

What is the Atonement? — A book review

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[0 : 0 0] Let's say a word of prayer. Our Lord, we thank you for the gift, the unthinkable gift of the gospel, and give us a further grace that we may seek to know it better for the benefit of all and for your greater glory.

Amen. In the summer, in here today, this morning, you don't remember in the summer, I hope you remember it, we paid some attention to a gospel story from Luke 7.

It was in the context, you recall, those wonderful talks we had in the summer about the hospitality, the gospel as hospitality. I enjoyed that sermon series very much.

Jesus, and we looked at Jesus, you recall this story, it's one of the really well-known stories from the gospels. Jesus at a dinner party, hosted by a teacher in Israel.

It doesn't often happen in the gospel stories, does it? But in this one, we find out the name of the host. It was a Simon, Simon, a Pharisee. And of course, you recall, again, there was a sinful woman there.

[1 : 1 6] Apparently, she was quite sinful, who washed or anointed Jesus. An act of, on her part, of great repentance, of humility, of love for the one that she saw at the dinner party, who apparently offered her a great acceptance.

Simon, of course, as the story unfolds, we find out, took offense at this act of Jesus receiving the woman. If Jesus had known this woman, he would not be so at ease in her presence, was the attitude of Simon.

That might be understating it a bit, but that's certainly there. Again, you know this story. Jesus showing forgiving love, and the bad guy in the story, we'll call him Simon Pharisee, not.

There it is, the gospel story. A great love story. It should be loved. However, we could say this about this story from outside the Christian community, and I hope to show today how, looking at, perhaps initially, how this might be read from outside the Christian community, that outsider might say, and will say, something about the story that we don't usually hear.

An outsider might say, this story is all too obvious. Here is a Christian remembrance, stuck right in one of the beloved gospels, which is, to put it, I wouldn't agree with this assessment, to put it mildly, but the outsider would say, this is a bit like a cartoon, this story.

[3 : 0 3] Here we've got good guy versus bad guy. And the question for the reader is, well, what side shall I identify with? Who shall I choose to cheer for in this story?

In other words, this story could be an invitation to very facile reading, self-serving, easy reading. You've got to be careful about such reading. Again, the outsider might challenge us.

Here is a story with no complexity in it. There's no nuance here, just a simple story, all too simple, perhaps, again, the outsider might say to us.

Today, with looking at Mr., with the help of Mr. Leithart, through Leithart, looking at his book, delivered from, here we've got the title of his book, delivered from the elements of the world, hope to show, and this is by way of introducing you to this wonderful book, I do think it's a wonderful book, to show that, in fact, a gospel story, like this gospel story from Luke, is not really simple at all, but takes us into nothing less than the strange mystery of the world in which we live out our lives every day.

And, much more important, what our God is doing about this world, and what's gone wrong with it. There we have it. Delivered from the elements of the world by Mr. Leithart.

[4 : 3 4] By the way, Mr. Leithart, as I recall, doesn't make any reference to this particular story, but everything he says impacts everything in the Bible, everything in Scripture, that tries to elicit the whole story.

So that's why, I think it's a good entryway into looking at this book, *Delivered from the Elements of the World*, is a book about, as announced, it's a book about the atonement.

It is, therefore, a book of theology. It seeks to say to the Church, for the Church, what Scripture is finally, and he attempts thoroughly saying, our author attempts a thorough look at it, saying about Christ crucified.

Why did Jesus die? The classic question that atonement theology asks. Mr. Leithart has a great respect for the whole deep tradition of Christian meditation on the atonement.

Big names like Anselm, associated with that look, Aquinas. Every theologian worth his salt, or her salt, gets around to looking at the atonement.

[5 : 38] What is atonement theology all about? What does this death mean? And, our author is very much concerned with this.

How may we say this doctrine today? How do we talk about the atonement? Just a brief background. Our author, Mr. Leithart, an American scholar, a theologian of great breadth, and a deep, deep learnedness.

He almost takes your breath away, how deep and profound, I find them profound. This man is. His learning is rather shocking. For instance, this is just from the back of the book, a lazy way to find these things.

James Smith, a distinguished Christian philosopher, calls our authors, Mr. Leithart, virtually the Augustine of our time. I don't know how you say a higher praise about a theologian than that.

Mr. Leithart believes that a Christian theological truth, and this speaks to speaking a doctrine into the world in which we live, speaking it to the church as well, Christian theological truth, again, should have the feel of necessity about it.

[6 : 51] When you describe a Christian doctrine truly, he says, it should feel inevitable. And that gives it, if you will, its apologetic punch. Again, this doctrine should be discussed so that people say, ah, yes, I see how that addresses the world in which I live.

And to put this point over, just briefly, on the road to Emmaus, Mr. Leithart appeals to this scripture moment, again from Luke, you'll remember that on the road to Emmaus, the resurrected one, the world's second Adam, the new head of the human race, says to the people on that road famously, was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer as he opens the scriptures to them, do we recall? Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer? In other words, was it not inevitable that the Christ should suffer? Within the logic of Israel's, of Israel's God, with his creation, with his people Israel, was it not necessary, the Lord says, to people on the road to Emmaus?

Heaven acts, and then heaven asks us to seek to understand deeply. Don't you see that the truths of the gospel, the truths of scripture, are necessary?

They're not from another planet. They have a logic within life lived. They speak to who we really are. So, one thing that I really much appreciated to move towards, get right into this book now, one thing I very much appreciate about this book is simply its focus on and its honoring of symbol, and or more precisely how it speaks about the typology of the Bible as deeply as any book I've ever read, I must say.

[8 : 51] Jesus, we know this so well, Jesus fulfills all the messianic hopes of Israel. He fulfills all the titles that Israel gives to the expected one.

Jesus fulfills, as Mr. Leithart puts it nicely, all of the saving actions of Israel. Again, we know this so well, but it's just so wonderful to go through this kind of language about our Lord.

He is the last Adam. He is the greater Abel. He is Abraham's seed. He is the new Moses. He is the greater Aaron. He is David's son.

He is a prophet like Jeremiah. What Scripture says about our Lord. Systematic theology, I quote here directly from Mr. Leithart, systematic theology is nothing but tidily presented typology.

It's a lovely sentence. Systematic theology is nothing but tidily presented symbol, broadly speaking. I think he's absolutely right about that. And if we forget this, and I know I do it all the time, you want to move off into kind of abstract reasoning about Scripture rather than immersing yourself in its symbols.

[10 : 05] I know I do it all the time. Then, a gospel story like Jesus at a dinner party with a sinful woman and a Pharisee, it does indeed become a kind of liberal morality fable.

Again, nice people are forgiving and nice and the bad Pharisees are severe, nasty, and to be condemned. Is that all we get from such a story? It isn't much.

Really, is it? But, again, the gospel story seems to give us insights like this. The Pharisee, evidently, at that dinner party with Jesus and the sinful woman, the Pharisee wants apparently some kind of exclusion to be maintained.

In the story of Israel, there is much exclusion and it must be maintained. Why, we might ask. Well, there's a big story at the base of the Pharisee's exclusion beliefs.

You might call it the exclusion motif. The God of the Bible, after all, excludes a lot of times. God is an excluder. God excludes.

[11:18] The Pharisee knows this for sure. God excludes. In Genesis, God excluded Adam and Eve from the garden. Get out of my sight.

Get out of my presence. Away with you. God excluded them from the garden. What symbol, what typology is here? Again, this is why reading this book, I was just immersed again in the symbol language, the symbol thinking of Scripture.

You recall, if I may expand upon it just a bit, mighty flaming angels, armed and dangerous, we might say, exclude us, exclude humanity, exclude Adam and Eve from the garden.

God excludes us from open and free and blessed communion with Himself. God excludes.

Scripture begins almost with this exclusion.

There it is. We're excluded from the garden. By the way, nicely, Mr. Letak, seems to me, garden in Scripture is holy space. And when we sin, the garden becomes restricted holy space.

[12:27] That's obvious what Genesis is teaching us. And of course, this garden exclusion motif is Israel's whole story in a sense, isn't it?

I remember Bill D'Umbrell at Regent College, I was so impressed the way he would talk about the whole Pentateuch, the first five scrolls, the core of Israel's Scripture. From Eden's garden, this story is about, to a new garden, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Adam and Eve with a law, which they disobey, and then we end up in the Pentateuch, Israel is in her new garden, now with the law given at Sinai.

From a garden to a garden, Adam and Eve in a garden with the law, they get excluded. God says to Israel, will you be my new Adam and Eve? I'll put you in a new garden, give you a law and you should obey it and we'll have some sort of fellowship together.

Of course, Israel disobeys as did Adam and Eve. They repeat Adam and Eve's disobedience and expulsion, exclusion, is repeated.

[13:37] God exiles Israel, sometimes to Babylon, Syria, whatever. They get kicked out of the garden. From a garden to a garden is the whole story of the first five books of the Bible.

A great, if you will, exclusion story. Right at the center of it all is exclusion. But of course, we have to remember that grace is at work here as well.

To Israel, moving right along here, I'm just skipping along the surface of this book. To Israel is given the beginnings of a way back to God, even when, after she's excluded from the garden.

It's as if the God of Israel excludes Adam and Eve, but quietly and secretly he goes with them into exile. And that way is pictured, again, symbolized, typologized.

Is that a new word that I just made up? Typologized in the glorious, strange gift of temple. Oh, there's much in this book about temples. In the temple, put it simply, Israel approaches her God again.

[14:48] Israel, that is to say, excluded humanity, Israel on behalf of humanity, begins a strange journey back to God.

What is the whole Bible about, if not that? Israel excluded from the garden, but God says, let's see if you can come back to me. I've got a way. Come back to me.

The gospel story, again, I'm sort of jumping right here to one of Mr. Lethar's great conclusions.

Christians. That gospel story, again, that we've looked at, Jesus at a dinner party, it's a delightful story, with a Pharisee named Simon and a sinful woman.

If we thickened our reading of that story, here's why it's not a simple morality fable, it's a deep, deep story. We might imagine, and I trust that it's a disciplined imagining, Mr. Lethar tries to take us down into a disciplined theological thinking.

Simon the Pharisee was perplexed, perhaps, at the timing of Jesus in offering such free and open fellowship with a sinful woman. Sinners were welcomed back into Israel's God's presence, but there was a way of this welcome.

[16:10] it was a covenant way back into God's presence. It did indeed involve repentance, which the woman showed, that is to say, it involved a change of heart.

Israel's psalmody is filled with stories of change of heart, of repentance. But also, and crucially, there was a temple way back into God's presence, which did a number of very important things. Purity rules were to be publicly honored. Had that sinful woman honored that in her life at all yet, Jesus?

What about the purity rules that God has given us? What about heaven's unapproachable holiness? Must that not be recognized? Where is that openly seen in the life of this woman?

What's this forgiveness thing that you're doing here? What gives? What about the costliness of forgiveness? Is it seen here in this story?

[17:15] Where is the costliness of forgiveness? The temple symbolizes the costliness of forgiveness. There is death to be done in the temple so that there may be forgiveness.

What's going on here? To state Mr. Lighthart's conclusion very briefly, Jesus was acting at a dinner party hosted by a Pharisee as if he, Jesus, and this isn't new to you, it's nice to hear it repeated though, he was acting as if Jesus was the temple.

Who do you think you are issuing forgiveness to this sinful woman? Our God has given us a way to act in forgiveness.

It's the temple. It's purity rules. It's costly. Who do you think you are, Jesus? Who do you think you are? Do you think you're the temple? It's what the Pharisee might very well have said to our Lord. Mr. Lighthart believes that the Gospels would have been read by a learned Jew in the first century at least as the story of the book of Leviticus. You know, that's all about what the temple is all about.

[18:28] The Gospels would have been read again by a smart first century Jew as the story of the book of Leviticus becoming incarnate. Yes. What if, to say it another way, what if the glory of the temple hidden by veils of exclusion approach God but not casually?

He's a dangerous God. He's holy. Did that woman recognize that? What if the glory of the temple hidden by veils of protection symbolizing the protected holiness of God, the flaming swords wielded by angels?

What if that glory took on flesh and walked about? Not in Athens, it couldn't have been understood there. Not in Rome, it wouldn't have been understood there. Not anywhere but in Israel.

Having dinner, the glory of God incarnate, with a teacher in Israel, and forgiving sinners. What if that happened? This is the story of the Gospels, really.

The Gospels, the story of, it's a strange story, the Gospels. The Gospels are the story of the community which is anticipating the Gospel, anticipating a Messiah, meeting that Gospel in person.

[19:50] Is that strange? The Gospels are very strange. It's as if Israel was meeting her true identity in Jesus. What if you met at a party your true identity?

Would you get along with your true identity? Israel didn't get along very well with her true identity, but we wouldn't either. It's a strange story that God gave his people Israel to live out.

There it is. the Gospels are a strange story. Paul finds it so strange that in the book of Galatians he talks about Jesus as faith appearing.

Isn't that true? When faith appeared, when the true story of Israel appeared, things changed incredibly. There it is. May I say, so far so good.

All of this is plain gospel stuff on the whole. plain, simple gospel stuff. Glorious and beautiful gospel stuff. Ah, but here we get towards moving towards the meat of this book, as I understand it.

[21:00] Our author, Mr. Lethart, I say this with apologies to any theologians who might be present. He is a theologian. And you know theologians, they just don't leave good enough alone.

This book presses on with more questions. And essentially, the question that Mr.

Lethart presses on, a why question, is simply this. Why did our God give Israel an exclusion story to deal with? Why?

Why did the God of grace who loves Israel as his beloved people, why did he give her this exclusion story to deal with? Which the Pharisee Simon had inherited and wanted to uphold.

Why did God give Israel an exclusion story to deal with? An exclusion regime, a separation command? You know what, it could be summarized in a thousand different ways.

[22:05] Come out from among them and be ye separate, says God to his people. Come out from among them and be separate. Be separate from things like sinful women.

Stay away. I want you to be a separate people, different and holy. Stay away. Be separate. Come out from among them. Circumcision, food laws, Sabbath regulation, and other things, all taught Israel, again God's beloved people, a way of distance, a way of separation, a way of apartness. And of course, as we know, properly understood, it worked. It worked magnificently. The world, the Gentile world, came to know this people as quite distinct.

If the Jewish people obtained anything in history, they were obedient to her God and obtained that distinctness that he called her to. Be separate, be apart, stand and be different than those nations around you.

Be different. All that could be expanded upon at great length, but you know this story. A story which in some ways won't go into this at all today at all, but a story which of source in some sense continues.

[23 : 22] The Jewish people remain a distinct separate people. The temple is very strange when you ponder it. Again, there's so much in this book about temple.

The temple enacts separation. God is there and you are here and there's no way across that barrier. It enacts separation, but it also enacts approach.

Keep your distance from me, says Israel's God, but approach me. I'll give you ways of approach, but keep your distance. Dangerous God, in a sense.

Now, in our author Leithart's meditation, a crucial move is made. And I will sort of start with his conclusion, just in the interest of time. I want lots of time.

I hope we can have lots of time for conversation. Here's one of his penultimate conclusions that he reaches in this rich and full book. In the light of the entire biblical story, as received by Christians, both testaments in all of their glory, and in this book, based upon a close reading of Galatians, with some help from Paul to the Colossians, and a big addendum at the end of the book, bringing in some help from Paul to the Romans, our author, Mr.

[24 : 43] Leithart, believes that Israel was called, here's one of the delightful things in this book, I've never heard it put quite like this before, Israel was called, not knowing why perhaps, rarely with much clarity, Israel was called to be, and this is his lovely little phrase, the people of God, Israel, they were called to be separate, indeed, finally, from separation.

God called Israel to be separate from separation. This is where Mr. Leithart gets subtle, and I think deep. That was Israel's strange destiny.

Her separation would be used to end all exclusion stories. That's the strange and complex story of Israel.

And this needs some elaboration, of course. Israel needed to be delivered from these words over here on this high-tech contraption that I'm using today.

on my left. Israel needed to be delivered from the elements of the world. Galatians 4, 3, it tells you at the bottom there.

[26 : 11] If you like a bit of Greek, which I can't pronounce very well, I'm in the presence of some Greek speakers here, that means the elements of the world.

The elements of the world delivered from the elements of the world. Galatians 4, 3. Here is the big thesis of this book. We finally got to it at 9.30.

What have I been doing for half an hour? Big thesis of the book, delivered from the elements of the world. Ah, Mr. Leithart, as I say, he's a learned fellow.

Bill Reimer, by the way, first recommended that I read this book. So if you're not enjoying this, blame Bill. Bill Reimer, it's not here I'm saving. Mr.

Leithart has paid some attention to, I'm not sure how much, in his case probably a lot, a lot of it's some attention at least to Jacques Derrida. Great.

[27 : 11] Some regard the French philosopher, the late Jacques Derrida. Some regard him as a genius, some regard him as a total charlatan. He might be a bit of both, I don't know.

You can decide that, you learned ones in this room. Derrida promoted the very simple idea that a long, intense engagement with what is apparently marginal may throw light upon that which is again, apparently central.

Got that? In a text, you might look at something that looks, oh, this is just a little detail. We've never made much of that. But you said, let's make a lot about that and see the light, if any, it throws on the reigning narrative, which may be just serving power.

Let's look at something marginal and see what it does. Mr. Lethar, in a sense, does this. This Derridian treatment, our author applies to this little Pauline moment. Paul rarely, in Colossians, Paul uses this phrase, once, I think it is, once in Galatians, pretty well it. The elements of the world.

[28 : 27] Israel was to be delivered from the elements of the world. What is this? This little passing moment. Well, Mr. Lethar goes to town on it, with the help of all the scholarship that's out there about this little phrase, reaches some big, heavy conclusions.

things. Wow, the elements of the world. This book really zeroes in here on this little phrase. The elements of the world, the whatever that we must be delivered from, are, in the mind of Paul, Mr. Lethar has reached this conclusion, nothing less than what we would call the social physics by which all of humanity lives. The social physics by which all of humanity lives.

And here is specifically why Mr. Lethar believes wonderfully that a properly stated atonement theology, as it's traditionally called, addresses the world thoroughly and almost exhaustively. The atonement speaks to everything that goes on in the world. It's not a set-apart, strange, Christian doctrine. It, in fact, it speaks right to the heart of how humans live their lives every day in every circumstance.

[29 : 49] This is, again, the big thesis of this book. There it is. Better, again, this is a very dense, thick book.

Castokia to Cosmo, the elements of the world, is originally a term in what we would call physics, that is Greek physics.

You describe how the world literally physically works, when a Greek speaker used this little phrase. Paul, in fact, what he does here, Mr.

Liethardt argues, he baptizes this conception in the whole gospel. He baptizes it into the mystery of Jesus Christ crucified, and it becomes what we would now, what we would call a foundational concept of biblical, he calls it biblical sociology.

Biblical sociologies at work here. Mr. Riethardt believes completely that an atonement theology, which is not at the same time an atonement sociology, is just completely inadequate.

[31 : 00] Jesus Christ dying is the center of the world. It changes everything. Now, that's a rhetoric that Christians are quite at home with.

In the cross of Christ, thy glory towering o'er the wrecks of time. In the cross of Christ, thy glory, Mr. Liethardt was a towering over every aspect of human life as human life is lived every day by every person.

In every culture, at every time, God doesn't reveal his son for some set apart religious group. He's addressing the whole world in the death of Christ.

So here, just in the inertia of time, I just have to race through this. I'll look at what our author does with Galatians, how he reads it. Much here, again, is quite obvious, but some is, I find at least, quite innovative.

At least, I found it so. What if we read Galatians, Mr. Liethardt, this is his big central thrust of this book, what if we read Galatians with special reference to this little phrase, the elements of the world, that is to say, within the symbol system or within the typology of the entire biblical witness.

[32 : 24] this is a big book about big topics. Nothing really new in this, when it's properly understood, it seems to me, every moment in the Bible is to be understood within the horizon of the whole Bible, of course.

That's why, for instance, you end up with four visions of hell. Very serious, Bible-loving people look at the whole of the Bible and put every particular scripture, say, about a topic like hell, within that whole horizon.

You can have significant differences about how you read any particular moment within the whole horizon. So we shouldn't be surprised if godly, scripture-loving, scripture-honoring people have different views about the biggest issues of the gospel, even eschatology, things like hell.

There it is. We'll put the entire phrase into the horizon of the whole Bible and see what happens. It begins within the horizon, of course, of Galatians.

There it is. That's, again, the thrust of what this book's above. But when done by someone like our author, well, the vista created, I find, at least, is simply breathtaking, what he does here as he unfolds the whole of scripture, in a sense, with this little phrase, waiting to be unpacked by the whole of scripture.

[33 : 55] Oh, what a book this is. I head towards my conclusion by attempting a description of this vista. I want to leave a good time for questioning. I hope I'm not losing you here.

This is a book that has a lot to say. Again, we've already looked at the Adam and Eve story. Again, this is what I like about this book.

He won't let you get away from the symbol, pictures of scripture. He takes you right back into pictures, like Adam and Eve. Okay, I got that. That's that wisdom literature that the Bible starts with. Adam and Eve in a garden and flaming angels. Mr. Lewis, immerse yourself in that symbol, that picture thinking. That's what God has given us to live by.

We've remembered the Adam and Eve story, a story of fellowship lost. It couldn't be simpler. A story of exile, of Israel called to repeat this story, again from a garden to a garden.

[34 : 56] She disobeys the law, did Adam and Eve, and God at a crisis time will send her into exile and then call her back. As he's doing the whole world. But that again is not the whole story of the Bible.

And here Mr. Leetard really is challenging. At least I find it so. It's really hard to read the whole Bible seriously. Mr.

Leetard would remind us. Say this more at the end. That is not the whole story. What about, you know, theologians again, they keep asking questions they won't leave well enough alone.

What about the others? What about the other excluded ones in the world? What about the Gentiles? What does the Bible, especially in the Pentateuch, have to say about them?

What about them? Where do they fit in? Do they fit into God's big story? The Gentiles, we find out, and this is obvious on the face of scripture, they're trying to find their own way back to God.

[36 : 02] Aren't they? They famously build a tower to reach into heaven itself. The Gentiles want to know God again, and they want to know something again about the big story.

So they build a tower that is going to reach into heaven. But this is, as famously as we know, defeated by God, this effort, and the nations are dispersed.

This again is one of the rich parts of this book. What do the nations do when they're dispersed? What do they do? Mr. Leithart meditates on this?

Well, they build temples. Isn't that strange? The Gentiles are always, Mr. Leithart always seems to say, he doesn't say this so explicitly, but the story of Israel is sort of the bright light of scripture, and the Gentiles are always sort of a shadow story that sort of follows the light.

It has to, that's what shadows do. There's a kind of a quiet story about the Gentiles, following along as a footnote, is that the right metaphor, along with the big story of Israel.

[37 : 14] The Gentiles are building temples, if you can believe it. They know enough to build temples, the Gentiles. What are they doing with these temples?

Temples in Greece, temples in Egypt, we have an Egyptologist with us this morning, temples in Babylon, temples, temples, temples. And, these temples attempt a picture of, in some different, in various ways, in all sorts of ways, Mr.

Leder's wonderful, imaginative picture of Paul visiting different pagan temples and having talks with the priests there. What are you guys trying to do here in these temples?

These temples picture somehow, some way to approach holiness, some way to approach deity, and they institute inevitably rigid, rigid, rigid, rigid, rigid, systems of, of all things, separation.

That's what these temples do. The world is filled, Mr. Leder would say, just as a footnote here, of temples that separate people, in all sorts of different contexts, in all sorts of different ways.

[38 : 32] The world orders itself by who's in, who's out, who's clean, who's unclean, who's acceptable, who's unacceptable. Like at a dinner party in Palestine, Pharisee with his exclusion narrative, Jesus with another kind of story, and a sinful woman.

And they're having a debate about who's in, who's out, who's clean, who's unclean, who stands where. That's what this Pharisee and Jesus are talking about.

Who's in, who's out. You know, systems of separation are at work in the world all the time. What is pure, what is impure, clean, unclean? That's the way the world works.

It works by, Paul summarizes it by, taste not, touch not. You know, it's the way the world works. Taste not, touch not. These are the social physics by which the world always lives.

Mr. Leithart argues, I think very convincingly, taste not, touch not. Gentile temples look like, and they look very unlike, Israel's temple.

[39 : 44] Yes. There's a funny shadow world out there which is sort of like Israel but sort of quite different than Israel. What's the divine connection if there is a divine connection at work here, if anything.

And it's time here now, I must give you here, I didn't know how to say this, I thought why not let the author speak for himself. I'll give you sort of a big generalized statement about how, a reading of how, what Mr.

Liethart does at this kind of moment. What's the connection between Gentile temples and Israel's temple? but this speaks to what I hope deeply.

I hope this isn't obscure. It's, forgive a bit of a lengthy reading. How did Torah express Israel's separation from separation?

The Gentiles are practicing separation but Israel is called to be separate from that kind of separation. You see his point there. How did Israel express Israel's separation from separation?

[40 : 51] Her negation, Mr. Liethart here wants to use some Pauline language, her negation of the politics of flesh. After the fall, we all become flesh, Gentile flesh seeks for God in one way, practices the politics, if you will, of flesh.

In part, it is achieved, it is achieved, in part, it achieved that by giving Israel access to Yahweh. That's what the temple is all about.

The creator of Israel and the nations. God is having dealings with Israel, but also with the nations. Yahweh's life, blessing and gifts, were available in the sanctuary, that is, in the temple.

And he drew near to Israel to distribute those gifts, not only to Israel, but also through them to the world. He gave his oracles to Israel.

That's what Paul celebrates in Romans. To them was given the oracles of God. He gave his oracles to Israel so that Israel may become a light to the nations and a teacher of the wise.

[42 : 08] That's what Simon the Pharisee thought all the time. We're the people of God. We're going to teach the nations wisdom. We're going to teach them the law. That was his business.

While Israel alone was the priestly people, the caretaker of Yahweh's house, Israel cared for the house on behalf of the nations.

At the Feast of Booths, what a great reminder this is from Leviticus, at the Feast of Booths, Israel, she, offered 70 bulls for the 70 nations.

That's how Israel symbolized all the nations in the world that were not Israel. And so offered up the world to the Creator.

Israel was called to minister to that shadow world by being a priest on the Gentiles behalf. That's what scripture's teaching, Mr.

[43 : 14] Leithart says, in Galatians, read in the little phrase in Galatians, seen within the whole horizon of holy scripture. That, it seems to me, beautifully captures.

That's one of many beautiful passages in this book as I head towards a conclusion. Beautifully captures the deep background of Paul to the Galatians and explains the shocking reason that Paul states for the rejection of circumcision as an entry right into the people of God, which is what Galatians is all about, isn't it?

And sees baptism as its replacement. Baptism into Christ, into Israel's true identity, dying on behalf of the nations.

Think of it. If you're familiar with Paul to the Galatians, I have to assume a bit of that this morning. Paul equates law in Israel with all forms of Gentile striving for entrance into renewed and good order for the world.

What the Gentiles were attempting in those temples had a family likeness to what Israel was attempting with her law, her life with God.

[44 : 38] Why then the law? Paul had to ask that question to explain the gospel. Why the law? The law is holy and just and good, but it could not achieve garden re-entry.

Paul came to see this so clearly. Both Israel's law and the attempts of the Gentiles to find her way back to God have been replaced by Christ crucified.

The world's perfect exclusion story and the perfect story of God accepting humanity back to him in the second Adam, the sinless second Adam.

Adam raised from the dead in and as, if that's the right way to put it, a spiritual body fit for fellowship with God. Here was the whole purpose of Israel's story was, to get back into the garden, symbolized in her temple, her true identity the Messiah appears and fulfills her mysterious calling by dying for

Israel and for the world.

That's why we Gentiles are here today celebrating him. In a word, again I love to stay with the symbols, those angels have lowered their flaming swords.

[46 : 02] That thing that protected the garden, Jesus did away with it. Now we're welcomed back into full perfect fellowship with our God in the mystery of Israel's true identity, Jesus.

This sort of big story, I'm going to end by going quiet here in a sense because it's big stuff here. Is it not passing strange that Mr. Lethard makes this point?

I think it's good to ponder. It is very strange that the Christian church normatively and the normative prevailed here, the church has fought, it fought in the early century, it fought even in Paul's time it appears, fought fiercely to hold Holy Scripture in as Christian Scripture.

Isn't that strange? And yet at the same time it adamantly refused to practice the rites insisted upon by those Scriptures.

That is really strange. Yes, those are our books, Genesis, the Pentateuch, the wisdom literature, all of it, that's Holy Scripture, but we don't practice the rites insisted upon there.

[47 : 16] That is an interesting dynamic in the Christian story. That's an amazing story of the church being faithful to the gospel in that strange, difficult, complex way.

Augustine, Mr. Lethard quotes St. Augustine, it's always good to quote St. Augustine, he usually gets it just right. Augustine calls the church's sacraments fewer and simpler and more effective.

They replace the temple rites, you see. And that's what Paul was fighting about with the Galatians. No more circumcision.

Or in Colossians, no Sabbath, you're following Sabbath regulations. No, no, that's another dispensation. Paul had once been a Simon the Pharisee, practicing those things, and then he saw that they'd been put aside.

This is a complex and beautiful story. I head towards a conclusion. So here, whoops, I've got to find another page here. There we go.

[48 : 24] The law taught wisdom. It taught restraint. Paul says the law is holy and just and good. We can never just simply put away the law as part of Pentateuch.

It taught restraint. Just wanted to sort of, here's the thing about the book that I just loved. The law says, for instance, we're also familiar with this.

I've never quite seen this the way Mr. Liethardt sees it. The law taught, for instance, famously something like an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Or it really means there that teaching that's always pointed out, restrain your desire for vengeance, which the nations practice much.

Restrain, it calls for a measured justice, justice, an eye for a tooth for tooth. Don't overwhelm the wrongdoer with your vengeance.

Have a measured justice. The world really has never caught up with the beauty of the wisdom of the Old Testament about these things. But, nevertheless, in Galatians, properly understood, Paul calls the whole story of Israel, she was under a guide or a guardian, a tutor, famously, until Christ, the faithful one, appeared.

[49 : 52] Again, Israel is, Jesus is Israel's true identity. But he taught, he taught the law differently, Jesus. Again, I hadn't seen this before.

The gospel of grace reveals something which fulfills this law of vision very strangely. Again, this is new to me. Remember, Jesus taught this.

Mr. Luther zeroes in on this. So many things that he talks about in this book. If someone slaps your cheek, Jesus says famously, boom. What are you supposed to do?

We all know as Christians, don't we? You turn the other cheek so that he can whack you again. The world doesn't see that as too commonsensical.

Whack! What should I do, Jesus? Show him your other side of your face so he can hit you again.

How come? Mr. Lethard asked. How come? Well, you see, it goes like this.

[50 : 50] Mr. Lethard reads it. The slapper, you don't have to hear that word, do you? I hope none of you are slappers too much. The slapper has sinned in dishonoring you.

You're dishonored by being slapped that way. The sinner has sinned in dishonoring you. Well, his sin needs to be atoned for.

So, you, my disciple, must offer up yourself as a bearer of an atoning punishment. The second slap. we enact in those little things Jesus' death on the cross. Okay, you sinner, you've sinned, it needs to be, there needs to be a punishing atonement.

I'll be that, I'll be the victim given. Hit me again. It's as if Jesus on the cross was saying to all the world, hit me again. God died for us.

[51 : 54] Hit me again. I'll bear the punishment for your sin. And the Christian is called to do that. This fulfills the law of the Lord. This is the law of love.

Jesus bore the world's disgrace and atoned for that disgrace. And he has done nothing less than he has established a new temple in the world where exclusion is ever to be overcome, where the only law is love, where all are welcome.

This is the new way of the world. Mr. Lither then goes on to talk about forms of despite itself, the gospel now creates a new kind of shadow world, which will inevitably, despite itself, echo the gospel.

The world is changed by the gospel even when it doesn't know it's being changed by it. Many cultures now have to think about inclusion, about rights for the poor, about, oh, it's bad to exclude minorities.

We have to work at this. The world is changed by the eruption into the world of an inclusion story now that Jesus was instituting in Palestine and which very much perplexed Simon the Pharisee.

[53 : 24] What are you doing? Do you think you're the temple rabbi from Nazareth? The hidden answer of the gospel would be, I am the new temple.

I'm here. I'm here, Israel. I'm your true identity. I'm going to fulfill the whole mystery of the whole story. And that's what the atonement does. It fulfills, answers the problems of the great difficulties of the whole world, the gospel is a gospel sociology.

It answers, in the cross of Christ, everything in the world is addressed. Nothing is left out. I've only touched upon a very rich, remarkable book of theological meditation.

I hope we can think deeply about the gospel. Mr. Letharth helps me to think deeply. I want to end with a footnote. Recently, I just came across this the day, and I hope it's applicable a recent biography of Kierkegaard, I don't know how to say his name, a great Danish thinker.

This biographer of that strange man, he says that he, Kierkegaard, wrote to avoid, from memory, he writes, I would put it, he wrote to defy summarization.

[54 : 40] I want to echo the same thing. This book by Mr. Letharth, I must say, it defies easy summarization.

There's so much here, so much meat, applying, seeing the atonement as addressing all of the world, and it's how the death of Christ on the cross changes the cosmos, changes the very elements of the world.

Everything is changed when the one through whom the cosmos was created died and rose again.

The doctrine of creation and salvation tie them together, they always have wisdom in them.

He who, through whom the world was created, hung on a cross to bring that whole creation of his back to himself. So, Mr. Letharth, in another one of his books, and on this I end, he warns us, maybe somewhat provocatively, he talks about too many of us in the church will say, well, just give me the gist of it, if you don't mind.

Well, that's okay. I think there's even summaries of the Bible in the Bible at different places, or big tracts of the Bible are summarized in a psalm, but that can be misleading.

[55 : 56] If we keep on saying, just give me the gist of it, well, he doesn't say this, but I'll say it, you become just the gist of it Christian. The Bible is a deeply rich and complex book.

It's the book that heaven gave it to us the way it is, and heaven means the church to read it the way it is, in all of its strange complexity about Israel and the Gentiles.

The story is just complex and beautiful, and it has to be read, there has to be times when we get perplexed again, and a bit mixed up, because God has given us a very complex salvation story.

It ends in glory and beauty and even properly understood simplicity, but it is the way it is. Maybe he is a theologian and he is apologizing for writing a complex book.

It does go on, for instance, to talk about how atonement affects our understanding of the doctrine of justification, how it affects the mission of the church, what the church expects to find the proverbial Gentiles doing when it reaches them, because the Gentiles can be doing very complex things, and it's good for the mission aspect of the church's life to know all of that.

[57 : 13] But there you go, it's a rich book, again, Bill Reimer suggested I read it, so I read it a couple times, and sorry, that is a big mouthful.

I don't know about it. And then the final footnote is, I have to say, I'm not sure if your reviewer really understood it. So, 10 o'clock, let me say a closing prayer, and then please, lots of questions, I hope. Lord, we thank you for the great and glorious mysteries of the gospel, which you've called us to understand as little children, turning to you as our savior, and help us to grow and grow and grow into more and more of the glorious mystery of what you've given to us, this great story of salvation, for you are a great God.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, you theologians, let's let it rip here.

I was just thinking while you were talking about Peter's dream, when he was questioning whether or not Gentiles, he had this dream, thinking about pictures, imagery, and I was thinking about Peter's dream, about the gospel, that you can eat, anything, which is sort of an overturning of some of the Mosaic decisions, that that was the way of getting to the rock.

[59 : 05] That's right, that's right. No, it's not according to the daredeaf. Oh, daredeaf thing, yeah, right. Basically, that's not marginal, that was like a big dream.

Yeah, that's right. Yeah. Yeah. There's inclusion of the Gentiles. Yeah. Yeah. Yes. I love this idea of the Gentiles.

It reminds me of what C.S. Lewis said, there are so many religions, again, an awful lot of it right, but they're not Christianity. Yeah, yes, yeah.

And that's the ultimate thing. That's right. It's fascinating, fascinating, and that's a lot. Thank you, Colleen, for that very rich, no, thank you, that goes to the heart of it.

You got it, A plus. Talk about being provocative. Mr. Lethard has a little, a little, his quick historical summary.

[60 : 08] I don't know where this goes, I don't know where, it just boggles my mind. But he tells the little story of a Presbytery minister who worked amongst Buddhists. Presbytery minister gave up his faith and became a Buddhist.

And he became one of the great organizers in the 19th century of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. He, in fact, gave this, taught Buddhism how to do a catechism. Really did.

You know, a good sort of Wetsminster catechism guy who's become a Buddhist, but says, well, I'll use my Christian ways. And he, in fact, as Mr. Lethard reads it, he smuggles a lot of liberal Protestant ideas into Buddhism.

And he uses this as an example of how the gospel will, like salt and light, in the strangest ways, start making its way. God uses the strangest methods and all of a sudden Buddhists have ideas about, oh yeah, loving your neighbor and including people.

Yeah, little funny shadows of the gospel work their way into Buddhism by a heretical Presbyterian minister. he is serious about this. This is the way the world works.

[61 : 22] It's sort of breathtaking, but another picture of how much is in this book. Remember, I didn't tell Sarah, Augustine taught the Roman Empire to re-envision itself in the mystery of Jesus.

Think about, have you ever tried to summarize the city of God? That's why Mr. Smith, the foster, says, this is what Mr. Letharth's attempting to, with all of our modern knowledge of global religions and whatnot, he's taking all of that and baptizing it in the gospel again, showing that the atonement of all things is a global sociology.

Here, world, do you want to understand what's going on? Look at Christ crucified. It'll tell you what's going on in your exclusion narratives, in your inclusion, who's in, who's out, all institutions, all families, all cultural dynamics live by some form of this.

And it's the prison in which we live, but it orders the world. Paul saw this so clearly. So he had to say to Israel, now in Christ, there's this amazing inclusion narrative that started that was always God's plan.

He separated Israel from the separation so that she could become a story of inclusion. Sir, I'm battling. Please, please.

[62 : 40] Thanks so much. You've inspired me to read the book. So I'm really curious and fascinated with the whole reference to worshiping and maybe a text upon this.

You go into how the other nations have a sacrifice and an end or a way of dealing with justice issues. And if so, that's kind of a rationale or for the atonement.

Yes, yes. Yes, yes. Yes, yes. Yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. He has, as I mentioned just in passing, he has a fascinating section which includes in the main part of the book a four or five pages, I would call it bibliography, where he goes through what scholarship is available out there to back up what

I'm saying here.

So that's there and he does have a kind of narrative voice here which I find very interesting. Mr. Lee has, I've heard him at Regent a couple of times tell he's been invited to give lectures.

Very, very interesting thinker. He pictures Paul going to Egypt, going to Greece, going to Babylon, and talking to priests about what is your temple about?

[64 : 08] Tell me about it. And they talk to him, again he's basing this on the best scholarship that he can involve himself with about these stories. And the priests talk to him about, well it's a story about here's how we approach this mystery in Egypt, so here's how we deal with death.

Here's how we separate ourselves from the uncleanness of death. Here's how we prepare for eternity. Other temples have different dynamics, but it's always some kind of variation on who's in, who's out.

How do we approach and how are we phobic about some things? What's dirty, what's clean? So yes, here's the shadow side of Israel's temple, where we believe as Christians, the living God says, here's how to approach me.

But the same dynamics, this family resemblance, if you will, to use Wittgenstein's famous phrase. So Lethar deals with the Gentiles in their temple world quite nicely in this book.

Yes, often in, I was talking to some friends the other day about this, how often in the prophets you get God suddenly erupting against his own people and saying, yes, Israel, yes, you're my people.

[65 : 23] but I took the Egyptians here from here to there and I have dealings with the other nations. You are my story for them.

It was hard, Tom Wright, Mr. Leithart doesn't always agree with Tom Wright, but he quotes with appreciation some of Tom Wright's writing about how Israel was called somehow to bear the sin of the nations.

her sin was she often, her works righteousness is not quite right beliefs, what we've come to think of it as. Her works righteousness was, well, if we stay faithful to the covenant, circumcision, food loss, Sabbath tribulation, that will make us a light to the nations.

But she failed to see that the light she'd be for the nations would come about through her bearing the sin of the nations. She'd become the suffering servant of Isaiah.

And when her true identity suddenly shows up, the temple becomes incarnate, that's Jesus, he takes down upon himself Israel's true story and dies for the nations.

[66 : 36] And Israel's true identity is worked out. That's how Mr. Lee, very sympathetic with, that's the first level of what salvation by works means.

it's about entrance into the true covenant community. Baptism and the Lord's table are now that same kind of story in the gospel key. It's very, I'm trying to, Mr.

Letharth's a strange thinker and I'll grab this, I want you to ask me some questions. I can read large tracks, I find this deeply encouraging, large tracks of Mr. Letharth and I keep saying, here's the classic reformed Presbyterian guy.

And he is, that's his background, that's his story. The next 25 pages you would think he's a Catholic. And I find this very encouraging. He's the kind of guy who, I see him as a symbol almost of where the church might go.

He sounds very Catholic-y. And then he sounds very much like Calvin and I think he's, it's all together in one guy. I think the church, he's a symbol of where the church may be going.

[67 : 49] ECT may have a great future because he makes you realize again how God speaks through symbols.

Baptism is important. The Lord's table is very important. That's the temple's fulfillment. There's where you approach Yahweh and find open, free, and beautiful communion with him.

And we, if we set aside the sacraments, we're throwing away the gospel in a sense. Anybody else?

Oh, it's there. When you mentioned the fellow has the Catholic leanings out in Presbyterian, was one of his parents perhaps a Catholic background?

No, I doubt it. What was family roots? I don't know anything about that, but I mean just in his intellectual life. He's certainly, he feels like one and then he feels like the other.

And I find that encouraging. Maybe it was the people that crossed his paths in his life. Yeah, that could, yeah. Maybe a good Catholic friend, a good Presbyterian friend.

[68 : 57] That always helps. That always helps. because my mom's family is Catholic and my dad's family is Protestant.

So I do that too. Yeah, yeah. I have a leaning that's in my room. I'm going to say one last question. the fascinating is exclusion pieces of George.

And I guess I'm wondering if the establishment of other temples and other gods was a reaction to being excluded. Clearly, there is a desire on the part of humanity to head toward faith and something presumably God.

Now, most of the other gods, goddesses, whatever, in the world of St. Paul and before that related somehow to Mother Earth. And without going into Gaia, and all that stuff, it was something they could see around them.

But is it possible that their continued searching for God was because of their creation from Judeans? Well, historically speaking, I would think, no, Judeans was always this small little obscure people.

[70 : 15] They were nobodies in the ancient world, at least in their own land. They were just nothing. But they were recognized by a unique in having a male God. Well, well, not well, it's complex, isn't it?

Certainly, their emphasis is upon one God. All we know about the Gentiles were attracted to Israel on occasion because of the beauty of her law. The nations did not have anything like the Decalogue or anything like Israel's moral insight or wisdom.

There's just nothing in the other nations that are quite like that. Well, it's very attractive. Work by your own efforts toward God. Okay, but that's certainly the Lutheran understanding of Paul.

And there's much truth to it, I'm sure, but it's open to challenge. Israel lived by grace. She knew that God had called her out of him. She was a nobody. She was that abandoned child by the road.

And Israel's God, by grace, had lifted her up and taken her to himself. That's a story of grace. The Old Testament's grace, a grace story. Again, Israel's mistake on one view of it is that she held on to her national identity through circumcision and food laws, and she thought that obedience of the covenant would make her a light to the nations.

[71 : 40] And that was sort of true, but she was in fact called to bear the sins of the nations. Israel. And Jesus then fulfilled that mysterious role for her because he is Israel.

He is the mystery of Israel in his own person. Just as Simon the Pharisee, I think, was beginning to intuit that this rabbi from Nazareth thought he was the temple. temple. Israel missed the final message.

Well, was she ordained? Thomas Torrance would say, he says, cover your lips when you say this. She was ordained to do that for the nation. Anyway, there you go. What a story, what a story. Hey, this is great.

I want to say, maybe next time I'm going to, if I'm ever invited back, I'll review something really simple next time.

[72 : 42] Let's get simple. Well, there's always October 16th. Thank you all for being here. It was once again lovely to be able to share with you as one big family.

If you have any ideas or suggestions, let me know. Thank you, Harvey, for a very I don't know if it was elucidating or intriguing or kind of inspiring.

We're all going to go and read the book, but not before you read the book club book. Let's not have.

Thank you, Harvey, for that.

Thank you. Thank you.