduction, will be to define the nature of a “fiduciary

⁵ The Holy Spirit appears as such no more than five times in Dryden’s work: twice in a section quoting and commenting on Luther’s view of justification and sanctification, once in citing Eph 4:25-31, and twice in footnotes concerning Augustinian theology (one footnote confronts the “New Perspective on Paul” in chap. 3 and the other affirms Augustinian hermeneutics in the conclusion). The Spirit is announced in several more places, but here we dare not digress too far. As we will see in chap. 3, my main objection to the works of Dryden, Wright, and Hays, is that only on occasion do these scholars offer a complimentary “tip of the cap” to the Holy Spirit.

⁶ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 18. Dryden cites his inspiration as Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996). Dryden affirms Hays while offering a veiled critique of Wright, which legitimizes our interaction with both conversation partners in chap. 3.

⁷ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 18.

⁸ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 20.

formative encounter with the biblical text.”⁹ He begins with a short definition of hermeneutics, saying that the paradigm of biblical interpretation relates to *skills* (the mechanics of interpretation), *contexts* (the historical background and personal presuppositions related to interpretation), and *dispositions* (the attitudes embraced, in which the reader approaches the Bible on its own terms and in its own prescribed manner). It is here, at the third level of hermeneutics, that we will focus our attention in this section. In terms of disposition, Dryden sometimes implies, and rather infrequently states explicitly, that the Spirit has been working preemptively within the reader so that he/she approaches the text in an appropriate way. Evident throughout is the connection between epistemology and hermeneutics (which is a “form of applied epistemology”).¹⁰

The first step toward a full-orbed presentation of wisdom hermeneutics is a critique of recent epistemological models. Modernist epistemology values both rationalism and subjectivism on the one hand, and empiricism and objectivism on the other. In the first set of values, the thinker attempts to wrangle the mysteries of the universe like a cognitive cowboy, roping and restraining unknown realities until they come under his control. The rational thinker relates to reality through his own self-perception. In the second set of values, the knower is concerned with scientific observation followed by the recording of data. Here, the modernist exegete is captured in three very memorable images: first, the bronze thinker exegete; second, the white lab coat exegete; and third, the exegetical prospector who sifts textual riverbeds for nuggets of theological gold.

All such exegetes stand as sovereign subjects in relation to the biblical text.¹¹ Individual sufficiency defines the modernist disposition to textual analysis and understanding. Thus, all

⁹ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 16.

¹⁰ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 24.

¹¹ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 25. The term, “sovereign subject,” is inspired by Dryden’s encounter with Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 3.

such exegetes remain self-referential in their relationship to the text's subject matter. For the white lab coat interpreter, the emphasis is placed on what can be known from personal evidence: data gathered through observation and understood through heuristic analysis. Or, in the case of the bronze thinker, the accent falls on what is known from personal cognitive ability. Even the exegetical prospector—the imagery Dryden employs to describe the systematic theologian—sifts through propositions and organizes them based on his own pre-determined categories and perceived usefulness. Thus, even the prospector stands over the text and determines its meaning through its conformity to the knower's presuppositions and, tragically, not in relation to the known.¹²

In one of his most astute observations, Dryden evaluates the modernist epistemological models as products of self-interest. The questions asked of the biblical text reveal a certain egocentric comportment to the text. Thus, when modernist interpreters are searching for, and uncovering, textual propositions from an objective text, they are participating in a self-centered pursuit of knowledge. The wisdom hermeneutic, inherent to the Bible's own formative agenda, does not embrace the sovereign subject—and, indeed, resists the theological excavation so characteristic of the modernist hermeneutic approach.

Dryden is also very careful to define the postmodernist perspective on epistemology and, constructed upon its foundation, the postmodern method of biblical interpretation. Like the modernist conception, postmodern epistemology creates a sovereign subject who reigns over the text and ultimately creates meaning. However, unlike the modernist understanding, the postmodern hermeneutic—being strongly reader-response centered—confronts the biblical text on a purely subjective level. The bronze thinker model survives the cultural shift from modernist empiricism to postmodernist existentialism. Whereas the modernist textual prospector sought

¹² Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 25 says, “Whenever we read the Bible to extract nuggets, we are reading in a modern mode, relating to the text as ‘sovereign subjects.’ The three most common ‘prospecting’ modes of reading are reading theologically, reading historically, and reading ethically.” This quotation substantiates a previous claim that Dryden's work is a veiled critique of N. T. Wright.

meaning objectively from a propositional rendering of the text, the postmodern exegete is more akin to a textual dramaturge. Here the exegete is concerned with how the socio-political context of the original author's material may be adapted, adjusted, and even violated (in the most extreme cases of reader-response criticism), through editorial manipulation.

Laudably, Dryden rejects both the modernist and postmodernist approaches to biblical hermeneutics on the basis that both are anthropocentric. As products of the Enlightenment, these two approaches place the human reader—with his cognitive capacities—at the center of the hermeneutic universe. The world of the biblical text is a world revolving around the individual interpreter. Likewise, the cosmos of interpretive meaning is subjected to the skeptical objectivity of some, or the cognitive subjectivism of others. But Dryden rightly dismisses the foundational notion of man's centrality, though elements of the postmodern worldview remain helpful. By embracing a self-evident finitude that defines human existence, he proposes a necessary humility among biblical interpreters. Also helpful for Dryden is the postmodern notion of culturally conditioned presuppositions. The modernist believed in objectivity in a way that the postmodernist no longer does. This developmental discontinuity proves essential to the idea of a “fiduciary formative encounter” with Scripture.

First, interaction with the biblical text is necessarily a “fiduciary” encounter because of our “finitude and historical embeddedness,”¹³ for these essentially serve to define human metaphysics. By recognizing human contingency, we are forced to admit that belief is essential to all knowing. Within a fiduciary framework, the human being embodies a trusting disposition to the text that, with its formational intent, is guided according to the benevolent will of Almighty God. The suspicion of modern and postmodern exegetes is replaced, in new birth, by a heart that fundamentally trusts, and is yielded to, the formative agency of Scripture. But how does the human heart discern trustworthiness?

¹³ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 29.

Supplemental to a fiduciary disposition is the gift of ears to hear and hearts to perceive the reliable voice of a validated authority.¹⁴ Like sheep with a shepherd, we must recognize, listen to, and follow the instructions offered by the correct voice. And this point is pivotal: there can be no discernment of trustworthiness, no dispositional transformation, no gift of spiritually perceptive ears, and no enablement to pursue obedience without the initial and ongoing, immediate intervention of the Holy Spirit.

In this vein, Dryden develops two main arteries to his fiduciary framework: (1) the necessity of faith, and (2) the divine-human relationship that precedes any biblical knowing whatsoever. Both are complimentary in that faith is bestowed upon the human knower by the divine Gift himself.¹⁵ Further, the Holy Spirit is the one who unites the believer to Christ, confirms the believer's relationship to God and is the One by whom the believer cries "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). The Spirit—who makes knowing possible (by faith)—is the same Spirit who establishes the relationship between the finite knower and the infinite Triune God to be known.

The problem for modernity is that faith is a presupposition, and all epistemological preconditions are suspect. The problem for postmodernity is uncovered in the opposite extreme: that presuppositions are welcome, but that they are determinative. For the Christian exegete, faith is a legitimate pre-commitment to all biblical interpretation. But there are other known and unknown presuppositions according to our being situated in history, culture, environment, and experiences; thus, the issue for Dryden—echoing the work of Gadamer—is knowing which

¹⁴ See the work of Dru Johnson, *Scripture's Knowing: A Companion to Biblical Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 18. The author says, "We must embody guided processes in order to know." And he says further, "In order to know well, you must listen to trusted authorities and do what they say" (26).

¹⁵ Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 171-4, 291. Interestingly, Allison and Kostenberger—alongside Dryden—draw on the work of the patristic father, Augustine, for the concepts of the Holy Spirit as "Love" and "Gift" (in Allison and Kostenberger) and the concept of "*credo ut intelligam*" (in Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 32).

prejudices (pre-commitments, or presuppositions) are valid.¹⁶ This is where the second part of the fiduciary formative encounter takes center stage.

Second, our encounter with the biblical text accords with spiritual/moral formation. Not only is our encounter with Scripture based on a relationship of trust and trustworthiness, but it is also based on the formative intent of Scripture. Dryden believes that the biblical text speaks with illocutionary force. As such, the Bible must be understood according to speech-act theory, in which statements are made in order to direct, guide, and/or transform thoughts, perceptions, and actions.¹⁷ The Spirit's work in and through the canonized Scriptures is to call forth and create faith. Thus, approaching the text means expecting to be changed. Our affections are altered. Our behaviors are amended. But greater than this, our worldview is transfigured; we are given a sufficient, yet incomplete, vision of God and the divine point of view concerning the created world. We are given a vision of the new creation—an eschatological unveiling of the heavenly realm—which serves as the interpretive grid through which to interpret ourselves, our ethics, and the cultural contexts surrounding us. In short, the formative intent of Scripture centers on the transformation of worldview yielding the reformation of ethics.¹⁸

In addition, the formational agenda of Scripture illumines which of our pre-existing suppositions are valid, all the while directing us in the appropriation of new pre-commitments. In didactic material, this is accomplished through the instruction of an authoritative voice. In

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 278, in Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 32.

¹⁷ The Genesis story of creation is a prime example of speech-act. That which God speaks (“Let there be light”) comes into existence. In terms of the biblical text having similar illocutionary force, see God's words in Isa 55:11, “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” The same could be said of Jesus's powerful word, which creates life through commandment in the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:43).

¹⁸ Using the language of “worldview” is my attempt to summarize Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 37. The author speaks of recalibrated understanding and affections, the means of perceiving God, self, and the world—evaluating the competing allegiances and values treasured by each—and the biblical vision “that reorients our lives, in how we see the world and how we live in it, in what we believe and what we love.” It should be noted that Dryden does not use the term “worldview” but conceptually presents a transcendent biblical worldview nonetheless.

narrative texts, the same is accomplished through the reader's identification and ethical imitation of virtuous exemplars. In any case, our point for now is that spiritual formation involves the discernment of legitimate presuppositions, theological biases, and ecclesiological traditions. Oftentimes, we may become aware of our biases and *traditions*—constitutive of the contexts in which biases are shaped and exegetical questions are determined—either through the prophetic voice of a prolific author (such as, Dryden) or the immediate prompting of the Holy Spirit. An oft neglected possibility entails moving beyond one's own interpretive neighborhood, crossing into the cultural and exegetical unknown, to have presuppositions challenged through interaction with the international Body of Christ.¹⁹ In any case, we must seek heightened sensitivity to our traditional presuppositions in order to be faithful interpreters of Scripture. Dryden acknowledges something of a mutual sculpting when it comes to the influence of tradition. He asserts that Scripture has shaped tradition, which in turn shapes readers in their hermeneutic biases. But, because no tradition is flawless, Scripture also challenges tradition and continually works to shape it further.

However, at this point, Dryden appears to forget that tradition shaped Scripture. The historical reconstructionist, N. T. Wright, assists the modern exegete by calling us back to the role of Second Temple Judaism—and, more importantly, the Jewish Scriptures—in the worldview formation of the biblical authors. Thus, we must admit that Old Testament theological tradition shaped the Apostle John (for example), who then constructs under the inspiration of the Spirit, a new creation and new exodus account of Jesus's life and ministry. The question surfaces: Does the biblical text belong to the Jewish tradition? And, if so, how can it function as a means of shaping traditions other than the Jewish tradition? How can it maintain

¹⁹ Thus, at the end of our examination of narrative and wisdom hermeneutics, we will demonstrate how an international community of believers might respond to our conclusions. We will attempt to discern the value of our findings within the general ecclesiological context of Ethiopia.

its own voice while still challenging and shaping foreign (non-Jewish) cultures with an intentional formative agenda?

The answer is as simple as it is profound. Dryden, echoing Gadamer again, believes that “although we read from the standpoint of a tradition shaped by the text, real understanding only comes when we meet the text as a stranger, as something outside ourselves and our tradition.”²⁰ In other words, the biblical text is transcendent. Though it was packaged within the first century Jewish world, the story of Israel belongs to the story of God’s self-revelatory engagement with humanity. John’s presentation of Jesus demands that Israel’s story and symbolic world be reshaped, retold, and redefined in light of Christ. Jesus does not merely join Israel’s story as another character in a long line of previous characters. Instead, Israel’s story is taken up and transfigured in him.

And this is where we must part company with Gadamer, who asserts with Dryden’s approval that “the important thing is to be aware of one’s own biases, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own foremeanings.”²¹ The “otherness” of Scripture, for Gadamer, is located in the interpreter’s ability to discern and embrace his/her biases and adopt a dispositional openness to be challenged by Scripture. Real exegetical insight comes not from historical reconstruction (contra Wright), nor primarily from dispositional openness (contra Gadamer). Instead, it comes from a Spirit-empowered and -illuminated encounter with transcendence in the Scripture that both lies within history and yet comes from outside of history. If there is any merit in a fiduciary disposition, it is found in the fact that the Spirit of God creates it. He overcomes the spiritual resistance of the unregenerate soul, so that the new believer not only identifies the authenticated voice of unrivalled authority,

²⁰ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 33.

²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 271-2, in Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 34.

but follows divine instruction and displays the harmony of appropriate (inward) motivations and obedient (outward) actions.

So, for Dryden (following Gadamer), real understanding comes only when we meet the text as a stranger, as something outside ourselves and our traditions. On this point, Gadamer is correct. And so is N. T. Wright. But the purported strangeness of the text is only partially due to its Jewishness or its dissonance with developed traditions. The Scripture has authority to confront, challenge, and subvert my culturally conditioned biases and presuppositions because it is transcendent. But how can we meet the text on its own terms, given the incontrovertible fact that we are contingent, pre-conditioned, and historically embedded people? The Spirit must bring us into union with Christ and enable our participatory involvement in the transcendent biblical narrative: in other words, the Spirit of God enables story immersion for worldview transformation. Thus, the text of John's Gospel (for example) may have contributed to the *shaping* of a Reformed Baptist community, but it also *challenges* that same community. The text is invested with a sense of transcendence that calls us away from ourselves, our worldviews, our traditions—and ironically, called the first century Jews away from themselves and theirs—and into the very realm of story immersion for conformity to the image of Christ. So, against Dryden, we would stand with the Apostle John and point to the transcendent “otherness” of the text and, therefore, the story of Christ established in the Fourth Gospel.

We affirm Dryden with unbridled enthusiasm in regard to his belief that readers—in whom space is created for the text to speak and transform—cannot determine the extent to which the text will shape them. In a deft move of intellectual insight, he connects his concept of fiduciary comportment to the biblical text with the broader life-orientation described by Paul J. Griffiths as “living datively.”²² We are not nominative subjects, standing in judgment above the

²² Paul J. Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 31–32. To summarize Griffiths, living datively is contrasted with the false notion of living nominatively. To live nominatively is to act upon the world—to make the world a better place, as it were—and to exert one's own power to initiate, to control one's own destiny, and to act decisively in achieving it. We believe ourselves to be nominative beings; but, in light of our contingency, this belief must be a vapor of self-

biblical text, but indirect objects called into being and shaped into conformity according to a transcendent biblical world that is, apart from the Spirit's illumination, unknowable and undiscernible to us. It is beyond our manipulation. We cannot see the kingdom of God unless we are born of the Spirit (John 3:3-5). The biblical story forms us; we do not form it. To live datively is to embrace a "wisdom comportment" in which the reader is personally engaged and begins to participate in the biblical text.²³

To summarize, a fiduciary formative encounter with the biblical text involves both a dispositional openness on the part of the reader and an awareness of the text's illocutionary force. Dryden says,

Hermeneutical understanding in the context of wisdom entails a holistic comportment, which brings the whole person, in all their historical conditionality, with all their conceptions, values, and affections, into the space created by the text. Wisdom eschews any claim to a self-sustaining field of reference but instead assumes a fiduciary transformational stance, expecting a reorientation of those same conceptions, values, and affections in a dialectic engagement with the text. This means that the whole person, in all their faculties, is involved in this dialectic movement toward understanding.²⁴

In the phrase "dialectic engagement," Dryden has implicitly identified the Holy Spirit, the divine author of the biblical text, as the necessary personal agent who effects this understanding, wisdom, transformation, reorientation, and participatory involvement. In order to be transformed, we must trust the transcendent guide (in and through the biblical authors, as well as, in and through the immediate illumination of texts). After all, we are strangers in a new world,

delusion trapped gaseously in the human soul from Gen 3:6 onward. By contrast, says Griffiths, to live datively is "to live in a world prior to and independent of yourself, a given world, presented unasked, whose overwhelming presence presses you into a responsive mold whether you like it or not." This is certainly how the biblical text operates upon the reader, but with one great exception: the Spirit wins our consent and, through purification in love, presses us into the Christological mold not against our wills, but in harmony with them.

²³ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 35. Dryden comments that his "wisdom comportment" continues in the lineage of Karl Barth's hermeneutics, in which a neutral observation of the biblical text was paramount to unbelief and active participatory involvement was necessary, not only for correct understanding itself, but for the development of appropriate presuppositions that make understanding possible. Dryden also echoes the eminently trustworthy Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) when he speaks of the illocutionary force of Scriptural assertions (36). The Bible makes statements not merely to assert, but to transform.

²⁴ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 37.

foreigners in the historical and transcendent realms of the biblical text. The divine guide will encourage and enable our language learning, our cultural assimilation, and perhaps one day we might even be mistaken for indigenous nationals. If dispositions remain the hidden, yet exceedingly influential, thoughts and attitudes toward the biblical text, then interpretive principles are the outworking—the visible manifestation—of the interpretive heart. The principles of the wisdom hermeneutic will be outlined presently.

The Interpretive Principles of Wisdom Hermeneutics

In this section, we are concerned with the mechanics, the exegetical toolbox, of the wisdom hermeneutic. We begin with the set of questions that Dryden proposes. He says, “The questions of wisdom are the questions of human flourishing.”²⁵ Thus, wisdom texts demand a specific set of interpretive questions; once the questions are modified, the exegetical conclusions will follow. Thus far, then, the underlying assumptions that determine the methodology of the wisdom hermeneutic are as follows: the Bible is a wisdom text; the transcendence of a wisdom text demands a fiduciary formative encounter between the knower and the known; a wisdom text

²⁵ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 36. The questions are unpacked thusly: What should I pursue to experience fulfillment, and how should I pursue it? What is worth giving my life to, and what will I get in return? What realities determine what I should value in life? This is an important set of questions, but the issue of human flourishing must be addressed appropriately. Should we be looking at human flourishing *per se* (an anthropocentric examination), or the model of new creational humanity (a messianic anthropology that involves participatory union with Christ and story immersion)? As long as human flourishing (if it were really possible in this life) is not an end in itself, and as long as we are willing to admit that it will never be fully experienced on this side of eternity (it’s not supposed to be)—or that it may be counterintuitively redefined by the biblical text—then we may pursue the notion of human flourishing (cautiously).

Requisite caution is advised because human flourishing in biblical terms means advancing toward the *telos*, the predetermined end of New Creation (which lies partially outside us). Dryden says, “Faith is always partial and found in varying degrees, but is also characterized by teleological movement” (43). He adds, “two-ways language [typical of wisdom literature] functions to clarify devotions by tying them to ultimate ends and desires (i.e., giving them a teleological grounding and motivation)” (55). However, human flourishing in worldly terms means something like realized autonomy (a myth of independence that promises delight and fulfillment, but leads only to despair and destruction). Caution is also advised because flourishing, in terms of experiencing fulfillment, is not an economic reality for the “two-thirds” world. Oftentimes, with life-long imprisonment of believers— involving torture, and ultimately execution—the question of “giving my life” to the pursuit of human flourishing, if not appropriately defined to include the possibility of suffering as flourishing, is a romantic fantasy reserved almost exclusively for wealthy Western and elitist Christianity.

has intrinsic sets of questions, based on its conscious formative intent, that lead to certain types of exegetical conclusions. In short, the essence of the biblical text determines the manner in which it should be read and interpreted.

The wisdom text is concerned with questions of human flourishing. Wisdom is related to happiness, the *εὐδαιμονία* that Aristotle had spoken of when identifying the ultimate pursuit of humanity, though it should be noted that wisdom is not the same as happiness. Strictly speaking, wisdom is not even the path to happiness, but the means of discerning the correct path among many competing alternatives. Wisdom is necessary for discernment. Discernment is necessary for pursuing happiness. And happiness is the “universal characteristic for human beings and an element in being constituted as God’s image bearers.”²⁶ All this depends on a few external factors: (1) the ability—or, the (political, social, and/or cultural) freedom—of the individual to pursue their goals; (2) the sufficient means—whether financial, cognitive, or physiological capacity—for individuals to pursue their goals; and (3) the nominative or dative realities that come to define human existence. Are humans ultimately active in pursuing happiness (or any other goal)? Or are they passive in receiving what is impressed upon them? Perhaps our reorienting encounter with the biblical text redefines *εὐδαιμονία*, so that it is understood from an eschatological perspective and pursued accordingly.²⁷

As with his section on theory, Dryden engages modernity and postmodernity here in his section on methodology. The content of John 3 becomes the textual laboratory in which three

²⁶ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 36. Interestingly, Dryden cites Aristotle and Augustine to justify this claim, but does not cite a corresponding biblical text to affirm its legitimacy.

²⁷ The term “eschatological” is used to mean that happiness is defined by something outside ourselves (such as, the Kingdom of God) and is from God, yet is at the same time situated within time and space. Thus, happiness is part of realized eschatology and may be experienced (imperfectly) in the here-and-now, but finds its center of existence and ultimate fulfillment in the future (eternal) Kingdom.

I recognize the potential for derailment here. We begin to scratch the surface of some major philosophical and existential issues and might, if not for the imposed parameters on this project, move beyond the bounds of our hermeneutical investigation. Nevertheless, it must be said that Dryden affirms the notion of human contingency—the idea of living “datively”—while also proposing an active—dare we say, “nominative”?—pursuit of life’s biggest goals.

hermeneutic approaches are juxtaposed for comparison and contrast. The gospel genre, being somewhat foreign to logical, propositional minds in Western Christianity, finds fertile soil in the seedbed of Ethiopian Christianity. This will be addressed in chapter 3. For now, Dryden begins in the gospel genre with an evaluation of the modernist hermeneutic. Once again, the framing of the modernist exegetical method implicitly identifies it with the work of N. T. Wright.²⁸ It is concerned with reconstruction and inquires as to the historical and ideological origins of Christianity. In terms of *historical* origins, the modernist exegete is concerned with the progressive formation of the text from its pre-existence in tradition. Thus, the question may be asked, “How does John 3 inform us about Jewish traditions in the First Century AD?” The possibility that John’s Gospel was written as an “anti-Essene” or “anti-Gnostic” polemic arises from modernism and its questions—formed from presuppositions about what the Bible actually is—with corresponding sets of interpretive conclusions. In terms of *ideological* origins, the modernist exegete is concerned, for example, with the historical/cultural context in which the concept of “new birth” was conceived, and from which it enters the biblical text.²⁹ The weakness of the modernist exegetical approach is seen in how it distances the text from the modern reader. How can we apply the text to ourselves? Is it even appropriate to assume the text was meant to be applied?

Dryden’s insightful perception of hermeneutic methods does not stop at modernity, but pushes into postmodernity in order to uncover the tendencies and presuppositions that guide (or determine) biblical exegesis. Origins, both historical and ideological, are replaced by agendas. The biblical authors were primarily concerned with composing an encrypted, multi-layered,

²⁸ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 38 says, “A modern comportment, again, seeks to sift texts for information that will aid in answering a set of questions regarding the historical origins of Christianity.” It should be noted that Dryden is not villainizing Wright; he is simply showing that specific interpretive questions (presuppositions) almost certainly lead to specific sets of interpretive conclusions (39). This is further validation for the cross-pollination introduced by conversation partners N. T. Wright and Richard B. Hays.

²⁹ Summarized from Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 38-40.

sociopolitical commentary. Thus, postmodernity has often assumed that John's Gospel was written under a pseudonym by a later Christian community to substantiate its legitimacy over and against other religious movements and institutions (such as, the Jewish Synagogue). In this schema, the coded language of "new birth" is intended to identify those within the community, to the exclusion of outsiders.³⁰ The postmodern reading of John 3 supposes that it was written as a social polemic against Judaism (the persecuting majority) from within the Johannine community (the persecuted minority) and, on another layer, as a polemic against the Essenes who exalted John the Baptist. The modernist polemic attempts to decide which tradition was foundational (and formational, in the composition and arrangement of the biblical text), whereas the postmodernist polemic attempts to decide which social community enfolded the privileged and enlightened "in crowd."³¹

To encapsulate the ground covered thus far, Dryden has proposed the following strategy: the interpreter must learn to ask the right question in order to get the right answers. The work of the interpreter is to get his presuppositions to line up with the worldview of the biblical author, to learn to ask the questions that the author (and his readers) would have been asking. As Dryden would assuredly concur, this is precisely the gift bestowed upon the contemporary exegete in the work of N. T. Wright.³² The Apostle John, together with the inspired host of New Testament authors, was deeply concerned about a Christocentric adaptation of the Old Testament

³⁰ On some level, the Synoptic Gospel parables function in this way (or perhaps I've been reading only postmodern commentaries that conclude thusly). In Matt 13:10ff, Jesus explains why parables are employed so frequently in his teaching. Miracles are the net of the kingdom that gathers crowds while parables comprise the "hard teaching" of the kingdom by which crowds are separated. For those enlightened by Christ and empowered by the Spirit—for those given ears to hear—the spiritual exile was coming to an end. This is why Isa 6 is quoted in Matt 13. Jesus speaks in parables to create space for the Spirit to work in God's elect, giving them the secrets of the kingdom, and to pronounce the judgment of Isa 6 upon the unbelieving crowds.

³¹ Summarized from Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 40-42.

³² I pause here to suggest that the biblical authors and their believing readers were less concerned with questions surfacing from the theological and cultural world of Apocryphal or Second Temple Judaism, and far more concerned with questions surfacing from an eschatological interpretation of the Old Testament, in light of Messiah's advent and subsequent life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reign.

interpretive world that included signposts such as Temple, Torah, and Land, and spoke of Messiah, a new exodus leading to a new creation. If John were concerned with human flourishing, it would inevitably be centered on—and defined by—these christologically transfigured signposts.

The application of wisdom hermeneutics to John 3 yields very different exegetical conclusions because it asks very different presuppositional questions. The first question is one of authorial intent. Why did the Apostle John write his gospel? Dryden answers: John wrote to encourage faith that is cognizant of—and bases itself on—the supreme trustworthiness of Christ. The concept of fiduciary formative encounters with the biblical text is clearly taught in the Fourth Gospel. It is an organic concept.

The second question is one of authorial methodology. How did the Apostle John achieve his purpose(s) for writing? Dryden rightly asserts that, since John employed the narrative genre, his gospel is less about presenting a set of Christological doctrines and more about including the reader within the salvific-historical story of Jesus. Thus, the Gospel of John presents readers with real-life characters with whom they can relate. The power of the reader’s “imaginative empathy”³³ is the deciding factor in whether John’s narrative strategy works.

The third question is one of selection and arrangement, especially concerning the cultural background. What cultural details did John consider to be important? In the Nicodemus narrative of John 3, we are meant to recognize the socio-political context of Jesus’s day: it was one full of conspiracy, violence, and opposition to the gospel message. Secondary source materials are helpful in illuminating the larger context of Second Temple Judaism. But John has selected appropriate details—primarily correlative of Old Testament themes—to show the ongoing conflict between Israel’s leaders and God’s anointed prophets. The Gospel of John

³³ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 16–17, in Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 43. As we will see in chap. 3, the idea of a conversion of the imagination is not exclusive to Dryden’s work. The use of the phrase echoes the work of Richard Hays and makes Hays an ideal conversation partner in evaluating Dryden.

highlights the necessary elements of first century culture in sufficient detail for the reader to discern its most important features, particularly as it relates to authorial intent.

The fourth question is one of literary/narrative analysis, at least here in the gospel genre.³⁴ Jesus is presented in John 3 as the “one from above” (3:12-13; cf. 8:23) such that his teaching is God-given and authoritative. Jesus is also the one uniquely commissioned of the Father to redefine participation in the Kingdom, not through covenantal nomism, but according to the free will of the wind.³⁵ The Spirit brings about such participation through spiritual new birth, predicated upon predetermined divine prerogatives. Faith is not automatic; indeed, for most of the characters in John’s Gospel, it is a risky proposition. For all of us, it is a definitive work of the Holy Spirit.

Our goal is not to rehearse the interpretation of John 3 exhaustively, but to show in the preceding details (at least), that the reader’s fiduciary formative encounter with the biblical text must be embodied datively. Dryden says, “Wisdom begins not in a self-sufficient act of the will but in reception of the eschatological new birth. Jesus’s words point to the necessity of that new birth (because one cannot see or enter the kingdom apart from it) and indicate that the impetus for the new birth comes completely from the creative, fatherly act of God. Any synergistic formula is completely excluded.”³⁶ Wisdom is imparted in the same manner as Kingdom

³⁴ On this point, Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), chap. 9, has been very influential.

³⁵ The word play in John 3:3-8 involves several uses of the Greek word *πνεῦμα* (wind, spirit, the Holy Spirit). Important for Dryden is that the Spirit is identified as the personal agent of the new birth, acting in divine sovereignty to bring it about.

³⁶ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 44. Obvious in the above quotation is Dryden’s use of “wisdom” as synonymous with Kingdom inclusion. The parallelism suggests that, just as the one begins with new birth, so does the other. I point this out for two reasons: first, that Dryden assumes the role of the Spirit in his methodology (the relative absence of the Spirit is not intentional); and second, to introduce the idea of divine determinism from first to last. Though Protestantism has been strong in its belief that the Spirit’s role in *creating* wisdom is monergistic, it has been weak in its belief that the Spirit’s work in *sustaining* wisdom is synergistic. If we begin the journey of Kingdom inclusion (or, of Wisdom) by the unilateral work of the Spirit—thus, beginning datively—do we then continue the journey by our cooperation with the Spirit—thus, continuing nominatively? Cf. Gal 3:3.

Concerning John 3:21, Dryden says, “Good character is not a self-reforming morality but a characteristic of the new birth, as John concludes, ‘so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God’ (3:21)” (45). The Greek of John 3:21—*αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ἐν Θεῷ ἔστιν εἰργασμένα*; “his works have been

inclusion. As we will come to see, participation in the Kingdom is through participation in the story of Israel. Correspondingly, participation in the story of Israel is through participatory union with Christ. And all this is from the Spirit.

Important to all literary analysis—and the fourth concern of wisdom hermeneutics—is the recognition of character juxtaposition. This, says Dryden, is the reason for the otherwise disjointed insertion of John the Baptist in the context of the Nicodemus narrative. We are meant to see the two characters as literary foils. They represent the conventional “two ways” of wisdom literature.³⁷ The Baptist is countercultural; Nicodemus is enslaved to cultural norms. The Baptist views ministry as a gift from Jesus and considers vocational calling as fulfilled in glorifying Jesus. Nicodemus, on the other hand, becomes paradigmatic of the Jewish rejection of Jesus. Though his deepest desires (or motivations) are not revealed fully in the text, the fact of his literary juxtaposition with John the Baptist implicitly shows, according to Dryden, that Nicodemus approaches Jesus from a position of power, status, and influence. His ministry belongs to himself; his life is self-determined.

As modern exegetes, we must approach biblical interpretation from an internal disposition of utter humility; the way the Baptist approaches Jesus is the way in which we ought to approach hermeneutics. Contrastingly, we are not sovereign subjects who stand over the text to dissect it for our own theological agendas; the way in which Nicodemus approaches Jesus becomes the negative example embodied by modernist and postmodernist exegetes. The text itself demands that we approach Bible interpretation from a fiduciary comportment, fully expecting a transformative encounter with the living God. Epistemic humility is derived from

worked in God”—uses *ἐν* as a preposition of instrumentality. God is the primary agent in the outworking of good human character. We begin and continue the journey datively. We are not nominative in spiritual formation.

³⁷ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 46. The “two ways” are to be understood in terms of “ethical antithesis” and not “metaphysical dualisms” (55).

creaturely metaphysics; what we are, as contingent creatures, must determine how we come to know.

The main presupposition of Dryden is that all Scripture functions as Wisdom. It is a worthy presupposition, surfacing organically from the Scriptures—like John 3—as this project addresses. And presuppositions are acceptable, even desirable, in his schema. Thus, at least in theory, the wisdom hermeneutic should apply to any/every New Testament text. It should stimulate new desires and create new allegiances. As the reader engages in a fiduciary formative encounter with the biblical text, he should find his loves and devotions challenged. The main application of this work will apply Dryden’s approach, synthesized to include the story immersion methods of Wright and Hays, to the “Bread of Life” Discourse in John 6. But before proceeding to John’s Gospel, we must evaluate the wisdom hermeneutic. It is to that task that we turn presently.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF STORY IMMERSION HERMENEUTICS

In this chapter, we intend to offer a generous and gracious evaluation of wisdom hermeneutics that not only honors its Biblicism and integrity, but also highlights its many strengths while challenging its very few weaknesses. As mentioned above, our conversation partners in this chapter will be Richard B. Hays and N. T. Wright. These two renowned scholars will facilitate a “round-table” discussion between Dryden’s work and their own, a discussion that we will overhear for our own benefit in discerning a balanced way forward. Also in play for this chapter is the promised, even if only implicit, taxonomy of “story hermeneutic” methods. But before all this, let us briefly rehearse the biblical storyline.

The Bible is one unified narrative. The work of God, as revealed by God, determines its unity. The story tells of the nature and development of the people of Israel and her relationship with the Lord God. Its grand and sweeping narrative moves from creation to new creation; it proceeds from the Garden Paradise of innocence—from moral perfection—to the Fall, the Flood, and the scattering of all nations and confused linguistic communication. The people of Israel are formed from the fertile soil of the Patriarchal narratives that involve covenant promises, ongoing commitment to God, and the struggle of ongoing faithfulness to this commitment in light of sin’s pervasive presence. From Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, the story shows the deeply flawed covenant fathers in contrast with the exceeding faithfulness of the God who promised.

The Book of Genesis soon melts into the scorching sands of the Egyptian desert. Here the nation of Israel is born. Like Adam, her primordial father, Israel too is formed from dust, only hers is the soot of straw-gathering and brick-making. Exodus opens with a transitional tone that strikes the chord of Pharaoh’s mistrust, mistreatment, and ultimately homicidal intent toward

the ancient Hebrew people. His guards are instructed to treat Israel with contempt. Babies are to be thrown to Nile crocodiles. Monuments are to be erected on the backs of enslaved people. Bricks by the millions are, therefore, to be furnished and fired to satiate the massive ego of Pharaoh. And all the while, the faithful covenant God of Israel remains active, patiently preserving a remnant and grooming the great prophet, Moses, for the liberation movement he will oversee.

The Egyptian exodus follows the Patriarchal narratives of the Pentateuch. It demonstrates the pattern of God's superlative faithfulness to a stubborn people. The Lord God who is faithful to the Abrahamic Covenant will deliver his people from Egyptian bondage. He will come and save them; he will lead them to Sinai and deliver Torah. With signs and wonders, with judgment upon the gods of Egypt, and with divine recompense, the rescue mission takes shape. The Exodus event involves the deliverance of God's people, their miraculous Red Sea crossing, and a period of wilderness wandering that leads first to Sinai—and the covenant ratified there—and finally to the Promised Land. And so, the Abrahamic Covenant as fulfilled in the Old Testament contains the major Old Testament signposts: Exodus, Land, Torah, and Temple (or Tabernacle). Subservient to the land inheritance is the promise of kings. Likewise, subsumed within the Temple's existence is the appearance of the priesthood and sacrificial system. The promise of a homeland would be fulfilled by God and received by Abraham's seed, but only through the miraculous work of divine deliverance from Egyptian slavery: in short, inheritance through exodus (Gen 15:13-14; cf. Gen 17:7-8).

As we approach the New Testament, we find a striking similarity. The promise of "land" is transfigured in Christ and by the Spirit so that "new creation" comes firmly into view. Those united to Christ as representative/covenantal figurehead would inherit the new creation, but only through exodus: inheritance through exodus. The people of God *become* the new creation; thereafter, they *inherit* the new creation. This is how the Apostle Paul structures his argument in Romans 5—8. The Abrahamic Covenant anticipates a cosmic inheritance for the seed of Abraham, who receive the promise in the fulfillment of grace (Rom 4:13-17). They have peace

with God, experience the love of God through the Spirit, and gain access into a positional and covenantal grace through Christ (Rom 5:1-5). In Christ, they are no longer condemned as slaves of sin by the trespass of the one man, Adam (Rom 5:18-20). They are justified; they are made righteous. But the inheritance of new creation comes as a result of divine deliverance through exodus waters.

Freedom from sin is dramatized in baptism, depicting the transcendent reality of Spirit-union with Christ (Rom 6:1-11). Emerging from judgment waters as slaves of God (and of righteousness), having been delivered from slavery to sin, portrays a transfigured exodus. The Old Testament signpost is transcended in Christ and by the Spirit. What happened historically and literally now happens christologically and spiritually. There is a figural, symbolic, and typological correspondence between the Old and New Testaments. As such, the exodus signpost has been invested with transcendence. The new exodus, which is present throughout the New Testament, is the vital link between the ancient story of Israel and the modern believer's participation in it. The believer of every historical generation has not only gone through exodus/baptism waters with Christ—having been united to him by the Spirit—but has also emerged in newness of life.

Hereafter, the covenant community (old and new) is brought into contact with Sinai and the Torah. This encounter only serves to accentuate the falsehood and self-deception of Israel's claim at Sinai: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exod 19:8). The Torah awakened sin because of the weakness of human flesh, but the Spirit ensures that God's people bear the fruit of divine righteousness. While the flesh still inhibits, the Spirit now empowers. The believer delights in the Torah in his inner being (Rom 7:22), but finds that nothing good dwells in his flesh (Rom 7:18). He is alive unto God in the Spirit, but the corruptible flesh holds him captive to sin in his members. In short, the New Covenant community faces the struggle of sanctification.

The tabernacle is constructed along the way, the transitory tent that prefigures the semi-permanent Temple. The Old Covenant community experienced the literal, physical signpost that

the New Covenant community would experience spiritually. In Christ and by the Spirit, the temple has been transfigured. The *Shekinah* glory of God is present among his people as the Spirit dwells in them (Rom 8:9-11). The Old Testament signpost is invested with transcendence, now referring to the Messiah himself and the Messiah's people (Col 2:9-10), who are being built upon the cornerstone into the dwelling place of God.

And finally, in terms of inheritance, the Spirit of God testifies that we are sons—and, as such, we are heirs—of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:14-17). The future glory of the sons of God corresponds with the renewal (and liberation) of the entire cosmos. The inheritance of land has been transfigured in Christ and by the Spirit. The Old Testament signpost is invested with transcendence, now referring to a cosmic inheritance for the multi-ethnic people of God and not a territorial (or localized) inheritance for homogenous Israel. In order to inherit the territorial land of promise, the people of Israel were told to destroy enemies, subdue nations, and establish a theocracy through which YHWH would be their God and King. In order to inherit the transcendent land of promise, the rulers and authorities must be defeated and the ruler of the world must be cast out; and this is, indeed, what we find (Col 3:15; cf. John 12:31).

This all-too-brief rehearsal of the biblical storyline serves our purposes in two ways. First, it establishes the preeminent themes and figural signposts that appear in the Old Testament and resurface later in the text of the New Testament. And second, it affirms our place in the larger narrative as the blood bought, Spirit-empowered, people of the New Covenant. In many ways, and with many shadows that ultimately become substantial, the Old Testament offers the paradigmatic people, events, and institutions that form the backbone of New Testament theology and invite modern readers to participate in the ancient story of Israel.

In summary, the skeletal framework upon which the flesh and blood of New Testament theology hangs is defined by signposts introduced in the OT and transfigured in the NT. The central figure of this transfiguration is Christ himself, and the relationship of the Old and New Testaments is one of intensified continuity. Thus, when we encounter a movement from creation to new creation that is Christ-centered, we recognize something greater/better in the new

creation; it has been transformed through transfiguration. The first and final creations are not merely linked by one-to-one correspondence. Nor is the new creation merely a return to Eden. Indeed, it is the return to a paradisaal garden-city, but it represents a greater inheritance—because it is eternal and incorruptible—concerning which no eye has seen nor mind imagined.

In addition, we find a covenantal continuity between the Old and New Testaments. The Abrahamic promises are brought to fruition in the New Covenant; both covenants speak of inheritance through exodus. Just as the sons of Abraham were born in Egypt, thereafter to be liberated unto a period of wilderness wandering before entering the promised land, so also the people of the New Covenant are liberated. The Spirit of God himself, the substance and fulfillment of the promised Abrahamic blessing, actuates the liberating work of Christ in freeing God’s people from slavery to sin. After such liberation, believers sojourn through an unfriendly and foreboding world that is not their home. They, like their patriarchal ancestors, are looking for the city that is to come (Heb 11). This they do by fixing their eyes on Jesus himself.

Engaging Conversation Partners: Richard B. Hays and N. T. Wright

All the aforementioned signposts are present in the Gospel of John, transfigured in Christ and by the Spirit. Though we have introduced Pauline theology here, we will focus hereafter on the Gospel of John. What Paul teaches didactically, the Apostle John describes in story form. Epistolary and narrative texts serve the same function in identifying the transfigured signposts of Old Testament theology and inviting readers’ participation in and through them. Thus, in his prologue, John brings “light” and “life” together with the “beginning” in order to indicate the dawn of the new creation.¹ The Genesis theme is adapted by John to show the gospel predates even the creation of the world, much less the earthly ministry of Christ. It becomes clear that, by John 6, the new creation will take the shape of a new exodus, with a new law-giver and a new—

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 91, 705.

because it is spiritual—manna from heaven.² Inheritance will come through exodus. Along the way, a new temple will be constructed as well; the typological wilderness wandering of the saints will not lack a locus of worship. Thus, in John 1:14 and 2:18-22, we hear echoes of what becomes concretely audible in 4:19-26.³ There will be a new creation, a new covenant, a new Torah, a new temple, and a Spirit-filled covenant community.

The Bible is a wisdom text. Dryden says that hermeneutic methodology is determined by the biblical text itself, due to its very nature. The Bible has an intentionality, a wisdom forming agenda that imposes itself upon the reader. But the reader must be dispositionally receptive to the intentional wisdom forming agenda. The reader must be pre-disposed to the Scriptural agenda; he must be prepared by the Spirit for the transformational purpose to be realized (or actualized). He must trust the God who is biblically revealed. Breathed into him, there must be a fiduciary disposition to the text, thereby to be formed and shaped accordingly.

We might speak here of a fiduciary epistemology, but must also recognize a revelatory epistemology as its necessary pre-condition. In other words, we must read Scripture with a trusting disposition, but we can only understand Scripture—and can only be granted a trusting disposition—by the Spirit of God. The Spirit must open our eyes before we may understand anything of divine revelation. The Spirit must bend our hearts into conformity to Christ before we may develop anything of a trusting disposition toward God and His self-revelation in Scripture. Furthermore, the Spirit must transform our intellectual capacities so that we may discern the figural correspondence of Old and New Testaments and, in so doing, find our place in the biblical narrative. In short, the Spirit must convert our imaginations.

² Carson again points the way forward; he says, “the sacrifice of the lamb anticipates Jesus’s death, the Old Testament manna is superseded by the real bread of life, the exodus typologically sets forth the eternal life that delivers us from sin and destruction, the Passover feast is taken over by the Eucharist (both of which point to Jesus and his redemptive cross-work).” Carson, *John*, 209, 705.

³ Carson, *John*, 81, 176. Carson writes (176), “Worship can take place only in and through [Jesus]: he is the true temple (2:19-22), he is the resurrection and the life (11:25).”

Here we are reintroduced to Richard B. Hays, who says that hermeneutic methodology will reshape our identity and convert our conceptual approach to story immersion.⁴ This means that, as we apply an apocalyptic, eschatological interpretation to Old Testament texts, we realize our identity as one wrapped up in the story of Israel. Methodology determines identity.⁵ When we interpret the Abraham narratives metaphorically, apocalyptically, eschatologically, and with a Christo-centric lens, we understand that our identity as true (spiritual) sons of Abraham is therein presented. We come to understand our sonship—our participation in the story of Israel—through proper hermeneutic methodology and application. Thus, Hays focuses on the imagination; his concern is for mind and method. The method shapes the mind. Several features of Hays’ method will be highlighted.

First, Hays believes that the Old Testament Scriptures should be read apocalyptically. This has implications for what we will call a retrospective epistemology. Believers come to understand when they read backwards—beginning with the resurrection of Christ and using christological lenses—at the various people, places, and institutions that typologically prefigured the Messiah. An apocalyptic reading of scripture holds the death and resurrection of Christ, as the hermeneutical hinges on which Hays’ method swings, constantly in the interpreter’s mind.⁶ Second, Hays believes that Scripture should be read metaphorically. This suits the aforementioned apocalyptic reading very nicely. Hays elaborates,

⁴ Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005. Kindle), Introduction, Kindle. Hays writes, “I contend that Paul’s pastoral strategy for reshaping the consciousness of his pagan converts was to narrate them into Israel’s story through metaphorical appropriation of Scripture—and precisely by so doing to teach them to think apocalyptically.”

⁵ Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle. Hays asserts, “Gentile converts to the faith needed to have their minds remade, made, and that instruction in how to read Scripture was at the heart of Paul’s pastoral practice: Gentiles needed to be initiated into reading practices that enabled them to receive Israel’s Scripture as their own.” Later in the book, Hays writes, “Paul’s missionary strategy in his confrontation with pagan culture repeatedly draws upon eschatologically interpreted Scripture texts to clarify the identity of the church and to remake make the minds of his congregations” (chap. 1, Apocalyptic Eschatology and Scripture, Kindle).

⁶ Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle. Hays says, “Paul rereads Scripture with an imagination converted by the death and resurrection of Jesus.”

Paul's readings of Scripture are poetic in character. He finds in Scripture a rich source of image and metaphor that enables him to declare with power what God is doing in the world in his own time. He reads the Bible neither as a historian nor as a systematic theologian but as a poetic preacher who discerns analogical correspondences between the scriptural story and the gospel that he proclaims.⁷

In reading metaphorically, the modern believer is enveloped within the story of Israel and Israel's symbolic world. However, the story-world has not remained unaltered; the death and resurrection of Messiah means that transformation has occurred. Thus, there is a tension between fundamental continuity and radical discontinuity in the story.

Third, Hays defines and employs a "literary-theological approach to intertextuality."⁸ This hermeneutic conviction underscores the legitimacy of calling Hays a biblical philologist. His concern for linguistic echoes and allusions, within an inter-textual and intra-canonical methodology, means that textual criticism happens at the level of words and stories. Hays demonstrates this methodology through an examination of Paul's use of Deutero-Isaiah. We lack time and space to rehearse the entire argument, but it will suffice to say that—according to Hays—the Apostle Paul finds in Isaiah an advanced heralding of the gospel and the Messianic prefiguration of his own ministry. It is the latter point here that deserves unpacking.

The Apostle Paul reads Isaiah and finds the eschatological salvation of YHWH announced to Jews and Gentiles. This is present in Isaiah 11:10, which Paul quotes in Romans 15:12, as the basis for—and in defense of—his own Gentile mission (Rom 15:14–16:23). Though Hays himself remains quite innocent of our "story immersion" agenda, he nevertheless (and perhaps unwittingly) unveils Paul's own convictions about such things. While Hays is speaking of hermeneutic apprenticeship, he shows that Paul inhabits the Old Testament story of Israel and the Messianic mission by Spirit-union with Christ. God had called Paul, giving him

⁷ Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle. We see in the above quotation that Hays has no trouble relating the ages-old Scripture to the modern-era believer and, for that matter, neither did the Apostle Paul. Metaphor and analogy, for Hays, keep the Bible relevant.

⁸ Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle.

the gift of the Spirit, to proclaim among the Gentiles the gospel of Christ. Paul says that Christ had accomplished this work through him by the power of the Spirit (Rom 15:17-19). Thus, Paul's own Spirit-inspired hermeneutic has forged his new identity in Christ as a minister of the gospel among Gentiles. His interpretive method shapes his identity and actions. It has happened first to Paul, and thereafter to those whom Paul teaches.

In summary, Hays believes that Paul's hermeneutic seeks to shape the identity and actions of the covenant community according to Paul's own story immersion. In Christ and by the Spirit, Paul has inhabited Israel's story; through the transformation of the mind (converted imagination), Paul teaches Gentiles to follow his example. Hays further demonstrates Paul's poetic hermeneutic commitment through the use of symbol, metaphor, and image. These figural elements of the texts bridge the eschatological gap between the Old and New Testaments, and between the ancient and modern readers of Scripture. For Paul, and thus for Hays as well, the analogous metaphorical interchange between Old Testament Scripture and New Testament Gospel is what gives the biblical canon its sense of fundamental continuity.

It is also the larger story, the biblical narrative that gives the Bible its inherent sense of cohesion. For Paul, the church is the heir of Israel's story and the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. Within the larger biblical story, we encounter apocalyptic eschatological dimensions that reshape Israel's history in the death and resurrection of Christ. This we will call the principle of intensified continuity. As we said above, the foundational continuity of the biblical narrative is not a merely 1:1 correspondence. But the relationship is not always easy to see. How, for example, could the people of God expect that the temple would be transfigured in the person of Jesus? Hays supplies us with an answer, saying that the Old Testament prefigures the New in ways that must be discerned retrospectively (cf. John 2:22). Hays maintains that the hermeneutical key for understanding the principle of intensified continuity is the death and, especially, the resurrection of Christ. He says, "Paul rereads Scripture with an

imagination converted by the death and resurrection of Jesus.”⁹ And then, “When he rereads Israel’s Scripture retrospectively, Paul finds numerous prefigurations of this revelatory event... [and] once the Scriptures are grasped in light of this hermeneutical key, their pervasively eschatological character comes into focus.”¹⁰

Thus, we are instructed within Scripture itself—by the Apostle Paul and, vicariously by Hays—that we should read eschatologically and apocalyptically. We are also, in this same vein, instructed to read Scripture teleologically, with the consummated new creation in mind. Finally, we are taught to approach Scripture according to a hermeneutic of trust. This presents us with an obvious overlap with wisdom hermeneutics and the fiduciary comportment, or trusting disposition, with which Paul reads Old Testament Scripture and we, by extension, should read all of canonized Scripture.

Ultimately, then, the significance of story immersion is discovered in hermeneutic methodology. Participation in the story of Israel is accomplished through imaginative analogical identification with Israel, through eschatological, figural, and metaphoric interpretation with the goal of worldview transformation. Thus, Hays believes that the conversion of the imagination—through the death and resurrection of Christ—will “necessarily see the moral world in which we live and move through new eyes.”¹¹

Do we live in a moral world, a textual world, a transcendent world, or a Second Temple Jewish world? The answer is “yes,” we live in each of these realms depending on our perspective and the illumination the Spirit provides for discerning our true identities. Certainly the writers of the New Testament lived in a Second Temple Jewish world, in which Palestine was occupied by political enemies. The Romans represented the same oppression that Israel had

⁹ Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle.

¹⁰ Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle.

¹¹ Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle.

experienced in Egypt those many centuries earlier and—more recently—that heavy handedness of the Babylonian Empire. But this, too, was ancient history for the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes who all considered themselves true Israel. What would it mean for Israel to end her exile and be restored, for YHWH to return to Zion? It would mean the transfiguration of the major Old Testament signposts.

Here we are reintroduced to N. T. Wright, who believes that worldview is shaped by the way we perceive Jesus himself. Wright says, “What you say about Jesus affects your entire worldview. If you see Jesus differently, everything changes.”¹² And Wright says much about Jesus, suitably connecting the Incarnate Word to the theological world of the Old Testament and the historical/cultural (and/or sociological) world of Second Temple Judaism. The applicability of the biblical story is uncovered through historical reconstruction and story immersion. When we realize that the worldview of Second Temple Judaism was centered on the signposts of Temple, Torah, and Land, we begin to realize that our story immersion deals first with Christ himself: the New Temple (John 2:20-22), the embodiment of Torah (John 1:14), and the place of eschatological Sabbath-rest for God’s people (Matt 11:28-30). The signposts of Old and New Testaments shape our “being” in the world. Thus, Wright says that story immersion gives our lives a *telos*, a future goal or vision of glorious new creation that determines our steps by wooing our hearts. Wright focuses on the heart and its visionary perception. Story immersion affirms one’s *telos*—one’s vision of the end, the new creation—and prescribes submission to an affectional direction/determinism.

¹² N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 12. Elsewhere, Wright affirms Jesus as the centerpiece of time, history, cosmology, eschatology, and anthropology (and, of course, the pivotal part of theology). See N. T. Wright, “The Stone the Builders Rejected: Jesus, the Temple, and the Kingdom” and “A New Creation: Resurrection and Epistemology” (The Gifford Lectures, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK, 2018. <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/discerning-dawn-history-eschatology-and-new-creation>). As such, worldview and epistemology considerations are subsidiaries, related more to human interaction with (and reflection upon) Christ’s centrality.

Dryden focuses on ethics. Though he rejects the modernist dichotomy of “being” versus “doing,” his rubric nevertheless involves behaviors and rationale: right ARM, unpacked as correct Actions, Reasons, and Motivations.¹³ For our purposes in examining the Gospel of John, the emphasis Dryden places on the differing tools of varying biblical genres is crucial. Gospel uses story. Thus, in Dryden’s estimation, gospel accounts employ story immersion for ethical transformation. The participatory reader is stirred by the characters within the narrative. Inspired by eminent humility, he wants to emulate John the Baptist. Confronted with the naïve ignorance (or even the proud arrogance) of Nicodemus, he responds differently. The reader is enabled, in this model, to achieve the prescribed end of the Bible’s intentional formational agenda through his own means. He is invested with real moral agency, a meritorious contribution to the Bible’s formative intent, insofar as he can recognize the moral exemplar (in narrative texts) and imitate his actions, reasons, and motivations.

Evaluating Conversation Partners: Dryden, Wright, and Hays

Though we are true ideological sons of the Reformation in terms of our *salvation*—rejecting the semi-Pelagian anthropology by which contingent creatures somehow make meaningful and active contributions in the soteriological economy—we may wonder if the vestiges of Roman Catholicism still cling to our understanding of *sanctification*. We would rightly reject the notion of grace infused, by which human merit may be achieved unto eternal life. This is undoubtedly modified in Protestant thinking, so that eternal life is not achieved by merit, but that some level of human merit, by way of meaningful contribution or cooperation, is nevertheless possible.¹⁴ But if the grace of God, as the foundational gift from Creator to

¹³ Jeffery de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 16-18.

¹⁴ Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 152. The authors write, “The Roman Catholic Church defined justification as forgiveness, regeneration, and sanctification together, received by the infusion of grace through the sacraments, by which human merit may be achieved, leading to eternal life.”

creature, serves as the basis of our very existence, surely it must also serve as the basis of our every act of righteousness, obedience, and/or covenant faithfulness. We live borrowed lives. We enact a borrowed obedience. If we reject the infusion of grace—and settle on imputation of righteousness instead—then we are almost forced to admit no possibility of merit in the believer, except what is produced within him by the Spirit. The merit of Christ is donated to the believer through the relational mechanism of mutual participation unto the transformation of the believer’s status: he was an enemy of God, but he now is at peace with God. Justification effects this positional shift.

But the merit of Christ is also donated to the believer through the same Spirit-union, or participation, with the ultimately successful goal of bearing fruit. The fruit of covenant faithfulness, belonging to the Spirit as love, joy, peace, and so forth, was produced in Christ by the Spirit. The same must be true of believers who partake of Christ’s body and live his risen life. The Spirit unites them to Christ’s positional righteousness and to Christ’s active righteousness. The Spirit produces the fruit of faithful obedience in them, according to the gift, the donated life of Christ, they have received. Thus, the doctrine of sanctification may be defined as the “effectiveness of Christ in the lives of believers.”¹⁵ Both aspects of Christ’s merit become theirs, though not ontologically, but rather by the Spirit’s work and the clothing of salvation’s garments.

We must discern the significance of the Spirit in the work of Dryden, Wright, and Hays. First, Dryden claims that inherent to the Bible (and the gospel) is the enlivening of human moral agency unto virtuous and upright conduct (fueled by proper motivations). This byproduct of the gospel accords with the very formative agenda of Scripture. Our evaluation contends that the Spirit is the personal divine agent of the gospel transformation Dryden affirms. But the Spirit

¹⁵ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

remains obscured beneath (or behind) human moral agency in Dryden's work. This calls the biblical sustainability and theological responsibility of the wisdom hermeneutic into question.

Furthermore, Dryden ascribes to the Bible—a sanctified creaturely object—an undue preeminence of moral and ethical transformation in the human reader that must be reserved for God alone. His assumption must be more clearly stated: the Bible itself does not possess or effect an intentional formational agenda, for it is only a tool in the hand of God. Instead, it is the Spirit *through the Scriptures* who possesses and effects the transformative wisdom of God in the human reader. Too often in Dryden, the Scriptures seem to possess this divine quality in-and-for themselves. But the Scripture mediates God's self-revelation and transformative intent. God orders and sanctifies "creaturely realities as servants of his self-presentation."¹⁶ The Bible is sanctified, a mediator of divine revelation made suitable for divine use through the Spirit's work of inspiring its human authors. The Spirit ordains that authors and texts should serve his transformative agenda. In his divine providence, the Spirit also ensures that creaturely texts achieve their intended goal, but not because the text inherently possesses such a goal.

In a close reading of their texts, we find Dryden, Wright, and Hays offering only a complimentary tip of the cap to the Holy Spirit. It is inconceivable that these scholars intentionally obscure the role of the Holy Spirit in formulating their thoughts on wisdom texts, historical reconstruction, and converted imaginations. Instead, it must be affirmed that our three main conversation partners have assumed the Spirit's redemptive and sanctifying agency in the fields of their respective studies, but have not always been clear, overt, and/or explicit in their affirmation of the Spirit's work.

¹⁶ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 20. Webster does not indicate in his book whether or not he is gleaning from Barthian fields in his doctrine of Scripture, but there appears to be produce of Barthian seeds. Surprising, then, is the fact that Dryden ascribes so much value (intentional formational agenda) to Scripture per se, when he follows Barth in his "story immersion" methodology. Concerning the doctrines of Scripture, Barth writes, "We have to call the Bible a witness of divine revelation. We have here an undoubted limitation: we distinguish the Bible as such from revelation. A witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses... which as such is not itself revelation, but only – and this is the limitation – the witness to it." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2*, in Gregg R. Allison *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 73.

In the end, the Bible might not be what Dryden presents it to be. It might not have the cognition, intent, or mystical power to transform human beings that he considers it to have. To be fair, it seems imbalanced to level these charges against a thoroughly conservative evangelical scholar. More likely, it is that Dryden personifies Scripture in order to make a point. But he wants to present the Bible as the source of revelation and not witness to it. Believers holding to the mystical worldview that prevails in the “two-thirds” world might interpret Dryden more literally than he intends. If the Bible itself has intrinsic power, why not sleep with it under your pillow, so that its transformative wisdom might seep through the ear canal into the brain?

Concerning a fiduciary formative encounter with the text, we must push back ever so softly. We must affirm that we encounter the Spirit of God through the text; the Spirit who unites us to Christ meets us in the story of Scripture. Through the Spirit, we are addressed as sons and heirs, as sojourners and tabernacles, as people of the living word (a new Torah) who approach Zion instead of Sinai and look for the new creation and not merely Canaan. However, the main point of Dryden is not to quibble over semantics, but to thrust a correct, balanced, and ultimately biblical worldview upon us. Contingent creatures must embrace a dative, trusting, and open disposition toward God’s will achieved in/through them. Ontology determines methodology. We must be illumined interpreters, empowered to leave our historical contexts behind. We never leave our finitude or contingency, but we abandon the historically and socially conditioned presuppositions and biases in approaching God through the Scriptures.

In terms of Wright’s contribution, we must also provide a word of slight modification. As a textual historian (or archeologist), Wright completes half of the journey, as it were, by connecting the signposts of the Old Testament story to Christ as their fulfillment in the New Testament. And, though he affirms the necessary work of Christ and the Spirit, he appears reluctant to explicitly collapse the spatial and chronological gap between original audience and contemporary reader. The meaning of a given text is historically conditioned and situated... and it is ancient history, rather than modern history in which that meaning finds its terminus.

In the end, Wright affirms typology as the christological key for understanding the relationship between Old and New Testaments. But the Spirit—who unites us to Christ—is the key for our story immersion. Perhaps this final aspect is beyond the scope of Wright’s concern. It would not be difficult to imagine that, as concerned ultimately with history, the modern sense of story immersion—or the mechanics of achieving it—might never have entered his mind. The genius of Wright, however, is found in the soil of historical reconstruction, yielding the seeds of authentic signposts that sprouted to create and govern the ancient Jewish worldview; these same signposts, fulfilled in Christ, thereby transcended the covenantal movement from Old to New.

At precisely this point, Hays becomes an invaluable guide. Where historical reconstruction allows us to grasp the Jewish worldview, a converted imagination allows us to assimilate its transfigured (christocentric and spiritual) expression through adoption. In short, the imagination allows us to be subsumed within the new creational storyline of Scripture. Hays specifically upholds the imagination of the biblical reader. The imagination, he says, allows us to understand the modern (Gentile) inclusion within these ancient (Jewish) signposts, as an extension of typological interpretive methodology. The imagination is the mechanism that places us (modern believers) in the story of Israel, through the biblical authors’ retrospective discernment of Old Testament types, thereafter applied to the trans-generational reader of Scripture. However, Hays presents us with a moderate dilemma as well. He writes, “The conversion of the imagination that Paul seeks is *not merely the spiritual enlightenment of individuals* but rather the transformed consciousness of the community of the faithful.”¹⁷ This is somewhat confounding. Certainly there can be no transformed consciousness apart from spiritual (as in, of the Spirit) enlightenment. The two ideas are not complementary, nor are they competitive. They must be consequential: that is to say, the transformed consciousness must be the result of Spiritual enlightenment.

¹⁷ Hays, *Conversion of Imagination*, Introduction, Kindle (emphasis added).

In the end, a converted imagination is quite insufficient, for it leaves the story participant suspended in a cognitive realization of his new identity, rather than a concrete expression of it. Gentiles do not enter the story of Israel—as true Israelites and recipients of the covenant promises—through interpretive methods born of imaginative processes. Their identities have been changed, not just in theory, but really and truly. Once more, the Spirit is the key for story immersion and worldview transformation. Thus, the Apostle Paul can say that, because of participatory Spirit-union with Christ, the believer’s life is radically re-centered. Indeed, Christ is their very life (Col 3:4). They no longer live apart from the life of Christ in them (Gal 2:20). Ethnicity and historical-cultural situatedness no longer define them; only whether or not they are united to Christ by the Spirit.

If the merit of a given methodology is found in its all-inclusive applicability, then our analysis ultimately boils down to the function of wisdom hermeneutics, historical reconstruction, and cognitive conversion within a variety of inner-biblical texts. We now embark on a journey whose goal will be to evaluate story hermeneutics in light of John’s Gospel and then apply a synthesized method to the “Bread of Life” discourse, all while keeping the ancient and modern contexts firmly in mind.

CHAPTER 4

THE TEXTUAL LABORATORY

In this chapter, we will deal with the nuts and bolts of applying hermeneutic theory and proposed methodology to biblical texts. The goal from here forward will be to survey the Gospel of John to discern the narrative presentation of Christ as the one in whom the story of Israel is transfigured, ultimately finding its coherent center. We will then synthesize the hermeneutic principles from Dryden, Wright, and Hays and bring them into contact with John's Gospel. And finally, we will unpack my proposal, a hermeneutic in which the interpreter:

1. *Inhabits a Historical Text.* The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the symbolic world of ancient Israel is fulfilled. The pillars of the Bible's symbolic world resist all self-referential forms of definition, thereby calling for an abandonment of self to the new identity assigned by story immersion.
2. *Interprets a Living Text.* The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the signposts of Israel's story are transfigured to unveil their transcendent significance. Believers of all generations participate in the cyclical recapitulation of Israel's story, which is ultimately coherent within the divine story of God's self-disclosure.
3. *Imbibes the Formative Intent of the Text.* The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the quality of the divine life is imparted. Any moral, ethical, or formative agendas in John's Gospel are expressed in terms of union with (and conformity to) Christ, and the fruitful outworking of the divine life by the power of the indwelling Spirit.

We begin this section with a few brief observations from the Gospel of John. The story of Israel finds its climax and coherence in Christ. Thus, John begins his gospel account with an apocalyptic unveiling and recapitulation of the Genesis creation while also pointing to a new creation about to unfold in his narrative account of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.¹ As the

¹ On the significance of the "new creation" theme in John's Gospel, see Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 175-8. The parallel passage in Ps 33:6 is particularly significant for the Fourth Gospel, for it illuminates a "new creation" *inclusio* within the narrative

theological, hermeneutic, and conceptual center of God’s self-revelation, Christ comes to embody and redefine the major signposts of the Old Testament story. We have alluded above to the Pauline Epistles because of their centrality in Wright and Hays. Now we want to explore the ways in which Christ embodies the Temple and Torah, all within the context of new creation and new exodus (following the “inheritance through exodus” pattern of Gen 15:13-16). The first indication of John’s “new temple” theology is located in his poetic prologue. Here we find that Jesus embodies the divine presence and radiates the divine glory (John 1:14). The Greek verb *σκηνώω* (to dwell, to have one’s tent) almost certainly alludes to the wilderness tabernacle, the place of God’s presence. The tabernacle existed during a precarious point in Israel’s history, when the nation was geographically suspended between Egypt (the land of enslavement) and Canaan (the land of promise). But John’s presentation of the transcendent Word incarnate dictates a fundamental reconfiguring of the “temple” signpost. In the Fourth Gospel, the people of God do not inhabit a conceptual world of bare recapitulation, but one of transfigured continuity.² Thus, while they are engaged in an exodus of sorts, it is a new (spiritual) exodus, with a new (superior) Moses figure and a qualitatively superlative “manna” in the wilderness. The miraculous provision of bread and fish in John 6 is explained in exodus terminology. We will come back to these details in due course.

For now, we find the tabernacle (or temple) of the new exodus at the inception of a new creation. The heavenly temple and the created world are joined together by Jesus Christ; he is at

structure. The powerful Word of God brought the heavens and earth into being, and the breath of his mouth (consider John 20:22) accomplished the same. In the Gospel of John, this idea of Word and breath involves Jesus and the Spirit as the divine agents of the new creation.

² Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 62-70, claims that the word “glory” binds together the Johannine themes of exodus, wilderness tabernacle, temple, and Moses typology. It is the word “glory” that also inspired the term “transfigured continuity,” a phrase coined in this project to describe the relationship of Old and New Testaments, Covenants, and signposts, all having undergone a glorious transformation in Christ. See also David Mark Ball, *‘I AM’ in John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background, and Theological Implications* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), who contends that the *ἐγώ εἰμι* statements of Christ serve a similar cohesive function.

the center of the heaven-and-earth overlap, the cosmological nucleus.³ Further indications of Jesus's place as the new temple continue to surface within John's Gospel. The disciples retrospectively discern that Jesus had disclosed the temple's true meaning and ultimate significance in himself (John 2:21-22). The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well explicitly asks about Jesus's supremacy. Is he greater than Jacob, who provided a sustainable well of fresh water in the desert (John 4:12)? She implicitly inquires as to Jesus's authority to determine the locus of worship for God's people. Should people follow the Abrahamic pattern and worship at Shechem—the place of the patriarch's first altar (Gen 12:6-7)—near Mount Gerizim? Or should people follow the Davidic pattern and worship at Mount Jerusalem, the location of the first temple? Jesus answers with transcendent authority. The new temple, from which living waters flow, will centralize universal worship around Spirit and Truth.⁴

In Christ, we find the new center of worship and sacrifice—not according to localized and physical realities (animal sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple), but according to spiritual and transcendent realities (sacrifices of praise, the offering of ourselves as living sacrifices to God himself, through Christ). Jesus is not only the temple embodied, but the priesthood fulfilled. Thus, we find in him the perpetual priest who eternally mediates the covenant relationship between God and man. Nowhere in John's Gospel is the mediatorial work of Jesus's high priestly ministry more evident than in chapter 17. This passage has commonly been called the

³ See here N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 56. Wright proposes the connection between Temple and Jewish/Christian cosmology because in the Temple we encounter the collapse between the heaven-and-earth overlap. He also proposes the connection between Sabbath and Jewish/Christian eschatology because the Sabbath defines the cyclical outflowing of time in the biblical narrative. In the Gospel of John, the idea of temple cosmology is certainly evident in the poetic prologue; the concept of Sabbath eschatology is not as clear, due to the fact that John organizes time in his gospel through the cyclical unfolding of Jewish festivals.

⁴ The connection between the temple and rivers of water flowing out from it is found in Ezek 47:1-12, which interestingly includes images of abundant fish (a slight echo of John 6?) and perpetually fruitful trees (a faint echo of John 15?). The same link is implicit in John's Gospel as well, when at the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths Jesus declares that living water flows out from himself (John 7:37-38). On this point, see the translation of John 7:37-38 in Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 411-12. Hays interprets the syntax and symbolism of the *Sukkoth* festival to present a Christo-centric understanding of the Johannine passage, noting the inter-textual echoes of Ezek 47 and Zech 14.

“high priestly prayer” of Jesus, for in it we encounter intercession on behalf of the covenant people. Jesus anticipates that his localized presence in heaven will ensure a continual intercession, while his sending of the Spirit fulfills the promise of his perpetual presence among God’s people.

The presence of Jesus assures God’s people of spiritual guidance, provision, and care. Jesus will be the great Davidic shepherd among the flock of Yahweh. In terms of Torah, Jesus embodies the divine instruction and imparts divine wisdom in his teaching.⁵ Themes of wisdom personified resonate within the prologue of John’s Gospel (1:14). Jesus is the authoritative word and wisdom of God. This is, perhaps, why the Apostle John emphasizes so frequently the all-sufficient power of Jesus’s words to create and sustain new creational life. John 2:22 places equal authority in the Scriptures that prefigured Christ and the actual word of Jesus, spoken to the disciples regarding the temple of his body. The word of Jesus is the basis of the disciples’ faith. The same is true for the Samaritans in John 4:39-42, where the crowd responded first to the woman’s testimony and then—more decisively and extensively—to the word of Jesus. It is also true for the official in John 4:50. But the word of Jesus creates division and separation, for within the “Bread of Life” discourse we find the grumbling crowds in juxtaposition with the valiant Simon Peter; one group stumbles over words of scandal (6:61) while Peter affirms Jesus as the one who possesses “words of eternal life” (6:68).⁶

In the Gospel of John, worldview transformation is described in terms of conformity to Christ and ethical outworking of Christ’s life in us (by the Spirit) through the production of fruit.

⁵ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 314, highlights an influential essay by Peder Borgen, in which Jesus is compared to Torah and Wisdom in the “Bread of Life” discourse. The original essay follows: Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, NovTSup 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

⁶ Wright, *History and Eschatology*, 187, provides a clue about the relationship between “words” and “eternal life” in John 6:68. Wright says, “Jesus and the early Christians... believed in a cosmology where heaven and earth, though very different, were made for one another and were able, under certain circumstances, to come together—the circumstances in question having to do, normally, with the Temple, and then with Torah. Jesus and his first followers, as Second Temple Jews, believed as well in an eschatology of new creation.” When the signposts of Temple and Torah came together to abolish the heaven-and-earth divide, a new creation was coming to pass.

The Spirit unites us to Christ. Thus, the New Testament speaks about Christ as the one in whom Temple and Torah are transfigured. Only then, in light of Spirit-union with Christ, do the New Testament authors begin to speak of the Christological implications of these transfigured signposts for the lives of believers. They inherit a temple identity, an inner-Torah, and a corresponding brightness, fruitfulness, and transformative wisdom. They inherit a place of peace and rest. Inasmuch as the Spirit dwells in them, they become members of the body of Christ, little stones being built into little temples, places of God's presence and radiating glory. By the Spirit, the Torah is written on their hearts and they begin to embody Torah in their ethical obedience and pedagogical wisdom. The eschatological fruit of righteousness is brought from the new creation (as the New Testament equivalent of the Promised Land) into the hearts of God's people by the Spirit. So, while they do not possess the land in its fullest consummated sense, they have received a foretaste (an evidential down-payment of its abundance).

Spirit-union with Christ redefines who we are. It also serves as the process by which we enjoy participatory union with the symbolic world and transfigured story of Israel. My focus will be on the Spirit who unites us to Christ and empowers our participatory union with Christ and, thus, our story immersion for worldview transformation. As we encounter this concept in the Gospel of John, we will observe his preference for defining it as conformity to Christ by the mirroring of Christ's ethical righteousness. We now derive our sense of identity from being "in Christ" and thus, real and active participants in the eschatological, New Israel. From this sense of identity, we begin to evaluate our worldview commitments, ethical behaviors and directional focus of life. We participate in the new creation, the new exodus, the new temple, the new covenant, and the new covenant community.

Proposing a Synthesis of Story Hermeneutic Methods

We begin our section on synthesis by unpacking the threefold manner in which the interpreter engages with the text. As we had stated above, the interpreter inhabits a historical

text, interprets a living text, and imbibes the formative intent of the text. Let us examine each of these proposals in turn.

First, *the interpreter inhabits a historical text*. The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the symbolic world of ancient Israel is fulfilled. It is here, within the world of ancient Israel, that we uncover a very significant hermeneutic principle. The text must be encountered as something outside us; it must be approached in its “otherness.” We have seen this principle above with the contribution of Gadamer’s work in Dryden. Now we apply the principle to how the Apostle John would have us engage with his gospel. The pillars of Israel’s symbolic world firmly resist all modernist forms of self-referential inhabitation of the biblical storyline. The individual reader cannot construct meaning, because the world that he begins to inhabit—and the worldview he begins to assimilate—lies outside himself and his experiences. He is a foreigner in an alien story. Thus, the biblical narrative calls for an abandonment of self to the new identity assigned by story immersion. And that new identity is found in no other than Christ himself. From the Gospel of John, it becomes clear that creation itself depends on the eternal Word for its very existence. In him was life (John 1:4), and that life was the illuminating force by which all men live and move and have their being.

Toward the end of the Fourth Gospel, we find the same theme of a donated existence in light of the new creation as well. Jesus breathes on the disciples and the Holy Spirit is imparted (John 20:22). This is undoubtedly a visual allusion to Genesis 2:7, in which God breathed life into Adam. As the one in whom the new creation is established, Jesus breathes the Spirit upon the disciples so that there would be a discernible connection between his commissioning from the Father and theirs from the Son. The power to engage in new creational mission will not flow from the disciples themselves, but from Christ and the Spirit.

The story of Jesus in the Gospel of John also presents the eternal Word who “tabernacled” among his people (John 1:14). The prologue hints at what the remaining gospel develops: namely, the temple was always meant to point to Jesus. The shadow was intended to point to, and unveil, the glory of its corresponding reality. But it is clear that this position is as

universal as it is individual. In other words, Christ becomes the locus of worship for Jews and Samaritans (John 4:21-24). More than this, Christ becomes the center of the cosmos, the one in whom the collapse of heaven and earth takes place. He is the one in whom eternal life is granted (John 6:40). The implications of the temple theme in John's Gospel for the modern interpreter of Scripture are clear. One must look outside himself—to Christ—in order to encounter God, find life, and share in eternal glory.

Within the theme of new creation, we find a familiar correlative. It was promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16 that inheritance would come through exodus. The same is evident in the Gospel of John, as the movement from material creation in chapter 1 to spiritual creation in chapter 20 involves a period of new wilderness wandering, miraculous provision of manna from heaven (John 6:32-35), and living water flowing from the rock (John 7:37-39).⁷ Eternal life, as the inheritance of the saints, involves their Spirit-union with Christ in the Gospel of John, in which the author draws heavily upon Old Testament imagery. This imagery both redefines and repositions believers of every era, identifying them as the new wilderness generation of Israel who, through their union with Christ, are established and preserved on the journey leading heavenward.

The vine and branches discourse in the Fourth Gospel is perhaps the strongest Old Testament image John employs for the self-emptying of the modern interpreter. It is no mistake that the centrality of Spirit-union with Christ connects this discourse—which is positioned at the center of the Farewell Discourse—to the “Bread of Life” discourse at the center of the Book of Signs (John 1—12). As the true vine, Jesus nourishes the branches that are only fruitful in him, ensures the fullest impartation of joy, and reveals the sovereignty of God by making determinative choices (John 15:5, 11, 16). Thus, through the creation theme, we find that man is

⁷ On this final point, recall Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 412. See also Mary B. Spaulding, *Commemorative Identities: Jewish Social Memory and the Johannine Feast of Booths* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

completely contingent; he cannot be self-referential. In the temple theme, we find that man is unable to find God except through God's own self-disclosure in Jesus. In the exodus theme, we learn that man is unable to sustain himself on the journey of life (his *new* life, as a pilgrim suspended between deliverance and inheritance). And, through the imagery of the vine and branches, we confirm that man is sustained and fructified in his new creational life by Spirit-union with Christ. As such, the interpreter who inhabits the symbolic world of John's Gospel is confronted with his own sense of utter dependence upon Christ.

Furthermore, the central themes in John's Gospel affirm the humility demanded by a revelatory epistemology: because this new identity, new worldview, and new ethical system are spiritually discerned, we cannot merely stumble into it or summon it from within ourselves. Elsewhere in Scripture, we find that truth must be revealed to us (Matt 11:25-26). It must come from the Spirit and not our sense of sight, imagination, or moral formation. In addition, we must embrace a fiduciary epistemology because it derives itself from ontology and metaphysics. Because we are contingent creatures, we must have a "dative" comportment to reality and not a "nominative" comportment to reality.⁸ We must realize that we are shaped as responsive molds by the forces acting upon us. When that force is the Holy Spirit, we respond with a trusting disposition toward knowing: that we come to know by what is revealed, but we affirm the trustworthiness of what is revealed because of the utterly reliable God.

The Bible is a unified narrative. And the biblical story invites the reader to find himself in the biblical text, a new world in which transcendence infiltrates human history and the divine enters into time and space. The reader must stand with the author, as Karl Barth proposed, and participate with him in the subject matter of the text.⁹ He must begin to ask the questions that

⁸ Jeffery de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 51.

⁹ Barth says, "To understand an author means for me mainly to stand with him, to take each of his words in earnest, so long as it is not proven that he does not deserve this trust, to participate with him in the subject matter, in order to interpret him from the inside out." Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 284, in Dryden, *Hermeneutic*

author asks, to observe what the author sees, and to affirm what the author believes. Surely this is the foundation of narrative epistemology, to learn from the divine and human authors according to a fiduciary comportment to the author's text that Dryden commends elsewhere. After all, these are trustworthy guides, proven to be authoritative because of their ontological quality (according to the Spirit) and their inspired status (according to the human author). As we have seen, trustworthy guides and trusting readers are necessary ingredients in all successful epistemological pursuits. Having now developed the notion that the interpreter of Scripture inhabits a historical text, we turn to the next principle.

Second, the reader inhabiting this historical text also *interprets a living text*. The Spirit unites believers to Christ, in whom the signposts of Israel's story are transfigured to unveil their transcendent significance. The historical story remains paradigmatic—this we have received from Wright—but the christological transformation of that story makes it relevant. In Christ, believers from across all ages participate in the cyclical recapitulation of Israel's story, which is ultimately part of God's story. We consider the “otherness” of the text brought near. Thus, we speak of the *new* creation, the *new* temple, and the *new* exodus, whereby a sense of transfigured continuity is illumined before us. It is continuous with the historical story in terms of its foundational signposts. But it is transfigured in that Christ takes it up into himself, transforming each of the signposts with transcendent significance.

When we learn to interpret the Bible eschatologically and apocalyptically—with Christ at the center—we will experience a conversion of the imagination. This conversion helps us conceive of ways in which our participatory union with Christ actually effects a transformation of our identities, our cultural and historical embeddedness, and our theological grammar. From Hays, we inherit the redeemed imaginative license to find ourselves in the biblical story at precisely those points where Spirit-union with Christ is linked to an apocalyptic unveiling of the

of Wisdom, 16.

Old Testament's eschatological significance. Here again the Gospel of John informs our hermeneutic methods. Christ stands at the center, the eternal Word incarnate, and takes up Israel's story into himself (not the other way around) in order to demonstrate its purpose in the divine act of self-disclosure.

As the astute interpreter knows, participation in the story does not mean importing his previous worldview in to the realm of the new world, with its subtle yet evident pre-suppositions and pre-commitments. Rather, it means abandoning his previous worldview convictions in submitting to the worldview of the divine (primary) and human (secondary) storytellers. Sensory perception will be of little value in this realm of the Spirit. The flesh will count for very little indeed. Worldview data cannot be gathered by physical means; the transcendent nature of the new world demands it be gained spiritually, by spiritual perception. The words of Christ are spirit and life. Ultimately, the story participant must seek to follow the lead of his cultural guides for integration within this new society, participating as a real and flourishing member of the new world. The fires of imagination will fuel his discovery, but the reality of the biblical world is objective—an expression of ultimate reality—and not subjective, the three dimensional imagining of his complex mind and must, therefore, be entered through self-surrender and self-abandonment. If, by the power of the Spirit, he can accomplish this kenosis, this self-emptying, he too may find salvation in the story; he too may find it to be redemptive.

And it should be carefully noted that the saving nature of the biblical story can *only* be applied by the Spirit; it can *only* be realized in the reader indwelt by the Spirit of God. Thus, biblical epistemology, the process of coming to know both God and self, depends on faith commitments held by regenerate readers. It depends on the power and illumination of the indwelling Spirit, who enables participants to spiritually perceive new worldview associations and empowers them with the necessary humility to reject previous pre-suppositional commitments and embrace new ones by faith. The Spirit must also incline the human disposition toward an unnatural submission in trust and openness to that which is revealed in the new

worldview. Here the reader must abandon himself to the text, to the story narrated within it, and to the Spirit who authored it.

So, while the post-modern interpreter is correct to say that presuppositions are an unavoidable part of our epistemic makeup, with which we inevitably approach the biblical text, the same interpreter is incorrect in conceiving that these presuppositions—inasmuch as they are self-generated or self-referential—are the correct or appropriate presuppositions to maintain.¹⁰ The worldview, like the imagination, must undergo a conversion. Though we are historically and culturally embedded people, we are taught to abandon notions of personal identity in light of what the Bible says about us. Therefore, we are no longer post-Enlightenment, post-modern people, but ancient people on an ancient journey through the worldly wilderness that is not our home. We build homes and buy possessions, but yet we are pilgrims *en route* to our true home, the heavenly inheritance that will one day descend upon the earth and renew it forever. Then the kingdom will be present on earth as it is in heaven.

In the meantime, we are, at one and the same time, both at home and on pilgrimage. Our presuppositions are challenged as our identity changes.¹¹ Our worldview is altered by the text that addresses and defines us. We no longer adhere to what we call ourselves, but to what the Bible calls us. We are contingent creatures, not self-referential beings. We are dependent entities, surviving only by the vivifying power of another. We are eternally secondary, never primary. Once again, the concept of gift sobers us; we live borrowed and donated lives, contingent—not necessary—in the realm of all existence.

¹⁰ In terms of postmodern presuppositions, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

¹¹ As we have seen, Hays calls this a “conversion of the imagination.” See Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), Introduction, Kindle. Our identities change at the moment of conversion (the new birth), as our status before God immediately shifts. This is where human history catches up to the divine will, for we had been known as saints in eternity—chosen in Christ before creation (Eph 1:4)—and will now be thusly known temporally. In terms of perfectly obedient actions, unblemished by the current disintegration of the inner and outer man, history and eternity coalesce in the consummated kingdom, when sanctification is finalized in glorification.

Furthermore, we are caught up in the story of Israel, as Israelites ourselves who not only possess the redemptive story, but inhabit the figural signposts as well. We are sons of God (in the covenantal sense); we are living stones, the temple being built in which God lives by His Spirit (1 Pet 2:4-5; Eph 2:22). We no longer consider our salvation—much less our sanctification—as byproducts of active choices and ethical striving. Remember the vestiges of medieval Roman Catholicism? They cling to us here more than anywhere else. We have forsaken the preeminence of *sola gratia* in the quest for free will and meaningful contribution.

Again, we long to be nominative, active subjects in the world. But we must only (and ever) be merely dative. Dryden cites Griffiths with justified approval: “You are constantly confronted and addressed by a world not of your making and largely beyond your comprehension and control. The sensory arrays that appear before you, the fabric of time that enmeshes you, the manifold of language in which you have your habitus, the social order in which your roles are given to you, the sea of faces of human others, constantly addressing you, calling you into being—all these make of you an indirect object and give you a dative, which is to say a called and donated life.”¹²

So the Bible calls us sons of God, heirs of Christ, and partakers of the Spirit. As such, we have experienced the inaugurated new creation and, like the descendants of Abraham, we expect to inherit the promised blessing through exodus (Gen 15:13-16). We move from the heavenly inception of the new creation as the eternal Word of God, beyond the highest reaches of the created order, speaks the heavens and earth into existence. But this is not a physical creation *ex nihilo*. It is, rather, a spiritual creation brought into being before the worlds began. The eternal Word speaks with illocutionary force; that which is called forth necessarily comes into being. But its consummation, yet assured, is not immediately realized: inheritance through exodus. And

¹² Paul J. Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 31–32.

so the eternally patient creator—the Son through whom all things were made—speaks life into God’s people by the Spirit. He calls faith into existence by his powerful word alone. Despised half-breeds respond in faith: “We have heard for ourselves,” they testify, “and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

The Lord liberates captives. Those dispersed are gathered. Those defiled are purified with clean water. Those broken are healed, and the weak are strengthened. Fruitfulness will come to characterize their land and their hearts as well. They will have been transformed by the Spirit. The Word is the Davidic prince among the people, guiding helpless and completely dependent sheep through the rough places of the world. He determines and directs a wilderness wandering, in which the Spirit-born members of the new covenant are sustained at every turn, fed with the bread of heaven. They are united to him; they are alive in his life, and because the Spirit of God dwells in them, they feed directly on God himself in their spirits. The Good Shepherd has led God’s own flock to green pastures; they shall never be in want.

But every wisp of self-referential cloud evaporates from the human soul. It is not for humanity’s sake that God acts as creator, redeemer, guardian and guide. It is not for their sakes that he imparts his Spirit and compels their volitional wills, winning their consent and producing obedience in them. No, it is rather for the glory of God and his renown among the nations. The restoration of a new Israel will be proof of the divine holiness in the power of transformed lives. Both the observer and the obedient doer will know that, according to the power of previously unredeemed moral agency, he was a disgrace in idolatrous impurity. But now, liberated under the divine compulsion of the Spirit’s agency, he will be a bearer of fruit and a light in the darkness.

As the Master was—under the direction of the same Spirit—so shall his servants be. He is the temple; they shall be constructed as living stones into the dwelling place of God. He is the light of the world; they shall pierce the darkness with the same luminescence. He is the Good Shepherd; after his example and in the strength he provides, they shall shepherd the flock with tenderness and care. They who share in Christ’s body shall live his risen life. They who partake

of his cup shall bring life to others. They whom the Spirit illumines shall give light to the world. And so, in Christ and by the Spirit, the ancient and modern contexts overlap. They are brought into harmony.

The worldview-story model of biblical involvement and interpretation seeks this same harmony. The human author's world must be subjected ultimately and fundamentally to the divine author's world and thus receives its redemptive significance. Or, in other words, the transcendence of the divine story dictates that the human author's world is not the definitive interpretive paradigm; instead, the human storyteller's world in the text is invested with meaning according to the divine author through Spiritual inspiration. Conversely, the contemporary reader's world (or really, the reader's world in any particular generation) cannot serve as the primary interpretive paradigm either. He must reject the self-referential form. For just as the transcendence of the Bible's new world infuses the authorial intent with timeless meaning, so also does it control the contemporary context of any redemptive era; it is not primarily the story of any particular people, but of God Himself. Just as the modern reader is dependent upon the Holy Spirit to illuminate the "really real" world of the biblical story, so also was the ancient writer. The Bible has a special way of evading contextual confinement; it cannot be fully expressed or understood according to a single time or historical place.

To be clear, then, this interpretive method is not a reader-centered approach to biblical interpretation; if anything, the reader is largely passive and surrendered to God (the intended and appropriate human posture), to authorial intent, and to textual structures. The reader does not control the story; he cannot undermine its power, authority, or wisdom-forming intent. Instead, the reader is only active as the Spirit acts within him in the discovery of spiritually discerned worldview values according to spiritual perception (not sensory perception – again relegating the reader to the passive reception of the Spirit's work). The reader is defined by the story; he becomes what the story determines, what it demands of him. He is part of the New Israel, inasmuch as he is united to Christ (the New Israel in himself) by the Spirit. He is part of the wilderness generation, baptized not into Moses but Christ, a sojourning company that is part of

the new creation (for new birth has happened among them) but still seeks the new creation as the eternal homeland.¹³ He is to abandon his worldly associations and identities, for they serve him no lasting purpose within the transcendent story. And he is to embrace his identity in Christ through new association with Him by the Spirit. Thus, the reader of Scripture must participate in the story through self-submission to its intent.

Perhaps the narrative approach to biblical interpretation, alongside a functional fiduciary, revelatory, and critical realist epistemology will avoid the pitfalls of interpretive chaos self-evident in postmodernity. Throughout history, the reader-centered approach has leaned in a decidedly individualistic and existential direction, away from firm exegetical foundations. But this interpretive method is not a purely author-centered approach to biblical interpretation either. In the marital history of hermeneutics, this approach has been largely betrothed to the historical criticism of the academy, leaning almost entirely in the opposite direction. Perhaps the narrative approach to biblical interpretation and epistemology will avoid the pitfalls of an interpretive monopoly, in which only the university can understand sufficiently the complexities and application of the historical-critical method. Having now discerned the role of the story participant, who inhabits a historical text and interprets a living text, we now turn to matters of ethical transformation.

Third, this same story participant *imbibes the formative intent of the text*. The Spirit unites believers to Christ, by whom the quality of the divine life is imparted. Any moral, ethical, or formative intent in John's Gospel is expressed in terms of conformity to Christ, and the outworking of the divine life through the indwelling Spirit (6:63). Here we recognize the

¹³ Dryden has rightly indicated a teleological dimension to story immersion and the ethical (or worldview) transformation that follows. The story participant, united to Christ by the Spirit, is always looking ahead on the horizon of his borrowed life, asking not "What kind of person do I want to become" (as in, Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 192), but instead "What kind of person is God directing me to become?" The answer is found in the apocalyptic visions of the biblical narrative. God has shown us the end, the future to which we are called and constantly beckoned. Thus, we would ask a theocentric, teleological question: "What are the good works God has prepared for me, so that I might keep in step with the Spirit and ultimately arrive at the appointed destination?"

centrality of union with Christ in two central discourses in the Fourth Gospel. We will attend to the “Bread of Life” discourse below, when dealing with matters of application. The other discourse has already been referenced, but has been left intentionally under-developed until this point in the project. When Jesus speaks of himself as the vine—and his disciples as the fruit-bearing branches—he indicates the necessity of Spirit-union with him, the actualization and outworking of Scripture’s formative intent.

Fruit-bearing in the Sermon on the Mount refers most naturally to the ethical transformation in which the wholeness of the divine life comes to characterize the human life. This is the command: “Be perfect (τέλειοι), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (τέλειός)” (Matt 5:48). However, in the Gospel of John, we are alerted to a subtle contextual factor that shifts the focus of one’s fruit-bearing activity. To be sure, Jesus speaks in John 15:10 of commandment keeping: as Jesus has obeyed the Father’s commandments, so the disciples are to obey the commandments of Christ. But the context is missional. The disciples have been chosen according to the will of God, now revealed to them in Christ, and commissioned to “go and bear fruit” (John 15:16). Perhaps we are dealing with an outward expression of obedience that serves the same testimony as in Matthew 5:16, in which moral light shines before men who praise God as a result. There is a missional focus to the fruit-bearing of John 15. But we must not miss the point of the larger discourse. Jesus has taken up into himself the signposts of exodus and temple and here applies all of Israel’s experiences—indeed, her very existence and destiny—to himself. He is the vine; he is true Israel.

Those grafted into him by Spirit-union are implicitly members of the community of Israel. As such, they are called to mirror his life to the world; the correspondence between the Father’s relationship with the Son and the Son’s relationship with the disciples is unbroken (John 15:10; 22:21). Any missional fruitfulness would be produced in and through them by the outworking of the divine life. Simply put, the Spirit who *unites* disciples to Christ also *conforms* disciples to the image of Christ. So, for Jesus and the Apostle John, ethics are included within the missional extension of the new creational life.

Also present in John's Gospel is the argument that Jesus, as the embodiment of Torah, is also the true manifestation of divine wisdom. This wisdom theme, in John's Gospel, relates to the idea of ethical transformation through the internalization of Torah.¹⁴ But John's concern is more visual than inter-textual. Thus, he speaks of the internalization of Torah not in terms of Old Testament quotation, citation, allusion, or echo. Instead, John employs the image of Jesus as the True Vine and his disciples as the branches. His morality—his ethical perfection—provides not just the exemplary model for the disciples to imitate; it enlivens and sustains the disciples' obedience like vines with fruit-bearing branches.¹⁵ The disciples must feed on the life-giving presence of Christ in order to have life.

Applying the Proposed Method to the “Bread of Life” Discourse

In the Gospel of John, the presence of Christ is life-giving. Nowhere is this more evident than in the “Bread of Life” discourse. As the exodus narrative in the Fourth Gospel unfolds, story immersion for worldview transformation takes on a new level of intensity. Our goal here is not a verse-by-verse exposition of John 6:25-71. Instead, we will trace wisdom themes for the ethical transformation Dryden values; we will survey biblical signposts for story immersion that Wright pursues; and we will uphold the conversion of the imagination for which Hays crusades. But we will seek each of these in Johannine terms, so that the biblical text—composed from divine inspiration and human inscription—might have the final word.

First, let us uncover wisdom themes in the “Bread of Life” discourse. In this way, we pursue story immersion as Dryden would have us do. As we have seen, John's ethic is unpacked

¹⁴ See again Wright, *History and Eschatology*, 200. Wright comments, “Ben-Sirach envisages ‘wisdom’ dwelling in the Temple in the form of Torah; since the priests in this period were the teachers of Torah, Wisdom and Torah seem at least to be held together, and together to represent that divine presence and glory.”

¹⁵ The idea of fruitfulness is covenantal, for God had commanded Adam to be fruitful (Gen 1:28; echoed to Noah in Gen 9:7). But the shift from commandment to promise in the Abraham narrative, still within a covenantal context, is striking (Gen 17:6). It foreshadows the New Covenant, in which the Spirit would dwell within believers, uniting them to Christ, thus making them fruitful (John 15:5).

in terms of Spirit-union with—and conformity to—Christ. It is insufficient that disciples should believe in Jesus and follow him throughout the Galilean countryside. Their belief must be rightly founded; their discipleship must be rightly empowered. Those who wished to make Jesus king (John 6:15) had an insufficient comprehension of Jesus’s mission as the messianic servant. Those who deserted Jesus at the end of the ensuing didactic discourse (6:66) had been following him for the signs he was performing (6:2). This is not the quality of faith the Fourth Gospel validates (cf. John 2:23-25), for it is grounded on human perception of miraculous power. Instead, ethical transformation in John’s Gospel hangs on the theme of discipleship.¹⁶ And the Greek verb μένω enlivens both concepts, as ethical norms are not merely feigned through fascination with Jesus, but accomplished according to Spirit-union with him (6:56; 15:5, 10).

Dryden’s approach helps us see the character of Christ in the middle of the story. He is the ethical/moral exemplar the Apostle John holds forth for our instruction, commending the imitation of Christ to those who would be disciples. But the correct form of discipleship that we see in John the Baptist, for example, remains praiseworthy. Upon seeing Jesus, the Baptist immediately rejoices and excitedly identifies the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36); he willingly embraces a diminished sense of self and scope of ministry in light of Jesus’s arrival and recognizes his own role in God’s eschatological program: he is the friend and not the bridegroom (John 3:25-36).¹⁷ But the enacted parable of feeding the crowd is intended to gather many within the net of the kingdom.

¹⁶ See here Sookgoo Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 103. Shin highlights the repeated use of μένω in John 3:36, 6:56, and 15:5 to defend the idea that discipleship in the Fourth Gospel is essentially about Spirit-union with Christ. Though the reference in 3:36b concerns the wrath of God “remaining” on those who fail to obey the Son, it is reasonable to see this as the negative corollary to the positive example in verse 36a. In addition, the potential parallelism in 3:36 is striking: believing in the Son and having life is contrasted with disobeying the Son and not having (*seeing*; ὄψεται) life.

¹⁷ We witness the agreement between the Gospels of Matthew and John, in which the baptism of Jesus serves the narrative by identifying Jesus. The Spirit’s descent upon Jesus points to his Messianic identity and the Spirit-empowerment he receives in order to (actively, through covenant faithfulness) fulfill all righteousness (Matt 3:15). The same event clarifies two things for John the Baptist: (1) His own role in the redemptive plan of God: “For this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel;” and (2) Jesus’s divinity: “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (John 1:31-34; cf. Matt 3:17).

The teaching discourse, however—as is so often the case in the Synoptic Gospels—is intended to separate. There is a preliminary, inaugurated judgment revealed from God through the words of Jesus (John 3:19; cf. 5:22-29): he is separating wheat from weeds, sheep from goats, in the Bread of Life discourse. Those who journey as the wilderness generation of Israel represent a mixed visible community. Many will follow not because of Spirit-empowered sight—they do not *see* the signs Jesus performs (6:26)—but because there is a prophetic attraction in the wilderness that smells like political insurrection.

Furthermore, the Gospel of John commends a way of life characterized by following Jesus which, though highly offensive to many in the original historical context, is actually the way of wisdom. But for John, Jesus is the embodiment of Torah and, therefore, of divine Wisdom as well. Thus, the way of wisdom is the appropriation of the divine life; it is found through union with Christ. This is the point of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ in John 6:53-58. It is the way of the eschatological/eternal life that has broken through into the present. But in antiquity, just as it is in modernity, the reader of John's Gospel is not able to discern or enact the formative intent of Scripture apart from a revelatory epistemology. Thus, it is the "Spirit who gives life" while "the flesh is no help at all" (6:63). In order to discern the spiritual and life-giving words of Jesus—in order to have "life" in oneself—one must be united to Christ by the Spirit.¹⁸ The reader of John's Gospel must, therefore, approach the text with a fiduciary disposition appropriate not only to his ontological existence, but to his epistemological limitations as well. To understand the things that are above (John 3:12), it must be granted by the Father (6:65) and enabled by Spirit-union with Christ.

¹⁸ The centrality of Spirit-union with Christ in the Gospel of John extends beyond its textual affirmations to its literary structure. An insightful and plausible, though perhaps ultimately unconvincing, set of essays has been set forth by Wayne A. Brouwer, "The Chiastic Structure of the Farewell Discourse in the Fourth Gospel, Part 1." *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 175 (April-June 2018): 195-214 and "The Chiastic Structure of the Farewell Discourse in the Fourth Gospel, Part 2." *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 175 (July-September 2018): 304-22. Here Brouwer establishes union with Christ as the central concept of the Farewell Discourse in John's Gospel. For another insightful and more convincing piece, see Brandon D. Crowe, "The Chiastic Structure of Seven Signs in the Gospel of John: Revisiting a Neglected Proposal." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* Vol. 28, No. 1 (2018): 65-81. The overlap in the two authors is the concept of union with Christ, which Brouwer sees in the didactic "Vine and Branches" discourse and Crowe sees in the enacted "Bread of Life" parable and its explanation in John 6:1-65.

Second, then, let us take note of the biblical signposts that are present in the text. In this way, we pursue story immersion as Wright would have us do. Here we seek to evaluate the story form of the text in light of its social, cultural, and historical contexts.¹⁹ But we also seek to evaluate the story in light of the transcendent, christocentric narrative that John develops. So, when we find that the Passover of the Jews was at hand (6:4), we are being prepared for a retelling of the exodus in light of Jesus and the Spirit. Standing as the paradigmatic theme of the Fourth Gospel, the new creation is both the prerequisite and the consummation of the new exodus.²⁰ In terms of prerequisite, those who journey the wilderness of following Jesus in a barren land have already been united to him by the Spirit. They are part of the new creation in its inaugurated phase. In terms of its consummation, the new creation is the final goal of the new exodus. The people of God continue their earthly wanderings, sustained not by Moses but by the Father, by whom the Eucharistic bread of heaven is given, until they reach—and inherit forever—the promised homeland (the new heavens and earth).²¹

In the biblical text, and particularly in the Gospel of John, the transcendent enfleshed Jesus stands as the central signpost. Jesus unites heaven and earth; he is the new temple. He connects past, present, and future time; he fulfills the Sabbath in himself. He represents the restored creation as the image-bearing human being; he is the new humanity. He is the divine creator, the author of old and new creation. The vivifying power of the new creation finds its terminus in Christ; in him was life (John 1:4). Thus, as we approach the “Bread of Life”

¹⁹ Dryden says, “A hermeneutic of wisdom will, therefore, need to augment these [narrative and historical critical] approaches because... the historical conditionality of the Gospel texts is constitutive of how they function as wisdom.” Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 126.

²⁰ See R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 44-48. Culpepper contributes to the overall sense and value of a literary reading of John’s Gospel and, in the aforementioned pages, develops the analeptic and proleptic significance of the John’s prologue.

²¹ See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 365, for a Pauline treatment of the same theme. Wright argues that baptism parallels the Red Sea crossing while Holy Communion parallels the manna feeding in the Arabian wilderness. In Rom 8, Paul offers another retelling of the exodus event, where the redeemed cosmos parallels the inheritance of the Promised Land.

discourse from the perspective of Wright's signpost theology, we recognize the inaugurated new creation with Jesus as the sustaining food provided by the Father to ensure the perseverance of his people. In Christ, the life of the world to come has invaded the present. Like the very story of Israel itself, we too are taken up into Christ by the Spirit and experience that life. In Christ, who reigns over time, all time is also connected. Like the very exodus from Egypt, we too are taken up into Christ by the Spirit and experience that redemptive event; we have been rescued, and we look forward to the final inheritance. Like the human vocation, we too are taken up into Christ by the Spirit and mirror the glory of God into the realm of sinful darkness. Wright describes the ultimate significance of the "Bread of Life" discourse by saying,

First, we have food in the present that acts as a symbol of God's future feeding. Second, this is the food over which Jesus said 'my body' and 'my blood'. Third, the Spirit is mysteriously at work in the present to anticipate the life that we will enjoy in God's new world. From these we may conclude that within the whole action of the Holy Communion, the Eucharist – the story, the drama, the actions and above all the prayer and the love – this food, through the Spirit's mysterious work, is a true anticipation in the present of the food that will sustain us in the age to come. And the name of that food is: Jesus.²²

All textual signs point to the recapitulation of the exodus event, with Jesus and the Spirit at the center of its transfigured significance.

Finally, let us engage the converted imagination. In this way, we pursue story immersion as Hays would have us do. We will attempt to enter the exodus story of John 6 for worldview transformation. This is where the principle of inter-textuality is vital; this is where Scripture must interpret Scripture. Alongside redeemed imaginative and/or cognitive agency, Hays ascribes particular value to the observation and interpretation of textual citations, allusions, and echoes. Thus, the perceptive exegete knows already that he is a sojourner in this world (1 Pet

²² See N. T. Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 48. Wright correctly argues that, in the Holy Communion, Jesus is present with the communicants, feeding them with himself. He describes how the celebratory event connects the chronological realities of past (deliverance from Egypt), present (deliverance from sin), and future (deliverance into the glorious inheritance). He also highlights though ultimately rejects John Calvin's view, in which communicants are transported by the Spirit into the heavenly throne room of Christ and therein partake of his life-giving presence. Given Wright's affinity for theological cosmology, it seems odd for him to reject Calvin's view since it connects heavenly and earthly realities.

2:11), that he is part of the wilderness generation of the new Israel. His identity has been changed according to the ways in which Scripture addresses him. He begins to consider his surroundings based on his newly transformed identity. The opposition and suffering he encounters is no longer surprising, but expected. The sense of estrangement he feels comes from those who are content to put down roots and establish themselves as permanent residents. He is different; he is a tent-dweller in the eschatological pilgrimage, at home in the present body, but longing to put on the heavenly dwelling (2 Cor 5:1-5).

This is the life God had prepared *for him* (and prepared *him for*) through the gift of the Spirit. The immersed exegete participates in the journey from slavery in sin to the garden paradise: the New Jerusalem that lies just beyond the horizon of his consciousness. He seeks after Christ because he has seen the signs for what they are, signposts indicating the one in whom life and light are inherited. As soon as the story participant attempts to become a nominative subject—trying to make a real and decisive contribution along the way—he is told that his work is to trust, to rest in the provision that God, through his messianic servant, would supply (John 6:29). The one who trusts is the one who inherits the inaugurated rest of the eschatological kingdom. He begins already to participate in the eternal Sabbath. All human beings are dative creatures, for not even the greatest of Old Testament prophets was active in the process of sustaining the wandering Israelites in the Arabian Desert. Through Moses, God had performed signs and wonders, even providing the bread of heaven. But Moses had been only a conduit of the divine blessing, and not the substance of it (6:32).²³ Jesus had been with the ancient Israelite community in the bread and water that prefigured his life-giving sustenance. Thus, it was only in right relationship with him that the wilderness generation would survive.

²³ On the Moses typology of the Fourth Gospel, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 286-318. Perhaps most illuminating from this work is the centrality of Moses in Jewish piety, transfigured in Christ as the center of Johannine morality and piety.

And even this relationship is beyond the capacity of the human believer. For it is God the Father who draws all men to Christ; no one is able (οὐδεὶς δύναται) to come to Christ without the preemptive and decisive work of God (John 1:13; 3:5-8; 6:37, 44). We are participants in a transcendent story, involving the heavenly provision of life-giving bread and the determinative work of God in salvation. The exodus and wilderness manna have been transfigured in Christ so that freedom is defined by eternal life. Spiritual food, as sustenance from God, is sufficient for establishing eternal life, even in the present.

The Jews who witnessed the miracle and sought a further sign of Jesus's authority begin now to grumble.²⁴ They resemble their ancient ancestors who patterned their wilderness wandering after a series of grumbling episodes (Ex 16:8; Num 14:27; Ps 95:8-9). The new exodus would be marked by a similar generation, a mixed people comprised of those who believed and those who grumbled. But the New Covenant ensures that the believers of the new exodus would certainly come to Christ and, in Him, receive eternal life. Thus, a possible allusion to Jeremiah 31:34—to a time in which all people would know the Lord apart from the instructive influence of their neighbor—may exist in John 6:45, alongside a textual echo of Isaiah 54:13. In successfully drawing people to Christ, the Father is actively instructing. But this he appears to do through Christ and the Spirit—always veiled in mediated actions, so that the invisible God may be revealed by Christ—according to the words of “spirit and life” from the lips of Jesus himself (6:63). The words of Christ, through the power of the Spirit, work in the unseen spiritual realm to create and sustain eternal life. Consequently, they are the “words of eternal life” (6:68).

²⁴ There is almost certainly a “seeing vs. believing” theme going on in John's Gospel at this point (John 6:26). The crowds had seen the sign Jesus performed, but they were not seeking him on account of the sign. They saw with their physical eyes and ate their fill of the bread and fish; their understanding of Jesus's identity was solely based on sensory perception, not spiritual illumination. The same theme exists in chap. 3, with Nicodemus attempting to understand spiritual realities (the new birth) according to physiological/biological correspondence (John 3:3-4). See also the Samaritan woman and her confusion about living water (John 4:7-15).

So Christ has life in himself; and this life will be given to God's people through the sacrifice of Jesus's physical body on the cross (John 6:51). But the sacrifice of Christ is not effective until it is appropriated. Thus, eating and drinking Christ's flesh and blood becomes a symbol or metaphor of participatory union with him (John 6:56). In the transcendent story, dative creatures inherit a borrowed (or donated) life not through consumption of biological food and drink, but through participation in the one who has life in himself (John 1:4; 5:26; 6:57). The new exodus will lead away from slavery and death and toward eternal life. It will center on the person of Christ even beyond his miraculous signs, for seeing signs and believing is not what the Apostle John promotes as life-giving faith (John 2:23-25). It will be the words of the Incarnate Word of God that give and sustain eternal life in God's people. Even more than that, it will be union with Christ by the Spirit that provides the life of God's kingdom (John 6:53). The centrality of union with Christ has already been discussed above. At the center of John's first half is the statement that anyone who eats and drinks the flesh and blood of Christ "abides" (*μένει*) in him; the center of John's second half testifies to the same truth (John 6:56; cf. 15:4-5). If union with Christ is the centerpiece of a Pauline theology, it must be seen as the cornerstone of a Johannine Theology.

However, our story immersion in John 6 is not merely one of converted imaginations or recognized signposts, particularly if we mean by these concepts a self-referential and purely cognitive exercise. The converted imagination must be a work of the Spirit; and the Apostle John's authority to promote and teach such a conversion exists only as he is a Spirit-inspired author of Scripture. Further, inasmuch as the biblical signposts are transfigured in Christ and inhabited by the Spirit-indwelt people of God, there can be no further confusion about how that aspect of story immersion takes place.

The Bible is a unified narrative. It is marked by theological signposts that, through an imaginative appropriation, believers may come to inhabit. The end of such story immersion will be worldview transformation. Armed with right actions, motivations, and reasons, his worldview will develop into a moral/ethical lifestyle as, by the Spirit's power, he comes into conformity

with the life of Christ. Through story immersion, we begin to think and behave differently. But the concept of story immersion for worldview transformation is more than mere epistemology and ethics. In John's Gospel, we begin to discern and assimilate an eschatological, apocalyptic, and biblically centered worldview. Thereafter, we begin to interpret Scriptures in light of our double participation: we participate in the story of Israel because we have come to participate in Christ. Our textual hermeneutic has been defined by narrative (and imaginative) analysis of texts. It has been strengthened by a historical reconstruction of Second Temple Judaism, which serves as a window into the biblical worldview. Furthermore, our hermeneutic has been balanced by the ethical and behavioral transformation that results from embracing the wisdom agenda of Scripture. Each of these components deals directly with our participatory Spirit-union with Christ.

At last we discern, with a fresh perspective, that story immersion hermeneutics must raise outstretched arms—buttressed by the twin pillars of dogmatics and biblical theology—in order to gain victory over the murky waters of interpretive chaos, defined chiefly by individualism and self-referentiality.²⁵ In short, we have come to see that *the Spirit narrates all believers into Israel's story through participatory union with Christ, and the result is story immersion for worldview transformation.*

²⁵ The dogmatic/systematic theological assertion that has gone benignly unnoticed in the works of Dryden, Wright, and Hays—namely, Spirit-union with Christ, which stands at the center of biblical christology, pneumatology, and soteriology—has reclaimed its rightful place at the roundtable of hermeneutic discussion.

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ABSTRACT

THE FORMATIVE WISDOM OF THE “BREAD OF LIFE” DISCOURSE

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The Bible is a wisdom text. This provocative thesis statement defines the purpose of Dryden’s book and drives its content forward in terms of telos, ethical trajectory, and moral goal. After the introduction, and within the first part of this thesis project, I will condense the contents of the book into a conceptual framework by showing the characteristics and convictions of wisdom hermeneutics.

In the second part of the project, I will situate the contribution of Dryden’s book within the larger discussion of wisdom hermeneutics and its application to narrative and epistolary texts. N. T. Wright and Richard B. Hays will be my main conversation partners, along with Dryden, in this section.

The third section deals with the practical application of narrative hermeneutics to the “Bread of Life” Discourse found in John 6:25-71. Here we discern the key elements of each approach highlighted in part two of the project through a synthesis of narrative hermeneutic methods. This final section will also develop a proposal derived from John’s Gospel, brought into contact with Dryden, Wright, and Hays.

VITA

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