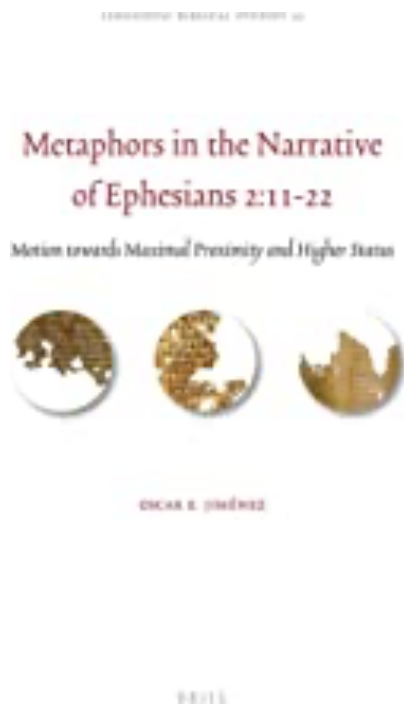


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Oscar Jiménez

*Metaphors in the Narrative of Ephesians 2:11–22:
Motion towards Maximal Proximity and Higher Status*

Linguistic Biblical Studies 20

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This monograph arose from Oscar Jiménez’s doctoral study at the London School of Theology. It applies insights from cognitive linguistics to elucidate the function of the metaphors in Eph 2:11–22. Given the dense complex of metaphors to describe Christ’s work in this passage, such an application is particularly suitable. Traditional exegetical treatments of biblical metaphors tend to regard them as illustrative images; the exegete’s task is to decode them into propositional paraphrases (2). By contrast, Jiménez seeks to explore how the metaphors as metaphors contribute to the discourse and how they likely impacted the original audience by moving them to adopt new frameworks and emotional dispositions. He contends that Eph 2:11–22 is a persuasive narrative structured by metaphors and that the tools of cognitive linguistics may be adopted and adapted to aid in understanding the nature and function of the metaphors. While Jiménez regards Pauline authorship of Ephesians as “credible” (11), he does not see the question of authorship as materially affecting his interpretation, since the metaphors would have had the same impact on any first-century Christian inhabitant of the Greco-Roman world (165). To engage his readers and to highlight the participatory nature of narrative, Jiménez structures his argument in terms of a “drama” with “Stage Directions” and three “Acts” (Jiménez does not thereby intend to imply any claim about the genre of the passage) (13).

Chapter 2, “Stage Directions” (16–50), establishes his methodological foundations. Jiménez first focuses on narrative, examining the nature of narratives in epistolary literature and the function of metaphors within narratives. He then describes three primary tools from cognitive linguistics for exploring metaphorical language: frame semantics, conceptual metaphors, and conceptual metonymies. A conceptual frame is a system of interrelated ideas that provides “a more finely tuned tool to grasp how words, concepts, and the readers relate” than the more general concept of “context” (28). A conceptual metaphor is a “mapping” of concepts from a “source” frame to a “target” frame (35) that structures and alters perception, identity, and emotion. A conceptual metonymy is a “conceptual mapping within the same frame” (45, emphasis omitted). Jiménez will have two more primary tools to present (eventually making a total of five; see 170) but chooses to wait until later in the book to introduce them. This choice is designed to ensure that his textual exploration is not overly dependent on his method and that his monograph “initiates a dialogue between the biblical text and cognitive linguistics” (14).

Chapter 3, “Drama—Act I: From Outsiders to Insiders” (51–83), explores the metaphors in Eph 2:11–13. The narrative of these verses is structured into two epochs: then (vv. 11–12) and now (v. 13). At this point, Jiménez introduces his fourth primary tool: spatial metaphors, which map concepts from the experience of human bodily orientations (up, down, in, out, etc.) onto a more abstract target domain (65–67). Three spatial metaphors are central to these verses: “ISRAEL” (target) is “A CONTAINER” (source) with an inside, an outside, and a boundary (68–77); “CHRIST” (target) is also “A CONTAINER” (source) (77–82); and “AN EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIP” (target) is “A DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO ENTITIES” (source) (82). Hence, gentile readers are “brought near” by the “blood” (evoking the frame of the sacrificial system) “of Christ.” The metaphors cement the audience’s new identity by moving them from emotional distance to emotional closeness. Furthermore, the author is engaging in a “reframing” of the readers’ conceptual map of the world, placing Israel rather than Rome at the center. “Hence, the author reframes the conversation by turning their world inside out” (71).

Chapter 4, “Drama—Act II: One Plus One Equals One” (84–124) explores the dense cluster of metaphors in Eph 2:14–18, showing how the transformation in 2:11–13 occurred. Traditionally, scholars have sought to explain the language of these verses by arguing that the author is borrowing material from traditional sources. By contrast, Jiménez argues that the author is employing metaphors from various source frames in a coherent way to focus the audience’s attention on Christ’s actions to bring about peace. The term *peace* is a “crucial narrative anchor” that appears repeatedly in this section to structure the narrative: “Christ is our peace (14), Christ makes peace (15), Christ proclaims peace to those who are far (17), Christ proclaims peace to those who are near (17)” (92). At this point, Jiménez introduces his fifth conceptual tool: embodied simulation, in which a metaphor invites an audience to recall and mentally simulate embodied experience (92–94). Embodied simulation helps the readers engage with Christ’s metaphorical peace-making activity, subverting both the Jewish concept of *shalom* and the

Greco-Roman concept of Pax Romana. The metaphorical depiction of ethnic hostility as a wall recalls the conceptual frame of a container with an interior, exterior, and boundary, evoking concepts of protection, exclusion, and threat. Christ is depicted as a warrior who broke down this wall. Yet the author reframes and subverts the warfare concept. In this case, the “antagonist” is not a person or group but “Hostility” itself, and the “champion” warrior achieves victory over the antagonist through his own death (104). This reframing, combined with other metaphors such as “man” and “body,” brings readers into a new reality that subverts old perspectives and creates new perspectives that affect reconciliation.

Chapter 5, “Drama—Act III: A More Perfect Union” (125–62), explores the metaphors used in the narrative of Eph 2:19–22 to solidify the identity of the audience. As in the previous section, the dense cluster of mixed metaphors is designed to achieve a coherent goal. The author depicts a series of “concentric Containers that together construct the landscape of a nation” (161). The narrative takes the audience on a multistage journey from a former location at the periphery of God’s people to a new location right at the center. The various metaphors lead the audience to a sense of ever-increasing closeness: from being on the outskirts of the land of Israel to being citizens, from being outside the family to being household members, then to the very center of the land as a temple in which God dwells. The author thus invites his audience to simulate a “journey towards maximal relational proximity and increasing status” (128), changing their perception as they inhabit these places. Jiménez questions the traditional dichotomy between Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds, suggesting that “the author is merging these two backgrounds” so that “the means (the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, languages, and viewpoints) match his message (new humanity out of the Jews and the Gentiles)” (144).

An epilogue (163–174) reviews the overall argument concerning metaphors in the narrative of Eph 2:11–22, as well as the five primary cognitive linguistic tools employed in the book, and suggests avenues for further research. This is followed by a postscript (175–77) that briefly raises some implications of the research for the contemporary Christian church.

Jiménez presents a strong argument that largely succeeds in its aim to demonstrate the value of cognitive linguistic tools for elucidating the significance of metaphors in New Testament texts. By the end of the book, the attentive reader is furnished with a basic cognitive linguistic toolkit and a good sense of how to use it. Furthermore, the value and purpose of the specific cluster of metaphors in Eph 2:11–22 is illuminated for the exegete so that they can be seen not merely as illustrations needing to be decoded but as vehicles for structuring the narrative and transforming the audience.

There were some places in the book where the method could have been applied with even more consistency and rigor. For example, while the discussion of the abolition of “the law of the commandments in ordinances” (Eph 2:15) brought some strong insights to bear on the text, it

could have been strengthened further by a more consistent application of the method (100–103). Jiménez rightly highlights that the metaphor is not designed to provide a complete account of the nature or continuity of the torah but to make a specific point concerning Christ’s peace-making work. When it comes to metaphors, “truth can only be conveyed partially, since it is determined by the elements that are mapped from the Source frame onto the Target frame” (101). Jiménez persuasively establishes the target frame as relationships among believers: “both the dividing wall and the Law are symbols for the enmity that was set aside in Christ’s flesh” (102). However, he is less persuasive in identifying the source frame and the mapped elements. He argues that the source frame and mapped elements focus on the torah’s function among Jews “to grant access to God’s people” and “to be a sign of membership of it” (102). Yet this is not an obvious inference from the phrase “the law of the commandments in ordinances” (Eph 2:15), since the term “ordinances” refers to human applications of the torah and its commandments, not to access or membership (100). I suggest a mapping more consistent with both the wall-breaking narrative (2:14) and the wording of the phrase “the law of the commandments in ordinances” (2:15): the target frame (agreeing with Jiménez) is relationships among Jewish and gentile believers, the source frame is access to the temple in Jerusalem, “ordinances” (2:15) are human applications of torah and its commandments exemplified by the well-known inscription on the dividing wall/balustrade (see 2:14) that decreed death for gentiles who entered the sanctuary (see 98), and the abolition of the “law of commandments in ordinances” (2:15) refers to the rendering obsolete of such applications of torah by the sacrificial “blood” (2:13) of Christ that has effected entry into the sanctuary for gentiles.

This suggestion (which is only a suggestion) is proffered not simply as a mild critique of one section of the monograph. It demonstrates (I hope) the interpretive fruitfulness of the cognitive linguistic tools presented in the monograph. Jiménez’s purpose in writing includes the goal “that other projects might use the exegetical insights of this work and its methodological frameworks to study the rest of the letter to the Ephesians.” There are straightforward applications to other narrative passages in Ephesians with similar metaphorical clusters, for example, Eph 4:7–16. The framework should also prove fruitful for other New Testament texts.