

Introduction

From Plane to Plane

WHEN JESUS PRAYED, *WHERE in the world was he?* The four Gospels portray him as praying in a variety of places: on a mountain, and in a wilderness or “lonely” place; in the midst of his disciples, and, again alone, in Gethsemane. According to Matthew, when he taught his disciples to pray he counseled them to “go into your inner room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret [*en to krypto*].” Immediately—which is to say, after about fifty-five years of reading this text—I find myself wondering whether this phrase “in secret” may contain more significance than meets the eye. Because, in the Old Testament—the book from which Jesus and his fellow Jews learned their religious ABC’s—that phrase, “in secret,” or “in a secret place,” at times appears to mean more than it says.

Frequently, the Hebrew word, *seter*, “secret,” refers to God’s sheltering presence in the sanctuary. For example, Ps 91:1 reads, “One who dwells *in the secret place* [*beseter*] of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty.” So, the psalmist often seeks that place, especially as a refuge from enemies (Pss 27:5; 31:21; 32:7; 61:4; 91:1; 119:114).¹ But once, when Israel calls out in distress, God says, “I answered you *in the secret place* [*beseter*] of thunder.” Clearly this “secret place” is not the earthly sanctuary. What, or where, is it? In Ps 18:11, David says that when God came to help him in answer to his prayer, God “made darkness his *covering* [*seter*] around him, / his canopy thick clouds dark with water.” Taken together,

1. Where the numbering of verses differs in English translations from the numbering in the Hebrew Bible, I shall follow the English text. Readers of the original text will know how to make the adjustment. For the most part I shall quote from the RSV, following the example of the late New Testament scholar, Krister Stendahl. Himself a staunch advocate for the ordination of women to Christian ministry, and holding that for, liturgical readings, inclusive-language translations are preferable, he wrote, nevertheless, that “I still consider [the RSV] to be the most useful translation for study purposes, because it has an adequate closeness to the Greek” (*Final Account*, xi).

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these two texts imply that God's presence and activity are at one and the same time revealed and hidden within the various features of a violent thunderstorm.

But what does the verbal form of *seter* mean in Isa 45:15? The passage goes like this: "Thus says the LORD: 'The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabians, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying: "God is *with you* [*bak*] only, and there is no other, no god besides him." Truly, thou art a God *who hidest thyself* [*'el mistatter*], O God of Israel, the Savior."

In this passage, all the human second person pronouns are in the second person feminine singular. God is addressing Zion, currently in ruins, about the fact that the Persian king, Cyrus, will rebuild the city and set the Jewish exiles free to return home (Isa 45:1–13). When other nations and peoples come to bring tribute to God in the restored city, they will confess: "God is *in you* [*bak*] only." (The Hebrew preposition, *b-*, here echoes the other passages with the expression, *beseter*; and the confessional line following makes that implication explicit: "Truly, thou art a God *who hidest thyself* [*'el mistatter*], O God of Israel, the Savior.") If the biblical God is a hidden God, as this passage suggests, God is at one and the same time hidden and manifest within the restored community.

But only the *restored* community? What of the exilic interim? What of those who mourn the destruction of the city and temple, and who would continue to use psalms like Psalm 91? Is God still a *secret place* of prayer and refuge? In the book of Ezekiel, the "glory of the LORD" that departed from the temple in Jerusalem before its destruction (Ezekiel 10) is envisioned as standing, then, "upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city." When the "glory of the LORD" is envisioned as returning to the rebuilt temple, it enters the temple "by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east." The implication is that the glory of the LORD during the exile is "hidden" among the exiles in Babylon. And this is made explicit in Ezek 11:16, where God says of the exiles, "Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary [*miqdaš*] to them for a while in the countries where they have gone." Clearly they have no temple in Babylon. So, in the interim between the destruction of the Jerusalem temple whose roots go back to God's instruction to Moses in Exod 28:8 ("let them make me a *miqdaš*, that I may dwell in their midst") and the "house" for God that Cyrus will commission in a Jerusalem to which the exiles are to return—in

this interim God will become a stand-in *miqdaš*. When, then, the exiles in Babylon pray to God, *where are they?*

To be sure, in one sense they are praying “in Babylon” (Jer 29:7), a city that occupies a specific meeting-point of GPS coordinates in the four-dimensional world of space-and-time. But are they not also praying *bese-ter*? Are they not also praying—as Jesus counsels his disciples to pray—“in secret”? What might this mean? Is this *bese-ter* plottable in the same sense as the city of Babylon? The question I am raising here, and a preliminary clue as to how we may think of the experiential reality it points to, may be indicated by a pair of anecdotes from two personal experiences of momentarily finding myself in a space-time “warp.”

It was reunion week at the seminary where I had undertaken my first theological degree. I had walked over to have breakfast at the student union building of the neighboring university, and taken a seat at an otherwise unused, large round table. Shortly, three women from the university’s administrative staff took seats opposite me. As I ate unhurriedly, reading the morning newspaper, they engaged in intimate, animated conversation. Although I could hear them quite easily, I did not feel intruded upon by their voices, because the warm intimacy of their voice-tones clearly, somehow, configured a space that included them and excluded me. Suddenly, my concentration on what I was reading was interrupted by a change in the tone of the current speaker, as, pausing in the middle of an anecdote, she shifted from easy intimacy into a neutral, impersonal courtesy, saying, “excuse me—could you pass the sugar?” Clearly her tone signaled that she was speaking to me, a stranger. “Oh yes—of course”; and with that I slid the sugar bowl to the center of the table where she was able to reach it, at which point, with a further polite, “thank you,” she lapsed back into the intimate tones of her anecdote while I turned back to my newspaper and coffee. But as I did so, I realized with a start that I had just participated in a space-warp. Simply—and paradoxically—by shifting from a tone of intimacy to one of impersonal courtesy, she had reconfigured her existential space from one that had included her friends and (appropriately) excluded me, to a space that included me, a stranger, and (appropriately) excluded her friends.

Academics are often accused of being absent-minded. (“Has Gerry heard anything I’ve said?” “No—he’s miles away.”) My retort, in self-defense, is that I have never in my life been absent-minded; but there have been times when, for what seemed to me like a short while, I was present-minded somewhere else. I think I may have come to this way of putting the matter as the result of a midnight observation in Jerusalem in the fall

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of 1964—my second anecdote of a space-time warp. My wife Eileen and I were living at the Hebrew Union College Biblical and Archeological School, I as a graduate student, along with a few others, under Frank M. Cross of Harvard as Annual Visiting Director. Eileen and I were returning from a late evening scooter ride, and were now pulling into the school parking lot. I brought the scooter to a stop facing the part of the wall where a half-dozen tall, narrow windows allowed us to see into Professor Cross's study. There he was, seated in the deep study chair, the desk piled with books, some of them open and leaning at an angle for convenient consultation, his legs extended and his heels resting on the edge of his desk, his gaze fixed on a huge tome lying open on his lap and across his legs. Before I turned away for us to return to our lodgings, it struck me that though his body was there in that chair, his mind seemed to be far away (or unfathomably deeper down, in some hidden recess inside him), holding conversation with the ancient, medieval, and modern authors whose written words, together with his receptive concentration on them, brought into being a space-time warp that threw the four-dimensional world of his study and his body into relation with a whole new dimension of interior depth. The temporal texture of that interior world was illustrated the day his wife Betty Anne phoned down at noon to announce that the lamb-chop lunch she had promised him at breakfast was now ready. He arose from his study chair, bounded up the stairs, sat down at the table and, after one mouthful, exclaimed, "Betty Anne, this chop is cold!" To which she replied, "Well, it was hot when I called you for lunch." He looked at his watch. It was 4:00 p.m.

By these two anecdotes, I mean to suggest that when prayer takes place it always occurs, and can be plotted, at a specific intersection of the coordinates of our ordinary four-dimensional, physical and embodied space-time world. And it also takes place within a human, social world (a world whose relational structures vary from intimacy to impersonal courtesy to unthinking rudeness to outright hostility and even dire conflict). Prayer also takes place in this latter world, whether in the "common prayer" of a synagogue, mosque, or church; solitary prayer in one's inner room or favorite "deserted" place; or internal prayer in the face of antagonistic or hostile individuals or groups. Here too, a sociologist and a psychologist could team up to "plot" such prayer-events on the relational coordinates of a social/psychological analytical grid of their devising. But prayer does not simply occur at either this physical or this social/psychological locus, as though these respective places are given and prayer simply takes up a place that they provide. Rather, at the intersection of these two

sets of coordinates, prayer “takes place,” in the sense that the act of prayer shapes a space for itself (the way the bird of Ps 84:3 shapes a nest for itself), and has a standing before God, that does not depend on the space and the standing that those other coordinates provide for it.

To address God in prayer, whether along with a group, alone in a group, or by oneself in a deserted spot (I want to coin a term here and say, whether solidarily or solitarily), is to participate in the emergence of a “place” that comes into existence, or is once again re-entered, through the act of prayer. Think of Psalm 100, the so-called *Jubilate Deo*, especially the words, “Serve the LORD with gladness! / Come into his presence with singing! / . . . / Enter his gates with [b-] thanksgiving, / and his courts with [b-] praise!” In the days when this psalm was sung in relation to the sanctuary standing in Jerusalem, the gates through which one would pass while singing would stand tall and sturdy in their carved beauty, and the courts would open out spaciously to receive them as they continued to sing there. But where there is no such sanctuary, I suggest that we may take the preposition *b-*, not in an instrumental, but in a locative sense, such that it is the very offering of thanksgiving that is the gates through which one enters into the space where God dwells “in secret” (Psalm 91); and it is the very offering of praise that configures a spacious secret place within which one may meet with God.

The nature of this “place” is such that it can be expressed or talked about only by using words that belong and have their meaning first of all in the two other “worlds,” the interwoven but distinguishable worlds of four-dimensional physical/embodied space-time and social and psychological inter-personal relationships. When they are used to talk about, and to talk within, this third sort of “space,” these words may be said to function figuratively or metaphorically. But in our day it is dangerous to put the matter this way. This is because we have become habituated, by a variety of practices and for a number of reasons, to think that reality and truth can best be expressed literally, and that when words are used figuratively or metaphorically, this is merely a colorful way of juicing up what could more straightforwardly be stated literally. One could, for example, quote a widely used high school textbook on English poetry, where after each poem the students are asked to state what the poem says “in their own words.” This is to assume that what the poem is getting at could be got at also in straightforward, “literal” language. Even the great literary scholar, John Livingston Lowes, in writing a monumental study of the sources lying behind Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem, “Kubla Khan,” mis-titled his study, *The Road to Xanadu*. The road that Lowe traces leads to

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the poem; but it is the poem itself that is the road to Xanadu, and if one wishes to enter into the Xanadu that Coleridge is concerned with, one must stay within the poem and trust it to lead one to that enchanted and unfathomable place.

So, if we are asked to think and speak about—and especially to speak within—this third “space” with the aid of metaphors and figures of speech, we must resist the default tendency of our modern minds to think of those words as “merely metaphorical.” The way in which this third “secret” space is distinct from and yet connected to our other two worlds calls for words that arise within those two worlds, yet, by the manner of their use, point to a world that is distinguishable from them. The most adequate, the most truth-telling language for this third world is the figurative language of metaphor. An example: When Jesus says, “I have meat to eat that you know not of,” he means to say that the reality he is talking about is like, and is connected to, their own physical experience of eating food and their own social experience of eating with others or alone; yet it is distinct in such a way that, if they understand his words only as applying to those two worlds, they will not (yet) know what he is talking about. The connection between this world and the other two worlds (worlds that we may properly and constructively call “secular”) is evidenced in the way that our experiences in this third world may become manifest in the way we come to fresh and new experience, understanding, and action in the “secular” worlds. This, I think, is part of what the Gospel of John is getting at in saying that, in Jesus of Nazareth, “the word became flesh and tented [*eskenosen*] among us”—the Greek word here being the verbal counterpart to the noun, *skene*, that appears in the Greek translation of Exod 25:9 where the Hebrew noun, *miškan*, is translated in the RSV as “tabernacle” in which God after Sinai dwelt among the people *beseter*.

The importance of this third realm is that—like the old farmhand in Robert Frost’s poem, “From Plane To Plane,” who wouldn’t hoe corn rows in both directions, but hoed one way, shouldered his hoe and walked back to the beginning, and only then lowered his hoe for another assault on the weeds, because “a man has got to keep his extrication”—like that farm hand, prayer is one way in which we are enabled to “keep our extrication” from—or within—our physical and social worlds which otherwise could overpower us and either press us into abject conformity or crush us to death.

To turn, now, to the essays collected in this volume: They were for the most part written as separate, self-standing studies. Each essay began when some word, phrase, image or sentence in an otherwise familiar

passage suddenly “made strange” and piqued my interest by some fugitive suspicion that there may be more to its meaning than had formerly met my eye. (As a matter of fact, this is what happened with the phrase, “in secret,” that for some reason came to mind when I sat down to draft this introduction.) From such a starting-point, I typically moved out (like an internet junkie following up web-links indicated by underlined words in an internet essay or news report) to other places in the Bible where the word was used, the phrase occurred, the image reappeared, or another sentence made a similar or contrasting statement on the same topic. My movements from passage to passage were not initially directed by method or design, but rather followed my nose the way a dog runs ahead of its master, darting into the underbrush first on one side of the path and then on the other, following the zigzag of rabbit trails as they crisscross one another, but always moving forward in the direction of the master’s walk. What I discovered was that, just as one can get from Indianapolis to Boston most quickly by the turnpike, but in so doing misses most of the scenery and local color of state highways and local roads, just so, I was not interested in simply rushing to an interpretive conclusion, but rather in following each local trail and examining each local stopping-point with unhurried curiosity and appreciation.

Recently, I have been browsing in a collection of essays by an Assyriologist, Professor William Moran. In one of the essays (the title of which—“The Most Magic Word”—is itself suggestive), this scholar quotes from a letter in which the German poet Schiller writes to Goethe as follows: “The purpose of the epic poet is present at every point of his movement. Hence we do not hasten impatiently to an end, but linger with love at every step.”² I recall an afternoon when, on sabbatical leave from my seminary duties (sabbatical being itself a form of fruitful “extrication”), I sat in on one of Professor Moran’s classes. The student was interpreting a text in ancient Babylonian, and at one point commented on a verb in that text as meaning, “to dig.” When he thought he had made his point, Professor Moran patiently asked the student whether he could identify what kind of digging the verb referred to. The student looked blank for a moment, then shook his head. With constructively elegant precision, Professor Moran encouraged the student to appreciate the significance for a full understanding of the passage that lay in the fact that the verb in question meant, specifically, to dig or trench accumulated silt and mud out of an irrigation canal.

In my own biblical studies, I myself have stumbled inadvertently onto the secret that Professor Moran so masterfully practiced himself, and

2. Moran, *Most Magic Word*, 59 and reference there.

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for which he has now given me words to describe my own mind-and-body feeling as I go about zigzagging through scripture. It is the feeling of “not hasten[ing] impatiently to an end, but linger[ing] with love at every step.” This introduction has already given a brief demonstration, and thereby fair warning—*caveat emptor*—that the person who reads this book will often be slowed down to pay particular attention to the nuances and connotations of a particular word or image in the passage at hand and in other passages that it stands ready to connect the reader to. This kind of reading is like picking raspberries—one at a time, while moving carefully so as not to snag one’s sleeve or scratch a bare arm on a prickly raspberry cane. The present essays are offered as a collection in hope that their content, as well as their compositional structure, will induce the reader, like Schiller with epic texts, to read and “linger with love at every step.” Not with love for what I have to say! But with love for what the quoted and examined biblical texts have to say, as I slow our reading down for the individual words and phrases and their web-link-like connections with other places in the Bible. In other words, this is not a book to be read. It is a book to be studied. Or rather, it is to be used as one “hitchhiker’s guide to the galaxy” of scripture. Used in this way, it may assist the reader in the practice of lingering lovingly on text after text along a variety of often-intersecting paths of biblical meaning.

One other thing: Some of the papers are sprinkled liberally with Hebrew and Greek words in English transliteration. This is to enable us to gain a finer appreciation of the precise connotations and overtones of individual words as well as their potential for linkage to related passages elsewhere in the Bible—such linkage not always apparent in English translation. To make the essays user-friendly, or at least user-accessible, by a wider readership than those who read the original biblical languages, these transliterations have been simplified from their more scientific form. Moreover, I shall make every effort to accompany original-language citations with lexical or grammatical comments that clarify the fine points at issue. Those who do read Hebrew and Greek will, I trust, be patient with these comments and forgive the simplified transliterations.

Either explicitly or implicitly, the essays all have to do with prayer. As most of them were written independently of the others, the reader should feel free to read them in any order, as dictated by personal interest. In his book, *The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention*, Reuben Brower quotes Frost as saying that a reader need not read his poems in any particular order, since “[p]rogress is not the aim, but circulation. The thing is to get among the poems where they hold each other apart in their

places as the stars do.” Whenever Frost set himself to gathering a number of separately composed poems into a publishable volume, “[t]he interest, the pastime, was to learn if there had been any divinity shaping my ends and I had been building better than I knew. In other words could anything of larger design, even the roughest, any broken or dotted continuity, or any fragment of a figure be discovered among the apparently random lesser designs of the several poems?”³ It is in that sense, I hope, that the essays, as collected here, may display an after-the-fact “constellation of intentions.”

A word about the title. I hope that the comments to this point convey to the reader an initial sense of what I intend to mean by “when prayer takes place.” As for the subtitle, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) says that, in one meaning, a “foray” is an advance troop on an incursion for supplies and to reconnoiter a territory to be taken over by a following military force. (Think of the Israelite spies, in Numbers 13, on a foray into south Canaan, one of the leaders of which is Caleb, a name that—fittingly enough in the context of this introduction—means, “Dog!”) More peaceably, a foray may be a scouting party sent out ahead of a wagon train westward. The year before I was born, my parents turned an old army tent and a flatbed wagon into a covered wagon and, with my three older brothers, joined such a train on a 350-mile trek into northern Saskatchewan to enter a land claim under the provisions of the homestead act. (My earliest memory dates to that homestead. All my life I have carried in the back of my mind the scene of our dad dragging a dead horse out of a log barn with another horse, around the corner to the right and into the bushes. When I shared this memory with our mother, at a family reunion forty years later, she gaped in disbelief: “You can’t remember that! You were born in August; and before the snow was off the ground the following spring, I stood in the doorway of the log cabin, holding you on my hip, and watching that scene, sick with worry as to how dad was going to be able to put the crops in with only one horse.” I suspect that my infant sensitivity to her emotional intensity burned that scene into my brain.) It turned out that our dad, whose health had already been poor before the trek, became even more unwell, and he was forced to abandon his claim on the homestead, which then reverted to the Crown. So all that I have from that attempt of our family to “take place” in the form of a homestead is a single snapshot memory. Now, I take the Psalms as various forays into a space which they may aspire to inhabit “forever” (as in Ps 84:4; and in Pss 23:6 and 27:4, on which see more fully chapters 10–11 below), but which, as most scholars hold, they perforce must relinquish in death if not sooner. So I offer

3. Brower, *Robert Frost*, 1–2.

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especially the essays on the Psalms and the Prayer of Hannah as Israelite forays into a biblical world. In some of these psalms, as in others, all that sustains the psalmist is a snapshot memory of a brief time spent in that “third world,” *beseter*. My own reflections track my own attempts, like that Israelite dog, Caleb, to make brief forays into that world. It is common among biblical scholars to refer to the activity of biblical interpretation as consisting in “exegesis,” which, from the Greek verb, *exegeomai*, means, at base, to “lead out” the meaning to where the hearers and readers are. My method, in these essays, may more properly be called “eisegesis”—not in the modern sense of reading one’s own meanings into the text and then pretending to have found them there, but in one original sense of the Greek verb, *eisegeomai*, which means, “to lead in, to introduce, to induct by means of religious rites.” I seek not so much to deliver the meanings of the text to the reader, as to help the reader enter into the text as a foray into the biblical world and its secret presence.

It remains to comment briefly on each of the essays that follow. In Part One, “Orienting Ourselves in the Biblical World,” I begin with “. . . and the Bush Was Not Consumed,” a passage foundational for all biblical narrative insofar as it portrays Moses as drawn by a strange sight out of his ordinary space-time world and warped into a world and onto a standpoint that is holy. That holy standpoint is intimately related to the social and political world of Moses’ people in Egypt, a world and a regime under which they are being crushed to death. In “What’s in a Name? ‘Yahweh’ in Exodus 3 and the Wider Biblical Context,” I explore the implications of God’s “exegesis,” or drawing out, of the meaning of the divine name that is represented in most English translations by the phrase, “the LORD,” and which is understood by many scholars as originally pronounced (when it was still uttered), “Yahweh.” This name is the most important word in the Old Testament. In “What Does the Priestly Blessing *Do*?” I explore what three-dimensional “word-event” transpires—what third world takes shape once again—when, in accordance with the instruction in Num 6:22–27, the worship leader blesses the people by “putting” God’s name on them, the people receive the blessing, and in and through those acts of blessing and reception it is in fact God who blesses. To this point the essays provide a general context for the specific practice of prayer, while already introducing some aspects of that practice. In “Praying in the Space God Creates for the World,” I reflect on how God’s creation of the world may be thought of as arising out of how God—who, prior to all worldly beginnings, exists as the ultimate mystery of a life that is self-constituting and whose infinite and eternal “here-ness-and-now-ness” knows no

bounds—how such a God acts in such a way as to make a space that is not God within God’s boundlessness, and then calls into existence, into that space as it were from out of nowhere, the various components and living beings of creation. The space that God makes for creation subsequently becomes the divine basis for “the place that prayer takes” in the midst of this space-time world.

In Part Two, “Forays into a Biblical World,” I offer forays into one woman’s prayer and into six psalms, in which, as I have said, I typically begin with a word or phrase or sentence, and from there move back and forth between it and “hyperlinked” other passages, and between those passages themselves, so that gradually a rough-and-ready sense may begin to arise of some of the contours and coordinates that are distinctive to the places that prayer takes, and some of the biblical constellations begin to appear by which we may take our bearings, especially when we find ourselves alone and in various kinds of darkness. The essay, “The Verb *yaʾameš* in Psalm 27:14: Who Is Strengthening Whom?” may put the greatest strain on the reader’s patience. But it may be in this essay that the tracks running through all the previous essays converge and give their combined payoff. I confess to having written it both for its own sake and yet with all the others resonating quietly in the back of my head. (In fact it arose out of an initial attempt to bring Ps 27:14 into the picture toward the end of the preceding essay.) To the degree that the reader can stay with the slow-moving zigzag in this essay, to that degree, I trust, the biblical text itself, apart from my own comments on it, will reward the trouble expended to do so. The final essay in this group reconsiders the question of whether, in Psalm 23, the psalmist’s foray into God’s (secret) presence ends at death, or whether the psalm intimates a permanent tenure there.

In Part Three, “The Standpoint of Two Prophets,” the two essays are of a more general character, although each in its own way engages a biblical text concerning the prayer-forays of a biblical prophet. Jeremiah has come into the picture already, in the essay on Psalm 69; and the short essay, “Solidarity and Solitariness in Ancient Israel: The Case of Jeremiah,” explores this figure as a classic biblical case of a solitary prayer presence before God that is at the same time rooted at the deepest level in the prophet’s solidarity with the people. I conclude Part Three with “Eschatological Symbol and Existence in Habakkuk,” centering on another prophet who is also introduced in the essay on Psalm 69. This essay recapitulates, yet under a fresh perspective, the way this prophet’s prayer not only takes place in a troubled space-time world, but also “takes time” in such a way

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as to “keep its extrication” in a world whose imperial powers threaten to subject Israel’s claim on the future to sudden foreclosure.

This prophet opens his prayer with questions familiar from the Psalter—“LORD, how long?” and “why?” In this connection, it is worth noting that, both in the *OED* and in *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* (1981), the first meaning for the word, “space,” is given as “denoting time or duration”—as the *OED* puts it, “a lapse or extent of time between two definite points.” So it is that, in the KJV, a worship scene in the book of Revelation is described at one point in the words, “there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour” (Rev 8:1). This capacity to experience time itself as constricting or as expansively hospitable helps us to appreciate how Habakkuk undergoes a “time-warp,” in that, having begun to pray by crying out, “How long, O LORD?” he ends with the confession and avowal, “Though the fig tree does not blossom, / nor fruit be on the vines, / the produce of the olive fail / and the fields yield no food, / the flock be cut off from the fold / and there be no herd in the stalls, / yet I will rejoice in the LORD, / I will joy in the God of my salvation. / GOD, the Lord, is my strength; / he makes my feet like hinds’ feet, / he makes me tread upon my high places” (Hab 3:17–19).

At a time of economic crisis, such as has been afflicting much of the contemporary world, one could do worse than seek to join Habakkuk in this his foray, and then, renewed by that period of extrication, put one’s hoe to the ground and once again attack the weeds that have sprung up in our midst and threaten to choke off all productive and sustaining growth.

Following these essays, I undertake to reflect at length on an aspect of the relation between biblical texts that I, along with others, have referred to as “resonance,” but that to my knowledge has not received the sort of attention that has been given to the phenomenon of inter-textual “echoes.” As an interlude (Part Four) before the final three essays, I explore in a preliminary, heuristic way how inter-textual resonance might relate to the phenomenon—and significance—of resonance in human existence and in the natural world, suggesting in this way also the theological implications of this phenomenon.

In Part Five, “New Testament Afterword,” I then extend this series of forays into the biblical world by ranging forward to trace briefly how themes central to this study as focused on the Old Testament are taken up or echoed in the New Testament. Perhaps the most central theme concerns the unfathomable mystery of the divine self-naming in Exod 3:14–15 as echoed, in my judgment, in the Alpha-Omega and related formulations in the book of Revelation and, perhaps, in the characterization in Heb 12:2

of Jesus as “pioneer” and “perfecter” of faith. By the exploratory attention I give to this theme, the present volume of forays into the biblical world returns to its starting point in the first two essays. One implication of this return is that, to echo Frost’s words quoted earlier, the aim is not so much progress as circulation, a process of reading—in the present instance, the process of reading the various parts of the biblical canon in such a way that each re-reading of a particular passage takes on fresh meaning in light of the other passages read in the meantime, and at the same time, by means of that fresh meaning, sheds still more light on the other passages read thereafter. The final foray, “Redeeming the Expression ‘Redeeming the Time,’” broaches the possibility of applying the spatial dimension of the preceding essays also to the dimension of time. When prayer “takes place,” it also “takes time.” As I propose—playing off of Anthony Powell’s epic novel title, “A Dance to the Music of Time,” when prayer truly takes place, one finds oneself beginning to dance in time to the music of eternity.

What I hope to show, then, in Part Five, is that the words and images, motifs and themes, exhortations, proclamations, and encouragements in the New Testament take on a depth of richness and a range of application in direct ratio to the reader’s prior immersion in and formation by the semantic grammars and existential fields of energy generated and presented in the Old Testament. For, when the author of Hebrews writes, “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart; and before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:12–13), it is of what we have come to call the Old Testament that the writer speaks. It is when we read the New Testament as both an energized and a re-energizing Afterword to the Old Testament, that the above words, originally referring back to the original canonical testimonies, come in time to apply to the New Testament also as partaking of that same living, active power in the lives of their readers.