

STEPHEN C. AMADOR

The Hour of Justification in the Fourth Gospel

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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For Matthias

1992–2023

“See how he loved him!”

John 11:36

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This book represents a complete revision of my German language, 1986 dissertation at the University of Tübingen, *Gerechtes Gericht und Gerechtigkeit im Vierten Evangelium: eine exegetische und traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. Prof. Peter Stuhlmacher was my Doktorvater; he and Prof. Otfried Hofius, who was a fine advisor, wrote the standard two evaluations, for which I was most appreciative.

An essay by Prof. Stuhlmacher on the interpretation of Scripture led me on my path to Tübingen. During an initial meeting he suggested several possible dissertation topics. One of them was “Righteousness in the Gospel of John.” A very appropriate topic, it would seem, for a doctoral student whose mentor’s own thesis was *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus (God’s Righteousness in Paul)*. I began my studies in September of 1981, supported by a Rotary Foundation Graduate Fellowship, for which I was most grateful. During this period, I was amazed at how much I was learning about the Biblical Theology that the Tübingen New Testament scholars were developing. During these years I had the privilege of being one of Prof. Stuhlmacher’s research helpers, later as Dr. theol. a research assistant. Prof. Stuhlmacher was always so much more than just a Doktorvater, helping me and my family in difficult times. For all his academic accomplishments, personal qualities and helpful deeds I am more than grateful.

At the conclusion of my doctoral studies, Prof. Martin Hengel (†) and Prof. Otfried Hofius offered to publish a somewhat revised version in the WUNT 2 monograph series. But it did not come to a published dissertation, as I completed pastor training and began teaching Protestant Religion at a Gymnasium. This was made possible by Kirchenrat Gottfried Gerner-Wohlfahrt and Kirchenrat Hartmut Greiling. To both gentlemen I am most grateful for their sponsorship.

Many years before pursuing doctoral studies in Germany I attended Wheaton College. My professor for Biblical studies, Prof. Donald A. Hagner, and for Theology, Prof. Robert E. Webber (†), inspired me to search the Scriptures and think critically. This process continued at Fuller Theological Seminary, where Prof. Daniel P. Fuller (†) introduced me to continental theology and encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies in Germany. Prof. Hagner caught up to me

at Fuller in my second year there. He and Prof. Fuller made the seminary a hot bed of learning and commitment for me. For this time I am most grateful to these scholars for what and how they taught me. I also owe Prof. Hagner a debt of gratitude for an adjunct professor position later in 1988.

The path to this complete revision, to this book, began in the spring of 2004. I realized the remarkable significance of John 1:45: “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Phillip identifies Jesus as the Prophet-like-Moses. Here Jesus is the pendant to the false prophet described elsewhere in John. The “christological cast” of John’s trial concept is introduced here in John 1:45–51!

Retirement came 15 years later and with it the opportunity to work full time on the complete revision. In 2021 Prof. Jörg Frey expressed interest in publishing it in Mohr Siebeck’s WUNT 2 series. I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to him for this (renewed) opportunity.

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November 2024

Stephen C. Amador

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Part I: Introduction

Chapter 1

The Quest for the Fourth Gospel's Cosmic Trial Concept

The Gospel of John ranks high among Christians because of its simple prose, faith strengthening metaphors, and heartwarming assurances of love and consolation. As time goes on, scholars and students often experience – not only initially – that this Fourth Gospel has made a deceptively simple impression on them as readers. Upon further study, the Gospel of John becomes a fascinating and unexpectedly demanding literary work. As a reflection of this, academia has long struggled with the so-called Johannine Question, which goes far beyond what the gospel's seemingly simple, but viewed from this other perspective, challenging words and thoughts could actually mean. This includes a plethora of issues including its authorship, provenance, literary composition, as well as its relationship to the Synoptic gospels.

1.1 Théo Preiss' "Justification in Johannine Thought"

It was in 1946, a time when Johannine scholars had already long found themselves amid so many questions on the one hand and so few answers on the other, that a theologian from Alsace, Théo Preiss, made a fundamental suggestion. He proposed that Johannine scholars turn their attention to its largely previously overlooked juridical aspect. He therefore entitled his essay "Justification in Johannine Thought."¹

Théo Preiss sees himself as having good reason to approach Johannine thought from a new perspective. He sees the Fourth Gospel having been "almost universally" interpreted in terms of the Prologue (10). In what follows in the Gospel of John (forthwith for the sake of clarity: Jn), Preiss sees John

¹ Théo Preiss, "La justification dans la pensée johannique," in: *Hommage et Reconnaissance. Recueil de travaux publiés à l'occasion du soixantième anniversaire de Karl Barth* (Cahiers Théologiques de l'actualité Protestante, Hors Série 2, Neuchâtel and Paris: Delechaux & Niestle, 1946), 100–118, Théo Preiss, "Justification in Johannine Thought," id., *Life in Christ*, translated by H. Knight (Studies in Biblical Theology 15, London: SCM Press, 1954), 9–31. Théo Preiss, "Die Rechtfertigung im johanneischen Denken," übersetzt von R. Pfisterer, *EvTheol* 16 (1956), 289–310. Both the English and the German translations are based on the original in French. In this study, numbers in parenthesis refer to pages in the work which is currently being discussed.

developing a few unchanging themes: Father, Son, love, life and death, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, judgment, and witness. John makes out of this “poverty” a kind of music which possesses “infinitely varied harmonies which even the most attentive ear cannot capture at once.” Preiss asserts that to try to analyze these themes in succession would be an exercise in futility. All these themes are curiously intertwined with each other, none of them is capable of being analyzed and explained in isolation. This said, Preiss observes that the difficulty of Johannine thought lies in its very simplicity. This should not be understood as just any kind of simplicity. It draws its source “from a strict convergence of all the themes towards the Person of him whose speeches, delivered in a mysterious monotone, culminate in those sovereign formulae, e.g.: “I am the light of the world [...] the resurrection and the life [...].” This convergence has a christocentric character which results in making “his thought so resistant to any systematic analysis.”

Preiss views the juridical aspect of Johannine thought as offering a chance to discover a “more coherent system of ideas” (11) than what he has just described, while at the same time not being divorced from the whole of it. Preiss goes on to present this “more” as involving this juridical aspect. He describes the elementary fact that juridical terms and arguments are “notably frequent.” He names the terms ‘sent,’ ‘witness,’ ‘judge,’ ‘judgment,’ ‘accused,’ ‘convict,’ ‘paraclete,’ and ‘truth.’ Jesus is light that judges and luminates in the darkness. Preiss then deals with questions and issues involving John being considered a mystic and with regard to Paulinism. He comments that Jn’s juridical aspect is not centered on the problem of the Law. For Jn’s interpreters there exists the theological problem of excessive emphasis on subjective and individualistic thinking, with personages such as the accuser Satan having seemingly been forgotten. The objective aspect of justification includes eschatology *and* judgment. John regards God’s judgment of the world as central and this is based on cosmic trial concepts found for example in Lk 18 and in Paul in Rom 8, where there is “the celestial court of justice which forms a climax to the process of justification” (12–14).

A one-sided emphasis on the purely individual and subjective aspect of justification is countered by this fundamental aspect of Johannine thought which “puts before us precisely this cosmic and objective perspective” (14). Preiss goes on to “summarily analyze its constituent elements,” beginning with the terms ‘witness’ and ‘to witness’ (14–15). These terms have both a religious and juridical sense, being conceived in the framework of a trial. Then Preiss observes that it is no coincidence that four groups of terms which he has examined center on Jn 3, 5, 8 and 12. These “gravitate around” the title of ‘Son of Man,’ who is judge and who functions as a paraclete according to 1Jn 2:1. Judgment is in Johannine thought both future and present (17).

Other figures also arise and belong in this “gigantic” juridical trial after the resurrection. The Spirit plays a major role in the new phase of the earthly trial.

The Spirit and its connection with the earthly Jesus must, according to Preiss, be viewed in terms of the drama which transpires on the celestial and cosmic plane, cf. Jn 12:31–32. Understanding judgment for John as being something purely interior, eminent, and spiritual is incorrect. In fact, the trial includes a transcendental aspect and involves the Last Judgment. In the Son of Man, the future judge, judgment is already mysteriously present. When the Son of Man accepts death, Satan is cast out. The Spirit will come and witness to Jesus (Jn 15:26–27). The “essential content” of being led in all truth (Jn 16:7–14) is seen in the reply of Jesus to Pilate. The justification of Jesus means that he will be and is already justified and glorified. He already has overcome the world (cf. Jn 16:33). With and in him, his own will be and are “already justified and glorified and triumphant” (17–19).

Preiss emphasizes the role of the Spirit-Paraclete as essential and thoroughly integrated in both the Fourth Gospel and Johannine thought as a whole. He then goes on to discuss the origin of what he calls juridical mysticism with the Son of Man representing the classic inclusiveness ideal associated with him. This aspect of Johannine thought, notes Preiss, is very similar in this respect to Paul's. In conclusion, Preiss stresses that this juridical aspect is not necessarily historical, but asserts that truth is nothing other than the last word in the drama of the cosmic trial (19–22).

Théo Preiss himself was not able to conduct further study. He died in 1950 due to wounds suffered in the Second World War.

After the publication of Preiss' essay in 1946 in French and its later translations into English and German, Preiss' article was well received. At the same time scholars appear to have had difficulty dealing with the large scope of his initiative and its theological consequences. In the four decades following its publication, Preiss' essay was often cited, but the scholarly world was still waiting for a study devoted to developing Preiss' perspective.

More recent reception of Preiss' article with its insights regarding juridical terminology, trial concept, and “objective” justification orientation presents a mixed picture beginning in the 1990's. P.W. Meyer's article on the Father in Jn does mention Preiss' article in a footnote but does not pursue the topic further.² J. Frey sees in Preiss' essay “a substantial contribution for understanding Johannine eschatology.”³ Andrew Lincoln refers several times to Preiss' article, stating that Preiss “did so much to rehabilitate the themes of judgment and witness.”⁴ At the same time Lincoln sees the “neglected juridical aspect of Jo-

² P.W. Meyer, “‘The Father:’ The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel,” R.A. Culpepper and C.C. Black, eds., *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 255–73.

³ Jörg Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, (WUNT 96, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 1:220 [Translation by S.C.A.].

⁴ Andrew Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 140.

hannine thought” already “remedied” with the monograph *Krisis* by J. Blank.⁵ In his 2001 study of Johannine sabbath conflicts, M. Asiedu-Peprah asserts that it “is generally acknowledged in this regard that Théo Preiss was the first to have drawn attention to the importance of the Johannine juridical metaphor for a correct understanding of the theological thought of the Fourth Gospel.”⁶ H.W. Salier⁷ states in his book on signs in John that contributions from scholars like Preiss, N. Dahl (1962), A.E. Harvey (1976), and A.A. Trites (1977) are significant.⁸ H. Thyen⁹ readily cites Preiss’ work, calling it a “brilliant presentation of John’s juridical thought.” P.J. Bekken refers to the theological work of Preiss regarding the law and judicial principles playing a central role in John’s “lawsuit.”¹⁰

The foregoing review of the initial as well as recent reception of Preiss’ article shows that his basic insight, that Jn is full of juridical terms, has been almost universally acknowledged. The concept of a “cosmic trial” has also gained wide acceptance, even if, as we will see later, much is dependent on how the term “cosmic” is understood. Another term Preiss uses, ‘juridical mysticism,’ has had a cool reception, partly because of the question of what is meant with the term mysticism itself, partly because of the question of how the mystical and the juridical are brought together in Jn or in a general theological sense.

A review of Preiss’ essay’s reception also suggests that many scholars have remained non-committal on what Preiss calls Jn’s “objective” side of justification. Preiss’ emphasis on what he sees as the close connection between eschatology and justification raises a central question: How can the role of justification in this gospel be of central and decisive importance, where a Greek term for this, δικαιοσύνη, is used practically only once in Jn 16:8 and 10? An answer to this question is imperative if Preiss’ trial concept insight itself is to be fully developed. Therefore, it appears necessary to pursue what Preiss envisioned as

⁵ Josef Blank, *Krisis: Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus, 1964), cited by Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 4–5.

⁶ Martin Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy* (WUNT 2/132, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 1.

⁷ W.H. Salier, *The Rhetorical Impact of the Semeia in the Gospel of John* (WUNT 2/186, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 47 n. 8.

⁸ N.A. Dahl, “The Johannine Church and History,” W. Klassen and G.F. Snyder, eds., *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation. Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper* (London: SCM Press: 1962), 124–42, A.E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1976), and A.A. Trites, *The Concept of Witness in the New Testament* (MSSNTS 31, Cambridge: University Press, 1977).

⁹ Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6, 2nd ed., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 74, cf. 144, 165, 204.

¹⁰ Per Jarle Bekken, *The Lawsuit Motif in John's Gospel from New Perspectives: Jesus Christ, Crucified Criminal and Emperor of the World* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 5.

a “more coherent system of ideas” (11) to sustain the thesis contained in his essay's title, “Justification in Johannine Thought.”

This brief introduction suggests that there are still many other questions awaiting answers when the title of his work is the subject. Therefore, efforts dedicated to this theme even after more than 75 years – and in a sense also dedicated to the memory of this one theologian Théo Preiss – are not in vain. In this spirit we now take up the quest for John's ‘Cosmic Trial Concept.’

1.2 Attempting to Solve the Fourth Gospel's Juridical Puzzle

We best begin our analysis by presenting germinal thoughts which form the present study's underpinnings. Here we compare the juridical aspect of Johannine thought together with the whole of John's Gospel to the challenge that a puzzle presents. In the Fourth Gospel we find several puzzle parts representing various juridical aspects. Here we are confronted with the issue, how can we understand what John does with these puzzle pieces and thereby enable us to recognize some kind of ‘juridical concept,’ in Preiss' words, a “more coherent system of ideas,” in the Fourth Gospel?

Here we begin with six well-known juridical puzzle parts in Jn.

The first puzzle part is made up of the many juridical terms which are found in Jn. These include as we have seen, among others, sent, witness, judge, judgment, accused, convict, and paraclete. Previous publications focusing on just one of these terms, more than one of these, or one of these terms in conjunction with a central theme in Jn such as eschatology, have certainly proven enlightening. But they have not solved the juridical puzzle before us.

Scholars have often consciously or unconsciously reduced John's juridical thought to a single term such as ‘trial concept’ or ‘lawsuit’ in the sense of a single trial or juridical proceeding. But this can overlook the necessity to deal with the simple fact that there are several different juridical proceedings and trials reflected in Jn.

Based on an exegetical investigation of the Fourth Gospel, we will establish that such examinations of John's juridical thought find him making use of no fewer than nine trials, including an interrogation.

This variety could lead us to speak of a ‘cosmic trial complex’ or a ‘multi-faceted cosmic trial concept’ except for the fact that these juridical models all center on the one Jesus and his one Hour as the One being justified and the One justifying all who believe in him.

The following factors listed support this view:

1. Isa 55:10–11's path of Jesus as the Word, whose salvific mission has pronounced juridical consequences in Jn, cf. for example, Jn 8:28–29, 3:13 and 19:30.

2. The two *rib*-controversies found in Second Isaiah and their use in Jn for the disputes between ‘the Jews’ and Jesus.

3. The fate of, and benefits associated with, Jesus as the Suffering Servant drawn from Isa 53 and 50.

4. John’s adaption of Synoptic Passion Week Events and the Trial narratives of Jesus before the Sanhedrin in what we propose to call the Preponed Trial in Jn 2:1–11:53.

5. Annas’ interrogation of Jesus in Jn 18:12–14 and 19–24.

6. Jesus’ Trial before Pilate in Jn 18:28–19:16.

7. The debate between ‘the Jews’ and Jesus, which centers on ‘judging according to appearance’ and ‘judging righteously’ (Jn 7:24).

8. The juridical-apologetic work of the Spirit-Paraclete (Jn 1–20) following Jesus’ departure.

9. God’s heavenly tribunal (cf. Jn 8:50 and 16:7–11).

Therefore, the term ‘Cosmic Trial Concept’ is in this christological and theological sense thoroughly appropriate to designate John’s juridical thought, provided we remain aware of the remarkable breadth of the juridical models that John has implemented.

Another puzzle piece concerns juridical rules and procedures which are reflected in Jn or are a matter of open dispute. These include the requirement for two witnesses, the circumstances under which – in John’s view – one witness suffices, the procedure for declaring a person to be wanted and calling for information about his whereabouts (cf. Jn 11:57), the rules for the status and function of emissaries, guidelines for cooperation between Jewish and Roman authorities, and the theological authority or power (ἐξουσία) required for becoming “children of God” (cf. Jn 1:12).

A puzzle piece of fundamental importance is Jewish Law, which is both religious and juridical. The guidelines pertaining to the observance of the Sabbath are at the center of Jesus’ disputes with his opponents in Jn 5 and 9. In Jn 18:28 we are told that those who led Jesus to Pilate did not enter the praetorium to avoid defiling themselves. Shortly afterward these persons maintain, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (RSV), a statement John explains as indicating that Jesus is to be crucified and not stoned. Jesus’ adversaries expressly accuse Jesus of breaking the Law when they claim in Jn 19:7, “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.”

Another puzzle piece consists of figures that are juridical per definition. These include the Son of Man in the sense of Dan 7 (cf. Jn 5:27), the Lamb of God, “who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29, 36), the high priests Caiaphas and Annas, Pilate, (possibly) Jesus the “King” as judge in Jn 19:13, and the convicting work of the Spirit-Paraclete in Jn 16:7–11.

1.3 John Borrows Juridical Material at Least Twice from the Synoptic Passion Week and Trial

What at first appears to be a very small puzzle piece consists of juridical material that John has borrowed from the Synoptic Passion Week and Trial. He has twice then imported them into contexts that are also juridical.

First, there is the so-called temple cleansing, drawn from the Synoptic Passion Week scene in Mk 11:15–19 and adopted by John in Jn 2:13–22. Second, there is the “Christ” question in Jn 10:24–25, “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly,” which appears to have been at least in part directly drawn from what we read in Lk 22:66–68.

At this juncture we must ask: Has John tipped his hand here? Has John left this puzzle piece as small as it seems at first glance? Or did he make it larger than research has, up until now, recognized? Did he gain inspiration from additional material from both the Synoptic Passion Week and the Synoptic Trial narratives? In this study we shall answer these questions affirmatively.

An examination of this aspect reveals that there are no fewer than eleven instances of John borrowing words and events from the Synoptic Passion Week narratives.

Further examination shows that there are nine instances of John borrowing christological titles drawn from the Synoptic Passion Sanhedrin and Roman Trials as well. Additional aspects include the I AM, witness, the temple, and blasphemy.

One of the key instances of John borrowing from the Synoptic Passion Week involves John the Baptist (JtB). The evangelist John turns him, the Baptist, into John the Witness due to his being referred to as possibly functioning as a witness by Jesus’ opponents in Mk 11:31 (“Why then did you not *believe* him?”). This makes JtB in Jn, who as an eschatological figure already has a juridical function in the Synoptics, a *confessional-juridical* figure, one whose confession and witness have great importance.

Against this background of John’s borrowing described above, the five christological titles surrounding Nathanael’s confession in Jn 1:40–51 – Christ, Prophet, Son of God, King of Israel, and Son of Man – attract our attention. Here we see what we wish to call Nathanael’s watershed confession. The reason for this lies in what John does with them in Jn’s chapters that follow.

The christological titles surrounding Nathanael’s confession in Jn 1 demonstrably play a key role in the christological controversy that marks Jn 2:1–11:53. All five figures in Jn are the objects of (intended) confessions (cf. “Christ” in Jn 11:27, “Prophet” in 6:14, “Son of God” in 3:18, 20:31, “King of Israel” in 12:13 and “Son of Man” in Jn 9:35–38). This makes Nathanael, like JtB, also a confessional-juridical figure.

Because of the political hazards associated with the designation “King,” John avoids this title here in Jn 2:1–11:53 except in Jn 6:15, which offers a

concrete example of the very danger Jesus wishes to avoid. John will of course come back to the title “King” in Jn 18–19.

These insights derived from John’s borrowing lead us to propose that John presents in Jn 2:1–11:53 a dramatization of the Sanhedrin Trial found in the Synoptics. He attempts to demonstrate that its verdict was false, and that Jesus’ claims were true. To describe this, we avail ourselves of the term in Indian English used for the opposite of ‘postponed:’ ‘*preponed*.’ John has *preponed* elements of the Synoptic Sanhedrin trial in his gospel.

All four gospels have what we call a Passion Demi-Week, that is, an account beginning approximately with Jesus’ triumphal entry and ending before Jesus’ arrest. John’s Passion Demi-Week differs sharply from those of the Synoptics. Following the Preponed Trial, John’s own portrayal of the Passion Demi-Week includes three major aspects. First, it makes the predetermined divine course of Jesus’ Hour of Glorification clear. This will involve criminal prosecution proceedings against Jesus, but his death will lead to his justification before the heavenly tribunal of his Father.

Second, the appearance of the ‘Greeks’ in the context of the whole of Jn 12 discretely resembles the watershed confession of Nathanael in Jn 1:40–51 in several respects. The ‘Greeks’ approach Andrew and Philip (cf. Jn 1:44–45) and wish to see Jesus (cf. Jn 12:20d; Isa 11:10). The whole of chapter 12 contains references to the same five christological titles as in Jn 1:40–51. Comparable to the scene with Nathanael, John will later focus on four of the five titles in Jn 18–19 associated with Nathanael’s confession.

Third, John uses his Passion Demi-Week to set the stage for chapters 14–16, 17, 18–19 as just noted, and for 20–21. He wishes to prepare believers for what is to come and strengthen their faith and resolve in the face of persecution.

John’s portrayal of Annas’ interrogation serves the purpose of showing that Nicodemus’ demand that Jesus be given a fair hearing in Jn 7:51 still goes unheard in 18:19–24. Annas suspects that Jesus is a false prophet, but he neither calls witnesses for, nor against Jesus. Annas’ decision to deliver Jesus to Caiaphas and Pilate is, therefore, juridically seen, null and void.

Three of the five christological titles stand in the center of the trial before Pilate: King, Son of Man and Son of God. The trial establishes that Jesus is not guilty of any crime. Jesus, on the contrary, is shown to be King, Suffering Servant/Son of Man, and Son of God from the perspective of faith, if not in Pilate’s view and that of “the Jews.” The title “Christ” is not relevant for John’s portrayal of the Roman trial and therefore does not appear here.

Isa 11:1–5 is the literary model for the activity of the Paraclete in Jn 16:7–11. This is based on correspondences between Jn 16:7–11 and Isa 11:1–5 that include all four Johannine key terms *ἐλέγχειν*, *ἀμαρτίας* (*ἄσεβων* as a synonym), *δικαιοσύνη*, and *κρίσις*, which involve the activity of the Spirit-Paraclete (cf. Isa 11:2). The presence of *δικαιοσύνη* demonstrates the positive core of this passage. Its genre is therefore not an apocalyptic Day of Reckoning at the Last

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