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NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF JOHN 8:12
WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION GIVEN TO THE
IMAGERY OF LIGHT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
AS ITS BACKGROUND


BY

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in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Theology

Approved:

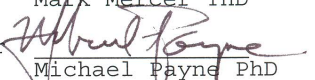
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ABSTRACT

The thesis discusses the imagery of light used as a figure of salvation in the Old Testament and the relationship it has with John 8:12. This is presented in five chapters. Chapter one covers introductory materials, namely, the statement of the problem, the hypothesis, significance of the study, the purpose of the study, assumptions, limitations and delimitations. Chapter two discusses the background and Old Testament use of the imagery of light, gives an overview of the significance of the imagery of light in the Old Testament, and examines selected Old Testament passages where light is used in the context of salvation. These include: the creation of light (Ge 1:3-5), the plague of darkness (Ex 10:21-23), light in the Exodus Journey (Ex 13:21,22), light to Zebulun and Naphtali (Is 8:22-9:2), the promise of light to the Gentiles (Is 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). Chapter three is devoted to the Gospel of John, especially John 8:12. John's understanding of Jesus as the light is discussed along with use of the imagery of light in relation to the person and ministry of Jesus. An overview of John's theological imagery of light is outlined. Discussed here also is John's concept of salvation and light in John's presentation of Jesus. Chapter four is a synthesis of the significance of light as is used in the scriptural passages already considered. This section pulls together the Old Testament and John's usage of the imagery of light (as a symbol of salvation). Chapter five gives a summary of findings and conclusion of the thesis. The biblical and theological findings are summarized in this chapter. The relevance of this study in its application for the Church is outlined.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A proper understanding of the Gospel of John should have as its background the Old Testament. This is a crucial beginning point because, in his presentation of Jesus, John shows ". . . a Christocentric and typological way of reading the Old Testament, whereby patterns of redemption foreshadowed earlier find their fulfilment in him."¹ Behind the major themes of John's presentation of Jesus and his messianic functions lie the Old Testament dealings of God with mankind. This thought is clearly attested by Bruce when he says, ". . . we may trace the bread of life, the water of life, the light of life, from their earliest appearance to their utilization as symbols for the saving word of Christ in the fourth Gospel."² Noteworthy is the fact that, "the perspective from which the New Testament writers interpret the Old is sometimes stated explicitly, sometimes it can be inferred from

¹John W. Pryor, John: Evangelist of the Covenant People (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992), 117.

²F. F. Bruce, This is that: The New Testament Development of Some Old Testament Themes (Exeter: Paternoster, 1968), 18.

their usage."³ John uses both of these methods in his understanding and use of the Old Testament as he presents the person and ministry of Jesus. It is apparent that the Gospel of John as a whole focuses on some specific Old Testament aspects that directly relate to Christ. As Bruce points out, "[it can be ascertained] from the wider context of the Fourth Gospel something about the specific terms in which the Scripture . . . bore witness to . . . Christ."⁴

The question that naturally arises is, what is the relationship between Jesus' self-disclosure as "the light of the world . . . the light of life" in John 8:12 with the Old Testament imagery of light? What implication does this statement by Jesus have within the biblical framework of light? How was John influenced by his understanding of the Old Testament's use of the imagery of light in relation to his presentation of Jesus as the light of the world? Our response to these questions will seek to establish the extent to which the understanding of John's use of light in John 8:12 can be traced back to the Old Testament. By so doing, we shall establish the significance of the Old Testament use of light in

³E. Earle Ellis, "How the New Testament Uses the Old," in New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 209.

⁴F. F. Bruce, The Time is Fulfilled; Five Aspects of the Fulfilment of the Old Testament in the New (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 35.

illuminating John's presentation of Jesus as the light of the world.

Statement of the Problem

The task of this thesis is to address the problem of understanding light as is used in John 8:12 in light of the Old Testament background. The thesis will seek to look at the relationship of the Old Testament background to Jesus as the light of the world. We should note, however, that our focus will be limited only to the imagery of light as a figure of salvation. This emphasis on salvation is in view of the mission for which Christ's incarnation was intended. This, as we shall see, is the emphasis of John's Gospel where Jesus says: ". . . I came that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). It is in view of this background that the selection of the Old Testament passages will be based.

Key questions that we need to investigate in this thesis include:

- a. What is the meaning of light in the Old Testament?
- b. What is the relationship between John's use of the imagery of light and that used in the Old Testament?
- c. How does John's presentation of Jesus as the light feature in his overall concept of salvation?
- d. To what extent does the imagery of light in the Old Testament prefigure the person and ministry

of Jesus as presented by John?

- e. How does the general understanding of the imagery of light bear upon the understanding of Jesus as the light of the world?

The Hypothesis

Major Hypothesis

The Old Testament imagery of light is central in understanding Jesus' statement that He is the light of the world.

Minor Hypotheses

- a. In order to understand the far-reaching implication of Jesus as the light in John, it is imperative to have a proper grasp of the Old Testament symbolism of light.
- b. John's use of light is grounded within his theological concept of salvation and goes beyond the literal meaning.
- c. The presentation of Jesus as the light of the world in the Fourth Gospel avails the modern church and biblical scholarship as a whole with an immense insight into his mission for the world as anticipated in the Old Testament.

The Significance of the Problem

The person and mission of Christ is one of the most critical issues in the life and practice of the modern church, especially within the African context. It is in this regard that Mugambi and Magesa observe that, "Christology is, in the final analysis, the most basic and central issue of Christian theology."⁵ The diverse understanding and presentation of Christ and his mission of salvation in the Church today necessitates a proper look at the biblical presentation of Jesus.

The significance of this study is to make an attempt of presenting the proper biblical view of the central task of Christ. His messianic mission is embedded within the Old Testament's anticipation as seen in its imagery and symbolism. It is imperative, therefore, that a proper understanding of the New Testament's presentation of Christ and his mission be understood in light of the Old Testament. This is important because, ". . . historic Christianity

⁵J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, eds., Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1989), x. They observe that "the faith, the hope and the praxis of love that Christian theology attempts to explicate, and which Christians endeavour to witness to by their life, must have Christ as their foundation and goal. Without Jesus Christ as this Cornerstone and final aim, nothing in Christology counts; nothing in theological thought is of any significance from the Christian point of view. In fact, to be precise, theology is not Christian at all when it does not offer Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the answer to the human quest, and as the answer to people who ask the reason for the hope that all Christians hold through faith. . . ." (p. x).

recognizes in the New Testament the goal of the Old."⁶ In this sense, the Old Testament plays an important role in preparing for the incarnation of Christ and his messianic task.⁷

John's presentation of Christ as "the light of the world" is a clear example of how the New Testament emphasizes and builds upon Old Testament images. Worth noting is the fact that the theme of light is central to Johannine theology in his presentation of Christ. To this effect, Vincent points out that, "light is another of John's characteristic terms and ideas, playing a most important part in his writings, as related to the manifestations of Jesus and his work upon men."⁸ This centrality of light is presented alongside its antithesis, the imagery of darkness. In presenting the imagery of light, the Gospel "establishes basic configurations by connecting light with God, Life, and knowledge, and by associating darkness with their

⁶Bruce, This is That, 12.

⁷Ibid. Bruce points out that ". . . the principal purpose to which the plan of the Old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming both of Christ, the universal redeemer, and of the Messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy . . . and to indicate its meaning through various types. . . ."

⁸Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1946), 166.

opposites."⁹ In view of this centrality, and the imagery of light given in the Old Testament, it is only proper that we look at the implication of light as a symbol in the Old Testament and its relationship to Christ.

The significance of this study is further validated by the fact that, "a clear and systematic reflection on Christ is still relatively limited in . . . Christian theology."¹⁰ This lack of a proper comprehension of the person of Christ has essentially brought about immense problems in the life of the Church. Such problems include a return to traditional forms of worship as well as an emergence of self-acclaimed messiahs. Since the identity of Christ is one among the many problems facing the Church, especially in Africa, there is need of a ". . . resolution through reflection on the scriptures."¹¹

Therefore, the study has a great contribution to

⁹Craig R. Koester, Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 124. In this regard, Craig points to the various depictions of light and darkness by John. In the prologue, the word of God is the "source of life and light shining in the darkness (1:5)." Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus applies the same imagery as it points to the lovers of darkness rather than light (3:19-21). Jesus' declaration as "the light of the world" (8:12) as well as healing of the blind man (9:4-7) and his challenge to the crowd at Bethany (11:9-10) are also features of this imagery. Other uses of this imagery are used in relation to Jesus' death (12:25-36, 46; 13:30) (p. 123).

¹⁰Mugambi and Magesa, Jesus in African Christianity, x.

¹¹Richard J. Gehman, Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective (Nairobi: Evangel, 1987), 8.

make toward the existing biblical reflections on the person and mission of Christ in the African Church.

Second, the study has stemmed from a conviction that one of the major weaknesses in the church today is the lack of a proper understanding of Christ as presented in the Scriptures. One of the many problems that has brought about this weakness is the failure to understand, and give due recognition to the significance of the Old Testament imagery of symbols pointing to the person and mission of Christ. As a result there has been a misrepresentation of who Jesus is. This can be seen in the rejection of Christ by the Jews, in spite of his presentation by John and other New Testament writers in terms that reflect links with the Old Testament. Had they understood Jesus in view of the Old Testament presentation and anticipation, their concept of his person and mission would have changed. The rise of other "messiahs" within christendom also reflects this misunderstanding.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, it is to examine the Johannine understanding of Christ in view of his presentation of Jesus as the light in John 8:12. Secondly, to show the relationship between John's presentation of Christ as the light and the Old Testament use of the imagery of light. This relationship will help in understanding the relevance of the Old Testament as the beginning point of understanding why the New

Testament writers, and John in particular, present Christ the way they do.

John's presentation of Christ as "the light of the world" is the central focus of our study. It is our hope that this study will make a significant contribution to the understanding of the person of Christ, as presented in the Scriptures, within the Church and that it will stimulate more theologians to reflect further on the person and mission of Christ by using the biblical text as the sole foundation of understanding the Saviour.

Assumptions

- a. That the church has not taken seriously the Old Testament imagery as the beginning point to understanding Jesus as presented in the New Testament.
- b. That modern scholarship has not fully utilized the imagery of light as is used in the Old Testament as the key to understanding John's presentation of Jesus as the light.
- c. That studies in Johannine theology have not taken seriously the imagery of light in John as central in understanding his concept of salvation.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The Johannine use of light in his concept of salvation is a very wide area of study. The study will not exhaust the use of light in John, except that I will be dealing with an aspect of it as found in John 8:12.

Furthermore, while recognizing that the imagery of light is used variously in the different genres of the Old Testament, I will only focus on some passages in Genesis, Exodus and Isaiah. Central to the passages selected for analysis include Genesis 1:3-5 which presents the creation of light. The Exodus account where the Lord provides light to the Israelites on two occasions will also be examined. One of these is found in Exodus 10:21-23, where the Lord provides light for Israel, while he strikes the Egyptians with the plague of darkness for three days. The other passage is Exodus 13:21-23, in which the Lord provides guiding light to the Israelites as they journey to promised land. Other passages that we shall analyze include the promise of light to Zebulun and Naphtali (Is 9:1) and the servant songs where light is promised to the Gentiles (Is 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). The teaching in each of these passages will be highlighted. This selectivity is based on the fact that the use of light in these passages is closely linked to the concept of light in John 8:12. Taken into consideration also is the fact that this is a concept study and both time and space would not allow me to be exhaustive. I will relate John's concept of salvation with his use of light as it pertains to the person and mission of Christ since, one cannot separate John's theological concept of salvation with his use of light.

Plan and Method

This study falls within the departments of biblical and theological studies. Therefore, all the theological discussions and principles will be drawn from a careful exegesis in John and other selected Old Testament texts. The approach will be exegetical. This is to ensure that the historical, cultural and social settings of the biblical traditions together with the literary and linguistic means by which the traditions were transmitted are fully considered.

I will do an exegesis of John 8:12 in particular, drawing from the wider context of John. A special attention will be given to the imagery of light in the Old Testament where some selected passages will be studied to shed light on John 8:12. Where necessary, I will employ concept study. I will attempt to place the study into its canonical context, by giving attention to the wider biblical and theological contexts.

General Content of the Paper

Chapter one has covered introductory materials, namely, the statement of the problem, the hypothesis, significance of the study, the purpose of the study, assumptions, limitations and delimitations. Chapter two will discuss the background and Old Testament use of the imagery of light. An overview of the significance of the imagery of light in the Old Testament will be highlighted. This section will examine selected Old Testament passages where light is used in the context of

salvation. This will include: the creation of light (Gn 1:3-5), the plague of darkness (Ex 10:21-23), light in the exodus journey (Ex 13:21,22), light to Zebulun and Naphtali (Is 8:22-9:2), and the promise of light to the Gentiles (Is 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). Chapter three will be devoted to the Gospel of John, especially John 8:12. John's understanding of Jesus as the light will be discussed. An exegesis will be done on John 8:12. A broad discussion of John's understanding and use of the imagery of light in relation to the person and ministry of Jesus will be examined and its relevance spelt out. An overview of John's theological imagery of light will be outlined. John's concept of salvation and light in his presentation of Jesus will be discussed here. Chapter four will be a synthesis of the significance of light as is used in the scriptural passages considered. This section will seek to pull together the Old Testament and John's usage of the imagery of light as a symbol of salvation. Discussed here will also be the significance of light and its effect on God's people. Chapter five will be a summary of findings and conclusion of the thesis. The biblical and theological findings will be summarized in this chapter. The relevance of this study in its application for the Church will be outlined.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND OLD TESTAMENT USE OF THE IMAGERY OF LIGHT

The use of the imagery of light in the Scriptures is significant in understanding biblical theology as it relates to God's dealings with mankind. The importance of the imagery of light is derived from its diverse use employed in the Scriptures. This use ranges from personal to impersonal and from literal to metaphorical levels. Central to a proper understanding of the imagery of light is the importance which the ancient world understood and treated it in their day-to-day life.¹² In this regard, it would help to distinguish between the ancient oriental understanding of light which links the source of light primarily to the luminaries, and the Hebrew understanding as portrayed in the Scriptures.¹³ The ancient Hebrews regarded light as one of the primary features of the cosmos. Its creation is prior and

¹²Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago: Moody, 1980), s.v. "אור," by Herbert Wolf. He points out that the ancient world, which believed that the sun is the source of light, worshipped the sun. The Jewish concept of God as Creator of light distinguishes them from other nations with respect to their object of worship.

¹³Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), s.v. "φως, κτλ," by H. Conzelmann.

independent of the heavenly luminaries as seen in Genesis 1:3-5. Its existence, like all the other aspects of creation, reflects the handiwork of God as we shall observe below.

The centrality of God in his role as creator of light is a significant aspect of distinction between the Hebrews and the nations of the ancient world. Thus the Bible makes a clear distinction between the source of light and the luminaries which are light-bearing bodies.¹⁴ Although the Hebrews gave a significant emphasis on the imagery of light, it is worth noting that Hebrew religion was not in any way associated with the worship of the sun.¹⁵ The extent to which the Bible employs the imagery of light is an indication of its significance and importance within the whole spectrum of Jewish religion. This indicates that the Hebrew imagery of light, especially as is used in the Old Testament creation story, contrasts with that of the surrounding nations.¹⁶ Since the use of this imagery is quite

¹⁴Wolf, 25. He also notes that "the Old Testament avoids isolating the sun as 'the light' lest the Hebrews succumb to the tendency to worship it (Jb 31:26-27)."

¹⁵George Arthur Buttrick, ed. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), s.v. "Light, Light and Darkness," by O. A. Piper.

¹⁶G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds. Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), s.v. "אור", by Oslo Sverre Aalen. He argues that "the religio-historical background of the Old Testament concept of light is to be sought in the 'pre-solar' stage, which may be seen in the

broad, we shall not attempt to exhaust it in any way. Our main concern will focus on the imagery of light as a figure of salvation.

With this basic general background of the imagery of light, we now focus on the Old Testament in order to examine its use of this imagery. The interest that the Old Testament places on the imagery of light concerns, as observed by Piper, the benefits which it imparts, rather than its nature.¹⁷ Worth observing is the fact that, even with the extent to which the Scriptures use the imagery of light, and no matter how familiar it appears to be, light still remains a mystery.¹⁸ A proper understanding of the usage of light in the Old Testament can clearly be discerned from the terms used. The major word for light is the verb אור, and the derivatives related to it. It is used in a literal as well as figurative sense in the Old Testament. These various uses and meanings employed by these terms in a literal

Ugaritic texts, among the Sumerians, and in an ancient stratum of the Egyptian religion [where] light is primarily daylight" (p. 150). It is significant to note that this background may not be fitting within the biblical concept because "according to the Old Testament thought, natural light is distinctly separated from the person of God which is impossible in nature religions. In the Old Testament, light is an emanation of divine creation. Therefore it does not come from darkness as in cosmogonic thought" (p. 151). This thought will be discussed later as we consider the creation account.

¹⁷Piper, p. 138.

¹⁸Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), s.v. "Light," by Leon Morris.

sense are light of day, dawn, light of the heavenly luminaries, lightning, and light of lamp. In the figurative sense, they refer to light of life, light of prosperity, light of instruction light of face or bright cheerful face, and Yahweh as the light of Israel.¹⁹ Since the Old Testament employs all these various uses, a brief overview will help in our understanding of the significance of the imagery of light as used in the Old Testament.

An Overview of the of the Imagery of Light in the Old Testament

The use and significance of light in the Old Testament encompasses the whole arena of life. In order to have a clear understanding of the use and significance of the imagery of light in the Old Testament, we should make a clear distinction between light and the luminaries.

Light of the Heavenly Luminaries

The Old Testament makes this distinction more clearly in the creation account. The creation of light (Gn 1:3-5), is distinct and independent of the creation of the luminaries (Gn 1:14-19). Consequently, a clear distinction between light, as an entity, and the brightness or light that comes from the sun should be

¹⁹Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1907 ed., s.v. "אור."

maintained.²⁰ The Old Testament indicates that the luminaries are objects of God's creation. Since light was created before the luminaries, it is a clear indication that the luminaries do not have a light of their own, but depend on the light which existed before them to carry out their function.²¹

Their Creation and Literal Function

The author of Genesis clearly points out that these lights in the expanse of the sky came into being by the creative word of God. Their purpose as is clearly spelled out in Genesis 1:14-18 has to do with the separation of day and night as well as signs for seasons. The Psalmist echoes this functional duty of the luminaries, as instruments of God to regulate time in terms of day and night as well as seasons (Ps 136:7-9). As the Psalmist relates the Lord's care over all His works, he says:

The moon marks off the seasons,
and the sun knows when to go
down.
You bring darkness, it becomes night,
and all the beasts of the forest
prowl.

²⁰Aalen, 151-52. He points out that "when the sun is described as light, it is just as one light among others in the firmament of heaven analogous to the moon and the stars. In keeping with the independence of daylight from the sun, light (אור) is explicitly used in connection with the morning, dawn and day in several passages."

²¹Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World: the Biblical Understanding of Light and Darkness," Interpretation 17 (1963): 440.

The lions roar for their prey
and seek their food from God.
The sun rises, and they steal away;
they return and lie down in their
dens.
The man goes out to his work,
to his labour until evening (Ps 104:19-23).

In view of this we would concur with Elizabeth Achtemeier when she says, "the heavenly bodies in their regular course allow the regulation of life."²²

As instruments of God, the luminaries are under the direct control and authority of God, the creator. As the psalmist observes, God is the one who established them (Ps 74:16). He is the sovereign Lord, ". . . who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and the stars to shine by night . . ." (Je 31:35). He can command, order, and use them at his will to accomplish his purposes. At his command, the sun can fail to rise while the stars can be stopped from shining (Jb 9:7) or their light made brighter (Is 30:26; cf. Re 16:8-9). He can halt the course of the sun and the moon, as he did in order to give his people victory (Jo 10:12-13).

Their Symbolic Function

The luminaries are also used as signs symbolizing God's present and future dealings with mankind and the universe as a whole. Isaiah, describing the devastation of Babylon when God's wrath falls on them on the day of the Lord, says, ". . . the day of the Lord is coming - a

²²Ibid., 439-40.

crucial day, with wrath and fierce anger - to make the land desolate . . . the stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light and the moon will not give its light" (Is 13:9-10). Amos also has the same idea in view of the day of the Lord as he says, "'in that day,' declares the sovereign Lord, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight'" (Am 8:9). The darkening of the luminaries on the day of the Lord, symbolizing the wrath of God and punishment for the wicked, is also featured in other prophetic passages like Joel 2:10,31; 3:14,15; Ezekiel 32:7,8 (cf. Mt 24:29,30; Mk 13:24,25; Lk 21:25; Re 6:12-14; 8:12).²³ In confirming his faithfulness to Hezekiah, the Lord also uses the sign of the light from the sun. As recorded by Isaiah, ". . . I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz. So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down" (Is 38:8). The light from the luminaries seem to be clearly distinct and serves some given purposes as intended and directed by God. In this regard our consideration of the imagery of light should be rooted in the existence of light apart from the luminaries.

²³Ibid., 440.

Darkness, the Antithesis of Light

In our consideration and understanding of the imagery of light, it is essential that we also understand its antithesis, the imagery of darkness. The major terms for darkness that will feature in our discussion are אֲדָמָה and אֲחֵרָה. The meaning of אֲדָמָה is "darkness, obscurity." Its implications include, darkness, secret, distress, dread or terror, mourning, perplexity, confusion, ignorance, evil, sin, and obscurity.²⁴ The meaning of אֲחֵרָה

is darkness, gloom or gloominess and calamity. This word has the implication of the literal darkness of night as in Psalm 91:6 or the darkness of the gloom of the underworld (Jb 10:21,22). It also refers to the figure of spiritual darkness (Is 29:18) secrecy or treachery (Ps 11:2) or calamity (Jb 23:17; 30:20).²⁵ Isaiah uses this term to indicate, figuratively, calamity (Is 8:22; 58:10; 59:9). Darkness in its literal and symbolic implications is contrasted with light .

Contrasts Between Light and Darkness

Darkness stands in opposition to the purpose and effects of light in all aspects. In spite of its distinctions with light we should note that, just as light is a creation of God, so also is darkness. This does not imply that the two receive the same commendation

²⁴Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1907 ed., s.v. "אֲדָמָה."

²⁵Ibid., s.v. "אֲחֵרָה."

by God. His creation of both indicates his sovereignty and control over all his creation. The existence of both is solely a prerogative of the creator God who alone understands and controls them (Jb 38:19).²⁶ Light, as the first of God's creation comes into existence to illuminate the existent darkness which was over the surface of the deep (Gn 1:2). In this creation account, God makes a clear separation between light and darkness. Light is said to be good (Gn. 1:4), while there is silence regarding the creation of darkness. This silence makes darkness have many tensions both in the world order and in the life of man.²⁷ The Old Testament contrasts light and darkness in terms of their symbolic representations or product. In the creation account, darkness is in existence within the void formlessness and emptiness (Gn 1:2), which is brought to order by the creation of light. Isaiah in associating light with prosperity and darkness with disaster argues that they derive their being from God (Is 45:7). Amos on the other hand indicates that the best representation of the devastation of the day of the Lord is darkness:

Woe to you who long
for the day of the Lord! . . .
That day will be darkness, not light. . . .
Will not the day of the Lord be
darkness, not light--
pitch-dark, without a ray of
brightness? (Am 5:18-20).

This indicates that the imagery of darkness is linked

²⁶Aalen, 156.

²⁷Ibid., 157.

with punishment, wrath and dread that befalls the evil-doers. The association of darkness with evil is further described by Job when he says:

There are those who rebel against the
light,
who do not know its ways
or stay in its paths.
When daylight is gone, the murderer
rises up
and kills the poor and needy;
in the night he steals forth like a
thief.
The eye of the adulterer watches for
dusk . . .
In the dark, men break into houses,
but by day they shut themselves in;
they want nothing to do with the
light.
For all of them, deep darkness is their
morning;
they make friends with the terrors of
darkness (Jb 24:13-17).

In this context, we see that evil-doers avoid the day (light) and do their evil deeds at night. The Psalmist also echoes the same thought by saying ". . . haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land" (Ps 74:20). This is an indication that evil deeds done in darkness are opposed to righteous deeds of the light which are in keeping with the will of God. This thought is also supported by Campbell who says: "In the religious thought of the first century, everything associated with God was often conceived in terms of light, and the power of evil, and everything associated with evil, in terms of darkness."²⁸ We would also agree with Blaney who argues

²⁸Alan Richardson, ed. A Theological Wordbook of the Bible (London: SCM Press, 1957), s.v. "Light, Darkness," by J. Y. Campbell.

that the entire Bible presents light as compatible with God, while darkness symbolizes the evil forces opposed to God.²⁹ This contrast between light and darkness associates sinners and darkness in a sense that places the two in direct opposite ends with reference to man's ethical behaviour. By associating themselves with darkness, the evildoers assume they can hide from God and therefore get away with it, not knowing that darkness cannot hide one's deeds from God (Jb 34:21; Ps 139:11).³⁰ Whereas darkness seems to stand in contrast and opposition to God, it is inferior and remains under his control.³¹ This is a clear indication that in and of itself, darkness is not to be regarded as an evil force. As we have observed above, it serves as a hiding place for the wicked in their attempt to cover their sins as they avoid light which exposes and convicts them of their

²⁹Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas, eds. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), s.v. "Light," by H. J. S. Blaney. The fact that aspects related to darkness are opposed to God does not imply that its source is other than God himself. It indicates the freedom with which Yahweh treats his own creation, even when it is opposed to his will.

³⁰Aalen, 162.

³¹Ibid., 157. He observes that the inferiority of darkness to light is shown in such ways like ". . . the association of light and life, of darkness and the underworld, of darkness and evil men; in the figurative use of light in the sense of success and salvation and darkness in the sense of failure and destruction; in the idea that darkness is a potential power of chaos; and finally in the expectation that darkness will be eliminated in the eschatological state of salvation."

wickedness.

Darkness and God's Hiddenness

Although the imagery of darkness is associated with evil, we should point out its use as a metaphor of God's presence in his hiddenness.³² In the giving of the Decalogue at Sinai, this thought is clearly seen. The people are afraid to approach the presence of God and send Moses to stand in their behalf. The author points out here that, "the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was" (Ex 20:21). On this observation, it can be argued that the metaphor of darkness is used with respect to the hiddenness of God. This hiddenness encompasses God's attribute of holiness and inapproachability which distinguishes him from sinful creatures. The fear of the Israelites to approach the mountain of God's presence was by and large contributed by their sinfulness. We can therefore conclude that this metaphor aids our appreciation of God as holy, hidden in his otherness and as a separate far off God.³³ A God who in his sovereignty uses his creation to reveal his will and plan for mankind in various ways. God who is light hates the works of evil done in darkness. As a holy God, he hides in thick darkness lest his wrath consume mankind. With

³²Frank G. Carver, "The Quest for the Holy: The Darkness of God," Wesleyan Theological Journal 23 (1988): 8.

³³Ibid., 19.

this brief overview of the distinction between light and the luminaries as well as light and darkness, we now focus our attention to the symbolic use of light.

The Symbolic Use of Light

The use of the imagery of light apart from the luminaries is more prominent in the Old Testament. The basic concept of this imagery is embedded within the creation story of Genesis 1:3 (cf Is 45:7), where God creates light by His creative word. This act clearly indicates that Yahweh himself is not light but the one who brings it into being, the one who causes it to shine. We can therefore argue strongly that light did not come into being in and of itself, but is a product of God's creative act, it derives its existence from the creator God.³⁴

Metaphorical References of God as Light

Even with this distinction between light and God, we observe several Old Testament passages where God is metaphorically compared with light. The Psalmist says, "The Lord is my light and my Salvation . . ." (Ps 27:1). In this context, the psalmist uses a metaphor to compare God with light and salvation. He uses light and salvation as representations of Yahweh to indicate the confidence that he has in the Lord. In spite of the apparent dangers and risks that encounter him, the Lord will enlighten him and save him from any apparent danger.

³⁴Conzelmann, 319.

The Lord illuminates him and he has no fear of any evil (darkness) that may be facing him as he observes, "whom shall I fear?" Yahweh is his salvation, the only source of his redemption.³⁵ The metaphor of light "implies a force that automatically dispels darkness . . . thus the Psalmist is affirming that even in the darkness of the terrible threat of war, he has no fear for God is the light that can dispel such darkness."³⁶ By this metaphor, the Psalmist (David) acknowledges the assurance of God's presence even in the face of his enemies that he does not fear or hide from them. His life is secure and he can therefore rejoice with the understanding that his enemies pose no harm to his life. The thought of protection is also found in Psalm 18 where David, as he rejoices over the Lord's deliverance from all his enemies says, "You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light" (Ps 18:28). In this context, the Psalmist is focusing on God's work of prospering him. As Anderson points out: Light is usually a symbol of life

³⁵A. A. Anderson, The Book of Psalms, New Century Bible Commentary (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 1:220. He notes that "Yahweh had manifested himself to his people through the great historical events of deliverance, but his saving activity is not an end. He is still a saviour of his people, and the deliverer of the individual in particular." On the same note, Craigie points out that this statement is an expression of the Psalmist's confidence that dispels fear, "regardless of the dimension of the threat" (Peter C. Craigie, Psalms 1-50, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 231).

³⁶Craigie, 232. On the metaphor of God as salvation (victory or deliverance) he observes that "the metaphorical language emphasizes God's ability to give victory, regardless of the military odds against success."

and prosperity while darkness represents disaster and death.³⁷ This thought follows 2 Samuel 22:29 where "the writer regards Yahweh as the source of light (or life) who has lightened his servant's darkness and has brought him back to the fullness of life (cf. Jb 18:5.; Pr 13:9; 20:20; 24:20)."³⁸ The writer uses the symbol of light in this case to indicate the way by which the Lord has graciously bestowed him with the blessing of life and prosperity while he was on the verge of death and misery. David sings to the Lord and says ". . . You save the humble . . . you are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop . . ." (2 Sm 22:21-30). In this context, we note that a lamp is used metaphorically to represent the source that illuminates David's life.

The metaphor of God as light is not only directed to an individual but to the nation of Israel as well. Isaiah points out that, "The light of Israel will become a fire, their holy one a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briers" (Is 10:17). In this context, we observe that the Lord as the protector of Israel is metaphorically referred to as a light which will become a consuming fire burning the enemies of God's people, the Assyrians, in his wrath. This metaphorical comparison is not only applied to God but to the Messiah as well. This is more evident in

³⁷Anderson, Psalms, 162

³⁸Ibid.

Isaiah's prophecies where the Messiah is described as a great light shining in the land of deep darkness (Is 9:1,2). He is a light to the nations as reflected in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6.³⁹ Since these passages will be dealt with in depth later on, we shall not analyze them now. However, the figurative use of the imagery of light employed here is central to our thesis and a brief mention is in order.

Light as a Figure of Salvation

The imagery of light used with reference to the Messiah in the Old Testament and later carried on in the New Testament focuses on the figure of salvation. The use of the term salvation in this paper connotes both spiritual and physical aspects of release or freedom from distress and or disorder. It involves the entire created order in which God is involved in establishing his purpose and will. It is "a dynamic force bringing emotional and physical well-being."⁴⁰ Light as salvation designates the bringing about of happiness or good days.⁴¹ This designates the Messiah's agency of bringing blessings and prosperity to those who are in deprivation.

³⁹Wolf, "אור," 26. This is one of the central use of the imagery of light in the Old Testament. It is closely linked to bringing salvation to the lost. It therefore forms the basic focus of our discussion in this paper.

⁴⁰Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago: Moody, 1980), s.v. "אור," by John E. Hartley.

⁴¹Piper, "Light, Light and Darkness," 131.

As pointed out earlier, this imagery of light as a figure of salvation can be traced, by implication, to the creation of light in Genesis. We observe that before the creation of light the heavens and the earth were characterized by darkness (Gn 1:1-2). With the creation of light, the universe experienced a state of order.⁴²

Central to the plan of God and his dealings with mankind is the bringing of salvation. The giving of this salvation is metaphorically referred to as giving light. In essence, "those to whom light is given are those to whom deliverance and healing are given."⁴³ The Prophet Micah employs this imagery of light as a figure of salvation when he foretells the well-being of Israel after going through a state of terrible misery. He says:

. . . Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath until he pleads my case and establishes my light. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness (Mi 7:8-9).

We note here that the prophet describes the forgiveness of his sin and consequential attaining of salvation (righteousness) as being in the light as opposed to being in the state of sin (darkness). This same thought is expressed by Isaiah when he says: "Then your light will

⁴²Blaney, "Light," 932. The contrast made by the author of Genesis between darkness and light and the functions of each as pointed out above necessitates us to relate the creation of light as an aspect that brings salvation.

⁴³Achtemeier, "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World," 441.

break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you . . ." (Is 58:8). The salvation of Zion is also described as light when Isaiah calls upon it saying, "Arise, Shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you . . . Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Is 60:1-3).

Ezra also applies the same imagery by describing the salvation of God for his people in exile which enables them to have a remnant. He says, ". . . God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage" (Ez 9:8). In view of these, uses of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation, we can argue that it encompasses virtually all the other uses of the imagery of light in the Old Testament and the purpose of the Bible as a whole. The Bible portrays God as seeking to bring the human race into terms with his intended purposes and will. Rebellion which results in distress dominates the human life. However, God is seen as moving out establishing just relationships (society) among men and between himself and men. This is aimed at bringing man into a proper standing before a just God and to lead a life that portrays the knowledge and obedience of God's law and precepts. The various covenants that God establishes with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and ultimately the New Covenant which is the culmination of his provision or grace in Christ all point to the salvation of God. It is central, not only to the purpose

of God in creation but also as it relates to man and his identification with a self-revealing God. Thus, the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is quite central to the Old Testament presentation and plan of salvation.

We should note that, this light or salvation is given to the repentant, those who turn to Yahweh. The Psalmist says, "Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart" (Ps 97:11). This thought is also reiterated in Psalm 112:4: "Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man." In this regard, Achtemeier says, light is "limited as a gift to the faithful - those who live in fellowship with Yahweh."⁴⁴ The experience of the Israelites in Egypt and their consequential release from bondage is a clear example. God sent thick darkness in all the land of Egypt while the Israelites had light (Ex 10:21-23). This is an indication that God saved the Israelites from his wrath which burned against the Egyptians for three days. This text will be dealt with further later on. As the Israelites made their journey to the promised land, the Lord provided light to guide them by night (Ex 13:21-22). This pillar provided light by which the Israelites were guided for forty years, as they walked to their freedom from Egyptian bondage.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Ibid., 442.

⁴⁵In this respect, Aalen, 161 notes that "walking in the light can become a comprehensive goal for human existence. This symbol was sometimes transferred to the

The Psalmist also points to the guiding function of God's light when he says, "Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell" (Ps 43:3).

Substitutes of the Metaphorical Use of Light

The Old Testament also substitutes the imagery of light with other objects. One of these is the sun which is used as a symbol of well-being and salvation.⁴⁶ The Prophet Malachi, in his anticipation of the coming of the Messiah says: "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Ma 4:2). The lamp is also another object that is used figuratively. In Proverbs 24:20, the author says, "For the evil man has no future hope and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out," a thought that is also expressed in Proverbs 13:9; Job 18:5-6 and 21:17. The lamp as a source of light is alluded to by Job when he says, ". . . when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness" (Jb 29:3). The word or law of the Lord is also figuratively used as a lamp and light. The Psalmist makes use of this figure by saying, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"

people, as in the case of the wilderness wanderings, when Israel was led by the light of the pillar of fire (Ex 3:21; Ps 78:14; 105:39; Is 42:16; 58:8; Ne 9:12,19)." The aspect of light as a figure of salvation in the events of the exodus will be expounded later as we examine a few selected passages on this concept.

⁴⁶Aalen, 160.

(Ps 119:105). The writer of the book of Proverbs in giving guidance to his son says, ". . . these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light . . ." (Pr 6:23). Those who keep the law and commands of God to guide them will walk in the light because, the law of God is a guide for man "without which man gropes in darkness."⁴⁷ This aspect of light and law is further alluded to by Piper who argues that,

According to the dynamic realism of the Old Testament, the light of truth and law operate upon man both by imparting knowledge and by guiding him. As a result, the reciprocal relationship between light and man, the recipient of light becomes light himself.⁴⁸

As a result of being enlightened or saved, man becomes a conveyer of salvation by reflecting that light to others.

Effects of Light On Its Recipients

Having received the light and walking in that light entails character transformation. This implies that man reflects the character of God in his righteousness. The last words of David clearly verify this idea when he says, ". . . when one rules over men in righteousness,

⁴⁷Ibid, 162. Aalen argues that the idea of the law or of wisdom being a guide which gives light is very close to the motif of walking in the light. Without this light on the way, man gropes in the darkness.

⁴⁸Piper, 131. He argues that because of the effect of this light on man, "He shines both outwardly (Ps 34:5; Ec 8:1) and inwardly, having been made wise by God's light (Pr 4:18; 20:27; Ec 2:13-14; Dn 5:11). Thus faithful Israel is to become a light for the Gentiles (Is 49:6; 60:3,5; 62:1)."

when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain . . ." (2 Sm 23:3-4). Being light entails administration of light in his rule. It can therefore be argued that "the peculiar character of the Old Testament . . . lies in the fact that the wholesome effects of light are contingent on righteousness."⁴⁹ This aspect of justice and righteousness is further related to the task of the Messiah (Is 42:3-7).⁵⁰ The one who walks in the light should not only be right in personal character but also in deeds.⁵¹

As we have already noted above, the imagery of light is central to the purpose and plan of God for man's salvation. In light, God manifests his work and his nature. God uses light because he dwells in it as we see in Psalm 104:2: "He wraps himself with light as in a garment. . . ." This relation of light and God "explains the eschatological hope that eventually the rhythm of

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Aalen, 63. The idea implied here has to do with the servant causing justice to appear to all the nations - thus bringing light or making manifest (Jb 12:22; 28:11; Mc 7:9; Zp 3:5). The central passage where the servant brings justice with a direct emphasis on salvation in Isaiah 42 and 49 will be studied in detail below.

⁵¹Ibid. He points out that "the figure of walking or of the way originated in Old Testament thought from the conviction that the crucial point in life does not lie in theoretical observations but in practical living. [thus] to walk in God's light is to live according to his instructions (Is 2:5) . . . [and therefore] the light which God gives represents his protecting and preserving guidance (Ps 43:3; Pr 4:18; Jb 22:28; 29:2; Is 9:1,2; 42:16."

darkness and light will give way to an eternal day, when God will be his people's light."⁵² This notion is reflected in several Old Testament passages (Is 30:36; 60:19-22; Hs 6:3; Ze 14:7; Ec 12:2). We therefore note here that the use of the imagery of light in the Old Testament ends with an emphasis of God becoming the light of man. This is not just in a metaphysical sense, but much more so in the sense that He will be their salvation. We can conclude here by saying that the use and significance of the imagery of light in general is an important beginning point in understanding specific passages that deal with the imagery of light as a figure of salvation.

We have seen that the imagery of light is rooted in the person of God, his creative work, and the manifestation of his plan and purpose for mankind. Central to God's purpose is salvation for mankind. With this brief overview, we now turn to an examination of selected passages that deal with the imagery of light as a figure of salvation.

An Exegesis of Selected Old Testament Passages

As we have already observed above, the Old Testament employs various usages of the imagery of light. Since this imagery is diverse and broad, we shall not consider it as a whole in depth. As we have indicated in chapter one, our main focus is centred on the imagery of

⁵²Piper, 131.

light as a figure of salvation. We have pointed to some of the passages in which light is used as a figure of salvation. Our exegetical emphasis will be focused on Genesis 1:3-5, Exodus 10:21-23; 13:21-22, and Isaiah 9:1,2; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4. Our goal in considering the selected passages exegetically is to relate their relevance in elucidating John's use of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation in John 8:12. As we consider these passages we need to point out in passing that the figure of salvation is implicit and the conclusions drawn will be derived from the exegetical analysis. One of the central texts that we shall consider is the creation account in Genesis 1:3-5. We should note here that the use of light in this context is not a figure of salvation. The function of this light in illuminating the pre-existent darkness and the ordering of creation that follows is, however, linked to the concept of salvation. This passage will also help us make the relevant distinction between the created light and Jesus, the light of the world and agent of creation.

The Creation of Light (Gen. 1:3-5)

And God said, "let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day", and the darkness He called "night". And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day.

This passage presents us with the first creative act of God which begins a series of six days of creation. Central to this text is the creative word or decree of

God, "And He said" (וַיֹּאמֶר). The speaker is God (אֱלֹהִים), but the context does not indicate to whom He speaks since we are not introduced to any other existing being.⁵³ The words that He uttered are more significant to our thesis. He said, "let there be light" (יְהִי אֵר) and there was. Thus light was called into existence. The pattern followed in each of the other days of creation of God saying "let there be" indicates to us the greatness of God's spoken word in expressing His divine will.⁵⁴ The creation of this light should be understood in a literal and physical sense where it illuminates the pre-existent darkness. Gibson in support of this view argues that the Hebrews should have first of all understood God's words, "let there be light" in a literal sense because of their conception of the physical world.⁵⁵ In response to God's creative word, light came into being. This light () does not emanate from any pre-existent entity but is made or called into being by God and illuminates the darkness

⁵³Diverse views have been expressed as to whether or not this was the first act of the creation of God. Since our focus is not on the order of creation, we shall not venture into solving the problem here. However, worth observing is the fact that creation is as a result of God's purposive will. To those who interpret light as being the first act of creation, וַיֹּאמֶר must be understood as "He said to Himself" for nothing else yet existed for Him to address.

⁵⁴George Herbert Livingstone, Genesis, Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas: Beacon Hill, 1969), 32.

⁵⁵John C. L. Gibson, Genesis, Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1981; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 1:43.

that was over the surface of the deep (v 2).

This creation of light which is consequently named day⁵⁶ clearly marks the beginning of the entire work of creation, thus "the temporal order coming before the creation of the world of space."⁵⁷ It was during the period of time when there was light (day) that God performed His creative acts. On this basis we may deduce that the order that God gave creation during the day was made possible because of the creation of light. In this context then we can understand light here as bringing order in an orderless state of existence, characterized by darkness, ". . . darkness was over the surface of the deep . . ." (v 2). This thought is also supported by Dietrich Bonhoeffer who argues that the creation of light must bring about form in the dark formless deep.⁵⁸ This

⁵⁶Donald E. Gowan, From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 22. He observes that "naming is no insignificant thing for it indicates knowledge of the thing named and control over it. So God affirms His sovereignty over both light and darkness by giving them names, day and night."

⁵⁷Clause Westermann, Genesis 1-11: A Commentary, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 112. He argues that "the creation of light is more than just the condition of all order in the cosmological sense; it makes the order possible and determines it; that the intention is providing the framework of the seven days and in directing this order from its beginning, the creation of light to its goal."

⁵⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3 (New York: SCM, 1979), 24. He points out that, "As the formless night becomes form by the light of morning, as the light creates and unveils form, so that primeval light had to order the chaos, create and unveil form. . . . the freeing of the

is the functional aspect of light that we shall refer back to when we consider Jesus' statement as being the light of the world.

Worth noting in this creation account is the fact that God called light into being or existence apart from the luminaries. It is not until the fourth day that the sun, moon, and stars are created (Gn 1:14). Though not implicitly stated, we can deduce here that the finality and completeness of the first day of creation in which light was the prime aspect of creation was purposeful, just as all the other aspects of creation were not accidental. The fact that there was no sun, from which light emanated, indicates the sovereignty of the creator in His ability to impart light that He holds in His hands without the sun and the moon.⁵⁹ Since this account presents the only occurrence of physical light apart from the luminaries in the Old Testament, its significance may go beyond mere illumination. It was light that "was indeed special and was reserved."⁶⁰ Helmut Thielicke

submissive, formless deep for its own being by means of the light is the reference to the light that shines in the darkness. The light awakens the darkness to its own being . . . without the light we would not be, for without light things cannot be 'over against' each other because there is no form. . . ."

⁵⁹John Calvin, Genesis, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1554; reprint, Edinburg: Banner of Truth, 1982), 76.

⁶⁰Meier Zlotowitz, trans., Bereishis: Genesis a New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources (Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, 1986), 40. He observes that, "the emanations

observes that, "when the ancient writer placed the creation of light before the creation of the sun and moon, he must have intended to say something quite specific, which he could not say in any other way."⁶¹ This indicates that light comes from God alone who brings it into being and does not depend upon any planet or force of nature.⁶² Consequently then the luminaries derive their functional task of illumination from God (Gn 1:14-18). Central to this task is darkness, which dominated the pre-creation of light.

As we noted above, darkness is the antithesis of light which aids our understanding of the function of light. The creative product of the first day, "light" receives the approval of God: "God saw that the light was good, and He separated it from the darkness" (v 4). This contrast entails a diverse contrast and apparent conflict. It marks the first act of ordering that God gives creation. This ordering implies a pre-existent disorder that required the hand of the creator to bring it under control.⁶³ This division or separation also

of its potentials provided the illumination that was embodied in the luminaries of the fourth day."

⁶¹Helmut Thielicke, How the World Begun: Man in the First Chapters of the Bible, trans. John W. Doberstein (Pennsylvania: Muhlenberg, 1961), 32.

⁶²Ibid., 33.

⁶³Gowan observes that darkness, which was "one of the symbols of formlessness, disorder, and the threat to life . . . was thus brought under control on the first day. It

brings about "the basic unit of time", the day, which in itself was God's act of creation and quite significant to the Jews.

As we pointed out above, darkness is generally presented in a negative way and associated with evil, Satan, and in opposition to God. Since the creation of light brings an end to the domination of darkness, it can be argued that this light brings about order and goodness, therefore can be referred to as bringing salvation. It is this light of creation that God uses as He forms creation. As we have observed above, light was the first creation of God. Its being, brought about order in the pre-existent order dominated by darkness. It is this light that God called "day" (יָמִים)⁶⁴ and in each of the successive days created and formed the universe. Light therefore allowed for the creation to be ordered.

The use of light as a figure of salvation is not only seen in the creation account but also in God's dealings with His people. A good example can be seen in the exodus account in which God uses light in various ways as He rescued them from the oppressive hand of the Egyptians. We now turn to the use of light in the exodus

was not destroyed nor was it transformed . . . light stands over against it, and the domain of darkness is restricted" (p. 22).

⁶⁴Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1976), 55-56.

account.

Light in the Exodus Account

The Exodus account is generally considered to be a salvation account in which God, after seeing the affliction of Israelites under the oppression of Egyptians (Ex 3:7), sends Moses with a categorical demand saying, "let My people go" (Ex 5:1; 7:14; 8:1,20; 9:1; 10:3). His covenantal relationship with this nation and His determination for their salvation or freedom is seen in the Exodus events that led to the final release of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.⁶⁵ Because Pharaoh refused to yield to Yahweh's demands, he brought about untold punishment to the entire land and people of Egypt in the plagues that ensued. The plagues clearly indicated that Yahweh was sovereign and demanded fear and obedience not only from Pharaoh and the Egyptians but also from Israel as well.⁶⁶ Among the ten plagues is the plague of darkness which covers the land of Egyptians for three days while the Israelites had light. After the release from bondage, the Lord gave His people guidance through the wilderness. He provided a pillar of cloud to guide them by day and a pillar of fire to give them light

⁶⁵Walter C. Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 103. Kaiser points out that the purpose for Israel's release from servitude to Pharaoh was to go and serve the Lord. Pharaoh however was adamant to let Israel go bringing about the wrath of God upon him, his people, and their lands and goods.

⁶⁶Ibid.

by night. These two incidents in which the Lord provided light to the Israelites are critical to our thesis as they occur within the context of Yahweh saving His people, Israel. It is therefore necessary that we now turn to an exegetical analysis of this plague, where light was provided for Israel while all Egypt was in darkness.

The Plague of Darkness (Ex 10:21-23)

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt--darkness that can be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

This is the plague that the Lord through His servant Moses brought upon the Egyptians. Like the other plagues, it was aimed at punishing the Egyptians and Pharaoh in particular in order to compel him to release the Israelites. This plague, like the third plague and the sixth plague, came upon Pharaoh without warning. By the Lord's command, Moses stretched out his hand to the sky, as he did in the plague of hail (Ex 9:22) and the plague of locusts (Ex 10:12), and initiated a miraculous punishment upon Egypt. This plague of darkness is therefore a supernatural act of Yahweh. God tells Moses to "Stretch out your hand" (שָׁרַף אֶת-יָדְךָ אֶל-הַשָּׁמַיִם) as he does in 9:22-23 and 10:12-13. This act is to bring about "darkness that can be felt" all over the land of Egypt. The Lord in this context is bringing about punishment

(darkness) to the Egyptians through the hand of Moses.

The nature and source of this darkness has brought about various discussions among biblical scholars.⁶⁷ A close observation of the plagues warrants to reject any view that denies the hand of God in this ninth plague. As Durham points out, "this is not a khamsin, even of such extraordinary dimension and effect . . . nor is there any basis in the narrative for describing what occurs here as an eclipse of the sun."⁶⁸

As a punishment from God against the Egyptians, this plague "struck at the foundation of Egyptian theology."⁶⁹ This is so because the Egyptians held the

⁶⁷Most scholars, in trying to deny the supernatural act of God, have given various explanations as to the means by which this was accomplished. As John J. Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in the Book of Exodus (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971), 125 (page reference is to reprint edition), observes, "the usual approach is to assume that the land of Egypt was struck with a devastating sandstorm known as the khamsin." Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus JI'X'U: The Traditional Hebrew Text With the New JPS Translation, The JPS Torah Commentary (Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 50, also argues that "this affliction can be explained in terms of the khamsin (hot, dry, withering wind). This scorching sirocco wind blows in each spring from saharan Africa or from Arabia, enveloping the land in thick sand and dust. It may often persist for several days and blacken the sky in its wake."

⁶⁸Durham, Exodus, 141. He argues that "this is unquestionably a supernatural darkness, thus all the more terrible and frightening."

⁶⁹Maxie D. Dunnam, Exodus, The Communicator's Commentary, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (n.p.: Word Inc., 1987), 126.

sun as their supreme god whose worship "was persuasive in the official palace ritual. The sun's diurnal rising was conceived to be a triumph over the demon Apophis, the embodiment of darkness, who struggled daily to vanquish him."⁷⁰ Just as the other plagues were aimed at showing the sovereignty of Yahweh over creation, this one shows His sovereignty over the sun and was a direct insult against Pharaoh.⁷¹ As Ellison observes:

The plague had started with a blow at the prestige of the Nile, one of Egypt's two leading deities. Now it was the other, the sun which was shown to be powerless to withstand the power of Yahweh and His representatives. It was also the crowning insult for Pharaoh, who was held to be in some sense the incarnation of Amun-Ra, the sun god.⁷²

As some scholars have observed, this plague would have carried a powerful symbolic message for the Egyptians.⁷³

The intensity of this darkness is shown by the fact that it was "darkness that can be felt" or "touched" (אֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁׁוּ). In this case darkness is the subject of the Hiphil imperfect verb (אֲדָמָה).⁷⁴ As observed by Durham, it implies that "darkness will cause groping", in

⁷⁰Sarna, Exodus, 51.

⁷¹H. L. Ellison, Exodus, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 58.

⁷²Elison, 58.

⁷³The plague of darkness therefore would have had a devastating psychological impact. The impotence of the Egyptians supreme god is exposed, thus foreboding imminent doom. This plague "was yet another insult to Egypt's religion and culture" Ronald F. Youngblood, Exodus (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 56-57

⁷⁴Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1907 ed. s.v. "אֲדָמָה."

other words, the thickness of this darkness will be so intense that people will feel their way about.⁷⁵ It was darkness of calamity in which the feminine noun קִלְקָלָה means calamity. In the sense that קִלְקָלָה is in construct with קִלְקָלָה , it implies that the effect of this supernatural darkness upon the Egyptian's was calamity.⁷⁶ The implication here is that the effect of this darkness was so intense that no one could counteract it.⁷⁷ The use of this term is parallel to that of Amos 5:20, with reference to the day of the Lord which will be pitch dark, along with Joel 2:2 and Zephaniah 1:15.⁷⁸ This darkness therefore resembles the "unnatural and fearsome darkness of the day of Yahweh."⁷⁹ It was thick to the extent that "no one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days, making business among the Egyptians impossible.⁸⁰ It was a mighty act that adversely affected the Egyptians. Durham observes that this "terrible darkness, despite the fact that it causes no death and is of prescribed duration is presented as the

⁷⁵Durham, 141.

⁷⁶Ibid., 139. He observes that quite literally, this is the darkness of a supernatural gloom or danger." It is worth noting here that the NIV translates it as "total darkness" by taking קִלְקָלָה to mean "total."

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1907 ed. s.v. " קִלְקָלָה ."

⁷⁹Leo G. Cox, Exodus, Beacon Bible Commentary in Ten Volumes, (Kansas: Beacon Hill, 1969), 205-6.

⁸⁰Durham, 141.

most fearful and ominous of the mighty acts in the sequence to this point."⁸¹ In view of the fact that all the Israelites had light at their places, the supernatural source of the darkness is more evident. The term בְּיָמֵיהֶם (in their dwellings), refers to the "dwelling-place of people, tribe etc, [which] often [implies] territory, district . . . city."⁸² The Lord therefore saved the Israelites from this terrible calamity. By allowing them to have this natural light the Lord clearly portrays His distinct relationship with them. He was working out salvation for Israel in punishing the Egyptians.⁸³ Darkness in this context then becomes a symbol of God's wrath and punishment for the Egyptians in contrast to the light that persisted among the Israelites.

We have seen that the Lord, through Moses, brought about a plague of total darkness to the Egyptians. This stood in contrast to the provision of light for the Israelites, who were saved from the lack of light within their premises. This plague of darkness is one of the

⁸¹Ibid., 140-41.

⁸²Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1907 ed. s.v. " בְּיָמֵיהֶם ."

⁸³Durham, 143. Durham argues that "the point of this mighty act is made in part by . . . the altogether supernatural aspect of the eerie darkness that cannot be dispelled yet does not somehow afflict the sons of Israel in their dwelling places. . . . Insufficient emphasis has been placed . . . upon the darkness as entirely unnatural and related to the move of Yahweh toward a settlement of the issue of the freedom of the Israelites in the climactic act of the proof of this presence in Egypt."

incidents in the exodus where the use of literal light is indicative of Israel's exemption from God's wrath that befell the Egyptian's. As has been observed above, the literal darkness that struck the Egyptian's and brought calamity for three days was Yahweh's hand of wrath and punishment. In providing light for the Israelites, the Lord saved them from his wrath as they anticipated their ultimate release (salvation) from Egyptian bondage. This provision of light forms the basis behind the figurative usage in other passages of Scripture. The other incidence in exodus where light is used as a figure of salvation is the provision of guiding light for the Israelites in their journey to the promised land.

Light for the Exodus Journey (Ex 13:21-22)

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Having rescued His people from Egyptian bondage, the Lord did not abandon them before seeing them realize their salvation. The journey to the promised land posed innumerable threats that would have easily turned away the Israelites from reaching their destination. We see here once again the Lord using the figure of light to bring about salvation for His people. The emphasis given in this passage focuses on God's constant presence in leading and guiding them. His presence takes the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

In this guidance, the Israelites were able to see their way clearly. The provision of the pillar of fire by night was mainly, ". . . to give them light." Worth noting here is the fact that the Lord gave His own guiding light which emanated from the theophanic fire.⁸⁴ This pillar of fire, "picks up the symbolism, . . . [connected] with the burning bush, of God's presence marked by fire (and also by cloud or smoke . . .)."⁸⁵ This is one of the major themes in the exodus account, that gives emphasis on the active participation of God in the affairs of Israel. It is indicative of the supernatural power of God as He moves out to bring salvation to His people.⁸⁶ We can therefore argue that the light that we see in this context is supernatural light, true light that is symbolic of the salvation of God. In as much as the Israelites were free, they needed guidance. They would not face the dangers of the journey

⁸⁴Ibid., 182.

⁸⁵Lester Meyer, The Message of Exodus (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 90. Meyer also observes that the presence of the Lord in several instances is represented by fire, as in the account of Moses and the burning bush (Ex 3), or the call of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6.

⁸⁶Sarna, 70. Sarna observes that, "a theme that recurs in the narratives of the wilderness wanderings is that God manifested His active, dynamic presence throughout. This is conceptualized in accordance with the idea that the God of the Hebrew Bible is a being who transcends the limits of time and space, and thus surpasses human imagining. Hence God's indwelling presence in the world is symbolized, however inadequately, by the mysterious, intangible incorporeal elements of fire and cloud . . . to escort and guide the people through the untamed wilderness."

without Yahweh guiding them (Ex 13:17-18). The light that He provides is indicative of the salvation which He is according them. It is guidance toward their total release.⁸⁷ It is worth noting that the Lord did not command the moon to illuminate the path. This is indicative of the presence of a loving, caring father, which reminded the Israelites of their special relationship with Him. The fact that "neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people" shows the concern with which Yahweh guided them.

We have observed that the use of light in the exodus account is significant within the whole program of salvation for Israel from Egyptian bondage. First we have seen how the Lord provided light for the Israelites and saved them from the calamity that befell Egypt in the plague of darkness which was indicative of His wrath. Secondly we have seen how the Lord provided light as they journeyed toward the promised land. With this brief analysis we now turn to the use of light as a figure of salvation in Isaiah.

⁸⁷Durham, Exodus, 187. Durham points out that the guidance offered by Yahweh in this section is "not toward Sinai or any other place of desert rendezvous but toward a final great moment of victory over Pharaoh, toward the greatest of all the self-proving mighty acts. . . . It is the guidance toward the place of Yahweh's great giving of Himself to all Israel."

Light in Isaiah

The imagery of light as used by Isaiah finds its placement within the wider context of the book. It is therefore essential to have a brief overview of the book.⁸⁸ Isaiah in a broad and general way presents God's demands and expectations of servanthood. The book is concerned with God calling his people, "to lay down their self exaltation and be depended upon him, to become evidence of his character and deliverance in order that the whole world might know him as he is and thus be delivered from their own destruction."⁸⁹

The first thirty nine chapters of Isaiah deal with judgement against Israel (1-5)⁹⁰ and the nations (6-39) mingled with promises of deliverance and blessing for the faithful. Chapters 40-66 focus mainly on the comfort that God promises his people. Israel is promised deliverance and restoration (40-48) through the servant's

⁸⁸Although the issue of authorship and the unity of Isaiah is not central in this thesis, we do agree with Oswalt that ". . . The essential content of the book has come to us through one human author, Isaiah the son of Amoz. It is he who received the revelations from God and who directed the shaping of the book" (John N. Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah 1-39, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament edited by R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1986], 25).

⁸⁹Ibid. He argues that "the overarching theme of the book of Isaiah is servanthood." Although this is explicit in chapters 40-55, "it is implicit in all the others and forms the thread which binds the book together."

⁹⁰Ibid. Oswalt points out that the problem with Israel is pride and arrogance, thus, "sinful Israel is anything but the servant of God." The nations, on the other hand, are castigated for their harsh treatment (oppression) of Israel.

ministry (49-57). The hope of God's people is based on the promise of their everlasting deliverance, while the wicked will go to eternal punishment (58-66). This is the general background in which Isaiah presents the imagery of light. The imagery of light is prominent in Isaiah and carries with it diverse implications in different contexts as we shall see below. We should note here that Isaiah uses light (אור) a total of 27 times in its various implications.⁹¹

The imagery of light in Isaiah is used in diverse ways in the spectrum of God's dealings with mankind.⁹² This use involves various features. His use of this imagery is directly linked to the work of Yahweh in his dealings with his people. Isaiah's presentation of light is linked directly with the knowledge and fear of Yahweh: ". . . Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord . . ." (Is 50:10). The imagery of light is related with the obedience of Yahweh's commands and the doing of his will. It is by virtue of identification with him that Isaiah calls upon his audience to walk in the light: "Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Is 2:5 cf. 50:10). In this context, light is symbolically used as a

⁹¹Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, The Vocabulary of the Old Testament, (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1992), 270.

⁹²Peter D. Miscall, "Isaiah the Labyrinth of Images," Semeia 54 (1991): 106. Miscall points out that "tracing light leads us into the labyrinth of Isaiah . . . and its minor corridors, terms and images."

figure of God's guidance and illumination which entails living in obedience to Yahweh's precepts. Conversely, those who disobey the law of God, the evildoers are described by Isaiah as exchanging light for darkness: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Is 5:20). In this case darkness is symbolic of evil and disobedience of God's law. Those who obey the Lord, apart from walking in light, are also described as light. This is the witness aspect to which Isaiah calls upon Israel to become by portraying a lifestyle that will attract others (Gentiles) to Yahweh. They therefore become, "a light for the Gentiles." This aspect of being light to illuminate the world (those living in darkness) is a central feature in Isaiah's presentation of deliverance, comfort and restoration of God's people. It is in this context then that Isaiah, in using light symbolically, promises deliverance to those who are oppressed (Is 9:1,2) and salvation (a right relationship with Yahweh) to those who had not put their faith in Him (Is 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). Light therefore becomes an important symbol in Isaiah's presentation of Yahweh and his dealings with his people.

In a figurative sense light becomes the centre of attraction for the nations of the earth: ". . . nations will come to your light . . ." (Is 60:3). It also becomes an object of destruction for the evildoers. In

this regard, Isaiah presents it as a consuming fire: "The light of Israel will become a fire, their holy one a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briers" (Is 10:17). In as much as the Lord Himself is the light (Is 60:19,20), the servant of Yahweh, in seeking to uphold justice and righteousness becomes light (Is 42:6; 49:6). Themes related to Israel's release from captivity and salvation are viewed in light of this imagery. Those who are oppressed are walking in darkness and are in need of light and their release from bondage implies seeing the light (Is 8:20; 9:2; 10:17). The imagery of light as used by Isaiah is closely linked with an individual's walk and behaviour in relationship to the Lord and His word. Light is also linked, in a literal sense, with the luminaries (Is 8:20; 13:10; 60:19).

The use of this imagery goes hand in hand with its antithesis, the imagery of darkness (Is 10:17; 42:24; 43:1,2; 47:14; 66:15,16). The evil and disobedient, who fail to follow the precepts of the Lord are walking in deep darkness. The imagery of darkness is also related with the devastating effect of the day of the Lord upon the wicked (Is 13:10).⁹³ In this regard, Isaiah's use of light reflects his understanding of how God relates with the human race. The imagery of light for Isaiah, as we

⁹³Ibid., 112. Miscall argues that "the horrific day of the Lord which Isaiah envisions . . . is marked by wrath and destruction that is cosmic in scope."

have seen encompasses both physical and spiritual deliverance or salvation that Yahweh promises the oppressed. It also points to those who are witnesses of his goodness to others. Consequently then, light is an aspect of creation, it is a symbol of God in His just and righteous dealings with humankind and also an image or symbol of those who reflect God's character. Any aspect opposed to the light is presented as being darkness.

Even with the wide scope of the imagery of light, it is worth noting that the source and function of light is directly associated with God (Is 45:6,7). Our consideration of this light as a figure of salvation reflects, in a general sense, the importance with which Isaiah views it.

Since our interest in this discussion focuses on selected passages related to this theme, we shall not exhaustively consider the foregoing. The selected passages are considered to be representative of Isaiah's theology and understanding of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation. With this brief overview, we now turn to a consideration of specific passages in Isaiah.

Light to Zebulun and Naphtali (Is 9:2)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Isaiah 9:1-2 falls within the context in which Isaiah describes a state of change from darkness to light effected by the birth of a promised child whose reign

shall be marked by justice and righteousness (9:6,7). The promise and use of the imagery of light in this context can best be understood by looking at the condition of the people described by Isaiah. He says that they are "walking in darkness". The close of the eighth chapter discloses great distress that the people of Zebulun and Naphtali experience:

Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrown in utter darkness (8:21-22).

The imagery of darkness is used here to describe the utter desolation of those who are devastated.⁹⁴ They have no hope whatsoever either from upward or from the earth.⁹⁵ The historical context that produced this state of

⁹⁴R. E. Clements, Isaiah 1-39, New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 104. He points out to the contrast between the "treatment 'in the former time,' which proved disastrous and which must reflect the situation brought about in 733, with that in the latter time, which will be triumphantly glorious, but which is still in the future. It is this latter expectation . . . with the demise of the Assyrian power, these territories would both be restored to Israel and set once again under the Davidic king. . . . In this case the entire geographical historical information contained in this verse can be related to Tiglath-pileser's treatment of Israel in 733, and no difficulty arises on this score against an application to Hezekiah's ascension in 725 BC."

⁹⁵E. J. Young, The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition and Notes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1965; reprinted 1981), 1:322. Young points out that, "only light can dispel the gloom of despair and desperation, but that light is not to be seen. There is distress of soul and distress in physical circumstances, and this distress speaks out in darkness."

affairs has to do with the invasion of Assyria on Israel.⁹⁶ This state of darkness is therefore representative of total isolation and separation from the Lord. In this passage, we note that the people Isaiah is describing are in a state of change from darkness to light effected by the birth of a promised child (vv. 6-7). In His divine reign, the child establishes justice and righteousness. The context in which this passage occurs is descriptive of an "atmosphere of occult darkness" and practices which Isaiah forbids (Is 8:19).⁹⁷ These practices are also forbidden in the law (Lv. 19:31; 20:6-7; Dt 18:9-14).⁹⁸ The intensity of devastation here goes beyond the judgement or wrath of the day of the Lord described by Isaiah when he says, "in that day . . . he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds" (Is 5:30). Comparable to the state of darkness in this context is Isaiah 60:2, where

⁹⁶G. W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986), 6:73. He argues that "the Assyrian invasions would bring an acute food shortage (cf. 3:1; 7:23-25). Hunger would foster anger, which the Israelites would blame, [in part correctly], on their . . . king and . . . their God." This response by man is as a result of God hiding his face (8:17) and the binding up of the testimony and sealing of the law (8:16).

⁹⁷Ibid., 72. Grogan observes that the close connection between this section and the one that precedes it, which opens the atmosphere of occult darkness is "due to man's reaction to the hiding of God's face (vs. 17); and the law and testimony of vs. 16."

⁹⁸Ibid. Grogan observes that "the law strictly forbade necromancy and other occult practices."

he says, "See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples . . ." ⁹⁹ This reign of darkness however does not persist for, in due course, light dawns. It is to the dawning of light that our attention is focused.

Those of whom Isaiah is speaking are "the people walking in darkness." It can be deduced from the immediate context that the reference made by Isaiah here has to do with the people described in Isaiah 9:1. As Grogan argues, this verse clearly links up with the end of chapter eight.¹⁰⁰ It is evident from this context that the inhabitants of "the land of Zebulun and Naphtali", which corresponds to "Galilee of the Gentiles", who had been "humbled"¹⁰¹ in the past will now

⁹⁹The promise of new light in 60:1-2 is comparable to the dawning of light upon Zebulun and Naphtali in 9:1. Worth noting is the fact that this is an eschatological event in which the glory of the Messiah and His light upon Israel attracts the nations to Himself and the glory of Israel.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 73. Grogan points out that "the humbling of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali refers of course to the invasion and annexation of the northern parts of Israel by Tiglath-pileser III in 733-32 B.C. . . . This is made very clear when we consider the other geographical references here, for 'the way of the sea' almost certainly refers to Sharon or Philistia, while 'Galilee of the Gentiles' is probably Gilead and south east Syria."

¹⁰¹This humbling points to the oppressive state of ("walking in darkness") that they were subjected to, which not only affected them physically but also spiritually for they were unable to go down to Jerusalem for worship - for they had been subjected to Assyrian captivity as seen in II Kings 15:29; II Chron. 16:4.

come to light. In linking this experience of this territory to the invasion of Tiglath-pileser, Watts concurs with many scholars in observing that:

Whatever . . . was not seized in Tiglath-pileser's drive down the coast in 734 B. C. was taken the following year in the invasion of Naphtali. . . . The Assyrian campaign of 733 B.C. drove across the heart of its [Naphtali] territory . . . attacked its major cities, and reduced it to a province under the Assyrian governor (2 Kgs 15:29). The same campaign subdued Gilead and it, too was made an Assyrian province . . . (1 Chr 5:6).¹⁰²

It is these who were "walking in darkness", who "have seen a great light." We note here that Isaiah is using a prophetic perfect (אִשְׁרָךְ) to indicate the certainty with which he sees the fulfilment of this event.¹⁰³ The imagery of light in this context then directly points to the release or salvation that the inhabitants of this land will experience in the near future. It is a metaphor for the saving act of God that he had in place for his people with the rise of Hezekiah to the throne.¹⁰⁴ To be

¹⁰²John D. W. Watts, Isaiah 1-33, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 135.

¹⁰³Grogan, 73. He argues that "past tenses are used to speak of events that, though future, are certain because they are divinely planned and predicted through an authentic prophet of God." These prophetic perfects serve to present faith's faculty of imagination with the assurance of things hoped for." On the same note, Young points out that, "when the prophet wrote they had not yet seen the light, but its occurrence was so certain and vivid to Isaiah's mind that he described it as though it had already dawned" (Isaiah, 325).

¹⁰⁴R. E. Clements, Isaiah, 106. Clements argues that "the language of accession oracle is evidently fairly stereotyped and traditional, appropriate to a special royal occasion. The application to Hezekiah's accession can only be a matter of reasoned conjecture, and the main function of the prophecy is to show that the period of God's 'hiding

more emphatic, the prophet employs parallelism which restates "the people walking in darkness" as "those living in the land of the shadow of death",¹⁰⁵ and "have seen a great light" as "a light has dawned." By using the imagery of light dawning in this context, the notion of salvation comes to the forefront. The gloom (darkness) that has been prevalent has come to a definite end and light (salvation) has come.¹⁰⁶

This imagery of light sees its fulfilment in the reforms of King Hezekiah who "opened the doors of the temple of the Lord" (II Cr 29:3) and summoned both Israel and Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh to "come to the House of

His face' can now end, since the king whose action occasioned this wrath, Ahaz, had now passed from the scene."

¹⁰⁵"The land of the shadow of death" does not refer to a specific or particular land. However, as Alexander points out, "the more common and probable opinion is that it is a compound of and . It is not the proper name of a particular valley . . . but a poetical designation of the most profound obscurity - as dark as death - deadly darkness - with a special allusion here to the spiritual death, under whose shade the Galileans sat." (Joseph Addison Alexander, Commentary on the Prophecy of Isaiah [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978], 198).

¹⁰⁶Watts, Isaiah 1-33, 135. Watts argues that "the speaker tries to change the mood of doom and gloom that dominated the previous response (8:19-22) to Isaiah's speeches. The anguish of God's people need not be forever. History belongs to God. He can turn things around. But the speaker avoids being too specific about it. In place of the darkness of calamity the people saw the light of peace and blessedness; in place of the darkness of death, the light of life; in place of the darkness of ignorance, the light of knowledge; in place of the darkness of sin, the light of salvation. Salvation in its widest sense had shined upon these people; a complete reversal of their condition had occurred."

the Lord at Jerusalem, to celebrate the Passover to the Lord God of Israel" (II Cr 30:1). Since Ephraim and Manasseh (Zebulun and Naphtali) had been shut from the worship at the Temple, it is figurative of their dwelling in darkness, which now Hezekiah brings to an end. This points to the ministry of Hezekiah in bringing about spiritual renewal and restoration of the worship of Yahweh by Ephraim and Manasseh. This prophecy is further fulfilled in the life of Jesus at the beginning of His earthly ministry, soon after His baptism and temptation He goes to settle in Capernaum, "which is by the Sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali" (Mt 4:13).¹⁰⁷ By virtue of His preaching which effected repentance, salvation came upon them. It is in view of this understanding then that we can argue that the imagery of light in Isaiah 9:2 relates to the person of Christ in his presentation as the light of the world. This light bringing function of Christ, as we have pointed out above and shall discuss further below is indicative of salvation thus, a figure of salvation. This prophecy, therefore, has multiple fulfillment.

Isaiah not only employs the imagery of light as a figure of salvation in this context alone but also in

¹⁰⁷Significantly, Matthew sees Jesus' presence and preaching as a fulfilment of the Isaianic prophecy of light coming to these regions. He says, this was "to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "land of Zebulun and of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people living in darkness have seen great light; on those living on the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (Matt 4:13-16).

other contexts. The other usages of the imagery of light are found in passages related to the task of the Servant. These include Isaiah 42:6; 49:6 and 51:4 whose consideration we now turn to.

Light to the Gentiles

As we have pointed out above, the Servant texts of Isaiah are central to his use of the imagery of light. These passages are related to the promise made by the Lord to his people who, after being captives in a foreign land, would eventually return to their own land. To bring about a state of restoration, he would use "His Servant" who, by the enablement of the Spirit of God undertakes the task of bringing justice in a physical as well as a spiritual sense.¹⁰⁸ In these servant passages, Isaiah employs the imagery of light as a figure of salvation which the servant is and brings to the Gentiles. Central to the discussion of the servant in these passages is his identity. Different views have been expressed. Some

¹⁰⁸The servant title is applied to designate the close relationship that Yahweh has with the chosen agent. As Mackenzie points out, the background of this term in the Old Testament applies to kings and prophets. Those serving the king would apply the term to themselves as a polite form of address when in conversation with a king. "As a title which designates a peculiar relationship and not merely a polite form of self-depreciation, it designates one who has a peculiar commission from Yahweh." On the aspect of justice, Chester Wood, "Old Testament Theology Manual," 1994, 43, discusses six aspects or facets of the concept of justice or righteousness, namely: forensic, standard, conduct, retribution, distribution and fairness. The bringer of justice model in the servant passages entails various aspects or facets in which He brings justice to the oppressed.

scholars have argued for a specific individual while others regard the nation of Israel to be the servant. While our focus is not centred on who the servant is, it is worth pointing out that these passages are looking forward to a time when justice would eventually come to the oppressed (exiled). The servant is therefore the individual(s) used by the Lord to bring about people to the light of the knowledge of God by administering justice or righteousness in both physical and spiritual aspects. This task is not only directed toward Israel but also to the Gentiles and thus the servant becomes "a light to the Gentiles."

In order to clearly understand the argument of Isaiah, it is essential that we look at each of the selected passages, since they employ the imagery differently. The first text that we shall consider is Isaiah 42:6.

Light to the Gentiles (Is 42:6)

"I, the Lord, have called you in
righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles, . . ."

In this servant of the Lord passage beginning in 42:1, the Lord presents His Servant as anointed with the Spirit for the task of bringing justice to the nations. This task involves opening the eyes of the blind, freeing the captives from prison and releasing those who sit in darkness from dungeon (Is 42:7). The task therefore

entails bringing of justice fairly to the oppressed - distributive justice, and restoring them back to society. This involves physical as well as spiritual release. It is worth noting that the Servant is under the direct command and guidance of the Lord. This is clarified by Isaiah in saying: "I the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand" (v 6a). To call "in righteousness" (יְצַדִּיק) in this context as it is also in Isaiah 41:2 (cf. 45:13) is indicative of God's attribute of his sovereignty in calling his Servant. This act is right and in accordance with his purpose. The Lord also says, "I will take hold of your hand" (אֲחַזְּךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ). We note here that your hand (יָדְךָ) is used with the preposition בְּ and literally means "in the hand of you" to denote the accompaniment that the Lord accords the Servant.¹⁰⁹ The Lord also tells the Servant "and I will keep you" (אֲשׁוּרְךָ) implying that Yahweh will "Watch, Guard, [and] Keep" him.¹¹⁰ This connotes the protection that he has from the Lord. Since the Lord has already called him, He has formed him (cf. 49:5) and now promises to strengthen him. The Lord will therefore be with the Servant as he performs his task. To this effect Mackenzie says that Yahweh "has chosen the

¹⁰⁹Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1907 ed. s.v. "יָדְךָ."

¹¹⁰Ibid., s.v. "יָצַר." We should note here that commentators like Whybray argue that this verb should be taken as a form of יָצַר "Form, Make" and read with what follows. (R.N. Whybray, Isaiah 40-66, New Century Bible Commentary [London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1975], 74).

Servant and given him His Spirit in order that he may bring judgement and teaching to the nations. . . ."¹¹¹

In defining the task of the Lord's Servant, Isaiah uses metaphors by saying, "I will . . . make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles." By saying that the Servant will be made a covenant for the people (אֲשׁוּרְךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֶתְּמֹלֶת לְעַמִּים), Isaiah implies that the task of the Servant is Yahweh's task. The Servant is therefore an agent who imposes Yahweh's will and purpose (law) on the people, the nations, as well as disobedient Israel. It is in this regard that the Servant becomes אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֶתְּמֹלֶת לְעַמִּים. We note here that "a covenant for the people" and "a light for the Gentiles" are parallel, describing how the Lord is going to use him. In this case then the light אֶתְּמֹלֶת is taken as genitive object of the preposition. The servant is an agent "who imposes Yahweh's obligations upon them."¹¹² His task entails the conversion of Gentiles to the worship of Yahweh. He is Yahweh's instrument of salvation. He is made a light which shines in the darkness of the surrounding nations. The imagery is employed here to designate "the light of joy and

¹¹¹John L. Mackenzie, Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), xxxix.

¹¹²Whybray, Isaiah 40-66, 75. He argues that the difficulty in this text lies in understanding "berit am" since the idea of a person becoming a covenant is strange. He however concedes that such bold metaphors are not unusual in Biblical Hebrew. On the same note, Mackenzie points out that, "the force of the figure means that the Servant mediates between Yahweh and peoples, that the Servant becomes a bond of union."

deliverance." The Gentiles are ignorant of Yahweh and therefore dwell in the darkness of idol worship. In a figurative sense, the Servant, by virtue of bringing those who are in darkness to light, is described as opening "eyes that are blind," "freeing captives from prison" and releasing "from the dungeon those who sit in darkness." These descriptions are figurative, in this context, of those who, by lacking light live in darkness (blind) and are "imprisoned" in darkness.¹¹³ By the Servant's task of bringing them into an encounter with Yahweh, the true object of worship, he becomes a light. They are exposed to the saving knowledge of Yahweh which entails obedience to the Torah. The imagery of light then in this context is therefore a figure of the salvation bringing aspect of the servant.¹¹⁴

¹¹³These figures point to the state of those who are ignorant of the Lord (light). Isaiah alludes to this state again in chapter 61:1,2. The fulfilment of this prophecy is related directly to the mission and task of Jesus in Luke 4:17-21.

¹¹⁴Jan Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, trans. John Vriend, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985), 378. Ridderbos concurs with this understanding by observing that, "light is here meant, generally, as a metaphor for salvation . . . but probably refers more expressly to the spiritual illumination that occurs by way of the "justice" and "teaching" (Torah) He brings forth to the nations. . . ." Young, 121, also supports the idea that "light is a figurative designation of salvation (41:6)." He points out that "the Gentiles are as yet in darkness, i.e. the bondage that sin places upon men and from this darkness there is no deliverance until the light of the world shines upon them."

With respect to the identity of the servant in this context, different views have been expressed. Some scholars have argued for a specific individual while others regard the nation of Israel to be the servant. However, this passage looks forward to a time when justice would eventually come to the oppressed (exiled). In this case then the servant could most likely be identified with Cyrus, the Persian king whom the Lord would use to restore His people back from Babylonian captivity and other centres of dispersion (cf Is 11:11). The annals of Cyrus attest to his work of restoring his subjects to their homelands.¹¹⁵ He says "I also gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned to them their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled all the gods . . . in their former chapels."¹¹⁶ By extending his justice to other nations, he becomes "a light to the Gentiles." As the Jews went back home, reconstructed the Temple and reestablished worship, there was spiritual enlightenment in as much as the Gentiles put their faith in Yahweh. We should however note that the task of the servant in this context points beyond Cyrus. In essence, Cyrus partially fulfils this prophecy with a further or ultimate

¹¹⁵Leo Oppenheim, trans., "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1969), 316. He observes that "all the inhabitants of Babylon . . . as well as of the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors . . . greeted him [Cyrus] as a master through whose help they had come (again) to life from death (and) had all been spared damage and disaster . . ."

¹¹⁶Ibid.

fulfilment in the person and ministry of Jesus. Matthew relates its fulfilment in the first coming of Christ with His earthly ministry of teaching and healing which entails meeting the physical and spiritual needs of the lowly, oppressed, and poor of his time (Mt 12:17-21).

The other servant song where the imagery of light is employed as a figure of salvation is Isaiah 49:6.

The Mission of the Servant (Is 49:6)

He says:

"it is too small a thing for you to be
my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have
kept.
I will also make you a light for the
Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to
the ends of the earth."

In this passage where light as a figure of salvation is clearly spelt out, the Lord presents his servant as Israel in whom he will display his splendour. The servant was called and commissioned before birth (49:1-3). His major task entails bringing Jacob (the nation of Israel) back to Covenant obedience (49:5-6a). This may indicate that Israel had abandoned (disobeyed) their identity as a covenant people. The servant is therefore called upon to bring them back to an obedience of the covenant by following the stipulations outlined in the Mosaic torah. (This task is too small for the servant). While the servant is here identified as Israel (vs. 3), the assigned task or role echoes that given to Cyrus in Isaiah 45:4 that, "for the sake of Jacob my

servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour. . . ." The estimate of the servant and of his work necessitates an expansion of his task to include the Gentiles. This task is "to bring back" לְיִשְׂרָאֵל those of Israel and "to bring" לְיִשְׂרָאֵל my salvation. Both of these are purpose clauses, each introduced by an infinitive. As Young observes, "to restore Jacob is a great task, but it is not great enough for my servant. . . . He has a greater task."¹¹⁷ This points to a new aspect in the theology of Isaiah where God is now, directly, including Gentiles as partakers of the covenantal promises of Israel.¹¹⁸ The task of the servant is elaborated further in Isaiah 49:8-13 where the blessings of restoration are outlined. The new aspect of the task is that the servant will be made "a light for the Gentiles" for the purpose of bringing "my salvation to the ends of the earth." The implication that Isaiah has in this context is that of making Yahweh's universal sovereignty known and acknowledged, not just by "those of Israel I have kept", but more so by the Gentiles. The Servant in this context brings "My salvation" (יְשׁוּעָתִי). As Yahweh brings about the downfall of Babylon and restores his people back to their homeland, other nations will observe and will be convinced that "submission is

¹¹⁷Young, Isaiah, 275.

¹¹⁸One of the distinctive features of Isaiah 40-66 centers on the new thing that God is promising to do which, significantly differs from what he has been doing in the past.

their only possible course of action."¹¹⁹ This idea is clearly reflected in Isaiah 52:10 where "all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God." This description of the extent or scope of Yahweh's salvation reflects that given to the disciples by Jesus (Mt 28:19; Ac 1:8). As the Gentiles watch the "just social shape" of restored Israel they will be drawn to Yahweh.¹²⁰ The importance of this task to Yahweh is clearly reflected in the fact that He is the author, "I will also make you." The servant is therefore involved in Yahweh's business, to which Young points that, "God has appointed the servant to this work and determined that he should carry it."¹²¹

The fact of the servant being made "a light for the Gentiles" is closely linked with bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. As we have already noted in 42:6, this task entails the conversion of Gentiles to the worship of Yahweh. He illuminates the darkness in which the Gentiles are engulfed in ignorance of Yahweh. This implies spiritual darkness as Young observes that, "the Gentiles are conceived as being in spiritual darkness, and when light comes to them they are delivered from

¹¹⁹Whybray, 139.

¹²⁰Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 187. He points out that "salvation is to be defined in such political and economic terms. Stable rule would in fact restore their economies and social orders."

¹²¹Young, Isaiah, 276.

their darkness."¹²² If by becoming "a light for the Gentiles", the servant brings salvation to the Gentiles, then it can be strongly argued that the imagery of light in this context is used as a figure of salvation. With the servant being a light, he is also salvation, the fulfilment of which Simeon sees in the person of Jesus when at His consecration he says: "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Lk 2:30-32).¹²³ The other text where Isaiah employs the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is Isaiah 51:4.

Justice: Light to the Nations (Is 51:4)

Listen to me, my people;
hear me, my nation:
The Law will go out from me;
my justice will become a light to the
nations.

¹²²Ibid. Young says that, "this light is the Servant, just as Jesus in the days of His flesh declared, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12)." This link will be elaborated further in the following chapters as it is the central tenet of our thesis.

¹²³Like the fulfilment of the Servant passage of Isaiah 42:6, this one also finds its fulfilment with the return of the exiles from exile with the ultimate fulfilment related to the incarnation of Christ. It is a significant point to note here that Paul associates its fulfilment with the rejection of his message by the Jews and his consequent turn to the Gentiles. He says: ". . . we had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 13:46,47).

The use of the imagery of light in this context is clearly linked with that already discussed above where light benefits the Nations. In this context, however, Isaiah presents the Lord as speaking to "My people", those "who pursue righteousness" (v 1). They comprise the Lord's nation, those who know what is right, ". . . who have my Law in your hearts" (v 7).¹²⁴ In saying that "the law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations," the prophet indicates to us the link of "law" and "justice," which complement each other, as symbols of light (salvation). It indicates the importance of the law in bringing about justice.¹²⁵ In this context, the "justice will become a light", indicating that "justice" is synonymous with light whose effect brings one into a right relationship with the Lord. This right relationship consequently, implies

¹²⁴We note here that the use of righteousness is parallel to salvation (vv. 5-6,8). Wood, observes that, "the salvation in view is the restoration of the nation to a place where they have joy and gladness. This righteousness is distributive justice. This righteousness and justice is not limited to Israel but also extends to the nations" (p. 52).

¹²⁵Young, Isaiah, 309. He points out that this law is "the expression of God's will which constitutes man's rule of duty. In particular it is the law of faith, given "by the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. . . ." George A. F. Knight concurs with Young by saying that, law is "a technical term for the revealed knowledge of God delivered to Israel in the form of instructions on how to live together as the people of God in obedience to His will." (Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55 [Edinburgh: Handsel; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1984], 152).

salvation and therefore the "light to the nations" is figurative of salvation. Israel's life and obedience to the law of God was central in enlightening the nations. Their faithfulness to God was a central aspect for their becoming God's agent or instrument through which he reaches the nations with salvation. The nations, like Israel, by putting their faith in God, are benefactors of God's blessings upon the obedience of his law. In this case then we note that the use of light in this context is figurative of the salvation that the Gentiles will experience.

Summary

In our consideration of the imagery of light in the Old Testament, we have discovered that it is variously used as a symbol of salvation. We have noted that the creation of light in Genesis 1:3, is critical to the ordering of creation. The effects brought about by this light upon the subsequent aspects of creation and more specifically in bringing the darkness under control, is symbolic of salvation. The use of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation finds a more practical use in God's dealings with His people in the Exodus account. The plague of darkness that covers the land of the Egyptians for three days and leaves unaffected the places where the Israelites lived is a clear indication that they were saved from God's wrath. Their consequent release from Egyptian bondage and the provision of light to guide them on their journey is yet another clear

indication of the Lord's salvation for His people.

Central to the use of the imagery of light in the Old Testament is the numerous use by the prophet Isaiah. In his various usages of the imagery of light, Isaiah clearly relates it to the figure of salvation for both Israel and other nations. The use of light in this context is applied both to the physical as well as the spiritual experiences. In as much as it was aimed at giving hope to the nation, during the dark times of exile, it also focused on the eschatological fulfilments related to the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah looks at light as coming to those who have been dwelling in the darkness of separation with God. The servant of the Lord becomes a central figure in Isaiah as an agent of light, which is used synonymously with salvation. As we have considered then, the imagery of light in Isaiah is therefore a figure of salvation. This consideration of the Old Testament's use of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is therefore central to our understanding of John's use of light in relation to the person of Christ when He says, "I am the light of the world."

CHAPTER 3

JOHN'S UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS AS THE LIGHT

The central focus of our thesis is John's presentation of the imagery of light. In this chapter, we shall concentrate on John's use of this imagery and more specifically on Jesus' self-declaration that, "I am the light of the World" (Jn 8:12). As pointed out earlier, a proper understanding of this imagery and John's soteriological theology as a whole requires a proper understanding of the Jewish thought as reflected in the Old Testament (which has already been considered), and other available literature. In this regard, we shall make a brief analysis of what may have influenced John in his theological understanding of light as a whole.

We should however note that there are various distinct uses of light in John all of which will not be exhaustively discussed. Only the relevant ones will be discussed. At the same time, because of the centrality of the symbolism of light in John, we shall not exhaust all his usages, but we shall concentrate on our central passage.

The imagery of light as is used by John in the Fourth Gospel encompasses other varied aspects of theology which are linked to the person and mission of

Christ.¹²⁶ As I. Howard Marshall indicates, "the theology of John is a Christology with which is clearly linked a soteriology."¹²⁷ By looking at the imagery of light in John we shall therefore be touching on his basic concept of salvation which is faith (belief) in the person of Christ, the light of the world. This is clearly reflected in John's purpose statement in which he says, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (Jn 20:30,31).¹²⁸

¹²⁶Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds. Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), s.v. "φως, κταλ," by H. Ritt. He points out that "the metaphor 'see the light' is used of the Christian proclamation of salvation grounded in Jesus' person, words, and works."

¹²⁷Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), s.v. "Johannine Theology," by I. Howard Marshall.

¹²⁸Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), s.v. "John, The Gospel According to," by Leon Morris. He argues that "the person of the son looms large for John . . ." Since he is the incarnate "word made flesh" (Jn 1:14), it is only through him that we know God and his plan for the salvation of mankind. Ritt, "φως, κταλ," has the same idea when he says, "for John faith is the direct response to the self-revelation of the one and only representative of God, who brings revelation, life, light, and salvation."

We shall also look briefly at John's concept and use of the antithesis of light, darkness. The relation between light and darkness has already been discussed above. However, it is worth noting that the "images of light and darkness pervade the Fourth Gospel, creating what is probably its most striking motif."¹²⁹ The relationship between light and life will also be discussed. Having made this brief highlight of what we shall discuss, it is essential now that we turn to the Gospel of John and look at his use of the imagery of light.

Overview of John's Theological Imagery of Light

The Fourth Gospel stands out in distinction from the other Gospels in its presentation of the person and ministry of Christ, among other things. John's teaching on Christ is central to his view of the imagery of light and his view of salvation. In examining Johannine theology, we note that he exhibits peculiar characteristics, featured in his themes, terms, and concepts. These features closely link him with a vast majority of Jewish literature (as seen in the Inter Testamental period), which were also founded upon the Old Testament concepts.¹³⁰ In view of the Old Testament

¹²⁹Koester, Symbolism, 123.

¹³⁰D. A. Carson, "Selected Recent Studies of the Fourth Gospel," Themelios 14 (1989): 64. He points out that "there is a rising interest in the OT background to many Johannine themes, verbal expressions, and even structures of thought." A cross-section of Johannine scholarship attest to the Jewishness of the fourth Gospel. Smith argues that

analysis of the imagery of light, we observe here that John took up the symbol of light from the Old Testament where it referred variously to God's presence, God's salvation, the law wisdom and logos, in order to epitomize the person and work of Jesus. This thought is also reflected in Judaism whose foundation was by and large the Scriptures.¹³¹

A close look at the Gospel of John helps us verify the assertions made above. John uses the term φως (light) twenty three times in his Gospel.¹³² Central to the use of light in his Gospel is the prologue which "sets the

John not only cites the OT and makes "frequent polemical and other references to Jews" but also compares Jesus with key Jewish leaders, in as much as he is familiar with their scriptures, customs, and traditions (Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Suppl. vol., 1962 ed., s.v. "John Gospel of") Sloyan also points out that the much that has been said about John in the past twenty years reveal "an emerging consensus on the Hebraic character of the Gospel. . . ." What are they Saying About John (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 97. This idea is also attested by Shirbroun who says that, "the use of light in the Gospels follows, on the whole, the use of light in the OT and late Hellenistic Judaism." Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), s.v. "Light," by G. F. Shirbroun.

¹³¹Shirbroun, "Light," 472. He argues that in this sense, John sees Jesus as the fulfilment of the expectations and hopes of Judaism." It is worth pointing out in this context that Judaism and the Old Testament are not taken as synonymous.

¹³²Ritt, "φως, κταλ," 447. He points out that this use "is especially noteworthy among the 73 NT occurrences. . . . There are 15 occurrences in the synoptics, 10 in Acts, 6 in Paul, 5 in Ephesians, 4 in Revelation, and 1 each in Col 1:12; I Tim 6:16; Js 1:17; and I Pet 2:9." One must however ascertain the nuance of meaning in each instance.

theme for Johannine theology."¹³³ The word, which was with God and was God, was the agent of creation, "in whom was the life and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4).¹³⁴ John presents this light as shining "in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (Jn 1:5). In this context, we note that John juxtaposes the two antithetical entities, "light" and "darkness," in a figurative sense to indicate the opposition or rejection of light by the darkness. This is clarified by verse 11 where John says, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (Jn 1:11). We note here that the contrast that John makes between "light" and "darkness" is focused on the person of Jesus and the world (Jews) which failed to recognize him and thus persisted to dwell in darkness.¹³⁵ In this prologue, we

¹³³Marshall, "Johannine Theology," 1082. He points out that "the Gospel is about the logos or word of God who from the beginning was with God and was himself God. . . . The only source of light and life . . . [through whom] people receive the right to become children of God. This fact presupposes that people are actually in darkness, and . . . the light was not welcome to them . . . [thus] the subject of the fourth Gospel is thus Jesus, the word made flesh and the true word of humanity."

¹³⁴This opening section of the Gospel links, in format, with the opening words of Genesis 1. We should however note a significant difference in the sense that light in the Genesis account is physical created light while in John, Jesus, the light is the agent of creation. Light in the Gospel, with reference to Jesus, is used figuratively in view of the messianic function of Christ in bringing salvation to men.

¹³⁵Dan O. Via, "Darkness, Christ, and the Church in the Fourth Gospel," Scottish Journal of Theology 14 (1961): 174. He argues that "the light, who is Jesus, has come into

note that the forerunner of Jesus, John the baptist, is clearly distinguished from the light. He is the forerunner of the light, to witness to the light. This aspect that points to Christ's incarnation is a significant feature of John's Gospel. Jesus the light of the World as seen in various passages of the Gospel, makes a personal declaration that he is the light of the World (Jn 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

As the light Jesus demands a positive response from men for them to come to the knowledge of the Father. John presents the radical demand of belief in the light, as the sole means by which an individual would come to terms with life or salvation (Jn 1:4; 3:15-16; 8:12; 12:36,46). In spite of this persistent call for faith, most of Jesus' audience turn a deaf ear on him and consequently persist to live in darkness. It is therefore clear that the imagery of light in John concerns the revelation of the person of Christ who alone

the world (1:9-10; 3:19; 8:12; 12:46)." We should take special note of the fact that the presentation of Jesus as the light presupposes the existence of darkness. John uses the figure of darkness in contrast to the figure of light to signify the conflict existing between the two. As Baylis observes, John uses *skotia* 5 times in a figurative sense (1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35; 12:46) . . . [and] none of these passages defines 'darkness'. If walking in the light entails identification with Jesus and his mission, then 'walking in darkness' rejection of the same" (Charles P. Baylis, "The Meaning of Walking in the Darkness," Bibliotheca Sacra 14 (1992): 216). On the same note, Vine observes that "skotia is used . . . of spiritual or moral darkness, emblematic of sin, as a condition of moral or spiritual depravity (Jn 1:5; 8:12; 12:35,46 . . .)." (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1952), 268).

brings man to the knowledge of God.¹³⁶ On this aspect Conzelmann observes that, "the light designates the nature of Jesus directly. He is not like a light; he is 'the light'."¹³⁷ We can, concur with Shirbroun that "light is a primary symbol in the fourth Gospel."¹³⁸ In order to have a clear understanding of the use of light in John, it is worth looking at the background that may have influenced his use of this imagery.

Light and John's Jewish Thought

The peculiarity of Johannine literature as compared to other Gospels indicate that his "tradition is independent of the synoptic Gospels."¹³⁹ As already pointed out above, John portrays clear Jewish distinctive features which place him within the heart of Jewish thought. It is to this effect that the Fourth Gospel gained popularity among the Gnostics, resulting in the thought that John may have derived his theological ideas from Gnosticism.¹⁴⁰ Our observation above has indicated

¹³⁶Colin Brown, ed. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Devon, UK: Paternoster, 1976; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), s.v. "Light, Shine, Lamp," by Colin Brown.

¹³⁷H. Conzelmann, An Outline Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1969), 351.

¹³⁸Shirbroun, "Light," 472.

¹³⁹S. S. Smalley, "Keeping up with Recent Studies: XII St John's Gospel," Expository Times 97 (1986): 102. He argues that John's "background is not fundamentally different from the tradition he is reporting" (p. 102).

¹⁴⁰Raymond E. Brown, "The Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles," in The Scrolls and the New Testament, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Harper and

that John's contrast of light and darkness is a central aspect of John's theology. Apart from the use of these imageries in the Old Testament, recent discoveries in Palestine on the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate a close connection with Johannine literature. A comparison of the terminology between the two indicate that "the new documents greatly increase the widely recognized resemblance between both theology and wording of the Gospel."¹⁴¹ This idea is clearly so because of the striking role that the contrast of light and darkness plays in the Essene documents as well as the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John.¹⁴² The conflict between light and darkness is a central point of similarity as it is widely featured in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These documents present a "modified dualism"¹⁴³

Brothers, 1957), 185. He points out that recent discoveries, in the Gnostic Codices of 1945, have nullified this claim.

¹⁴¹W. F. Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of St. John," in The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: Studies in Honour of C. H. Dodd, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), 168. On the same line of thought, Neil S. Fujita points out that, "the whole pattern of thought and vocabulary is common to both John and Qumran" (A Crack in the Jar: What Ancient Jewish Documents Tell Us About the New Testament (New York: Paulist, 1986), 140).

¹⁴²Albright, "Recent Discoveries," 168. He gives examples of similar usages between John and the Essene document like; "sons of light" (Scroll of discipline 1:9; 3:24f.) which appears in John 12:36. The light of life (Jn 8:12) and "those who walk in darkness" (Jn 12:35) corresponds almost word for word with the Scroll of discipline (3:21).

¹⁴³Brown, "The Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles," 184. He points out that modified dualism is the view that "the Universe is under the dominion of two

which the universe is subjected to. The two opposing forces of good and evil, light and darkness characterize man's existence and allegiance.¹⁴⁴ In accordance with the Dead Sea Scrolls, man has very little role to play in determining his destiny because of the pre-determinism that they exhibit. Men are therefore aligned under either light or darkness apparently without much choice.¹⁴⁵ The Johannine Gospel also presents a struggle between light and darkness, with the result that, Jesus, the light has triumphed over darkness (Jn 1:5).¹⁴⁶ The

opposing principles." One of these is good and the other is bad or evil, yet both are created by God.

¹⁴⁴Ibid. He argues that "in the Qumran literature, all men are aligned in two opposing forces, the one of light of and truth, the other of pervasion, with each faction ruled by a spirit or prince."

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 189. We should however note that the relationship between predestination and human free will is thus explained: "The very fact that a man joined the community proved that he was one of the predestined. He did not do so to become one of the elect. Predestination did not contradict free-will; it proved the rationale as to why men chose "freely" as they did." Fujita, A Crack in the Jar, 139-140.

¹⁴⁶Brown, "The Qumran Scrolls," 189. He observes that, "there is a similarity of thought between the two groups of writings on the conflict, and both are sure of the ultimate success of light. Yet there, Christ makes a tremendous difference in John's outlook. For Qumran, victory is still in the future; for John light is already triumphant." This same thought is expressed by Newcombe Gilkes who points out that, "for Qumran, the world is engaged in a titanic struggle in which the two sides are led by two spirits, one called spirit of truth or the prince of lights, the other the spirit of pervasion, the angel of darkness or Belial. John emphasizes the same antithesis, between truth and falsehood, light and darkness. But for him 'God is the light and in him is no darkness at all' and 'Christ is the light of the World.' In this struggle, Christ has already overcome the World and made victory secure" (The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls [New York: St. Martin's, 1962], 154).

"modified dualism" centering on the light and the darkness point to other related aspects featured in John and in the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁴⁷ The two people, "sons of light" and "sons of darkness" represent the insiders and the outsiders respectively.¹⁴⁸ There is however a distinct contrast between this thinking and John's concept because for him, it was faith in Christ the light of the World, that constitutes one a son of light, rather than good deeds (Jn 3:21; 8:12; 12:36,46).

On the whole, there is a clear distinction between John and the Qumran literature. The resemblances do not seem to indicate immediate relationship, as if John was himself a sectarian or were familiar with the Qumran

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 183 -207. In his article Brown observes that there are various parallel aspects between Qumran and John where easy comparison is found. This has made several Johannine scholars identify his background in thought and phrasing as being rooted in the ideology and terminology of Qumran. Some of the points that link the two together include, the doctrine of creation, two spirits, good and evil, struggle between the spirit of light and darkness, man's role in accepting or rejecting light, sons of light and sons of darkness, truth and perversity, brotherly love, fountain of living waters among others. On the same note, James H. Charlesworth points out that in John we see a distinct difference in his theological framework of the dualism. John's dualism is "essentially soteriological and ethical in the sense that 'dualism' is conceived as Christ opposed by the World, belief opposed by disbelief, light opposed by darkness, truth opposed by falsehood, righteousness opposed by sin, love opposed by hate, and life opposed by death" ("A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in IQS 3:13-4:26 and the Dualism Contained in the Gospel of John," in John and the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. James H. Charlesworth [New York: Crossroad, 1990], 96).

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 193-94. He observes that the sons of light in the Qumran community are "the doers of the law in the house of Judah whom God will deliver from the hour of judgement for the sake of their labour and their 'faith' in the teacher of righteousness."

literature.¹⁴⁹ Thus in as much as John portrays these close points of relationship with the Qumran literature, there is no indication that this is the source of his Jewish thoughts and ideas. Whether or not he was a member of the sect is not easy to determine, in as much as it may not affect the ideas already reflected. It can be argued that, John, like any other Jewish writer of his time, reflects clear Jewish thoughts which are embedded within his perception of life and faith as a true Jew. The Old Testament, the Scriptures available to John, plays a significant role in shaping this theology.¹⁵⁰ The features we have thus observed in relation to John's presentation of Jesus, the light, are significant for his concept of salvation. We now turn to a consideration of John's use of light as it relates to his view of salvation.

Light and John's Concept of Salvation

John's concept of salvation is closely linked with the presentation of Jesus, the light of the World "who takes away the sin of the World!" (Jn 1:29). This

¹⁴⁹Brown, "The Qumran Scrolls," 206. He argues that "the ideas of Qumran must have been fairly widespread in certain Jewish circles in the first century A.D. and may have indirectly influenced John."

¹⁵⁰Smith, "John, Gospel of," 484. He observes that "John's characteristic emphases on individual faith and attainment of salvation in the form of eternal life as well as the language of . . . union with the saviour, also serve to show the Gospel's participation in the broader religious currents of the Greco-Roman World." In essence then, the religious ideas and thoughts seen in John and the Qumran sect reflects a religious atmosphere of the time.

indicates on the outset that John's Christological presentation is "orientated towards Soteriology."¹⁵¹ The incarnation of Christ is the focal point in John that ushers in the Mosaic promise of salvation for mankind. Belief in the light (Jesus), implies identification with him.¹⁵² It entails becoming children of God; "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-" (Jn 1:12). The conflict between light and darkness is key in John's view of salvation for "light" invades the "darkness" to reveal God's salvation (Jn 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35,46).¹⁵³ This salvation is presented by John as being eternal life (Jn 3:16; 5:24; 17:3). This signifies that for John, eternal life is not only an eschatological event but also a realization in the present age of the saving work of Christ. The future has broken into the present, in the person of Christ and ushered in not only spiritual but also physical blessings that entail salvation. John therefore focuses on a realized eschatology, in his soteriological concepts.

The aim in presenting Jesus, as the light, is to give each individual a chance to believe in him, of which

¹⁵¹R. Schnackenberg, The Gospel According to St. John, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1968-82), 548.

¹⁵²R. H. Lightfoot, St John's Gospel: A Commentary, edited by C. F. Evans (London: Oxford University, 1957), 189. He points out that "the light of the World' bestows 'the light of life' (cf 1:4,5); and in having this life, the disciple, follower or believer has the speaker, the Lord himself."

¹⁵³Shirbroun, "Light," 473.

most did not but some did. The aspect of belief is central for John.¹⁵⁴ John presents Jesus as making a radical demand upon the conscience of his hearers for them to make a choice either to believe (receive) him or not.¹⁵⁵ The Gospel is also saturated with miraculous signs, teachings and events which validate the claims of Jesus, the light and the only bringer of salvation, who demands faith.¹⁵⁶ In the same way, John uses "I am" sayings in which Jesus hinges his self claim with aspects related to his soteriological work. We note that Jesus claims to be: "the Bread of life" (6:35), "the light" (8:12), "the gate for the sheep" (10:7), "the good Shepherd" (10:11), "the resurrection" (11:25), "the way and the truth and the life" (14:6), "the true vine" (15:1). Each of these claims is related to "an aspect of the salvation which Jesus is and brings."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 12. He observes that ". . . 'belief' (pisteuo) appears ninety eight times in the Gospel, more than any other key word, and is obviously the major theme."

¹⁵⁵Dale Bisnauth, "A Rereading of John in the Struggle for Liberation," International Review of Missions 79 (Jan 1990): 325. He observes that "An important feature of the Gospel according to St John is the tendency of the Evangelist to use the dialectic of debate and discussion to challenge the readers and hearers of his word." The radical claims of the word, Jesus Christ, also challenges his audience.

¹⁵⁶Tenney, "Gospel of John," 12. He argues that "all the signs, teachings, and events in the Gospel are used to stimulate faith in Christ and are so ordered that they mark growth in this faith on the part of his disciples."

¹⁵⁷G. R. Beasley-Murray, John, Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), lxxxiv.

Aligned with this aspect of salvation is the centrality of the redemptive death which John sees as "the lifting up" of the son of man (3:14f.; 8:28; 12:31; 13:31).¹⁵⁸ This presentation of salvation which is closely linked to the person and mission of Christ, the light, as we have observed is central to our thesis on the imagery of light. Salvation and the saviour, Jesus Christ, go hand in hand. In this regard, our understanding of salvation and the light entails a proper understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. It is important that we now turn to a brief look at John's presentation of Jesus.

Light and John's Presentation of Jesus

Jesus' Relationship to the Father

Central to the presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is His special relationship with the Father. In the prologue (1:1-18), John presents Jesus as the logos of God.¹⁵⁹ He is not only the word of God but He is also

¹⁵⁸Ibid. He argues that "in the Gospel, the 'lifting up' coincides with the death of the son of man; it is the supreme moment of his obedience which reconciles the world to God and is one with the resurrection which brings life to the World."

¹⁵⁹Robert Kysar, John, the Maverick Gospel (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976), 25. We note with Kysar that, the "logos was an idea which had roots in several different religious and philosophical settings," such as Stoicism and Hellenistic philosophies. However, we go with the Hebrew tradition in which the logos "was the word of God which brought all existence into being, according to the tradition embedded in Genesis 1." We should note that this prologue of John is closely linked in terms of the Christological emphasis to the views presented in other Christological hymns on the New Testament like Phil 2:6-11 and Col 1:15-20.

God. He existed from the beginning as God and is the agent of creation, without whom nothing would have been created (1:13). As the eternal word, He was incarnated in human life (1:14) to reveal God to man (1:18). This revelation calls for belief that results into salvation for "whoever believes" (1:12).¹⁶⁰ This revelation which he imparts is the salvation of the world. Thus, "the revelation and the salvation are consummated together in Jesus' laying down his life on the cross."¹⁶¹ This links Christ to the Messianic function of self-sacrifice for the salvation of the World (1:29,35). He is the "son of God" (1:34), the Messiah (1:41) spoken of in the Old Testament (1:45), the king of Israel (1:49).¹⁶² John portrays a clear relationship between Jesus (Son) and God (Father). On the basis of this relationship, Jesus' work is the work of the Father because, "I and the Father are one" (10:30). Jesus' ministry is to reveal the Father and his will for mankind (5:37-47; 6:38-40,44-46; 7:26-27; 8:18-19,26-29,42-47,54-55; 10:23-39; 11:41-42; 12:27-28,44-50; 14:6-14,15-31; 15:8-10,15-16; 16:25-28; 27:6-

¹⁶⁰F. F. Bruce The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 14. He argues that "Jesus is the eternal word or self-revelation of God" who was incarnated into a human life. The Gospel places an emphasis on Jesus as the eternal son of the Father, who was "sent into the world for the world's salvation."

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Kysar, The Maverick Gospel, 33. He argues that "what the Evangelist is emphasizing in these titles is the conviction that this Jesus was indeed was the fulfilment of the whole body of Messianic expectations."

26). All these references indicate that everything that pertain to the person and ministry of Jesus is in view of his special relationship to the Father. Whatever Jesus does is in line with the father and His salvific ministry. In essence then, "what Jesus says about himself and his mission progressively defines his relationship to the Father and exposes the blindness of others.¹⁶³ The "I am" sayings therefore define or describe Jesus in view of who He is to man.¹⁶⁴ Knowing the son is knowing the father, for he says, ". . . if you really knew me, you would know my father as well" (8:19; 14:7). Jesus' relation to men is therefore indicative of the fathers' relation to men.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 108. He says that "Jesus' statements about himself not only employ the divine 'I am' (8:24,28,58) but also press the Gospels images and themes into service . . . [where] each [image] . . . serves to enrich the disclosure of Jesus' identity."

¹⁶⁴Brown, The Gospel According to John, 534-35. He points out that, the "predicates are . . . a revelation of the divine commitment involved in the Fathers' sending of the Son. Jesus is these things to men because He and the Father are one (x 30) and he possesses the life giving power of the Father (v 21)."

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 535. On the same note, Schnackenburg points out that "the Johannine son-Christology is essentially the doctrine of salvation for believers, i.e. not a doctrine about Jesus in isolation but taking in the human race, with Jesus as God's emissary revealing and mediating salvation." In this case then, Christology is not primarily "concerned with statements about the metaphysical being of the son, his relationship to the father within the trinity, his pre-existence and the union of the divine and the human natures in the incarnate son . . . [but rather with] the 'functional' character of the Johannine son-Christology, the theme of revelation and salvation which it articulates, and its anthropological and existential point of departure."

John also presents Jesus as the son of man (1:51; 3:13-15; 5:27; 6:27,62; 8:28; 9:35-38; 12:23,34-36; 13:31), who has a close relationship with His Father and whose testimony should be heeded (3:18,36; 5:24; 6:29,40,47; 10:37-38; 12:44-46; 17:8). Closely tied to the person of Jesus is the works that He does. His works, seen in His signs (miracles), are given on various occasions, in order to appeal for people's belief in Him. John terms the miracles 'signs' "because their spiritual significance is drawn out in associated discourses which are sometimes pointed . . . by a connected saying introduced with the formula $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\mu\iota$ "¹⁶⁶

The I am Sayings and the Significance of Jesus' Miracles

There are seven signs (miracles) seen in John:

- Changing of water into wine at Cana (1:1-11)
- Healing of the Official's son (4:46-54)
- Curing the sick man (5:2-9)
- Feeding of the crowd (6:1-14)
- Restoring the blind man's sight (9:1-7)
- Raising of Lazarus (11;1-44)
- The miraculous catch of fish (21:1-14)

These signs are central to our understanding of who Jesus is because His person is validated and explained by His actions.¹⁶⁷ The definite claims of Jesus are related to His Christological functions that are aimed at portraying His peculiarity. In making these claims, Jesus uses "I am" statements, with predicates, seven times to verify

¹⁶⁶Smalley, Evangelist and Teacher, 86.

¹⁶⁷Robert Kysar, John's Story of Jesus (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 16. He points out that, "who Jesus is merges with what he does."

who He is. These are:

"I am the bread of life" (6:35,51)
 "I am the light of the World" (8:12; 9:5)
 "I am the gate of the sheep" (10:7,9)
 "I am the good Shepherd" (10:11,14)
 "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25)
 "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6)
 "I am the true Vine" (15:1,5)

These sayings link Jesus with the Old Testament's self revelation of God. This is especially seen in the burning bush episode where God reveals his name to Moses (Ex 3:14). Isaiah also applies the self revelatory sayings in which God makes himself known in what he does (or will do) for Israel.¹⁶⁸ This helps explain the close relationship that John explicates between Jesus (Son) and God (Father) as has been pointed out above.

John portrays Jesus and his ministry as a ramification of God's will and purpose for mankind which is anticipated in the Old Testament.¹⁶⁹ His constant conflict with the Jewish religious leaders in view of who He claims to be, as is verified by His deeds (10:37,38),

¹⁶⁸Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes, (I-XII), The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: DoubleDay & Company, 1966), 534. He argues that "it is to Deutero-Isaiah that we must go for the background of the Johannine usage of ego eimi, "I am," . . . and for some elements of some universality attributed to Jesus' mission."

¹⁶⁹C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953 reprint 1972), 346. There is a constant dialogue between Jesus and his opponents regarding specific themes that are drawn out of an Old Testament understanding. These include the relation between, "Moses and the Christ" (7:14-24); "Jesus' Messianic claims" (7:25-52); "the nature and value of the evidence for the claims of Jesus" (8:12-20); "challenge of Jesus to the Jewish leaders" (8:21-30); "Abraham, his 'seed' and Christ" (8:39-59).

is clear proof that they had a notion of a messiah, but rejected Jesus because of their outright unbelief. Jesus came, not only as revealer of God to man but also as the revelation. He is the light of the world, the saviour of man. His self-revelation and the presentation that John makes of Him is sufficient enough for his audience to make a definite choice of belief. John therefore ties together the person of Christ, His earthly ministry, and His relationship to the Father. The central focus of John's Gospel, then is Jesus Christ, the light of the World.¹⁷⁰

With this brief analysis of John's presentation of Jesus, the light, it is appropriate now that we turn our focus to an exegetical study of the central passage of our thesis, which is John 8:12. In the foregoing considerations, we have observed that John's background is strongly embedded within the Jewish thought, background, and expectations of the Old Testament. His terminology and theological framework clearly portrays this. He presents Jesus as the life, the light of the World and the central focus in God's redemptive program. This background is essential to us as we turn to John 8:12.

¹⁷⁰Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St John, 186. He argues that the central issues, 'the very heart' of Johannine 'son-Christology' pertain to "Jesus Christ, who is our access to the father, the revelation in this World of the remote, invisible God; the disclosure of God's love for the World, which otherwise remains hidden and incomprehensible to us; the light which makes sense of our existence and the way along which we can attain to its goal. . . ."

An Exegetical Study of John 8:12

The events lying behind the statement made in this text take place within the precincts of the Temple. John says here that:

When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

In this context, we note that Jesus makes a declaration regarding his self-consciousness. The context of this declaration is clearly placed within the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus uses the ceremonies associated with this festival as the giver of the living water (7:2,37).¹⁷¹ In this case, he also makes a claim from the analogy of the ceremony to point people to himself.¹⁷² This verse therefore opens a new episode,

¹⁷¹Brown, The Gospel According to John, 343-44. He argues that Jesus' self proclamation to be the light in this context, as he proclaims "himself to be the source of living water" in 7:37-38, is "prompted by the ceremonies of the feast of tabernacles." These two claims by Jesus find their background "in the same passages in the OT," (Zech 14:8), and ". . . the Exodus wanderings that supplied the imagery of the water from the rock [and] also supplied the imagery of a flaming pillar that guided the Israelites through the darkness of the night (Ex 13:21). That this background could have entered into the background of Jesus' claim to be the light is suggested when we remember that Wis xviii:3-4 gives witness to the tradition that identified this pillar with "the imperishable light of the law."

¹⁷²William Barclay, The Gospel of John, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 2:11. He observes that on the evening of the first day of the feast of tabernacles "was a ceremony called the illumination of the temple" which took place "in the court of women. The court was surrounded with deep galleries, erected to hold the spectators. In the centre four great candelabra were lit, and, it was said, they sent such a blaze of light throughout Jerusalem that every courtyard was lit up with their brilliance. Then all night long,

but still within the same context of the Feast of Tabernacles in which Jesus combines His "words" and "works" in verifying His claim.¹⁷³ His self-claim raises a conflict with the Jews, Pharisees and members of the Sanhedrin, since it touches on not just His qualifications as the Messiah but more so, "the meaning of His special relation to God."¹⁷⁴

In his attempt to bring to their attention yet another aspect of Jesus' personality, John says: "When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said . . ." This

until cock crow the next morning, the greatest and the wisest and the holiest men in Israel danced before the Lord and sang psalms of joy and praise while the people watched." It is this analogy that Jesus takes and declares himself to be the light and "for the man who follows me there will be light, not only for one exciting night, but for all the pathway of his life."

¹⁷³J. N. Sanders, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John, edited by B. A. Martin (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), 218. He points out that, ". . . this declaration comes in effectively here, between the description of the division which arose among Jesus' hearers and the healing of the man born blind. It is also appropriate in the feast of tabernacles, since one of the features of the ritual of the feast was the illumination of the Temple."

¹⁷⁴Barnabas Lindars, ed. The Gospel of John, New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 312-13. He compares 8:12 to 7:37 as a "fragment of a revelation discourse." The themes highlighted and emphasized here relates not just to the feast of tabernacles but also with the themes developed in chapters 5, 7, and 9, where John seeks to verify Jesus' Messiahship. Schnackenburg also agrees with the suggestion that John 8:f. shows ". . . clear links with chapter 7 and . . . with chapter 5. Schnackenburg, Gospel According to John, 182. Crossan also argues that, "it is possible that John has divided between chapter 5 and chapters 7 and 8 events of one feast at Jerusalem." Thus the unnamed feast of 5:1 is the feast of tabernacles in 7:2 and therefore alludes to a clear connection between 7:23, 5:1-9, 31-47, and 8:12-20. (Dominic Crossan, The Gospel of Eternal Life: Reflections on the Theology of St. John [Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967], 91).

statement is an "editorial link" in which Jesus' self-claim is made afresh, ". . . with the minimum of disjunction from the preceding paragraphs."¹⁷⁵ Jesus spoke εὐτοῖς (to them). There is no indication in the Greek text who the addressees are, though it can refer to the crowd (as the NIV supplies it with "people") or both the Pharisees and the crowd in the temple.¹⁷⁶ However in view of verse 13 where the Pharisees respond to His claim, we can argue that they were part of the audience to whom Jesus spoke. The verb that John uses to indicate Jesus' speaking (ἐλάλησεν) is an aorist indicative which points to the certainty with which Jesus makes His self-claim.

Jesus begins by saying, "I am the light of the world." Here we note the use of the ἐγώ εἰμι with a predicate "το φῶς τοῦ κόσμου." The ἐγώ εἰμι apart from having close connection or relationship with the Old Testament's self-revelatory formula of God introduces an emphatic self-claim by Jesus. The use of this phrase by John is a purposeful indication of the divinity of Jesus in the sense that his utterances and revelation are God's.¹⁷⁷ It indicates the finality with which Jesus

¹⁷⁵Lindars, Gospel of John, 313.

¹⁷⁶Fritz Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, edited by Cleon L. Rogers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1980), 238.

¹⁷⁷Michael J. Taylor, John: The Different Gospel, A Reflective Commentary (New York: Alba House, 1983), 101. He points out that Jesus "is understood to be the only one who legitimately and truthfully can speak in this manner. . . ."

makes his self-claim. This "I am" formula is uniquely Johannine as there are no parallels in other Gospels.¹⁷⁸ It has as its background among other sources, the Old Testament where it "is the divine word of self-revelation and of command"¹⁷⁹ (cf Ex 3:6,14; 2:20; Pr 8; Is 51:12). This statement by Jesus is meant "to raise the question of witness-bearing."¹⁸⁰ Jesus is not making a claim that puts Him above others. The "I am" is not a polemic against other dispensers of light.¹⁸¹ It reflects Jesus' enforcement of His self-claim which, by implication, contrasts "the claims and attitudes of His enemies."¹⁸² This formula is central to John's presentation of Jesus as the son of God, and the Messiah in whom the Old Testament expectations are fulfilled. All the predicates attached to his person are in one way or the other related to the Old Testament presentation of God in His dealings with Israel. John is therefore bringing to the attention of his reader and the Jewish listeners of Jesus

¹⁷⁸Sanders, Gospel According to St. John, 189. He notes that this uniqueness, and also "the fact that these sayings embody some of the most characteristic themes of the FG.

¹⁷⁹C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to John: An Introduction With Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text (London: SPCK, 1978), 292. He observes that "the background of these sayings . . . proves to be multiple."

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 333.

¹⁸¹Ernst Haenchen, John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-12, translated and edited by Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 26.

¹⁸²Merrill C. Tenney, John: the Gospel of Belief, An Analytic Study of the Text (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1948), 144.

that in the use of "I am," the Old Testament formula in relation to Yahweh is at the forefront. This is to say that in Jesus is the embodiment of God. John perceives in Jesus the divine (1:1), who is incarnated in human flesh in order to bring mankind to the full knowledge of the father.¹⁸³

Jesus claims that He is "the light of the world." As we have already observed above, John's concept of light is derived from his Jewish understanding embedded within the Old Testament. The symbol of light with reference to the person of Jesus recalls the significant role of light in illuminating mankind, which served as a figure of salvation in the Old Testament.¹⁸⁴ This imagery of light is symbolic of the revelation and teaching that Jesus has brought into the world. As "the light of the world," Jesus transcends the Jewish framework and conception of the messiah (cf 11:25). His focus is not just national but universal, not just for the Jewish race, but for the entire human race. The

¹⁸³Haenchen, John 2, 26. He observes that in John's announcement of Jesus, the intention is not "to lead man away from other gods (in which John has no interest) [but, rather,] "to lead them to the one true God," His intention as the way is to bring man to the Father.

¹⁸⁴Crossan, Gospel of Eternal life, 51. He points out that, "the symbol of light had become associated with the great future moment of eschatological or messianic salvation since it recalled the pillar of fire which had led the Israelites through the desert toward the promised land (Ex 13:21; Wis 18:3-4; cf., Is 9:1,2; 42:6; 49:6)." Schnackenburg says "Jesus has come into the world as the eschatological light (3:9; 12:46) to bring light and life to the whole of mankind." Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John, 169.

purpose of this light is to dispel the darkness which is present in the world, indicative of unbelief and godlessness. Those who put their faith in him enter into the realm of light and thus become children of light. In Jesus then, the meaning and purpose of life becomes evident.¹⁸⁵ John's concept of light is not just another component in the created order. It has a far reaching salvific activity since it reflects the Saviour, the Revealer who came so that man may see the light, be saved and thereby attain life (10:10).

The "world" is an "objective genitive" which receives the the light that issues from Jesus and is embedded within Him. The world, which is the created order and an object of God's love (3:16), in spite of its hostility and rebellion, can only come out of its state of darkness by getting light from Christ.¹⁸⁶ This idea of Jesus bringing light to the world is anticipated in the Old Testament's foreshadowing by Isaiah, where the "Servant of the Lord" is called a "light to the nations"

¹⁸⁵Brown, The Gospel According to John, 344. There are some specific references or parallels with the synoptics where light is used to illuminate and can be inferred, indirectly as serving the purpose that John attaches in this context (cf LK 8:16, 11:33; Mk 4:22).

¹⁸⁶Sanders, The Gospel According to St. John, 76. He points out that "the world hates Christ (vii. 7), and His disciples (xv. 18 f., cf. I John iii. 13), and so incurs judgement, though this is the consequence rather than the purpose of Christ's coming into the world ((cf. iii. 17 ff.; xii. 47). His purpose was to conquer, and in conquering, to save the world."

(Is 42:6; 49:6; 54:1).¹⁸⁷ This universal scope of the Messiah's work is a central aspect in John's theology, who sees him as the saviour of the world.

The relation of the light to man demands a definite response which Jesus always calls for. Jesus says, "he who follows me shall not walk in darkness." We observe here that this life is in a sense a journey in which one walks. It is a pilgrimage that requires guidance. For the follower of Christ, Jesus' teaching becomes a guide on this journey and thus he does not walk in darkness.¹⁸⁸ This statement portrays John's view in which light and darkness are in sharp conflict. "He who follows" in this context and in John's usage as a whole refers to an individual's self determination to abandon the world (darkness) and accept the light (saviour). The verb "Follow" entails a determinative step to follow Christ

¹⁸⁷Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John, 190. He observes that "the Johannine image developed in the soil of O. T. Judaism, although it was the evangelist who gave it its final form and force." Bruce concurs with this idea in saying that ". . . Jesus as the son of the father, the servant of the lord and the word incarnate, embodies this OT language even before the word became incarnate, the life which he eternally possessed, says John, "was the light of men" (John 1:4); now by his incarnation the true light came into the world, providing illumination for all (John 1:9; 3:19). (The Gospel of John, 188). On the same note, Pryor observes that, "the image of light has links with the feast of tabernacles, and also with the Wisdom/Torah tradition within Judaism. But in the context of John's Gospel it draws particular attention to Jesus' role as judge" (John W. Pryor, John: Evangelist of the Covenant People, the Narratives and Themes of the Fourth Gospel [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1992], 36).

¹⁸⁸Albert Kirk and Robert E. Obach, A Commentary on the Gospel of John (New York: Paulist, 1981), 122.

unconditionally and unreservedly.¹⁸⁹ As the light, Jesus wroughts judgement and demands each individual's self-examination with a purpose to making a positive response to the light.¹⁹⁰ This is within the context of discipleship and thus entails a "promise to the faithful disciple."¹⁹¹ He will not "walk in darkness" indicates life character where one, by accepting the light, attains salvation and changes his domain of existence from darkness to light. Darkness as an antithesis of light, reflects a persistent refusal to acknowledge the revelation of Christ. It rejects all that which entails the messiahship of Christ and his substitutionary sacrifice. It is a rejection of life which is salvation.¹⁹² This light has in essence pierced through this realm of darkness for the freedom of the whole world.

In the place of darkness, Jesus says that one "will have the light of life." We note in this context again, the close connection between light and life. This could either be "the light which issues from the source of life

¹⁸⁹Barclay, The Gospel of John, 12. He says that to be a follower of Christ is to give oneself body, soul and spirit into the obedience of the master; and to enter upon that following is to walk in the light."

¹⁹⁰Schnackenburg, 190. He observes that "instead of 'believe' or "come to Jesus" (6:35; 7:37; cf. 12:36), the characteristically synoptic expression 'follow' is used."

¹⁹¹Lindars, Gospel of John, 316.

¹⁹²Smalley, 203. He observes that eternal life or salvation which is the gift of God, "is mediated to the believer through Christ; in His incarnation, death, resurrection and exaltation."

or the light which gives life."¹⁹³ It is central to Johannine theology where light, life and salvation are intertwined in the person and ministry of Jesus. The concept of life occupies a central position in John (4:10,14; 6:35,48,51; 7:38; 14:6; 17:3). In John's concept of realized eschatology which was inaugurated by Jesus' incarnation, eternal life has already begun for the followers of Jesus or believers (cf I Jn 5:10-12). Since Jesus is the life, "the disciple, follower or believer . . . has the speaker, the Lord Himself."¹⁹⁴ This links Jesus and his followers in the sense that they also reflect the light that they have placed their faith upon. This points to the benefits there is in following Christ. The ethical life and behaviour of the believer should reflect that of Christ, since He is the "true light who transforms believers into sons of light"¹⁹⁵ Having life entails being in the right relationship with God. In this case, we agree with Ashton that "light is conceptually very close to salvation, and the proximity both assists and enriches

¹⁹³Barclay, 11. He argues that in this passage it means both where "Jesus is the very light of God come among men; and He is the light which gives men life."

¹⁹⁴R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel: A Commentary edited by C. F. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University, 1960), 189. He comments that "the light which the believer has, is always the light, which Jesus is; and in this sense the believer must never regard it as his own."

¹⁹⁵Xavier Leon-Dufour, Dictionary of the New Testament, translated by Terrence Prendergarst (London: Harper and Row, 1980), 269. He observes that "the light convicts itself to a combat with darkness, and man has to chose between these options, that is he has to believe in Jesus. . . ."

its symbolic significance in the Gospel tradition."¹⁹⁶

Summary

We can therefore argue that this verse is central to the Johannine portrayal of Christ, the light of the world. His appeal for men to put their faith in Him and the consequences of either acceptance or rejection come out clearly. Unbelief entails remaining in darkness and ignorance of the saviour, while belief gives one the right to have life and walk in the light. The symbolic imagery of light in relation to Jesus as portrayed by John is central to our understanding of the plan of salvation for mankind. The uniqueness of Jesus in His special relationship with the Father is a central feature in his messianic task. Jesus' self-consciousness as one with the Father in His use of the "I am" sayings is validated by His miracles. The portrayal of Jesus as the light in view of what He does, broadens our concept of salvation to include not only the spiritual aspect of it but also the physical. The symbols used by John as we have seen help in our understanding of his theological background which is rooted in the Jewish ideas and writings of his time. The Old Testament therefore is central in John's writing in his presentation of Christ, the messiah who was anticipated by and fulfils the Old Testament expectations.

¹⁹⁶John Ashton, Understanding the Fourth Gospel (New York: Clarendon, 1991), 219.

the nations.¹⁹⁷

The concept of light and its diverse nuances avails the biblical student with one of the various themes or subjects that developed in the Old Testament and shaped the mind of the New Testament writers. Consequently, therefore, the understanding and use of light in John has the Old Testament as its background. We have also noted that the Jewish thought reflected in the Old Testament as well as other available literature (Dead Sea Scrolls) made a significant impact on John's theological concepts.¹⁹⁸

In order for us to make a clear link between the Old Testament and John's use of the figure of light, it is essential that we synthesize the passages that we have already discussed. This way, we shall pull together the Old Testament and John's use of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation. The implications that this figure or imagery has in each context and more specifically as it relates to the person and mission of Christ will be

¹⁹⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament (London: Marshall Pickering, 1992), 138. He continues to say that: "The restoration of Israel and the ingathering of the nations were seen in eschatological terms as the final great act of God, the day of the Lord." In this sense, the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel also include the future of the nations.

¹⁹⁸ James Montgomery Boice, The Epistles of John (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1979), 35. In his discussion of John's presentation of God as light, in his writings, Boice observes that the statement 'God is light' ". . . carries the reader into a world of imagery that is as old as religion and which would have been quite familiar and agreeable both to John's readers and to his opponents." This imagery, he points out, is found in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER 4

A SYNTHESIS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIGHT IN THE PASSAGES DISCUSSED

In the foregoing discussion, we have sought to analyze specific Old Testament passages focusing on the imagery of light as a figure of salvation. At the same time, we have looked at the use of the imagery of light in the Gospel of John and more specifically in the words of Jesus, "I am the light of the world." As we have already observed, the imagery of light is broadly applied to God's salvific program rooted in the Old Testament. An understanding of this imagery in the Old Testament, the foundation upon which the New Testament is built, helps us in understanding its use in John's Gospel. This assumption is validated by the fact that the Old Testament was the Scripture available to the New Testament writers and whose fulfilment they anticipated. We have observed that the theological concepts and anticipations of the first century Jews is evident in the Inter-Testamental writings. It is through this literature that Jewish expectations are found. In this regard, Wright observes that:

. . . Aspects of Jewish expectation at the time of Jesus—the restoration of Israel and the ingathering of the nations—had deep roots, of course, in the Old Testament itself. . . . Jewish hopes at the time of Jesus, then, focused primarily on the restoration of Israel, with the closely attached implications for

outlined.¹⁹⁹

As we have already observed the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is used with reference to both the physical as well as the non-physical aspects of light. In both cases, the Bible applies and imagery of light as a figure of salvation in relation to God's plan of bringing salvation to humanity.

The Significance of the Creation of Light

In this passage, we see the first appearance of light as a creative act of God. Light emanates from God and, in this context, serves the purpose of illuminating the existing physical reality covered in darkness. In the creation of this light, God exhibits his control and sovereignty over it as he gives it a task of illuminating the darkness that was over the surface of the deep. This creation of light makes possible the other creative acts of God since he created during the day (when there was light). This light, therefore, brought order to the pre-existent state of disorder, dominated by darkness, ". . . darkness was over the surface of the deep . . ." (v 2). In this regard, we can deduce that light was significant

¹⁹⁹It is worth observing here that John does not make a direct quote of any Old Testament passage in his presentation of Jesus as the light. In this case, the relationship that we shall seek to make between the Old Testament and John is one of thought patterns, concepts, or ideas. At the same time, the general understanding of the function of light as a figure of salvation is in relation to the function of Jesus, the light, in his salvific mission.

to the whole creative acts of God.²⁰⁰ The created light in this context, penetrates the formlessness, void and darkness that was over the deep and gave it form and light. The physical created light brings order that enables the creative work of God for the next five days possible. It is this light bringing function (illumination) to a dark existence that avails light in this context a significance relevant to our thesis. God's creation of light on the first day gives us the importance that He places on it in His dealings with the universe.

This functional importance of light in the creation account is also reflected in John's Gospel. John presents Jesus as "the light of the world," who invades darkness to bring God's salvation (Jn 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35,46). Jesus as the light is in direct conflict with the darkness. The appearance of light in John's Gospel therefore presents some similarities with that of Genesis. In both cases, light appears in order to illuminate the existing darkness. The creation of the physical light in Genesis is central to God's creative acts and the order that he gives His creation.²⁰¹ In

²⁰⁰The implication here is that, without the creation of light first, it would not have been possible to have the work of creation done as it was. Though this is an argument from silence, the only account of creation provided in the biblical text, in Genesis, takes place during the day.

²⁰¹We should note that in the creation account light is physical and created. Its function is to control the darkness and provide light in which God orders his creation. In John's Gospel, light is symbolic of the person

John's Gospel "the light" is the saviour of the world, and His light bringing function is related to His task or mission of bringing humankind to the knowledge of God.²⁰²

In as much as the centrality of light in both Genesis 1:3-5 and John 8:12 focuses on God's work with and on His creation, a distinction needs to be made. In Genesis light is created, In John light (Jesus) is the agent of creation. The point of connection between the two is one of function. We have pointed out above that the opening words of Genesis 1:1 and those of John 1:1 portray a similarity. This, as we have argued, should not make us draw an erroneous conclusion that the referent is the same.²⁰³ Jesus is the light in a metaphorical sense, where he brings the knowledge of God to a world dominated by godlessness. His light bringing function, therefore, is embedded within the pronouncement of the coming of God's kingdom of justice and

and mission of Jesus, through whom creation was made possible (Jn 1:3).

²⁰²We have already discussed above John's presentation of salvation as eternal life mediated through Christ. Stephen S. Smalley observes that: "The life-giving activity of Christ) with which, as we have seen, the symbol of 'light' as regularly linked) thus involves both the person and work of Jesus, the word who revealed God's nature and was glorified by him, and it is no accident that the titles used by Jesus of himself in John, therefore, always contain or imply the thought of life and (light)." (John: Evangelist and Interpreter [n.p.: Paternoster, 1978], 203).

²⁰³Such an erroneous conclusion would result in identifying the created light of Genesis with the person of Jesus, the creator presented in John. The fact that he, the word, was with God in the beginning and all things came into being through him is a clear indication that he is not a subject of creation but its master.

righteousness. The kingdom of satan, dominated by darkness, is in conflict with Jesus' kingdom, of light, and attempts to overcome him with no avail.

In the same manner in which the light of creation invaded the existing darkness and subdued its dominance,²⁰⁴ also has light (Jesus) as presented in John invaded darkness (the world).²⁰⁵ The light of creation brought order to the pre-existent state of disorder and the consequent formation or ordering of creation was effected. In His coming, Jesus brought "the light of life" so that through Him, all men might believe (Jn 1:17). Whoever believes in the light will therefore have eternal life (Jn 1:12; 3:16; 8:12). The functional aspect of the light of creation and Jesus the light, therefore, point to the illumination of the world.

The other passage we have considered where light is used as a figure of salvation is in the exodus account. God uses light in various ways in order to effect the salvation of His people from Egyptian bondage. We now turn to a synthesis of light in the exodus account.

²⁰⁴It is worth noting here that physical darkness in the creation account was not totally conquered but, as we saw above, it was controlled and limited to the night. The moon and the stars (lights) were given the task of illuminating the night. In the same way, Jesus, "the light," did not completely wipe out "the darkness" which in this regard is a personification of satan and his evil deeds. He is, however, controlled under and subjected to the authority of the light (cf Matt 28:18).

²⁰⁵We should observe here that the world as the sphere of darkness is so designated because of its association with satan, the prince of the world. Its opposition to the light (Jesus) and his mission is portrayed clearly in the crucifixion.

The Significance of Light in the Exodus Account

In the context of the exodus account, we have considered two passages where God provides light to the Israelites. In both cases, we have argued that, Yahweh is redeeming His people from Egyptian bondage.²⁰⁶ A consideration of each passage will help our synthesis at this point. We shall first consider the provision of light for Israel when Egypt was hit with a plague of darkness.

A Synthesis of the Plague of Darkness

This passage occurs within the context of the ten plagues through which God's hand of wrath falls upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their oppression of Israel. The plague of darkness, the ninth in order, portrays a clear distinction of Israel as God's people. While all the land of Egypt was covered in darkness for three days, "all Israelites had light in the places where they lived" (Ex 10:23). Our discussion above has shown that the darkness that God struck Egypt was supernatural. This corresponds with the fearsome darkness of the day of the Lord. It was darkness that could be felt. As the

²⁰⁶F. F. Bruce, The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 32. He argues that in the Exodus, "the God of Israel was proclaimed as everlasting king . . . [and] revealed as his people's saviour." This declaration is made in the "song of the sea" where Yahweh's kingship is seen in his saving power (Ex 15:2). In this presentation, "the exodus provides for the rest of the biblical record a form of language and imagery for communicating the message of salvation."

Egyptians anguished in this darkness, the Israelites, who at the time were in bondage in the land of Egypt, had light.

In the sense that God was punishing the Egyptians when he struck them with the plague of darkness, it is evident that the light available among the Israelites was an indication of God's mercy upon them. Worth noting in this context is the fact that both the light and the darkness were natural. The Egyptian's obstinate rejection to heed to Yahweh's appeals for Israel's release was indicative of their disregard of the person of Yahweh. Yahweh, consequently subdued the power of the sun, a supreme god in Egypt. This literal darkness over Egypt, for three days had symbolic implications, in as much as it had devastating effects. With Yahweh in control of the luminaries, it was possible for him to give light to the Israelites. Darkness did not subdue the light. As we have argued, this darkness was indicative of Yahweh's wrath and punishment. For Israel to have light is a clear indication that Yahweh was saving them from his wrath. In as much as it was physical or natural light, this provision is symbolic of the salvation of Yahweh. It was indicative of His concern for their salvation, not only for their present predicament but more so their ultimate release from bondage.

In relating this account with the light bringing function of Jesus in the Gospel of John, we note that

Jesus' purpose in coming was for the salvation of the human race. Jesus as the light rescues those who follow or believe in Him from the agony of dwelling in darkness. To this effect, John says: ". . . whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). The subjects of God's wrath walk in darkness because, like the Egyptians, they have obstinately rejected the light. Walking in darkness is indicative of the character of those in opposition to God. The contrast between light and darkness and their symbolic representation come out clearly in this passage. The Egyptians rejected God and His constant appeal for them to let the Israelites go. In the ninth plague they were struck with darkness. As we have argued out above, this plague touched on the very heart of Egyptian religion.

In the Gospel of John, the unbelievers, in rejecting Jesus, the light of the world, continue to walk in darkness. Conversely, the Israelites were saved from the wrath of God, by having light in their premises. This is indicative of their special relationship with him. Figuratively, light served as a symbol of God's salvation in the midst of the Egyptians who were undergoing punishment. In the same way, the believers, those who have a special relationship with Jesus, the light, and follow him, "will never walk in darkness" (Jn 8:12). The light that Jesus provides is symbolic of God's salvation, through Christ the saviour of the world.

In the same way that the physical light provided to the Israelites, while the Egyptians were submerged in darkness, was symbolic of God's salvation, so also is the light that Jesus gives to those who follow him. We can, therefore, deduce that there is a resemblance between this passage and John in the sense that light is symbolically used as a figure of salvation.

Light as a figure of salvation in the exodus account is not only used in the context of the plague of darkness but also in God's guidance of the Israelites, in the wilderness, in their journey to the promised land. This is yet another aspect of provision of light in the Old Testament which we have discussed. We now turn to a synthesis of light in this passage.

A Synthesis of Light for the Exodus Journey

The provision of light for the Israelites in this context is a pointer to God's continued pursuance of the salvation of his people. Once they were released from Egypt, the Lord did not abandon them before they reached the end of their journey. His constant presence, represented by "a pillar of cloud to guide on their way and by night a pillar of fire to give them light . . ." clearly indicates his concern for their salvation. Worth noting here is the provision of the supernatural light, to guide the Israelites. As we have observed above, the Lord did not command the moon and stars to provide light but went ahead of them himself. His presence, and the light that emanated from the pillar of fire, was a

constant reminder for the Israelites that Yahweh, their saviour, was in control.²⁰⁷ This light was, therefore, figurative of the Lord's salvation that he was in the process of effecting in the life and experience of the Israelites at this point. The Lord himself was the light of Israel. In his light they walked and were shielded from any attacks or dangers from their enemies, until they eventually realised their salvation by entering the promised land.

The figure of light in this context also relates to the light in John. The fact that Jesus is presented as "the light of the world" reflects the presentation of the Lord as "a pillar of fire" giving the Israelites light. The figurative symbolism of light in both contexts give us a good example to the Lord's involvement in the salvation of his people.²⁰⁸ The Israelites walked in the light that was provided and in that sense did not walk in darkness. In the same way, Jesus says that "whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). As the light guided the

²⁰⁷We should indicate here that light came from the pillar of fire, as in natural fire. This illumination enabled the Israelites to progress with the journey, even at night. The source of this light was God himself in the sense that he does not ordinarily provide light in this manner.

²⁰⁸Bruce, Old Testament Themes, 33. He argues that "if at the Exodus Yahweh saved his people . . . as he went before the Exodus generation in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, a pillar which moved from before them and stood behind them when danger threatened from the rear, so to the latter generation the promise is given. . . ."

Israelites through the wilderness to the realisation of their salvation, so also does Jesus guide the believer in this life. As we have argued above, the earthly Christian life of those who are being saved is a journey, which requires guidance, just as that of the Exodus did. In this case then, salvation is the central aspect in the provision of light in both John and the Exodus.

Our argument so far has shown that light is used figuratively as an image of salvation or is directly connected with the provision of salvation. The exodus account where the Lord discriminately provided light to the Israelites as he inflicted the Egyptians with the plague of darkness serves as a good example. In the same way, the provision of light for the Israelites as they journeyed to the promised land is also another good example where salvation is in the forefront. These two accounts, as we have already observed, serve as backgrounds to John's presentation of Jesus as the light of the world. The imagery of light as a figure of salvation in the Old Testament is also reflected in the prophetic passages of which Isaiah is a good example. We now turn to a synthesis of the passages in Isaiah that we have discussed above.

The Significance of Light in Isaiah

We have already observed the prominence of the imagery of light in Isaiah. The breadth with which Isaiah uses light indicates its importance to his message

whose central focus is the future hope of God's people.²⁰⁹ The use of the imagery of light in Isaiah is broad and involves various figures. The imagery of light as a figure of salvation is directly related to the future release of God's people from the bondage and oppression of darkness, sin, and Satan. The symbolic representation of darkness, that has already been discussed above, forms a good background of Isaiah's use of darkness and light. Isaiah's prophecies regarding the salvation to come are linked to the light bringing function of the Messiah, an aspect that has already been pointed out above. In bringing out the relevance of the use of the imagery of light in Isaiah we now turn our focus to the passages that have already been considered.

A Synthesis of Light to Zebulun and Naphtali (Is 9:2)

The provision of light in this context has to do with the inhabitants of the northern region of Israel (Zebulun and Naphtali), who were "walking in darkness . . . [and] living in the land of the shadow of death." We have argued out above that the reference to this account has to do with the oppression of Israel by the Assyrian invasion led by Tiglath-Pileser, in the wake of the Assyrian captivity (734-733 B.C.). Isaiah,

²⁰⁹William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 380. They argue that "this concept of the future hope springng forth from the stump . . . becomes part of the language of the messianic promise in several prophets".

symbolically, describes the oppressive conditions under which the Israelites were living as darkness. The darkness in this context is indicative of both the physical and the spiritual devastation that the people were undergoing. The light that Isaiah promises will, therefore, provide both physical and spiritual release (salvation).

In view of the experience of the people in this context (inhabitants of Zebulun and Naphtali), the promise of light is indicative of their salvation. The immediate bondage, described figuratively as darkness, requires a redeemer, saviour (bringer of light). The dawning of this light, as we have observed, is fulfilled when Hezekiah ascended the throne and ultimately in the life and ministry of Jesus in this region. When Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world" it is important that we understand Him as referring to His person and mission in His light bringing function. His presence in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, at the beginning of His ministry, is a direct fulfilment of this prophecy. In presenting Jesus as the Messiah, Matthew alludes to the Old Testament quotations as well as tracing His geographical movements. In this context, he relates Jesus' movement to "Zebulun and Naphtali . . . Galilee of the Gentiles" with the fulfilment of Isaiah 9:2. This fulfilment, as we have pointed out above, is with reference to Jesus' ministry to the inhabitants of this

region,²¹⁰ who, like those in the time of Isaiah are oppressed. In this regard, the fulfilment of this prophecy by Jesus is important to John in his presentation of Jesus as the light of the world. By bringing about spiritual and physical freedom (release) to the oppressed (lowly), Jesus' person and ministry verify His self-claims. The light that Isaiah talks about here is, in essence, figurative. The dawning of light, fulfilled by Jesus, as He visits and ministers in this regions is figuratively indicative of his salvation bringing function. Those walking in darkness will do so no longer, for the light of the world has come and dispelled the darkness. It is in this regard that we can argue that the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is anticipated by Isaiah in this prophecy and fulfilled in Jesus' earthly life and ministry. His light bringing function or task verifies His self-claim that: " I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8:12). The other texts that we have considered in Isaiah are within the servant songs where the servant is variously designated or described as "a light for the Gentiles." The light bringing function of the servant is directed toward those who have been living in separation from the

²¹⁰Through his ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons (Matt: 9:1f.; 12:22f.), Jesus released the needy from their oppression. He also preached repentance which brought release from the bondage of sin and Satan, to the repentant. All these aspects of release are related to the physical and spiritual status of the needy. This ministry is an aspect of the light bringing task of the messiah.

Lord and by figurative implication in darkness. We now turn to a synthesis of each of these servant passages as discussed above.

A Synthesis of Light for the Gentiles (Is 42:6)

In the context of this passage, Isaiah presents the servant as a light in his justice bringing task. As we have observed above, this light bringing function is figurative of the freedom brought to the oppressed.²¹¹ As an agent of Yahweh, the servant is enabled by the Spirit of the Lord to be a light to the nations.²¹² As we have already observed, the servant is the object (light) through whom the Gentiles will come to the knowledge and obedience of Yahweh's commands. Light in this context is figuratively symbolic of the enlightenment that the servant brings to those in darkness.²¹³ This has an implication of the Gentiles

²¹¹Wright, 162-63. He observes that the mission of the servant is in view of the restoration of redemption of Israel. He says: "Israel was the servant of God . . . with the purpose of being a light to the nations . . . but, historically, Israel was failing in that role and mission. . . . The individual servant is thus at one level distinct from Israel because he has a mission to Israel to challenge them and call them back to God. The restoration of Israel, God's servant, is the task of the servant himself. . . . Through him God's justice, liberation and salvation will be extended to the nations."

²¹²We should note here that the light we are talking about in this context is metaphorical. The light bringing aspect of the servant, as we have pointed out above, is functional in the sense that he is or becomes light by what he does.

²¹³In this context, darkness is representative of the ignorance of and separation from Yahweh that people (gentiles) are living in. The servant in this context draws them to establishing a living relationship with Yahweh

being converted and worshipping Yahweh through the ministry of the servant. The Gentiles change their lifestyles and accordingly live and walk in the light. In essence, light in this context is a figure of salvation in as far as the servant, light, is the object that effects the salvation of the Gentiles. By learning from him, the gentiles are saved.

In relating the use of this imagery with John's presentation of Jesus as the light, we note a close comparison. John presents Jesus as "the light of the world," by virtue of his person and ministry. As we have discussed above, Jesus' light bringing function is embedded within his salvific ministry. In the same manner in which the servant is the light, so also is Jesus. The scope of their task, however, differ in the sense that the servant's task in this context is directed to the Gentiles while that of Jesus is to the whole world. On the same note, the servant is described as "a light" while John portrays Jesus as "the light." In view of our analysis of the person and mission of Jesus as presented by John, the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is ultimately fulfilled in him. The other agents that the Lord uses as light, preceding the coming of Christ, like the servant are all involved in the light bringing function whose ultimate fulfilment is Jesus. In this regard, therefore, we can argue that, Jesus' statement: "I am the light of the world" was, in

which implies the obedience of his laws.

retrospective, related to the ongoing program of God's salvation for the human race. This is indicative of Jesus' self-perception of his own mission as well as his mission to Israel which is "related to the later apostolic mission to the gentiles (the nations)."²¹⁴ The messianic incarnation of Christ is the highlight (climax) of the provision of the program of salvation. In John's presentation of Jesus as the light, the Old Testament's view of the servant as "a light to the gentiles" comes to mind. In addition to this passage, we have considered other servant passages. Our attention will now be focused on the presentation of the servant as agent of light (salvation) in Isaiah 49:6.

A Synthesis of Light for the Gentiles (Is. 49:6)

As the other servant of the Lord passage that we have already considered, Isaiah here spells out clearly the light bringing function of the servant. As we have discussed, the servant in this context is identified as Israel. The task of the servant here is "to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept" (Is 49:6a). To this task is added that of making "you a light for the gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Is. 49:6b). The figure of light in this context is also directly related to the function of the servant in, not only gathering Israel and bringing them back to covenant obedience, but

²¹⁴Wright, 163.

also making Yahweh known to the Gentiles. As a light, the servant reflects the saving grace of the Lord to the Gentiles who, in the past, were ignorant of Yahweh and his laws. The purpose of the servant being a light is primarily to bring Yahweh's salvation to the ends of the earth. This, as we have observed, is a clear link of light with the salvation bringing task of the servant. The servant is a light in as far as he is an agent of Yahweh's salvation to the gentiles. Light in this context then is used as a figure of salvation.

In relating this text with the presentation of Jesus in John's Gospel we note aspects that link the task of the servant to that of Jesus. As we observed above, the servant is a light in his agency of bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. Jesus is the light and the ultimate fulfilment of the Old Testament's expectation of the messiah. Central to this passage is the fact that light and salvation with reference to the task of the servant are directly linked. The scope of the servant's light bringing task is related to that of Jesus who is "the light of the world." The presentation of Jesus in John 8:12 recalls the presentation of the servant in this passage in the sense that both are agents of salvation to the whole world.²¹⁵ John's presentation of Jesus as the light therefore

²¹⁵Our observation here is that "the ends of the earth" in reference to the light bringing function of the servant and the presentation of Jesus as "the light of the world" is the same scope of reference.

recalls the light bringing function of the servant of Yahweh who, in this context, brings salvation to those in darkness.²¹⁶ We note here that the imagery of light as a figure of salvation in relation to the servant and John's presentation of the person of Christ are closely linked. The other servant text that we have considered, where the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is employed is Isaiah 51:4. We now turn to a synthesis of the presentation of light in this context.

A Synthesis of Light to the Nations (Is 51:4)

The use and application of the imagery of light in this context is related with that presented in the preceding passages. The distinctive aspect here is that, rather than the servant directly being presented as light, it is justice which is referred to as the light. In this sense justice is used as a symbol of light (salvation). We have also observed that, justice, as light, is linked to the law of the Lord. We pointed out the importance of the law in bringing about justice. The nations are here indicated as the recipients of the light (salvation) which the Lord will give through his obedient nation (Israel). By virtue of the nations observing the just social shape of Israel, they will be attracted to Yahweh and will consequently become partakers or

²¹⁶The justice bringing task of Jesus in his mission to the lowly, needy and oppressed is a key point of linking the presentation of the justice bringer in Isaiah as an agent of light and Jesus, the light, as the bringer of justice.

beneficiaries of the blessings of Yahweh's people. In the nations identification with Israel's law and God, they will be saved. The figure of light in this context is, therefore, indicative of Yahweh's unlimited offer of salvation.

In relating this passage with John's presentation of Jesus as the light of the world we note some specific areas where they are linked. We have noted above that Jesus' task as the bringer of light has to do with justice bringing. As the light is directed to the nations in this context, Jesus also is the light of the world. The effect of light in Isaiah and in John is functional. Justice functions as a light bringer, as is beheld by the nations who are consequently attracted and drawn to it. In the sense that justice is the Lord's, "my justice," and the response it receives from the nations is directed to the Lord. It draws people to establishing a relationship with Yahweh, amounting to their salvation. In the same way Jesus, the light, draws people to himself as their Lord and saviour. The symbol of light as a figure of salvation in this context is therefore indicative of the salvation that the Lord has given to all who are drawn to himself. It is on this basis, therefore, that we can argue that John's presentation of Jesus, "the light of the world" looks back to the presentation of the light in Isaiah.

Summary

In our synthesis, we have observed that the symbol of light as a figure of salvation discussed in the selected passages of the Old Testament serves as a significant background of John's presentation of Jesus as the light of the world. We have noted that this imagery of light is used both in a physical as well as spiritual or symbolic sense. The imagery of light is central to God's plan of salvation for the world. This we have clearly seen in the way that the recipients of light both Jews and Gentiles, came to the knowledge of the Lord and obedience of his law. As recipients of light, the subjects of salvation are drawn out from the domain of darkness. In this way, the imagery of darkness as an antithesis of light is clearly portrayed. The order brought about by the creation of light, the provision of light to the Israelites in the Exodus account and the promise of light to the Gentiles (nations) in Isaiah's servant texts all point to the salvific figure of light. In relating this texts with John's presentation of Jesus in John 8:12, it is apparent that his notion of light as a figure of salvation had this Old Testament background.

and its effects on God's people. This entails the first recipients of the biblical message as well as the modern reader. This analysis will facilitate our outlining of the relevance of our findings in the Church. We now make a summary of our findings.

Summary of Findings

A Summary of the Old Testament Passages

The task of this thesis has been to address the problem of understanding the imagery of light in John 8:12 in light of the same figure in the Old Testament, which, as we have sought to illustrate, is its appropriate background. In our attempt to address this problem, we have considered selected Old Testament passages which are representative of the general Old Testament understanding and use of the imagery of light. These passages have set both the physical as well as the symbolic use of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation. Our consideration of each of the passages has indicated that:

1. The imagery of light is one of the central biblical symbols representing God's provision for the salvation of the human race. As the light, Jesus reveals himself to humankind and, by so doing, he provides for an establishment of their proper relationship with him.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Our discussion thus far has sought to relate the relevance of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation. John's presentation of Jesus as the light of the world and his salvific mission to the world has been presented. The Old Testament background that influenced John in his presentation of this imagery has also been considered. The theological framework (mind set) that prevailed during the first century, the Messianic hope anticipated by the Jews, as attested in the Inter-Testamental literature has not escaped our notice. The general presentation of the plan of salvation as viewed in the imagery of light and whose ultimate object (source) is the person and mission of Christ, has also been considered. We have also taken note of the relevant aspects touching on John's presentation of Jesus as the light and its effect on people's response. The presentation of this imagery has also incorporated that of its antithesis, darkness, in its physical as well as symbolic implications. In view of this, it is necessary that we now make some conclusive remarks.

In our conclusion, we shall give a summary of the biblical and theological findings arrived at. It will also be necessary to draw out the significance of light

2. The origin of light in both its physical and symbolic implications present us with one of the most profound biblical teachings of the nature and character of God in his dealings with the created order. God is the author and embodiment of the light which has as one of its functions, the illumination of that which resides in darkness. This provision of light is a representation of God as he stands in opposition to darkness or evil.
3. The presentation of the imagery of light is antithetical to the imagery of darkness. Light is revealed for the purpose of ending the domination of darkness. The imagery of darkness as the antithesis of light, is a representation and embodiment of evil.
4. Darkness in its physical and metaphysical sense is presented as already in existence. Its corrupt effects permeate both the physical and the spiritual world. The appearance of light has a salvific function of salvaging, giving order and regaining that which darkness is on the verge of destroying.
5. The presentation of light as a figure of salvation in the Old Testament context is embodied, in its literal and metaphorical level, within God's program of salvation of the human race from both spiritual and physical oppression.

- This entails a total (monistic) provision of salvation.
6. Each individual context where the imagery of light as a figure of salvation is used, addresses a specific situation that requires a salvific illumination of light.
 7. The Old Testament presentation looks forward to the ultimate revelation of light in the person of the Messiah. In as much as each individual context is historical and complete, there is a sense in which the thought progresses and builds upon the anticipation of the coming of "the light."
 8. John's presentation of Jesus as "the light of the world" is ideally related to the presentation of light in the Jewish thinking evident in the Old Testament and illustrated in the Inter-Testamental literature. John's understanding and use of this imagery is therefore illuminated by a proper understanding of its use in the Old Testament.

This Old Testament study of the imagery of light as a figure of salvation has given us a good background upon which the New Testament is based. Our analysis of John is a good example of how this background is essential. We now look at the summary of John's presentation of light.

A Summary of John's Presentation of the Imagery of Light

In our exegetical study of the Gospel of John, we have considered his use of the imagery of light, in his presentation of Jesus, the light of the world. This understanding of the imagery of light is directly related to his perspective of the person and mission of Christ. The salvation of the world is central to John's understanding of Christ's mission. In understanding Jesus as the light, it has been shown that John's concepts are embedded within the Jewish thought reflected in the Old Testament.

To understand Jesus, it is essential for one to have a fair grasp of God's program of salvation which He began in the Old Testament. In order to understand the culmination of this program with Jesus, the various aspects of God providing salvation for His people in the Old Testament is essential. One should also understand the mission for which Christ's coming (incarnation) was intended. Our consideration of the various texts in the Old Testament where light is used as a figure of salvation has prepared the ground for which the mission of Christ and His presentation as the light is based. John uses the imagery of light as a figure of salvation in his presentation of Christ in view of his person and mission. The special relationship that Christ has with God as we have seen, links the mission of God in the Old Testament with the person of Christ. The work of Christ is the work of God. His presentation as the light is in

line with God's revelation and the use of light in the Old Testament. The program of salvation which God began in the Old Testament as he revealed light to mankind, finds its continuation and culmination in Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

As a true Jew, John presents Jesus, the light, in his Jewish understanding of the messiah. This light bringing function is in line with the Jewish understanding of the saviour, the redeemer of Israel. The ideas expressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls have indicated to us that John's concepts were in line with those of his time. This thinking was based on the revelation given in the Old Testament and the fulfilment thereof. The presentation of Jesus as the light of the world in John 8:12 and John's use of the imagery of light as a whole has as its appropriate background the Old Testament. The presentation of Jesus as the light and the imagery of light as a figure of salvation as a whole has a definite effect on its recipients.

The Significance of light and its effects on God's People

As we have observed, the provision of light in each context has as its primary function, the salvation of those for whom it was intended. Salvation for the human race is at the forefront. Jesus as the light calls for man's response: "Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." As Smalley has observed: "The fourth Gospel as a whole possesses a

strongly individualistic character."²¹⁷ The provision of light demands a personal decision either to receive or reject Jesus. Those who refuse to accept the light continue to live and walk in darkness. They are opposed to God's plan and program of salvation and are thus destined to an eternal separation with God, the light, for they loved darkness more than light. Both John and the Dead Sea Scrolls present them as the sons of darkness.

Those who accept and receive the light are the believers or sons of God (sons of light). These are partakers of the blessings that light brings. They are physically and spiritually freed from the oppression of sin, Satan and darkness. They enter into a personal relationship with God where they enjoy His special provision of grace as they live in opposition to the world (darkness) awaiting their eternal salvation. This aspect of salvation that they now enjoy has both physical as well as spiritual implications.²¹⁸ It is therefore the individual responsibility of the believer to respond to the summons of Christ, follow the light and become a

²¹⁷Smalley, 234. He argues that, "many sayings of Jesus in John, for example, refer to the relation between individuals and himself. . . . to describe the Christ-Christian relationship, John uses distinctive ideas which appear to be thoroughly corporate."

²¹⁸Smalley, 203. He observes that the "concept of salvation in John . . . has a continuing reference: past, present and future. . . . The believing Christian, who has passed from darkness to life and light, is called to abide in Christ and to practice a love and service reflecting those of the earthly Jesus himself."

member of the household of God's people.

The Church, which is composed of believers of all ages in their identification with Christ, should reflect the light that it carries on the mission of Christ to a lost world (cf. Mt 5:14-16; Ac 13:47; 1 Jn 1:5-7). The followers of Jesus are therefore children of light by virtue of their incorporation in Christ's mission. This is a corporate as well as an individual task. As members of the body of Christ, the Church shares the blessings accompanying the incarnation of Christ, the light. Identification with and acceptance of the saviour, by each individual is obligatory in order for them to walk in the light. Jesus stands out as the only light that illuminates each individual. He is the saviour who has not failed. The Church has the responsibility of educating its members on the uniqueness of Christ. Proper biblical teaching on the person and mission of Christ to a lost world, should characterise the pulpit ministry of the Church. It is not until the Church comes into terms with the proper biblical presentation of Christ that it will start enjoying the benefits that He brings. Resulting into other sources or so called, dispensers of light, is not the solution to the unending spiritual as well as physical oppression that humanity is subjected to. The solution to the problems facing the human race is Christ, the light of the world.

This paper has sought to analyze the biblical presentation of the imagery of light, as a figure of

salvation, as it relates to the person of Christ. As the light of the world, Jesus, as presented by John is the ultimate fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament is also the appropriate background for the ideas developed in the New Testament relating to God's dealings with mankind. Our study of the imagery of light has shown that John's concept of Jesus, the light, is based on the Old Testament understanding of this imagery.

We have seen that the imagery of light relates both to the physical as well as the spiritual (symbolic) aspects. In using this imagery, God portrays His nature and intention for the world. Jesus as the light is the culmination of God's work of salvation in which he seeks to destroy the works of darkness. It is, therefore, evident that John's presentation of Jesus, the light of the world, has as its background the Old Testament.

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