A Dictionary of Biblical Allusions in The Scarlet Letter

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. 2
2. INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 3
3. DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES  
   (in order of textual appearance) ....................................................................................................... 6
4. INDEX OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES  
   (in alphabetical order) .................................................................................................................... 39
5. REFERENCES .......................................................................................................................... 44
I. ABSTRACT

Biblical allusions resonate in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In general, Hawthorne does not simply mention a biblical figure or event, but often reworks it in order to deepen the meaning of the text. This volume is a catalogue which lists the allusions both alphabetically, and in order of their appearance in the text. Its purpose is to elucidate some of the multivalent meanings inherent in this novel.
II. INTRODUCTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is undoubtedly one of American literature’s most studied literary works. Through use of considerable craftsmanship, he structures a sophisticated narrative that presents characters confronting weakness and strength, evil and good. Although an imaginative work, *The Scarlet Letter* is also, to a great extent, derivative, for its complexity derives from themes, many of which are biblical.

Hawthorne skillfully uses biblical themes to augment his writing. However, he does not merely allude to biblical concepts. Rather, he goes beyond, refabricating Jewish and Christian ideas and tailoring them to his own particular literary needs. His allusions are many; thirty-eight are catalogued in this reference guide. The sheer numbers of these references, when coupled with his marked willingness to adapt biblical themes to *The Scarlet Letter*, demonstrate the profound significance that he invests in biblical figures and concepts. Such a distinct emphasis warrants a thorough study of the author’s approach to biblical ideas within the text.

A cursory reading of this novel does not readily reveal these references, and readers may fail to grasp the biblical context that structures the theme of sin and salvation in this text. To accommodate such readers, some editors of the novel, particularly those of the Norton Critical Edition, highlight a few of the numerous and varied allusions in footnotes. Moreover, supplementary information is given as the editors attempt to clarify for the reader the author’s intention. Careful analysis of the Norton Critical Edition, however, reveals that it is seriously lacking in its treatment of biblical allusions. The need for this dictionary arises therefore from the failure of the Norton editors to give thorough documentation and completely accurate exposition of Hawthorne’s references to scriptural texts.
Rather than engaging in a critique of the Norton Edition, the author of this volume aims to contextualize many of the major allusions, to suggest Hawthorne's reasons for including them in his novel, and to elucidate syntheses of these biblical motifs with his own. The format is primarily that of a reference work.

The first major section is called a “dictionary” section. It lists the allusions in order of their appearance in the text. Within each listing, relevant biblical passages are identified, and an attempt is made at contextualization and exposition of the reference.

The second major section is called an “index.” It lists the allusions in alphabetical order. The information, including the location of the reference within the text, its particular listing in the dictionary section, and related biblical passages, is presented in a concise, tabular form. This allows for quicker reference than the more expository dictionary section.

This work can prove informative to those who are intimately familiar with the novel, as well as to those who are reading it for the first time. To those who do not know the novel, the author suggests that they complete the novel first, before consulting this volume. The reason for this is that one can surely find satisfaction in personally solving the various “literary puzzles” Hawthorne scatters throughout the text. Certainly, though, it is useful as a companion to The Scarlet Letter: a resource to which the reader can refer as she progresses through the book.

Although the author has done his best to insure its completeness, he acknowledges the possibility that he may have overlooked some of the novel's more obscure biblical allusions. Undoubtedly, much more could be written on the various allusions than what is presented here, and hopefully, this reference work can be used as a springboard for further research. The ultimate goal is to acquaint the reader with biblical ideas suggested in the novel and to
III. DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Note: emphasis (bold lettering and capitalization) was added by the author, and quotations from biblical texts are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

1) "This old town of SALEM--my native place, though I have dwelt much away from it, both in boyhood and maturer years--possesses, or did possess, a hold on my affections, the force of which I have never realized during my seasons of actual residence here" (p. 7, mentioned also on pp. 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11).

The significance of the name of Hawthorne's home town may elude readers who are unfamiliar with biblical texts. "Salem" is the name of a town mentioned in the book of Genesis, and Hawthorne uses the town's name to make certain statements about his Puritan heritage. To understand why the name "Salem" was chosen by the Puritans, it is necessary to examine the biblical happenings associated with it.

In the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, Lot, nephew of the great patriarch of Israel, Abraham, is kidnaped. Abraham subsequently sets out to rescue him. After defeating his enemies and freeing Lot, Abraham is visited by Melchizedek, the king of the nearby city of Salem. Melchizedek, described as a "priest of God Most High" (14:18), supplies bread and wine and offers a blessing to both Abraham and the God he serves. This is not the only reference in the bible to this Jewish figure; the writer of the letter to the Hebrews makes an interesting comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews asserts that Jesus and Melchizedek are similar in that they both served dual roles, those of king and priest, at the same time. Jesus is said to be a "priest after the
"order of Melchizedek" (7:17) as opposed to the Levitical order, which was, according to the writer of Hebrews, to be supplanted by Jesus's new order (Hebrews 7:15-19, 22). The new covenant differed from that of Moses in that, under the Mosaic covenant, priests were only chosen from among the descendants of Levi, and were never allowed to become kings. Therefore, to have a system of faith in which one person served as both king and priest would be a new concept to the Jews. The writer argues throughout the epistle that the arrangement ushered in by the death of Jesus is far superior to that of the Mosaic covenant; he supports his assertion by using several examples, one of which is his discussion of Jesus and Melchizedek.

The Puritans, being extremely religious people, most likely chose "Salem" as a name for a town because of its biblical connotations. As the home of the famed king and priest, Melchizedek, it is certainly an important city in the Bible. To name a town "Salem" would amount to giving glory to God on account of Melchizedek and Jesus, and would acknowledge that the townspeople were attempting to follow God. Hawthorne, though, seems to dispute the morality of the people of the town. The name of the town becomes significant when Hawthorne begins to speak of the moral depravity which is characteristic of Salem, particularly of the Custom House officials.

2) "These old gentlemen--seated, like MATTHEW at the receipt of custom, but not very likely to be summoned thence, like him, for apostolic errands--were Custom-House officers" (p. 7).

Matthew 9:9 reads:

"And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him."

An interesting contrast is drawn here. Judging from Hawthorne's later descriptions of these men
(he later tells of their “evil and corrupt practices” [p. 12]), they certainly were not likely to
imitate Matthew in any other aspect other than occupation. Matthew, of course, was one of
Jesus’s original twelve disciples.

3) “The spell survives, and just as powerfully as if the natal spot were an earthly PARADISE”
(p. 10, mentioned also on pp. 12 and 148).

Here Hawthorne speaks of his instinctive urge to continue his residence in Salem. While
the word “paradise” is used in the Bible in reference to a higher spiritual realm (Lk. 23:43, 2 Cor.
12:4, Rev. 2:7), Hawthorne is apparently referring to the garden of Eden story of Genesis. He
calls Salem his “natal spot” referring to humanity’s “natal spot,” Eden.

4) “Had it been otherwise,--had an active politician been put into this influential post, to assume
the easy task of making head against a Whig Collector, whose infirmities withheld him from the
personal administration of his office,--hardly a man of the old corps would have drawn the
breath of official life, within a month after the EXTERMINATING ANGEL had come up the
Custom House steps” (p. 12).

This recalls several events in Jewish history. During the reign of David, God sent an
angel to destroy Jerusalem as punishment for Israel’s disobedience; luckily, he changed his mind,
stopping the angel before it could carry out its dreadful task. The story is recounted in both 1
Chronicles 21 and 2 Samuel 24. Similarly, 2 Kings 19:35 and 2 Chronicles 32:21 tell of the
destruction of the Assyrian army by an angel sent from God. The swift political demise of the
Custom House is comparable to the destruction of these people in Jewish history.

5) “He might truly be termed a legitimate son of the revenue system, dyed in the wool, or rather,
born in the PURPLE; since his sire, a Revolutionary colonel, and former collector of the port,
had created an office for him, and appointed him to fill it, at a period of the early ages which few living men can now remember” (p. 14).

Purple is a significant color in the Bible. It was associated with the tabernacle (Ex. 26:1) but was perhaps most important for its ties to royalty. Jesus, shortly before his crucifixion, was mockingly dressed in purple clothing by the Roman soldiers whose prisoner he was (Mk. 15:17). The importance of the Inspector is made clear by the reference to this regal color.

6) “His voice and laugh, which perpetually reechoed through the Custom-House, had nothing of the tremulous quaver and cackle of an old man’s utterance; they came strutting out of his lungs, like the CROW OF A COCK, or the BLAST OF A CLARION” (p. 14).

Perhaps Hawthorne did not have the apostle Peter in mind when he was describing the Inspector, but this reference does make the reader wonder whether the author does liken the official, and perhaps all of the other officials, to the apostle who denied Jesus three times before hearing a rooster crow (Mt. 26:34-74). In light of Hawthorne’s criticism of the morality of the officials en masse, it seems an appropriate reference.

The blowing of a trumpet was definitely a significant event in the Bible. It was often used to announce important event, as is the case with the story of the Jews’ march around the city of Jericho (Josh. 6:20).

7) “The brave soldier had already numbered, nearly or quite, his THREESCORE YEARS AND TEN, and was pursuing the remainder of the his earthly march, burdened with infirmities which even the martial music of his own spirit-stirring recollections could do little towards lightening” (p. 16).

According to Psalm 90:10,
"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

Seventy years was, apparently, the normal life expectancy in ancient times. Seventy is the product of ten and seven, a prominent number in the Bible. The number seven is, of course, significant, in that it is the number of the Sabbath. Seven is used in the Bible to connote completion and fulfillment (i.e., the process of the creation of the world took seven days), and thus the use of seventy as a normal life span is consistent with a biblical pattern. In this passage Hawthorne describes the Collector of the Custom House, and he uses the biblical idea of "threescore and ten" to suggest that the former General has lived a full life, and is now simply awaiting death. Hawthorne seems to have had a greater regard for the aged General than for the other officials, and he describes the man as a hero of the past. While the author upholds his previous achievements as a military officer, Hawthorne points out that the man has served his great purpose and, like the other officials, is simply marking time in the Custom House.

8) "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there no law for it? Truly there is, both in THE SCRIPTURE and the statute book" (p. 38).

In a footnote, Gross et al. state that the Puritans used such practices as "whipping, branding, and execution" as punishment for adultery. The editors seem to think that the Puritans, acknowledging the prohibition of adultery in the ten commandments (Ex. 20:14, Deut. 5:18), simply decided that such measures would adequately correct people guilty of this sin. The editors do not seem to be aware of the Jewish law pertaining to punishment for adultery. Leviticus 20:10 reads:

"And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth
adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

The omission of this passage from the footnote can contribute to misconceptions of the Puritans. They chose to punish adultery severely, but not because they were cruel people who simply enjoyed inflicting pain on others. They did, in fact, attempt to follow biblical standards.

To mention only the prohibition of adultery in the ten commandments, and to neglect the specific Jewish punishment for the sin, does a disservice to readers who are unfamiliar with biblical texts. The power of the statement made by Hester’s critic can only be appreciated when one realizes that, according to both the Mosaic Law and the Puritan statute book, Hester should have been put to death for her commission of adultery.

9) “A blessing on the righteous colony of Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine. Come along, Madame Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!” (p. 40).

In his gospel, John records that Jesus said:

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (Jn. 3:20, 21).

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes:

“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20).

Just as with the issue of the punishment of adultery with death, although the Puritans’ practice of open rebuke seems cruel, they apparently had scriptural authority behind them. The passage in John shows the emphasis put upon light by Jesus. When this is coupled with Paul’s statement in his letter to Timothy, the significance of the town beadle’s words becomes much more apparent.
10) "Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman, so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent; something which should remind him, indeed, but only by contrast, of that sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world. Here, there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect, that the world was only the darker for this woman’s beauty, and the more lost for the infant she had borne” (p. 41).

Accounts of the miraculous conception and the virgin birth are found in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-2:7. The reference in this remarkable paragraph, though, is not so much to the events detailed in these passages of Scripture as it is to the ideal of the Madonna and Child which is associated with the Roman Catholic Church—probably one of the most significant concepts in Catholicism. Hawthorne acknowledges that, to Catholics, the picture of Mary with the Christ is one which gives hope for the world, with the promise of redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus. A Catholic would certainly have been reminded of the holy scene by looking at Hester with her child Pearl, but would also appreciate the contrast of Hester’s situation with Mary’s. Indeed, the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus as detailed in the gospels and the circumstances surrounding the birth of Pearl are vastly different. Whereas, with the biblical scene, the emphasis is on purity and holiness, the picture of Hester with her illegitimate child is recognized as being so fraught with sin that it becomes almost a perversion or mockery of God’s holy family and, consequently, his plan for the redemption of humanity. Hawthorne gives rather ironic commentary on the scene. While he admits the two different scenes of mother with child
appear very similar to the eyes, he asserts that Hester and Pearl should remind Catholics of the virgin and child “only by contrast.”

In the last sentence, the author draws an interesting analogy. Mary’s beauty, both in personal appearance and character, is appropriate to the privilege given her by God the Father—that of carrying and giving birth to the Christ. Hester possesses comparable beauty, which would seem to offer a similar measure for hope. However, the circumstances of her life allow for no such blessing and, instead, seem to offer only despair. Thus, the world is “only the darker” for her beauty. Similarly, the beauty of the child Pearl would seem to offer hope for redemption, but the circumstances do not allow it: the world is “the more lost” as a result.

The reader may wonder why Hawthorne chose to discuss the scene in terms of the image most often associated with the Roman Catholic Church, when the story deals exclusively with the Puritan religion. A comparison of Hester and Pearl to Mary and Jesus might have been of slight interest to the Puritan crowd, but it certainly would have been much more potent to those of the Catholic faith. This is perhaps a result of the Puritans’ attempts to do away with the images associated with the Catholic church, which they had denounced. The small likelihood that any Catholic adherents could have been present at Hester’s ordeal makes Hawthorne’s presentation of the Catholic perspective all the more puzzling. There is, however, a plausible explanation for why he chose this method. The similarity to the holy family was apparently an element which Hawthorne found vitally important to his presentation of Hester and Pearl, but his Puritan onlookers would probably not have been thinking about this similarity. He found it necessary to compare the two scenes of mother with child, but for the sake of realism he was forced to make the comparison using a Catholic viewpoint rather than that of a Puritan.
11) "...And who, by your favor, Sir, may be the father of yonder babe--it is some three or four months old, I should judge--which Mistress Prynne is holding in her arms?"

'Of a truth, friend, that matter remaineth a riddle; and the DANIEL who shall expound it is yet a-wanting,' answered the townsman" (p. 45).

The Norton edition of The Scarlet Letter, in a footnote, refers the reader to the fifth chapter of the book of Daniel. The true significance of the townsman's statement encompasses more than just this chapter, as will be shown. First, though, some background information on Daniel the prophet is needed.

Daniel 1:17 states:

"As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams."

This statement, at the very beginning of the book, expresses God's purpose for the life of his servant Daniel: the interpretation of dreams. Daniel was an Israelite who lived in Babylon during the time of the Babylonian captivity. He had already successfully interpreted two dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, before he unraveled the mystery of the "handwriting on the wall" for Belshazzar, the subsequent king, in chapter five (Dan. 2:24-45, 4:19-37, 5:25-29).

The editors of Norton's Critical edition of The Scarlet Letter, omitting the verse number, refer to Daniel 5:27, which states,

"TE'KEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

By referring the reader to this verse, the editors imply that the townsman's response to Chillingworth's question derives from this specific verse, and that, in this verse, the person who is "found a-wanting" is the prophet Daniel. A closer examination of the text of Daniel chapter five...
reveals that this is not the case.

In the context, Daniel is interpreting the writing for king Belshazzar. He states that the king would be punished for his debauchery and his failure to recognize the God of Israel (Dan. 5:22-29). Belshazzar is the one who is “found wanting” in verse 27. In accordance with Daniel’s prediction, Belshazzar was later killed and his kingdom divided (Dan. 5:25-6:1).

Although Hawthorne’s use of the phrase “found a-wanting” refers to Daniel the prophet, the phrase “found wanting” used in the book of Daniel does not refer to the prophet. This presents an interesting question: Is Hawthorne distorting a biblical passage?

Hawthorne’s phrase “found a-wanting” and the phrase “found wanting” in Daniel 5:27 are similar, but not identical. Daniel successfully interpreted several visions in addition to the one he interprets in chapter five. Judging from the accuracy with which Hawthorne treats biblical texts throughout The Scarlet Letter, the critic can easily deduce that he would have known that Daniel successfully elucidated more visions than just the one in chapter five. Why would he only credit Daniel with only one interpretation, as the Norton Editors imply that he did? He simply would not. The townsman’s statement, “the Daniel who shall expound it is yet a-wanting,” is a general one, and one which simply means that Daniel had an exceptional talent for interpretation of dreams. The similarity between the phrase “found wanting” in Daniel 5:27 and “found a-wanting” in The Scarlet Letter is purely coincidental. The special connection placed between the two phrases is misapplied, erroneously forced upon the texts by the Norton editors.

12) “Take heed how thou denyest to him--who, perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for himself--the BITTER, BUT WHOLESOME, CUP that is now presented to thy lips!” (p. 49).
In this passage, Arthur Dimmesdale is ironically imploring Hester Prynne to reveal to the townspeople the identity of Pearl's father. These words are similar to those used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39, Mk. 14:36, Lk. 22:42). Jesus prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt. 26:39). The "cup" spoken of by Jesus apparently is a metaphor for the great suffering that he would endure on the cross. Similar language is used in other passages (Mk. 10:38, Jn. 18:11).

Hawthorne's usage of the "cup" is similar to Jesus's usage. In both cases, the cup is one of suffering, although Hester would suffer for her own sin, while Jesus would endure the cross not for anything he had done, but for the sin of humanity as a whole. Hawthorne describes this cup as "bitter, but wholesome" (p. 49). Certainly, Hester's suffering would be bitter, since the Puritans were administering it, but hopefully it would be "wholesome" in that she would be made a better person by it. Again, parallels can be drawn with the suffering of Jesus. He was to be executed in an agonizing way, and he would even be given vinegar to drink (Mt. 27:48, Mk. 15:36). His suffering was certainly bitter, but it was certainly "wholesome," in the sense that it would provide humanity with salvation.

13) "Over and over again, the TEMPTER OF SOULS had thrust this idea upon Hester's contemplation, and laughed at the passionate and desperate joy with which she seized, and then strove to cast it from her" (p. 56).

Matthew refers to Satan as "tempter" as he relates the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Mt. 4:3). Also, Paul uses the same word in reference to Satan in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Th. 3:5). The notion of Satan's capacity to tempt people is certainly fomented by these verses of Scripture. Hawthorne may not have had these particular verses in
mind as he wrote, but he was surely aware of the biblical concept of Satan as a tempter and thought that this would be useful to his treatment of Satan in The Scarlet Letter.

In the context, Hester is haunted by thoughts of Judgment Day. Her thought was that, on this frightening day, she would be reunited with the man with whom she committed adultery, and together they would be doomed to an eternity of torment. These thoughts are said to have been placed by “the tempter of souls.”

14) “With her native energy of character, and rare capacity, it could not entirely cast her off, although it had set a mark upon her, more intolerable to a woman’s heart than that which branded the BROW OF CAIN” (p. 59).

The story of Cain is found in the fourth chapter of Genesis. He and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve, humankind’s first parents. Abel won favor from God because his sacrifice was pleasing, but God was not pleased by Cain’s offering. One day Cain killed his brother Abel, apparently out of jealousy. God punished him by making him a “fugitive and vagabond in the earth” (Gen. 4:12). As the story goes, Cain thought that his punishment was too much, and that, since God had cursed him, he would be killed by anyone who found him (Gen. 4:14). To protect Cain from would-be assassins, God put upon him a mark of some sort (Gen. 4:15).

Hawthorne likens the mark put upon Hester by the Puritan authorities to the mark imprinted upon Cain by God. He equates the idea of Cain’s mark with severe punishment, but it is interesting to note that, while Hester’s scarlet “A” was a sign of her punishment, the mark imprinted upon Cain was a protective measure, one which would prevent his being murdered. Technically speaking, Hawthorne’s usage of the idea is different from the biblical usage.

The author’s comparison of Hester with Cain is interesting for another reason. God
punished Cain by making him a “fugitive and a vagabond.” Cain became an outcast as a consequence of his sin. Hester’s situation in Puritan society was similar. The purpose of the chapter containing the reference to Cain is apparently to show just how ostracized Hester had become. She was now, to her Puritan society, the epitome of sin (p. 56). Hawthorne uses the concept of the mark of Cain to emphasize the marginalization which Hester suffers.

15) “She shuddered to believe, yet could not help believing, that it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts. She was terror-stricken by the revelations that were thus made. What were they? Could they be other than the insidious whispers of the BAD ANGEL, who would fain have persuaded the struggling woman, as yet only half his victim, that the outward guise of purity was but a lie and that, if truth everywhere to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne’s?” (p. 61).

Here Hawthorne refers to Satan again, this time as “the bad angel.” What he alludes to is an interesting topic: the belief that Satan was originally one of God’s angels. Several contexts have spurred interest in this notion, one of which is verse six of Jude’s epistle: “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the great day.” 1 Peter 2:4 conveys the same idea as Jude 6, and Jesus, in Luke 10:18, reportedly said to a group of seventy of his followers, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” Other verses with relevance to this topic are Isaiah 14:12 and Revelation 9:1 and 8:10.

Satan plays an active role in The Scarlet Letter. In the narrative Hawthorne refers to Satan by several different names, emphasizing different aspects of the devil’s character. Here he is called a “bad angel,” a name which indicates a perversion. In this passage, Hester wonders
whether Satan is attempting to convince her that many others are guilty of the same sin as she.

The concept of a bad angel, one who experienced the glory of heaven yet still chose to sin rather than remain faithful to the Almighty, serves the context well. It emphasizes the universal quality of sin. If even God's angels can fall, so, too, can the most pious people. With this in mind, it becomes clearer to the reader why Hawthorne alluded to Satan in such a way. It fits well within the context, in which Satan is apparently attempting to convince Hester of the ubiquitous nature of sin.

16) “But she named the infant “PEARL,” as being OF GREAT PRICE,--purchased with all she had,—her mother’s only treasure!” (p. 62).

Matthew 13:45-46 reads:

“'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.'

Just as with Hawthorne’s earlier comparison of Hester and her child to the Madonna and Child, here is another sort of perversion of a biblical ideal. In Matthew, Jesus speaks of finding salvation and within that context talks about righteousness. Hester’s daughter Pearl, however, was brought forth through an illicit affair. Her price was great; she cost her mother her good name and place in society.

17) “By its perfect shape, its vigor, and its natural dexterity in the use of all its untried limbs, the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in EDEN; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the WORLD'S FIRST PARENTS WERE DRIVEN OUT” (p. 62).

Hawthorne’s physical description of Pearl is one of perfection. He argues that, according to physical matters, Pearl belonged in Paradise. This is certainly in contrast to her spiritual
nature; for in this category Pearl is said to be far from heavenly.

The creation story is told in the first chapter of Genesis. The statement “it was good” recurs throughout the first chapter; God was apparently pleased with the quality of the things he had created. Perhaps it is for this reason that, in describing Pearl’s beauty, Hawthorne states that she “was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden” (p. 62).

Genesis 3:24 tells of the expulsion from the garden of Eden: “So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” Hawthorne remarks that Pearl was worthy to have stayed in the garden to entertain the angels. This indicates a heavenly quality of the young girl. The author is emphasizing the beauty of Pearl, as implied by her name.

18) “The discipline of the family, in those days, was of a far more rigid kind than now. The frown, the harsh rebuke, the FREQUENT APPLICATION OF THE ROD, enjoined by SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY, were used, not merely in the way of punishment for actual offences, but as a wholesome regimen for the growth of all childish virtues” (p. 63).

The idea of discipline recurs throughout the book of Proverbs. A relatively familiar proverb dealing with discipline is found in the thirteenth chapter: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Pr. 13:24). Several other Proverbs mandate strict discipline of children (Pr. 22:15, 23:13-14 and 29:15). Speaking of a prominent descendent of King David, God announced to David through the prophet Daniel that, “‘He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men’” (2 Sam. 7:13-14).
Certainly, the idea of discipline with a rod is prominent in Jewish writings.

While the word “rod” is mentioned in the writings of Christianity (Heb. 9:24, 2 Cor. 11:25, Rev. 2:27), the idea of using a rod to discipline children is not upheld as it is in the Judaic writings. Interestingly, Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, asks them, “What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?” (1 Cor. 4:21). The use of the rod in discipline is not its only use in the Bible, but it is interesting to hear Paul make such a distinction. In reading the Proverbs, one can infer that such strict punishment was normal and considered healthy in Judaism; one would think that, of all people, Paul would uphold such a principle. But Paul differentiates between using a rod and showing kindness, as though the two are mutually exclusive. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, in chapters nine and ten, proposes several reasons for why the covenant preached by Jesus was superior to the Mosaic covenant. Perhaps, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is making a subtle argument on behalf of the Christian covenant, an argument put forth by the writer of Hebrews. Moreover, Paul may be stating that Christianity’s emphasis on love and grace necessitates a departure from the strictness of Judaism, specifically in regard to discipline.

Hawthorne makes an analogous point dealing with the Puritan’s method of disciplining children. He states that, in addition to “the frequent application of the rod,” frowns and harsh criticism were used by the Puritans, not only as punishment for disobedience, but also in the normal upbringing of children (pp. 63-64). Hester attempts to use such measures to insure Pearl’s proper development, but eventually abandons them as useless (p. 64). The tone underlying Hawthorne’s description of Puritan discipline is one of protest, and in a way similar to Paul’s argument, he implies that love and patience would be more effective as tools of
discipline.

19) "She resembled, in her fierce pursuit of them, an infant pestilence,—the scarlet fever, or some such half-fledged ANGEL OF JUDGEMENT,—whose whole mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation" (p. 71).

Similar to EXTERMINATING ANGEL. See reference #4 of this section.

20) "'Hush, child hush!' said her mother earnestly. 'Do not cry, dear little Pearl! I hear VOICES IN THE GARDEN. The Governor is coming, and gentlemen along with him!''"

Gross et al. cite a parallel between this passage and a passage in Genesis. Verses eight through ten of Genesis chapter three read as follows:

"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art Thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Within this passage, Pearl cries out to Hester for a red rose. Gross et al. suggest that the red rose is a “symbol of passion” and that it is reminiscent of the forbidden fruit (presumed by the editors to be an apple, although the Genesis account itself makes no such distinction). Such a parallel seems likely, but Hawthorne’s intention is unclear.

It may be that, in alluding to the Eden story, he was attempting to reinforce the unruly nature of the child Pearl. Hawthorne states earlier that Hester had difficulty in making Pearl behave; for the author to have the child metaphorically crying out for passion would certainly emphasize Pearl’s tendencies toward disobedience. The reason for the presence of Hester and
Pearl in Governor Bellingham's garden is that the Puritan community was threatening to take the child from Hester, due to its doubts as to how such an adulterous woman could give Pearl a proper Puritan upbringing. Pearl's misbehavior at such an inopportune time as the interview with the governor heightens the reader's expectation that Hester will have her child taken away. This may have been Hawthorne's intent in using such an allusion to Genesis.

21) "The wide circumference of an elaborate ruff, beneath his gray beard, in the antiquated fashion of King James's reign, caused his head to look not a little like that of JOHN THE BAPTIST IN A CHARGER" (p. 74).

The gospels of both Matthew and Mark relate the story of the beheading of John the Baptist. John was beheaded by King Herod (Mk. 6:27). Previously, John had criticized Herod for marrying the wife of Herod's brother (v. 17). Herodias, Herod's new wife, had wanted John to be killed for his impudence (v. 19). Subsequently, Herodias' daughter danced at a banquet of the king (v. 22). Her dancing pleased Herod so much that he promised to give her anything she desired (v. 23). Under the strong influence of her mother, she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a "charger," or platter (v. 25). Herod granted the request, although reluctantly (v. 27).

In light of the unpleasant death suffered by the prophet John, Hawthorne's comparison of the Governor's head to that of John seems hardly complimentary. In fact, it seems baffling that he would make such a comparison. The reason for the comparison lies both in the context and in the characteristics of the John the Baptist. Once again, Hawthorne takes the opportunity to point out the hypocrisy of the Puritans, this time using a rather unusual method.

John the Baptist led a strange life as he preached in the wilderness (Mt. 3:1). He wore clothing made from camel's hair and kept a diet of locusts and wild honey (v. 4). He certainly
did not see luxury as a priority. This is in stark contrast with the Puritans mentioned in the context of the reference to John the Baptist. Hawthorne continues his description of the Governor:

"The impression made by his aspect, so rigid and severe, and frost-bitten with more than autumnal age, was hardly in keeping with the applicances of worldly enjoyment wherewith he had evidently done his utmost to surround himself. But it is an error to suppose that our grave forefathers--though accustomed to speak and think of human existence as a state merely of trial and warfare, and though unfeignedly prepared to sacrifice goods and life at the behest of duty--made it a matter of conscience to reject such means of comfort, or even luxury, as lay fairly within their grasp" (pp. 74-75).

The author makes similar comments about the famous pastor John Wilson:

"The old clergyman, nurtured at the rich bosom of the English Church, had a long established and legitimate taste for all good and comfortable things" (p. 75).

Although John's characteristics are not mentioned in the novel, Hawthorne's point is that these Puritans, as much as they would deny it, are not nearly so pious as John the Baptist. Hawthorne appears to flatter the Governor in comparing him to John, but he actually contrasts the two. The Governor would be complimented to hear that he resembled John the Baptist; from what is said, it seems he would consider it a realistic comparison. The implication, though, is that Hawthorne scoffs at such a claim. Wilson and Bellingham, living their outwardly pious lives of ease, have none of the faith and self-denial displayed by John, and Hawthorne again shows the hypocrisy of the Puritans.

22) "'Sayest thou so?' cried the Governor. 'Nay, we might have judged that such a child's
mother must needs be a **SCARLET WOMAN, and WORTHY OF HER TYPE OF BABYLON!**" (p. 76).

The editors of the Norton edition imply, in the footnote, that the words of the Governor must refer to the Puritan backlash against the Catholic church. Almost parenthetically, the editors add that these terms “originated in Revelation 18:1-5." It is interesting that the editors seem to artificially make the Governor’s statement into an anti-Catholic criticism, especially when nowhere in the passage is the issue presented or even alluded to. Perhaps a more viable approach is to try to understand the literal meaning of Hawthorne’s statement. The woman referred to in the book of Revelation is an evil woman. While the idea of this woman of Babylon can symbolize other things, the fact that she is evil remains. That Pearl is evil is the main point the Governor is trying to convey. He surely would have understood that the woman of Babylon had come to represent the Catholic Church, but this meaning does not fit well into the context.

Additionally, the editors of the Norton edition conclude that in Revelation 18 the author specifically writes of literal Babylon, lamenting the evil of the ancient city. In the previous chapter, the author writes that the woman sits atop seven mountains, indicating the city of Rome, which was in full swing at the time Revelation was written. Certainly, the Revelation writer’s allusion to the Babylonian woman has several possible interpretations. To conclude, as the Norton editors apparently have, that it refers only to the literal city is to make a seemingly erroneous observation.

23) "'Pearl,' said he, with great solemnity. 'thou must take heed to instruction, that so, in due season, thou mayest wear in thy bosom the **PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.** Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee?''' (p. 77).
See reference #16 of this section.

24) "'Make my excuse to him, so please you!' answered Hester, with a triumphant smile. 'I must tarry at home, and keep watch over my little Pearl. Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book too, and that with mine own blood!'" (p. 81).

Again, Hawthorne seems to take a biblical theme and use it in a negative sense in order to make a point. Just as he has previously perverted the biblical concepts of the holy family and the Pearl of Great Price, now he seems to be doing the same with the concept of the "Book of Life" which is used in Christian writings.

Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, speaks of those "whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3). John, in his highly metaphorical Revelation, mentions the "book of life" several times. In one passage he depicts the scene of the Day of Judgment, when books were opened and the dead were judged according to what had been written in the books (Rev. 20:12). John reports that, "...whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:15). Clearly, the book of life is an important concept in the Christian religion; for, according to John, only those whose names are written in the sacred book will be saved from eternal torment.

Interestingly, John states that in his vision, the book of life was not the only one which was opened for the judgement of the dead (Rev. 20:12). Hawthorne's Black Man, presumably Satan, has a book containing signatures of various people who have relinquished their lives to him. Hawthorne may have had these other books in mind as, with regard to The Scarlet Letter, he conceived the idea of a book containing the names of evil people. Again, Hawthorne reworks
a biblical theme, rendering it negative in order to enhance his novel.

Previously, Hester has been interviewed by Governor Bellingham and Arthur Dimmesdale. They were to decide whether Hester would serve as a proper parent to Pearl, or whether the child would be taken from her. When they decide in favor of Hester, she and the child exit the house, and the witch Mistress Hibbins appears. After Hester declines the witch's invitation, the author states that, out of devotion to her daughter, Hester refused to go to the forest with the witch. He seems to emphasize that the better situation was for Hester and Pearl to remain together.

25) “Even thus early had the child saved her from SATAN’S SNARE” (p. 81).

This allusion occurs in the same context as the previous reference. In 1 Tim. 3:7 and 2 Tim. 2:26, Paul warns against “the snare of the devil,” emphasizing the crafty aspect of Satan’s character. In mentioning “Satan’s snare” Hawthorne is apparently attempting to convey the same idea.

26) “By those best acquainted with his habits, the paleness of the young minister’s cheek was accounted for by his too earnest devotion to study, his scrupulous fulfilment of parochial duty, and, more than all, by the fasts and vigils of which he made a frequent practice, in order to keep the grossness of this earthly state from clogging and obscuring his SPIRITUAL LAMP” (p. 83).

The idea of a spiritual lamp is found in several biblical passages. The 119th Psalm reads, in verse 105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” A similar statement is made in 2 Samuel 22:29. These passages portray God and his word as that which illuminates, showing the way of righteousness. In Christian writings the idea of keeping one’s spiritual lamp burning is introduced. This idea is present in Matthew 5:14-16, and in Luke 12:35 Jesus
commands, "Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps alight" (New American Standard version). The contrast of light and darkness is a recurring theme in The Scarlet Letter, and the concept of one’s “spiritual lamp” relates to this metaphor.

27) “‘Youthful men, not having taken a deep root, give up their hold of life so easily! And saintly men, who walk with God on earth, would fain be away, to walk with him on the golden pavements of the NEW JERUSALEM’” (p. 84).

John, in his Revelation, refers to the city called “new Jerusalem” (3:12, 21:2). He describes a wonderful city, made of gold and adorned with precious stones (20:18-19). Only those people whose names were written in the book of life were allowed to dwell in the city (20:27). It was certainly a beautiful place, one which would be desirable to live in. It is somewhat obvious why Arthur Dimmesdale would want to leave the world to go to such a place.

28) “The walls were hung round with tapestry, said to be from the Gobelin looms, and, at all events, representing the Scriptural story of DAVID AND BATHSHEBA, and NATHAN THE PROPHET, in colors still unfaded, but which made the fair woman of the scene almost as grimly picturesque as the woe-denouncing seer” (p. 87).

The story of David and Bathsheba is told in 2 Samuel 11-12. One evening King David, looking out his window, noticed a beautiful woman taking a bath. She was Bathsheba, the wife of the Uriah, the Hittite, a soldier under David’s command. David, knowing that she was married, sent for her, and the two engaged in an adulterous affair. After finding herself pregnant with the king’s child, she sent him word. David attempted to persuade Uriah to return home from the camp, so that Uriah might sleep with his wife. But Uriah was too loyal to his fellow soldiers to do so. When this failed, David was forced to formulate another cover-up scheme. He
ordered Uriah to be put in the front line in the thickest fighting. His fellow soldiers were told to withdraw, and Uriah was killed. Upon hearing of her husband's death, Bathsheba mourned. After her mourning, she became the wife of the King, and David's actions were said to be displeasing to the Lord.

God sent his prophet Nathan to rebuke David for his misconduct. The prophet told David of two men who lived in a city, one rich and one poor. The rich man had many sheep, but the poor man had only one ewe lamb. One day the rich man was entertaining a guest. Instead of slaughtering and serving a lamb from his own flocks, the man ordered his servants to take the poor man's lamb and kill it. When David heard this, he declared that the rich man deserved to die for such a crime, and that he should pay four lambs for the one he stole. Nathan replied to the king, "Thou art the man" (12:7), and David realized the sin he had committed.

The story of Chillingworth, Hester, and Dimmesdale is similar to that of David and Bathsheba, and the fact that the home of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth is decorated with a tapestry depicting David and Bathsheba seems more than simply coincidental. The stories have similarities but are not completely analogous. Dimmesdale is similar to David, in that he is the adulterer. The role of Bathsheba, moreover, would be played by Hester. Interestingly, Chillingworth plays the role of both Uriah and Nathan the prophet. Like Uriah, his wife became unfaithful, and, just as Nathan was sent to rebuke David, Chillingworth seems to find purpose in correcting the minister.

29) "The heart, making itself guilty of such secrets, must perforce hold them, until the DAY WHEN ALL THINGS SHALL BE REVEALED. Nor have I so read or interpreted Holy Writ, as to understand that the disclosure of human thoughts and deeds, then to be made, is intended
as a part of the retribution. That, surely, were a shallow view of it. No; these revelations, unless I greatly err, are meant merely to promote the intellectual satisfaction of all intelligent beings, who will stand waiting on that DAY, to see the dark problem of this life made plain” (p. 91).

This is one of Hawthorne’s several allusions to the concept of the Judgment Day as presented in Christian writings. Paul writes in Romans, “...in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (2:16). It is said that it will be a day when the secret actions of people will be brought to light and judged. This is significant to the plight of Hester and Dimmesdale, two persons secretly bound by the chain of adultery.

In the passage, Dimmesdale converses with Chillingworth on the topic of hidden sin, thereby subtly introducing the subject of the Day of Judgment. Naturally, Chillingworth argues that hidden sins should be revealed in this life, while the minister attempts to justify those who wait until Judgment Day to reveal their sins. The exchange is interesting; the two discuss in theoretical terms what has become in their own lives a practical reality. Furthermore, as the tension in Hawthorne’s narrative seems to increase progressively, a revelation or a sort of “Judgment Day” seems inevitable. The scaffold scene, when Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s secret is revealed, is analogous to the Christian notion of final judgment.

30) “Why should a wretched man, guilty, we will say, of murder, prefer to keep the DEAD CORPSE buried in his own HEART, rather than fling it forth at once, and let the universe take care of it!” (p. 91).

This subtle allusion occurs in the same context as the one listed previously. It is reminiscent of Matthew 23:27-28, which reads,

“‘Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres,
which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but are within full of hypocrisy and iniquity.'"

Dimmesdale's statement is rather ironic, as he decries hypocrisy while acting the hypocrite in his own life. In this way he becomes very similar to the Pharisees in the gospel account of Matthew.

31) "So she drew her mother away, skipping, dancing, and frisking fantastically among the hillocks of the dead people, like a creature that had nothing in common with a bygone and buried generation, nor owned herself akin to it. It was as if she had been made afresh, out of new elements, and must perforce be permitted to live her own life, and be A LAW UNTO HERSELF, without her eccentricities being reckoned to her for a crime" (p. 93).

This is one of the most obscure, but perhaps one of the most interesting examples of Hawthorne's allusions to biblical texts in The Scarlet Letter. It recalls a passage in Paul's letter to the Romans, which reads,

"For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men though Christ Jesus" (2:12-16, NASV).

Again, Hawthorne seems to take a biblical idea and convert to a negative form. He draws an interesting parallel. The passage in Romans, itself rather intriguing, speaks of non-Jews during
the time before Christianity. Hawthorne seems to apply the principles spoken of by Paul to the situation of Pearl (and of Hester, although she is not mentioned in the same passage).

The exact meaning of Paul's statements is debatable, but his words seem to assert one general idea. Although the Jews had a special relationship with God, this was true only in that he had revealed his word or Law to them. Non-Jews could obtain salvation, but only if, by their nature, they kept the precepts of God's Law. However, the Law had not been revealed to them, and in this they became "a law unto themselves."

Hawthorne, in stating that Pearl would become "a law unto herself" could be proposing several different assertions. One possibility is that, in keeping with his criticism of the Puritans, he is arguing that Pearl, and later her mother, would realize that salvation would not necessarily have to be found within the restrictive Puritan faith, but that it would come as a result of a more individual spiritual journey. The suffering levied upon Pearl and Hester by the Puritan community would serve to make the two look elsewhere for a means of salvation and acceptance, and the message Hawthorne seems to convey through the eventual triumph of Hester and Dimmesdale is that one must ultimately look inward in order to find hope.

32) "All that guilty sorrow, hidden from the world, whose great HEART would have pitied and forgiven, to be revealed to him, the Pitiless, to him, the Unforgiving! All that DARK TREASURE to be lavished on the very man, to whom nothing else could so adequately pay the debt of vengeance!" (p. 96).

Again, Hawthorne reworks a biblical theme, shaping it into a negative form in order to accommodate the themes in his novel. Matthew 6:20-21 reads,

"...But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt,
and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

In the parallel account of Luke’s gospel, Jesus says,

“Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:33-34, NASV).

In these texts Jesus demands that his followers give highest priority to spiritual matters rather than to earthly pursuits.

Hawthorne’s idea of “dark treasure” within the heart connotes sin, paralleling what Jesus says of those who hoard treasure on the earth. Once more, Hawthorne brings into the story a negative aspect of a biblical theme. In this context, Chillingworth, after his discussion with Dimmesdale on hidden sin, resolves to torture the minister all the more, utilizing his knowledge of the secret affair between Hester and Dimmesdale.

33) “All that they lacked was the gift that descended upon the chosen disciples, at PENTECOST, IN TONGUES OF FLAME; symbolizing, it would seem, not the power of speech in foreign and unknown languages, but that of addressing the whole human brotherhood in the heart’s native language” (p. 97-98).

Hawthorne continues his criticism of Puritanism, this time by pointing out the failures of the clergy. Hawthorne again alters a biblical idea in order to apply it to his own writing.

The second chapter of the book of Acts records the events of the first day of Pentecost after the death of Jesus. With Pentecost being a major feast day for Jews, there were multitudes of Jews gathered in Jerusalem, many of whom had come from far-away places to observe the
ritual. Mysterious "tongues of fire" touched the apostles, and they began to speak in languages different than their own. The miracle was that all the people present, despite their various nationalities, were able to hear, in their native language, the apostles' speech.

Hawthorne writes that, while it was amazing that the people on the day of Pentecost heard the apostles in the language they each knew, the true miracle of the "tongues of fire" was that the apostle were able to communicate to the people "in the heart's native language" (p. 98). The Puritan clergymen desired such a gift, but they were not given it; he writes that "Their voices came down, afar and indistinctly, from the upper heights where they habitually dwell" (p. 98). However, as Hawthorne presents the character of the unusually capable Reverend Dimmesdale, he writes that, "...his heart vibrated in unison with theirs, and received their pain into itself, and sent its own throb of pain through a thousand other hearts, in gushes of sad, persuasive eloquence. Oftest persuasive, but sometimes terrible!" (p. 98). In his use of the "tongues of fire" mentioned in the book of Acts, Hawthorne deepens the concept through a discussion of the language of the human heart. Although the other Puritan ministers desired such a gift, only Arthur Dimmesdale, at this particular point in time, seemed to be able to claim it.

This passage serves to reinforce the idea of Arthur Dimmesdale as a hypocrite. While he inwardly languishes in sin, he boldly rebukes it from the pulpit. This theme continues to build throughout the story, until the final scene, when Dimmesdale reveals his secret sin.

34) "...I, in whose daily life you discern the sanctity of Enoch,--I, whose footsteps, as you suppose, leave a gleam along my earthly track, whereby the pilgrims that shall come after me may be guided to the regions of the blest.--I, who have laid the hand of baptism upon your children.--I, who have breathed the parting prayer over your dying friends, to whom the Amen
sounded faintly from a world which they had quitted. -- I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!" (p. 99).

The case of Enoch is an interesting one. The Genesis account reads, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (5:24). The writer of Hebrews attempts to clarify this by adding that, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (11:5). Not much is said about Enoch, except that he was faithful to God and, for this reason, he was allowed to escape death.

Within this biblical context, the reader sees Dimmesdale as imagining a moment of confession, in which he would reveal to his congregation the great sin which he has hidden from them. Hawthorne's purpose in mentioning Enoch was apparently to use him as a biblical example of righteousness, against which Dimmesdale could compare his own life.

35) "The town did not awake; or, if it did, the drowsy slumberers mistook the cry either for something frightful in a dream, or for the noise of witches; whose voices, at that period, were often heard to pass over the settlements or lonely cottages, as they rode with SATAN through the AIR" (p. 102).

In Ephesians 2:1-2, the apostle Paul writes,

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (NASV).

A reference to Satan as "prince of the power of the air" seems to emphasize his power on earth, to turn humanity away from God. As heaven is God's domain, it follows that the world is the
domain of the devil. Hawthorne seems to take the analogy further, by referring to witches riding through the air with Satan. The concepts of witchcraft and Satan recur in the novel, and Hawthorne makes an interesting connection between the two through use of this biblical allusion.

36) “There would have been no scandal, indeed, no peril to the holy WHITENESS of the clergyman’s good fame, had she visited him in his own study; where many a penitent, ere now, had confessed SINS of perhaps as deep a DYE as the betokened by the SCARLET LETTER” (p. 24).

This passage, just as the concept of the scarlet letter representing sin, is reminiscent of a biblical theme. Isaiah 1:18 reads,

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool...”

The same idea is contained in Revelation 7:14:

“And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Hawthorne’s contrast of white, representing purity, and red, symbolizing sin, seems to originate in scriptural metaphor.

37) “There was the Bible, in its rich old Hebrew, with MOSES AND THE PROPHETS speaking to him, and God’s voice through all!” (p. 151).

Hawthorne uses a phrase which occurs three times in the gospel of Luke. The story told in Luke 16, during which the phrase “Moses and the Prophets” occurs, is quite relevant to this passage in The Scarlet Letter. It is the story of the rich man and Lazarus.
Jesus begins the story by speaking of a rich man who wore purple clothing and led a luxurious life. Lazarus, however, was a very poor, and he was afflicted with a disease which left him covered with sores. Lazarus was left at a gate, and, in his extreme state of hunger, he wished to be fed crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Soon, both men died. Lazarus was taken by angels to a place called “Abraham’s bosom,” while the rich man was put in “Hades,” where he was tormented. The rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus, so that Lazarus might come and dip his finger in water and cool the rich man’s tongue, but Abraham denied his request, saying that such actions were not permitted. Then the rich man asked that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers that their souls were imperiled. Abraham denied this request too, saying, “‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’” (16:31, NASV). Still, the rich man begged that Lazarus be sent, saying that his brothers would repent if they saw someone come back from the dead. But Abraham replied that, if they were so stubborn as not to heed to “Moses and the Prophets,” they would not even change if they were to see a person rise from the grave.

According to Hawthorne, Dimmesdale has just returned home after being with Hester and Pearl in the forest. As he walked through the town on his way back, he was plagued by unusually evil thoughts and temptations, and he succumbed to several. The author writes of the minister’s walk through the town, stating that, “Tempted by a dream of happiness, he had yielded himself with deliberate choice, as he had never done before, to what he knew was deadly sin. And the infectious poison of that sin had been thus rapidly diffused throughout his moral system. . .” (150). Upon entering his study, he is reminded of all the time he has spent reading Scripture, meditating, fasting, writing sermons, and praying. In spite of all his preparation, he has strayed from his righteous way of life. By acknowledging that Moses and the Prophets had
spoken to him, the minister appears at a loss to discover the means to return to being faithful again. Abraham told the rich man that, even if someone rose from the dead the miracle would not spur to repentance one who had rejected Moses and the Prophets. Dimmesdale, perhaps recalling this passage in Luke, realizes he has nothing else to effect a renewal of his faith than the words of Scripture which he has come to know so well.

38) "'A good man's prayers are golden recompense!' rejoined old Roger Chillingworth, as he took his leave. 'Yea, they are the current gold coin of the NEW JERUSALEM, with the King's own mint-mark on them!'" (p. 152).

See reference #27 of this section.
### IV. ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index Number</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Listing in Dictionary Section</th>
<th>P. # in Book</th>
<th>Relevant Biblical Passages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>angel, the exterminating</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 Chron. 21 2 Chron. 32 2 Kings 19:35 2 Chron. 32:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>angel of judgment</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Chron. 21 2 Chron. 32 2 Kings 19:35 2 Chron. 32:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>angel, Satan, the fallen</td>
<td>#15</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Jude 6 1 Peter 2:4 Lk. 10:18 Is. 14:12 Rev. 9:1, 8:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>Babylonian woman, the</td>
<td>#22</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Rev. 17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Baptist, John the</td>
<td>#21</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Mk. 6 Mt. 3:1</td>
</tr>
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<td>#s 16, 23</td>
<td>62, 77</td>
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