

"Kayle de Waal makes a persuasive case for the importance of understanding the motif of the 'way' in the New Testament on the basis of strong connections with the Old Testament, urging Jesus as the final, superior, and climactic Way to be admired and followed."

—*Jiří Moskala, Dean, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary,
Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology*

HEARING THE WAY

WHAT THE FIRST CHRISTIANS
HEARD IN THE STORY OF JESUS

KAYLE B DE WAAL

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“This book shows how the early Christians used the Old Testament to explain what following Jesus meant. I now see the New Testament with a new pair of glasses—a new frame of reference—and it makes a familiar text exciting and refreshing all over again. If this is a ‘way’ you would like to go, I highly recommend this book.”

—*Glenn Townend, President, South Pacific Division*

“Hearing the Way provides an entry into the New Testament via a door that is very much Old Testament-ish. It is a helpful reminder, to us as visual and digital natives and immigrants, that the earliest Christians were more often hearers rather than readers. This fact impacts on the way the Scriptures were written, and how we should hear, interpret and apply them. I hope that de Waal’s work will motivate other serious students of Scripture to continue the development of a fully-fledged hermeneutic of hearing.”

—*Professor Ray Roennfeldt, PhD, President, Avondale College of Higher Education*

“Kayle de Waal’s *Hearing the Way* reflects his passion for mission that I have witnessed in his work as a pastor and evangelist. But this book also captures his desire to make academia accessible to church members, small-group leaders, workshop presenters and preachers.”

—*Eddie Tupa’i, President, New Zealand Pacific Union Conference*

Chapter 1

Getting Under Way

We've all lost our way! It was 1992 and I was heading to Japan to finalise my visa to work in the Seventh-day Adventist language school in South Korea. I was off to Japan to sort out my visa as one of the new staff joining the language school. I distinctly remember looking out the window of the airplane at the vast city of Tokyo—I was truly in awe of its size.

As I got through customs and headed out into the city, I had my instructions in hand at all times—how to get to the office of the church's Japanese headquarter in Yokohama. Even though I had these instructions and phone numbers to call in an emergency, I still felt overwhelmed. The hustle and bustle of many crowds of people, the noise and movement of the city, and the “culture shock” all cumulatively impacted me. While the smiling faces of the Japanese people seemed welcoming, the need to get to my destination was urging me onward. Yet my movements were uncertain and I felt confused as I tried to follow the directions given to me.

Eventually, even after carefully following the directions, I knew I was lost. It was a sinking feeling, a feeling of emptiness. I asked around for help but no-one could speak English. People just smiled and moved on. I walked around for at least two hours with this lost feeling.

Why didn't I phone for help? I'm sure it was my pride!

Later in the day, I came across some school girls. I approached them for help and fortunately they could speak English. In no time, I was back on my way to Yokohama, grateful for the girls' help.

Finding the Way

The writers of Scripture used the word “way” to describe God's actions in the Old Testament, especially in Exodus and Isaiah. This notion of “way”—*hodos* in Greek—becomes an innovative literary construct used by the New Testament writers. It is used 108 times in the New Testament

to articulate the implications of the life, death, resurrection, high priestly ministry and return of Jesus Christ.¹ With a wide-angle lens, the New Testament writers understood the death and resurrection of Jesus as a New Exodus from the penalty and power of sin, the defeat of Satan and the ensnaring power of death (see Luke 9:31). When we take a narrow-angle lens to examine the notion of New Exodus, it often appears as the “way”—especially in the gospels, Acts and the book of Revelation (see Matthew 22:16; Mark 8:27; Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22; Revelation 16:12).

The New Testament writers draw the term “way” especially from Isaiah 40–55. As it is used in Isaiah, the concept refers broadly to the New Exodus. According to David Galleta, “The New Exodus refers to the fulfilment of those unfulfilled promises in the Prophets concerning the Babylonian exodus. These prophecies are typologically linked to the original exodus from Egypt and are spiritually fulfilled in the death, resurrection and return of Jesus the Messiah.”² This definition will be explained and explored in the pages to follow

This book aims to explore how the term “way” emerges in literary, Christological and relational terms, and for what it can teach us about God (theology), studying the Bible (hermeneutics), mission (missiology), the end-time (eschatology) and the church (ecclesiology). This discussion will culminate in a “theology of the way” and explore how the “new creation” theme, an aspect of the New Exodus, emerges in Galatians and Corinthians. While this book is indebted to many scholars who have written about the notion of “way” and the “new exodus” theme in the New Testament, it takes an integrated approach by studying how the theme emerges across a range of New Testament books and, in this way, makes a unique contribution.³

Martin Hengel suggests that the notion of Jesus “on the way” is not “literary decoration” but rather “the most important words and actions are performed” on this way.⁴ He suggests that Christianity is not a creed or theory about Jesus Christ, but rather that it is at its core a “way” of life. That “way” of life was meant to impact and transform the existence and experience of the early Christians. While these comments are helpful, this project will seek to deepen this traditional perspective.

It's About Jesus

The notion of “way” only has meaning because of the Christ-event—the life, death, resurrection, high-priestly ministry and return of Jesus Christ.⁵ The death and resurrection of Jesus is so central to early

Christianity that Martin Kähler can suggest that the gospels are “passion narratives with extended introductions.”⁶ The Christ-event profoundly impacted the world view and thinking of the early Christians and influenced their understanding of their Scriptures in new and profound ways.

The gospel writers engage the Old Testament stories of God’s involvement in the life and experience of His people to draw their picture of Jesus in the first-century Mediterranean world. It is a masterful picture, metaphorically speaking, with rich yet subtle density that draws ideas and concepts from the vast Old Testament library. Richard Hays maintains that the Old Testament is the “*generative milieu* for the gospels, the original environment in which the first Christian traditions were conceived, formed and nurtured.”⁷

There is broad understanding that the New Testament writers quote or allude to a range of Old Testament texts and passages to explore the implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This book will specifically focus on the Old Testament backgrounds of Isaiah and, to a lesser extent, Exodus. For example, in relation to Isaiah 53, James Dunn says that

Isaiah 53 provided the first generation Christians with an important Scriptural means of understanding the death of Jesus, and the fact that the reference is a formulaic allusion rather than a carefully argued scriptural proof . . . strongly suggests that the use of Isaiah 53 was widespread in earliest Christian apologetic and exercised a major influence on earliest Christian thought.⁸

Examining how the New Testament writers engage with Exodus and Isaiah, and how early Christian hearers would have understood the use of these books in their new literary context, serves to enhance the deftness of the evangelists’ literary craft. The New Testament writers were convinced that just as God was actively involved in the past, so He had been actively at work among His people in and through Jesus, the Messiah.

The Influence of the Roman Empire

The Roman Empire dominated the political, social, religious and economic landscape of people living in the first-century world. The early Christians living in this empire were not immune to the influence of its social practices, cultural ethos and political agendas.⁹ The interplay of

these religio-political and socio-cultural forces can be seen in, for example, the shipping industry, the imperial cult and imperial propaganda.

The Roman Empire, especially the elite, spent large amounts of money to purchase exotic goods from the other nations brought by the shipping industry. By the same token, Kraybill states that “200,000 families in Rome received from the government a regular ‘dole’ of free grain” that was facilitated by the shipping industry.¹⁰

Shipping also provided a forum for guilds, through which business and social relationships were advanced. But these guilds also had a “religious character,” often focusing “on the patron gods or goddesses of the association.”¹¹ The significant commercial benefits of shipping have led Kraybill to write: “The imperial government had more interest in the shipping industry than in any other commercial enterprise.”¹²

The Roman Empire had an overwhelming presence through the institutions of the imperial cult.¹³ While the roots of emperor worship lay deep in ancient Near Eastern cultures, the Roman Empire made its own contribution by organising and refining it into a unifying political force.¹⁴ This is one of the central features of the Roman Empire that John castigates in Revelation 13 in particular.¹⁵

The legitimacy, depth and influence of the imperial cult on the early Christians is evidenced in the first-century by an imperial temple being built in Smyrna (45 AD), in Philadelphia (55 AD) and in Sardis (56 AD).¹⁶ In my view, the erection of the imperial temples in Laodicea (87 AD) and Ephesus (89 AD) was the catalytic spark that necessitated John and Peter’s attacks on Rome in Revelation and Peter’s letters, respectively.¹⁷

A third manner in which the Empire legitimated the reality of presence is through the images—coins, buildings and monuments—that pervaded, even dominated, the everyday life of the early Christians.¹⁸ In fact, Zanker states that “the physical setting of the cult of the emperor was usually in the middle of the city.”¹⁹ Everywhere you turned you saw the emperor! The spread of coins in the Empire was like the profusion of the internet in our contemporary world, not as a means of communication but rather in its ubiquitous dominance in our everyday lives.

For example, the coins struck under Domitian’s reign emphasised his desire for the insignia and prerogatives of divinity in his dynasty.²⁰ Janzen contends that this “ever-escalating numismatic propaganda of the imperium”—the development of more coins to champion the Empire—could have been a direct factor in shaping the book of Revelation’s

response to the Empire. The same could be said about coins developed by Emperor Caligula in the late 40s and Emperor Nero in the late 50s of the first century, and highlights the complex and challenging world the early Christians lived in as they followed Christ.²¹

Doing Theology

Given this social and political context, we can ask a series of questions:

- How did the New Testament writers enlist and deploy the construct of “way” in the gospels of Mark, Luke and John, in Acts and in Revelation?
- How did the early Christians, who were largely hearers living in an oral culture dominated by the Roman Empire, understand the notion of “way”?
- What impact does the wider Old Testament context from which the allusions are drawn have on the meaning we can attribute to them in these New Testament books?

The penultimate chapter of this book examines the application of the concept of “way” in a globalised world. This provides us with another series of questions:

- How can the concept of “way” help us navigate the digitally disruptive world we live in?
- How can the construct of “way” assist in disciple-making and mission?
- How does the concept help us to contextualise the gospel in our post-Christian “liquid” culture?²²

This book will study the theme of the New Exodus. This kind of theology is concerned with developing a theology from the whole Bible, both Old and New Testament, that takes seriously the self-consistency of Scripture and the unified message Scripture conveys in the person and work of Jesus Christ.²³ According to Gerhard Hasel, “biblical theology employs the theological-historical method which takes full account of God’s self-revelation embodied in Scripture in all its dimensions of reality.”²⁴

An aspect of biblical theology is the typological interpretation of Scripture. Typology means that God has ordained certain people, institutions or events to prefigure or foreshadow His divine leading in the future. Typology demonstrates God’s leading in human affairs and in the lives of His people. It points forward to end-time realities or predictively prefigures. While it prefigures, it is not explicit. Where there are no

verbal or linguistic parallels, typology can sometimes be difficult to detect or, alternatively, it can make us see typological relationships where there are none.

But typology emerges in the Old Testament itself. The broad typological sweep of Old Testament self-understanding is evident in how Moses functioned as a type for both Joshua and Josiah.²⁵ In other words, Joshua and Josiah's ministries and leadership are patterned after that of Moses. For example, there are explicit statements of Joshua as a New Moses: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you" (Joshua 1:5); "Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you" (Joshua 1:17); "On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses" (Joshua 4:14); and "The Lord dried up the water of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea" (Joshua 4:23).²⁶

Furthermore, the prophets continually portray the eschatological future with motifs and imagery derived from the book of Genesis (compare Genesis 2 with Isaiah 11:6–9, 35; 65:23–25; Ezekiel 34:25–30; 36:35). Similarly, Isaiah predicts the coming deliverance of Israel from the Assyrian-Babylon captivity in terms of a new and greater exodus (Isaiah 43:16–19; 51:10–11).²⁷

The typological interpretation of Scripture was the most popular way to interpret the Scriptures by the early Christians.²⁸ The idea emerges from within the New Testament itself with the word *typos* or *antitypos* (see Matthew 12:40, 41; Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Hebrews 8:5; 9:24; 1 Peter 3:21). Jesus saw Himself as a New Jonah and a New Solomon (see Matthew 12:40, 41), but what Jesus went through as the New Jonah far exceeded what Jonah went through. There is often a heightened correspondence between the type and the anti-type, meaning the anti-typical fulfilment is greater and more intense than the initial historical reality.

Reading and Using this Book

God's plan for His children is that we grow in our relationship with Him (see Ephesians 4:15; 2 Peter 3:18). Each chapter of this book will end with a section called "Growing Hearing Communities." The questions are focused on exactly that—to grow communities that hear and obey God's voice (see Luke 11:28). There are three kinds of questions:

1. Meta-learning questions: Have you ever been surprised by what you are you're doing or learning? Have you had an "ah-hah" moment—

something captures your attention and your mind engages in a new way. These “meta-moments” are moments of discovery, moments of new learning. Your mind is exposed to a new reality through the information you are learning and processing.

2. Reflective learning questions focus on what is happening *in you* as a result of what you are learning. The gospel—and the process of sanctification, in particular—is about the transformation of the inner person (see Ephesians 3:16). Reflective learning asks what is God saying to you in this chapter or this text, and what is happening as a result to your thinking, your feeling, your relating, your attitude and your purpose.

3. Experiential learning questions pay attention to our actions, our application of what we are learning. Knowledge without application leads to spiritual laziness! James suggested that faith without works is dead (see James 2:17). Motivated by love (see Galatians 5:6) and the power of the Spirit (see Romans 5:5), these works cause us to take godly risks, experiment and practice. So, up front, I would love what you are learning in this book to actually make a difference in your life.

I normally listen to a local Christian radio station when I travel around the Central Coast. As I head toward Sydney, however, the sound on FM station becomes muffled and choppy as I head further away from the radio tower. As I drive away from the radio tower, the signal gets weaker and weaker. But when I head back up the motorway toward home, the signal becomes stronger and I can hear enjoy my favourite station once more.

Some might suggest that, in the same way, God’s voice goes fainter when we drift away from Him. But I would disagree and suggest that God’s voice is louder when we initially drift away from him. He is desperate to save us (see John 12:31, 32). Then His voice becomes fainter the longer we keep drifting from Him. But if we will turn around and come back to Him, we’ll hear his voice in clearer and stronger tones again. The closer we are to God, the clearer we can hear Him. I hope that you will hear God’s voice in clearer fashion as you read and reflect on this book: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

Growing Hearing Communities

1. Describe an experience when you lost your way.

2. Read Isaiah 35:8–10; 42:16; 43:16–19; and 49:11, 12.
 - a. What's new in these verses?
 - b. What surprises you?
 - c. What can you apply?
3. Jesus is the great Unifier of Scripture. Read Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:27–29; John 8:58.
 - a. What's new in these verses?
 - b. What surprises you?
 - c. What can you apply?
4. “The spread of coins in the Empire is like the profusion of the internet in our contemporary world, not as a means of communication but rather in its ubiquitous dominance in our everyday lives.” Do you agree that the internet and its many applications have come to dominate our lives? Is this positive or negative? How can you harness the power of social media to advance the gospel?
5. Typology points to the activity of God in the life of His ancient people. Jesus saw Himself as a New Jonah and a New Solomon (see Matthew 12:40, 41). Share the parallels and insights you can think of between Jesus and Jonah, and Jesus and Solomon. How is Jesus greater than both of these men? How can Jesus become greater in your life?

1. See I Howard Marshall (editor), *Moulton and Geden Concordance of the Greek New Testament*, 6th edition (London: T & T Clark, 2002), pages 736–7, and include Matthew 22:16; Mark 1:2, 3; 2:23; 4:4, 15; 6:8; 8:3, 27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52; 11:8; 12:14; John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22.
2. David Galleta, *The New Exodus in Galatians* (unpublished dissertation, University of Wales Saint Trinity David, 2016), page 18.
3. The theme of the “new exodus” came to the fore in the academic guild through the writings of N T Wright in the 1990s. The notion that Israel in the first century viewed her condition and plight as still in exile and in need of deliverance through an Exodus-type event is one of the main formulations in Wright’s view of first-century Judaism. See N T Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), pages 268–79, and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), pages 126–8, 209, 243. In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Wright argues that “Many if not most second-Temple Jews, then, hoped for the new

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