

Trauma and Moral Injury as Catalysts Driving Theology (6300 words)

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There would be no need for generational theological explorations if a community or an individual had never experienced trauma¹ or moral injury². Without trauma or moral injury there would not be a problem of Theodicy – a need to explain experienced or observed evil in a world created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent monotheistic God. The symbiotic process of continuity and change takes place in any belief system as a faith community attempts to stay relevant in an ever-changing world. However, a theological “revolution” took place during the Second Temple period which caused a fundamental shift affecting most (if not all) of the beliefs constituting the “theology of the Old Testament.”³ This period was not 400 years of silence as many modern believers think, but rather it produced a prolific and diverse body of literature, especially during the period 250-50 BCE. No matter how you view this body of literature, they are a written record produced by struggling faith communities who tried to survive this tumultuous and traumatic period of battling empires, exile, persecution, assimilation, and globalization – while still holding onto their faith in a just God. In the end, this trauma driven theological exploration gave birth to Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity – both of which incorporated an apocalyptic worldview.

This paper provides some examples of how trauma and moral injury made the theological revolution of the second temple period inevitable – focusing on the plethora of eschatological variations

¹I have been very privileged to have worked as Research and Special Projects Consultant (2023-2025) for Pat Rush MD, the co-director of The Center for Collaborative Study of Trauma, Health Equity, and Neurobiology – Then Center, see <https://thencenter.org/>. Their definition of trauma is “the direct, personal experience of harm (or threatened harm) to self or others” (<https://thencenter.org/Core-Concepts>). It might come as a surprise to some, but trauma is a common experience as 60% of adults and 40% of children report at least one traumatic experience during childhood according to the Then-Center. Thus, we can also assume that trauma was also very common in the biblical period, and would have had a similar effect on ancient peoples as medical scientific research has demonstrated it has in modern people. The Then-Center notes that trauma disrupts brain-body regulation and can cause inflammation and trigger chronic disease. Most trauma is complex and dose-dependent, resulting from a pattern of recurrent trauma, and thus, increases the likelihood of physical or mental illness. However, the impact of these events depends on the presence or absence of supportive factors and the emotional state of the person. Regardless, trauma is preventable and can often be healed – which is the ultimate purpose and goal of the Then-Center (summarized from <https://thencenter.org/Trauma-Accordion>). This web-site provides a comprehensive list of resources for all aspects of trauma research.

² Moral injury occurs when an individual experiences a profound violation of their moral beliefs or ethical code. Unlike Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which centers on fear responses, moral injury focuses on the spiritual, ethical, and moral impact of events that transgress deeply held beliefs about right and wrong. For articles on moral injury see e.g., Brad E. Kelle, “Moral Injury and Biblical Studies: An Early Sampling of Research and Emerging Trends,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 19.2 (2021): 121–144; and Cory M. Marsh, “The Hermeneutics of Moral Injury: Trauma Studies Offer Fresh Insights on Mental Anguish in Scripture,” *Didaktikos: Journal of Theological Education* (2021): 41-42; Brad E. Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture Alongside War's Unseen Wounds* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020); and Joseph McDonald, *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*, Studies in Religion and Theology (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017).

³Philip Jenkins, *Crucible of Faith: The Ancient Revolution that Made Our Modern Religious World* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

appearing in Second Temple period literature which attempted to provide restorative justice to the traumatized faith community who produced them. It concludes by making some brief and general observations for how this theological trauma response is also seen in Seventh-day Adventist eschatological beliefs.

Trauma and Old Testament Theology

The narratives of the Old Testament are filled with traumatic events that not only affected the individual characters of these stories but, perhaps more surprisingly, also their supreme God. The shocking and devastating breakdown of every relationship described in the Eden Narrative (Gen 2-3) turns a perfect world into a world haunted by trauma – in which death and destruction dominate the daily life. God's trauma is clearly heard in the melancholy question: אַיָּה, *where are you?* (Gen 3:9b).⁴ This is also the opening question used centuries later by Jeremiah when he wrote his Lament after the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel: “How [אֵיכָה] lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal” (Lam 1:1, NRSV).⁵ The joy of childbearing in Genesis 4:1 turns to sorrow when Cain kills his brother Abel (Gen 4:8). An enmity develops between Cain's offspring and his brother Seth's. In the end, humanity had become so wicked and destructive (self-destructive) that God regretted that he had created the world in the first place:

⁵The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’

The key theological themes of the Bible are introduced in Genesis 1-11⁶ emerging from these traumatic events and are expanded upon throughout the rest of the sacred scriptures. Although God showed grace towards Noah and his immediate family and saved them from annihilation (Gen 1-2), Noah probably suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and survivor's guilt, and turned to alcohol (Gen 9:21).⁷

⁴This interrogative particle is rare in the Hebrew Scripture and carries, according to Allan Herman, the meaning of “how” in asking true question – expressing a sense of “horror, amazement, and despair” in an exclamatory statement by the speaker (A. Herman, “Particle,” *NIDOTTE* 4:1034).

⁵In Lamentation, the interrogative particle is followed by a *Paseq* in the Masoretic text; to have the reader or the chanter linger on the horror expressed by the author. However, in the case of Genesis 3:9b, it is the only word spoken by God in his opening statement to Adam, thus, there would be no need for a *Paseq* as the reader would already linger on God's despair as it is followed by a *Sof Pasuq*. Importantly, in an unpointed text, this difference would disappear.

⁶Richard M. Davidson, “Back to the Beginning: Genesis 1–3 and The Theological Center of Scripture,” in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle*, ed. Jiri Moskala, Peter M. van Bemmelen, and Daniel Heinz (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Dept., Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2009), 5-29.

⁷Steven Luger, “Flood, Salt, and Sacrifice: Post Traumatic Stress Disorders in Genesis,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 38.2 (Apr-Jun 2010): 124-126.

God did not escape unscathed either and had to acknowledge that despite his destructive act and attempt to reset, it did not solve the underlying problem: “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). Thus, the emphasis of the Old Testament became the Covenant relationship that he established with his people (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and the Renewed Covenant mentioned by the latter prophets), with its accompanying blessings and curses.

Trauma and Second Temple Period: Early Judaism and Early Christianity

At the end of the First Temple period and during the Second Temple period, however, a shift in focus from the collective to the individual took place and the problem of theodicy became more apparent.⁸ Questions about the validity of the retribution principle, that God would reward the righteous Torah observant Jews with a long and prosperous life while cutting short the life of the wicked, were undoubtedly raised by some Old Testament writers (e.g. Book of Job; Jer. 12:1–3; Mal. 3:14–18) and was perhaps most succinctly expressed by the author of Ecclesiastes 8:14:

There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. (NRSV)

The Jews during the Second Temple period experienced “foreign occupation and oppression; oppression of the righteous poor, religious persecution, and martyrdom. For the Torah observant Jews, justice had been perverted: the righteous were receiving the curses of the wicked, while the wicked enjoyed the blessings promised the righteous. A belief in an afterlife could solve this acute problem. If there was an afterlife, it was argued, God could set things straight and give the righteous and the wicked their proper due.”⁹ However, the increased interest in an afterlife belief, although providing a satisfactory solution to the problem of theodicy for the individual, introduced a complexity that resulted in a plethora of afterlife views. In the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, eighteen complete and distinct death-to-eternity views appear. Even the partial views appearing in these writings seem to provide additional afterlife/eschatological scenarios. Sigvartsen concludes that “each literary work containing a ‘life-after-death’ view seems to present a unique perspective.”¹⁰

Most of the resurrection texts are unsurprisingly found in eschatological passages and apocalyptic literature, a genre which became prevalent during the Second Temple period. It could even be argued that an afterlife belief is one of the hallmarks of eschatological and apocalyptic texts.¹¹ Andrew Judd in his

⁸The question of theodicy is a central theme in the Old Testament (e.g. Gen. 18:17–32; Lev. 16; the Book of Job).

⁹Jan A. Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*, Jewish and Christian Texts Series 29 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), 10.

¹⁰Idem., *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Pseudepigrapha*, Jewish and Christian Texts Series 30 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), 209.

¹¹See John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1-19; Idem., *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Idem., *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigrapha: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*

consideration into the social situation and function of this genre, concludes that “while the exact social background of apocalypse is disputed, in general this is literature for people who have found themselves on the wrong side of history. It speaks into their distress and offers them meaning. . . No matter how unstoppable the forces against God and his people seem, there is a greater spiritual reality that puts those forces into perspective and calls on God’s people to persevere.”¹²

The clearest eschatological resurrection statement in the Old Testament appears at the end of the Book of Daniel (Dan 12:2-3, 13) – a book that was written in response to the trauma of exile and the death of the nation of Israel. The primary theological message of this book, both the non-apocalyptic material and the apocalyptic,¹³ is that God is in charge of history, that nothing happens without his permission. The opening statement of the book sets the tone for the entire composition, as the impossible had just taken place and God’s power and sovereignty was questioned, especially in a polytheistic world in which YHWH had been defeated by the chief deity of Babylon, Marduk:

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. ²The Lord handed Jehoiakim king of Judah over to him, along with some of the vessels from the house of God. Nebuchadnezzar carried them to the land of Babylon, to the house of his god, and put the vessels in the treasury of his god. (Dan 1:1-2, underline added)

Thus, the exiled should not think that YHWH was less powerful than the gods of their captors. In reality, it was YHWH who had handed their king and themselves, together with some of his own treasures, into the hands of the Babylonians and into the treasury of their god. This key theological point permeates the book as the narratives demonstrate that he is sovereign against Israel, the pagan nations, and against the pagan gods and spiritual powers, and that he is faithful towards those who remain faithful to him. The book also demonstrates that what YHWH declares will take place, in other words, he is in control over kings, and empires, and history itself. The non-apocalyptic material of this book is crucial as it adds credibility to the apocalyptic material by demonstrating that God has sovereignty beyond the land of Israel; He rewards people for their righteousness and demonstrates his interest beyond his covenant people; He installs and overthrows kings and empires (Babylon => Persia); His prophetic predictions were fulfilled within the lifetime of Daniel (Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 and Belshaz’zar in Daniel 5) and the prophecy of the empires (Dan 2 and Dan 7) began to be fulfilled. Therefore, since God has been shown to be in control of history and events through the non-apocalyptic sections of the book, the reader can be rest assured that the apocalyptic prophecies are also reliable - God’s everlasting kingdom will be established, God will judge, and righteous and wicked will be rewarded or punished. It is because of the credibility that the non-apocalyptic material added to the apocalyptic material that later communities valued the Book of Daniel

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 1-20; Andrew Judd, *Modern Genre Theory: An Introduction for Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 164-165

¹² Judd, *Modern Genre Theory*, 171-172. See also, John J. Collins, “From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Volume 1 – The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins (London: Continuum, 2006), 129-161.

¹³Traditional scholarship considers the book to be historically accurate, containing predictive prophecies, thus, identifying genres like: historical narratives (Daniel 1; 3; and 5), predictive apocalyptic prophecies (Daniel 2; 7; 8; 9:22-27; 11-12), predictive classical prophecies (Daniel 4 and 6), monologues/prayers (Daniel 9:1-19), non-apocalyptic visions (Daniel 10:1-9), and dialogues (Daniel 10:10-11:1).

and safeguarded it for later generations. Thus, material from the book of Daniel is alluded and referred to in the New Testament, especially in the Book of Revelation. However, over time, the non-apocalyptic material became less important as far as credibility and reliability of the apocalyptic prophecies were concerned as time and history gradually replaced their important function.

The book of Daniel must have given the believers great comfort in the midst of their trauma and moral injury, as it would have given them great assurance that there would be a restorative justice at the end of days, which would bring punishment upon the wicked and great reward for the saints (Dan 12:2-3, 13), even long after they had passed away – as there will be a resurrection.

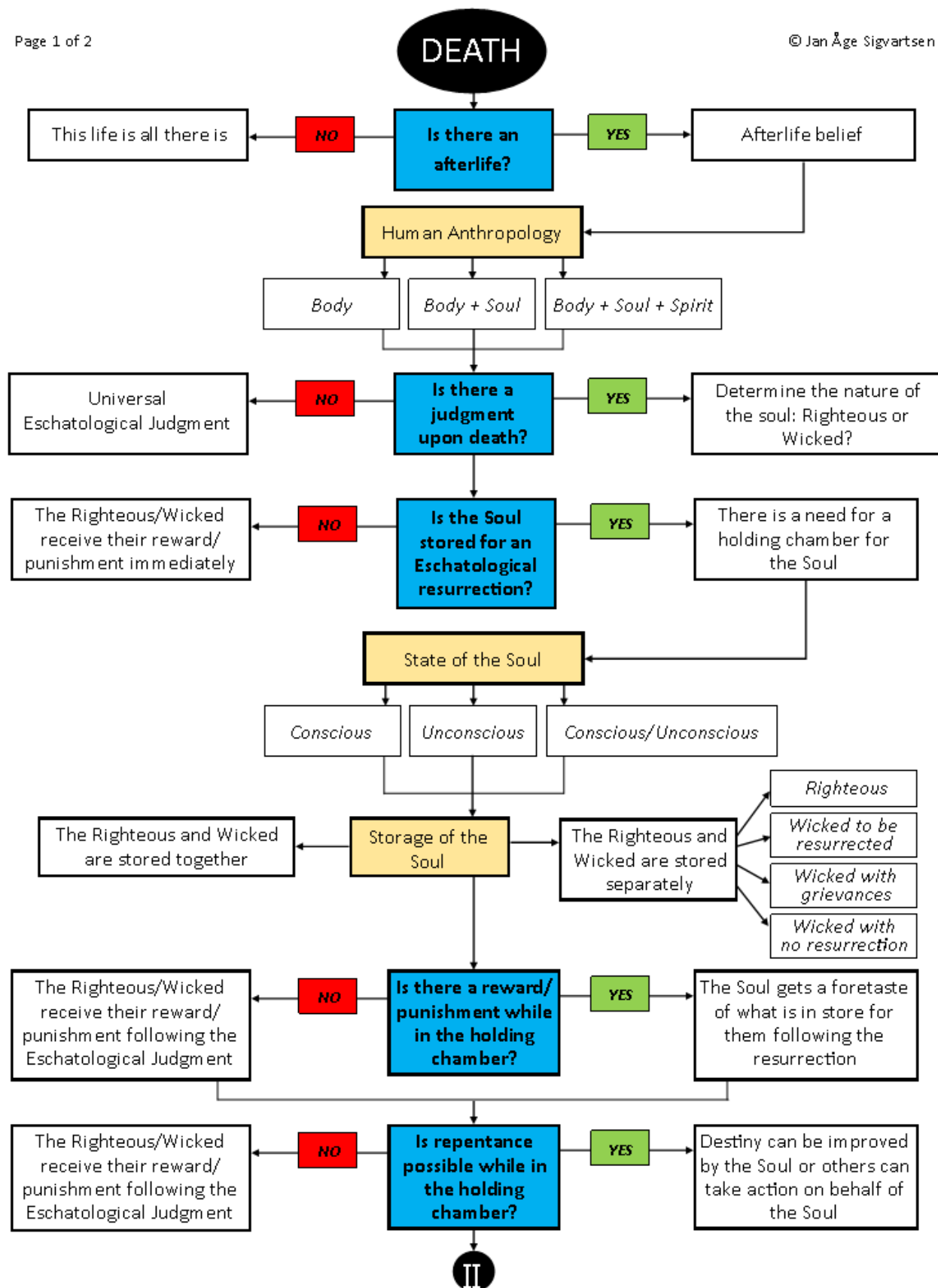
Second Temple Period Eschatological Views

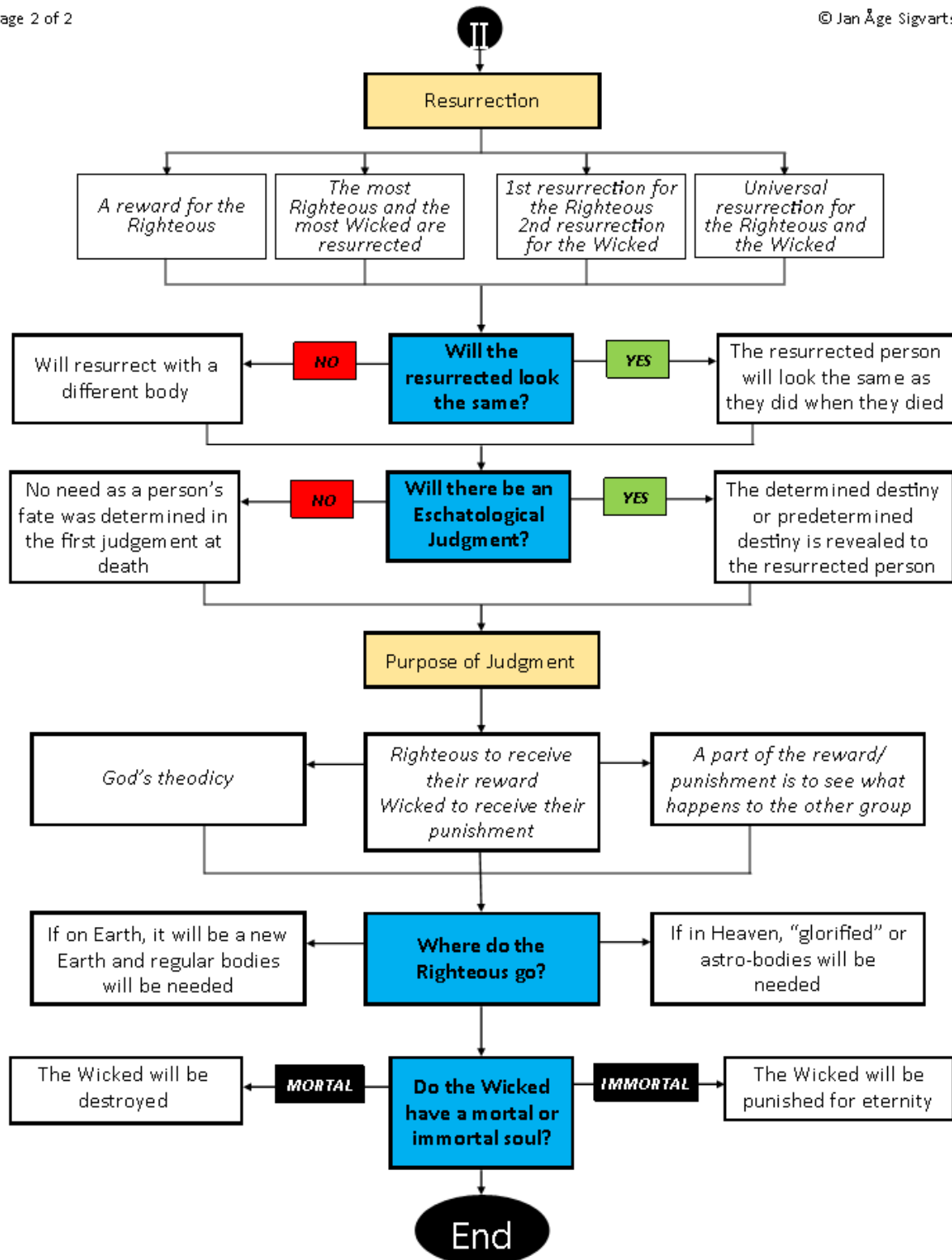
In *Afterlife and Resurrection in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature* and *Afterlife and Resurrection in the Pseudepigrapha*, eighteen distinct and complete resurrection and afterlife views are identified in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Even when a partial view is described in this literature, of which there are many, they too do not seem to correspond perfectly with any of these eighteen complete views. When considering this plethora of afterlife and resurrection views, several general observations could be made. First, these eighteen distinct and the numerous partial life-after-death views have various degrees of complexity and each seems to present a unique perspective. Second, there is no progression from a basic to a more complex death and resurrection view as various levels of complexity are found throughout this period. Third, there seems to be no linear development of the resurrection belief. Fourth, there are multiple views coexisting at the same time. Fifth, there is no evidence in this literature supporting the notion of a shift in focus from a bodily resurrection toward the immortality of the soul. Sixth, the terms and concepts present in Greek philosophical texts were adopted to fit into the theological framework of these apocryphal/pseudepigraphical compositions. Thus, although there is a consensus in these collections of Second-Temple period literature that this present life is not all there is; that how an individual's life is lived will impact their ultimate destiny beyond this life; and that God is just, there also seems to be little agreement regarding the finer details of the afterlife.

Why a plethora of afterlife and resurrection views?

When introducing an afterlife belief, a number of questions emerge that require resolution (see flowcharts below). Perhaps the most important is what happens upon a person's death, if something of that person survives and continues to exist beyond death. This is a question regarding human anthropology. It should be noted that the majority view appearing in the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha is that humans have a soul – found in more than 80% of the literary compositions that present an afterlife view.¹⁴ Thus, if a person has a soul, what happens to that soul when it leaves the body, is it stored somewhere in wait for

¹⁴Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Pseudepigrapha*, 210–211.





an eschatological reunification with the body? If so, are the righteous souls and the wicked souls stored together or separately, and would they be conscious or unconscious during this phase? If the soul is conscious, would it experience any reward or punishment prior to reunification with the body? Would the wicked souls have an option to repent during this period? A different line of questions relates to the resurrection. Who will resurrect? Will the resurrected look the same or different than how they looked before they died? What and where is the final destiny of the righteous and the wicked? An afterlife view also raises the need for one or more judgments. In the eighteen complete views identified in the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, two judgments are the norm as one is needed following death and a second following the eschatological resurrection. There is also a question regarding the purpose of the eschatological judgment.

There are several societal factors during the Second Temple period which could have served as a catalyst and caused the many variables that may have influenced the complexity and the significant number of afterlife and resurrection views described in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. This paper will only describe these briefly. The primary external influence was the Persian (538-331 B.C.E.) and later the Greco-Roman Empire (331 B.C.E. – 5th/6th century C.E.) and scholars argue these empirical powers influenced both the culture and belief system of Judaism.¹⁵ From the Zoroastrian religion derived an interest in angels, the battle between good and evil, a future bodily resurrection, and judgment. From the Hellenization of Judaism, derived a belief in an immortal soul, which could exist separately from the physical body after the moment of death. Although they borrowed religious and philosophical concepts from both the Persians and Greeks, they synthesized and amalgamated these views into their own religious framework.

During the Old Testament and Second Temple period, the larger political and societal structure changed. In Pentateuch, the societal structure moved from family to tribal. In Judges and Samuel, it moved from tribal, to city states, to nation states. In Kings and Chronicles, empires began to interfere in local politics in much more significant ways, leading to the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, and the fall of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE by the hands of the Babylonians. Following the exile, Judah was occupied by the Persian empire, the Greek empire (Ptolemies and the Seleucids) and only experienced a brief period of independence during the Hasmonean period (141-37 BCE) before the Roman Empire became the dominant force. This process of consolidating power with the resulting increased levels of bureaucracy in which the King and his court became increasingly more distant had an impact on the worldview and theology which became more multi-layered in nature – as it is natural to view and explain the divine sphere in light of the earthly political structure. The increased interference of empires also caused the problem of theodicy to become more apparent as the retribution principle seemed flawed and in need of revision due to the trauma and moral injury caused by foreign occupation, oppression, religious persecution, and martyrdom – thus, the appearance of various afterlife beliefs in an attempt to solve this acute problem.

¹⁵Casey D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: 200 BCE – CE 200* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 44-65. For a description of Iranian and Greek afterlife views, see Alan F. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 1989): 173-247.

Towards the end of the First Temple period and into the Second Temple period, there was also a gradual shift from a mainly communal and national thinking (community responsibility) to also considering the individual member of that community (personal responsibility). Perhaps one of the most significant catalysts driving this shift was the remnant concept in the context of the promised national restoration. Since a remnant is by definition a small group of the whole, it begs the question, what qualifies an individual to be counted among this specific group, and by extension, become a part of the restored covenant people of God. Ezekiel and Jeremiah focused on the individual's covenant relationship (Ezekiel 18:1-32 and Jeremiah 31:29-34) while Ezra and the Chroniclers focused on the call for the exiled to return to the homeland (Ezra 9:8, 13-15; 2 Chronicles 36:15-23). Thus, the covenant relationship of the individual became a determining factor, whether the person is righteous or wicked. When the individual aspect is introduced into the equation, the problem of theodicy did not only need to be satisfied on a national level, but also accounted for on a personal level – hence the need for a personalized eschatology.

The symbiotic process of continuity and change takes place in any belief system as a faith community attempts to stay relevant in an ever-changing world. If a faith community is unwilling to modify or reframe its belief system and add new or remove outdated one, it will risk becoming irrelevant and may even cease to exist. On the other hand, if a community changes too much, it would lose its core identity and, as such, also cease to exist. This paper suggests that trauma and moral injury may have served as the primary role in the development and diversity of these numerous distinctive beliefs as each community attempted to provide its members a hope for restorative justice.

Trauma and Moral Injury as the primary catalyst: Theodicy and Restorative Justice

Although there are several key elements playing a part in restorative justice, this paper will only consider briefly two of these. Firstly, the need for a reward and vindication of the righteous. Secondly, the question of the destiny of “the others” – those who do not belong to your faith community.

Reward and Vindication of the Righteous

Perhaps the most important element when it comes to restorative justice, is a sense of justice and vindication. However, what this justice may look like, would vary from faith community to faith community. What does a person need God to do for them to feel they have received justice? A punishment of those who caused them harm (and to what level of severity)? Or would an eschatological reward be enough to feel vindicated? Each afterlife and resurrection belief during this period presents a different answer or eschatological scenario. Following are two examples, one from the Apocrypha (Septuagint) and one from the Pseudepigrapha.

In *Wisdom of Solomon*, a part of the reward for the righteous, is for the ungodly to recognize that they were wrong about the righteous, whom they had mocked for their hopes, values, and righteous deeds, thinking that it was all for nothing. In addition, the righteous will receive a great and everlasting reward as God had tested them and they had been found worthy of him. Thus, their experienced trauma

was in reality a test to determine if they would be worthy of God and the eternal reward – their mockers will be proven wrong.¹⁶

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-13a

The Destiny of the Righteous

¹But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.

²In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, ³and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.

⁴For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality.

⁵Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; ⁶like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.

⁷In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble.

⁸They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them for ever.

⁹Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones.

The Destiny of the Ungodly

¹⁰But the ungodly will be punished as their reasoning deserves, who disregarded the righteous man and rebelled against the Lord;

¹¹for whoever despises wisdom and instruction is miserable. Their hope is vain, their labors are unprofitable, and their works are useless.

¹²Their wives are foolish, and their children evil; ¹³their offspring are accursed.

In *2 Baruch*, it becomes important for the faith community that the righteous and the wicked dead will be resurrected with the identical body they possessed prior to their death, to ensure that the living and the resurrected dead will recognize each other to ensure a restorative justice takes place. How can you have true justice if you are unable to recognize the person being judged? After the judgment has taken place, the individual body will be transformed based on their reward or punishment. The righteous' bodies will be glorified (2 Bar 51:3, 5, 10) while the bodies of the wicked will be made more horrific (2 Bar 51:2).¹⁷

¹⁶For a detailed analysis of the afterlife and resurrection passages in Wisdom of Solomon, see Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*, 50-63.

¹⁷For a detailed analysis of the afterlife and resurrection passages in *2 Baruch*, see *Ibid.*, 163-177.

2 Baruch 50:2-4

²For surely the earth will then return the dead, which it now receives to preserve them, while not changing anything in their form. But as it has received them, so it return them, and as I have handed them over to it, so too it will restore them. ³For then it will be necessary to show to the living that the dead are living again and that those have come [back] who had been gone. ⁴And when those who know [each other] now will have recognized each other, then judgment will be strong, and those [things] that were formerly spoken of will come.

Varying Attitudes towards the Gentiles

As far as how the Gentiles are perceived by the various faith communities during the Second Temple period, each literary composition addressing this subject presents a different attitude. It could be argued that said view could have derived from past experiences with the Gentiles – the more negative the experience, the more negative attitude towards them. This attitude could also impact the eschatological view held by the community and the expected destination for the Gentiles. The following two examples from the Apocrypha (Septuagint) serves as a good example.

The Book of Tobit, a third or early second century BCE composition, presents a surprisingly optimistic view of the Gentiles. Not only will God bring his people back from the captivity and have them rebuild the Temple in splendor at the end of the age, but all the Gentiles will bury their idols and turn to fear and praise the Lord. This reflects the universal scope of God's salvation as prophesied by Isaiah (Is 2:2-3), Micah (Mic 4:1-3), and Zechariah (Zech 14:16). It should also be noted that the age to come is a very earthly reality and that the transition between this age and the age to come is gradual.

Tobit 14:5-7 - Tobit's Final Counsel (optimistic)

⁵But God will again have mercy on them, and bring them back into their land; and they will rebuild the house of God, though it will not be like the former one until the times of the age are completed. After this they will return from the places of their captivity, and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor. And the house of God will be rebuilt there with a glorious building for all generations for ever, just as the prophets said of it. ⁶Then all the Gentiles will turn to fear the Lord God in truth, and will bury their idols. ⁷All the Gentiles will praise the Lord, and his people will give thanks to God, and the Lord will exalt his people. And all who love the Lord God in truth and righteousness will rejoice, showing mercy to our brethren.

The late first century CE composition of 4 Ezra, is a stark contrast to the Book of Tobit, as it presents a very pessimistic eschatological view of the salvation prospects of the Gentiles. The author of 4 Ezra is no longer reading the universal Old Testament salvation prophecies in the context of the world-to-come but rather consider them a description of a temporal Messianic Kingdom which will be an undescribed world-to-come. The gloomy view presented in 4 Ezra should be read in light of the failed Jewish revolt (66-73 CE) which had resulted in the traumatic destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman Empire in 70 CE – it was written by a community who had suffered great moral injury who were in dire need for

restorative justice. Thus, it considers the world to come as Israel's portion alone as this world has become too corrupted to be redeemed.

4 Ezra 7-8 (pessimistic view)

^{7:50}For this reason the Most High has made not one world but two.

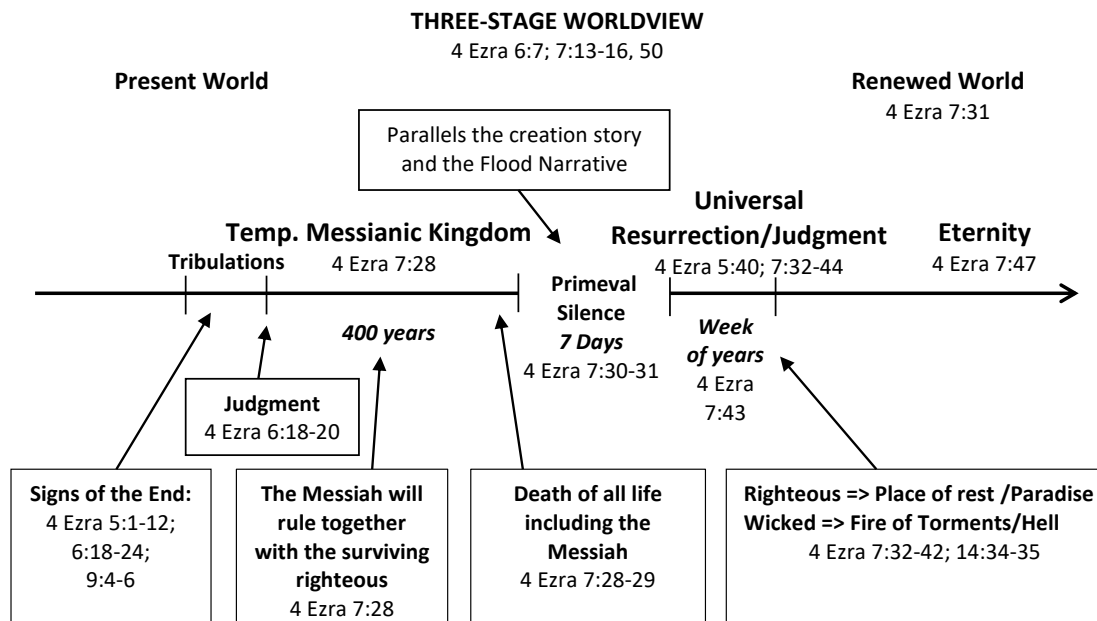
^{10b}And he said to me, "So also is Israel's portion. ¹¹For I made the world for their sake, and when Adam transgressed my statutes, what had been made was judged. ¹²And so the entrances of this world were made narrow and sorrowful and toilsome; they are few and evil, full of dangers and involved in great hardships. ¹³But the entrances of the greater world are broad and safe, and really yield the fruit of immortality. ¹⁴Therefore unless the living pass through the difficult and vain experiences, they can never receive those things that have been reserved for them.

¹¹²He answered me and said, "This present world is not the end; the full glory does not abide in it; therefore those who were strong prayed for the weak. ¹¹³But the day of judgment will be the end of this age and the beginning[ad] of the immortal age to come, in which corruption has passed away, ¹¹⁴sinful indulgence has come to an end, unbelief has been cut off, and righteousness has increased and truth has appeared. ¹¹⁵Therefore no one will then be able to have mercy on him who has been condemned in the judgment, or to harm him who is victorious."

^{8:52}because it is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed, goodness is established and wisdom perfected beforehand. ⁵³The root of evil is sealed up from you, illness is banished from you, and death is hidden; hell has fled and corruption has been forgotten; ⁵⁴sorrows have passed away, and in the end the treasure of immortality is made manifest.

Interestingly, even the longed-for Messianic Kingdom would not ultimately redeem this world, but would instead only be a temporary kingdom lasting a mere 400 years. At the end of this world, the Messianic Kingdom will come to an end, all life including that of the Messiah will perish (4 Ezra 7:28-29). The world will experience a primeval silence (4 Ezra 7:30-31), paralleling the creation story (Gen 1:2) and the Flood Story (Gen 8:1). At the beginning of the renewed earth, there will be a universal resurrection and judgment in which the righteous will take possession of this new reality while the wicked will be handed over to the fire of torments (4 Ezra 7:32-42; 14:34-35). The following figure diagrams this three-stage worldview with the very clear abruption between this current world and the world to come.¹⁸

¹⁸For a detailed analysis of the afterlife and resurrection passages in *4 Ezra*, see *Ibid.*, 64-82. The three-stage worldview figure is taken from, *Ibid.*, 71.



The views in Tobit and 4 Ezra seems to be very far apart, one being very optimistic and the other being very pessimistic. The other literary compositions addressing this subject during this time-period, present views that fall somewhere in-between these two extremes.

Concluding Observations: Adventism rooted in Eschatological Trauma

It should not be surprising that trauma and moral injury is also the driving force behind Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) theological and eschatological views. The SDA movement is rooted in eschatological trauma, and apocalyptic thinking is an integral part of its DNA as the Great Controversy is its interpretive lens and worldview. If it was not for the great disappointment experienced by the Millerite movement on October 22, 1844, there would be no SDA Church. The deeply traumatic aftershocks – including spiritual, social, emotional, and financial ruin - of this failed second coming belief suffered by the disappointed believers led to theological exploration that ultimately led to SDA belief statements 24-28. Perhaps the most innovative theological development was the introduction of a Heavenly Sanctuary with the accompanying belief that like the Earthly Sanctuary of the Old Testament, which was in need of an annual cleansing from all confessed sins on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16), the anti-typical Heavenly Sanctuary was also in need of a “cleansing.” As such, the biblical day of atonement came to be viewed as a type for a heavenly investigative judgment which would determine who were righteous and who were wicked prior to the Second Coming and the resurrection of all the righteous. Thus, the perceived interpretative failure of the biblical prophecies was remedied by emerging Seventh-day Adventists by adopting a new understanding of October 22, 1844 – not as the date of the Second Coming – but rather, the beginning of the investigative judgment. Therefore, it was only at the completion of this judgment (cleansing) process that the Second Coming could finally take place. Utilizing a *peshar* reading of the Scriptures, it did not take long before this group of believers considered themselves to be God’s final remnant church, the Laodicean

Church of Revelation 3, who had been given the divine task to spread the Three-Angels-Messages of Revelation 14:6-12 to the whole world to herald the Second Coming as the anti-typical Prophet Elijah (Mal 4:5-6) – the prophetic activities of Ellen G. White being viewed as a proof of their status (Belief 18). Thus, these restorative theological beliefs propelled this small group of people who had experienced significant spiritual, social, emotional, and financial trauma, into a worldwide movement, as it was now fueled by the inherent urgency of the investigative judgment and the successive close of probation. The acute apocalyptic nature of the movement was strengthened by time, as the question became, how much time could possibly be left before the investigative judgment is concluded and the Second Coming will take place.

In conclusion, this solution to the very real trauma of the Great Disappointment of 1844, may in time become a liability for the SDA faith community, because they feel too much time has passed, and members might start to question the validity of this restorative belief. They may argue that there might be another and better explanation for the delay of the Second Coming.¹⁹ Perhaps some would even speculate that the believers are the reason for the delay, or perhaps God is waiting for a final generation who can play a fundamental function in God's controversy with Satan. With an aging Seventh-day Adventist population in the West, who are multi-generational members, this issue becomes particularly pertinent and is also causing trauma and moral injury as they endure retirements that they are very ill-prepared for because they genuinely believed they would never grow old. Their children and grandchildren may also struggle to select and pursue careers in adult lives they were raised to believe they would never have. Additionally, the SDA church's discomfort with those who have experienced deeply traumatizing events and adverse childhood experiences, who are the larger majority in a population, may also be challenged – especially if the church is perceived as the perpetrator or perpetuator of this trauma and moral injury to its members. One has to wonder if people are attracted to the SDA faith community because of their own trauma, but leave because the trauma is being exacerbated by the indifference of some the faith community. Either way, this mounting tension in eschatological beliefs and church culture may be indicative of a soon approaching continuity and change moment for the denomination.

Considering all this, it could be claimed: no trauma, no theology.

¹⁹Gilbert M. Valentine explores seven doctrinal and theological adopted by the Adventist movement to explain the problem why the Second Coming still has not happened, despite the acute end-time expectation of its members, see "The Relentless Delay: Evolving Adventist Explanations for the Absence of the *Parousia*," in *"The Kingdom of God is at Hand": Adventist Interpretations of Biblical Apocalypticism*, ed. Rolf J. Pöhler and Kerstin Maiwald, *Adventistica: Studies in Adventist History and Theology – New Series 4* (Friedensau, Germany: The Institute of Adventist Studies of Friedensau Adventist University, 2025), 167-188.