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# The motif of lawlessness, lawless personage and the usurpation of Divine prerogatives in Scripture

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## **Abstract**

*The motif of lawlessness has been well articulated in Scripture, and even by extension in the extra biblical writings. This motif appears in all its perspicuity having been bequeathed from the Old Testament, particularly the Prophets, and Writings. This motif has had an indelible influence on the Second Temple Jewish writers, and also the Church Fathers. In most of the contexts where these motifs exist the lawless personage engages in actions that are targeted at supplanting God and concomitantly exhibit an attitude of wanton arrogance and blasphemy. The motif of lawlessness therefore always exists within context of cosmic conflict between two opposing powers vying for supremacy and control. In the Prophets this conflict is placed within perspective with the reader being led into its origin, nature, and the key proponents. While the lawless personage in the Old Testament constitutes a supernatural being, in the New Testament it is cosmicized into temporal beings that become the embodiment of lawlessness. The Old Testament thus provides both a contextual and theological framework by which the New Testament motif of lawlessness should be understood.*

## Key Words:

**Lawlessness, Divine Prerogative, Defilement, Sanctuary, Divine Usurpation**

## Introduction

There is something about God's prerogatives that attracts the aspirations of those whom He has created. The quest to be like God has never been satisfied ever since it was conceived in the heavenly realms (Rev 12:9-12; Ezek 28:14, 15; Isa 14:12-14), and consequently perpetuated in the Edenic Garden (Gen 3:1-7). This paper encapsulates this quest to be like God as the "motif of lawlessness" which essentially depicts beings in rebellion or seeking to usurp God's prerogatives. The motif of lawlessness finds its most replete expression in the Antichrist motif in Scripture. The Scripture often characterizes the Antichrist personage as who stands both in apposition and opposition to the true Christ of Scripture. The Antichrist personage stands against Christ who "born under the law" (Gal 4:4), and while Christ was submissive to the will of His father (Hen 10:9), the Antichrist will seek his own agenda (Dan 11:36).<sup>1</sup>

The motif of the lawlessness as a usurpation of divine prerogative found throughout Scripture and particularly as popularized in the New Testament (NT)<sup>2</sup> can be traced back to the Old Testament (OT), and even in the extra-biblical literature. A mere cursory glance through these writings particularly the biblical literature reveals a profusion of the motif of lawlessness, especially associated with habituated rebellion against the will of God, epitomized in the experiences of Israel.<sup>3</sup> While in Scripture there are only a few references of human luminaries acting in defiance of God within the context of expropriating His divine perquisite, the echoes of rebellion resound throughout holy writ as if surfeit by human caprice. The accounts of human contumacy will be assessed, in an attempt to identify if any, the common seams that suffuse these accounts.

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1 Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Antichrist* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2005), 64.

2 In the NT the word *ἀνομία* is used approximately fifteen times referring to the concept of "lawlessness." In most of these instances the context points to a state or condition of being predispose to lawlessness, or what is lawless (Rom 6:19a; 2 Cor 6:14; Matt 23:28; 1 Jn 3:4). It can also be understood to mean the product of lawless disposition, lawless deed (Rom 6:19b; Tit 2:14; Matt 13:41; Jn 3:4).

3 See Exod 34:7,9; Lev 16:21; 19:29; 26:43; Deut 31:29; Isa 27:9; 50:1; Jer 5:25; 6:18

## Methodology and scope

Lawlessness as used in this paper can be regarded as an arrant and iterated behavior towards God's explicit command (Deut 31:29). The concept of lawlessness will be limited to explicit lexical and grammatical cognates and their derivatives. Only the passages that are found in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and Daniel in the Wisdom literature will be explored.<sup>4</sup> Thus it will be shown diachronically that the motif of "lawlessness" as posited in the NT also resonates in the OT, and also the extra-biblical literature.

Methodologically, this paper will first survey the terminologies denoting lawlessness in the LXX and Hebrew will be analyzed so as to ascertain currents of commonality. Secondly, the passages that deal explicitly with lawless personages or the motif of lawlessness will be singled out and discussed from the perspective of the common peculiarities in function and the challenge levied to the prerogatives God.

Thirdly, the motif of lawlessness will be surveyed from selected extra-biblical literature, namely the Pseudepigrapha, and the Fathers, in an effort to ascertain if any thematic parallels exist with the biblical accounts. Finally, the implications of the motif of lawlessness as found in the NT will be shown.

## Etymological study

While there is no precise Hebrew equivalent for the Greek ἀνομία "lawlessness" or ἄνομος "lawless one," some close parallels exist, such as: עֵוֹן, פְּשָׁע, תּוֹעֵבָה<sup>5</sup> and שֶׁקֶר (each of which will be investigated). Before delving into the Hebrew usages, it will be helpful to investigate the sense in which LXX uses ἀνομία and ἄνομος, the two most common terminologies used for lawlessness.

The noun ἀνομία occurs 199 times in the LXX, primarily in the Psalms<sup>6</sup> and

4 This study will not engage in any discussion on the authorship and historicity of the aforementioned books, but would rather assume their current form resonates with the overarching thrust of inspiration that has been accrued to the books within the biblical canon.

5 W. Gutbrod, "ἀνομία, ἄνομος" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), ed. Gerald Kittel, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1967), 4:1085-86.

6 The Psalms depicts ἀνομία as evil actions (see 5:6; 6:9; 13:4; 35:13; 36:1; 37:5; 51:9) as well as state of being (17:24; 26:10; 31:1,5; 35:14; 36:3-5; 39:13; 40:7; 44:8; 51:2-5)

prophets. In the prophets the lexical domain of ἀνομία is primarily associated with actions of habitual defiance and its corresponding consequences (Hos 6:9; Isa 3:8; 5:7; 33:15),<sup>7</sup> a state of lawlessness (Zech 3:4; 5:8),<sup>8</sup> and most profusely, lawlessness as abomination (Jer 16:18; Eze 8:6,913).<sup>9</sup> The noun ἀνομία also carries the connotation of falsehood (Isa 59:3,4), punishment (Lam 4:22; Eze 32:27; 33:10), and acting foolishly or outrageously (Jer 29:23). The cognate ἄνομος further delineates attributes such as coveting (Jer 6:3), abrogation (Eze 5:6), revolt (Isa 31:6; 48:8), and falsehood (Isa 9:5,17; 57:4).<sup>10</sup> Having analyzed the usage of ἀνομία and ἄνομος it can be deduced that the LXX associates lawlessness as a habitual actions, state of being, and as a flagrant rebellion (abomination). Additionally, traits such as coveting, arrogance and falsehood are characteristic of such a disposition. It would be interesting to see if a similar trend of intimation occurs with the Hebrew.

The noun תועבה “abomination” occurs copiously throughout the prophets. It is often used in conjunction with the land (Jer 2:7), coveting, deceit, and falsehood (Jer 6:15; 8:10),<sup>11</sup> contempt for the commandments of God (Jer 7:10), idolatry and adultery (Jer 16:18; 32:25; 44:4,22; Eze 6:9; 7:20),<sup>12</sup> disobedience (Eze 5:9), sanctuary defilement (Eze 5:11; 8:6,9),<sup>13</sup> sun worship (Eze 8:13,15,17), a habituated behaviour akin to one’s state of being (Eze Eze 7:3,4,8,9; 16:2,22,36,43,47,50,51). A similar focus is implied by the noun פֶּשַׁע “rebellion/sin.” In congruence with the former it refers explicitly or implies a state of being (Isa 43:25,27; 46:8; 48:8),<sup>14</sup> rejection of the commandments (Hos 8:1; Amos 2:4), falsehood and pride, idolatry, and offering sacrifices.<sup>15</sup> A similar focus can be seen in the nouns עֵוָה and שִׁקָּר, only that with the former

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7 See also Isa 43:25; 44:22; 50:1; 55:5,9; 59:4,6,12; 64:5,6; Jer 29:23; Eze 3:19; Jer 5:25; Lam 4:6; Eze 3:19; 18:20,21,27; 23:21; 28:16; 29:16; 32:12,13,18,19)

8 See also Mal 1:4; 6:7; Isa 59:3,4; 43:26; Eze 20:30; 33:8; 36:33

9 See also Eze 9:4; 11:18,21; 11:21; 12:16; 16:2,36,43,47,51,58; 18:12,13,24; 20:4; 22:2; 23:36; 36:31; 37:23; 43:8

10 The cognate ἄνομος is further used to denote lawless actions (Mic 6:10; Mal 3:15,19), state of lawlessness (Mal 3:18,19; 4:3; Hab 3:13; Isa 1:4,28; 29:20.

11 cf. Eze 18:12,13, 24, 20:422:2; 23:36; 33:26

12 cf. Eze 11:18,21; 12:16; 14:6

13 cf. Eze 33:29; 36:31; 43:8; 44:6,7,13; Mal 2:11

14 cf. Isa 53:5,8; 58:1; 59:12,13,20; Jer 2:8,29; 3:13; 5:6; 33:8; Eze 2:3; 14:11; 18:22,28,30,31.

15 More on the usage of פֶּשַׁע as rebellion see Eze 20:38; 33:10; 37:23; 39:24; Dan 8:12,13,23; Hos 7:13; Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13; 3:14; 4:4; 5:12; Mic 6:7; Zeph 3:11

there is added connotation of arrogance and superciliousness (Isa 6:7; 13:11; 16:49)<sup>16</sup> and apostacizing and false prophecying with the latter (Isa 9:14; 28:15; 32:7; 59:3,13).<sup>17</sup>

It can be surmised that the concept of lawlessness as deduced from an analysis of both the LXX and Hebrew reveals some noticeable qualities that will be evident in any lawless personage or any motif demarcating lawlessness. These include: an absolute disregard for the commandments or the general dictates of God, an idolatrous and apostacizing spirit which is externalize in homage attributed to other gods, persistent rebellion, contempt for the sanctuary or its significance, falsehood and purposive deceit, and transcending one's creaturely limitation. This list is by no means exhaustive, however, it does provide the general ambits compromising the connotation of lawlessness.

## Analysis of selected passages on the motif of lawlessness

At this point an investigation will be undertaken of the passages in the prophets and wisdom literature where the explicit motif of lawlessness is seen as exemplified through human luminaries. The objective is to identify treads of crosscurrents that unites these passages. These passages include:

1. Isa 14:12-15 (son of the morning)
2. Isa 57:3,4,7,8 (sons of sorcerers)
3. Eze 23:36-38 (Oholah and Oholibah)
4. Eze 28:11-19 (King of Tyre)
5. Eze 44:6-8 (rebellious ones of the house of Israel)
6. Dan 7:9, 25 // 8:9-11, 24-25 (little horn power)

16 For more on עוֹן cf. Isa 14:21; 22:14; 26:21; 43:24; 53:5,6,11; Jer 2:22; 11:10; 13:22; 14:7,20; 16:18,23; 25:12; 30:14,15; 31:30; Lam 4:6,13,22; Eze 3:18,19; 4:4,5,6,17; 7:13,16,19; 14:3,4,7; 16:49; 18:30; Hos 5:5; 7:1. These texts essentially depicts עוֹן either as a state of being or behavioral traits that is practiced.

17 For more on שִׁקָר cf. Jer 3:10,23; 5:31; 6:3; 7:4,4; 7:9; 9:2; 13:25;14:14; 16:19; 23:32; 27:10,14,15,16; 28:15;29:9,21,23,31; 37:14; Zech 5:4; 8:17; 13:3; Mal 3:5. The predominant focus in these texts pertains to actions of blasphemy, apostacizing, and idolatry.

### **Motifs in Isaiah 14:8-21**

Isa 14:8-21 is generally understood by some scholars as an apparent mythical derision of a fallen hero, *helel son of Sachchar*,<sup>18</sup> from הֵלֵל בֶּן-שַׁחַר, who sought to make himself equal to the god El Elyon.<sup>19</sup> Some also postulate it's a satirical taunt of the humiliation of a supposed invincible Babylonian king,<sup>20</sup> or a possible rival to a Canaanite deity.<sup>21</sup> Driven by "ambitious aim against the throne and monarchy of God" this usurper acts as if God is not supreme over His creation.<sup>22</sup> Others see the Hebraic expression הֵלֵל בֶּן שַׁחַר as epitomized by the LXX ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρῶτὸ ἀνατέλλων "shining one, the son of the dawn." One view posits Christ as the φωσφόρος "morning Star" according to 2 Pet 1:19 (cf. Rev 22:16), and thus attribute the substantive ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ ἀνατέλλων in Isa 14:12 as typifying Lucifer and the position of honor once held, but greatly abused and misdirected.<sup>23</sup>

There is unanimity with respect to the message of Isa 14:12-14, that is, it was an egoistic and supercilious pride that led to the eventual abasement of this usurper.<sup>24</sup> The passage alludes undeniably to historical Babylon in its splendence, end-time Babylon as typified through the "man of lawlessness" or the "beast," and finally to Satan, the one who inspires and wheels the control over apostate systems.<sup>25</sup> The use of the imperfect אֶעֱלֶה "I will ascend

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18 D. E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God: Humanism and Hubris in the Old Testament* (Pittsburgh: Pickwith, 1975), and J. W. McKay, "Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Reexamination of the Myth of Isaiah XIV 12–15," *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970): 451–64; see also M. H. Pope, "El in the Ugaritic Texts," *VTSupp* (Leiden, Brill, 1955), 27–32, 61–63.

19 John D.W.Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 209,210. Scholars believed that שַׁחַר is a god because in Psa 139:9 he is depicted with wings, and eyes lashes or rays in Job 3:9; 41:18 (cf. Ps. 57:9; 1083; 110:3. The noun is הֵלֵל traced to many Near Eastern deities of luminaries such as the sun, moon, the star venus, fire, among others.

20 Gary Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, New American Commentary, vol. 15a (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 313.

21 For more information on Canaanite religions see M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 27-60; W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), 13-162; and W. R. Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (New York: Meridian, 1956).

22 George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1-XXVII*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 256.

23 Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Isaiah*, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2002), 170.

24 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1974), 288

25 Roy E. Gingrich, *The Book of Isaiah* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 1993), 21.

up,” אָרִים “I lift myself” and וְאָשֵׁב “I will dwell” speaks of an action that is both anticipated or in progress.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, it adduces to the optimism vested in the one initiating the action.<sup>27</sup> The use of hiphil אָרִים corroborates the arrogance of this divine supplanter,<sup>28</sup> who does not necessarily seek to be God, but rather to transcend his ascribed creaturely status. Such has been a recurring trait exemplified by lawless personages both biblically and extra-biblically.

### ***Motifs in Isaiah 57***

Isa 57 constitutes a prophetic liturgy and lament,<sup>29</sup> and God’s judgment<sup>30</sup> over those within Israel who relinquish their responsibilities of leading for idolatry, by allowing the truth to be syncretized with paganism.<sup>31</sup> At the same time degeneracy prevailed and the righteous forsaken (Isa 5:9-12). In Isa 57:3,4 the expressions בְּנֵי עֲנָנָה “sons of soothsaying,” זֶרַע מְנַאֲף “seeds of adultery” and זֶרַע שֶׁקֶר “seeds of falsehood” are used to typify an attitude of rebellion. The designation “son of...” and “seeds of...” are indicative of a settled inculcated character traits emulated from an archetype.<sup>32</sup> The leaders within Israel were so subsumed by idolatry that they even went beyond syncretism to fully adopting the practices of paganism (Isa 57:7-11). It is thus evident that lawlessness whether practiced by those who are pagans, or even among “God’s people” bares a distinctive mark—idolatry and apostacizing.

### ***Motifs in Ezekiel 23, 48***

Eze 23 explicitly indicts Samaria and Jerusalem for their apostasy (cf. Eze 16). Their symbolic names Oholah “her tent” and Oholibah “my tent is in her” speaks of the prohibited worship practiced by one and magnified by the other.<sup>33</sup> Although for most of the chapter the author focused on Israel’s

26 Bill T. Arnold & John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56-58.

27 J.D. Wijnkoop, *Manual of Hebrew Syntax* (London: Luzac, 1897), 41.

28 Choi & Arnold, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* 48-49.

29 Watts, 287; see also O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans by P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) 462.

30 G. Fohrer, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols (Zurich: Zwingli, 1960-64), 161.

31 Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 198. The pagan practices for which Israel were indicted had received the strongest condemnation, cf. Jer 2:20; 3:6, 13; 17:2; Eze 6:13; II Kings 16:4; Jer. 7:31; 32:35; Lev18:21; 20:2-4; II Kings 23:10

32 Francis, *SDABC*, vol 4, 301.

33 H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary: Ezekiel* (Chicago, IL:

political alliances which contributed to her demise, in verses 36-42 he highlights the specific cultic sins associated with her apostasy, which include: adultery, idolatry, defiling the temple, profaning the Sabbath.<sup>34</sup> In Eze 44:6-8 the nouns מְרִי “obstinate” and תּוֹעֵבָה “abomination” are used in describing Israel. These terms are used 16 and 43 times respectively, and in most cases in reference to a consistent habitual disobedience, idolatry and defilement of the sanctuary.<sup>35</sup> According to verses 6-8, Israel became so spiritually incapacitated that they lost all reverence for the sanctuary.<sup>36</sup> The experience of Israel reveals an interesting parallel that exists between lawlessness and disobedience and the defilement of the sanctuary.

The account of the king of Tyre in Eze 28:11-19 appears thematically to be an enumeration of Isa 14:12-14. While critical scholarship prefer to see this story as a mythical requiem,<sup>37</sup> emphasizing the literality and historicity of Tyre’s downfall.<sup>38</sup> Others however, while not denying that the vision of Ezekiel might have been incited by the historical king of Tyre, they choose to attach a broader application to the passage as referring to Satan,<sup>39</sup> whose character was exemplified in the king of Tyre.<sup>40</sup>

While not engaging in some of the minutiae nuances of this passage, this paper concludes that in Eze 28 the motif of lawlessness is rife, and it stands as a paradigm of subsequent rebellion. Despite the indecisiveness as to the identity of the king of Tyre, most agree that like the “son of the morning” in Isa 14 his demise was due to his presumptuousness,<sup>41</sup> whereby he transcended the limits of his “creatureliness.”<sup>42</sup> This again is a trait will become evident in most of the motifs of lawlessness, especially when the prerogative of God is the object under attack.

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Wilcox & Follet, 1983), 17.

34 Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 29 (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 51; H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on Ezekiel the Prophet* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1949), 159.

35 See Eze 2:5,6,7,8; 3:9,27; 12:2,3,9,25; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6 // 5:9,11; 6:9,11; 7:3,4,8,9,20; 8:6,9,13,15,17; 11:18,21; 16:2,22,36,43,47; 18:12,13,24; 22:2,11; 33:26,29; 44:6,7,13

36 R. E. Gingrich, *The Book of Ezekiel* (Memphis, TN: Riverside, 2005), 56.

37 Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*, vol.19 (Grand Rapids, MI:Eerdmans, 1989), 199.

38 Allen, *Ezekiel*, 94.

39 cf. Luke 4:5, 6; 10:18; John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 12:7-9

40 Nichol, *SDABC*, vol 4, 675.

41 Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Hermeneia, vol. 2, trans. by James D. Martin, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 94.

42 G.A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 313.



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## ***Motifs in Wisdom Literature***

Finally, a survey of the Wisdom literature of Daniel reveals how the little horn power epitomizes and becomes the symbol of lawlessness par excellence. Although the identification of the little horn power of Dan 7 and 8 are disputed,<sup>43</sup> there is concurrence on the nature of his actions. This being/power is described as self-exalting and blasphemous power (7:8, 11, 20, 25 // 8:10-12, 25), exercising a crafty intelligence (7:8 // 8:23-25), described as persecuting powers (7:21,25 // 8:10,24), share the same target group as object of their persecution (7:27 // 8:24), and are to be supernaturally destroyed (7:11, 26 // 8:25).<sup>44</sup> This action of the little horn power of Dan 7 and 8 confirms the fact that the one epitomizes lawlessness not only expresses disregard for God, but also seeks to destroy His people (cf. Eze 16,44).

In Dan 7:25 the little horn blasphemes the name of God, persecutes the saints and attempts to change times and laws. Twice in Dan 8 it is stated that he “little horn” magnified himself (Dan 8:11, 25). Furthermore, his activities involve primarily the defilement of the sanctuary—the center of the plan of salvation.<sup>45</sup> The hiphil stems **הִגְדִּיל** and **הִנְדִּיל** “magnify himself” and **הִוְצִילָהּ** “he will cause” implies not only someone vying to “become,” but more so, one who considers himself to actually “be” that which he seeks.<sup>46</sup> Commenting on the little horn of Dan 7, Steven Miller said, “this individual will be extremely intelligent and clever, a mouth that *spoke boastfully* depicts the king’s *arrogant assertions*, particularly his *blasphemies* against the true God...the world will fall under the spell of his winsome words and captivating personality.”<sup>47</sup> This power possessed an exaggerated evaluation of his importance as well as openly defying the supreme authority of the universe.<sup>48</sup> The little horn power of Dan 7 and 8 was driven and controlled by the same power that led all of the lawless personages studied, only that its activities launch an attack on the foundation of God’s plan of salvation—the sanctuary.

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43 Critical scholarship accept Antiochus IV Epiphanes Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.), the eight king of the Seleucid dynasty, as the little horn power of Dan 8. However, those who accede to a historicist rendering of Daniel believes that the description fits best Rome, cf. John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 30 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 209 & William Shea, “Unity of Daniel,” *Symposium on Daniel*, vol.2, ed. Frank Holbrook, (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986),186-191.

44 Shea, “Unity of Daniel,” 187.

45 Ibid., 198,199.

46 Choi and Arnold, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 51.

47 Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 202.

48 René Pétér Contesse & John Ellington, *A Handbook on the Book of Daniel* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 212, 226.

## Second Temple writings and the motif of lawlessness

The writings of the second temple period, particularly the Pseudepigrapha can provide some informed perspectives for the biblical student in the quest to trace the trajectory of thought. Most pseudepigraphal works are written between 200 BC to AD 200. They are both Jewish and Christian in character and are attributed to prominent figures in OT history; also they allegedly contain themes that are either built around or upon biblical motifs.<sup>49</sup> These writings while evidently not placed on the same level of inspiration as the canonical books, valuable insights and trend can be gleaned from them which can lead to a more informed understanding of the canonical text and context.

The Sybilline Oracles though noted for their political agenda with a prophetic outlook on the impending disaster to befall humanity. They foretold of the wars, famines and plagues to befall the human family as the world nears to a climax.<sup>50</sup> In book five, although primarily focused on the return of Nero as an eschatological adversary, there is an allusion of the cosmic destruction to befall the world, and the advent and work of the supernatural lawless figure. In Sib. Or 5:155-160 it is said,

*<sup>155</sup> But when after the fourth year a great star shines, <sup>156</sup> which by itself will destroy the (whole) land, [because of the honor <sup>157</sup> which they first paid to Poseidon god of the sea, <sup>158</sup> then will come a great star from heaven into the divine sea, <sup>159</sup> and will burn up the deep sea and Babylon itself, <sup>160</sup> and the land of Italy on whose account <sup>161</sup> many faithful saints of the Hebrews have perished, and the true people, <sup>162</sup> you will be afflicted with evil among evil men, <sup>163</sup> but you will remain utterly desolate for whole ages hereafter, . . . . (SibOr. 5:155-163 OPE)*

Biblical scholars who have analyzed the aforementioned passages aligned them with Rev 8:10; 9:1, at least based on their shared thematic consonance. According to Rev 8:10 a celestial luminary falls from the heavens destroying a third of the earth. Some associate this “falling star” as a defiant supernatural being that was expunged both as an act of judgment, resulting in wide-scale destruction on the earth.<sup>51</sup> The description of the falling star and the ensuing

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49 James H. Charlesworth, “Introductuons for the General Reader,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol 1 ed. James Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), xxv.

50 J. J. Collins , “Sybilline Oracles,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol 1 ed. James Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 317-322.

51 Ian Boxall, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 139; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 133.

destruction that is effects befits one who stands both against Christ, and those belonging to Him, and this it qualifies as lawless personage.

Perhaps the clearest allusion to the motif of lawlessness can be found in the Apocalypse of Elijah and its eschatological premonitions on the Antichrist figure. This Jewish-Christian work attests to the prevailing sentiments existing both in both circles of an apocalyptic lawless apogee that will precede the Parousia. Commenting on the advent of the son of lawlessness sit is said:

*In the fourth year of that king the son of lawlessness will appear, saying, "I am the Christ," although he is not. Don't believe him. When the Christ comes, he will come in the manner of a covey of doves with the crown of doves surrounding him. He will walk upon the heaven's vaults with the sign of the cross leading him. The whole world will behold him like the sun which shines from the eastern horizon to the western. This is how he will come, with all his angels surrounding him. But the son of lawlessness will begin to stand again in the holy places. He will say to the sun, "Fall," and it will fall. He will say, "Shine," and it will do it. He will say, "Darken," and it will do it. He will say to the moon, "Become bloody," and it will do it. He will go forth with them from the sky. He will walk upon the sea and the rivers as upon dry land. He will cause the lame to walk. He will cause the deaf to hear. He will cause the dumb to speak. He will cause the blind to see. The lepers he will cleanse. The ill he will heal. The demons he will cast out. He will multiply his signs and his wonders in the presence of everyone. He will do the works which the Christ did/ except for raising the dead alone. In this you will know that he is the son of lawlessness, because he is unable to give life (SibOr 3:1-13).<sup>52</sup>*

The above text share an striking parallel to some NT passages on the same motif, thus corroborating the singularity of thrust that both shared, and affirming the widespread anticipation that awaited (see Matt 24:5, 27, 29; Mk 6:48; Lk 17:24; 2 Thess 1:7). While scholars accede to the chronological priority of the biblical text, that several works can attest to a singular motif in such resolute terms only speaks of the prominence such ideations played in the theological and eschatological worldview of those who shared those sentiments.

Finally the blasphemous trajectory of the eschatological Antichrist is best articulated by the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra drawing upon Isa 14:13-15, it is said of him, "He was exalted up to heaven, he will descend as far as Hades" (ApEzra 4:31). This evidently parallels aspects of the little horn's work of Dan 7-8, and the man of lawlessness of 2 Thess 2:3-4, again attesting to the compelling belief that prevailed concerning the motif of lawless, and its implications both for the temporal and heavenly realms.

<sup>52</sup> For signs of the Antichrist, see SibOr 5:14-18.

Surveying the above Second Temple works confirms that the motif of lawlessness was one that dominated the eschatological paradigms of religious thinkers. These extra-biblical works provide valuable insights and perspectives for the biblical student who attempts to reconstruct the thought-world that was influenced by or originated from the theological themes and motifs that are found in the canonical Scripture. Based on the text surveyed it can be deduced that the motif of lawlessness as portrayed in the pseudepigraphal works adduce to an apocalyptic figure that will seek to usurp God's divine prerogative, and also deride His people. These traits were also possessed by the personages encapsulating the motif of lawlessness as presented in the biblical texts.

## The Church fathers and the motif of lawlessness

This section is intended to show the continuance of the motif of lawlessness beyond the NT. The writings of the Church Fathers as other extra-biblical works provide sagacious perspectives on biblical themes and motifs. While the works on the Antichrist is voluminous, a few excerpts can corroborate the consonance shared with the biblical motif of lawlessness. Augustine alluding to 2 Thess 2:1-12 calls the Antichrist "a renegade from the Lord God," who "sit[s] as the temple of God, as if he were himself the temple of God."<sup>53</sup> Additionally, he posit the Antichrist as one who "...sits as a friend," meaning like a friend."<sup>54</sup> Here the inference is to the benign yet noxious nature of the Antichrist.

Another Church Father adds, that the "antichrist pretends to be Christ... falsely cloak[ing] their shameful lives under an honourable title."<sup>55</sup> Basil in his Letters referred to the man of lawlessness as an appostate.<sup>56</sup> Other Church Fathers basically ascribed to the "man of lawlessness" or "man of sin" attributes given by the biblical writers, such as, being audacious in speech and actions (cf. 2 Thess 2:3, 4; Dan 8:9-12, 25).<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the motif of lawlessness is seen as being at variance with reverence to God, likewise also, the practice of persistent defiant actions and attitude.<sup>58</sup>

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53 Augustine *The City of God Against the Pagans*, LCL 416, 359.

54 Ibid.

55 Jerome *Letters*, LCL 262, 149.

56 Basil *Letters*, LCL 215, 327.

57 John *Damascene Barlaam and Ioasaph*, LCL 34, 333.

58 Hermas *The Shepherd*, LCL 25, 245.

While this study was only meant to provide a cursory glance at the Church Fathers and their contribution to the motif of lawlessness, already one can ascertain that they were mainly preoccupied with the advent and work of the man of sin/lawlessness. Taking the writings of the Fathers as individual works one may not necessarily find a developed systematic teaching/theme on the motif of lawlessness. However when taken collectively it is evident that within their works resonate and echo the sentiments of the biblical authors.

## The motif lawless in the New Testament & its implications

The motif of lawlessness personages while not restricted to the prophets or wisdom literature, they nonetheless provide the cardinal framework and tenets for understanding such motifs. Lawlessness as was exemplified refers to disobedience to the explicit will of God, which resonates in an attitude of habituated defiance, idolatry, disregard for the Ten Commandments, devaluation of the sanctuary and its services, conceitedness, victimizing the upright. Lawlessness as arrogance and self-conceited was epitomized in the person of Lucifer as the son of morning (Isa 14:12), and through the king of Tyre (Eze 28:14), both of whom were abased on account of their pride.

The little horn power of Daniel 7 and 8 launch His affront upon God's prerogatives and His plan of salvation as outlined typified through the sanctuary, it shows no regard for the commandments, neither of those who observe it, and uses human wit and prowess so as to ensnare others. It is this exemplification of lawlessness that spurns over into the NT in the person of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3-4), the Antichrist (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), the land beast of Revelation 13,<sup>59</sup> and false eschatological Christs (Matt 24:15, 23-24; Mk 13:14; Lk 8:13). Like the OT, the NT motif of lawlessness pertains to allegiances rendered to rival personages claiming to be God.

Historically, exegetes of the NT have seen an inseparable correlation between the little horn power of Dan 7-8 and beasts of Rev 12-14, particularly, the

59 Johann Heinz, "The modern Papacy: Claims and Authority," in *Symposium on Revelation II*, ed. Frank Holbrook (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 338-40; see also S.N. Haskel, *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1905), 232; L. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1954), 299,319,520; U. Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and Revelation 2* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), 564-65.

land beast of Rev 13.<sup>60</sup> These personages though separated by time are united in purpose-disregard for God's law, blasphemy against God's name, His tabernacle, and persecuting His people. Scripture accords the mark of the beast to those who will consent to the allegiance of the end-time lawless figures (see Rev 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20), as opposed to those who bare the seal of God (see Rev 15:2; 20:4; 12:17; 14:12; cf. Exo 31:12-17). The former carry a similar character to the beast, in that they will join in disobeying God's law, blaspheming His sanctuary and persecuting His people.<sup>61</sup>

It appears that the eventual aim of the end-time lawless personages is to lead as many as it possible into defiance against the God, and by implication their eventual demise. In fact, even though aware of its futility, one of the subtle ploys of the end-time lawless one will be to portray God's faithful as the cause of the incessant problems and lawlessness plaguing the world, thus, they will be made the "objects of universal execration."<sup>62</sup> However, they will find in God a refuge in whom protection can be found.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

This study while tracing the trajectory of lawlessness in the biblical and extrabiblical writings has shown its suffisiveness as a motif, and thus laid a foundation for its perpetuity in the NT. Most of the works surveyed posit personage/s that sought to transcend their creatureliness by usurping divine prerogatives, and even in some instances galvanizing support in favor of their defiance. However, in the biblical text, every instance of such defiance has been abased and ultimately silenced by God. Additionally the motif of lawlessness forms an important eschatological framework upon which biblical apocalypse can be understood.

In many religious circles there is growing anticipation of an end-time showdown between Christ and the Antichrist or "man of lawlessness." Scripture assures the reader that Christ will be the victor-defeating once and for all all usurpers to His throne. In a similar vane those who belong to Christ is assured of His victory being credited as theirs.

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60 William Johnson, "The Saints End-time Victory Over the Forces of Evil," in *Symposium on Revelation II*, ed. Frank Holbrook (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 10-11.

61 C. Mervyn Maxwell, "The Mark of the Beast," in *Symposium on Revelation II*, ed. Frank Holbrook (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 53-61.

62 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888; revised 1907), 615.

63 Ellen White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 259.

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Finally, any study on the motif of lawlessness in Scripture is of practical value to every believer as it beckons that a choice be made either for Christ or His opponent.

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