INTRODUCTION

Introductory Comments

In his book, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God*, Bruce W. Longenecker argues for an apocalyptic reading of Paul’s theologizing.¹ Significant for Longenecker is the apostle’s depiction of Sin as a cosmic force under whose power all of humanity stands (see Rom 3:9). In response, God invades the cosmos in an attempt to set the world to rights and establish a new way of life. For Longenecker, such a perspective is incompatible with John Bunyan’s soteriology. On this point, he states:

[Paul] does not mean to suggest that our personal sins and transgressions are so numerous and ever-increasing that they weigh us down under their heavy load… Paul is not thinking here of errors of lifestyle that are, in a sense, carried by people on their backs, exerting pressures that are too great to bear, in the style of the character ‘Christian’ in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.²

Longenecker’s comments reflect recent conversations in the guild of Pauline scholarship, especially the affirmation of the apocalyptic tenor of the apostle’s writings. According to this line of thinking, the emphasis in Paul’s elucidation of the human predicament falls on humanity’s enslavement to Sin and Death rather than on the need for forgiveness or repentance.³

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle repeatedly employs terms associated with enslavement, liberation, and deliverance while those associated with forgiveness and repentance remain

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² Ibid., 38.

³ On this point, see J. Louis Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” *Int* (54): 254. An exception might be Rom 3:25 where Paul speaks of forgiveness, but this is a text fraught with interpretive difficulties.
scarce. To be sure, Paul does envision human response, obedience, and faithfulness as indispensable pieces of the soteriological puzzle; however, Bunyan’s vision of Christian’s introspective struggle over his sin from the very first chapter of The Pilgrim’s Progress and laying down his heavy burden at the cross in chapter 6 create dissonance when read alongside Paul’s letter to the Romans. These represent theological themes that can be drawn from elsewhere in the canon, but not from the Pauline letters.

Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress (1678), like Paul’s letter to the Romans, remains a cherished text for the church, especially those of Baptist traditions. After the initial release, Bunyan’s work met immediate success and numerous subsequent editions appeared in print in the following years. In addition to Bunyan’s classic allegory of Christian’s travels from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, he intended another volume, The Holy War (1682), to serve

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4 Ibid.
5 Daniel V. Runyon, The Holy War: Annotated Companion to The Pilgrim’s Progress (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012), 74n.131, points out that the scene at the cross appears rather downplayed: “In a scene anticlimactic relative to its significance, when Pilgrim leaves Interpreter he comes to a Cross and ‘his burden loosed from his Shoulders, and fell from his back’… Bunyan underscores the importance of prayer in holy warfare instead of dwelling on God’s redemptive act.”

6 This issue arose with scholars such as Kristër Stendahl and E.P. Sanders, who challenged the “traditional” or “Lutheran” paradigm—a paradigm to which Bunyan adheres. Stendahl claimed that the apostle did not have a constant psychological struggle over his inability to overcome human sinfulness in his previous life as a Pharisee. Paul neither battled with attempts to gain merit before God nor worked out of the Western concept of an introspective conscience. Further, Paul did not offer a gospel of repentance as a solution to the plagued conscience. Instead, the modern reading of Paul tends to lay Luther’s own struggle with his conscience on top of the Pauline letters. Part and parcel to this issue is a misreading of ancient Judaism as a legalistic religion. See Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” HTR 56.3 (1963): 199-215; Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

7 As Anne Dunan-Page notes, by the nineteenth century Bunyan’s writings reached such popularity that only the Authorized Version of the Bible and Shakespeare’s works surpassed them in the Anglophone world (“Introduction” in Anne Dunan-Page, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 2, 4). Bunyan’s image of a pilgrim continues to have staying power. Isabel Hofmeyr points to the Nigerian poet Tolu Ogunlesi’s poem in which he utilized the pilgrim as a cipher for Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential election (“Bunyan: Colonial, Postcolonial” in Anne Dunan-Page, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 162-3.); Tolu Ogunlesi, “Pilgrim’s Progress,” 11 November 2008 (https://toluogunlesi.wordpress.com/2013/01/26/poetry-pilgrims-progress-for-barack-obama/).

as a companion allegory. This latter text relates a vision of the Christian life from a different perspective than the one found in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Here Bunyan recreates the metanarrative of the scriptures, including the fall of humanity, the promise of redemption, and the battles waged in order to restore God’s rightful rule over creation.

As Anne Dunan-Page claims, the disproportional emphasis on Bunyan’s well-known *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Grace Abounding* “necessarily narrows our sense of his scope.” Readers would do well, in her estimation, to expand the canon beyond these primary works. Taking a cue from Dunan-Page, in the following study I intend to read Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War* as companion allegories and to put the visions of salvation conveyed in these texts in conversation with Paul’s gospel in his letter to the Romans. Reading these texts alongside one another will reveal that Paul and Bunyan share some significant themes and therefore are not as incompatible as Longenecker claims.

**Framing the Conversation**

The life narratives of Paul and Bunyan present some similar features, although separated by a vast amount of time. The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 resulted in the suppression of unlicensed preaching and various religious expressions in Bunyan’s context. As a Puritan

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10 “Introduction,” 5.

11 Ibid. Bunyan’s catalogue is quite large, but among the significant texts she names *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), *The Holy War* (1682), various works of poetry found in *Profitable Meditations* (1661), and Bunyan’s book for children, *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686).

12 As noted below, Bunyan draws on a number of texts from the canon in crafting his allegories. By no means do I wish to delimit the resonances to this text alone; however, Romans presents the fullest articulation of Paul’s gospel. For this reason, Romans offers a workable point of comparison for this project.

deacon and laypreacher at St. John’s Church in Bedford, Bunyan’s preaching landed him in jail for twelve years. During this time he penned a number of publications, not least of which The Pilgrim’s Progress. Conducting his writing program from a prison placed Bunyan in company with the apostle Paul, who faced a number of hardships as a result of his missional activities (see 2 Cor 4:7-12; 11:16-33) and wrote three so-called “Prison Epistles” while in captivity (Phil; Philem; Col; cf. Eph).  

Bunyan frames his own preaching and writing endeavors in a way that corresponds to Paul’s career. In 1666, Bunyan published his spiritual autobiography, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. In the opening pages, he addresses his readers as “children,” and expresses his regret that he can no longer be present with them in body (cf. 1 Cor 5:3; Col 3:5). But like the apostle, Bunyan also conveys that his writing functions as an attempt to bridge the divide imprisonment created so that his parishioners “may see my soul hath fatherly care and desire for your spiritual and everlasting welfare.” Additionally, he proceeds to paraphrase Philippians 1:3 and 1 Thessalonians 2:20 in the second paragraph, expressing his continuing prayers on his readers’ behalf and calling them his “glory and joy.”

Bunyan’s friend, Charles Doe, composed “The Struggler” (1692) as a defense of Bunyan and his works. In this document, Doe reinforces the connection between Paul and Bunyan. At the age of 27 without any formal theological training or license, published his first text at 28 in 1656 (Some Gospel-truths Opened), and at 29 became a lay preacher.

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14 Traditionally, Eph is counted among the “Prison Epistles.” I mention Phil, Philem, and Col since I deem these to be authentic letters and Eph a later development of the Pauline voice.


16 Ibid; see also N.H. Keeble, “John Bunyan’s Literary Life,” 21. For Paul’s use of the metaphor of father, see 1 Thess 2:11; Phil 2:22; Philem 1:10.

17 Ibid.

18 Charles Doe, “The Struggler,” III. On this text, see Robert J. McKelvey, Histories that Mansoul and Her Wars Anatomize: The Drama of Redemption in John Bunyan’s Holy War (Reformed Historical Theology 15; Oakville: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 112-13. According to McKelvey, the original title of the work, “The
one point he states, “yet certain I am, from safer reason of faith, that our author Bunyan was really, sincerely, and effectually a lawful successor of the apostles, and as lawful as any have been above this thousand years.”\textsuperscript{19} He even goes so far as to call him “a second Paul” since Bunyan’s conversion occurred via the “strong and irresistible workings of sovereign grace.”\textsuperscript{20} As a result, God made Bunyan “a minister of, and sufferer for, the gospel.”\textsuperscript{21} Using good Pauline rhetoric, Doe also states that Bunyan’s imprisonments, do not provide grounds for contradicting his claims to authentic preaching (2 Cor 4:7-5:5; 11:16-33; cf. Phil 3:7-11; Rom 8:17); rather, these hardships confirm his authenticity as God’s servant since “God usually works those seeming contrary things to his own end and glory” (1 Cor 1:27-29; 3:1; Rom 8:28)\textsuperscript{22}

Beyond these points of comparison between Paul and Bunyan, the task in what follows will be to place the texts of these authors in dialogue. To be clear about the approach, I do not wish to claim that Bunyan drew on a certain reading of Paul’s letter in writing The Pilgrim’s Progress or The Holy War. At the same time, texts are “relational objects”\textsuperscript{23} and always exist in a “network of relationships.”\textsuperscript{24} As such, when documents are placed in conversation with one another, each can illuminate the other in profitable ways.\textsuperscript{25} Putting the visions of salvation in

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Mikhail M. Bakhtin helpfully expresses the methodological posture of this endeavor: “The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue” (“Toward a Methodology for
Romans, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and *The Holy War* in dialogue will highlight the shared motifs of struggle and conflict endemic to the Christian pilgrimage, along with the eschatological hope that encourages perseverance. Thus, I hope to show that Paul’s vision of the journey of Jesus-followers toward the promised glory and Bunyan’s allegories share certain affinities.

**PAUL’S MAP OF THE COSMOS IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS**

In both *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War*, Bunyan artfully draws on nearly the entire Protestant canon in crafting his allegories, weaving echoes from Genesis to Revelation throughout the texts. The primary motif of pilgrimage can be seen most clearly in the letter to the Hebrews—a text Bunyan likely uses as a primary source for his motif and which many believed to an authentic Pauline letter in Bunyan’s day. Yet the idea that the present world is beset with struggles for Jesus-followers who must persevere to attain eschatological glory represents a theme also at home in Paul’s letter to the Romans. As will be shown, Paul crafts Sin and Death as cosmic enemies whose defeat Jesus Christ secures on behalf of humanity; however, Paul also views the present life as a battlefield on which the members of the Christian community must continue to vie with anti-God forces as they hope in God’s final victory. These reflections on Romans will set the stage for an analysis of similar themes in Bunyan’s texts.

*Sin and Death as Cosmic Forces in Romans*

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26 In the words of W.R. Owens, “It is clear from all of [Bunyan’s] writings—and not least from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*—that he had absorbed the language of the Bible so thoroughly that his own prose was infused in the most natural way with Biblical references, phrases and idioms” (“John Bunyan and the Bible,” in Anne Dunan-Page, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 49).

Among the purposes in writing his letter to the Romans, the apostle pens this document in order to offer an articulation of his gospel ahead of his arrival in Rome. As the thesis of the letter in 1:16-17 states, in the εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel”) the true dynamics of power at work in the world are now revealed. There is a pulling back of the curtain in order to disclose the mystery long concealed, which unmasks a different reality: Sin (ἁμαρτία) and Death (θάνατος) represent the primary enemies and God’s act to defeat these powers via the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ makes way for a more potent one to reign.

From the opening gambit in 1:18-3:31, Paul’s hearers learn that all of humanity—both Jews and Greeks—stand under the power of Sin. Reinforcing the point, Romans 3:9 explicitly states, “What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all people, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of Sin.” Immediately following in 3:10-20, the apostle strings together a catena of texts from the Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures with an emphasis on the repeated refrain “no one”—there is no one righteous; no, not one. In Romans 3:21-26, Paul reprises his initial claim from 1:16-17. Here Paul contends that God’s righteousness comes about through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe (3:21-22).

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29 As will be evident in this section, I am highly influenced in my reading by the apocalyptic stream of interpretation in Pauline scholarship, especially the following: Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); J. Christian Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); J. Louis Martyn, Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997); Martinus C. de Boer, The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 (JSNTSup 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988); Longenecker, Triumph of Abraham’s God; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, Our Mother Saint Paul (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); idem, “Neither Height Nor Depth: Discerning the Cosmology of Romans,” SJT 64.3 (2011): 265-78.

Students of the Pauline letters often affirm that the argument shifts in Romans 5-8,31 as the apostle attempts to “redraw the map of the cosmos”32 and redress the powers at work in the world. Prominent among the features in this section of Paul’s text is the depiction of Sin and Death as enemies of God, who together enslave humanity. Martinus C. de Boer notes that Paul speaks here of Sin and Death as alien intruders and in ways similar to his talk of Satan, evil angels, and demons elsewhere in his letters.33 This is especially evident in the verbs in chapter 5 associated with Sin and Death: “Sin entered the world and through Sin came Death. Thus, Death entered into all people” (5:12); “Death ruled from Adam until Moses” (5:14); “Death ruled through the transgression of one person” (5:17); “Sin ruled through Death” (5:21). The emphasis on Sin and Death as powerful, enslaving forces continues into chapters 6-7: “Death no longer rules over Christ” (6:9); “Let not Sin rule in your mortal body” (6:12); “Sin shall not lord it over you” (6:14); “Sin, through the commandment, deceived me and killed me through the commandment” (7:11); and finally, “I am sold under (the power of) Sin” (7:14).

From Paul’s perspective, Sin and Death amount to usurpers of God’s intentions, “entering” (ἐἰσῆλθεν; 5:12) into the cosmos through Adam and dominating humanity. One can see that the language associated with enslavement and lordship pervades this section of the letter.34 The dense collocation of this terminology highlights an important point in Paul’s

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34 For a full discussion of language in Romans related to warfare, slavery, and state power, see the analysis of Gaventa, “The Rhetoric of Violence and the God of Peace in Paul’s Letter to the Romans” in Jan Krans, L.J.
worldview: humanity always remains under the dominion of someone or something, and Paul wishes to proclaim God’s redemption from the bonds of Sin and help his readers move into God’s dominion.\(^{35}\)

As a result of the enslavement perpetrated by these anti-God forces, the entire cosmos becomes contested territory. The good news, according to Paul, is that God invaded this space in the person of Jesus Christ. Although Paul claims that Jesus-followers once stood under Sin’s rule as enemies of God, they are now reconciled to God by the death of God’s Son (5:10), whom God did not spare but “handed over for us all” (8:32). Paul states that for those who are “in Christ” there is “now no condemnation” since “the law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus” freed them “from the law of Sin and Death” (8:1-2). Further, he claims in Romans 6:22 that because Jesus-followers “have been set free from Sin and have become slaves of God,” the return they now receive “is sanctification and its end, eternal life.” The apocalyptic moment of the cross and resurrection, for Paul, signals a pivotal point in the ongoing war between God and these malevolent forces.\(^{36}\) With the decisive victory now accomplished, Jesus-followers can be set free from the bonds of Sin and come under the rule of grace (5:21) to “walk (περιπατήσωμεν) in the newness life” (6:4).

*The Ongoing Battle and the Hope in God’s Final Victory*

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But this opens up a complex dialectic in Paul’s theologizing. Although the apostle views the initial defeat of anti-God forces to be secured in the Christ-event, humans remain plagued by the assaults of these powers in the present as they continue toward the eternal goal. Paul notes that the lines of battle can still be crossed in the present time; people can return to Sin’s lordship and must remain vigilant to be led by the Spirit of God (8:14). Jesus-followers thus stand in the liminal space between God’s initial foray against the cosmic, malevolent powers and God’s ultimate eschatological defeat of these powers in the end. Paul, therefore, supplies instructions for the community undergirded by the hope in eschatological glory.

The martial language of Romans 6 offers one instance where Paul emphasizes this point. In 6:12 he states, “Therefore, let not Sin rule in your mortal bodies, to make you obey its passions.” As an explication of this initial call, in Romans 6:13 he advises, “Do not yield your members to Sin as weapons (ἵππα) of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as people brought from death to life, and your members to God as weapons (ἵππα) of righteousness.” Paul emphasizes the point again in Romans 13:12 where he states, “Let us put away the works of darkness and clothe ourselves with weapons (ἵππα) of light.” Note here the militaristic language of “weapons” in the ongoing struggle against Sin. In the apostle’s view, only God can conquer this cosmic enemy, but those in the Christian community are enlisted to fight alongside

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37 Joel Marcus argues that this third person imperative should be understood against the backdrop of apocalyptic Jewish holy war theology and thus comes as a cry for God to rise up, battle forces of evil, and end the reign of Sin (“‘Let God Arise and End the Reign of Sin!’ A Contribution to the Study of Pauline Parenesis,” Bib 69 [1988]: 386–95; see also idem, “Entering into the Kingly Power of God,” JBL 107.4 [1988]: 663–675.


39 In agreement with Joel Marcus, the genitives “weapons of wickedness/righteousness” should be understood possessively, meaning that the members of one’s body belong to wickedness or righteousness for their use in the ongoing fight (ibid., 393-94).
God against anti-God forces in the present struggle.\textsuperscript{40} Just as they once yielded their members to impurity for iniquity, they must now take care to offer up those same members to righteousness for sanctification (6:19). Paul’s communities must remain on guard to embody the new way of life made possible by the Christ-event and not slip across the battle lines back under the dominion of their former master.

Romans 8 turns to a discussion of life in the Spirit, affirming that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (8:1-3). Even after this claim, however, the end of chapter 8 once again returns to the cosmic battlefield between God and God’s enemies and the trials of the present life. In Romans 8:20, the apostle envisions even creation itself in subjection to “futility” (τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη)—all of creation stands under the dominion of a third party and remains in need of rescue. In 8:35-39, the apostle offers a litany of entities that seek to separate human beings from the love of God. In spite of these efforts, Paul proclaims, “in all things we are super-victors (ὑπερωικῶμεν) through him who loved us” (8:37). Indeed, the apostle remains convinced “that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powers, neither height nor depth, nor any other creature” will pull humanity away from the love of God in Christ Jesus (8:38-39).

The final reference in the list to οὔτε τις κτίσις ήτέρα (“nor any other creature”; v. 39) underscores that all of the preceding entities are “agents” and fall within the realm of creation.\textsuperscript{41} As such, they are not outside of the sovereign power of God.\textsuperscript{42} Paul here strikes a note of caution and hope for his readers. They must remain alert against malevolent forces that still lurk in wait

\textsuperscript{40} The battle is a spiritual and cosmic one. This in no way gives permission for Christians to act in violence, as the direct prohibition in Rom 12:14-21 makes clear.

\textsuperscript{41} Gaventa, “Neither Height Nor Depth,” 276; Käsemann, Romans, 250-52.

\textsuperscript{42} Edward Adams, Constructing the World: A Study in Paul’s Cosmological Language (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 185.
to inflict harm in the present. But they can also be confident in the Spirit’s assistance to be victorious against these assaults. They look forward to a future glory that, though unseen at the moment (8:24), will far outshine their present sufferings (8:18).

One additional passage in Romans is worthy of mention. As Paul closes out the letter, he offers a final exhortation along with a gesture toward the promised eschatological victory on the horizon for which Jesus-followers hope. Romans 16:19-20a reads,

For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil. And the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet (ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης συντρίψει τὸν σατανᾶν ὕπο τοὺς πόδας ὑμῶν ἐν τάχει).

Such comments could be disregarded as insignificant at this point in the letter. The statement is so terse and seemingly out of place that some argue this must be a later interpolation, even though no extant manuscripts omit the verses. Rather than offering an afterthought, however, these words provide one last assurance to Roman communities. The present journey for Jesus-followers remains fraught with attacks from enemies, but they must stay the course and embody God’s new way of life. The assurance that “quickly” God will crush Satan under their feet provides a final note of hope to look forward to a release from the grips of opposing forces and attain the promised eschatological glory.

JOURNEY, STRUGGLE, AND DISCIPLESHIP IN THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS AND THE HOLY WAR

43 In the interest of space I pass over an additional important text in Rom 11:25-32, which concludes the material in Rom 9-11. Paul strikes an apocalyptic note here as he points to the final redemption of Gentiles and “all Israel,” promising that the Deliverer will come from Zion.


When turning to the work of John Bunyan, the mode of communication with his audience differs significantly from the apostle Paul. Neither *The Pilgrim’s Progress* nor *The Holy War* relay information as straightforwardly as do Paul’s letters to his congregations. Bunyan’s use of allegory allows him to inspire the reader’s imagination, leading her or him to a conclusion. In spite of this obvious difference, the apostle Paul and Bunyan both intend their works to serve a didactic purpose for contingent circumstances. As one piece of evidence, both *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War* contain extensive marginalia that point readers to scriptural texts or assist readers in understanding the allegorical correspondences. In the words of Daniel V. Runyon, “As a pastor and evangelist, Bunyan had two pressing concerns: first to make believers, and then to make disciples and spiritual warriors of those believers. He pursued both objectives in his pulpit and in his daily life before attempting to accomplish both in his allegories.” As complementary allegories, Bunyan attempted to offer his readers the full scope of the Christian life with these texts. I move now to an examination of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War* in an attempt to display that these pieces share some points of convergence with Paul’s articulation of his gospel in Romans.

*The Pilgrim’s Progress*

Bunyan frames *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a dream as he narrates the Christian passage through the present world and into the next. “Dreams,” as Roger Pooley notes, “give us a

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46 With this said, at times Bunyan appears to be careful to explain the allegory to the reader. The slip into the didactic voice allows Bunyan to emphasize the points he deems essential.

47 On this point, see W.R. Owens, “John Bunyan and the Bible,” 41. Marginalia, summaries, subject headings, tables, etc. became popular by Bunyan’s time to aid readers in comprehending the texts (see, for instance, John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the Geneva Bible).


privileged entry into a world that is hidden to ordinary perception.” As noted above, the apostle Paul viewed his letter to the Romans as a means of relaying God’s good news to his audience. Given Bunyan’s context of religious oppression, the image of the Christian as a wayfarer enduring “assaults in the Way” provides a means of conveying truth to his audience. As a tool designed to make faithful followers of Jesus, Bunyan’s text serves to alert his readers of the troubles ahead, the need to be vigilant in the battle against opposing forces, and points them to the hope that they can in fact be victorious, all of which echo prominent themes highlighted in Romans.

When Christian flees the City of Destruction and sets off on his journey toward the narrow gate after Evangelist points him in the right direction, he attempts to convince Obstinate and Pliable to join him. Christian notes that what he forsakes by setting out on pilgrimage “is not worthy to be compared with a little of what I am seeking.” These words from the newly embarked pilgrim recall Paul’s insistence in Romans 8:18 that the coming glory to be revealed pales in comparison to the present sufferings of this world. The pilgrim’s claim also sets the tone for what follows in the narrative. Bunyan wishes to drive home the point, as does Paul, that becoming a Christ-follower entails a path fraught with difficulties and attacks from a number of different angles in this life. Faithfulness on the journey, however, will result in glory.

Enticed by Christian’s talk of “an inheritance incorruptible,” Pliable comes along with him. As they walk together, Christian continues to speak of everlasting life and crowns of

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51 On the relationship between author and reader in allegories, who together share the work of interpretation, see ibid., 81.

52 Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress, 28.

53 Ibid., 29. This is likely an allusion to Heb 7:16; cf. Heb 11:10, 16.
But the pilgrims hardly start out on their journey before they meet with difficulty in the miry swamp of the Slough of Despond. Pliable becomes discouraged and abandons the task, thinking the happiness Christian proclaimed not to be worth the trouble. Christian continues to wade, however, and in the midst of his struggle comes a character named Help who takes Christian by the hand and pulls him to solid ground. Beginning with a scene in which the pilgrim overcomes the discouragement in his first steps not only foreshadows the hard road ahead, but also points forward to subsequent victories in the text.

At Interpreter’s House, Christian gains more clarity on the journey. Here Bunyan frames the Christian pilgrimage as a battle, which reflects a major theme in Paul’s letter to Romans. The Interpreter leads the pilgrim to “a stately palace, beautiful to behold.” He shows Christian a doorway guarded by men in armor to keep people from entering and another man sitting at a table with a book and inkhorn in hand. At this point, one with “a very stout countenance” walks up and asks that the person at the table write down his name. Immediately, the man of stout countenance draws his sword, puts on a helmet, and runs toward the armed men. He receives a number of blows and wounds from those attempting to keep him out, but after much struggle finally gains access. Upon entering, the man receives new garments and those clothed in gold walking on top of the palace call out, “Come in, come in; Eternal glory thou shalt win.” At the sight of this scene, Christian smiles and his confidence for the journey grows stronger, as he sees that the trip ahead entails a battle as well as a reward for enduring.

Juxtaposed with this triumphant scene at Interpreter’s House is another of a sad man sitting in a cage. This person claims that he “was once a fair and flourishing professing Christian” on
his “way to the Celestial City”; however, because he “stopped watching and being sober” he “hardened [his] heart” so much that he can no longer repent.\textsuperscript{57} The Interpreter then interjects, “Let this man’s misery be remembered by you and be an everlasting warning to you.”\textsuperscript{58} Bunyan again drives home the point for his readers that the progress toward glory demands that the pilgrim remain vigilant, always ready to battle with various forces that seek to pull her or him away from the task at hand. Before leaving, Christian claims that these visions put him “in hope and fear.”\textsuperscript{59} Interpreter assures him, “The Comforter be always with you, good Christian, to guide you in the way that leads to the city.”\textsuperscript{60} When read in conjunction with Romans, the scenes at Interpreter’s House noted here bring to mind Paul’s emphases on the Jesus-follower as a participant in the battle against Sin and the risk of forfeiting the life God made possible. But even in the midst of struggles, Paul and Bunyan assure their readers that the Holy Spirit will provide them with the needed assistance (Rom 8:1-27).

In \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} one also finds an emphasis on God’s previous work of redemption at the presuppositional level. God’s prior redemptive action in the cross and resurrection Bunyan now works out in the allegory of the individual Christian pilgrimage. Christian’s time at the House Beautiful marks one instance in which Bunyan foregrounds this point. The narrative pauses momentarily as Christian recounts his pilgrimage thus far—both the positive and negative events. When he sits down to dine with Discretion, Piety, Charity, and Prudence “all their talk at the table was about the Lord of the hill, about what He had done and why He did what He did, and why He had built that house.”\textsuperscript{61}

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\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 64.
    \item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
    \item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 67.
    \item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
    \item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 93.
\end{itemize}
The narrator strikes an apocalyptic note at this point, which converges with the picture painted of God’s action on humanity’s behalf in Romans. The text states, “By what they said, I perceived that He had been a great warrior, and had fought with and slain ‘him that had the power of death,’ but not without great danger to Himself, which made me love Him more.”62 Indeed, as Christian’s hosts go on to claim about their Lord, “He stripped Himself of His glory that he might do this for the poor; and that they had heard Him say and affirm ‘that He would not dwell in the mountain of Zion alone.’”63 Bunyan’s book conveys a theme found in Paul’s letter at this point; that is, the image of God in battle with those forces that seek to harm God’s creatures. In a similar fashion to Romans, Bunyan’s text indicates that God defeated the one who “had the power of death.”

The image of the pilgrim participating in spiritual conflict also finds expression in Bunyan’s text. Christian meets a number of tempters along the way that he must remain faithful to resist. At the House Beautiful, after the mention of God’s victory over the one who possesses the power of death, the members of the house show the pilgrim the armory. This building contains the accoutrements provided by the Lord for battle, as well as a number of weapons from past victorious conflicts. The householders then equip Christian with his own armor for the duration of the journey since he can rest assured that he will “meet with assaults in the Way.”64

Recall that Paul framed the journey of discipleship in Romans as a participation in God’s conflict with spiritual forces at work in the world. Bunyan’s pilgrim in full fighting garb complements this motif. The God who is “a great warrior” did indeed defeat the powers of death,65 but in the

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62 Ibid. This is likely an allusion to Heb 2:14-15 (as noted in 99n.10. This does not, however, empty the comments of resonances with Paul’s letter to the Romans.
63 Ibid., 93-4.
64 Ibid., 96.
65 Ibid., 93.
present world the Christian faces off against various attacks and she or he must be on guard against them.

In the following chapter (chapter 9), the wayfarer enters the Valley of Humiliation where “poor Christian was hard put to it.”66 Here he meets the foul fiend Apollyon and faces off against this foe in battle. Bunyan’s depiction of the scene conjures up images relayed in Paul’s letter to the Romans where the apostle frames Sin as a cosmic enemy.67 Bunyan’s description of this figure combines elements of the dragon found in Revelation and various other folk tales.68 In the seventeenth century context, Apollyon came to be a trope representing an evil character, often the devil and sin.69 But, as Michael Davies notes, the “allegorical index” of Christian’s battle with Apollyon likely moves beyond the mere personification of sin and the devil and also points to persecution from political authorities Bunyan’s context.70 Apollyon thus likely figures forth the religious oppression in Bunyan’s time and the unseen forces animating that persecution.71

After a brief consideration of turning back in the face of the ghastly Apollyon, the pilgrim stands his ground. The issue at hand in the exchange between the two is who possesses rightful rule over the pilgrim. Apollyon claims that Christian remains one of his subjects since the pilgrim comes from the City of Destruction. He asks, “How is it, then, that you have run away

66 Ibid., 101.
67 As Michael Davies puts it, “it is quite easy to read this scene as an example of Bunyan’s artful fusion of folk-tale narrative with spiritual instruction” (“The Radical Reformation of Romance in The Pilgrim’s Progress,” in N.H. Keeble, ed., John Bunyan: Reading Dissenting Writing [Religions and Discourse 12; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002], 119).
68 See the discussion on this point in ibid., 117-20.
69 Ibid., 120.
70 Davies notes, “That the language of rebellion here is being set against a rhetoric of rational coercion, and that it is the dissenter’s pride and humiliation which are being tested by an Anglican attempt to persuade before persecuting, seems clear to see in Christian’s battle with Apollyon” (ibid., 124). See also Richard L. Greaves, “‘Let Truth Be Free’: John Bunyan and the Restoration Crisis of 1667-73,” Albion 28 (1996): 587-605.
71 Cf. ibid., 127-8.
Christian insists that he now belongs to a different ruler, the King of princes, and he cannot return to his previous state. In spite of Apollyon’s challenges to the benefits afforded to him under this new master, Christian successfully rebuts this line of reasoning by insisting that suffering along the journey is a necessary plot point (see Rom 8:17). Indeed, the pilgrim points to the hope in eschatological glory as the grounds for enduring present trials: “As for present deliverance, they (i.e., Christian pilgrims) do not much expect it, for they stay for their glory and then they shall have it, when their Prince comes in His glory and the glory of the angels.”

Finally, Apollyon acknowledges that he is an “enemy of this Prince,” and attacks Christian. The two fight for half a day with the pilgrim incurring injuries. As the battle begins to turn in Christian’s favor he exclaims Romans 8:37, “Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” When compared with Romans, this chapter from Bunyan shares some common themes with Paul’s text. Forces at work in the world continue to wreak havoc in the lives of Jesus-followers, who are enlisted into battle against them. Courage for the journey can be found in setting one’s hope on the glory God promised and standing firm in the fight against elements that seek to draw Christians away from the path.

**The Holy War**

With *The Holy War*, Bunyan widens the angle of vision. Rather than narrating Christian’s journey forward to the Celestial City, this book explores the cosmic forces at play in the world that lead to the burden on Christian’s back in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the need for

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73 Ibid., 103.
74 Ibid., 106.
75 The full title of this work is *The Holy War, made by Shaddai upon Diabolus, For the Regaining of the Metropolis of the World. Or, the Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul.*
his redemption. The Holy War allegorizes the overarching narrative of the Scriptural texts, beginning with King Shaddai’s creation of the town of Mansoul, followed by its fall to the machinations of Diabolus, its rescue at the hands of Emanuel, and subsequent battles in which Diabolus attempts to take back the town. In the brief analysis of Paul’s letter to the Romans earlier in this essay, I noted that the apostle seeks to draw back the curtain in order to reveal the malevolent powers at work in the cosmos and God’s act to defeat them. When reading The Holy War in conjunction with Paul’s letter, this work from Bunyan offers a similar expression of mythological language.

At the beginning of the text, Bunyan points to the pristine state of the town of Mansoul, a town without “a Rascal, Rogue, or Traiterous person then within its Walls.”76 King Shaddai delights in this town and considers it one of his chief creations. The figure of Diabolus Bunyan narrates as a servant of this King who holds a prominent place in the court. Because of the glory that comes with this status, Diabolus’s “Luciferian heart” becomes insatiable and as “inlarged as Hell itself.”77 He plots to overthrow King Shaddai and the King’s son, Emanuel. After discovering the plot, however, the members of the King’s court put Diabolus and his co-conspirators on trial, convict them of treason, and banish them from the kingdom. In an attempt at revenge, Diabolus and his followers invade the town of Mansoul. Primarily using slick rhetoric, they succeed in the foray and Diabolus sets up his own rule.

When word arrives to King Shaddai of the overthrow, he sends a coalition of forces to regain control of the town. Boanerges, Conviction, Judgment, and Execution all set up camp

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76 Bunyan, The Holy War, 9.
77 Ibid. (emphasis original).
outside of Mansoul. Eventually, Emanuel must intervene in order to win back the people of the town. After the trial and punishment of those responsible for the coup, Emanuel sets up a new government. But this is by no means the end of the story since Emanuel leaves the town in the hands of this new governance. Meanwhile, Diabolus continues to plot a way to re-take Mansoul.

From this précis of the plot of Bunyan’s allegory of the fall and redemption of humanity, one can detect thematic overlap with Paul’s letter to the Romans. Of course, Bunyan draws out motifs from many different biblical texts, but a number of narrative points converge with Paul. Throughout the text, Bunyan places the accent on the theme of dominion with a running dialogue about which power possesses rightful rule over the town. Mansoul enjoys the rule of Shaddai until Diabolus infiltrates its walls, sets up his own government, and lulls the denizens of the town into the believing his governance to be to their benefit. The text notes, however, that the rule of Diabolous is actually a form of slavery and he is nothing but a “pretended king.” This figure’s entrance into the town and subjugation of the inhabitants aligns with Paul’s depiction of the dual powers of the Sin and Death entering the cosmos and enslaving humanity. Much more prominent than in The Pilgrim’s Progress, language related to dominion, enslavement, and deliverance from bondage appears repeatedly in The Holy War—language that reiterates prominent themes found also in Romans.

The motif of conflict between Shaddai and the opposing forces of Diabolus dominates the book; indeed, the entire text Bunyan frames as a battle allegory over the kingship of Mansoul. Early on in the text, Diabolus fits himself with a suit of armor that Bunyan intends as a parody of

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79 See ibid., 81-2.
God’s armor (see Isa 59:16-20; cf. Eph 6:13-20). The people of the town remain unable to escape the bondage imposed by Diabolus on their own. They need an external action on their behalf from an entity more powerful than their enslaving forces. Like Paul’s emphasis on the invasion of God into the cosmos in the Christ-event, Bunyan also depicts Emanuel entering into Mansoul and defeating Diabolus in an attempt to set things right.

Just prior to Emanuel’s war to take back Mansoul, he and Diabolus have an extended exchange concerning which one rightfully reigns over the people. Appealing to the King’s identity as creator of the town, Emanuel declares his possession of Mansoul: “For this Town of Mansoul is mine, O Diabolus, and that by undoubted right, as all shall see that will diligently search the most ancient, and most authentick Records.” In order to reclaim the town, Shaddai sends Emanuel, the son, to go to war against Diabolus:

Wherefore the King called to him Emanuel his Son, who said here am I, my Father. Then said the King, though knowest, as I do my self, the condition of the Town of Mansoul, and where we have purposed and what thou hast done to redeem it. Come now therefore my Son, and prepare thy self for the War, for thou shalt go to my Camp at Mansoul. Thou shalt also there prosper, and conquer the Town of Mansoul.

Bunyan does not provide allegorical reference to Christ’s death on the cross beyond these references. He rather keeps an anthropological focus and frames the Christ-event as already accomplished. The de-emphasis on the cross signifies a difference between Paul’s theologizing and Bunyan’s allegorizing, even while the conflict between God and malevolent, enslaving forces represents a point of correlation.

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80 Ibid., 38-40.
81 Ibid., 83.
82 Ibid., 74.
83 See Runyon’s comments on this point, ibid., 74n.131.
A point of dissatisfaction with *The Holy War* repeated by a number of critics is the redundancy of the episodes. The reader finds a sequence of conquest, enslavement, and redemption, with Diabolus attempting to retake the town. Rather than attempting in an uncreative manner to offer the reader battle scene after battle scene ad nauseam, Bunyan’s interests lie in what he perceives to be the reality of ongoing warfare in the present life of all those claiming to be Jesus-followers. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Bunyan narrates a number of trials and temptations against which the wayfarer continually needs to guard against and fight. The author makes a similar point here in *The Holy War*. Even though Emanuel accomplished the decisive victory on behalf of Mansoul, the onslaught from Diabolus continues until the final consummation occurs. Paul in Romans warns his hearers that they must continually offer their members to God as “weapons” of righteousness rather than “weapons” of iniquity, while Bunyan communicates to his readers that the spiritual battle remains ongoing and they must not let down their guard.

Bunyan’s conclusion to this text is yet another point scholars tend to criticize. The conclusion of *The Holy War* no doubt presents a significant departure from the satisfying resolution of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Rather than the opening of gates, crowns, a golden city, and a host of angels singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord” in the Celestial City, the reader is left on the edge of his or her seat as the final consummation of Mansoul remains absent. Instead, Bunyan concludes with a warning placed in the mouth of Emanuel:

*O my Mansoul, remember what my Captains, my Souldiers, and mine Engines have done for thee. They have fought for thee, they have suffered by thee, they have born much at thy hands to do thee good, O Mansoul. Hadst though not had them to help thee, Diabolus had certainly made a hand of thee... Thou must believe, O my Mansoul, when I am from thee, that yet I love thee, and bear thee upon mine heart for ever.*

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Remember therefore, O my Mansoul, that thou art beloved of me; as I have therefore taught thee to watch, to fight, to pray, and to make war against my foes, so now I command thee to believe that my love is constant to thee. O my Mansoul, how have I set my heart, my love upon thee, watch. Behold, I lay none other burden upon thee, than what though has already, hold fast till I come.85

The allegory thus stops short of any of the people of Mansoul reaching their eschatological goal. The implication is that the assaults from Diabolus and his followers will continue on the town for the foreseeable future. The inhabitants are left only with a warning to “hold fast” as the fight continues until Emanuel returns a final time to rectify their situation.

Pointing to Emanuel’s return, Bunyan engenders hope in his readers with the final words coming as a direct address to Bunyan’s audience. As John R. Knott notes, “if the conclusion of The Holy War is less rousing than that of The Pilgrim’s Progress, it speaks more directly to the state of the warfaring Christian.”86 Runyon, too, pushes back against any who disparage the ending. He rightly states, “The Holy War begins with creation and ends with the people of Mansoul in the same position within the narrative as the people of earth’s salvation history in Bunyan’s time—holding fast in the face of persecution in the promised hope of a new heaven and a new earth.”87 The open ending directs the readers toward the apocalyptic denouement and functions prophetically, as Zinck cogently claims.88 Far from a weakness, Bunyan aligns his own work with a sequence similar to the one found in Paul’s letter to the Romans. The apostle leaves his communities in that liminal space between their previous enslavement to Sin and their final


87 Runyon, John Bunyan’s Master Story, 257.

and ultimate deliverance. Bunyan reinforces the point as well by reminding his readers of God’s deliverance, which remains on the horizon. Those facing persecution and various other struggles can be hopeful if they remain faithful in the ongoing battle with the full assurance that God will indeed intervene on their behalf to bring creation to rights.  

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing analysis by no means claims to be an exhaustive exploration of the motifs in Paul’s letter to the Romans or John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War*; indeed, this investigation only scratches the surface of the possible resonances between the Pauline letters and Bunyan’s works. As noted in the introduction, Longenecker is quite right to point out that Bunyan’s emphasis on personal sins and transgressions as burdens that need to be forgiven signal a significant difference in the theological perspectives of Bunyan and the apostle Paul. At the same time, Bunyan’s texts also evince motifs that converge with those found in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

To re-emphasize, this does not mean that Bunyan draws on an apocalyptic reading of Paul, aided by modern advancements in research on the Pauline letters, in crafting his allegories; rather, when read carefully alongside one another, Romans helps to illuminate aspects of Bunyan’s thought that might be overlooked otherwise. If Paul and Bunyan sat down together in order to discuss their theological perspectives on the human plight and God’s redemption there is little doubt that the apostle we know through the canonical letters would find some points with which he would disagreed. But, judging from the shared motifs discussed above, he also might find himself nodding at a number of turns in agreement with Bunyan.

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90 Bunyan remains, like Paul and all of us, to some extent a product of his time.